University of Reading

Metaphysical Comedy: Samuel Beckett and Fyodor Dostoevsky

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I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the connection between Beckett's comedy and Dostoevsky's novels in the light of René Girard's theory of metaphysical desire. While focusing on Beckett's prose of the 1930s, this study begins with the typology of laughter in *Watt*. With the help of this passage (employed as a critical tool), the subject of Beckett's comedy is preliminarily defined as 'The Unhappy Consciousness'. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this term is stated with regards to the functions of laughter as a negative response to a threat from a hostile phenomenal world. 'The risus purus', which Beckett celebrates as 'the laugh of laughs', reveals itself as a satirical attack at Kant's rational cosmology and Hegel's phenomenology. A further investigation into this structure provides a link between the genre of comedy in general, Beckett's comic form and Girard's theory of mimetic desire, based on the works of Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky. The works of these novelists allowed René Girard to articulate a concrete theorization of desire, which binds together literary and anthropological questions.

Beckett's engagement with Dostoevsky remains a blind spot in Beckett studies. Although as early as *Proust*, Beckett attempted to link Proust and Dostoevsky as the writers whose technique he defined as 'negative and comic', the scarcity of his critical comments on Dostoevsky has been an obstacle for scholars trying to identify and analyse their relationship. This study hopes to reveal that Beckett's enthusiastic comments on the Russian novelist are only the tip of the iceberg whose bigger part is hidden in the deeper waters of Beckett's fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea that the novels of Beckett and Dostoevsky can be read in parallel as metaphysical comedies emerged out of a genre study of Beckett's early prose, undertaken initially with a view to translating *Murphy* into Russian. *Murphy* embodies the problem common to all of Beckett's novels that Ruby Cohn has highlighted so concisely: 'Murphy is hardly a clear book, but it is clearly comic in its details'.[1] Elsewhere in her seminal *Comic Gamut*, she complains that 'so ambiguous are Beckett's comic heroes that we scarcely know why we laugh'.[2] There are many who would argue that Beckett's creation is not comic, but even these readers admit that the significance of the philosophical allusions, constituting the content of his works, remains 'opaque'. According to Matthew Feldman, the author of *Falsifying Beckett*, 'the very opacity of Beckett's work […] is a key part of its universal relevance and force'.[3] In his 'Introduction' to *Beckett/Philosophy*, he expresses a degree of scepticism with regards to a previous critical approach advocated by Dermot Moran, who wrote in 2006 that a 'stark Beckettian world cries out for philosophical interpretation'.[4] Cohn's insistence on the clarity of Beckett's comic details calls to mind Chris Ackerley's *Demented Particulars*, which is the best annotation of Beckett's philosophical allusions in *Murphy*. Despite the fact that the book enriches our knowledge of Beckett's readings in philosophy, it hardly accounts for their 'concretion' in a form that affects us aesthetically. From Beckett's critical writings we know that he was committed to the art that 'makes no attempt to dissociate content from form. The one is the concretion of the other, the revelation of a world'.[5] Since Beckett's early writings are especially notable for their rich vein of comedy, it is perhaps possible to suggest that the critic who wishes to understand his comic form must look for a philosophical meaning that is essentially comic.

In trying to bind together comedy and philosophy in Beckett's early writings, the methodology advocated across this study leans on the *theory of mimetic or metaphysical desire* proposed by the French American critic René Girard. According to Girard, mimetic desire is a puzzling phenomenon which can only be discovered in the context of literary

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[1] Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 46.
[2] Ibid., p. 8.
[3] Matthew Feldman, *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archives, Philosophy, and Methodology in Beckett Studies* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2015), p. 19.
[4] Dermot Moran, 'Beckett and Philosophy', in *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years* (Dublin: New Island, 2006), quoted in Matthew Feldman's 'Introduction' to *Beckett/Philosophy* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2015), p. 12.
[5] Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues With George Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), p. 88.

texts. He speaks of 'one essential human behaviour' – namely, desire, whose imitative nature has been largely misunderstood. Plato's notion of *mimesis*, known to us through Aristotle's *Poetics*, states that 'man is the most imitative of creatures' and 'learns his earliest lessons by imitation'.[6] Whereas Aristotle refers to men's propensity to represent (imitate) objects, Girard insists that humans imitate desires of one another in choosing their objects.

Given that mimetic behaviour is essential, or almost unconscious, this condition is ideal for comedy. As Chapter 4 will reveal, Beckett was acquainted with Henri Bergson's concept of comedy (in *Le Rire*) as the genre that feeds on the individuals who are perennially 'absentminded'. It is, perhaps, no mere coincidence that both Bergson and Girard have singled out Don Quixote as a classical example of the over-romantic mind – a comic character who 'falls' because he is 'intent upon a star'.[7] Both see this situation as a comic archetype, but their accounts of the hero's tragic unconscious are very different. For Bergson, Don Quixote is 'the stubborn spirit [that] ends by adjusting things to its own way' (91). In Girard's opinion, Bergson himself is a romantic reader because he overlooks the role played by Amadis of Gaul – a legendary model whose chivalric life-style Don Quixote wishes to imitate. For a philosophically minded critic like Girard, this form of representation subverts the whole Enlightenment project with its insistence on the mind's 'divine autonomy'. By Girard's own admission, the shift in his thinking as a philosopher and historian towards far broader social and cultural questions occurred when he was assigned to a teaching post on French literature at Indiana. The need to read all the novelists opened his eyes to their 'intuitive and concrete understanding of the human condition' which he called *mimetic desire*.[8] Once the reality of the divine *model* or *mediator* is acknowledged, the traditional cleavage between the Enlightenment (reason) and Romanticism (imagination) is removed. The romantic myth of divine autonomy is at the core of Girard's earliest monographs on mimetic desire, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, in original *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (1961) and *Resurrection from the Underground*, first published as *Dostoevski: du double à l'unité* (1963). In both of them, he traces this development from Don Quixote's desire for the 'divine Amadis' to Kirillov's desire for self-annihilation. Although upon this journey, Girard speaks more about tragedy

[6] Aristotle, *Poetics* in *Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle, Horace, Longinus* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 35.
[7] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 7.
[8] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (USA: the John Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 1.

and only occasionally about comedy, it is obvious that the territory upon which these two genres meet is comparative anthropology.

From what has been outlined above, it is easy to deduce another aspect of mimetic theory, which is useful for this genre study: Girard's approach to literature. In a series of articles addressed to the structuralist movement of the 1960s, he argues that literature is a form of thinking that has as much theoretical power as the more systematic modes of inquiry and encourages his colleagues to read literature to illuminate psychoanalysis or phenomenology, rather than the other way round. It is remarkable that Beckett contends the same epistemological role of literature in *Proust*, demonstrating throughout his essay that 'in the case of the scientist the action of the intelligence precedes the event and in the case of the writer follows it'.[9] Moreover, his famous declamation – 'I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophical terms' – points to a view of the novel as the most adequate form to express the subject which is conventionally rendered in philosophical terms.[10] Although the interview does not reveal what his philosophical subject was, his approach to the Proustian novel as the 'Le Discours de la méthode' suggests that this subject was human thinking or *desire*. In posing the question as to why modern men cannot satisfy their desires with objects, Beckett looks for an answer in Proust's 'involuntary memory', Stendhal's 'theory of crystallization' and Dostoevsky's 'impressionism'. It is hardly a matter of mere coincidence that the same group of novelists explained to Girard the nature of this progressive disappearance of objects from the scope of our perception which no philosopher or phenomenologist could ever explain. The changes in the evolution of our thinking, deployed on the pages of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, will be presented in Chapter 1 alongside a discussion of the historical developments of comedy.

So far we have noted two elements in Girard's schemata, which will underpin this study: his approach to literature and the theory of mimetic desire. The third part of his three-fold programme may seem to be incompatible with comedy because it deals with those ramifications of mimetic desire which activate the impulse for interminable revenge, conventionally associated with tragedy. Prompted by a friend (Eugenio Donato) to look into anthropological texts, such as Greek Tragedy and myth, Girard redeployed and developed some of his initial insights on mimetic desire, derived from his prior work on

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[9] Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues With George Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), p. 84.
[10] Beckett's interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède of 16 February 1961 in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1997), p. 217.

the novel. After a decade of research, he offered his 'eidetic' reconstruction of the origins of cultural and social order in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972). An excerpt from his 2006 text 'On War and Apocalypse' provides a brief summary of his hypothesis:

> Because humans imitate one another, they have had to find a means of dealing with contagious similarity, which could lead to the pure and simple disappearance of their society. The mechanism by which they have done that is sacrifice which reintroduces difference into a situation in which everyone has come to resemble everyone else. What I call (after Freud) "the founding murder" – the immolation of a sacrificial victim who is both guilty of disorder and able to restore order – is constantly re-enacted in the rituals at the origins of our institutions. Since the dawn of humanity, millions of innocent victims have been killed in this way to enable their fellow-humans to live together or at least not to destroy one another. This is the implacable logic of the sacred, which myths dissimulate less and less as humans become increasingly self-aware.[11]

Arguing that the decisive point in this increasing self-awareness was Christian revelation, Girard puts forward a paradoxical idea that the Judeo-Christian texts were decisive in launching the process of secularization. He credited this discovery to Nietzsche who viewed Christianity as the chief antithesis of the Dionysian will (that is 'beyond good and evil'). Although in the course of this discovery Girard took a contrary stand, he did not see how modern society could reintroduce Christianity as a social institution: 'Religion is going to be divisive'.[12] This part of Girard's anthropology will help us to clarify Dostoevsky and Beckett's engagements with Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* in 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' and *Watt* that, as will be argued in the last chapter, stands in direct relation to the central thesis of Dostoevsky's 'Legend'.

In the wake of Girard's election to the French Academy as 'a new Darwin of the human sciences', his synthesising thought has extended across a remarkably wide range of disciplines; his books have been translated into many languages and a number of learning societies has been set up to validate his legacy. Ironically, the very area from which he derived his verve – literary criticism – has remained almost deaf to his ideas. It is true that

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[11] René Girard, 'On War and Apocalypse', in *First Things*, August 2009, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/08/on-war-and-apocalypse.
[12] Girard's interview with Thomas F. Bertonneau of 7 March 1987, published by the University of California, eScholarship.org, p. 9.

Deceit, Desire and the Novel 'has gained the status of one of those *livres de chevet* cherished by many readers', as Paolo Antonello puts it, however, Girard's critical practices have never become a part of literary training.[13] There are many reasons for this silence but what seems to be most obvious is that Girard's 'Darwinian' standing finds itself at variance with the very essence of literary studies which seek to replace the myths of sacred origins with the hard facts of various struggles for justice and equality. The approach to literary texts as reflections of exterior factors, such as *race, milieu, moment,* emerged in the late nineteenth century. In the course of this development, literary studies have obtained their leading role, being in command of the area which deals with language. If '*there is no outside to the text*', as Jacques Derrida has famously stated, the task of literary critics consists in liberating our language from its violence, or from what Derrida calls 'logocentrism'.[14] A literary critic becomes a deconstructionist of philosophical texts, where the latter present themselves as nothing more than 'grammatology', a collection of arbitrary signs of which they are constituted. In the view of this Western attitude towards violence, Girard's "deconstruction" of cultural origins appears to be the very *terra firma* of violence. But does not this 'new Darwinism' deal with the same task of deconstructing violence, with the difference that Girard substitutes 'texts' for the real world of humans *doing* violence towards each other?

An interesting response to mimetic theory can be found in J.M. Coetzee who has undertaken a series of recondite deconstructions of Girard's anthropology through his fiction. For instance, *The Master of Petersburg* depicts Dostoevsky's "fall" contrary to Girard's tracing of Dostoevsky's novelistic development as his "resurrection" from "the underground".[15] In *Resurrection from the Underground*, Girard argues that Dostoevsky's 'Christian choice' was the only cure for the writer's mimetic entanglements. Coetzee's non-fictional objection can be deduced from a endnote in the back of his volume *Giving Offence* in which he warns that 'Girard's grand theory lacks an empirical basis and therefore can be even unfalsifiable'.[16]

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[13] See Pier Paolo Antonello, 'Introduction' to *"Mimesis, Desire and the Novel": René Girard and Literary Criticism'* (2015), p. ix. https://www.academia.edu/11367565/Introduction_to_Mimesis_Desire_and_the_Novel_René_Girard_and_Literary_Criticism_

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.

[15] My MA dissertation, called 'J.M. Coetzee and René Girard: Triangular Structures of Desire in Coetzee's earlier works' contains detailed analyses of Coetzee's texts reflecting Girard's influence.

[16] J.M. Coetzee, 'Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry', in *Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 93, 248.

The principle of falsifiability is central to contemporary Beckett criticism that has to deal with the knowledge amassed by archival studies of Beckett's philosophical allusions. Matthew Feldman, the editor of, and the contributor to, *Beckett/Philosophy* (2015), and the author of *Falsifying Beckett* (2015), advocates a methodology based on Karl Popper's epistemological principle, according to which, '*the criterion of a scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability*'.[17] By 'theorising from a position of empirical strength' the critic is 'aiming for falsifiable assertions'.[18]

According to Feldman and Dirk Van Hulle, this method will allow Beckett scholars to narrow the writer's philosophical scope to those references and notes that are empirically present in his manuscripts. Although Feldman is aware that the 'falsifying principle' is identical with 'this epistemological *via negativa*' he is convinced that only this method would minimize the danger of 'universal statements' which the previous interpreters have allegedly tended to impose on Beckett.[19] Given the synthesising nature of Girard's cultural anthropology, it would appear to fail this criterion of empirical testability. To weigh all the pros and cons of these very different methods, the remainder of this Introduction will trace the antagonism between the two approaches back to its origin in the late 1950s. Alongside this excursion, certain critical developments in Beckett scholarship relevant to this study will be surveyed.

The antagonism in question should not be tied to specific names but shall be considered within a broader methodological framework. As Feldman himself points out, Popper's theory was published only in the 1950s – the decade which saw revolutionary change in the human sciences and literary studies. This change was prepared by Saussure's linguistic theories which challenged the positivist view of literary texts as mere reflections of the "real" world. The realization that any discourse is made up of words as signs that convey only relative knowledge, or the knowledge resulting from relations between innumerable things, invites the researcher to perceive the world as a structure. Suddenly, the linguists and the human scientists recognized that their disciplines were not evolving in a vacuum. In 1933, Nikolai Trubetzkoy wrote: 'Our time is characterized by the tendency in all

[17] Matthew Feldman, 'Introduction', *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 19.
[18] Erik Tonning, 'Forward: Feldman After Feldman', in *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 13.
[19] Matthew Feldman, 'Introduction', *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 19.

disciplines to replace atomism by structuralism […]. Contemporary phonology is not isolated. It is part of a larger scientific movement'.[20]

In his early article 'Formalism and Structuralism in Literature and the Human Sciences' (1963), Girard lays out a strong defence of structuralist theory seeing its advantage in allowing the literary critic to overcome the positivist spirit with its tendency to reduce literary meaning, posited as 'unknown', to 'what is known', i.e. empirically available data. He quotes an excerpt from Louis Hjelmslev's *Acta Linguistica* that offers a vision of the world as

> […] an autonomous entity of internal dependences or, in a word, a structure […]. The analysis of this entity allows us to constantly separate parts that reciprocally condition each other, where each part depends on certain other parts and would neither be conceivable nor definable without these other parts. Structural analysis reduces its object to a network of relations, while considering linguistic facts as being "in a network".[21]

Such a reduction, Girard argues, does not place the object of study within 'a univocal causal relation', just as the positivist critic tends to do. Structures or forms are not some ideal entities "out there", but they make their meaning 'by maintaining the relation of reciprocal expression'.[22]

His main disagreement with contemporaneous structuralism (the so-called 'French theory') is that its exponents deny meaning to structure beyond linguistic articulation. He argues that these relations of expression indicate that structure is essentially meaningful. To those thinkers who fear universal explanations, Girard replies that the concept of structure 'does not imply any hierarchical organization of structures; these structures exclude neither oppositions nor contradictions, and far from suggesting an *a priori* solution, no longer allow us to pose the question of origins'.[23] He also makes an important analogy between what Proust was trying to do in his novels, and what structuralist thinkers are trying to do. For all of them, 'it is a matter of reconquering an alien interiority by

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[20] Nikolai Trubetzkoy, 'La Phonologie actuelle', in *Psychologie du langage* (Paris: Alcan, 1933), quoted in René Girard, "Formalism and Structuralism', in *Mimesis and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 82.
[21]Louis Hjelmslev, *Acta Linguistica*, quoted in René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 82.
[22]René Girard, 'Formalism and Structuralism', in *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 83.
[23]Ibid.

taking a position completely outside of one's own structures'.[24] On a broader scale, he maintains that the structuralist vision will put an end to 'turf battles' between different disciplines, 'for the only things that remain are structures and structures of structures, often called 'worlds' or 'worldviews''.[25] As one follows this argument, it seems that Girard was no stranger to some kind of utopia: the time will come when academics will stop fighting and engage in a dialogue revealing their worlds to one another. The reality of the 1960s, however, presented Girard with the problem, which would become the subject matter of his comparative anthropology – namely, the 'mimetic rivalry' between those same 'worldviews'.

By the time he wrote 'Theory and Its Terrors' (1989), any respect for structuralism and its deconstructionist successors had vanished. Looking retrospectively on the outcomes of the legendary colloquium on structuralism that took place at Johns Hopkins in 1966 (of which he was a participant and one of the organizers), Girard describes post-structuralism as the return to, and the entrenchment of, the positivist ideology with its demarcation of the empirical and the aesthetic. Fixated on the key principle of Saussure's linguistics which denies 'the referent-signified', the structuralists proclaimed that the conclusions of the social sciences are nothing more than mediocre fiction. For Girard, Jacques Derrida *joined* Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault 'in insisting that we can and must undermine all philosophical systems with the help of structural linguistics'.[26] Towards the end of his essay, deconstructionism is presented as an enemy of 'truth' and 'our great cultural tradition in favour of the latest research'.[27] What Feldman calls the *via negativa* Girard describes as 'a mirror image' of the previous belief in progress, conducive to the production of deconstructive literature every ten years in order to render the previous batch outmoded: 'If one wanted to be really polemical, one could say that faith in the progress of knowledge has been replaced by faith in the progress of ignorance' (201).

The atmosphere of the 1950s and the 1960 was crucial in forming Beckett's reputation as the writer who, in Eric Tonning's words, 'needed knowledge *in order to* write ignorance and failure'.[28] As Feldman observes, Jacques Derrida found Beckett's work '"too close for him" to write on'.[29] One of the earliest accounts of Beckett as a deconstructionist comes from Claude Mauriac who invented the term 'aliterature', i.e.

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[24]Ibid., p. 93.
[25]Ibid., p. 83.
[26] René Girard, 'Theory and Its Terrors', in René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 201.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Erik Tonning, 'Feldman After Feldman' in *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 14; Tonning's emphasis.
[29] Matthew Feldman, 'Introduction', *Beckett/Philosophy*, p. 27.

'literature freed from the hackneyed conventions'.[30] The apparent consequence of this freedom is the sameness of meaninglessness. Thus, for Mauriac, such writers as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Henry Miller, Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett, 'speak the same language because they are releasers of the same secret'.[31] Since such secrets are enclosed within one's subjective system, to the exterior observer they are the same:

> The author of *Finnegans Wake* in fact creates out of whole cloth words full of so many diverse overtones that they are eclipsed by them. For Beckett, on the contrary, words all say the same thing. In the extreme, it is by writing anything at all that this author best expresses what he considers important. The result is the same.[32]

One may presume that even if Beckett had intended to parody the purveyors of a-literature, he certainly put himself at risk of losing his distinctive voice. An English reviewer of the 1960s, Melvin J. Friedman, takes Mauriac's 'aliterature' with a pinch of salt: 'Mauriac's is perhaps the most revealing discussion we have so far about Samuel Beckett, the Irish writer who lives in Paris'. Having little else to add to Mauriac's 'line of negation', Friedman suggests that '[Beckett's] instinctive Irish wit balances his subterranean French pessimism'.[33]

Despite the nihilistic temperament of the 1960s, this decade saw more attempts at aligning Beckett's humour with a certain comic tradition than any other period. For instance, Patrick Murray in his 'Samuel Beckett and Tradition' contends that Beckett's works should be placed alongside the masterpieces of Gaelic humorous writers, such as Swift and Joyce, notable for 'their tendency to regard no aspect of life as too sacred'.[34] It is surprising that in making this statement, Murray ignores Swift's fame as a great satirical writer whose motivation for the macabre has been famously summarised by W.B. Yeats: 'Swift has sailed into his rest/ Savage indignation there/Cannot lacerate his breast'.[35] But with the rise of nationalism in the 1930s, the meaning of this 'savage indignation' came to

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[30] Claude Mauriac, *The New Literature* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), p. 131, quoted in Melvin J. Friedman, 'Samuel Beckett and the "Nouveau Roman"', *Wisconsin Studies of Contemporary Literature,* vol. 1, No 2, (Spring-Summer 1960), p. 22.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 23.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Patrick Murray, 'Samuel Beckett and Tradition', in *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 58, No 230 (Summer 1969), p. 167.
[35] W.B. Yeats, 'Swift's Epitaph', http/www.poeticous.

be perceived as the writer's 'elitism' rather than the expression of his concern for humanity. This strange idea that the business of the comic writer consists exclusively in demonstrating his contempt for the human race was reinforced by Freud who saw women and comedians as narcissists *par excellence*.[36]

The most substantial work on Beckett's humour of that period, and, one may safely say, of all successive periods, is Ruby Cohn's *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (1962). Far from subsuming Beckett within 'aliterature', Cohn outlines her task as an attempt to understand 'the idiosyncratic structure that Beckett builds from often familiar materials'.[37] As a result of this approach – structuralist as it is – she was able to single out a paradoxical psychology of 'a pseudocouple' – the term that Beckett uses in *The Unnamable* is applicable, she argues, to other characters as well.[38] The fact that all Beckett heroes behave as doubles of each other would come to be known as 'the Cartesian bias in Beckett studies'. It is true that in Cohn's research this structure somehow recedes in the light of the dichotomy on which she insists – namely, between Beckett's world and 'the cluttered complexity of our planet'.[39] The laughter that occurs as a result of this opposition is read as a way of facing up to the hostility of 'a stone cold universe'. In 'The Comedy of Samuel Beckett: "Something old, Something New"', Cohn set the tradition of reading humour as an accompaniment of man's existential tragedy. She argues that unlike the poets of "*l'humour noir*" (like Chaucer and Rabelais), 'Beckett's heroes are not victorious through their laughter; their suffering and death are part of a larger, grimmer joke – the absurdity of a human situation, the cosmological comedy'.[40] This important conclusion takes us to the realm of metaphysics where we are compelled to pose this question: who is the author of that cosmological joke? Could it be that Beckett, like the novelists selected by Girard, was able to grasp the 'triangular nature' of our metaphysical desires? The philosophical meaning of Cohn's cosmological comedy comes into focus in Simon Critchley's *Very Little … Almost Nothing* (1997), which discusses Beckett's laughter as an antidote to nihilism. This theme is central to the argument of Chapter 2.

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[36] Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: *An Introduction', in General Psychological Theory* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 62.
[37] Ruby Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, p. 16.
[38] Ruby Cohn, 'Philosophical fragments in Works of Samuel Beckett', *Criticism*, Vol. 6, No 1 (Winter 1964), p. 35.
[39] Ruby Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, p. 8.
[40] Ruby Cohn, 'The Comedy of Samuel Beckett: "Something old, Something New"' in *Yale French Studies*, No 23 (Humour), 1959, p. 2.

Laura Salisbury's *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* presents itself as an alternative to Cohn and Critchley's existentialist readings of Beckett's comedy. For Salisbury, Beckettian laughter is purely physical and therefore anti-philosophical *per se*. With this emphasis on the physical importance of laughing matters, Salisbury argues that comedy in general is a genre that 'stretches initial incongruities, folding them into new configurations through forms of rhythmic accretion, hesitation and deviation'.[41] Her discovery of what she calls 'comic timing' exemplifies the triumph of formalism in that part of Beckett studies that likes to present Beckett as a "pure artist". Salisbury's particular version of this trend celebrates the bleak aesthetics of 'waiting' and 'procrastination' as ethical and amusing, although one cannot rid oneself of the sense that her 'comic timing' represents an absolutely unfalsifiable type of philosophical deconstruction.

Over the decades, the study of Beckett's philosophical references has been a counterbalance to the expulsion of content from his works. Early approaches were marked by scholars' attention to a number of recurrent structures (or themes), such as, for instance, the stark Beckettian dualism, which inspired Hugh Kenner's work on the Cartesian echoes in Beckett's post-war novels.[42] By contrast, the approach underpinning *Beckett/Philosophy* encourages the researcher to begin his or her research with archival findings ('theorizing from a position of empirical strength') rather than with the analysis of the work itself. Since the latter is not unlike the Thing-in-Itself, posited as the unknowable, it is incumbent on the researcher to move between Beckett's notes and their philosophical sources, posited as knowable. Feldman's faith in the objectivity of the observer resembles the old positivist method with its insistence on the empirical facts. It is therefore understandable why he mistrusts 'literary-minded scholars' and hopes that their research would benefit from the opinion of "real" experts – 'academic philosophers'.[43] One wonders, whether such a collaboration would place the limit on interpretation.

As an archival methodology, the Popper-based scientific paradigm outlined above is relatively neutral, in so far as the archival critic does not insist that his reading of evidence is absolute. The majority of essays included in the volume resort to the structuralist analysis as an essential means of achieving a synthesis. In his essay on Beckett and Berkeley ('"The Books are in the Study as Before": Samuel Beckett's Berkeley'), Steven Matthews argues that archival criticism will benefit greatly from paying closer

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[41] Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2012), p. 1.
[42] Hugh Kenner, 'The Cartesian Centaur', in *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (London: John Calder, 1962).
[43] Matthew Feldman, *Beckett/Philosophy*, p. 13.

attention to the way in which certain recurrent philosophical tropes are interrelated across Beckett's texts. Having taken up this lead, Matthews has demonstrated that Beckett evokes "Berkeley's case" to typify the absurd rivalry between two identical philosophical presumptions: 'a victory of mind over matter and sealing off the mind against it'[44]. The latter is a 'defence mechanism' of 'such fellows' as Berkeley and Beckett, whose 'scepticism' derives from the sense of national, and, one may presume, personal, inferiority complex demanding immediate retaliation.[45] For the current study, Matthews' archival intervention has revealed that the power of Beckett's fiction and critical texts lies in their author's ability to satirize himself – the finding which sheds some light on the nature of absurdity in Beckett's cosmological comedy.

There is no denying that archival criticism is truly priceless: it is the method that will always support the editing of texts as the critique of the knowledge amassed by literary history. Feldman, however, claims that the falsifiability criterion serves the cause of advancing the common good of Beckett studies and, by extension, literature in general. According to Steven Connor, all successive criticism should be dated 'AF' – 'After Feldman': 'By teaching us to read as Beckett himself read, Feldman enables us to read him anew. The effect of this work will be seismic'.[46] Erik Tonning, another eminent Beckettian, confirms that the shift has truly occurred: 'it is now very difficult, given the amount of documentation in the public domain about precisely what Beckett was reading and when, for scholars to shirk the task of building any assertion about what Beckett 'must have read' (and when he read it) upon empirical evidence'.[47] As one reads these reviews, the following question arises: is the knowledge based on 'what' and 'when' sufficient for building assertions about 'how' Beckett read? As Anthony Uhlmann has rightly observed, 'although [Feldman's] argument begins from empirical evidence, it further develops interpretations based on *a reading* of this evidence. These interpretations thus involve presuppositions with regard to how Beckett might have worked with or attacked ideas otherwise developed by philosophers'.[48] This reciprocal relation implies that in choosing this or that literary form, Beckett had something new to say in response to philosophy. On

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[44] Steven Matthews, '"The Books are in the Study as Before": Samuel Beckett's Berkley', in *Beckett/Philosophy*, pp. 214-16.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Steven Connor, quoted in Erik Tonning's 'Forward: Feldman 'After Feldman'', in Matthew Feldman, *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 13.
[47] Erik Tonning's 'Forward: Feldman 'After Feldman', in *Falsifying Beckett*, p. 13.
[48]Anthony Uhlmann, 'Approaches to the Archive: Popper, Coetzee, and Scientific Validity', in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (June 2017), p. 103; Uhlmann's emphasis.

this supposition, the Alfa and Omega for the 'literary-minded' critic should be the work itself. If instead of the work, it is the search for 'falsifiable instances',[49] such a critique will become predictable and tautological in the way it traces meaning back to an all-determining principle: that is 'falsifying Beckett' whose 'Country' is 'opaque'. In Beckett studies, the validity of the 'obscure', 'opaque', 'incoherent', has become so dogmatic that the researcher sometimes submits to it unwittingly.

John Bolin's *Beckett and the Modern Novel* is a case in point. From the outset, Bolin challenges 'the common theoretical project' by blaming it for gleaning philosophical meaning from Beckett's works instead of paying attention to his literary influences.[50] His own study, examining Beckett's engagement with the theory of the novel, derives from the premise that Beckett was 'influenced' by 'the Continent in order to challenge what he termed 'the tradition' of the 'European novel''.[51] Bolin's watchword for Beckett's style is 'incoherence'. Matched with André Gide's term '*inconséquence*', it fits perfectly into the common theoretical project that sees 'Beckett's work as co-evolving […] with phenomenology or even Derrida's poststructuralist philosophy'.[52]

The empirical evidence upon which Bolin relies for his argument are the notes taken by Beckett's students at his lectures when he was teaching a course on French modernism at T.C.D. in the autumn of 1930. Whilst quoting some disjointed phrases and sometime single words from those notebooks, Bolin links them to the similarly fragmented sentences from Beckett's published works. Thus, *Proust* is read through the lens of the lectures dominated by the discussion of Gide and Dostoevsky:

> Beckett turns to these exemplars because, in the face of reality that was ultimately 'unknown', he wished to ask a question unlike that asked by Proust, for whom the '*Whole problem*' of the artwork was '*how to apprehend the real*' (MIC60, 99, Burrows's emphasis). Rather than this Proustian urge to unite the ideal and the real in the transcendent moment of aesthetic 'apprehension', Beckett described a fundamentally 'different need' from any he had hitherto expressed for the artwork: '*preserving* [the] *integrity of incoherence*' (MIC60, 37, Burrows's emphasis).[53]

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[49] Matthew Feldman, 'Introduction' to *Beckett/Philosophy*, p. 40.
[50] John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 1.
[51] Ibid., p.4.
[52] Matthew Feldman, 'Introduction' to *Beckett/Philosophy*, p. 13.
[53] John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 17.

This archival reading allows Bolin to dissociate Dostoevsky from Proust and create a bond between Beckett, Gide and Dostoevsky – the bond that is roundly contradicted by *Proust*'s entire argument.

It is not that Bolin is completely unaware of such contradictions. The most obvious one is Beckett's contemptuous aside made against 'the Gideans and analogivorous' with their motto "Live dangerously', qualified as 'a nonsensical bastard phrase'.[54] But for Bolin, this emotional outburst proves Beckett's reluctance to admit 'the influence of the old writer'.[55] Such an excuse, however, does not accord with the final section of *Proust* in which Beckett links Dostoevsky to Proust, not Gide, and objects to Ernst Curtius (who was a German 'Gidean') that Proust's 'perspectivism' (an analogue of Gide's 'incoherence' and 'relativism') has nothing 'positive' but is employed as an element of comedy:

> Proust's relativism and impressionism are adjuncts of this same anti-intellectual attitude. Curtius speaks of Proust's 'perspectivism' and 'positive relativism' as opposed to the negative relativism of the late ninetieth century […]. I think the phrase '*positive relativism*' is an oxymoron, I am almost sure that it does not apply to Proust […]. In a sense, Proust is a positivist, but his positivism has nothing to do with his relativism, which is as pessimistic and as negative as that of France and employed as an element of comedy […].[56]

One might feel lost in all these almost identical terms. It is, however, obvious that by 'the negative relativism of the late nineteenth century' Beckett means nihilism. This reference could have suggested to Bolin the context in which all these terms begin to make sense.

As Walter Kaufmann reminds us, Nietzsche sought to replace Christ's silence in response to Pontius Pilate's question, "*Was ist Wahrheit?*", with the concept of 'perspectivism' or 'relativism': 'every thinker who begins from Kant's philosophy' should endure 'a gnawing and crumbling scepticism and relativism'.[57] The phrase 'Live Dangerously' comes from the 'untimely meditation' on *Schopenhauer as Educator* in which Nietzsche celebrates the will that aspires to self-destruction. For Gide, this scenario was unacceptable. Writing that 'nul plus que Dostoevski n'a *aidé* Nietzsche', he was able

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[54] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 20.
[55] John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 7.
[56] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 85-86.
[57] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy', in Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (London: A Plum Book, 1989), p. 123.

to persuade his contemporaries that the "irrational" self-sacrificial drive of Dostoevsky's characters was a positive response to Nietzsche's nihilism.[58] Beckett's objection evidences that he did not support the fashionable doctrine of failure known as *l'acte gratuit*.

Whilst repeating twice in the next two paragraphs that Proust's relativism is 'negative and comic', Beckett coins the term 'impressionism' to relate Proust to Dostoevsky: 'Proust's […] characters seem to obey an almost insane inward necessity […] developed with a fine Dostoevskian contempt for the vulgarity of a plausible concatenation. (Proust's impressionism will bring us back to Dostoievski)'.[59] One would assume that the subtle distinction between 'perspectivism' and 'impressionism' was of little assistance to Beckett's making his point. The sense that the writer was dissatisfied with his critical performance shows in a letter to Charles Prentice dated 1931, in which he asks for '5 or 6' more pages 'to develop the parallel with Dostoevsky'.[60] Perhaps, this missing part would have been a further advancement of the idea that Proust and Dostoevsky's 'incoherence' or 'relativism' or 'perspectivism' was 'negative and comic'.[61]

Despite Bolin's misinterpretation of Beckett's relationship with Gide and Dostoevsky, his book has highlighted the territory which still remains uncovered in Beckett studies: writer-philosophers, their reception and the dissemination of their thought across generations. Some fragments of Beckett's lectures, cited by Bolin, reveal that Dostoevsky was primarily received as an extraordinary psychologist of modernity:

> Stendhal and Flaubert (the 'pre-Naturalists', in Beckett's terminology) are presented as 'the real ancestors of the modern novel' because of their 'Dostoevskian duality', 'complexity' and 'indeterminacy' (MIC60, 19, 7).[62]

What is modern in Dostoevsky is to be found also in Racine: ''the division in [the] minds of antagonists''.[63] As Chapter 3 will reveal, Beckett did not adhere to the dichotomy of rationalism versus romanticism: the type of consciousness he attacks in *Proust* is the product of 'the ineluctable gangrene of Romanticism'.[64]

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[58] Quoted in Alexander McCabe, 'Dostoevsky's French Reception' (PhD Dissertation, University of Glasgow, May 2013), p. 80.
[59] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 82.
[60] *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 51.
[61] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 85.
[62] John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 20.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 80.

As we shall see in the course of subsequent chapters, the fact that the root of Romanticism leads to the Enlightenment was no secret to Jules de Gaultier, Arland Ussher and Ernst Cassirer, whose philosophical overviews Beckett read. Just to give an instance of this perspective, the first chapter of Cassirer's *Kant's Life and Thought* traces the 'beginnings of Kant's philosophy' to the devastating event of the Lisbon earthquake which precipitated the philosopher's obsession with 'a supreme will' that demands 'exceptions from the rules of nature'.[65] It is this 'supreme will' whose psychology Jules de Gaultier traces 'from Kant to Nietzsche', describing it as 'the instinct to power', and which Girard identifies in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* as 'the romantic myth of divine autonomy'.

As for Girard's "deconstructions" of this myth, it should be noted that his criticism is not infallible. Thus, his division of literary artists into 'the novelists' and 'romantic writers' is based on a somewhat unstable criterion: the novelists are geniuses because by 'revealing mimetic desire' they debunk the myth of divine autonomy; the romantics are deceitful because they only 'reflect' this desire. This dichotomy is all the more questionable given Girard's insistence that the process of writing amounts to a form of introspection allowing the writer to come to grips with his or her divided consciousness. If romanticism is a euphemism for mimetic desire, it is rather difficult to separate those who are perennially blind from those who are relatively lucid. The former include modern 'neo-romantics' whose stance Girard labels 'a vast syndicalism of defeat', and goes ironic:

> Neither Roquentin in *Nausea* nor Meursault in *The Stranger* nor Samuel Beckett's tramps desire metaphysically. These characters are overwhelmed by many different ailments but the worst of all – metaphysical desire – is spared them. Our contemporary heroes never imitate anyone. They are all perfectly autonomous and they could repeat in chorus with Valéry's M. Teste: "We may look like just *anyone* but we are completely self-sufficient".[66]

This was written in 1961; in successive decades, Girard would change his opinion about Camus' *Stranger*. In 'Camus's Stranger Retired', he writes: 'The truth denied in *L'Etranger* is really so overwhelming that it comes out almost openly at the end of the

[65] Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 51.
[66] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, p. 258; Girard's emphasis.

novel, in Meursault's passionate outburst of resentment'.[67] In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, he derides romantic critics for their inability to appreciate Dostoevsky's humour; but in his later essay, 'Precarious Balance', he declares that today, Bergson's type of comedy does not make us laugh at 'the autonomy to which we cling', because this autonomy is no longer 'of our own making'. He claims that with the gradual disappearance of true differences between the individuals in modern societies, 'the whole domain of wit is turned into the object of a grave and continuous debate'.[68] Does this mean that the genre of comedy ought to be discarded as insufficiently supportive of Girard's theory?

Another downside of Girard's approach is its scant attention to the method of literary historiography, known as *intertextuality*. By tracing links between allusions and their probable sources, the intertextual analysis considers how later authors refer to and modify their predecessors. Faithful to his mimetic readings, Girard finds this method 'positivist' because it 'appeals to some extra-literary discipline, presumed to be particularly "scientific"'.[69] But we have already seen that the study of intertextuality does not need to make such an appeal if it relies on the structuralist analysis. Once the artificial denial of meaning is removed, the analysis of structures allows the researcher to move freely between different disciplines (or discourses), comparing them as 'world-views'.

In this respect, the current study must acknowledge its debt to the Russian scholar, Yakov Golosovker, who was the first to discover and examine the intertextuality of Dostoevsky and Kant.[70] Golosovker taught philosophy at St Vladimir University in Kiev in the 1910s and wrote his diplomas in philology (on the poesy of Sappho) and philosophy (on the philosophy of Rickert). Unfortunately, his archives were destroyed, as a large part of his life was spent in Stalin's labour camps. His long essay *Dostoevsky and Kant* (1963) is a vivid evocation of Dostoevsky's dramatization of Kant's antinomies of pure reason in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Perhaps due to this style, betraying the philosopher's live interest in literature, the book has never been considered as a serious academic study. Thus, according to Steven Cassedy, 'a Russian scholar by the name of Golosovker […] spent most of his book explaining close analogies between Dostoevsky's and Kant's thought'.[71] Dostoevsky's letter to his brother Mikhail of 22 February 1854, quoted by Golosovker in support of his argument, does not prove to Cassedy 'that Dostoevsky sat

[67]René Girard, 'Camus's Stranger Retired', in *To Double Business Bound* (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 31.
[68]René Girard, 'Precarious Balance', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 135.
[69]René Girard, 'Introduction', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. vii.
[70] Яков Голосовкер, *Достоевский и Кант* (Москва: Издательство Академии Наук, 1963).
[71] Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 94.

down and carefully read Kant'.[72] Indeed, instead of providing sufficient historical evidence for future reference, Dostoevsky wrote from Omsk in the following dramatic terms:

> Send me the Koran, Kant's *Critique de raison pure* and if you are ever in a position to send it to me unofficially, then without fail send me Hegel, especially Hegel's *History of Philosophy*. My whole future is bound up with that![73]

Another commentator, Malcolm Jones, in his article 'Some Echoes of Hegel in Dostoevsky', also denies that 'Dostoevsky 'actually read any Hegel during these years – or so we must assume for the want of evidence to the contrary'.[74] Such evidence, however, is not lacking, given that Dostoevsky was involved with the circles (the so-called 'Occidentalists') whose enthusiasm for Kant and Hegel Jones describes in terms of 'contemporary thinking'.[75] Such thinking, however, is denied to Dostoevsky, who, being in exile in Siberia (which was a punishment for this kind of thinking), simply decided to engage with philosophy in order not to lag behind 'the progressive ideas of his time'.[76] Neither the writer's indictment of Western individualism (everywhere evident in his correspondence and diaries) nor his passionate endorsement of 'the faith of the Russian people' (the thing which he could never explain in his critical texts) suggests to Jones and Cassedy that there was an *existential* immediacy to Dostoevsky's interest in Kant and Hegel. It is, perhaps, due to this old positivist belief in the objective observer that prevents these critics from bringing together structures, which are not material but meaningful. If the positivist critic is so preoccupied with objectivity how can he deny the fact that writers quite often *conceal* their sources, not wishing to disempower their art?

Evaluating Girard and Feldman's methodologies, the following issues become apparent: Is Girard's cultural anthropology applicable to Beckett given that it might be 'unfalsifiable'? What evidence should be considered sufficient in terms of intertextual analysis? What method should finally be adopted with regards to the main subject of this study, that is comedy? In order to broach these questions a *structuralist methodology* has

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Феодор Достоевский, «Письма», том 1, с. 139, quoted in Malcolm V. Jones, 'Some Echoes of Hegel in Dostoevsky', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 49, No. 117 (October 1971), p. 504.
[74] Malcolm V. Jones, 'Some Echoes of Hegel in Dostoevsky', in *The Slavonic and East European Review,* Vol. 49, No 117 (October 1971), p. 504.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Jones suggests that '[Dostoevsky's] cry was probably in part the cry of a man who was anxious at being left behind by contemporary thinking', Ibid.

been chosen. Girard's thought will be treated as *a theory* or a worldview, not a science; its conclusions verified through the reading of Beckett's texts. Findings will be arranged in a circular order, which presupposes the centrality of Beckett's oeuvre that will provide a platform for further theoretical forays into the history and function of comedy. The criterion of empirical evidence will be replaced with the principle of *linguistic facts*, i.e. meaningful structures which signify in relation to one another. Consequently, instead of analysing texts through the lens of a particular theory, this study will give priority to the imaginative texts, treating them as 'theories' in their own right. This implies looking for structures that provide analytical tools for further systematization. Ultimately, the following three principles will be implemented: (1) the imaginative text is critical, in the sense that it contains profound insights into the human condition, which can be considered on a par with any of the human sciences (psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology); (2) there is a dynamic and essential relation between author and work; and (3) 'literary theory and cultural theory are one', in the sense that the great literary texts are concerned with what is essential in the human experience from the perspective of a specific historical moment. The first principle could be described as 'structural'; the second as 'existential'; and the third, 'historical'.[77]

[77] Robert Doran, 'Editor's Introduction' to René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory*.

CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

One aspect of Cohn's approach to Beckett's comedy is especially valuable. On the basis of previous scholarship that has studied comedy diachronically, i.e. 'through the ages', she discerns two main subgenres relevant to Beckett's comic method: (1) comedy of manners, which employs laughter as 'a tool of instruction by negative example', and (2) cosmological comedy or farce in which laughter 'arises from a malicious feeling of superiority over a victim'.[1] Having assigned Beckettian comedy to the second group, Cohn nevertheless contends that 'his choice of laughter is abnegation, if you like'.[2] In other words, in Cohn's opinion, the laughter of Beckett's characters is helpless before a certain mysterious absurdity, which is nowhere to be located. Noting that Beckett nevertheless avails himself of some techniques developed in the comedy of manners subgenre, she does not specify, however, whether the abnegation of his characters is malicious, and if so, whether it instructs us by negative example. When it comes to genre, she emphasises the centrality of *the absurd* to Beckett's comedy and traces this type of absurdity to 'the works of its vivid portraitists – Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Kafka'.[3] Unfortunately, a comparative analysis of the texts embracing this tradition is not part of Cohn's study.

Adhering to the structuralist principle of analysis described in the 'Introduction', this chapter begins straight away with Beckett's "theory" of comedy as it emerges in Section II in *Watt*. The excerpt in question is incorporated in Arsene's 'short statement' in which he complains to Watt, his successor as a servant in Mr Knott's house, about the absurdity of their master's arrangements. The scope of these arrangements is truly cosmological: 'The sun! The light! Haw! […] and all the sounds, meaning nothing […] and the secret places where nobody ever comes […], always mere places […] of a being so light and free that it is as the being of nothing'.[4] Laughter is introduced as a means of 'excoriating the understanding':

> Of all the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs, but modes of ululation, only three I think need detain us, I mean the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. They

[1] Ruby Cohn, 'The Comedy of Samuel Beckett: "Something Old, Something New"', p. 11.
[2] Ibid., p. 17.
[3] Ibid., p. 14.
[4] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, ed. by C.J. Ackerley (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 32.

> correspond to successive, how shall I say, successive … suc … successive excoriations of the understanding, and the passage from the one to the other is the passage from the lesser to the greater, from the lower to the higher, from the outer to the inner, from the gross to the fine, from the matter to the form […]. The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well, well. But the mirthless laugh […] it is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs – silence please – at that which is unhappy.[5]

Such words as 'the unhappy' and 'the understanding' along with Arsene's cosmological concerns display a striking relevance to some important conceptual tropes in the phenomenologies of Kant and Hegel. No less striking is the pertinence of 'the bitter' and 'the hollow' to the types of laughter preferred by Kant and Hegel respectively, as they emerge in their philosophical texts. The passage quoted above suggests that Beckett's 'risus purus' asserts itself as a superior medium to the 'the bitter' and 'the hollow' in their capacity to excoriate the understanding. Beckett calls his laughter 'the form', hinting thereby at its universal quality, although the procedure through which it will take us does not promise to be painless: we are invited to compare the *risus purus*' function with comic *catharsis*, which is literally a medicine that releases a certain mental constipation.

SECTION 1: BECKETT AND KANT

'The understanding' is a term used by Kant across his oeuvre as a synonym for his famous *a priori* principle, according to which reason can and must make its judgements about the external world and about itself independently of all particular experience. From this view, humanity's rational development manifests itself in progress not only in the arts and sciences, but also in politics, education, religion, and morality. Moral development is to culminate in the moralization of humanity and the transformation of society into a moral whole. Although, according to Pauline Kleingeld, 'few philosophers today share Kant's

[5] Ibid., p. 39.

view of history', in the domain of education, *a priori* idealism predominates as 'the highest good' and an 'ethical commonwealth'.[6]

Thus, P.J. Murphy emphasises 'a transcendent aspect' of Kant's philosophy, which, he argues, 'supplied Beckett with a philosophical grammar for combating negatives encountered at the boundary lines of word and world'.[7] Murphy quotes John Pilling, according to whom 'Kant's great achievement' was the view of 'space and time [as] not a substantial reality, nor [as] properties of the object', but the properties of 'the subject of knowledge', 'the categories of his sensibility'.[8] It is true that Kant's philosophy underpins modernity, but does this allow us to assert that Beckett considered Kant's 'grammar' an achievement? Murphy reminds us that Beckett read Jules de Gaultier's *De Kant à Nietzsche*, without, however, emphasising that the book was 'an attempt to show how Nietzsche had the courage to carry to their logical conclusion the sceptical consequences involved in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*'.[9] Could Beckett overlook this thesis or did he simply disagree with it? Murphy refers to an entry in "*Whoroscope*" *Notebook* in which he finds the evidence of Beckett's "approval" of 'Kant's master stratagem': 'Kant's proof that the conditions of the possibility of experience are also the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience!!!'[10] Three exclamation marks do not suggest to Murphy a possibility of irony, which is all the more possible, given that further on in his essay, he recognizes 'a problematic role' which Kant's philosophy played in Beckett's thinking. Beckett's 1967 interview with Michael Haerdter conveys the writer's explicit indictment of *le siècle de la raison*:

> The eighteenth century has been called the century of reason, *le siècle de la raison*. I've never understood that; they're all mad, *ils sont tous fous, ils déraisonnes*! They give reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak. The Encyclopaedists wanted to know everything … But that direct relation between the self and […] the knowable was already broken.[11]

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[6] Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development', in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 16, No 1, January 1999, p. 60.
[7] P.J. Murphy, 'Beckett's Critique of Kant', in *Beckett/Philosophy*, p. 281.
[8] Ibid., p. 264.
[9] J.H. Jacques, A Review on *From Kant to Nietzsche*, in *Theology*, Vol. 65, No 506 (1961), p. 335.
[10] P.J. Murphy, 'Beckett's Critique of Kant', p.264.
[11] Interview with Michael Haerdter, quoted in P.J. Murphy, 'Beckett's Critique of Kant', p. 268.

The breakdown between the subject and the object (much lamented in *The Three Dialogues* and surreptitiously ridiculed in 'Recent Irish Poetry' as the index of 'self-awareness') calls to mind Beckett's joke in *Proust*: 'the whiskey bears a grudge against the decanter (the mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm)'.[12] Who is responsible for this breakdown? And is it really true that the objects of reality are merely the products of our mind? Absurdity arises when we refuse to accept the evidence of our eyes; but on the other hand, our eyes quite often perceive what reason commands ("I can't believe my eyes"). Here we arrive at the double nature of absurdity: what is absurd is *simultaneously* true and false.

Once 'real' objects no longer exist, the task of reason is to prove to other perceivers that its perceptions are right. In the third *Critique*, we find the description of a psychosomatic effect – 'a lively convulsive laugh' – that arises from the realization that reality ('representation') does not correspond to the thinker's Idea of it. For Kant, such a reality would be absurd: [13]

> In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). *Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing*. This transformation, which is certainly not enjoyable by the Understanding, yet indirectly gives it very active enjoyment for a moment. Therefore its cause must consist in the influence of the representation upon the body, and the reflex effect of this upon the mind.[14]

The sense of defeated expectation dominates Kant's entire *Critique of Pure Reason* – a search for 'pure and transcendental concepts' freed 'from the unavoidable limitations of possible experience'.[15] Since immortality lies beyond all possible experience, Kant presumes that practical reason ought to justify its resolutions by a certain unconditioned necessity that is distinct from both empirical necessity and religious dogma. How can reason transcend causality so that it may act freely and responsibly? According to Kant, the only method that can be applied is to conduct a synthesis of all appearances through the (a)

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[12] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 21.
[13] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Jonathan Bennett (https://earlymoderntexts.com/assests/pdfs/kant 2017), p. 207.
[14] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan & Co, 1914), p. 133; Kant's emphasis.
[15] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 207.

'ascending series of conditions related to a given conditioned x', and (b) 'descending series of consequences […] running in the opposite direction', i.e. all 'ever-later times'.[16] According to Kant, reason 'does not have to worry' about 'the series of consequences' because the 'ascending series of conditions' will inevitably suffice for 'the understanding'.[17]

The whole of *Watt* is literally made up of the ascending and descending series of conditions surrounding Watt in Mr Knott's house and grounds. The ascending series begins with a tedious enumeration of Arsene's ancestors on 'this lousy earth' ('my earth and my father's and my mother's and my father's father's and my mother's mother's […]') vanishing into nothing more unconditional than 'an excrement'.[18] Another such series deals with Mr Knott's servants who preceded Watt in Mr Knott's house, 'one always ousting the other' (49). From Arsene, Vincent and Walter, we move backwards to those whose 'trace is lost' and 'Christian name forgotten' (49). Comparing Watt's and his own physical make-ups, Arsene traces two lines of their distant antecedents: 'big bony shabby seedy haggard knockneed type', on the one hand, and 'the small fat seedy shabby oily or juicy bandylegged type, on the other' (51). None of these conditions, however, accounts for their desire to serve Mr Knott: 'It is rumoured', the narrator says, 'that Mr Knott would prefer to have no one at all about him, to look after him, fuss about him […] in tireless love' (52).

While pursuing the unconditioned, Kant himself was well aware that his method provided anything but certainty. In the most dramatic part of his *Critique*, entitled 'The Antinomies of Pure Reason', he declares that 'we are confronted here by a new phenomenon of pure reason – an entirely natural antithetic into which reason stumbles unavoidably, quite of its own accord, without being led on by sophisticated arguments'.[19] The psychology of this antithetic is scepticism, which Kant presents in the *Metaphysics of Morals* as the supreme principle of morality.[20] Since that time onwards, scepticism and agnosticism would be referred to as the position of epistemological modesty. Kant's text, however, betrays that this modesty is somewhat forced. Unlike latter day scepticism,

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[16] Ibid., p. 208.
[17] Ibid., pp. 207, 208.
[18] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 38; further references are in the main body of the text.
[19] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 206.
[20] See Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Kant: The Philosophy of Right* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 57.

Kant's new 'sceptical approach' does not want to deny knowledge, on the contrary, '[it] aims at certainty', but, quite paradoxically, has to step into 'the infinite regress'.[21]

On many occasions we are told that Watt advances backwards ('Watt advancing backwards towards me' (78, 134)). The opening part of Section II, presents the hero making his way towards Mr Knott's house in this manner: 'Watt's way of advancing […] was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again […]' (24). It is not easy to continue to write in this way. Reality intrudes in the shape of Lady McCann, whose attack on Watt is rendered in terms of a rival morality: 'Lady McCann, coming up behind, thought she had never, on the public roads, seen motions so extraordinary. […] Faithful to the spirit of her cavalier ascendants, she picked up a stone and threw it, with all her might […], at Watt' (24). This aggression produced 'no resentment' in Watt, and soon he was again 'in motion', like a machine, on his way towards Mr Knott's house – until the weakness in his body let him literally down, in a ditch (24). The tropic significance of ditches in Beckett's novels will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4; in the meantime it suffices to say that this place is not unlike the grave in which Watt hopes to rest. It is thus lying in his ditch, Watt realised that 'he could not sustain himself in this position' being disturbed by the inexhaustible manifestations of life all around, such as the moon pouring its light upon him and 'the little nightsounds coming from afar, from without, yes, really it seemed from without' (26).

Mark Nixon comments on the significance of 'the little nightsounds' (an allusion to Goethe's poem 'Wandrers Nachtlied II') in terms of Beckett's 'attachment to the poem's quietness': 'the birds in the forest have finished their song/Wait: you too shall rest before long'.[22] Such an attachment, however, is not in tune with Beckett's satirical tone. This emphasis on Watt's hostility towards the naughty phenomena suggests that he read 'The Wanderer's Nightsong' as the encapsulation of the doctrine that the leader of Weimar culture owed to Kant and which he modified in accordance with 'an era of

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[21] Claiming that 'anything that exists *contingently* must always be regarded as conditioned by a condition relative to which it is necessary', Kant flies into a veritable verbal frenzy. He continues: 'if this condition also exists contingently, then it must in turn be conditioned by (and necessary relative to) a further condition … and so on upwards, backwards, with reason demanding unconditioned necessity in itself, not necessary relative to something else – and that can be supplied only in the totality of the series', in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 210; Kant's emphasis.

[22] Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 66, and Mark Nixon, '"Scraps of German": Samuel Beckett Reading German Literature' (Samuel Beckett Today/*Aujourd'hui*, vol. 16, 2006), p. 266.

uncompromising individualism'.[23] The poet welcomes death as the ultimate achievement of a being, seeking to end his wanderings by joining an eternal order in which nothing ever stirs and nobody ever desires. We may understand Watt's irritation. Resting in a ditch he still can hear 'the little nightsounds', such as frogs' croaking and dogs' barking, which do not accord with the solemnity of the moment. The same resentment is at work in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, in which Beckett replaces Goethe's promise that the trees 'will soon be silent' with the narrator's spiteful observation that 'the little bitches [Bitchlein] are never silent in the forest'.[24] In *Watt*, we find a whole page of music composed by its author as if only to prove that the surreal 'outside' is truly alive and kicking. When Nixon insists on Beckett's overall attraction to 'the quietist and pessimistic tradition', he chooses to deal with the personal characteristics of a writer, disregarding the fact that the high satirical art is necessarily self-critical. By deriding his own 'Old Grillen', Beckett elevates his comedy to the level of philosophical reflection.

We can now consider the subject of this reflection in a broader context. *Watt* enacts the condition which Beckett calls 'duality' (in Burrows' notes). In the 'Introduction', we have referred to his lectures in which the term 'modern' appears in the context of psychology wrought with inner division: the 'Self divided against itself' or 'a division in the minds of antagonists'.[25] The whole structure of *Watt* rests on the dual opposition between the servants and their master, which also manifests itself as an internal division in the mind of the protagonist (the pertinence of this structure to Hegel's dialectic of master and slave will be discussed in detail in the final chapter). The satirical significance of Watt's desire to "abnegate in a ditch" in the context of romantic biographies, which, one would assume, could hardly have escaped Beckett's attention given his interest in romantic psychology. John Scholl's 'Study in Early German Romanticism' reveals a strange discrepancy between the doctrines teaching universal tolerance (in Kant, Herder, Fichte and developed in Schiller's and Goethe's influential works) and the atmosphere of resentment dominating romantic circles. Scholl characterises their relationships as 'a settled bitterness of a quarter of a century'.[26]

It may be unusual to approach Kant's rational cosmology from this perspective, but 'the risus purus' invites us to do so. According to Theodore Greene, Kant's entire critical

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[23] John William Scholl, 'Friedrich Schlegel and Goethe, 1790-1802: A Study in Early German Romanticism', in *PMLA*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1906), p. 47.
[24] Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 66.
[25] Burrows' notes quoted in John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 20.
[26] John William Scholl, 'Friedrich Schlegel and Goethe, 1790-1802: A Study in Early German Romanticism', p. 43.

philosophy derived from the realization that 'speculative reason is confronted by an insurmountable *barrier* and must therefore remain agnostic'.[27] The nature of this barrier comes into focus in the chapter on antinomies, where Kant formulates four theses, in the validity of which, he points out, 'every right-thinking man has a practical interest'.[28] According to these theses, man's freedom is only possible in so far as he is immortal. So the individual may conceive

> That the world has a beginning, that my thinking self is of simple and therefore indestructible nature, that it is free in its voluntary actions and raised above the compulsion of nature, and finally that all order in the things constituting the world is due to a primordial being, from which everything derives its unity and purposive connection – these are so many foundation stones of morals and religion (xl).

These theses, however, are absurd from the perspective of the dogmatic empiricists, whose examinations of the empirical world do not discern any trace of a primordial being. Their conclusions Kant formulated into four antitheses: 'that the world is infinite both spatially and temporally, that there exists in the world no room for human freedom, and that there no exists an absolutely necessary Being' (xl).

The antithesis is also absurd. If there is no afterlife, then all men's actions and purposes necessarily submit to the laws of mechanics, which is scandalous in terms of freedom. Kant's solution of this dilemma is the distinction between Science and Religion (that is, between the phenomenal world, or the world of "appearances" and a possible noumenal world of ultimate reality). Undoubtedly, this cosmology expresses men's collective abnegation before the unknowable – the domain traditionally treated by religion. Greene, however, characterises Kant's logic as 'theological' due to the replacement of 'a primordial being' with 'an intelligent being':

> May not both theses and antitheses be true, Kant asks, the antitheses, if taken to apply solely to phenomena, and the theses as applying only to the noumenal world? The "intelligible" world (as he also calls it, in contrast to the sensible world) and

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[27] Theodore M. Greene, 'The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's *Religion*', in Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, edited and trans by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. xl; my emphasis.
[28] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in Theodore Greene's 'Introduction' to Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. xl.

> man's "intelligible" nature would, on this hypothesis, be timeless, unaffected by the world of sense yet conditioning it as a whole.[29]

In reading Kant in conjunction with *Watt*, one may reveal a comic, if not naïve, aspect of the philosopher's duality, his 'unhappy consciousness'. Since the master of the house is absent (Whatnot or simply Not), the servant is free to condition this world's 'phenomena' ('unintelligible intricacies') according to his high moral principles.[30] Quite sadly, these same phenomena never fail to demonstrate their "noumenal" power. One such instance is Arsene's painful recollection of Lisbon's earthquake. Although this event did not see him as a participant, his personal system is said to have been so 'distended' that

> the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw – I did not, need I add, see the thing happen, nor hear it, but I perceived it with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding' (35).

Pilling and Lawler's archival study has revealed that Beckett read Cassirer's *Kant's Life and Thought* and transmitted some of his thoughts into his 'Whoroscope notebook'.[31] The significance of this reading in *Watt* is summed up by Mark Nixon and Dirk van Hulle in *Beckett's Library*[32] as the exposition of Kant's personal reaction to the event that had destroyed his optimistic teleology (in Cassirer, the Lisbon's great day is marked as 'the first step toward the gradual crumbling of the foundation on which the edifice of [Kant's] *Universal Natural History* and *Theory of the Heavens* was raised').[33] One of Kant's utterances in 'Allgemein Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels' is especially revealing in terms of 'abnegation', typical of the unhappy consciousness:

> The contemplation of such dreadful events is edifying. It humbles man by showing him that he has no right, or at least that he has lost it, to expect convenient

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[29] Ibid., p. xli.
[30] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 63.
[31] John Pilling, 'Beckett and Mauthner Revisited', in *Becket after Beckett*, edited by S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).
[32] Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 139.
[33] Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, p. 57.

> consequences only from the laws of nature, which God hath ordered, and he perhaps learns in this manner to perspect That this *arena* of his desires ought not equitably to contain the aim of all his views.[34]

From Lisbon's great day onwards, man, having been thus humbled, is presented with the need to avenge himself for not being God who does not exist. Although in 'Le Concentrisme', Beckett gave himself a promise 'not to concretise Kant's Thing', in *Watt* we find Mr Knott, 'a good master in a way', whose headquarters are vacant, and yet impossible to occupy. It becomes obvious that the absurd in Beckett's comedy stems from the amplification of the servant's resentment – the resentment of a superman who fails; in other words, he remains a superman. We can also view the servant's abnegation as an accurate imitation of his master's withdrawal.

Cohn's suggestion that Beckett's cosmological comedy harks back to Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Kafka brings us to the realm of existentialist thought. Given that this comedy is particularly concerned with 'the cosmos as it appears to human sense',[35] it is not surprising that Dostoevsky also refers to the event of Lisbon's earthquake in his early article on the usefulness of art.[36] He attacks 'the utilitarian critic' for his inability to perceive the usefulness of beauty that serves humanity in a longer run than its immediate purposes. He imagines a Lisbon poet who, instead of 'jumping out of the window' or publishing an obituary in a local newspaper (on the next day after the earthquake), sat down and wrote a poem about 'the purple of roses' and the beauties of other natural phenomena.[37] He also attacks the advocates of 'pure art' for turning away from society. His own position is neither here nor there, except for the complaint that the modern artist can no longer exercise his freedom by imitating nature. The artistic procedure, he argues, consists in creating impressions, that is, pointing out to us the beauty of certain natural phenomena: 'the talent is given to the writer for the sole purpose of creating an impression […]. "This marble is god", and spit at it as much as you like, you will not rob it of its divinity'.[38]

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[34] Immanuel Kant, *Essays and Treatises on Moral. Political, and Various Philosophical Subjects*, Vol. II (London: William Richardson, 1799), p. 96; "That" with the capital letter and emphasis are Kant's.
[35] Ruby Cohn, 'The Comedy of Samuel Beckett: "Something Old, Something New"', p. 11.
[36] Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'Mr –bov and the Question of Art' (*Time*, January, 1861), in *Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997).
[37] Ibid., pp. 93-94.
[38] Ibid., pp. 118, 97.

Dostoevsky's aphorism *La Beauté sauvera le monde* was widely discussed during the time of La Belle Époque. Writing retrospectively about that time, Cassirer holds that 'the principle *ars simia naturae* could not be maintained in a strict and uncompromising sense'.[39] Indeed, in Dostoevsky's works, one would hardly find *beauté* in the sense of *simia naturae*. His novels had impressed his early readers with that absurdity which Albert Camus calls 'noble' in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.[40] Like Cassirer in his *Essay on Man*,[41] Camus rejects the necessity of suicide as an entirely free act. Nevertheless, he writes with admiration about Kirillov's suicide (a character from *The Devils*) and draws attention to an entry in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* (December 1876) in which the novelist mimics the logic of a modern 'noble man' who reasons in a very Kantian manner:

> In my indisputable capacity of plaintiff and defendant, of judge and accused, I condemn that nature which, with such impudent nerve, brought me into being in order to suffer – I condemn it to be annihilated with me.[42]

Camus suspects that Dostoevsky could be joking, but the theme is so serious that he dismisses any possibility of a satire on the unhappy consciousness. So far, we have discussed 'the bitter laugh', characterized as 'ethical' with a further note that it is 'not good!' Perhaps, there is nothing ethical in this duality that denies wisdom and beauty to nature.

SECTION 2: HEGEL

Cassirer writes in his *Essay on Man* that 'beauty appears to be one of the most clearly known of human phenomena. Unobscured by any aura of secrecy and mystery, its character and nature stands in no need of subtle and complicated metaphysical theories for their explanation'.[43] This view seems to be close to Dostoevsky's, who declares in the face of the utilitarian critic: 'man […] accepts beauty without any condition […] without asking

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[39] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 139.
[40] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans by Justine O'Brien (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), p. 85.
[41] Ernst Cassirer discusses 'statistical laws' as 'in a sense, "causes" which enforce certain actions on us. Suicide, [Buckle] holds, seems to be an entirely free act. But if we study moral statistics we must judge quite otherwise', in *An Essay on Man*, p. 198.
[42] Dostoevsky's *Diary*, quoted in Albert Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 377.
[43] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 137.

what it is useful for or what one can buy with it'.[44] Those who practice "pure" art are no better than the utilitarians, since the denial of art's usefulness amounts to the same rationalisation of artistic purposes.

The cult of beauty emerged fully-fledged in the 1870s with the symbolist movement. For Oscar Wilde, for example, 'beauty is the symbol of symbols; it reveals everything because it expresses nothing'.[45] Cassirer espouses the mainstream version of symbolism, according to which 'Beauty is no quality in things themselves, but […] a contemplation of a new reality […], detached from the spectacle of life'.[46] As Beckett notes in *Proust*, this contemplation was worshipping 'the pictorial transmission of a notion'.[47] Indeed, towards the turn of the century, beauty, 'one of the most clearly known of human phenomena', had become a mystery.

This mystery in *Watt* is treated with humour. Beckett paints nature with love, and far from being clouded in shadows or some "embroidered cloths", it is simple, 'never the same', and available to the servant's contemplation (32). But Mr Knott's servants are suspicious of nature. Arsene, for example, would check his 'premonitions of harmony' short (33). What all of them resent is the very indifference of Nature, its narcissistic self-sufficiency: 'a face offered, all trust and innocence […] to be sponged away and forgiven! Haw!' (32). We are in the house of Mr Knott, 'a being of nothing', and as such, the object of envy and adoration. In so far as 'the risus purus' 'laughs at that which is unhappy' it is clearly possible to draw parallels between Beckett's servants and Hegel's 'Unhappy Consciousness'. What is Unhappy Consciousness? The simplest definition of this concept is dualism. This is what Malcolm Jones emphasises when he studies the Unhappy Consciousness in Dostoevsky's characters: 'the ideal-real duality expresses itself as a division between self and world'.[48]

Hegel modified Kant's *freedom versus nature* dualism by subsuming it within spiritual substance, or simply 'Spirit' and 'Ethical Life'. God that remained in Kant to only satisfy the needs of morality and epistemology turns into an anti-Self. This part of consciousness compares itself with what appears to be "objective" in terms of its other part: 'the voices of trees and birds are not the ways in which truth manifests itself; they are warning signs of deception, of an absence of self-possession, of the singularity and

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[44] Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'Mr –bov and the Question of Art', in *Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings*, p. 124.
[45] Oscar Wilde, 'Intentions', quoted in Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 139.
[46] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, pp. 150, 146.
[47] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 79.
[48] Malcolm V. Jones, 'Some Echoes of Hegel in Dostoevsky', p. 510.

contingency of the knowledge' which we reveal.[49] According to Hegel, our consciousness ought to be unhappy because, as a singular shape, it cannot complete its *Gestalt* within the essentially 'happy consciousness' of the Olympian world. The latter is nothing other than the necessary antithesis without which Science seems to be impossible: 'the truth of the opposing powers of the knowledge and of consciousness is the result that both are equally right and therefore in their antithesis equally wrong' (449). This is what Hegel calls 'the *fate*' of the Ethical Substance. It is easy to perceive the romantic aspect of the Unhappy Consciousness. Since it is aware that 'all our thoughts of beauty and truth have no essence', desire for death appears to be an ethical solution ('the reconciliation of the opposition with itself is the Lethe of the underworld (450)).

According to Hegel, this 'wrestling' of the natural self-consciousness towards 'objectivity' is the main topic of Greek tragedy – the genre that reflects the process of 'the depopulation of Heaven' (452). Hegel was the first to realize the death of God as 'the expulsion […] of that unthinking mingling of individuality and essence […] demanded by the philosophers of antiquity' (449). In Hegel's analysis of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the Unhappy Consciousness appears in the shape of the avenging Furies, driving the hero towards his 'true' identity: 'self-possession and consequent inactivity and lack of vitality' (448, Hegel's emphasis). Paradoxical though it may be, Hegel sees laughter as playing a significant part in the attainment of this ultimate self-possession. For him, the type of Greek Comedy known as Dionysian Pomp derides 'the pure thoughts of the Beautiful and the Good as untrue and empty' – something that allows us to identify this laughter as 'hollow' (452). Arsene, for example, seems to be laughing at himself in a hollow kind of way when he imagines his afterlife as that of 'a cromlech in the middle of the field for succeeding generations to admire'.[50] And yet, Hegel insists that 'the individual self is not the emptiness of this disappearance but, on the contrary, preserves itself in this very *nothingness*, abides with itself and is the sole actuality' (452, Hegel's emphasis). Arsene ascribes such a divine existence to Mr Knott who 'abides in his place […] like an oak' ('And yet there is one who neither comes nor goes, I refer I need hardly say, to my late employer' (48)). According to Arsene, the hollow is 'the intellectual laugh' – one that is 'not true'. Why is this so?

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[49] G.W.F. Hegel, 'The Truth of Self-Certainty' in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 448; further references are in the body of the text.
[50] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 40.

SECTION 3: FROM OLD TO NEW COMEDY

Going back to Cohn's idea that in cosmological comedy laughter is a sign of 'superiority over a victim', it is rather obvious that 'the bitter' and 'the hollow' stem from the 'victim's' sense of inferiority, despite all his assertiveness. Also, Cohn seems to be unaware of the retributive nature of laughter, which is no idealistic illusion, but the reality of the structure: "He who laughs last laughs best". When Hegel views laughter as a means of achieving self-possession, he imagines what will make *him* laugh, but he cannot envisage what will make *others* laugh at him. The same error is apparent in his interpretation of tragedy. He disregards that after the demise of the tragic hero (with whom he associates himself), there still remains the audience – the spectators – with their eyes glued to the stage and their consciousnesses undergoing the experience which Aristotle called *catharsis*. We have already highlighted this "*kathartic*" quality of the risus purus: 'the laughter laughing at the laugh'. This structure seems to be asserting that, just like tears, it has to get rid of something that obstructs 'the understanding'. In *Proust*, Beckett uses a conceptually similar set of metaphors describing the revelation of reality after the removal of 'the prism' from 'the eye', imposed by 'the notion of what [we] should see'.[51] It would be a diversion now to enter the polemic on what this 'reality' is; for the time being it is sufficient to note that in comedy, reality comes out when the victim of self-consciousness does not know that he is a victim. Henri Bergson, as we shall see in chapter IV, having discovered this law, rejected comedy as anti-art.

Hegel speaks about 'the religion of art' without realizing that just like religion, drama, and especially comedy, is a socially bound activity: by sacrificing its victim to the audience, dramatic art brings community together. The 'Dionysian Pomp' on which Hegel builds his theory of laughter was a social satire, also known as *Old Comedy*. The nature of this entertainment has been invariably linked with the heyday of Athenian democracy:

> The heart of an Aristophanes comedy was its Chorus. The fifth-century chorus symbolized the Athenian citizen's knowledge that there was nothing he dared not think; that what he thought, he was ready to say not merely in private but in the

[51] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 27.

> hearing of all his fellow-citizens; and that he was no less prepared to hear what his fellow-citizen had to say.[52]

So writes Philip Vellacott in the 'Introduction' to his translation of Theophrastus and Menander – the founders of the New Comedy. In Menander's day, Vellacott continues, 'this trenchant liberty' of expression was no longer available.

The difference between Old and New Comedy is puzzling. It is commonly argued that after the defeat of democracy the public grew indifferent to politics. If in Old Comedy gods appeared in the shape of humans, wearing the masks in which anyone could recognize real politicians, poets or military leaders, the actors of New Comedy wore the masks representing stereotypes, such as, for example, 'the ironic man', 'the toady' (in Theophrastus' *Characters*). Menander's characters, however, have always been admired for their inimitable charm and witty pronouncements. For centuries after his death, their lines would be quoted and paraphrased in comedies from Plautus and Terence to the Commedia dell Arte and Molière. Vellacott, for example, takes a few quotations from *Hamlet* and finds their prototypes in the Loeb edition of Menander's plays. Here is one of them, which Hegel would have found especially amusing: 'there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so'. All in all, Menander scholars speak of 'the revolutionary change' in public entertainment, which took place during the fourth century B.C. Whatever its causes, the effect of this change is unanimously seen as the overlapping of comedy and tragedy. For instance, Michael Tierney in his 'The New Menander and The Origins of High Comedy', argues that 'this change brought comedy and Euripidean tragedy so close together that some later critics distinguished them only by the social status of their characters'.[53] He wonders 'what type of amusement' this new genre was, given that 'it found its chief delight in the burlesque of heroic suffering'.[54] The question is very interesting indeed in terms of the Unhappy Consciousness.

Having not found a satisfactory answer in Tierney or later critics, this survey offers to consider the following interesting point made by Vellacott in his 'Introduction'. Whilst distinguishing Menander as 'the creator of individuals', he traces the etymological origin of the word 'individual' to the Greek term '*dike*':

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[52] Philip Vellacott, 'Introduction', in *Menander: Plays and Fragments; Theophrastus: The Characters* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 12.
[53] Michael Tierney, 'The New Menander and The Origins of High Comedy', in *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 19, No 74 (June 1930), p. 296.
[54] Ibid., p. 296.

> Man's thoughts about the problem of living with his neighbour and his family are all included in the Greek word *dike*, which means 'right' or 'justice'. Many of the most famous tragedies are stories of revenge; and revenge is simply the crudest way of seeking justice. These stories (as in Aeschylus' Oresteian Trilogy, or Euripides' *Medea*) usually show the act of revenge as being more wicked than the crime, which provoked it; and the result is that the feud continues.[55]

Having made this observation, Vellacott argues that all Menander's characters are seekers for justice, 'trying to be faithful to their neighbours and themselves', and therefore Menander is not to be treated as a comedian but 'the poet of humanity'.[56]

One wonders, whether a comic writer can still be a poet of humanity, given that laughter in Menander's plays occurs when his characters fall the victims of their own judgement. For instance, in *Arbitrator*, the character called Smicrines comes out with irrefutably reasonable solutions which eventually rebound against the presumptuous. Could it be that this retributive pattern is common for comedy and tragedy? It is not difficult, for instance, to discern the revenge plot in Shakespeare's comedies, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and many others.

We think of justice as an ideal towards which all of us should be striving, but it seems that great tragedians and comic writers treated this ideal as the fundamental source of human conflict. In this respect it is useful to recall Beckett's praise for the Proustian representation of humanity as 'parasitic plants':

> There is no right and wrong in Proust nor in his world […]. Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organized by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'socii malorum', the sin of having been born.[57]

For Girard, tragedy is concerned with the collapse of the social order, which, in its basic form, he argues, is nothing other than the disappearance of differences caused by

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[55] Ibid., p. 18.
[56] Ibid, p. 20.
[57] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 67.

mimetic crisis. In the 'Introduction', we have mentioned his concept of religion as sacrifice: in primitive societies that had no tried and tested remedies for dealing with an outbreak of violence, a sacrificial act would serve to absorb all the internal tensions, feuds and rivalries pent up within the community and reinforce the social fabric. In the process of cultural evolution, this function would gradually pass on to the institutions of justice, which, through their authority, rationalise revenge by punishing the guilty party.[58]

Interestingly enough, in Cassirer's philosophical anthropology, we find a very similar view of cultural evolution: 'In the history of Greek culture we find a period in which the old gods, the gods of Homer and Hesiod, begin to decline […]. There arises a new religious ideal formed by individual men'.[59] In so far as Cassirer views the sacred as the fruit of ignorance, he celebrates this process as 'an indispensible step in the evolution of religious thought', which he calls 'the humanization of the gods' (which corresponds to Hegel's metaphor of 'the depopulation of heaven'). According to Cassirer, this new religious ideal entailed a big change in man's attitude towards nature and his place in it: 'There was no longer a natural kinship, a consanguinity that connects man with plants and animals'. Cassirer believes that 'in his personal gods man began to see his own personality in a new light' – namely, as 'the guardian and protector of justice'.

As we have seen, in *Watt*, the servants' unhappiness comes from their awareness that they are not the legislators in Mr Knott's house – an establishment that seems to be totally indifferent to the question of justice. In chapter five, we will discuss Beckett's depiction of plants and animals – rats, dogs and goats – as dramatic characters in his novel who become the victims of Mr Knott's servants, acting as their moral governors.

SECTION 4: THE REALISTIC NOVEL

As David Wootton observes in his *The Invention of Science,* during the age of reason, the notion of justice and Science became inextricable.[60] In 1637, Descartes established his method of universal mathematics, published under the title of *The Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Kant's 1785 'Groundwork' (*The Metaphysics of Morals),* following *The Critique of Pure Reason*

[58] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[59] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 90.
[60] David Wootton, *The Invention of Science: A New History of Scientific Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 23.

(1781), set forth the laws of morality as mathematical laws: 'So the moralist rightly says that there is only one virtue […]; the chemist, that there is only one chemistry […]. Since, considered objectively, there can be only one human reason, there cannot be many philosophies'.[61] Claiming that only his *Metaphysics* can bring reason 'to understand itself', Kant envisaged the demise of his rivals: 'Critical philosophy's turn must finally come to laugh last and so laugh best when it sees the systems of those who have talked big for such a long time collapse like houses of cards one after another and their adherents scatter, a fate they cannot avoid'.[62]

If Kant had known the law of laughter ("he who laughs last laughs best") he might have been less assured about the future. A moral system based on *a priori* reason does not take into account the fearsome problem that the presence of others poses. The form of 'phenomenology' that Girard discovered in the art of five European novelists (Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky) roundly contradicts the conclusions of philosophical phenomenology. Outside of philosophical reflection, our desires appear to be intersubjective or *mediated*. Each novelist had his specific term to encapsulate the prevalent desire of his time. Cervantes speaks of chivalry, Flaubert of bovarysm, Stendhal of vanity, Proust of snobbism and Dostoevsky of the underground. Girard formulated the novelistic concept of desire in the following way:

> To say that our desires are imitative or mimetic is to root them neither in their objects nor in ourselves but in a third party, the *model* or *mediator* of our desire, whose desire we imitate in the hope of resembling him or her, in the hope that our two beings will be "fused", as some Dostoevskian characters like to say.[63]

The realm of the metaphysical as it appears in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is thus triangular. The triangle is only an explanatory metaphor, which describes sociological and psychological changes, which occurred over several centuries. These changes stem from the *distance* between imitators and mediators – the distance that reflects existing social order so that it is more spiritual rather than temporal and spatial. In the chapter 'Men become Gods in the Eyes of Each Other', Girard describes how models 'enthroned in inaccessible heaven' become mediators of each other's desires, and how as a result of this

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[61] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 4.
[62] Ibid., p. 6.
[63] René Girard, 'Mimetic Desire in the Underground', in *Resurrection from the Underground* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1996), p. 76.

change, objects lose their significance. Imagine two children playing together on a heap of toys – each will choose the toy which is chosen by the other. The terms 'internal' and 'external' mediation are not very helpful outside the context of Girard's book and even within this context, these types of imitation never exist in their pure form. 'External mediation' stands for admiration and veneration; 'internal mediation' stands for rivalry, which is the mixture of love and hate – that which we have discussed under the title of duality. Let us travel for a while across *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* in order to learn some of the novelistic terminology, which will be useful for our study.

Girard begins with a passage from *Don Quixote* in which the eponymous hero explains to Sancho Panza why he decided to become a knight-errant: 'Amadis was the star […], and we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him'.[64] Don Quixote does not conceal his imitation, which is suggested by an *external* model. The rivalry between Amadis and his disciple is impossible because their desires will never converge on the same objects. Although in imitating the life of chivalry, Don Quixote takes windmills for giants, his choices are spontaneous. His imagination and passion distinguish him as an exceptional being with regards to the others. It could be said that the "knight of the rueful countenance" possessed a happy consciousness, unaffected by resentment.

In Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, the mediation is still external, but Emma's desire is more anguished. Girard points to the second-rate books, which Emma read in her youth and which 'destroyed all her spontaneity'. Therein she found some ideal objects of desire (like the 'Prince Charming') suggested to her by the romantic heroines whom she would like to imitate. Jules de Gaultier defined *bovarysm* as 'a desire suggested by an external milieu'. Girard adds to this definition a hidden inferiority complex: 'that contempt and hatred of the self' that dimly senses its '*objective* mediocrity' (63).

Stendhal recognised the desire of his time as *vanity*, which he saw as a consequence of the French revolution: the rise of the bourgeoisie and the decline of the nobility had entailed what he described as the modern emotions of 'envy, jealousy and impotent hatred'.[65] The main Stendhalian theme – nobility – constantly addresses 'this sadness which overcomes all those who succumb to the mania of comparing oneself to another'.[66] In his theoretical works, Stendhal opposed to vanity 'pure passion'. In *De L'Amour*, we

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[64] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 1; further references are in the main body of the text.
[65] Stendhal, *The Memoirs of a Tourist*, quoted in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 14.
[66] René Girard, 'Stendhal and Tocqueville', in *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 46.

find his famous theory of *crystallization*, according to which an authentic person endows the object of his passion with spiritual value. Beckett tests this theory in *Proust*, trying to find out whether the identification of the subject with the object of his desire is possible. Meanwhile, Girard advises all Stendhalian critics to search for answers in Stendhal's novels wherein the source of passion is a rival. Thus, Julien gets a better position in the Rênal household as a tutor thanks to his father's ruse in replying that Julien has 'a better offer' from M. Valenod, M. de Rênal's rival and the richest man in Verrières, despite no such offer being on the table in the first place. The very suggestion of a rival desire intensifies M. de Rênal's intention. This free market principle benefits Julien's amorous pursuits. To win back Mathilde he only needs to present himself as a desirable object by making her jealous. Another important aspect of Stendhal's internal mediation is the hero's '*Divine Ascesis*'. It is precisely this 'strange strength of soul' or self-possession to which Julien owes his rapid rise. In the universe of the Black, the winner is always the one who 'suppresses everything in his desire which can be seen, in other words, every impulse towards the object'.[67] Stendhal called this concealment 'hypocrisy'. Julien and Mathilde are a pair of lovers/doubles who never love each other simultaneously. In the domain of sexuality, the object of desire is the body of the beloved. His or her personality plays the role of the mediator-rival who checks desire for the object: 'Double mediation in the sexual domain as in all others is incompatible with any reciprocity between the Self and the Other' (159).

The next stage of 'internal' mediation is the *model-obstacle* addiction, characteristic of Proust and Dostoevsky: the subject desires for an insurmountable model-obstacle that would effectively reject all his/her attempts at love and friendship (178). For Girard, *masochism* and *sadism* – those exotic and theatrical sexual deviations in Freud's sex-based account of desirable objects – are entirely normal and widespread examples of advanced mimetic behaviour. Thus, Proust tells us that 'in love, our successful rival, that is our enemy, is our benefactor. To a person who aroused in us only an insignificant physical desire, he adds an immense prestige and value, which we immediately recognize in him'.[68] The Proustian character is torn between two opposite feelings towards his model – the most sublime reverence and the most intense hatred. The same duality underpins the life of the Parisian snobs who furiously desire to 'be received' by the circles that successfully reject them. The same psychology reigns in private lives (Marcel's passion for such a

[67] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 153.
[68] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, quoted in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 89.

nonentity as Albertine), business relations and political affairs. At some point, the masochist assumes the role of his sadistic model. Proust comments on modern art by evoking Mlle Vinteuil's imitation of 'the wicked': 'a sadist of her kind is an artist in evil, which a wholly wicked person could not be […] they [these artists] endeavour to impersonate, to assume all the outward appearance of wicked people […] so as to gain the momentary illusion of having escaped beyond the control of their own gentle and scrupulous nature into the inhuman world of pleasure' (187).

According to Girard, Dostoevsky represents 'the final and supreme stage of the development of the modern novel'.[69] He begins this part of his book with a vehement attack on the French Nietzscheans – the creators of 'the Dostoevsky cult'. It is hard to imagine that Beckett was unaware of this pandemic when he was teaching French modernism to his students at Trinity College Dublin. A salient feature of Girard's vision of Dostoevsky is his insistence on the 'rupture' in the author's artistic and personal development marked by *Notes from Underground* (1864). While frequently repeating that towards 1864, Dostoevsky had begun to satirise his own Romanticism, Girard, in fact, associates this satire with Dostoevsky's mimetic representation. From this perspective, the first part of *Notes*, 'a monologue pure and simple', as Gide put it in his essay *Dostoevsky*, is still romantic, whereas the second part in which the hero describes his adventures is novelistic. We will return to this dichotomy at the end of this section – in the meantime, let us dwell briefly on the first part because it is strikingly resonant with Beckett's satirical attitude toward Kant and Hegel that we have discussed earlier in this section.

The underground character is 'a wretched civilian clerk'; his underground flat in St Petersburg clearly symbolizes the solipsistic mindset that had become fashionable in the romantic circles of the mid nineteenth century.[70] Reflecting on his own confession, he declares that unlike Rousseau or St Augustine, he talks to himself and therefore his sincerity is pristine, totally unaffected by external opinions. This emphasis not only caricatures the famous Romantic sincerity but also suggests that the hero's indifference to the opinions of others is perhaps a little strained. It is also evident that Dostoevsky caricatures the 'Method' that insists on the cleavage between reason and nature. Thus, we read that the underground man has decided to abandon the pursuit of 'virtues and duties' being confronted with the laws of nature:

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[69] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 44.
[70] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 45; further references are in the main body of the text.

> Once it is proven to you, for example, that you're descended from the apes, it's no good pulling a long face – you must accept things as they are. Or when they demonstrate that one ounce of your own fat should essentially be dearer to you than a hundred thousand of your fellow men and that this demonstration finally settles the whole question of so-called virtues and duties and other such ravings and prejudices, you must simply accept it, there's nothing you can do about it, since twice two is mathematics (12).

This narrative not only displays Dostoevsky's 'acquaintance' with the Enlightenment project; it also shows his profound concern with its consequences. The underground man, with his embittered faith in practical reason, embodies the stubborn romantic spirit which Hegel called the unhappy consciousness: 'the duplication of self-consciousness within itself because it truly experiences as containing the other also'.[71]

At a certain point, the underground man declares that 'the laws of nature have constantly offended [him], more than anything else' (15). Unable to refute Science, he rebels against 'the utilitarians' and the moralists:

> You keep repeating that an intelligent person cannot knowingly desire something that is not to his advantage […] but I repeat to you that that there is one and only one case when man may deliberately and consciously desire something that is downright harmful […], and that is: *to have the right* to desire what is even extremely stupid and not to be duty bound to desire only what is intelligent (26, Dostoevsky's emphasis).

The underground man's anti-Enlightenment stance would be widely celebrated throughout the 1900s and onwards. It is perhaps true that Dostoevsky's satire 'does not prove anything at all', but 'the right to caprice' – Gide's *l'acte gratuit*. Only the second, 'novelistic', part, Girard argues, reveals the illusionary freedom of the underground solipsist.

At a certain point, the underground man declares that he can no longer remain in his underground retreat. After some roaming through empty streets, accompanied by the thought that '*I am alone and they are everyone*' (40), he enters a tavern where he gets in

[71] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 120.

the way of an arrogant officer who, most unceremoniously, lifts him from one spot and puts him down in another. His thirst for vengeance would appear properly rational were it not for the revelation of a letter in which he offers friendship to his insulter. Another time, he drags himself to a party organized by one of his fellow alumni by the name of Zverkov. Had Girard known that the name 'Zverkov' in Russian means "a little adorable beast", he would have gained additional evidence for his argument that mimetic desire leads pell-mell to rivalry:

> In Dostoevsky, desire has no original or privileged object [but] chooses its objects through the mediation of a model; it is the desire of and for the other, which is nonetheless identical to a furious longing to center everything around the self […]. The more desire learns about itself, the more self-defeating it becomes; it believes that by adoring the obstacle it moves more quickly towards its goal […]. For example, the jostling in the street immediately turns the insolent stranger into one of the fascinating obstacles, simultaneously rival and model.[72]

Girard's term, 'the model/obstacle addiction', accounts for a form of idolatry that the process of 'the depopulation of heaven' entails. As a certain equality of conditions is achieved between models and imitators, individuals become obsessed with each other's standing. An absolute freedom required by intellectual reason manifests itself as a secular religion whose adherents are caught up in an internalized revenge. *Notes from Underground* describes this psychology in the following way:

> I practice thinking and consequently every primary cause immediately draws another in its wake, one that is even more primary, and so on *ad infinitum*. And that is precisely the essence of all thought processes or self-awareness. Again this must therefore be the laws of nature. And what is the final result? Well, exactly the same. Remember that I was talking of revenge not so long ago? (You probably didn't get my meaning very well.) I said that a man avenges himself because he finds justice in it. That means he has found his primary cause, has found a basis for his action, namely justice. But for the life of me I can see neither justice here nor virtue and consequently, if I start taking my revenge, it's really out of spite (16).

[72] Rene Girard, 'The Underground Critic', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 39.

The consciousness that avenges itself *ad infinitum* in order to establish its primary cause is reminiscent of Kant's philosophical method of self-consciousness. The underground thinker reveals the destiny of the mind that is conscious of the impossibility for it of really forming an idea of the world or of exerting any influence on its development:

> Again, as a result of those damned laws of consciousness, my spite is subject to chemical decomposition […]. And so you give it up as a bad job because you've failed to find a primary cause. But just you try letting yourself be carried along blindly by your emotions, without reasoning, without primary cause, banishing your consciousness at least for the time being: hate or love – do anything but sit there not doing a stroke […]. You see, gentlemen, perhaps I only consider myself an intelligent person because all my life I've never been capable of starting or finishing anything. All right, so I'm a windbag, a harmless, tiresome windbag, as all of us are. But what can one do about it if the direct and sole purpose of any intelligent man is idle chatter, that is deliberately milling the wind? (16).

As we shall see in the next chapter, for Gide, Dostoevsky's "underground" was a form of quietism which he liked to contrast with the Enlightenment faith in pure reason ('our Western logic').

It seems that Dostoevsky recognised the force of his character's unassailable logic. Towards the end of Part I, we suddenly hear the voice of the author, warning us that 'I've *deliberately* gathered together all the features of an anti-hero' (117, Dostoevsky's emphasis). This bizarre intervention is backed up with a further reflection on *tempora and mores*: 'we have reached the point where we look upon real life almost as a burden, almost as servitude' (117). Beckett's account of the fashionable 'positivist relativism' as negative and comic suggests that he was perhaps the only reader to understand Dostoevsky's metaphysical comedy.

In Beckett's later prose, the underground psychology is represented by the 'voices' that finally replace characters. Molloy is an anti-hero and an avatar of his author. He is also the "author" of some other characters created solely for the sake of filling his "stories" with some content. Not long after these "other characters" have made their appearance, he is relieved to see them vanishing ('I saw them dwindling, dwindling'), 'and once again I am, I will not say *alone*, no, that's not like me, but, how

shall I say … *restored* to myself, no, I never *left* myself, *free*, yes, I don't know what that means, but it's the word I mean to use, *free* to do what, to do *nothing*, to know, but what, the laws of mind perhaps, of *my* mind'.[73] As this *éleuthéromane* reveals, the similarity between *The Unnamable* and *Notes* is hardly a matter of "influence". Beckett and Dostoevsky converge on the examination of the same anthropological subject: the unhappy consciousness in its attempt to achieve a divinity it cannot possess:

> So it is I who speak, all alone, since I can't do otherwise. No, I am speechless. Talking of speaking, what if I went silent? What would happen to me then? Worse than what is happening? But fie these are questions again. That is typical. I know no more questions and they keep on pouring out of my mouth. I think I know what it is, it's to prevent the discourse from coming to an end, this futile discourse which is not credited to me and brings me not a syllable nearer silence […] in obedience to the unintelligible terms of an incomprehensible damnation.[74]

This damnation seems to be the logical conclusion of a genre which has exhausted its main resource, that is, the making of characters.

As soon as there are no characters but just this irreducible double mirroring of the Self and the Other, it is difficult to associate this action with comedy. Beckett's late fiction does not possess this distinctive comic quality with which his early works are charged. *Watt* can be regarded as the last novel in which the metaphysical conflict emerges in the form of the embodied confrontation between the master and the servant. This negative comic method, operating through hyperbole, through the amplification of the characters' resentment, would persist in the novels of *The Trilogy* and after, but it would never achieve the same level of the comic catharsis that *Watt* 'excoriates'.

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[73] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1994), p. 11; my emphases.
[74] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, ed. by Steven Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 16.

CHAPTER 2: NIHILISM

The obsession with Mr Knott, which pervades the life of 'the unhappy', suggests that Beckett's philosophical subject in *Watt* is metaphysical desire – the desire for the Other's *being*, the desire to be a master. This structure brings to mind Sartre's definition of the Unhappy Consciousness in *Notebooks for an Ethics* as an impossible attempt to be God: 'every attempt of the for-itself [qua human consciousness] to be an in-itself [qua being] is by definition doomed to failure'.[1] Sartre's other formulation of this impossible operation echoes the names of Beckett's characters: '*I am what I am not, and I am not what I am*'.[2] The desire to imitate another's being *is not to be*. This is what Sartre meant by 'bad faith'. According to Robert Doran, Girard's term 'metaphysical desire' is only another way of stating the same ontological predicament.[3] In Girard's study of Shakespeare's theatre, the concept of 'metaphysical desire' is replaced by the word *envy* – the emotion that testifies to a lack of *being* that puts the envious to shame. The term 'metaphysical comedy' (instead of 'cosmological comedy') highlights the method that displays and amplifies the mood of *resentment* aroused by the servant's sense of inferiority. So far, we have been tracing this pattern within the context of the theory of comedy. This chapter focuses on the psychology behind the Unhappy Consciousness, and includes the following parts: the first section addresses the theme of Beckett and nihilism; the second section studies Dostoevsky's reception in France during the period between 1900 and 1945; and the third section focuses on the phenomenon of the Doppelgänger (the double) as it appears in some of Beckett's and Dostoevsky's critical and imaginative texts.

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[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. by David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 472.
[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essays in Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 102.
[3] Robert Doran, 'René Girard's Concept of Conversion and The "Via Negativa": Revisiting *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, in *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 43, No 3 (Autumn 2011), p. 174.

SECTION 1: RESSENTIMENT

The Unhappy Consciousness avenging itself *ad infinitum* is the revelation of nihilism. Theodor Adorno was one of the first critics to interpret Beckett's nihilism as a moral concern: 'the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet'.[4] But how can 'another world that is not yet' come if Adorno insists that a 'moral consciousness' must resist 'all images of reconciliation'?[5]

In his 'Beckett and Ethics', Shane Weller reminds us that ethics implies a certain purpose, an attainment.[6] Drawing attention to Beckett's famous phrase in *The Unnamable* 'I can't go on, I'll go on', Weller weighs an 'ethics of negation' (the desire to withdraw from the world) against 'an ethics of affirmation' (the desire to "go on") and concludes that Beckett's imperative "to go on" is not ethical, in so far as it encourages us to negate *ad infinitum*, instead of giving the instruction "to end".[7] Given this contradiction, Weller suggests that 'Beckett's beings are neither ethical nor unethical but *anethical*' where 'the prefix 'an' signals both a movement towards […] and a movement away from […] the poles of ethicality and unethicality'.[8] According to Weller, this 'doubleness', expressed as the "no"/"on" competing imperatives, constitutes the distinctive feature of Beckett's nihilism which invites a necessary 'failure'. Recalling Beckett's well-known disavowal of his commitment to nihilism ('I simply cannot understand why some people call me a nihilist. There is no basis for that'), Weller suggests that this relation is more complex.[9]

To justify the overwhelming presence of nihilism in Beckett's works, it is useful to recall Arsene's definition of laughter as the means that "excoriates the understanding". Unfortunately, all attempts to grasp the redemptive nature of Beckett's humour have resulted in the entrenchment of nihilism. The classical example of this reading is Simon Critchley's *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (1997) and *On Humour* (2002). According to Critchley, the 'risus purus' is a smile: 'this smile does not bring unhappiness, but rather elevation and liberation, the lucidity of consolation […]. We smile and we find ourselves ridiculous. Our wretchedness is our greatness'.[10] Later

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[4] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 381.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Shane Weller, 'Beckett and Ethics', in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, edited by S.E. Gontarski (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 119.
[7] Ibid., p. 127.
[8] Ibid., p. 128.
[9] Samuel Beckett in an interview with Büttner 1984 denied his commitment to nihilism; Shane Weller suggests that 'Beckett's relations to nihilism {…] is considerably more complex', p. 119.
[10] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 85.

commentators have found this ethics unacceptable. Suzanne Dow, for instance, decisively condemns 'the superego at play' that Critchley recommends as 'a positive response to nihilism'.[11] In her view, laughter is a kind of drug that helps to accept finitude without thinking of it as particularly ethical ('a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective that, far from offering solace for finitude, highlights it as the remainder that resists philosophy's attempt to sublate it into a version of the Good').[12]

What is nihilism? Weller points out that 'nihilism' is a highly problematic notion, mainly seen as 'a doctrine that nothingness is the ultimate reality'.[13] Like many scholars, Weller traces Beckett's nihilism to Arnold Geulincx and Arthur Schopenhauer. The latter is usually seen as an inspiration for Beckett's quietism. According to Schopenhauer, Weller reminds us, 'the negation of life as pointless suffering is not enough […], another crucial step to be taken is the denial of the Will'.[14] Coming up with the term 'anethical', Weller makes an insightful point in suggesting that nihilism, being a *dynamic*, cannot be a doctrine or even a philosophy:

> To see Beckett's oeuvre as the expression of either an ethics of negation or an ethics of affirmation, to label it as quietist or stoic, is to avoid that very doubleness of the "pseudocouple" that inhabits the Beckettian no-man's-land.[15]

Unfortunately, in examining this dynamic, Weller remains within the context of Beckett's "philosophical preferences" among which the name of Friedrich Nietzsche (Schopenhauer's successor) is not registered by Beckett scholars. Regardless of whether Beckett liked Nietzsche or not, 'the will to power' constitutes the immediate historical context of the writer's life and work.

The condition that Weller describes as 'the pseudocouple' is the subject of early 20th century *philosophical anthropology* – the discipline that emerged in the wake of the publication and popularization of Nietzsche's thought. In *Watt* and *Molloy*, Beckett refers to 'our anthropologists' (*Watt*) in relation to '[their] inexhaustible faculty of negation, [their] relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what

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[11] Simon Critchley, *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 62.
[12] Suzanne Dow, 'Beckett's Humour: From an Ethics of Finitude to an Ethics of the Real', in *Paragraph*, Vol. 34, No 1 (March 2011), p. 135.
[13] Shane Weller, 'Beckett and Ethics', p. 119.
[14] Ibid., p. 124.
[15] Ibid., p. 128.

he is not' (*Molloy*).[16] When Girard discusses in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* "how men became gods", he mentions in passing Jules de Gaultier and Max Scheler, both of whom contributed to the theory of mimetic desire. In *From Kant to Nietzsche* (the book from which Beckett took copious notes), Jules de Gaultier identifies the will to power as the basic instinct of life which governs modern man

> Life, according to Nietzsche, is the instinct to power; it is that which wishes unceasingly to surmount itself. Now, if every philosophy is indeed a confession of its author and the expression of a physiology, this definition of Life yields us the secret of the tendency which, in Nietzsche, became imperious; it reveals to us the instinct which governs him and in which he situated his self […] he is the one who finds his joy in the consciousness of his strength and who wishes unceasingly to rise above himself.[17]

What Weller calls 'the anethical' Gaultier describes as 'this instinct of power [that] invented its own means: cruelty towards oneself'.[18] Far from viewing this cruelty as a conscious choice, Gaultier poses the rhetorical question which recognises the will to power as a self-propelling mechanism: 'How is its strength to be augmented except by setting it at variance with what one knows to be stronger, and nothing in any man is stronger than his dominating instinct', the will to power.[19]

Cassirer's treatment of myth in *Philosophy of Symbolic forms* (published in subsequent volumes in 1923, 1925, 1926) and his structuralist method anticipated Girard in a large number of ways. According to *Beckett's Library*, Beckett read only Cassirer's *Kant's Life and Thought*. It is hard to imagine, however, that the young erudite was unacquainted with Cassirer's large-scale work on the history of modern thought from the Renaissance to Nietzsche, given that, according to the same *Beckett's Library*, Joyce 'encountered' in Cassirer 'a German equivalent of 'Work in Progress''.[20] In 1944, Cassirer published his *Essay on Man* as a concise introduction to the philosophy of symbolic forms and a summary of the essays published during the 1930s. Here he formulates the issue of

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[16] Samuel Beckett, *Watt,* p. 63, *Molloy*, p. 39.
[17] Jules de Gaultier, *From Kant to Nietzsche*, trans. by Gerald M. Spring (London: Peter Owen, 1961), p. 205.
[18] Ibid., p. 206.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2013), p. 140.

nihilism in a few words: 'our modern theory of man lost its intellectual centre'.[21] In particular, he praises Max Scheler for his research on nihilism as a collective drift of Western civilization: 'Scheler was one of the first to become aware of and signalize this danger' – namely, that 'in no other period of human knowledge has man ever become more problematic to himself than in our own days'.[22]

In *L'Homme du Ressentiment* (written in1912 and translated into French in 1933), Scheler tries to reconcile Nietzsche's ideas of master-slave morality with the Christian ideals of love and humility. He notices that the philosopher makes no clear distinction between the *will to power* and *ressentiment*. In *Ecce Homo* (1888), ressentiment is presented as the mood underpinning that 'degenerative morality' which Nietzsche associated with Christianity because of its support of the weak: 'What is it we combat in Christianity? That it wants to break the strong, that it wants to discourage their courage […], convert their proud assurance into unease and distress of conscience'.[23] But earlier, in *The Case of Wagner* (1878), the term *ressentiment* is synonymous with a 'will to power' that characterises behaviour secretly motivated by an extreme regard for the opinion of others. In this essay, Nietzsche was describing the Bayreuth festival as the composer's attempt to organize his own cult.

Scheler picks up on this particular case as commingling the *will to power* and *ressentiment* in 'a special form of human hate', typical of those transitional periods when the lower classes strive to rise at the expense of the noble classes. Girard points out that both Nietzsche and Scheler acknowledged their debts to Stendhal who, in his turn, was attacking *ressentiment* in *The Memoirs of a Tourist* as 'the modern emotion' typical of the *vaniteux* caught up with 'this imperative need to compare oneself with others'.[24] Scheler provides his own definition of *ressentiment* as an inauthentic will to power:

> […] it is a self-poisoning of the mind […], a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgements. The

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[21] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 32.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, trans by Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 146.
[24] Stendhal, *The Memoirs of a Tourist*, quoted in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, p. 14.

> emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite.[25]

One might be surprised to learn that Scheler was in fact the first to introduce the triangle to describe human desire as the relationship between the subject, the object and the model. Girard corrects Scheler's triangle in one respect. The philosopher assigned the primary role to the object, arguing that fair distribution of goods will assuage *ressentiment*, aroused by 'a feeling of impotence which vitiates our attempt to acquire something, because it belongs to another'.[26] For Girard, *ressentiment* is a more accurate term for the will to power.

In his article 'Strategies of Madness – Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevski', Girard examines two similar cases of nihilism in Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. The big contribution here is to read psychopathology traditionally viewed as the unconscious "Oedipus complex" or Jacques Lacan's theory of symbolic "forclusion" through the lens of interpersonal and mimetic relationships. The philosophical "pseudocouple" that Weller has found in Beckett's works is approached by Girard as a real-life experience, without which, he insists, the notion of nihilism will remain forever 'Obscure'. 'The case of Nietzsche' automatically involves 'the Wagner problem' and is typical of all such 'pseudocouples' as Schiller and Hölderlin, Rimbaud and Verlaine, and, one might add, Joyce and Beckett. Rejecting the traditional argument on the incommensurability between the "life" and the "works", Girard leans on Nietzsche's texts and Walter Kaufmann's study to demonstrate that 'Wagner is very much a part of "the works" [which] Nietzsche kept writing *for*, then *against* Wagner during his entire career'.[27]

First, Wagner is chosen as a model that "rescued" Nietzsche from all things German.[28] Later, when Wagner becomes the cultural hero of the German people, he turns into a rival without ceasing to be a model. A 'will to power' in *The Case of Wagner* denounced as ressentiment appears as the authentic 'will to power' in *Ecce Homo*: 'I am strong enough to turn even what is most questionable and dangerous to my advantage, and

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[25] Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. by William H. Holdheim (New York: Free Press, 1960), p.45.
[26] Ibid., p. 46.
[27] René Girard, 'Strategies of Madness – Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevski', in *To Double Business Bound* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 61.
[28] In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche wrote: 'All things considered, I could not have endured my youth without Wagner's music. For I was condemned to Germans. If one wants to rid oneself of an unbearable pressure, one needs hashish. Well then, I needed Wagner, Wagner is the antitoxin against everything German *par excellence* – a toxin, a poison, that I don't deny', quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 31.

I call Wagner the great benefactor of my life'.[29] Girard notes that in the relationship of doubles the "healthier" party is always the one that enjoys the admiration of the crowds. While Wagner had real admirers, Nietzsche had none. From his subsequent works the name of Wagner disappears – it appears again in what Girard calls 'triangular configurations' in Nietzsche's late notes and poems. Here Cosima Wagner appears as Ariadne 'while [Nietzsche] increasingly identifies himself with Dionysus – and Wagner must occasionally fill the role of Theseus'.[30] The key to the story is the evidence provided by Nietzsche's sister. As Kaufmann describes it, 'Frau Förster-Nietzsche assures us that it is fantastic that Nietzsche loved Cosima – and she explains the matter. Hans von Bülow, deserted by Cosima, visited Nietzsche in March 1872 and in their conversation he jokingly likened himself to Theseus, and Cosima to Ariadne, who had now abandoned him for the superior and god-like Wagner-Dionysus. In Nietzsche's earlier notes, says Frau Förster-Nietzsche, Dionysus is Wagner'.[31] The rest of the story dissolves into a kind of tragi-comical anecdote: 'Cosima herself received a sheet of paper with the sole inscription: "Ariadne, I love you. Dionysus". And on March 27, 1889, in the asylum at Jena, Nietzsche said: 'my wife, Cosima Wagner, has brought me here"'.[32]

Treating this severe case of nihilism as a strategy of madness, i.e. the force that chooses for the subject, Girard regrets that in the hand of 'the French Nietzscheans', the will to power became 'a dainty little idealistic gadget' that does not resemble at all the tragic reality of Nietzsche's concept; worshipping their dead god, 'the Nietzscheans never spell out the self-defeating consequences of the real will to power'.[33] Why is it self-defeating? Jules de Gaultier has partly answered this question by referring to 'cruelty towards oneself'. The individual who has will to power cannot possibly exercise it among those who are weak. Like Don Quixote, he needs to organize the adventures that will test his strength. But if the knight of the lonely countenance performed his glorious deeds in the name of Amadis, a modern Don Quixote needs a rival otherwise all his values will devalue themselves. Nietzsche therefore always prescribed 'victory' as a 'medical kit for the soul'.[34] The sad thing is that this victory may appear rather petty if it is gained at the expense of mediocre adversaries. In the light of mimetic theory, a nihilist is a person who

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[29] Ibid., p. 32.
[30] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 32.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] René Girard, 'Strategies of Madness – Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevski', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 71.
[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 159.

'obeys a mimetic propensity that cannot be let loose without turning into a search for, and if need be a creation of, the insurmountable obstacle'.[35]

To illustrate this point, Girard draws attention to the famous passage from the *Dawn* (*Morgenröthe*) in which Nietzsche invokes a certain divine power:

> Make me insane, I beg you, o divine power. Insane, so that I may finally believe in myself. Give me delirium and convulsions, moments of lucidity and the darkness that comes suddenly. Makes me shudder with terror and give me ardours that no mortal man ever experiences; surround me with thunderbolts and phantoms! Make me howl, moan and crawl like a beast, in exchange for faith in myself! Self doubt devours me. I have killed the law and I feel for the law the horror of the living for a corpse. Unless I am above the law, I am the most reprobate among the reprobate. A new spirit possesses me; where does it come from if it does not come from you? Prove to me that I belong to you (o divine power). Insanity alone can provide the proof.[36]

The truth that Nietzsche reveals about his lack of belief in himself is acknowledged with reverence. However, Girard points out that the "corrupt" law, killed by the glorious reprobate, is not sufficient as an explanation. The appeal to 'divine power' suggests that the reprobate's 'self-doubt' is due to a *comparison* not with something but with someone. This someone is not named.

Dostoevsky's case is taken up to be placed in contrast to Nietzsche's inability to tell the truth about himself. Girard's analysis of manic-depressive types represented by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky was conceived in response to Freud's essay 'Dostoevsky and Patricide' (1927). Freud, in his turn, was reacting against the Dostoevsky cult created by the French and German Nietzscheans. Having psychoanalyzed 'the Dostoevskian type', Freud warns his contemporaries against 'the barbarians of the great migrations, who murder and do penance therefore, where penitence becomes a technique to enable murder to be done'.[37] The novelist, Freud suggests, was given to a pattern of sinning, repenting and sinning again, due to the Oedipus complex.

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[35] Ibid., p. 73.
[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Dawn', quoted in René Girard's 'Strategies of Madness – Nietzsche, Wagner and Dostoevski', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 75.
[37] Sigmund Freud, 'Dostoevsky and Patricide' in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 95.

Although Girard's interpretation of Dostoevsky's mimetic syndrome is a good alternative to the Oedipus complex, one can understand why Freud was keen to denounce Dostoevsky's extremes. Girard himself points to the novelist's early fiction where he finds 'the lyrical frills' around the characters' self-defeating behaviour. The exemplary work of this kind is *Poor Folk* (1844). A minor official Makar Devushkin exchanges letters with a woman whom he admires at a distance although they live on the same street. Soon it appears that a certain rich but cruel proprietor wants to marry her. Devushkin hastens to facilitate the nuptials in order to preserve for himself a modest place as a third party in the couple's future existence. The obsessive behaviour described in *Poor Folk* reflects its author's conduct, as revealed in the Siberian correspondence. Although there was no Richard Wagner, Dostoevsky was absorbed in the triangular relationship with his future wife and his rival Vergunov whom he was eager to befriend and even to support financially. For Girard, this model/obstacle compulsive behaviour resembles Nietzsche's quest for self-engineered adversity.

In his famous lecture series, André Gide taught his audience Dostoevsky's "*religion de la souffrance*" ('that uncanny humility of the Russian' resembling Buddhism), which he saw as a clever maneuver to neutralize that excruciating self-doubt or *ressentiment* which tormented Nietzsche and finally drove him to insanity:

> I find it highly interesting to observe and compare in two natures akin in so many respects, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, the very different reactions to contact with the Gospels […]. Nietzsche was jealous of Jesus Christ, jealous to the point of madness […]. With Dostoevsky the reaction is far different. He felt at once that he was face to face with something superior, not only to himself, but to entire mankind, something divine… The humility of which I spoke earlier in the day […] predisposed him to making submission before what was avowedly better and higher than himself. He bowed his head humbly before Jesus Christ, and the first, the greatest consequence of his submission and self-surrender was the safeguarding intact his nature's rich complexity.[38]

Gide applies the term 'complexity' to what Freud saw as the manic-depressive oscillations of the neurotic author whose literary creations included every sort of character

[38] André Gide, *Dostoevsky* (London, Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1925), p. 12.

from the humblest to the most assertive. As discussed in the previous chapter, Girard marks *Notes from Underground* as 'a rupture' after which Dostoevsky begins to write from a mimetic perspective.[39] The theme of "noble generosity" and "greatness of the soul", celebrated in *Poor Folk* and *The Insulted and Injured*, is pushed to its logical extremes in *Notes* where it turns into the obstacle addiction. For Girard, this 'rupture' indicates the author's critical attitude towards his earlier work. In satirising himself, Dostoevsky clarifies his malaise, his obscure obsession.

Earlier on, we referred to Beckett's "aside" against the Gideans and their motto "Live dangerously". In a letter to McGreevy dated 23 April 1933, he makes a scornful remark about Gide's imitation of Dostoevsky: 'Gide seems to be making a whirl of gaiety out of his last days. Perhaps he hopes to end where Dostoevski began, with a 'Pauvres Gens'.[40] According to Alexander McCabe, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* was the last novel in which Gide, encouraged by a friend, decided to engage with the main themes he distilled from the works of the Russian genius: 'suicide, abnegation, revelation and gratuitous action'.[41] The novel's reception proved to be rather cold; some critics even dared to openly discuss 'a tangible Dostoevskian flavour'.[42]

What interests us in Beckett's comment is that it reveals the scope of his knowledge about Dostoevsky's artistic and existential evolution. To realise 'a Pauvres Gens' as the writer's point of departure, Beckett should have had some idea about Dostoevsky's itinerary. How did he see it? The discussion of Dostoevsky and Proust as anti-Gideans points to the fact that Beckett's interest in these novelists resided in their ability to handle nihilism. In *Proust*, Beckett compares their techniques which state 'the chronology and the characters as though obey[ing] an almost insane inward necessity'.[43] Hailing the Proustian solution, consisting in 'the negation of Time and Death', Beckett regrets that the titles of Proust and Dostoevsky's masterpieces are not good enough to emphasise this victory: 'At this point a brief impertinence, which consists in considering *Le Temps Retrouvé* almost as inappropriate a description of the Proustian solution as *Crime and Punishment* of a masterpiece that contains no allusion to either crime or punishment'.[44]

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[39] René Girard, 'The Underground Critic', in *To Doubles Business Bound*, p. 39.
[40] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 154.
[41] McCabe quotes from Gide's correspondence with Roger Martin du Gard, in 'Dostoevsky's Reception in France', p. 121.
[42] Edmond Jaloux, '*Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, par André Gide', in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 13 Fev 1926, No 174, quoted in Alexander McCabe's 'Dostoevsky's reception in France', p. 122.
[43] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 81.
[44] Ibid., p. 75.

Crime and Punishment was the cornerstone that Gide had put into the foundation of his theory of the gratuitous act. Beckett's comment is important and we will come back to it at the end of the next section. For the time being, it is enough to note that the renunciation of 'crime and punishment' could point to 'the law' which the Nietzschean 'reprobate' dares to transgress. We have seen, however, that Beckett does not share Gide's interpretation of *Crime and Punishment* as the triumph of the Will to power achieved via *failure*. All such terms as 'relativity' or 'relativism' or 'perspectivism' invented by the leader of the French Nietzscheans are given short shrift by Beckett as 'negative and comic'.

SECTION 2: DOSTOEVSKY IN FRANCE

In his anthology *Existentialism: from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Kaufmann avoids the term 'nihilism' and defines existentialism as 'conflicting individualisms' or 'various revolts' against all values and systems:

> The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – that is the heart of existentialism.[45]

The volume opens with Part One of *Notes from Underground* selected as 'the embodiment of individualism' – the only principle upon which Kaufmann could bring together such different thinkers as Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Rilke, Sartre and Camus.[46]

While each of these writers has created a particular theory, the underground man's philosophy is 'a way of life'.[47] Kaufmann even compares the unnamed hero with Socrates and Spinoza who had also been able to set an example, but in the case of the underground man, 'we have a completely 'new voice'. It is 'the drama of the mind that is sufficient to itself, yet conscious of its every weakness and determined to exploit it. What we perceive is an unheard-of song of songs on individuality […]. No, individuality is not retouched,

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[45] Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky To Sartre* (London: A Plume Book, 1989), p. 12.
[46] Ibid., p. 13.
[47] Ibid., p. 14.

idealized, or holy; it is wretched and revolting, and yet, for all its misery, the highest good'.[48] What appears to be 'the highest good' is the *Notes*' unidentifiable humour, which, according to Kaufmann, 'is not romantic'. He reminds us that even Nietzsche called it 'music' and described his experience in a letter to a friend: 'An accidental reach of the arm in a bookstore brought to my attention *L'Esprit Souterrain*, a work just translated into French … The instinct of kinship (or how should I name it?) spoke up immediately; my joy was extraordinary'.[49] Nietzsche encountered *L'Esprit Souterrain* in 1887. According to Jacques le Rider, a historian of Nietzsche's reception in France, the "philosophy" of this "Spirit" was 'the only domain that surpassed the colossal wave of Nietzsche's reception in Europe'.[50]

It is symbolic that Kaufmann's anthology closes on Sartre's 1945 lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism'. Like Nietzsche, Sartre condemns 'university professors who wanted to 'suppress God at the least possible expense' and quotes Dostoevsky: 'Dostoevsky once wrote "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted"'. Perhaps, it was the end of the War that inspired Sartre to proclaim with high enthusiasm:

> Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom.[51]

The reader may recognize Kant's categorical imperative slightly corrected; 'existence precedes essence' is a debt to Hegel's *Phenomenology*. 'Everything is indeed permitted' belongs to the devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*. This character appeared to Ivan Karamazov in the shape of 'a Russian gentleman of a certain type' to confirm that without religion 'everything will be permitted'. To Ivan's protestation, 'You are *I*, you

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[48] Ibid., p. 12.
[49] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel*, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky To Sartre*, p. 52.
[50] Jacques le Rider wrote: 'Le seul domaine qui surpasse, par son ampleur, la réception de Nietzsche dans les pays de langue française, est celui de la littérature russe contemporaine (Dostoievski, Tolstoï). Jacques le Rider, Nietzsche en France: De la fin du XIX siècle au tempe présent (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), p. 105.
[51] Jean Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky To Sartre*, p. 353.

are I and nothing more!' the unwelcomed guest replies: 'Well, if you like, I have the same philosophy as you […] *Je pense donc je suis*, that I know for certain'.[52]

As Peter Kaye rightly points out, Dostoevsky was viewed as a totally humorless writer.[53] 'Dostoevsky', Gide asserted, 'leads us, we may take it, if not to anarchy, to a sort of Buddhism, or at least *quietism*'.[54] During the War, Sartre's group fell out with the Communists over a number of issues. As it follows from the lecture, the latter accused the existentialists of quietism. Without naming the underground man, Sartre assures his allies that 'doing nothing' is only a personal choice which he, Sartre, does not approve. We can easily recognise the underground man's conclusion: 'To sum up, gentlemen: the best thing is to do nothing! Better conscious inertia! So, long live the underground!'[55] For Sartre, those who espouse this attitude are simply lazy: 'Quietism is the attitude of the people who say, "let others do what I cannot do"'.[56] He explains that the terms 'abandonment', 'anguish' and 'despair' are legitimate emotions in someone who, in making his choices, 'decides for the whole of mankind'.[57] Sartre's very eagerness to disengage his version of Humanism from Gide's theory of *l'acte gratuit* illuminates a striking similarity between the both:

> Even if my choice is determined by no *a priori* value whatever, it can have nothing to do with *caprice*: and if anyone thinks that this is only Gide's theory of the *acte gratuit* over again, he has failed to see the enormous difference between our theory and that of Gide.[58]

Alexander McCabe's reading of André Gide's *Journal* for 1887-1922 reveals the chronology of Gide's transformation from a Kantian idealist to a Nietzschean reprobate under the influence of Dostoevsky's novels:

> In August 1891, Gide discovers Schopenhauer with considerably less enthusiasm, affronted by the latter's critique of Kantian ethics: 'Cette moral de Schopenhauer

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[52] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brother Karamazov*, trans. by David Magarshack, Vol. 2 (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 763.
[53] Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 34.
[54] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 152; Gide's emphasis.
[55] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 34.
[56] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', p. 358.
[57] Ibid., p. 298.
[58] Ibid., p. 363.

> toute *empirique*, m'agace … Une moral doit être *a priori*'. Striving towards the unadulterated and the a priori in epistemology as in ethics, it is hardly surprising that Gide's reading of Crime and punishment in 1891 left an ambiguous to negative impression […]. This would soon change […]. In September 1893, while reading Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, he interrogates himself: 'au nom de quel Dieu, de quel idéal, me défendez-vous de vivre selon ma nature?' […]. In *Nourriture Terrestres*, Gide rose to his own challenge in a sensualist awakening in: 'Volupté! Ce mot je voudrais le redire sans cesse; je le voudrais synonyme de bien-être, et même qu'il suffit de dire être simplement'.[59]

The leader of the French avant-garde prided himself on "revolting" against Melchior de Vogüé's moralistic reading of Dostoevsky. Although the author of *Le Roman Russe* also admired 'la religion de la souffrance', he nevertheless placed an embargo on Dostoevsky's mature novels, such as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, seeing them as immoral. Gide's response was *L'Immoraliste* (1902) in which he 'dialogued' with Dostoevsky's heroes from the prohibited novels, especially *Crime and Punishment*.[60]

The fruit of this dialogue was the theory of the gratuitous act. Its influence on the avant-garde movements of the 1910s-onwards was by all account unprecedented. In 1908, Gide co-founded the literary magazine *La Nouvelle Revue Française* that would come to represent the cutting edge of modernism in Europe's literary and political life. Arnold Bennett's 1925 'Introduction' to Gide's *Dostoevsky* imparts the atmosphere of the decade:

> Andre Gide is now one of the leaders of French literature. The first book of his to attract attention among the lettered was *L'Immoraliste*. Since then, in some twenty years of productiveness, he has gradually consolidated his position until at the present day his admirers are entitled to say that no other living French author stands so firm and so passionately acknowledged as an influence. His authority over the schools of young writers who contribute to or are published by *La Nouvelle Revue Française* […] is quite unrivalled.[61]

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[59] Alexander McCabe, 'Dostoevsky's French Reception', p. 77.
[60] Ibid., p. 85.
[61] Arnold Bennett, 'Introductory Note' to André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. v.

In numerous letters to friends and a series of addresses, delivered between 1920 and 1922 before Jacques Copeau's School of Dramatic Art at the *Vieux-Colombier*, Gide sought to remove 'the principle charges brought against Dostoevsky in the name of our Western-European logic' and to prove that in Dostoevsky 'there are no criminal characters […] but only their puzzling complexity'.[62] Gide consulted Mme. Hoffmann, a translator of Dostoevsky's novels into German, and she assured him that 'complexity' was the most distinctive feature of the Russian psyche.[63]

The theory of the gratuitous act reached its ontological apex in Gide's interpretation of the engineer Kirillov's suicide. This character from *The Devils* was destined to become the embodiment of the 'man-god', seen as Dostoevsky's analogue of the Nietzschean Overman. Kirillov's oft-quoted credo goes like this:

> He who dares to kill himself is a god. Now everyone can make it so that there shall be no God and there shall be nothing.[64]

Kirillov kills himself not in despair of not being immortal but, on the contrary, in order to possess himself in his mortality. From Dostoevsky's point of view, suicide logically follows the loss of belief in the 'loftiest' 'sublime' idea: the immortality of the soul.[65] The way in which Kirillov's last minutes are depicted in the novel (the "man-god" bizarrely bites the finger of his witness, Peter Verhovensky) did not suggest to the Nietzscheans that the writer was negatively disposed towards his character. Gide declared that 'Dostoevsky builds an entire system of metaphysic, containing Nietzsche in embryo on the premise of self-destruction'.[66]

The extent to which Dostoevsky's nihilism affected European minds is hard to exaggerate. Anthony Cronin's biography of Samuel Beckett highlights the atmosphere of the 1920s as a combination of *la douceur de vivre* and a cult of violence.[67] Noting that 'the process of formal politicization of the avant-garde' was quite advanced when Beckett arrived in Paris, Cronin, as a scrupulous cultural historian, tries to establish the objective

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[62] Ibid.
[63] 'Another observation of Mme. Hoffmann's concerning the Russian people. It is inherently incapable of leading a strict methodical existence, of being punctual even. It would seem as if the Russian did not suffer much in consequence of his own improvidence', in André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 77.
[64] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, trans. by D. Magurshak (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 126.
[65] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. by B. Brasol (New York: George Braziller, 1954), pp. 538-42.
[66] Andre Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 45.
[67] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo, 1996), p. 83.

reasons behind the spread of suicide. The tropes, which appear in the course of his investigation, are important because some of them pop up in Beckett's critical writings, like, for instance, the word 'solution' in *Proust*. Cronin points to the second number of *La Révolution surréaliste* that posed the question, 'Is Suicide a Solution?'[68] Although in response to it the majority of the Bureau of Surrealist Research would answer 'no', 'some members did take their own lives in well-publicized fashion from time to time', Cronin comments.[69] One of these cases was Harry Crosby's suicide. The founder of the Black Sun Press (and the publisher of Joyce's *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun*) promised 'to fly his aeroplane into the sun until it ran out of petrol and crashed'.[70] Crosby did not keep that promise but all the same committed suicide by shooting himself. His action was commemorated in *transition* 19/20 (Spring-Summer 1930) to which Beckett contributed a poem 'For Future Reference' in which he presents himself as a winner over 'my cherished chemist friend' who 'lured me aloofly from the cornice down into the basement […] but I stilled my cringing/and smote him/yes, oh my strength!'[71]

Beckett's strange fascination with suicide has been noted by his biographers. Cronin, for instance, mentions Richard Aldington's recollection of Beckett as 'a splendidly mad Irishman […] who wanted to commit suicide'.[72] According to Deirdre Bair, Beckett's interest in suicide was purely intellectual:

> He would eagerly corner anyone who came to his room for long, rambling, gloomy discussions on all aspects of the subject – from the great men who had committed suicide in strange ways to the infinite variety and multiplicity of reasons for wanting to do so.[73]

According to James Knowlson, Beckett's first period of depression coincided with the time when Alfred Péron, a new *lecteur* from the Ecole Normal Superior, arrived at T.C.D and became Beckett's friend. As Knowlson describes it, 'in spite of Péron's liveliness, Beckett still went into a period of growing introspection, depression and

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[68] Ibid., p. 79.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] *Samuel Beckett Collected Poems*, edited by Sean Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 233.
[72] Ibid., p. 80.
[73] Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett* (New York, London: A Touchstone Book, 1993), p. 64.

withdrawal'.[74] It is not unreasonable to suggest that Péron was perhaps the first swallow to bring the latest tidings from the Continent concerning various existential 'solutions'.

An important historical document of that period emerges in Cronin's discussion of the cult of violence: the essay *Sur un nouveau mal du siècle* by Marcel Arland, published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1924.[75] In this work, which is written in a very personal and affected manner, Arland surveys the history of the avant-garde movements from Dada to the surrealists, paying particular attention to the 'principle of daring'. He asks whether 'silence' might be a more radical 'solution' than suicide.[76] 'Silence', as we know, is Beckett's signature. Cronin suggests that Arland's treatment of silence as *daring* resembles 'the preoccupations that would one day be central to Beckett's work'.[77] Having said that, Cronin, however, remains unaware that the 'principle of daring' is a recurrent trope of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. In *Dostoevsky*, Gide applies the term 'daring' as an evaluative criterion to modern writers, including James Joyce (we will return to this point at the end of this section). 'The principle of daring' is related to all those man-gods' acts, like Raskolnikov's crime, the underground man's silence and Kirillov's suicide.[78]

When Arland refers to the Dada's 'daring', we begin to understand that he uses this term as an analogue to the will to power:

> I'm not setting down the history of the Dada movement, and I'm not going to seek out all its causes. This cause, fairly accurate, a little too simple, has already been stated: A generation affirms itself by denying everything that was posited yesterday. Which suddenly gives rise to this thought: what if we went to the very limits of daring? The limit of daring could be not self-destruction but abstention; a violence greater than saying "no" is silence, and the real despair is acceptance, not suicide.[79]

The way in which Dada applied 'the principle of daring' is deserving of separate research. To avoid a diversion, it is enough to quote a passage from Hugo Ball's *Diary*, recalling the nihilistic activities carried out on a daily basis in Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich between February and August 1916:

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[74] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 66.
[75] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 79.
[76] Marcel Arland, 'Sur un nouveau mal du siècle', in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, revue mensuelle de littérature et de critique, Tome XXII (January June 1924).
[77] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 79.
[78] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 156-159.
[79] Marcel Arland, *Sur un nouveau mal du siècle*, p. 159; (here and further on my translation).

> We read *The Possessed* by Dostoevski. A psychology such as this, which comes from the infinity of the heart, such absolute power of motivation, has its dangers. The boundaries between the permitted and the prohibited are broken; the crime seems plausible, the miracle seems natural. Such a psychology could be the abolition of all laws, an anarchism of the most sublime kind. Nietzsche knew well why he triumphed.[80]

Arland describes the inception of the movement as the beginning of the era of 'individuals', that is, those 'species' who were the first to realise the absence of God: 'Car ce n'est pas en quelques années que l'homme se consolera de la perte de Dieu'.[81] Dada, he maintains, does not represent the people but is rather the product of the people's civilization.[82] The identity of a nihilist, described by Weller as 'the pseudocouple', emerges in Arland's description as a double mirror:

> Between two dangers, the generations lurch from order to anarchy and back again. Two mirrors on both sides of me, I can see my reflection indistinctly in both. Only a genius is one-eyed.[83]

It would appear that being a genius was a task common to Arland and Beckett's generation where literature was its means: 'Before all literature, there is one subject that interests me in priority to any other: myself (*moi-même*). From this subject, I seek to approach my Self by the purest means I can find. Literature, which is the best of these, is never more attractive than in its connections to ourselves, and in direct proportion to the influence it can have on us'.[84] The essay ends on the following note:

> The actuality of Dostoevsky is a significant mark of our time. Never have we felt in France closer to some of his heroes from *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov*: the anguish in which these characters live, the tragic rhythm of their

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[80] Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), p.182.
[81] Marcel Arland, *Sur un nouveau mal du siècle*, p. 157.
[82] Ibid., p. 150.
[83] Ibid., p. 149.
[84] Ibid., p. 156.

> gestures and the evangelical mysticism that their author sometimes shares with them – all these are the traits, which we perceive today in our contemporaries.[85]

He hopes that by continuing to imitate these tragic gestures, the younger generation of writers will be able to produce 'a very dangerous and truly individualistic literature'.[86]

The essay appeared in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* only one year after the publication of Gide's *Dostoevsky* (1923). Arland had just started his career as a literary critic and was no doubt keen to contribute to the common cause. Did not Gide write in his essay that 'Dostoevsky's individualism […] becomes for us a shining example' and that 'I gathered from his works to make my own honey'?[87] However, the reaction from *La Nouvelle Revue Française* was anything but positive. The editor Jacques Rivière responded with his essay *La Crise Du Concept de Littérature* in which he accused 'the younger writers' of 'romanticism' (meaning, nihilism), which made them to confound literature with religion.[88] He recommended 'modesty' and the acceptance of the fact that 'everything had already been discovered', adding that the modern writer should treat literature as 'an arrangement in happy letters': 'Ceci, décidément, est à jamais démodé, dans le concept de littérature, qui désignait un arrangement heureux de lettres et de mot autour d'un sentiment ou d'une idée déjà connu, déjà conquis par le sujet écrivant'.[89]

Rivière does not mention the younger writers' desire '*to imitate the tragic gestures of Dostoevsky's heroes*', given that this right had long been reserved for André Gide. Rivière's advice to the young writers was heard in England where the Garnett translations of all Dostoevsky's novels (made between 1912 and 1921) produced the lasting effect of 'the Dostoevsky cult'.[90] According to Kaye, 'the incomparable psychologist' (Dostoevsky's title in 'the English house of fiction') was 'a haunting figure' for such writers as Robert Louis Stevenson, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Foster, John Galsworthy, and Henry James. Unlike in France and Germany, in England, Dostoevsky's influence was often compared to 'a fever', 'a virus',

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[85] Ibid., p.158.
[86] Ibid.
[87] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 35, 170.
[88] Jacques Rivière, *La Crise du Concept de Littérature*, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (Paris: *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1908– 1938), p. 167.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Helen Muchnic entitled the chapter that deals with the initial response to the Garnett translations "the Dostoevsky cult"; Peter Kaye discusses numerous responses of 'intellectual England' to the Garnett translations. For instance, according to Edmund Gosse, 'every member of England's literary elite had been subjected to the magic of this epileptic monster', quoted in Peter Kaye, Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900-1930*, p. 19.

'a drug' and 'an epidemic' brought about by the writer whose 'genius led us astray'.[91] T.S. Eliot in his *Criterion* was waging a perpetual war against Middleton Murry, his friend and an influential critic of the 1920s, who 'became an "amanuensis" for the spirit of the author [Dostoevsky] which dwelt within him'.[92] On 24 April 1924 Eliot wrote to Rivière:

> My dear sir, I have made use of my brief period of rest in the country to read the article which you published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* of two months ago and must congratulate you on your exposition of a most important idea. You have asked questions and you have expounded a point of view which is, in fact, extremely close to mine; so much so that I intend to quote your article in a paper in which I propose to attack the ideas of Middleton Murry, who upholds views opposite to mine […]. I wonder if I could ask you whether or not you hope to be able to say something about *The Waste Land*? Cordially yours, [T.S.E].[93]

In subsequent decades, the Dostoevsky cult would become 'internal', in the Girardian sense. The Dadaists, who came to Paris in the early 1920s, were ridiculed for plagiarism. Eugene Jolas, who was at the time a contributor to *Ramblings Through Literary Paris*, wrote: 'German civilization is looking to the East. It has been caught up in the cult of Dostoevsky [whose] brooding, nebular mysticism apparently has gotten hold of the younger minds of Germany and Austria'.[94] André Breton included in his 1924 'Manifesto of Surrealism' a critique attacking Dostoevsky's realistic representation of Raskolnikov's room: 'I am in no mood to admit that the mind is interested in occupying itself with such matters, even fleetingly. It may be argued that this schoolboy description has its place, and that at this juncture of the book the author [Dostoevsky] has his reasons for burdening me. Nevertheless, he is wasting his time, for I refuse to go into this room'.[95]

When Beckett arrived in Paris in November 1929 the Dada "daring" was already dead. However, despite the change of colours, which became more subdued, the theory of the gratuitous act reinforced its position due to the rising interest in the unconscious. The term 'unconscious' would become the key trope of Jolas' magazine *transition*. The accent

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[91] Ibid., pp. 14-18.
[92] Ibid., p. 19.
[93] Eliot's letter to Jacques Rivière, 17 April 1924 in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, Vol. 2: 1923-1925 (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 213.
[94] Eugene Jolas, 'Number 40 (November 16, 1924), in Eugene Jolas, *Critical Writings* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 58.
[95] André Breton, *The Surrealist Manifesto* (André Breton, *The Surrealist Manifesto* (www.archive.org/details/SurrealistManifesto).

would be made on Joyce's scientific approach to the unconscious states. In his second Manifesto 'The Language of Night', Jolas presents Joyce's work as 'a gratuitous state of mind': 'There is a state of mind that worries little or not at all if the masses understand its implications. It is in no way concerned with the problem of considering the audience. It is primarily interested in stating an aggregate of experiences that come from mysterious sources. This state of mind is a gratuitous one'.[96]

Richard Ellmann, while describing Joyce's time in Zurich, denies his connection with Dada,[97] though it is hard to ignore the obvious similarity between Joyce's *Revolution of the Word* ('the plain reader be damned')[98] and Tzara's *The Magic of A Word* ('All the words are other people's inventions. I want my own stuff, my own rhythm').[99] From Zurich, Joyce emerged with the idea of a novel as 'a limit of literature' and even 'an end of writing'.[100] This kind of daring, however, did not mean 'silence', as Arland suggested, but an arrangement in the words of Joyce's own making. In the June-July 1933 of *transition*, Jolas compares Joyce with Shakespeare 'who devoted himself to the "alchemy of the word"'.[101] The epigraph with which Ellmann opens the chapter on Joyce's Parisian period is quite suggestive: 'Parysis, tu sais, crucycrooks, belongs to him who parises himself ("Paris, you see, belongs to him who parises himself").[102] The verb 'to paris himself' symbolizes self-worshipping: Joyce, unlike Paris, would not give his preference to any divinity but himself. The same chapter in Ellmann's biography tells an anecdote circulating among Joyce's friends of how Joyce's children used to tease their father. Giorgio liked to remind Joyce that 'the greatest novelist was Dostoevski, the greatest novel *Crime and Punishment*'. To this, Joyce enigmatically replied that 'it was a queer title for a book, which contained neither crime nor punishment'.[103]

At the end of the previous section, we have referred to Beckett's remark that Dostoevsky's masterpiece 'contains no allusion to either crime or punishment' just as *Le Temps Retrouvé* contains no allusion to Time, because both celebrate the obliteration of

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[96] Eugene Jolas, 'The Language of Night' (1932), in *Critical Writings*, p. 135.
[97] Richard Ellmann writes: 'In 1915 at the Café Voltaire, in the old city, the surrealist movement was fomented with which Joyce was sometimes mistakenly associated', in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 409.
[98] Eugene Jolas, 'The Language of Night', in *transition* (1932), in *Critical Writings* (Northwestern: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 112.
[99] Quoted in Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, p. XXI.
[100] Eugene Jolas, *Critical Writings*, p. 116.
[101] Eugene Jolas, 'The Revolution of Language in Elizabethan Theatre' (June-July 1933), in *Critical Writings*, p. 132.
[102] Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce*, p. 409.
[103] Ibid.

Time and Death. Joyce's objection to Dostoevsky's title could have been patterned on Gide's interpretation of Raskolnikov as a failed man-God – we should bear in mind that in terms of Gide's theory, *failure* is a necessary condition of victory ('Dostoevsky, I repeat, has visions of salvation only through renunciation').[104] Picking up on Raskolnikov's reference to his crime as 'the daring' ('I wanted to have the daring … and I killed her. I only wanted to have the daring'), Gide places Raskolnikov's pride on an unshakable metaphysical foundation: self-sacrifice.[105] Arguing in *Dostoevsky* that it is the same 'abnegation', the same *l'acte gratuit*, that the underground man made manifest in his 'monologue pure and simple', Gide emphasises that 'it is a trifle daring to assert that James Joyce, the author of *Ulysses*, devised this form of narrative'.[106]

Could it be that 'abnegation' or 'failure' was a kind of kudos – an object of competition among the avant-garde supermen? As Ellmann points out, Joyce's youthful idea of freedom can be found in his essay 'ADMG': 'the garb of royalty or of democracy are but the shadows that a man leaves behind him […]. But, the man who has no ambition, no wealth, no luxury save contentment cannot hide his joy of happiness that flows from a clear conscience and an easy mind'.[107] This was written when Joyce was at Belvedere. At the time of *Ulysses*, his motto would become '*Fuge … Late … Tace*' – these Stephen Dedalus translates as his own watchwords, 'Silence, exile, and cunning'.[108] According to Mark Singleton, Joyce's entire oeuvre represents 'a mythology of loss', 'a need for incalculable loss is the essence of Stephen's sovereignty' and '*Finnegans Wake* is the most complete expression in Joyce's work of sacrifice, both in terms of thematic content and semantic excess'.[109] Jacques Derrida in his *"Ulysses" Gramophone* reads Joyce's work as an archetypal 'death of sense' which the Irish writer had deliberately inflicted on his art.[110]

A different view of Joyce's "gratuitousness" can be found in Girard's later work *A Theatre of Envy*.[111] The ninth episode of *Ulysses* ('Scylla and Charybdis') contains Stephen Dedalus' lecture on "Life of William Shakespeare" which, in Girard's opinion, is nothing other than a mimetic interpretation of Shakespeare's theatre. Stephen observes that Shakespeare concentrates on human propensity to self-punishment mediated by an intense

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[104] Ibid., p. 188.
[105] Ibid., p. 157.
[106] Ibid., p. 160.
[107] 'AMDG' (Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam'), Ibid., p. 37.
[108] 'Escape, More broadly, Silent', quoted in Ellmann's *James Joyce*, p. 354.
[109] Mark Singleton, 'Lure of the Fallen Seraphim: Sovereignty and Sacrifice in James Joyce and George Bataille', in James Joyce Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Winter 2007), p. 304.
[110] Jacque Derrida, *"Ulysses" Gramophone*, quoted in Mark Singleton, 'Lure of the Fallen Seraphim', p. 318.
[111] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

sense of inferiority. The source of these self-destructive impulses Stephen locates in the playwright's first sexual encounter with his future wife. All we know about Ann Hathaway is that she was older than Shakespeare. This information allows Stephen to assert that she played the role of an aggressive male in her relationship with her future husband. He assures his listeners that the young Shakespeare was 'raped in a ryefield':

> Belief in himself has been untimely killed. He was overborne in a cornfield first and he will never be a victor in his own eyes after, nor play victoriously the game of laugh and lie down.[112]

At some point Stephen claims that Ann cuckolded her husband with two of his brothers to make him jealous and restore her dominance over him. This 'trauma' is invented to account for the relentless focus on the bawd-and-cuckold scheme in all works of Shakespeare: 'it is in infinite variety everywhere in the world he has created, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, twice in *As You like It*, in *The Tempest*, in *Hamlet*, in *Measure for Measure* – and in all the other plays which I have not read'.[113]

This dreadful example of biographical criticism scandalizes Stephen's listeners. One of them, Eglinton, especially famous for his liberalism, makes a point that tolerates no objections: 'The bard's fellow-countrymen', he notes ironically, 'are rather tired perhaps of our brilliances of theorizing'.[114] Seeing Englishness as the supreme authority in all matters Shakespearean, Eglinton dismisses Stephen's theory as 'a French triangle':

> – You are a delusion, said roundly Eglinton to Stephen. You have brought us all this way to show us a French triangle? Do you believe your own theory?
> – No, Stephen said promptly.[115]

Glad to find an ally in Joyce, Girard reproaches his scholars for not paying attention to Stephen's inner monologue immediately following his recantation, in which his 'no' is not final: 'I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief. That is, help me to believe or help me to unbelieve? Who helps to believe? *Egomen*. Who to unbelieve? Other chap'.[116]

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[112] James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Co, 1922), p. 343.
[113] Ibid., 345.
[114] Ibid., 346.
[115] Ibid., p. 347.
[116] Ibid., p. 348; Joyce's emphasis.

"Who is the *Egomen*?" In posing this question Girard is frustrated with Joyce who allowed the truth stated by his hero to get lost 'in the trampled mug of a pig pen'.[117] The critic is convinced that by the time of writing *Ulysses*, Joyce was no longer inclined to 'turn mimetic rivalry into an ideal […] he knew that he often behaved in a way that could only strike "normal" observers as ridiculous or insane. He obviously viewed his own bawd-and-cuckold syndrome as the price he had to pay for his unusual perspicacity in regards to mimetic relations'.[118]

We should bear in mind that mimetic rivalry is a self-defeating behaviour which Gide describes as 'audacity' or 'daring' in his theory of the gratuitous act. According to Ellmann, during the period of *Exiles*, Joyce was obsessed with a theme of friendship with a rival. His notes for the play present the following conception of friendship: 'a friend is someone who wants to possess your mind and your wife's body, and longs to prove himself your disciple'.[119] At the same time, the husband (Richard) wishes 'to feel the thrill and horror of cuckoldry'; only by begetting his own suffering he becomes a victor. In *Ulysses*, Stephen interprets Shakespeare's plays in the same way:

> In *Cymbeline*, in *Othello* he [Shakespeare] bawd and cuckold. He acts and is acted on. Lover of an ideal or a perversion, like José he kills the real Carmen. His unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer.[120]

According to Girard, Joyce's assimilation of Desdemona to Mérimée's character shows that Joyce saw her and her death wish in the same mimetic and self-destructive light as Shakespeare saw Othello who promoted Cassio to make himself jealous. Stephen asserts that the structure described by the French triangle was that knowledge which promoted Shakespeare to the heights of genius. Girard admits that when he read Stephen's lecture in French he understood literally nothing. Valéry Larbaud translated the French triangle as 'Monsieur, Madame et *l'autre*'. In Girard's opinion, this translation robbed the term of its comical allusion to French vaudeville. It is really interesting why Joyce, while possessing the key to mimetic desire, had chosen to keep it deep in his pocket.

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[117] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, p. 261.
[118] Ibid. p. 264.
[119] Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce*, p. 356.
[120] James Joyce's *Ulysses*, p. 345.

SECTION 3: DOPPELGÄNGER

Joyce's work does not fit into Girard's dichotomy "novelistic versus romantic". The critic sincerely believes that the very awareness of mimetic propensity in humankind should encourage a writer to bring this plight into the open. Unlike the five novelists, included in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Joyce systematically undermines the credibility of Stephen's theory by 'bury[ing] it in a deep thicket of words […] for the sole purpose of preventing his discovery'.[121] So, instead of calling Joyce a 'romantic writer', Girard defines his method as 'a delayed-action satire'.[122] Presumably, Joyce decided to hide his knowledge about mimetic desire in order to remain a towering master like Shakespeare. This is Girard's answer to the question "who is *Egomen*?" In Joyce's case, it is the genius of Shakespeare to whom Stephen appeals secretly in the inwardness of his mind to restore his self-confidence.

Why did Girard decide that Joyce recognised in the bawd-and-cuckold scheme *mimetic* rivalry? The prayer to '*Egomen*', humorous as it is, could be an expression of a credo that had nothing to do with a service to mankind. Joyce's manifesto states clearly that his oeuvre aims to serve itself: '[it] is a state of mind that worries little or not at all if the masses understand its implications'.[123] Girard himself recognizes in Stephen's prayer 'a purely egotistical version' of Mark 9:24 ("I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief"). Anthony Uhlmann has discovered that in the Oxford dictionary, 'egomen' means 'the servants of faith in the Orthodox church'.[124] It is, however, very unlikely that Joyce makes his hero appeal to any such servants.

If we consider Stephen's lecture in the context of the major intellectual preoccupation of that time, which was individualism, there is reason to believe that '*Egomen*' could be a pun on Gide's "theological theory", based on Dostoevsky, opposing the 'God-man' to 'a man-god'. The inventors of this theory – Dostoevsky and Vladimir Soloviev – caution their contemporaries against 'the man-god' – the product of the rationalist ideal, which, according to them, would lead to totalitarianism in its various manifestations. Gide reversed this dichotomy with Kirillov's assistance: 'The man-God. That's the difference!'.[125] Plenty of critical literature on this subject demonstrates that

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[121] Ibid., p. 267.
[122] Ibid., p. 269.
[123] 'The Novel is Dead. Long Live the Novel' (November 1929), in Eugene Jolas, Critical Writings, p. 113.
[124] Anthony Uhlmann, *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 74.
[125] Andre Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 174-175.

Dostoevsky and Soloviev themselves were somewhat lost in their theoretical speculations.[126] Gide discusses this opposition in his lectures in order to prove that Dostoevsky's 'Overman' as 'the quietist' ultimately ended up as 'the Devil': 'We observe (and on this point I am bound to insist) how Dostoevsky assigns the Devil's habitation, not to the baser elements in man, but to the very noblest – the realm of intellect, the seat of reason'.[127] Let us put aside for a while the question of Joyce's *Egomen* and consider Dostoevsky's *Egoman*, the devil.

Ivan converses with his double in the chapter 'The Devil, Ivan's Nightmare' which is also selected by Golosovker in his *Dostoevsky and Kant* as the key to Dostoevsky's satirical attack on the antinomies of pure reason. Wishing to confirm his theory ("if God does not exist everything is permitted") Ivan asks the devil whether God exists or not. To this his *Egoman* replies:

> I keep you dangling between belief and disbelief by turns, and I don't mind admitting that I have a reason for it. It's the new method, sir. For when you lose your faith in me completely, you will at once begin assuring me to my face that I'm not a dream, but do really exist.[128]

According to Golosovker, Dostoevsky intended to subvert Kant's subjective idealism by presenting the consequences of a justifiable crime. From Ivan's point of view, the death of his father, Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov, would only benefit humanity because objectively the man is a villain. The chapter entitled 'Why such a man lives' portrays Fyodor Pavlovitch as 'a vicious insect', that is to say, a totally amoral natural phenomenon. Golosovker, unfortunately, does not arrive at any sustainable counter argument against the murder; at the end of his book, he simply repeats Dmitry Karamazov's platitude that man's nature is too broad ('here all contradictions live side by side').[129] How does the scene with the devil (Ivan's *Egoman*) help us to understand Dostoevsky's belief?

The devil started to visit Ivan when the latter decided to appear in court 'to justify himself to himself'. The on-going court hearing, however, has nothing to do with Ivan but

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[126] See, for instance, Marina Kostalevsky, *Dostoevsky and Soloviev: The Art of Integral Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 14.
[127] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 154.
[128] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 2, p. 759.
[129] Ibid., p. 123.

his elder brother Dmitry, falsely accused of the murder of their father. Ivan has always seen Dmitry as a mimetic rival of their father; this is why he had expected that someday 'one reptile will devour the other, and serve them both right!'[130] When it turns out that the murderer is the lackey Smerdyakov, the illegitimate son of Feodor Pavlovitch, Ivan is devastated. What could be the reason for this strange reaction? Smerdyakov has chosen Ivan as his "*Egoman*". When Ivan moved in with his father he took some interest in this taciturn young servant. They started to read books together. During these sessions, Ivan criticized everything. As a result of this learning, the 'lackey-son' became extraordinarily ambitious. When Smerdyakov tells Ivan that in murdering their father he has acted in accordance with Ivan's instructions the latter suddenly begins to insist that he himself was the only murderer. Does this mean that he wishes to appear in court to defend his falsely accused brother? Dostoevsky needed the devil to tell us the truth. Ivan is eager to prove to himself that his thoughts had nothing to do with the lackey's vulgar logic: having learnt that "everything is permitted" Smerdyakov decided that he was legitimately entitled to kill the old 'sensualist' and use his money to open a café in Moscow. While the devil encourages Ivan to appear in court and 'put his case boldly and resolutely', he repeats, '*C'est noble, c'est charmant*'.[131] Disgusted with the devil's vulgarity, Ivan rushes to a doctor, who advises him to spend more time in bed and look after himself.

Since many characters in the novel and even the narrator affirm that Ivan has been driven to madness by his 'tender conscience',[132] it would appear to the reader that the devil is playing the role of Ivan's good conscience, however, Dostoevsky uses the comic device of the double: Ivan 'justifying himself to himself'. This doubleness turns the scene into a hilarious comedy, which totally escapes Gide. When he admires Raskolnikov's '*daring*' he omits the rest of the scene that emphasises the role of imitation: 'I wanted to become a Napoleon that is why I killed her. I wanted to find out then, and quickly, whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man, whether I can step over barriers or not'.[133]

If we recall Joyce's claim that *Crime and Punishment* 'was a queer title for a book, which contained neither crime nor punishment', could it be that Joyce grasped Dostoevsky's emphasis on imitation? As an imitator of Napoleon, Raskolnikov becomes "a man of *ressentiment*", not an Overman. Joyce's discovery of the 'French triangle', however, does not necessarily imply that Joyce saw rivalry as a contradiction to Gide's

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[130] Ibid., p.164.
[131] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 747.
[132] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 813.
[133] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 428.

theory of superhumanity. While repeating almost verbatim Joyce's objection to Dostoevsky's title, Beckett distinguishes between the method, which he calls 'negative and comic', and the 'relativity' which is 'as pessimistic and as negative as that of France'.[134] There is a subtle but significant difference between these two interpretations.

One may suggest that Joyce's appeal to *Egomen* is merely a humorous oath to his 'artistic God'. Stephen qualifies Shakespeare's method as working exclusively for the author: 'he [Shakespeare] laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage'.[135] In saying 'I don't believe my theory', Stephen acts in accordance with the theory of *l'acte gratuit*: his motto, as a hero, is 'Silence, Exile and Cunning', while the French triangle is the means of producing superior art. We should bear in mind that according to Gide, the real superman is the one who "imitates Christ" just as Kirillov tried to imitate him: 'the attribute of my Godhead is self-will. That's all I can do to prove in the highest point my independence and my new terrible freedom. For it is very terrible, and I am killing myself to prove my independence and my new terrible freedom'.[136] Voluntary sacrifice, offered consciously for the sake of self-affirmation is the credo of the man-God. Despite Joyce's awareness of the law of a French triangle, it is highly arguable that he saw this structure as *mimetic* desire. Commenting on his later 'fictional method' as 'variation and sameness', Ellmann writes: 'the accumulation of identities is intended. For Joyce, no individual is so unusual and no situation so distinct as not to echo other individuals and situations'.[137]

It is perhaps due to the hidden mechanics of the French triangle that Joyce's works exude their marvelous exuberance, instead of making explicit the reductionist tendency of mimetic mechanics. Joyce himself called his artistic process 'three cat-and-mouse acts',[138] which accords, it seems, with Beckett's description of Joyce's 'Purgatory' in 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce' 'a kitten trying to catch its tail':

> No resistance, no eruption, and it is only in Hell and Paradise that there are no eruptions, that there can be none, need be none. On this earth that is Purgatory, Vice and Virtue – which you may take to mean any pair of large contrary human factors – must in turn be purged to spirits of rebelliousness […]. And no more than this;

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[134] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 85.
[135] James Joyce's *Ulysses*, p. 345.
[136] Gide quotes Kirilov from *The Devils*, in Andre Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 190.
[137] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 550.
[138] Ellmann comments on the Richard and Robert pair in Exiles as follows: 'Richard and Robert watch each other in what Joyce called "three cat-and-mouse acts"', in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 356.

> neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail.[139]

Joyce seems to have found the method by which he could reconcile himself with his *Egomen*. In Dostoevsky and Beckett, we find the theme of the double or the *doppelgänger*, which is not a mere device, a technique or even a philosophical subject, but an indication of an existentially unresolvable predicament, which can be resolved if it is made explicit.

According to Mario Praz's authoritative *The Romantic Agony* (1933), the double is nothing more than a figment of poetic imagination, signaling 'man's inability fully to comprehend haunting reminders of another supernatural realm […], the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena […], and a sense of nameless guilt'.[140] Praz, writing in 1933, was behind his time. As we have seen, towards the end of the 19th century, a few perceptive writers and 'philosophical anthropologists' had come to realise that reason was no less a metaphysical phenomenon than the Ghost in *Hamlet* (Joyce interprets the Ghost as Shakespeare's double).

In 'Les Deux Besoins' (1938), Beckett describes the literary establishment of his day as the trespassers on 'the metaphysical flowerbeds':

> Nothing resembles the creative process less than these convulsions of enraged little worms, propelled in spasms of judgement towards a decay of choice. Because it is the conclusions and not the premises that are lacking from the enthymemes of the art.[141]

His own definition of this process is 'a silent cry', appealing to a certain centre around which everyone turns in monotonous circles. He inserted a diagram depicting two superimposed triangles, one pointing upwards and the other downwards and provided the following comment:

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[139] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', in *Disjecta*, p. 33.
[140] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 11.
[141] Samuel Beckett, 'Les Deux Besoins', in *Disjecta*, p. 57; translated by Nicholas Waller.

> Here for example is one of various ways of indicating the bounds within which the artist tortures himself, analyses himself, turns himself into questions, into rhetorical questions with no oratorical function.[142]

Although the piece can hardly be viewed as intended for oratorical purposes, the images it evokes show that Beckett was eager to impart the horror of the split identity, the double. The doubling pseudocouple springs up everywhere in the text. It is implied by the epigraph ('And the apothecary ... sang, "*I have two big oxen in my stable, Two big white oxen...*"), by the triangles but especially by the image of the writer as a bicycle rider:

> There are days, especially in Europe, when the road reflects better than a mirror. To prefer one testicle to another would be to trespass on the metaphysical flowerbeds.[143]

The writer would not like to see himself as a trespasser on the metaphysical flowerbeds, but he cannot escape this experience because literature implies an oratorical function. Consequently, the journey on the public roads of literature should be nothing but a bicycle trip, invariably implying either the rivalry with a 'bigger vehicle' (like in the opening scene in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*) or the means of escape from human kindness (like in Molloy's interaction with his angelic hostess). In chapter 3 (section 4) and chapter 4 (section 2), we will consider Beckett's use of the bicycle metaphor in more detail.

Beckett's interest in 'the Dostoevskian duality' seems to have been inseparable from Dostoevsky's embeddedness in the Romantic tradition or rather its particular trend, which Beckett traces from Racine to Stendhal and Flaubert (in Burrows' notes) and Victor Hugo (in *Proust*).[144] The next chapter (section 3) will set out to suggest that Beckett was well acquainted with Dostoevsky's satire on the Romantic Movement as it appears in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In Girard's view, Dostoevsky's self-defeating "ethics", as it manifests itself in his early works, is inextricable from the writer's imitation of Romantic models with which he was besotted in his youth:

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[142] Ibid., p. 56.
[143] Ibid., p. 55.
[144] Earlier on, we have referred to Burrows' recording of 'the Dostoevskian duality' which Beckett characterises as exemplary and modern (the 'division in [the] minds of antagonists' quality typical of Racine's plays and also of Flaubert and Stendhal), quoted in Bolin's Beckett and the Modern Novel, p. 20; in *Proust*, Beckett argues that 'Proust recedes from the Symbolists back towards Hugo', p. 80.

> The childhood of Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky unfolded in the shadow of a father as sometimes capricious in his conduct as he was always austere in his principles. Literature thus became a means of fleeing the sad realities of family life. This tendency towards "evasion" was subsequently reinforced by the young Shidlovsky, who became a close friend of the two Dostoevsky brothers, on the very day of their arrival to St. Petersburg, in 1837. Shidlovky swore only by Corneille, Rousseau, Schiller, and Victor Hugo. He wrote verses in which he expressed a need "to govern the universe" and "to converse with God". He cried a lot, he spoke of making an end by throwing himself into a St. Petersburg canal. Feodor Mikhailovich was subjugated: he admired what Shidlovsky admired; he thought what Shidlovsky thought. It seems that his writer's vocation dates from this period.[145]

Dostoevsky's own comment on his duality can be found in a letter to the artist and writer, Ekaterina Iunge, who had written to the novelist, complaining about her duality, the constant 'reversals' that tormented her. Dostoevsky responded as follows:

> What are you writing about duality? But this is the most common trait in people … those, of course, who are not entirely ordinary. The trait is characteristic of human nature in general, but by far not encountered with so much force in every individual human nature as in you. You are related to me, as it were, because this division-in-two in you is exactly like the one that exists and always has existed in me. It's a great torment but at the same time a great delight. It indicates a powerful consciousness, a need for self-awareness, and the presence in your nature of a need for moral duty to yourself and the humankind. That's what this duality means.[146]

Dostoevsky advises his friend to believe in Christ as a cure for her affliction. The problem with this advice is the same need to express one's belief.

The artist, whatever his personal convictions may be, cannot possibly decide for the rest of mankind – or to put it otherwise, he cannot oppose his personal belief to the beliefs prevalent among his readers. In the last year of his life, Dostoevsky penned a suggestive little remark in his notebook: '*All nihilist*. Nihilism made its appearance in our midst

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[145] Ibid., p. 25.
[146] Fyodor Dostoevsky's letter to Ekaterina Iung, quoted in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 89.

because we're *all nihilists*'.[147] In one of his early articles for *Time*, he tried to state his belief in an imaginary dialogue with a Frenchman, who asks him:

> "And another thing", he [the Frenchman] goes on, "in your announcement you express the hope that the Russian idea will in time become the synthesis of all the ideas Europe had so long and so stubbornly cultivated in her separate nationalities. What do you mean by it?"

Dostoevsky replies with a question: '"[do] you want us to declare plainly and frankly what we believe in?"' Instead of replying 'plainly' and 'frankly', he asks:

> Why is it that if in our age we feel the need to tell the truth we have more and more to resort to humour or satire or irony in order to present one's convictions to the public while pretending to be a shade haughtily indifferent to them or even with a certain shade of disrespect for them – in short with some mean little concession?[148]

The answer, perhaps, would be a specific type of comic art that proceeds by a practical *via negativa*. If the expression of one's belief implies a necessity to negate, the truth can only result from the negation of the first negation.

With regards to Dostoevsky's beliefs, Gide was convinced that before *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky was a quietist ('Prince Myshkin [is] the hero who best embodied Dostoevsky's philosophy until the day when he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*).[149] For Gide, in Prince Myshkin, the mastery of Self stems from humility or 'a sort of Buddhism, or, at least, *quietism*'.[150] Girard provides an insightful comment on this quietist version of Christianity as it appears in *The Idiot*:

> The primary model for Myshkin is a Christ more romantic than Christian, that of Jean-Paul, of Vigny, of Nerval in *The Chimères*, a Christ always isolated from human beings and from his Father in a perpetual and somewhat theatrical agony.[151]

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[147] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Diary of A Writer*, quoted in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 84.
[148] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Occasional Writings*, pp. 57-58.
[149] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 153.
[150] Ibid., p. 152.
[151] René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, p. 34.

Noting that this purely individualist perfection turns back against its own idea, Girard views *The Idiot* as the most humourless of all Dostoevsky's novels. Meanwhile, if we bear in mind Dostoevsky's account of irony, the very name of the Prince "Myshkin" (which means "like a mouse") points to an undergoing comical process; this mouse also brings to mind the underground man who prides himself on being 'an intensely aware mouse'.[152]

An exemplary parody of quietism in Dostoevsky is *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (1859). The name of the main character, Foma Fomich Opiskin, is clearly a corruption of Thomas Kempijsky, the 15th century Christian mystic and author of the *Imitation of Christ*. His teaching enjoyed immense popularity amongst the educated in late 19th century Russia. While travelling abroad in winter 1844, Gogol wrote to Sergei Aksakov, strongly recommending to his Slavophile friend that he read one chapter of the *Imitation* every day 'after you've taken your tea or coffee so that your appetite will not distract you'. The letter received a very sharp response from Aksakov who was particularly incensed by Gogol's "after coffee". In a letter dated 17 April 1844, Aksakov writes in the most emotive terms of the disappointment that overtook him while reading Gogol's missive. Aksakov came across an allusion in the letter to "the remedies for spiritual anxiety" and thought that the author of *Dead Souls* was sending him the long-awaited fifth volume of his "poem": 'I thought of praying while delighting in the creation of art', Aksakov writes, 'and suddenly you forcibly sit me down, like some small boy, to read Thomas à Kempis, without knowing my convictions'.[153]

The inhabitants of the village of Stepanchikovo are subjugated by Foma Fomich. Residing permanently with an aristocratic family, he never ceases to denounce its worldly ways. He is equally demanding towards himself. He despises money, he refuses to accept a pension; his ascetic life prevents his detractor, Rostanev, from throwing him out of the house. The reader may even sometimes feel that Dostoevsky is sincerely passionate about his character. A new perspective opens in the scene that presents Foma Fomich examining his reflection in the mirror:

> "Happened to stand in front of the mirror today and had a close look", continued Foma Fomich, solemnly omitting the pronoun "I". "Far be it from me to regard myself as handsome, but I was nevertheless obliged to conclude that there is

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[152] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground*, p. 10.
[153] Commentary to *Gogol's Letters*, in «Комментарии к Письмам Гоголя 1842-1851» (Москва: Наука, 1976), т. 12, стр. 246.

> something in this grey eye of mine to distinguish me from the Falaleys of this world" [Falaley is an unfortunate houseboy who happened to be handsome].[154]

A mirror is a perfect device to expose the double – the division in the mind of a demi-god who cannot maintain his divinity without comparing himself with others, i.e. negating others. 'The grey eye of mine' is an adequate colour to emphasise an ecstatic self-abnegation.

Turning to Beckett's quasi-quietist aesthetics, we can find similar colours and a similar use of the double. In *Molloy*, for instance, grey is the symbol of the hero's detachment combined with a desire to watch others. A classic example of this combination is Molloy's voyeurism: 'I was perched higher than the road's highest point and flattened what is more against a rock the same colour as myself, that is grey'.[155] Another scene from *Molloy*, contrasts the grey to the colorful with an emphasis of self-sacrifice: 'the Aegean, thirsting for heat and light, him I killed, he killed himself early in me. The pale gloom of rainy days was better fitted to my taste'.[156]

"Beckett and Quietism" is, perhaps, the most metaphysical part of Beckett studies. We have already quoted from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, which insists that 'as long as the world is as it is, all pictures of reconciliation, peace and quiet resemble the picture of death'.[157] Weller's study 'Beckett and Ethics' identifies Beckett's quietism as both cosmological and ethical forms of nihilism.[158] This, however, does not mean that Beckett himself was a nihilist because his recantations of this "ethics" are everywhere evident. One of his most explicit negations of nihilism is a 10 March 1935 letter to McGreevy ("the Letter on *Imitation*"), which begins with a virulent attack on *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.

Beckett calls *The Imitation* a 'self-referring quietism' and tells his friend that it 'only confirmed and reinforced the way of living that tried to be a solution and failed'.[159] In fact, he views himself and the author of the *Imitation* as proud worshippers of their own Ego: 'I mean that I replaced the plenitude that he calls "God" not by "goodness", but by a pleroma only to be sought among my own feathers or entrails, a principle of self the possession of which was to provide a rationale and the communion with which a sense of

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[154] Ibid., p. 159.
[155] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 11.
[156] Ibid., p. 30.
[157] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 381.
[158] Shane Weller, 'Beckett and Ethics', p. 128; (quoted at the beginning of the chapter).
[159] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 257.

Grace'.[160] The spiritual practice developed by the immortal mystic appears to be nothing other than a 'Luciferian concentration' which 'twisted the hypostatics of "meekly, simply and truly" […] into a programme of self-sufficiency'.[161] Beckett's use of metaphors points to the same self-sacrificial idealism that we have found in Dostoevsky. The author of *The Imitation* is called 'the sparrow alone upon the housetop' that 'always had Jesus for his darling'. Beckett "admires" such phrases as "seldom we come home without hurting of conscience" or "the glad going out and sorrowful coming home".[162]

The fact that Beckett assimilates quietism to nihilism is evident from the passage that analyses 'that way of living or rather a negation of living' as it had been developing from the time when he 'went into T.C.D.':

> The misery & solitude & apathy & the sneers were the elements of an index of superiority & guaranteed the feeling of arrogant "otherness", which seemed as right & natural & as little morbid as the way in which it was not so much expressed as implied & reserved & kept available for a possible utterance in the future. It was not until that way of living, or rather a negation of living, developed such terrifying physical symptoms that it could no longer be pursued, that I became aware of anything morbid in myself. In short, if the heart had not put the fear of death into me I would be still boozing & sneering & lounging around & feeling that I was too good for anything else.[163]

The passage suggests that Beckett hardly treasured this behaviour at the time of writing his letter and that he was in the process of finding a solution.

He entered Trinity in October 1923, having enrolled in the arts faculty to study modern languages. Born into a family of solid Dublin bourgeoisie, he began to circulate among the intellectual and artistic upper classes. To be sure, 'the misery & solitude & apathy & the sneers' were the indispensible armor for the seventeen-year-old who had hitherto demonstrated his otherness only to his schoolmates in Portora and the members of his family. Like the hero-narrator of his beloved Proust, Beckett succumbed to the dark forces of snobbism. It is 'in deference to this snobbishness that [he] told his tutor, Henry Luce, that his father was an architect', thus elevating Bill Beckett up an echelon in Dublin

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., pp. 258-259.

society.[164] Quantity surveying was not the kind of ancestry one could be very proud of in that environment. According to Beckett biographers, he decided to do an arts degree without any clear idea about the future. There is, however, some slight evidence in the letter that he had a writing career in mind: 'the feeling of arrogant "otherness"' seemed as right & natural […] as the ways in which […] it implied a possible utterance in the future'.

The second period of negation refers to Paris and the early 1930s when Beckett was a young man of 27 who had taken the first steps in his literary career. It was precisely that period when his quietist tactic 'was not to prove very splendid' and some 'terrifying physical symptoms' started to show. He must have been tempted by madness since the letter refers to an encounter with 'the demon – pretiosa margarita!'[165] This antagonist, he hopes, would not disable him any the more 'with sweats & shudders & panics & rages & rigors & heart bursting' because he rejected 'the principle of faith' based on his own Ego.

The solution he finally found which he recounted to McGreevy is not unlike Kantian scepticism. He decided to replace the principle of faith with the principle of fact, 'personal and finite'. That is, at least, not to pretend that his 'motives are unselfish' and that 'the welfare of others was [his] concern'. The letter was written at the time when Beckett was completing his course of intensive psychotherapy with doctors Geoffrey and Bion which he started early in 1934.[166] The 'pathology' they diagnosed sounds rather ironic in the context of the letter: it was the 'condition denoting the superior man' – something that was not that untypical of Beckett's generation.

The profound self-awareness displayed in the letter suggests that by 1935 Beckett had a clear view of his mimetic double bind: a pathological need for being treated like a scapegoat. Although not explicitly Beckett relates this need to his writing, which he calls 'the analysis' – just as it is called in 'Les Deux Besoins'. He asks McGreevy 'is there some way of devoting pain & monstrosity & incapacitation to the service of a deserving cause?' and replies with a rhetorical question: 'Is one to insist on a crucifixion for which there is no demand?'[167] McGreevy was a long enough confidant of Beckett to understand a certain aspect of his friend's 'Old Grillen'. As their previous correspondence makes clear, 'the fatuous torments which I treasured as denoting the superior man' were numerous attempts to produce a piece of writing that would assure Beckett's literary reputation.

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[164] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 52.
[165] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 258.
[166] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett,* p. 174.
[167] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 258.

"The letter on *Imitation*" does not mention the name of James Joyce – the 'Penman' whose writing Beckett truly wanted to imitate. This follows from a 15 August 1931 letter to McGreevy that presents us with a rather astonishing personal fact. Beckett confirms that his work '*of course* stinks of Joyce in spite of most earnest endeavours to endow it with my own odours', and admits that 'unfortunately for myself that's the only way I'm interested in writing'.[168] Was Beckett aware of the 'Penman's' method of the 'French Triangle'? We will consider this possibility in the next chapter.

[168] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. 1, p. 81; my emphasis.

CHAPTER 3: BECKETT AND HIS MODELS

SECTION 1: JAMES JOYCE

Beckett's self-analysis in his 1935 letter to McGreevy omits a period of his life when he was less unhappy; when, instead of treasuring his solitude and apathy 'as denoting the superior man', he became unwittingly a disciple of the writer James Joyce. Beckett was introduced to Joyce by Thomas McGreevy in December 1928 when he came to Paris to take the position of exchange *lecteur* in English at the École Normale Supérieure. It is interesting to examine Beckett's relationship with Joyce in terms of the mimetic process we have been discussing in previous chapters. The first stage of this process was admiration based on an abstract contrast between what he saw as his own nonentity and the famous writer who embodied that "otherness" which Beckett cherished for himself but did not know how to 'utter'.

What was Beckett's life situation when he came to France? He had graduated from T.C.D. with a vague idea about his future; the file card he had had to fill in when he entered the college read: 'law and chartered accountant'.[1] An interesting comment on this identity can be found in the short story 'What a Misfortune' from the collection *More Pricks than Kicks*. Here Beckett draws a comparison between the "misfortune" of being a chartered accountant and the good "fortune" of being a poet: 'A poet is indeed a very nubile creature, dowered, don't you know, with the love of love […]. So nubile that the women, God bless them, can't resist them, God help them'.[2] Those refined maidens, not 'intended merely for breeding', will never surrender to 'the more balanced and punctual raptures of a chartered accountant'; instead, they would rush after Belacqua who exudes indifference and therefore is 'dowered with the love of love'.[3]

In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 'the love of love' is presented as narcissism. Here Belacqua and the narrator 'quaver a very shaky proposition [that] Love condones … narcissism. We pause, we beseech you not to mind the terminology […]. Love demands

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[1] Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett*, p. 42.
[2] Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*, edited by Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 112.
[3] Ibid.

narcissism. […]. We mean that in a certain case, his, possibly, by all means, an isolated case, a certain quality of loving […] imports a certain system of narcissistic maneuvers'.[4] Beckett explicitly mocks Freud's theory of desire that was still widespread among the intellectuals of the 1920s. In his famous essay *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1913), Freud ascribes 'intact narcissism' to children, flighty women, humorists and bohemian artists. Apparently, the libidinal energy of these "species" 'goes in a circle' – that is to say, 'it stays with the subject or returns to it. As a result, this subject may be said to be self-contained or self-sufficient'.[5] Girard resorts to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in order to prove that there is no such thing as an objective narcissism: 'to say that no one is a narcissist for oneself and that everyone wants to be one, is to say that the self does not exist in the substantial sense that Freud gives to this term in *Narcissism*'.[6] In Proust's novel, the real narcissist is always another person – one who manages to perpetuate the illusion of his or her "blissful autonomy", which, in its turn, is impossible to do without real admirers.

The way in which Beckett describes narcissism in his early fiction alludes to a similar experience – one that he was undergoing during his first *séjours* in Paris. Joyce is admired as the embodiment of artistic omnipotence and yet he is already a potential rival, possessing the identity his disciple lacks. Beckett started to copy the desires of his model even down to the level of his habits and tics: he began to dress like Joyce; he copied his mannerisms; he drank the same wines. Later in his life his would admit that his literary ambition dated from that Joycean period.[7] In this respect, it is useful to recall Arland's assertion that for the first generation of 'individuals', i.e. those 'species' who had first realised the absence of God, literature became the purest means of acquiring self-possession. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* opens with a scene that introduces the bicycling Belacqua in the full possession of his creative vehicle:

> Behold Belacqua an overfed child pedaling faster and faster, his mount ajar and his nostrils dilated, down a frieze of hawthorn after Findlater's van, faster and faster till cruise alongside of the hoss, the black fat rump of the hoss. Whip him up, vanman,

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[4] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, edited by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (London: Calder Publication, 1993), p. 35; Beckett's ellipse.
[5] René Girard paraphrases Freud, in 'Narcissism: The Freudian Myth Demystified by Proust', in *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 175.
[6] Ibid., p. 182.
[7] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 102.

> flickem, flapem, collop-wallop fat Sambo. Stiffly, like a perturbation of feathers, a tail archers for a gush of mard. Ah …![8]

This passage, printed separately on the novel's first page, suggests that the indolent Belacqua can be fiercely energetic when it comes to his rivalry with a more solid vehicle on the highways of literature.

Already in his first published work, the story 'Assumption' (March 1929), Beckett caricatures his admiration for Joyce.[9] The story's main character is a nameless artist who armed himself with Stephen Dedalus' strategy of 'Silence, Exile and Cunning' in order to defend himself against a largely philistine society. He spends most of his time sitting in a café, frequented by members of 'the unread intelligentsia' (268). Rather than join in their conversation, he remains in self-imposed exile, but from time to time, in an exercise of cunning, succeeds in 'whispering the turmoil down' (268). 'He could have shouted', says the narrator in the story's opening sentence, 'and could not. Because the buffoon in the loft swung steadily on his stick and the organist sat dreaming with his hands in his pockets' (268). The buffoon is, no doubt, a divine conductor of the whole show – the artistic Godhead, in whose hands art achieves 'bombshell perfection' (269). The artist's 'struggle for divinity', 'his caged resentment', results in a battle between the urge to remain silent (represented by the Angel of quietism) and the urge to shout (represented by its 'satanic rival'). In order to defeat the rebel, the artist even stops to whisper because the whisper within him threatens to burst the dam he has constructed to prevent the flood. Feeling that he is about to drown, the artist is suddenly blessed with a visitation of 'the Woman' who has come to release his tension. The use of a capital "W" and the fact that her 'eyes' ('pools of obscurity') resemble the eyes of D.H. Lawrence's Minette ('the dead bottomless pools')[10], suggests that the Woman stands for all those women-in-love who are the rivals of their lovers. Although Beckett's artist imagines that in the Woman's company, he has repeatedly 'died', and in doing so has become at one with 'the blue flower, Vega, God', this mystical union distracts him from becoming an artistic God of creation (271). To appreciate the brilliance of Beckett's satire, involving the struggle between the Angel of quietism and its assertive satanic rival, it is worth recalling the two pillars of Gide's theory of the gratuitous act: Prince Myshkin's 'quietism' and Raskolnikov's 'daring' (or the

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[8] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, p. 1.
[9] Samuel Beckett, 'Assumption', in *transition* 16-17 (June 1929), p. 268; further references are in the main body of the text.
[10] D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 88.

'daring' of some of the characters from *The Devils*), both types representing 'extraordinary men' towering over 'the common rut'.[11]

Having spent only four months in Paris, Beckett grasped all the intricacies of the reigning ideology. Given that he was immediately drawn into the Joyce circle that was competing with the powerful *La Nouvel Revue Française*, his agility is hardly surprising. Just a year before his arrival, Eugene Jolas started up the magazine *transition* to publish Joyce's 'Work in Progress' serially. Gide initially called *Ulysses* 'a sham masterpiece'; by the end of the 1920s, he would begin to speak more positively about Joyce's work, although he never omitted to emphasise that Joyce's 'form of daring' was a derivative of Dostoevsky's.[12] Joyce, on the other hand, considered Gide as the only modern writer who wrote 'a pure French' and seemed to 'know a pen from a pitchfork'.[13]

Girard's complaint that Joyce made his own 'mimetic' perspective willfully obscure is rather irrelevant. However profound Joyce's knowledge of the law of a 'French triangle' might have been, he most certainly did not consider rivalry as a form of *imitation*. On the contrary, he intended to devote his work to the 'alchemy of the word' to oppose 'an illusory mass mind' and 'rebuild an idealism as precise as physics itself'.[14] One may perceive the idea of *Finnegans Wake* as a further development of his aesthetic theory based on the triad of 'Silence, Exile and Cunning'. Instead of choosing literal 'silence', Joyce issued a manifesto (November 1929) declaring the death of the novel: "The Novel is dead – Long Live the Novel". What could be more suicidal and more gratuitous than the novelist turning against the art of the novel? However, this new artistic God of Creation had his purpose: he had revolted against 'language and grammar' in order to establish 'a mantic laboratory that will examine the new personality, particularly with relation to the irrational forces dominating it'.[15]

In the proximity of Joyce, Beckett acquired that 'unremitting intellect' which would ensure that the "chartered accountant" in him should suffer.[16] Just over a month after they met, Joyce asked his new disciple to contribute to a volume of self-homage, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. There had to be twelve contributors and Beckett was supposed to be among the number of Joyce's

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[11] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 157.
[12] Ibid., p. 160.
[13] Richard Ellmann mentions Joyce's discussion of modern writers with William Aspenwall Bradley, which took place shortly after Joyce's arrival in Paris, see Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 487.
[14] Eugene Jolas, *Critical Writings*, pp. 133, 140.
[15] Ibid., p. 115.
[16] We have quoted this phrase from Stephen's lecture in the previous chapter: 'His unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer', *Ulysses*, p. 345.

supporters – there were contributors who had to play the role of Joyce's detractors. Beckett's essay was entitled 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', revealing Joyce's choice of writers in whose company he wished to emerge. When suggesting the subject, Joyce must have taken into account Beckett's passion for Dante and his good Italian. Beckett's research into the philosophies of Vico and Bruno proved to be gratifying and congenial, as we shall see, with his own philosophical preferences. When the essay was published, Joyce's reaction was somewhat subdued: the final product was more like Beckett's homage to Vico and Dante than to Joyce.

Joyce's next job for Beckett was a translation of *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, a section of 'Work in Progress'. Still not sure of his command of French, Beckett invited Alfred Péron to join him as a collaborator. During the spring and summer of 1930, the young men were engaged on the complex task of decoding Joyce's neologisms. In May, there an incident occurred that would destroy the "friendship" that Beckett had treasured so highly: when Joyce and Nora were abroad, the young man announced to their daughter that he was not interested in her but in her father. The result was devastating: 'Beckett's visits were to cease; he was *persona non grata* at Square Robiac'.[17] In addition to this punishment, Joyce decided that the translation of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* was unsatisfactory. When the work had already been completed, he invited the experts from *La Nouvelle Revue Française* to revise Beckett and Péron's translation. As Megan Quigley's research has revealed, there are only twelve differences between the two versions.[18] At the time, Beckett was already in Ireland. In a 1932 letter to Samuel Putman he would write: 'I'll get over J.J. before I die'.

In the universe of metaphysical desire, rivalry is an indispensable element, which gives desire its object. Beckett did not find it even necessary to conceal that the only way he was interested in writing was that of Joyce. The desire to win makes the bond between the rivals even stronger. As Girard reminds us,

> Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to *the desirability of the object*. The

[17] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 105.
[18] Megan Quigley, 'Justice for the "Illstarred punster": Samuel Beckett and Alfred Peron's Revisions of "Anna Lyvia Pluratself" in *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, Spring 2004, p. 187.

> rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires.[19]

In Beckett's case, however, the matter of opinion was not secondary. The evidence for this can be deduced from his intention to write a comparative study on Proust and Joyce. According to James Knowlson, 'the young man admired Joyce so much that he […] even suggested to the Directeur-adjoint of the Ecole Normale, Professor Bouglé […] that he might register for a French Doctorate taking the work of Proust and Joyce as his subject'.[20] But what kind of admiration was it? Was Beckett unaware that Joyce disliked Proust? In Bruce Bradley's memoirs, we find the following comment: 'Joyce liked *Les Caves du Vatican* ['the parodic representation of *Crime and Punishment*'[21]]. The name of Proust came up and Joyce, having read a few pages, commented, "I cannot see any special talent but I am a bad critic"'.[22] Why did Beckett wish to compare Joyce with the writer he (Joyce) considered mediocre? To answer this crucial question, which has a bearing on Beckett's own opinions, we should focus on the comparative analysis of 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce' and *Proust*.

SECTION 2: PROUST, DANTE AND VICO

Beckett was determined to write a book on Proust, and when McGreevy introduced him to Charles Prentice of Chatto & Windus, Beckett interested him in his subject – a certain cognitive-existential experience epitomized by the Proustian novel. Although much of his argument would come to contradict his own novelistic practice and some of his later theoretical pronouncements, *Proust* deserves to be called Beckett's 'manifesto' because it states a *solution*. In this respect, it is useful to bear in mind that the majority of manifestos, published during the interwar period in Paris and Zurich, provided 'solutions' to nihilism. Beckett called his solution 'Proustian', arguing that the Proustian form of writing ('the Proustian Discourse de la Methode') embodied a method of cognition, which invokes the experience of 'extratemporal reality' (opens 'a window on the real').[23] The book begins

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[19] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 145 [my emphasis].
[20] Ibid., p. 100.
[21] See Alexander McCabe, *Dostoevsky's French Reception*, p. 131.
[22] See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 488.
[23] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 43, 39 [Beckett's emphasis].

with the problem of Time as the 'instrument of death', which 'measures the length and weight of man in terms of his body instead of in terms of his years'.[24] This investigation concludes on the following note:

> Consequently the Proustian solution consists, in so far as it has been examined, in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time. Death is dead because Time is dead.[25]

As such, Beckett's solution indicates that he objects to the conclusions of Science that man's intelligible nature is conditioned by time and space and therefore reality is nothing other than man's perception – as 'Schopenhauer would say': 'the world is an objectivation of the individual's will'.[26] While agreeing that 'the world is a projection of the individual's consciousness', Beckett insists, nonetheless, that 'reality' does exist, but 'whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied – *a priori* – to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo […]'.[27]

It is easy to recognize here Beckett's reference to Kant's cosmology with its central distinction between the world of phenomena and a possible noumenal world of ultimate reality.[28] Beckett agrees that 'Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object […]'.[29] His solution, however, draws on the Proustian novel where this contact is possible:

> But, thanks to this reduplication ['the identification of immediate with past'], the experience is at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal.[30]

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[24] Ibid., p. 12.
[25] Ibid., p. 75.
[26] Ibid., p. 19.
[27] Ibid., p. 74.
[28] Theodore Greene (the translator of Kant's *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*) writes: 'Kant's solution of the antinomies rests on his distinction between the phenomenal world […] and a possible noumenal world – a distinction central to Kant's later theological [cosmological] thinking', in the 'Introduction', p. xl.
[29] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 74.
[30] Ibid., pp. 19, 74

Beckett argues that 'the Proustian real' has a place in everyday life as 'involuntary memory', triggered by 'the objects of the physical world' ('the source and point of departure of this sacred action, the elements of communion, are provided by the physical world').[31] Keen to highlight the epistemological function of literature, he contends that 'an impression *is* for the writer what an experiment is for the scientist', and asserts that 'Proust's impressionism will bring us back to Dostoevsky'.[32] It is hardly a matter of mere coincidence that in Dostoevsky's article on the usefulness of art (to which we referred in chapter I with regards to the discussion of the *Beautiful* and the *Sublime* in Ernest Cassirer's *Essay on Man*) we find the following statement: 'talent is given to a writer for the sole purpose of creating an impression. One can know a fact, one can see it a hundred times oneself and still fail to get the same impression as when someone else, a man with special gifts, stands beside you and points out that fact to you'.[33]

Celebrating the centrality of this method in the selected type of the novel, Beckett separates Proust from the naturalists and the symbolists ('Proust recedes from the Symbolists – back towards Hugo').[34] He attacks the Gideans' motto "Live dangerously" and objects to Curtius' statement that Proust is a 'positive relativist'.[35] Joyce is not mentioned at all, except a passing remark that 'now [Proust] is no longer read, it is generally conceded that he might have written an even worse prose than he did'.[36]

We do not know what points of contact Beckett saw between Proust and Joyce when he proposed to write a comparative study of their novels, but we may well suggest that by the time of his arrival in Paris, the 'Proustian solution' had already been formed in his mind. This follows from 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', which begins with Beckett's high praise of Vico's style, 'hoisting the real unjustifiably clear of its dimensional limits'.[37]

In an interview with James Knowlson in September 1989, Beckett used a form of understatement to disavow the then prevalent opinion, stated in Bair's *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, that 'Dante was one of the strongest bonds between Beckett and Joyce'.[38] He tells Knowlson that Joyce chose him 'because of [his] Italian'; he describes how much he enjoyed reading Vico and Bruno ('I spent a lot of time reading Bruno and Vico in the magnificent library, the Bibliothèque of the Ecole Normale'); he hints that Joyce was

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[31] Ibid., p. 36.
[32] Ibid., p. 82.
[33] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings*, p. 118.
[34] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 86
[35] Ibid., pp. 20, 85.
[36] Ibid., p. 87.
[37] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', in *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 19.
[38] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 45.

intent on presenting Vico and Bruno as Nietzschean predecessors ('We must have had some talk about the "Eternal Return" that sort of thing'); and he hints that Joyce was slightly disappointed ('He liked the essay. But his only comment on it was that there wasn't enough about Bruno').[39]

Vico rose to eminence in the 1910-30s owing to his reputation as a 'mystic' accorded to him by Croce. As Joyce was keen on the exploration of 'the nocturnal empire of the pre-logical' and 'daemonic qualities of life', he considered Vico's approach to myths as pre-Freudian.[40] With regards to Dante, Joyce in his 1911 essay 'The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance' refers to the great Italian poet as the genius of the past: 'still, the Renaissance had created the sense of compassion for each thing that lives and hopes and dies and deludes itself. In this at least we surpass the ancients'.[41]

In the first paragraph of his essay, Beckett announces that Vico was 'a rationalist' and 'a scientific historian'. He vehemently disagrees with Croce who placed Vico in contradistinction to the utilitarian school of Locke and Hobbes and praises Vico's prudent faith in Divine Providence as "*a mind distinct from and sometimes adverse and always superior to the purposes men want to achieve; narrowing these purposes and turning them into tools to […] maintain the human generation on this earth*"'.[42]

Having quoted this passage from Vico, he asks, 'What could be more definitely utilitarianism?'[43] Although his essay was intended, of course, to enlighten the reader on the connection between 'Work in Progress' and the three eminent "ancients", Beckett states from the outset that the connection between Vico and Joyce is structural, not philosophical: Vico's account of history is 'clearly adapted by Mr. Joyce as a structural convenience – or inconvenience. His position is in no way a philosophical one'.[44] It is remarkable, however, that what he likes in Vico is precisely the synthesis of Philosophy and Philology. In fact, this synthesis is so palatable to Beckett's taste that he likens it to 'a carefully folded ham-sandwich' toasted on 'the complete identification between the philosophical abstraction (Philosophy) and the empirical illustration (Philology), thereby annulling the absolutism of each conception – hoisting the real unjustifiably clear of its dimensional limits,

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[39] James Knowlson, Damned to Fame, p. 100.
[40] Eugene Jolas, *The Language of Night* (1932), in *Critical Writings*, p. 155.
Joyce's 'nocturnal empire of the pre-logical' included Christ, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Ahriman and Albert Einstein.
[41] *James Joyce in Padua*, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 321.
[42] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', in *Disjecta*, p. 20. [Beckett's emphasis].
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., p. 22.

temporalizing that which is extratemporal'.[45] By dint of this mode Vico is affiliated with Dante. Both share this 'general esthetic vigilance without which we cannot hope to snare the sense which is forever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself'.[46]

Although Joyce is also accorded the unity of form and content, for the 'sense', Beckett turns to Vico and Dante. He is looking for a term which would sum up their motivation to write: 'St. Augustine puts us on the track of a word with his '*intendere*''.[47] Beckett translates '*intendere*' into English as the word 'apprehension'.[48] Vico borrowed this term from Dante, and Beckett quotes this passage: 'Dante has, *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*, and *Voi che, intendendo, il terzo ciel movete*': those who are motivated by the desire to understand possess the intelligence of love. [49]

Beckett extols 'the unqualified originality of Vico's mind' that presented a rational cosmology based on 'the ineluctable circular progression of society' at the centre of which is Divine Providence.[50] He calls it 'rational' because Vico does not divide religion from science. In the age of Enlightenment, this division separated 'thought' from 'experience': on the one hand, the body, tied to materialism (the laws of causality), and on the other, the mind, reserved for transcendental *a priori* reason, presiding over these laws: 'Both these views, the materialistic and the transcendental, Vico rejects in favour of the rational'.[51] For Beckett, it is important that *this* rational view does not undermine man's freedom vis-à-vis the laws of causality or common experience, which he links to History. The latter 'appears to be a preordained cyclicism'.[52] However, as Beckett expounds on it, this cyclicism is by no means an "Eternal Return". 'It follows', he writes, 'that History is neither to be considered as a formless structure, due exclusively to the achievement of individual agents, nor as possessing reality apart from and independently of them, accomplished behind their backs in spite of them'.[53] At this point, he formulates perhaps one of the most concise and clear critical recoveries of the ideas of the Counter-Enlightenment:

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[45] Ibid. p. 21.
[46] Ibid., p.27.
[47] St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), in his *Confessions* (III, 5), writes: 'So I made up [intendere] to examine the Holy Scriptures and see what kind of books they were'; quoted in *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, edited by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 60.
[48] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', p. 24.
[49] It is interesting how writers comment on their writing by reapplying their own metaphors. Dante cites himself in the *Commedia*, where he transcribes the incipits of three canzoni: *Amor che nelle mentemi ragiona* (*Purg*. 2, 112), *Donne ch'avette intelletto d'amore* (*Purg*. 24. 51) and *Voi che intendendo il terzo il terzo ciel movete* (*Par*. 8.37) – they move 'the third heaven', i.e. Venus, the planet of love.
[50] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', p. 20.
[51] Ibid., p. 22.
[52] Ibid., p. 21.
[53] Ibid.

> Individuality is the concretion of universality, and every individual action is at the same time superindividual. The individual and the universal cannot be considered as distinct from each other […]. Humanity is its work in itself. God acts on her, but by means of her. Humanity is divine, but no man is divine.[54]

Another important point Beckett makes concerns Vico's conception of religion as an unavoidable social construction allowing separate individuals to come together and worship a certain force:

> In the beginning was the thunder: the thunder set free Religion in its most objective and unphilosophical form – *idolatrous animism*. Religion produced Society, and the first social men were the cave-dwellers, taking refuge from a passionate Nature: this primitive family life receives its first impulse towards development from the arrival of terrified vagabonds: admitted, they are the first slaves: growing stronger, they exact agrarian concessions, and a despotism has evolved into a primitive feudalism: the cave becomes a city, and the feudal system a democracy: then an anarchy: this is corrected by a return to monarchy: the last stage is a tendency towards interdestruction: the nations are dispersed, and the Phoenix of Society arises out of its ashes.[55]

A larger part of 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce' is devoted to the question of language and communication. In calling Vico 'a scientific historian', Beckett addresses his role in "the Great Controversy between The Ancients and the Moderns", i.e. Vico's objection to Descartes' *Method*. Although Beckett does not dwell on this subject it will be useful to briefly outline Vico's principal points, which will clarify Beckett's concept of extratemporal reality.

One needs to start with the observation that Vico was a professor of rhetoric – an art which had been on the decline in Universities ever since the introduction of Descartes's method of universal mathematics. A basic description of Descartes' system would be that it represented a successful rebellion by the mathematicians against the authority of the philosophers. A key part of philosophy, as that discipline was inherited from Aristotle and

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[54] Ibid., pp. 21, 22.
[55] Ibid., p. 20.

taught in the Universities, was the study of nature or physics, that is to say, the laws of probability, in which rhetoric played a major role. Language mobilized for 'the best imitation of Nature' was important for the eloquent representation of phenomena – the invention of argument is thus 'prior to the judgement of their validity'.[56] For Vico, rhetoric or the art of eloquence is 'the training in common sense' whereas 'mathematical criticism' fosters 'odd and arrogant behaviour':

> The principles of nature, which are put forward as truths on the strength of the geometrical method are not really truths but wear a semblance of probability […]. The archetypal forms, the ideal patterns of reality, exist in God alone. The physical nature of things, the phenomenal world, is modeled after those archetypes. It is our task to study physics in a speculative temper of mind, as philosophers, that is curbing our presumption. Let us surpass the Ancients; they pursued researches in Nature in order to match the gods in happiness; we should, instead, cultivate the study of physics in order to curb our pride. Intensely ambitious, as we are to attain the truth, let us engage upon its quest. Where we fail in this quest, our very longing will lead us as by hand towards the Supreme Being, who alone is the Truth, and the Path and Guide to it.[57]

Reading Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, Beckett must have acquired some knowledge of 'topics', which is another term for rhetoric – the procedure whereby one can find the 'lines of argument' bearing on the *loci communes*, i.e. commonplaces or generalities.[58] Beckett explains how '*reality*' felt for the Greeks, the Hebrews or the Egyptians: 'myth, according to Vico, is neither an allegorical expression of general philosophical axioms, nor a derivative from particular peoples, nor yet the work of isolated poets, but an historical statement of fact, of actual contemporary phenomena, actual in the sense that they were created out of necessity by primitive minds, and firmly believed […]. Jove was no symbol: he was terribly real'.[59]

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[56] In medieval universities, the core curriculum consisted of the seven liberal 'arts', but each one was originally called both an 'art' (a practical skill) and a 'science' (a theoretical system). Mathematics and geometry were two of them.
[57] Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans by Elio Gianturgo (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1963), p. 24.
[58] "Ars topica" was a method utterly dissimilar from the "critic" method devised by the Sophists'; see 'Introduction' by Elio Gianturgo, in Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time* p. xxi.
[59] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', p. 26.

Beckett does not apply the term ‘extratemporal’ when he speaks about the ‘necessity’ shared by ‘primitive people’. He refers to the form of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as ‘Purgatory’ because its primary purpose was to purge common morals (‘He wrote a vulgar that could have been spoken by an ideal Italian’).[60] ‘It follows’, he concludes, ‘that poetry is a prime condition of philosophy and civilization’.[61] In the last part of his essay he contrasts Dante and Joyce’s ‘Purgatories’. The difference between them consists in the choice between two types of an Absolute, God or man:

> A last word about the Purgatories. Dante’s is conical and consequently implies culmination. Mr Joyce’s is spherical and excludes culmination. In the one there is an ascent from real vegetation – Ante-Purgatory, to ideal vegetation – Terrestrial Paradise: in the other there is no ascent and no ideal vegetation.[62]

‘In what sense, then’, Beckett asks, ‘is Mr Joyce’s work purgatorial?’ His answer describes the mechanism that resembles the dynamics of rivalry that Girard discovered in Joyce’s lecture on Shakespeare:

> In the absolute absence of the Absolute. There is a continuous purgatorial process at work, in the sense that […] Vice and Virtue […] may take to mean any pair of large contrary human factors – must in turn be purged down to the spirits of rebelliousness. Then the dominant crust of the Vicious or Virtuous sets, resistance is provided, the explosion duly takes place and the machine proceeds. And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail.[63]

‘Neither prize nor penalty’ – we may find in this description an echo of Joyce’s interpretation of *Crime and Punishment* as ‘a title for the book that contains neither crime nor punishment’. Beckett’s essay reveals that Joyce’s philosophical position was hardly very different from Gide’s. Quite clearly, the mimetic process Joyce called ‘a French triangle’ is only another term for the “Eternal Return”. ‘The kitten trying to catch its tail’ might not have satisfied Joyce – therefore he wanted “more Bruno”.

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[60] Ibid., p. 30.
[61] Ibid., p. 24.
[62] Ibid., p. 33.
[63] Ibid.

Reading *Proust*, one may get an impression that since the time of Dante, "reality" stood in need of perpetual identification. Beckett calls a common cognitive experience 'Habit':

> Habit it is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit.[64]

'The Proustian solution' is an antidote to contemporaneous nihilism caused by 'the 'absolute absence of the Absolute' (as Beckett describes Joyce's outlook in 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce').

Beckett's eagerness to dissociate Proust and Dostoevsky from the Nietzscheans did not stem from any concern as a literary critic. The main subject of his essay is human desire and, as we have noticed earlier, his reference to Kant's *a priori* in relation to the categories of time and space suggest that by the time of *Proust* he had been well acquainted with the principles of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Metaphysics of Morals*. Jules de Gaultier explains very clearly the relativity of 'the argumentation of the moral proof, based on the existence of a *categorical imperative*, indicating to human conscience a good and an evil'.[65] A new type of reason, which Kant called *practical reason*, 'does not tolerate' the category of external reality which Gaultier paradoxically considers 'irrational' from a phenomenological point of view.[66] Throughout his essay Beckett coins metaphors which attack phenomenology: 'Our perception is not concerned with other than vulgar phenomena'; 'we are rather in the position of Tantalus, with this difference that we allow ourselves to be tantalized' (17, 13). One of the most memorable of his inventions is 'the whiskey bearing a grudge against the decanter' because 'the mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm' (21). Beckett's note in his *Whoroscope Notebook*, which we have already quoted in chapter I, is appropriate here: 'Kant's [proof] that the conditions of the possibility of experience are also the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience!!!'[67]

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[64] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 18; further references are in the main body of the text..
[65] Jules de Gaultier, *From Kant to Nietzsche*, p. 52.
[66] Gaultier writes: 'Now what Kant carefully avoids saying, however strongly the evidence coerce him, is that the idea of *a first cause*, taken as a transcendental concept, charged with explaining phenomenal existence, is in the highest degree one of those concepts formed in contradiction to rational laws'. One wonders, what is the difference between 'practical' and 'transcendental' causes? Ibid.
[67] Quoted in Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, p. 141.

Beckett refers to Kant's *Metaphysic of Morals* where the philosopher defines 'moral life' as 'the faculty of desire to be the cause of the objects of one's representations'.[68] This statement resurfaces in his fiction in various versions, presented as an authoritative opinion espoused by his characters. For instance, in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, when Belacqua travels, all sites disappear 'as soon as he came to rest in them' ('Ding Dong').[69] Molloy, when he "goes out", likes to remind himself that his 'region is vast' and that '[his] movements owed nothing to the places they caused to vanish'.[70]

Despite Beckett's indignation at the method of thinking which Proust called 'Habit', the young academic is unable to reformulate the 'Proustian solution' in conceptual terms. At the beginning of his essay he speaks of the 'Proustian equation': a straight line connecting the subject the object – 'But what is attainment?' Ideally, it should be 'the identification of the subject with the object of his desire' (14). As we follow his argument, it appears that he is keen to prove that desire in the Proustian novel is rooted in the object. He makes up the list of those objects, though calling them 'fetishes', which effectively realise the identification of subject and object: 'The Madeline steeped in an infusion of tea' or 'the steeples of Martinville' and other 'incidents' (36). One such evocation garners his particular attention. It comes from the scene from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* where Marcel recovers his dead grandmother as *living*. Beckett stresses the role of the material object: the 'boots'. Marcel stoops to unbutton his boots and this gesture raises the dead woman 'alive' and 'tender' (41). How is this miracle possible? When Marcel was a child feeling lonely and frightened, she came to his room to comfort him. She took off his boots and helped him to bed. Although the old lady's 'mystical presence' lasted only a second it has left an indelible *impression* on her grandson's memory. Beckett quotes at length:

> If I ever did succeed in extracting some truth from the world, it would be from such an impression and from none other, an impression at once particular and spontaneous, which had neither been formed by my intelligence nor attenuated by my pusillanimity, but whose double and mysterious furrow had been carved, as by a thunderbolt, within me, by the inhuman and supernatural blade of Death, or the revelation of Death (43).

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[68] Immanuel Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, p. 11 (Kant calls such a perception 'life': 'the faculty of a being to act in accordance with its representation [its vision of reality] is called life').
[69] Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 31.
[70] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 66.

The spectacle of this timeless reality is extremely painful because 'this contradiction between presence and irremediable obliteration is intolerable' (42).

If for Dante, the 'ideal vegetation' was the 'culmination', no such culmination is possible in a modern novel. Beckett likens Proust's extratemporal experience to an 'inverted Calvary' (60). 'Our dream of a Paradise with retention of personality' is 'absurd', Beckett repeats after the Proustian narrator (26). Although such flashes of memory in the novel are fortuitous 'Proust's work is not an accident but its salvage is an accident […]. A second-hand climax is better than none' (32). Is his 'Proustian solution', then, only a second-hand climax? How could one believe in the twentieth century that 'Death does not exist'?

That the temporal perception makes art impossible is not a proof of extratemporal reality. In the final part of his essay, the identification of subject and object undergoes a radical change. Beckett suddenly begins to speak about the 'ineluctable gangrene of Romanticism' which Proust, he believes, had overcome completely (80). Right after his reflection on Proust and Dostoevsky's 'impressionisms', he observes that 'generally speaking, the romantic artist is very much concerned with Time and aware of the importance of memory in inspiration' (82). He quotes a verse from Victor Hugo's 'Tristesse d'Olympio':

> ('c'est toi qui dors dans l'ombre, o sacré souvenir! …').

The sleep of sacred memory is a euphemism for death; but Beckett is clearly reluctant to bury a curious phenomenon of '*involuntary memory*'. He notes that unlike other romantic writers (who 'are inclined to sensationalise' memory in inspiration), Proust and Dostoevsky[71] treat this subject with 'pathological power and sobriety'. He contrasts their treatment to Musset, Chateaubriand and Amiel whose 'extratemporal identification' is 'vague, without any real cohesion or simultaneity, between *the-me and not-me*'.[72] The me and not me? Did Beckett forget that he was speaking about the identification between *subject* and *object*? Whence does this couple come from?

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[71] Although the name "Dostoevsky" is omitted from this part of his argument, it continues the previous comparison between the two novelists.
[72] Ibid., p. 82; my emphasis.

SECTION 3: THE INELUCTABLE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Beckett's correspondence between 1931 and 1940 reveals that this decade was perhaps the unhappiest period of his life. In September 1931, he reluctantly left Paris for Dublin to take up the position of a lecturer in French at T.C.D. James Knowlson opens his chapter on this period with a fragment from Beckett's letter in which he writes: 'The life is terrible and I don't understand how it can be endured. Quip – that most foul malady – scandal and KINDNESS'.[73] In the same letter, he contemplates 'a row' with 'Ruddy', his old teacher, in a sort of abstract way: 'if one can make a row. A rowdiness I suppose you might call it'.[74] He hated teaching, because he 'could not bear teaching to others what he did not know himself'.[75] All ordinary things 'vulgarize' his existence turning 'anger into irritation and petulance'.[76] He started writing a novel (*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*) but, as his correspondence reveals, the creative process cost him a lot of distress ('nothing is so attractive anyhow as abstention').[77] Sometimes he is 'frightened that the 'itch to write' will be 'cured' and that he would end up in his father's office 'with a car and a bowler-hat'.[78] He often defines writing as a medicine against *ennui*: 'this writing is a bloody awful grind […] because one has to do something or perish with *ennui*'.[79] The same emotion reappears in two of his letters (one to Lawrence Harvey and the other to Ruby Cohn) in which he describes the process of writing *Watt* 'as only a game, a means of staying sane', 'to counter the long hours of ennui'.[80] But what is 'ennui'? Ennui is a psychological life, described in *Proust* as an extreme phase of Habit:

> The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering – that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom – with its host of tophatted and hygienic ministers, Boredom that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils.[81]

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[73] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 121.
[74] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 48.
[75] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 126.
[76] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 48.
[77] Ibid., p. 87, 88.
[78] Ibid., p. 112.
[79] Ibid., p. 157.
[80] Quoted in the Preface to *Watt*, p. viii.
[81] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 28.

All these metaphors – 'the pendulum', 'a window on a real', 'host of hygienic ministers' – conceal the state of manic-depressive oscillations which Beckett describes in 'Les Deux Besoins', resembling those we have studied in the previous chapter with regards to Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Behind the concern with 'the identification of subject and object' we find the theme that had preoccupied Beckett before he met Joyce. Only towards the end of his essay, it becomes clear that 'the Proustian procedure' treats the illness to which Proust refers as 'the ineluctable gangrene of Romanticism'. It seems that at the period of *Proust*, Beckett began to associate his duality with the Romantic movement. 'We are frequently reminded of this romantic strain in Proust', he observes reluctantly; in Beckett's opinion, Proust is very different from Chateaubriand and Amiel whom he named as his spiritual ancestors: 'It is difficult to connect Proust with this pair of melancholy Pantheists dancing a fandango of death in the twilight'.[82]

René de Chateaubriand created a melancholic hero, René, echoing Goethe's Werther across a generation; but René's melancholy was of different kind. Sick of civilization, René contemplates suicide as a dignified outcome of his suffering which he secretly treasures. One of his utterances is a *locus classicus* of romantic grief (the 'Old Grillen', as Beckett would call it): 'my melancholy became an occupation which filled all my moments; my heart was entirely and naturally steeped in ennui and misery'.[83] Although later Chateaubriand would dismiss his hero as a 'milksop who believes himself tormented by his own genius'[84], the little book infected successive generations with *mal de siècle* – the term coined by Chateaubriand as a diagnosis of the characteristic illness of his time. The title of Arland's essay – 'un nouveau mal de siècle – harks back to Chateaubriand.

Henri-Frederick Amiel, the second romantic author to whom Beckett refers, is more suitable for the role of 'a melancholic Pantheist'. Amiel was not a writer but a philosopher from Geneva who wrote all his life about himself. Travelling widely across Europe, he kept a diary, which would come to be known as the *Journal Intime*. Amiel's personality, his vocation as a traveller-philosopher, paradoxically combined with his disdain for everything he describes, invites the suggestion that Amiel's *Journal Intime* provided the plot for Beckett's lecture 'Le Concentrisme'.

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[82] Ibid., p. 82.
[83] Will Durant, Ariel Durant, *The Age of Napoleon: The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), p. 76.
[84] Françoise-René de Chateaubriand: 'Il n'y a pas de grimaud sortant du collège qui n'ait rêvé être le plus malheureux des hommes; de bambin qui a seize and n'ait épuise la vie, qui ne se soit cru tourmente par son génie', in Françoise-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Tome 2 (Paris : Garnier, 1910), p. 282.

In November 1930, Beckett read a paper on concentrisme to the Modern Language Society of Trinity College, without telling his listeners that the founder of a new movement, called 'Le Concentrisme', was a fictional character. The most remarkable trait of du Chas' poetry is its obscurity and its elliptical mode. It could be said that the real Amiel was "silent" all his life because his *Journal* only saw the light of the day after his death. Published in 1882, Amiel's book contains a long and remarkable 'Introduction' from the pen of a friend (Edmond M. Scherer) to whom Amiel entrusted the publication of his thoughts. Scherer stresses that Amiel 'could find no words for what he felt' and therefore his 'marvelous expression' took on the form of 'the molecular whirlwind, which men call individual life' (XXIX). [85] Beckett's title could have been inspired by this description.

The founder of 'Le Concentrisme', Jean du Chas, is also of Genevan stock and owes the appearance of his *Journal* to the same miraculous scenario, involving a necessary display of the writer's contempt for the reader and even for the future of his own oeuvre. When Jean du Chas decided to die he left his notebooks with a concierge having designated a fellow Toulousain to collect the package. Therefore, the material arrived just like one of those 'downpours *ex nihilo*'.[86] 'I am really the first to broach the hymen of this subject', Beckett tells his audience, 'Virginal and perfectly obscure'.[87]

All these emphases on virginity, originality and obscurity seem to have been arranged to mock Joyce's 'pre-logical' and 'preconscious mind'; 'his right to bend language to his sublime needs'.[88] But this interpretation on its own would narrow the lecture's historical and sociological significance. The fact that Beckett endowed his hero with his own date of birth suggests that he did not exclude himself from the trappings of 'le concentrisme'. Overall, one is left with the impression that having just returned from France and being a lecturer on French modernism, Beckett set out to satirise the French avant-garde's obsessions the strongest of which was Dostoevskian. Let us follow the course of the lecture and then gather all our observations together.

What appears most conspicuous is that Beckett plays with various meanings of the word 'movement'. Thus, while describing Du Chas' life, he juxtaposes it with the movement of our planet. Le concentrisme, it is hinted, is the force that disperses people:

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[85] Henri Frederick Amiel, *The Journal Intime*, translated by Mrs. Humphry Ward (New York, 1962) in archive.org, pages are not indicated, the parts are marked by roman numerals; my emphasis.
[86] Ibid., p. 37.
[87] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', in *Disjecta*, p. 36.
[88] 'The Language of Night', in Eugene Jolas, *Critical Writings*, p. 129.

> By reading his diary one gets an impression that for this man, fatally and beyond any action of pride or contempt, social life, social convention, all tedious and careful stylization of human afflictions – love, friendship, glory and the rest – was only one dimension, or the attribute of a dimension, inevitable, like friction, a condition of his adhesion to the surface of the earth. So that Chas had a social life as you have a centripetal life, namely, unconsciously and indifferently, which is the same as saying that he was free of it, because the indifference and unconsciousness hardly tally with the sacrosanct tradition of the cave and the fear and ignorance and the solidarity contracted under the thunder.[89]

A comical picture emerges before our very eyes. It appears, that since the age of the Enlightenment ('under the paroxysms of the cerebral pressure'), the life of human beings have become centrifugal. Ironically, while giving themselves consciously over to the 'dispersion of concentrisme', they are nonetheless held together by the centripetal force of which they are not aware because it is only Newtonian.

Speaking of le concentrisme as an intellectual movement, Beckett highlighted his hero's constant travelling. Jean du Chas is predisposed to self-exile because he cannot tolerate collective pressure. Perceiving all other individuals as his rivals, he thinks of humanity as the 'fauna' (Amiel uses the term 'human animals'; XXXI). Du Chas' motto and the stimulus of all his dislocations was this: 'the fauna is too abundant, I'd better feck off'.[90]

The phrase 'as you have a centripetal life' in the context of the Romantic Movement brings to mind a memorable scene from *The Brothers Karamazov* in which Ivan tells Alyosha that he still believes in 'the centripetal force on our planet'.[91] This force is ascribed to the first Romantics who asserted the eternity and intensity of their passionate sentiments. But in going to visit Europe, Ivan knows that he is only going to 'a graveyard'.[92] Nostalgic of a centripetal life, Ivan has no social life whatsoever.

The meaning of movement as tourism furnishes the setting for major political changes in European history that led to the rise of individualism. Tourism is a kind of activity that is indifferent to communal life. In *Proust*, Beckett attacks Habit as a tourist-like perception ('normally we are in the position of the tourist […], a brief inscription

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[89] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', in *Disjecta*, p. 38.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 269.
[92] Ibid.

immortalises his emotion'). The Romantic era opens with Napoleon, 'the first European tourist'. This seemingly strange epithet refers to Napoleon's campaign in Egypt that was undertaken as a "cultural exchange" aiming to inoculate the Egyptians with European Science and culture. It was the beginning of 'Imperial acrobatics' which 'withered the Leonardian heart; poisoned the quiet virtue of indifferent Europeans'.[93] 'The eternal glory of the first European tourist' inspired energetic young men coming from the newly educated lower classes. Beckett names Raskolnikov, Rastignac and Sorel – and adds to them André Gide – also a "traveller" to Egypt[94] – 'who crucifies himself at an angle of 69 degrees because he has lost the concordance of the hunter' and therefore cannot be counted as an individual, having 'exhausted his repertory of filth'.[95] Beckett mentions such notable romantic figures as Renan, Ibsen (Joyce's favourite writer), Anatole France, Valéry, Mallarmé and ends up with a mysterious 'l'ânesse' ('she-ass') who he has 'insulted' but now, in the process of his speech, apologizes to "him" (not her!).[96]

Throughout his presentation, the lecturer insists, not altogether modestly, that Jean du Chas was 'the first European individual since the Egyptian campaign'. This superior title seems to be due to Du Chas's faith in 'the concierge' – not in a particular concierge but in 'the ideal', 'the abstract' and 'the absolute' one:

> Jean du Chas suffered in this respect from a true obsession, and he was very clearly aware of it. 'The concierge', he wrote in one of his books, 'is the cornerstone of my entire edifice.[97]

That du Chas' obsession with the concierge is a kind of religion is humorously implied by its contrast with those Biblical verses in which 'the corner stone' is associated with Jesus who is referred to as the cornerstone of his church – 'the cornerstone that the builders rejected' (Psalm, 118:22). Why should an ideal European individual believe in the concierge? This minor force is supreme in its anonymity; whilst informed about the private life of the inhabitants of the building, 'it does not gossip'.[98] It is pure intelligence

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[93] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', in *Disjecta*, p. 39.
[94] In Gide's *Carnet d'Egypte*, one will find the description of various tactics of sexual curiosity as *a hunt*, 'for example, he trails the most reserved boy working in the hotel gardens'; in *L'Immoraliste*, Gide also employs the analogy between sexual pursuits and a hunt, see Victoria Reid's *André Gide and Curiosity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 9.
[95] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', p. 39.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., p. 36.
[98] Ibid., p. 38.

reminiscent of a Kafkaesque official whose power is absolute and impenetrable. It is also reminiscent of a *particular* concierge – one that plays the role of a sentinel responsible for the "door". We will return to this link later on in this section. In the meantime, let us continue with 'the concierge' as the equivalent of *pure reason*.

This association is reinforced when the lecturer tells his listeners that René Descartes conceived '*I think therefore I am*' in a hot room ('among the hot vapors of the concierge's chamber') in which he locked himself up to avoid any contact with the outer world. The religion of self-worship is inextricable from the operation of pure reason, and the Chasian art is its fruit:

> Chasian poetry, it is the overstretching of a sentence whose petals open, "*cordon s'il vous plaît*", and break up under the knitted brow of our indomitable captain, who, alas, also knew his Sweden. It is in him that we salute […] the author of the *Discours de la Sortie*, conceived and composed among the hot vapors of the concierge's chamber, of all the concierges […].[99]

The reader, accustomed to think in terms of the strict division between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, may object that du Chas' faith in the Cartesian 'concierge' has nothing to do with Romantic sensibility; that 'the Chasian art', whose 'petals once open, *cordon s'il vous plaît*, momentarily break down', is alien to the romantic passion, the embrace of the Beautiful and the Sublime. Beckett, however, would have been greatly surprised at *our* romantic sensibility. In order to grasp the uninterrupted connection between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, let us consider du Chas' manifesto, teaching 'concentrisme' as a new cult – that of the Buddha Biconvex who addresses his successors with the following speech:

> "My children, tender bearers of the thyrsus, let go of the udder, pay attention to what I am about to tell you. I know that in ten years we will ask for nothing better than to please my Manes. But my Manes will be difficult […]. One of those noisy and bloody devotions […] will avail you of nothing […]. And it is in order to shelter myself that I expose to you, here and now, your program. You will be called *Concentrists*. It is I, who tell you this, I, inventor of Concentrisme, I, the biconvex

[99] Ibid., p. 42.

> Buddha. You will tell your contemporaries: 'Jean du Chas, illustrious founder of our order, inventor of Concentrisme, the biconvex Buddha, the only son, illegitimate and posthumous, of a Belgian stockbroker and a Germano-Toulousean strumpet, invites you, 'tutti quanti', to a religio-geological feast, where you will be able to stuff yourselves, to the point of loosing your buttons, with holy food in the double shape of Cartesian lentils and synthetic concierges".[100]

There are several catchwords in this address which seem to allude to Gide's lecture series on Dostoevsky that he delivered before the young artists of *Les Vieux Colombier*. Gide tells his listeners that Dostoevsky – the "ex-Buddhist" – had finally achieved his '*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*' (Gide refers to Blake's 'admirable little book') that celebrates man's 'marvellous complexity'. 'The bearers of thyrsus' is the Bacchus procession in Schiller's poem 'The Eleusinian Festival' with which Dmitry Karamazov begins his 'confession of an ardent heart in verse'. Gide mentions this scene to confirm his idea of 'complexity': 'after citing lines from Schiller's *Hymn to Joy*, Dmitry Karamazov exclaims: "And the awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the Devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man"'.[101] Gide, however, did not notice that having announced 'Ode to Joy' ('An die Freude', 1785), Dmitry recites 'The Eleusinian Festival' ('Das Eleusische Fest', 1798), beginning *precisely* from the line that opens the speech of Beckett's Buddha Biconvex ('My children, tender bearers of the thyrsus, let go of the udder'):

> At the breast of bounteous Nature
> Everything that breathes is glad;
> All nations, all creatures seek her pleasure,
> She gives to man a friend when sad;
> She gives the juice of grapes and garlands,
> And lust in lowly insect fires,
> But up above the angel stands
> In sight of God – his joy admires.[102]

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[100] Ibid.
[101] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 172.
[102] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 123.

The scene to which Gide refers is a hilarious satire on the Romantic Movement that he must have totally misunderstood.

In Book Three of *The Brothers Karamazov*, entitled *The Sensualists*, the three chapters – 'The Confession of an Ardent Heart in Verse', 'The Confession of an Ardent Heart in Anecdotes' and 'The Confession of an Ardent Heart' – illustrate a transition from the natural man of Rousseau, Goethe and Schiller to Dmitry Karamazov. Like his character, the young Dostoevsky was infatuated with Schiller: '[he] used to shed tears over all "the noble and beautiful"; […] he too dreamed of love's happiness; and he knew how dangerous it was to surrender to dreams ("one can throw one's self out of joint")'.[103] Schiller's recourse to "dreams", however, was all but spontaneous; it was deliberately intended in the view of nature's hostility to man, its tendency to overrule his *a priori* reason and his desire for eternal beauty.

Schiller developed his aesthetics under Kant's influences but sought to correct the philosopher's concept of the Beautiful and the Sublime. According to Kant, 'Judgements which predicate beauty are always singular […]. "This rose is beautiful" is a legitimate judgement of taste, whereas "Roses (in general) are beautiful" is not'.[104] For Schiller, roses are beautiful in general only thanks to the power of poetic imagination which triumphs over death and decay. 'The Eleusinian Festival' supersedes Kant's system by depicting a happy humanity that can share the ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime by imitating the best classical patterns. The poem opens with the lively Thyrsus-swinger herself, leading the Bacchus procession and singing:

> "Springs's fair children pass away,
> In the Northland's icy air;
> Leaf and flower alike decay
> Leaving withered branches bare.
> But I choose life's noble glow
> From Vertumnus's lavish horn;
> As a gift to Styx below
> Will I send the Golden corn!"[105]

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[103] Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 86.
[104] Immanuel Kant, 'The Essay on Beauty', quoted in Jane Kneller's 'Kant's concept of Beauty', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 3, No. 3 (July, 1986), p. 311.
[105] Schiller, 'The Eleusinian Festival', (www.archaiv.org/stream/poemsschiller01).

Dmitry Karamazov's ardent heart suffers from the realisation that his desire for the beautiful and the sublime can no longer be satisfied by an irreplaceable woman. Paradoxically, his craving for beauty impels him to surrender to lust. He quotes Schiller in order to confess his self-awareness as an 'insect' that 'God has endowed with lust'.[106] 'My friend, my friend', confesses he to his younger brother Alyosha, 'in degradation, in degradation even now, Man has to suffer a fearful lot on earth […]. Don't think that I'm just a bore of an officer who does nothing but drink brandy and leads a life of lust and depravity'.[107] Dmitry is 'an ardent heart', and his nature is so '*broad*' that the *Beautiful* and the *Sublime* turns into their opposites:

> Beauty! It makes me mad to think that a man of great heart and high intelligence should begin with the ideal of Madonna and end with the ideal of Sodom.[108]

One may still wonder how this "broadness" may coexist with 'la poésie chasienne' (Beckett's minimalist style yet to come, whose petals 'break down' the moment they open).

Girard explains this leap by the disappearance of the love object: 'Romanticism is a literature of the self and for itself. […] The chosen woman played a very minor role. […] The Romantic was God, and his love was a communion with himself'.[109] This communion, however, ends in a strange mixture of hate and veneration – 'typically Dostoevskian', as Girard asserts – which is intelligible in the mimetic perspective. The sentiment of the model-obstacle is 'that alternating impulse to overthrow and "fuse with" the monstrous idol'.[110] We may add to this explanation a passage from Amiel's *Journal* in which his biographer describes '*la maladie de idéal*' which is typical of a genius who cannot satisfy his idea of an Absolute by mere objects – 'they all disappear the moment he throws himself into them' (Amiel; XVIII). This kind of futile 'throwing' leads to 'that "sterility of genius", of which he [Amiel] was the victim'. Girard substitutes 'the object' for 'the model-obstacle' in order to highlight that paradoxical desire for *failure* or rather 'a

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[106] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Vol. 1, p. 123.
[107] Ibid., p. 122.
[108] Ibid.
[109] René Girard, 'Pride and Passion in the Contemporary Novel', in *Mimesis and Theory*, p. 33.
[110] René Girard, 'The Underground Critic', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 40.

negative imitation' aiming at 'the success of the rival that makes him [the desiring subject] fail'.[111]

The "discovery of nature" by the romantics is another good illustration of this paradox. Thus, in Schiller's essay *On The Sublime* (1801), one may find a very Kantian attitude towards nature. Schiller is virtually incensed by the way in which nature treats man. In order to assert his will, the individual should finally be prepared to "walk out" or "take his exit":

> By no means can Man be the being, which wills, if there is even but a single case, where he absolutely must, what he does not will [Schiller means death]. I will make him capable, therefore, of asserting his will, for man is the being who wills. This is possible in two kinds of ways. Either *actually*, when man opposes violence with violence, when he, as nature, rules over nature; or *ideally*, when he steps out of nature and so, in regards to himself, annihilates the concept of violence.[112]

Schiller's solution of the 'ideally stepping out' must have inspired Beckett to change *Le Discours de la Methode* into *Le Discours de la Sortie* because logically – and we may recognize this logic in relation to Dostoevsky's Kirillov – the heaviest insult that man can inflict on Nature is simply to 'walk out': '"the door, please" (*cordon s'il vous plaît*') as the single final act of the individual who renders unto him at last, more than justice'.[113]

"*Le cordon s'il vous plaît*" is a strange phrase, meaning "the door, please", that was used by Russian travellers to France in the nineteenth century. It can be found in Dostoevsky's article in *Time* (January 1861) to which Gide persistently refers, although he does not mention this phrase. We have discussed this article with regards to Dostoevsky's attempt to formulate 'the Russian idea' before a French traveller to Russia. It is really ironic that fifty years after Dostoevsky's death, a real Frenchman, André Gide, formulated that idea for Dostoevsky. But let us first look at Dostoevsky's anecdote.

In his theoretical writings, Dostoevsky liked to think that Orthodox faith and its "bearers", the Russian people, would play their reconciliatory role in the history of Europe. In Dostoevsky's eyes, the European idea based on practical reason was selfish and divisive

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[111] Ibid., p. 39.
[112] Friedrich Schiller, 'On The Sublime', translated by William F. Wertz, The Schiller Institute (archive.schiller.institute.com), pages are not indicated; Schiller's emphases.
[113] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme' in *Disjecta*; p. 42.

('they don't even understand one another very well').[114] As we have seen, instead of telling a Frenchman, 'plainly and frankly', what the Russian people really believe in, Dostoevsky begins to complain about the unwillingness of the French to accept other cultures. He points out that all they know about Russian history is that the Genevan native Lefort helped Peter the Great to impose some manners on the Russians. 'I suppose', he writes, 'that every Paris concierge knows him [Lefort], and no doubt at the sight of a Russian demanding '*le cordon, s'il vous plaît*' at a late hour he mutters to himself: if the Geneva native Lefort had not been born you'd still be a barbarian, you would not have come to Paris, au centre de la civilisation, you would not wake me up at the night shouting at the top of your voice '*le cordon, s'il vous plaît*'.[115]

Gide does not tell this anecdote, nor does he notice that Dostoevsky *condemns* individualism. It is really an extraordinary misunderstanding that Gide blandly ignores the major opposition that Dostoevsky pursues across all his critical works – namely, between the individualist West and the communal Russia: 'the ideal of universal humanity becomes more and more obliterated among them. It means something different to every one of them […]. Even science is unable to unite the nations who drift more and more apart'.[116] It is true, of course, that like many representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, Dostoevsky suffered from the complex of national inferiority, but it would be wrong to assert that his idea of universal humanity was merely a matter of injured pride. The problem with this idea is that Dostoevsky simply cannot concretize it. Such demands as 'the return to the soil' or 'the faith of the common people' or 'the Russian instinct for universal humanity' could hardly persuade Gide and other Western intellectuals that the hyperbolic individualism in his novels was in fact *a caricatural art*.

The way in which Beckett refers to Dostoevsky's texts (*Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* and the article in *Time*) suggests that he, firstly, had undertaken an independent study of the Russian unruly genius, and, secondly, it is clear that Beckett, unlike Gide or any intellectual of his time, was able to understand and share Dostoevsky's concerns. Throughout his lecture Beckett explicitly attacks Gide personally and the general avant-garde contempt for 'the social rubric'.[117] At some point the lecturer declares that his hero, Jean du Chas, is 'a true individual ['*individu tandis*'] while Gide is nothing of the sort and will never amount to one' because Jean du Chas was 'free of such social

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[114] Fyodor Dostoevsky, 'Five Articles' (*Time*, January, 1861), *Occasional Writings*, pp. 54, 61.
[115] Ibid., p. 52.
[116] Ibid., p. 61.
[117] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', in *Disjecta*, p. 40.

aggravation that was necessarily expressed in antisocial braying, infinitely less moving and less noble than the most ordinary outbursts of anile sorrow''.[118]

'The anile sorrow' seems to be another allusion to *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the course of his survey of the Romantic Movement, Beckett attacks the post-Napoleonic social elite that pretends to be a 'majority' ('minorities mobilize and invent an abstract vampire whom they call the majority') which travels across Europe 'in search of the eternally exhausted she-ass (l'ânesse éternellement exténuée').[119] At the end of his lecture, he chooses to apologise before this 'gloomiest of all animals':

> In the course of this comedy and in the hope of clarifying my text, I have insulted the ass ['*j'ai insulte l'âne*']. I beg for *his* forgiveness [je *lui* demande pardon]. I prostrate myself before this most charming and gloomiest of all animals […]. But the final affront, that of Aesop, that for which there is no forgiveness, and which consists in making him speak – him the ass – as God is my witness, of that I am not yet guilty'.[120]

It is strange that the "she-ass" (the French feminine for this word) becomes "he-ass" in the process of Beckett's apology. We all know that the only she-ass that was forced to speak was l'ânesse de Balaam. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, this epithet is applied to the lackey Smerdyakov. After Ivan's involvement in his education, this taciturn servant suddenly broke into speech showing extraordinary disdain for traditional morality and religion ('he had a supercilious character and seems to despise everyone').[121] Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov found this transformation amusing: 'You're going to have a good laugh, Balaam's ass has begun talking to us, and how he talks, how he talks!'[122]

Beckett is thus humorously pleading non-guilty '*yet*' to teaching "individualism" to an uneducated mass-mind ('the final affront for which there is no forgiveness'). The young academic seems to be reflecting on his future as a writer. How does the language of Aesop come into this business? Throughout his lecture Becket keeps assuring his listeners that the Chasian art is 'fiercely obscure'; towards the end he admits that 'du Chas […] is one of those minds that cannot be explained' and that 'It is not thus that he wants to be

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[118] Ibid., p. 39.
[119] Ibid., p. 40.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 142.
[122] Ibid.

understood'.[123] One feels that despite his parody of 'the first European individual', i.e. himself, the lecturer does not know how he can avoid being one such individual. 'Aesopian language' was a favourite writing technique of Russian satirical writers who used ambiguous language in order to confuse their censors. Dostoevsky, as we have seen, ascribed a similar function to humour ('Why is it that if in our age we feel the need to tell the truth we have more and more to resort to humour or satire or irony'). The answer, perhaps, is that nobody really knew what "the truth" was, except those who took themselves completely seriously. Beckett's bitter irony throughout his fiercely obscure lecture highlights his negative attitude towards the literary establishment of his day, and especially towards Gide's theory of the gratuitous act which he had to teach to his students. 'What else would lead a respected intellectual to offer such ridiculous comments on Dostoevsky's religion as those that fill Gide's lecture series?' asks Steven Cassedy, meaning Gide's Protestantism (in his lectures, Beckett likewise argues that 'Gide should be read as a Protestant first and an Iconoclast second').[124] The 'ridiculous comments' are the following: "Dostoevsky's heroes inherit the Kingdom of God only by the denial of mind and will and the surrender of personality"; "Dostoevsky leads us to a sort of Buddhism, or at least a sort of quietism"; "the man-God's succeeding the God-man".[125]

Beckett provides an interesting summary of Gide's teaching: 'Raskolnikov, Rastignac and Sorel sacrifice themselves and bring the Trinity in the style of the day, scalene triangle or phallic symbol, as you would have it, comrades'.[126] The 'triangle' or 'the phallic symbol' suggests that the young academic knew what Gide did not know, namely, the law of a French triangle: the condition which produces a Raskolnikov, a Rastignac and a Sorel is the negative imitation of an incontestable idol.

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[123] Ibid., p. 41.
[124] Beckett refers to Gide's comment on Dostoevsky's novel as "the most lawless of genres", quoted in John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 9.
[125] André Gide, quoted in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 20.
[126] Samuel Beckett, 'Le Concentrisme', in *Disjecta*, p. 39.

SECTION 4: KICKS

Beckett's first novelistic "daring" was *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, which he wrote in the summer of 1932. By December 1932, *Dream* had been rejected by so many publishers that Beckett decided to revise parts of it for publication in a different form. He rewrote several episodes, added new ones and started to send separate sections to various literary magazines. Finally, on 24 May 1934, Charles Prentice published Beckett's collection of ten short stories under the title *More Pricks than Kicks*.[127] Shortly after its publication Beckett wrote to McGreevy: 'I do not feel like spending the rest of my life writing books that no one will read. It was not as though I wanted to write them'.[128] Indeed, *More Pricks than Kicks* is a daunting read. Beckett's stories harbour plots that lead nowhere; they are over populated with short-lived characters with elaborate names whose significance is obscure; still more frustrating is the omniscient and omnipotent narrator who 'does whatever he wants while showing no sign of narrative responsibility'.[129] John Pilling has suggested a concise definition of the work's genre as 'Beckett's uncomfortable – and for him dispiriting – adoption of the short story as a halfway house between fiction and poetry'.[130] According to Pilling, this form allows us to consider each story as 'a more or less successful item on its own'.[131] Although in terms of reading, this approach is the most convenient, it does not explain Beckett's motivation to engage with prose rather than poetry.

An interesting view of the work as a whole can be found in the advance notice about *More Pricks Than Kicks* published in the *Observer* in 1934. Its author writes: 'Mr Beckett's mixture of mock-heroic and low comedy surprises. When you expect him to expand, he contracts'.[132] The reviewer suggests that 'together the stories form the epitome of Mr. Beckett's life'. 'Imagine', he writes, 'Mr. T.S. Eliot influenced by *The Crock of Gold*, and not unmindful of Mr. Joyce's vocabulary, and you will have a notion of Mr. Beckett'. The reviewer, however, appreciates the work's 'minor brilliances' as a potential

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[127] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 182.
[128] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 220.
[129] John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 103.
[130] Ibid., p. 95.
[131] Ibid., p. 101.
[132] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 210.

for a fuller comic effect, which, unfortunately, he stresses, has been stolen by excessive allusiveness. 'A further editor', he recommends, 'may have to provide notes'.[133]

The salient features of Beckett's prose enumerated above – the mixture of mock-heroic and low comedy, allusiveness and the writer's psychological life – call for an attempt to interpret his narrative as satirical. In which case, it is worth recalling Beckett's review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions* in which he writes that 'art has always been this – pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric – wherever else it may be obliged by the "social reality" to appear, but never more freely so than now, when social reality […] has severed the connection'.[134] We may perceive the same claim that we have encountered when we discussed Beckett's "letter on *Imitation*" and 'Les Deux Besoins': art is a form of self-analysis or self-crucifixion that needs to be presented to the public in order to serve 'the need that is the absolute predicament of particular human identity' – the need to be acknowledged.[135]

Beckett's irony is not hard to spot. In 'Le Concentrisme', while attacking the new romantics for their 'antisocial braying', he recognizes himself – 'the first European individual' – as liable to 'the outbursts of anile sorrow'. Beckett speaks of literature as the language of analysis, which, while feeding on the ideas of others, renounces everything to affirm one's opinion. He is glad that he is not yet guilty of Aesopian language. We have related this allusion to "the language of criticism" that Ivan Karamazov teaches Smerdyakov. One episode depicts them studying the Biblical story of creation:

> They discussed philosophical questions and even how there had been light on the first day when the sun, the moon, and the stars were only created on the fourth day, and how that was to be understood; but Ivan soon found out that what interested Smerdyakov was not the sun, the moon, and the stars, and that though he was undoubtedly interested in the subject, it was only of secondary importance to him.[136]

Dostoevsky shows that the critically minded person is not interested in the object of his study but in asserting his opinion. Soon, Ivan would come to resent 'the Balaam ass' who

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[133] 'I NEVER contract' is Beckett's reaction to the blurb in the *Observer*, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 210.
[134] Samuel Beckett, 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin', in *Disjecta*, p. 91.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 313.

began to talk and criticize all and sundry. To his own surprise, he finds in his lackey-brother a rival.

Even if we treat each story of the collection as a kind of poetry it is difficult to rid oneself of the impression that they are all pervaded with the spirit of *ressentiment*. The title *More Pricks Than Kicks* displays a desire "to kick against the pricks", that is, to rebel against the 'fathers' or authority. We may thus approach Beckett's prose not as a collection of poems but critical texts harbouring his thought about other critical texts – a fictional digestion of ideas wrapped up in 'Aesopian language'. The upcoming analysis will focus on two texts – 'Ding Dong' and 'Dante and The Lobster' in which one may trace Beckett's engagement with *Notes from Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The beginning of the 1930s was the period when he was actively reading Dostoevsky. We know from his letter to Prentice that he wanted to develop the link between Dostoevsky and Proust. However, when they met in London on 28 July 1931 and Prentice suggested that Beckett write a book on Dostoevsky, he refused: '[Prentice] proposed a Dostoevsky, knowing bloody well I would (could) never do it'.[137] Beckett must have realized that academic criticism on Dostoevsky would be a waste of time in the view of the circumstances he would describe in 'Le Concentrisme'. Dostoevsky's texts were worth studying in practice. His letter to McGreevy dated 29 May 1931 reveals that he admired Dostoevsky's techniques:

> If I could only get you to sleep in Dostoevski's bed somewhere! I'm reading the 'Possèdes' in a foul translation. Even so it must be very carelessly written in the Russian, full of clichés and journalese: but the movement, the transitions! No one moves about like Dostoevski. No one ever caught the insanity of dialogue like he did.[138]

Already 'Le Concentrisme' shows that Beckett uses movement as a means of characterization. In *More Pricks Than Kicks*, movement replaces chronology, monitoring inward motivations of the hero. Let us begin with 'Ding Dong', the story that deals with 'the need that is the absolute predicament of particular human identity' which echoes Dostoevsky's depiction of his underground character's "movement" towards failure.

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[137] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, pp. 60, 82.
[138] Ibid., p. 79.

'Ding Dong' opens with the theme of the double, implemented as a narrative structure. The narrator and the protagonist engage in a kind of dialogue which displays their conflict: 'We were Pylades and Orestes for a period, flattened down to something very genteel; but the relation abode and was highly confidential while it lasted'.[139] The narrator is concerned with the hero's desire 'to go out' which Belacqua cannot properly explain: 'In his anxiety to explain himself he was liable to come to grief' (32). This one-time friendship broke down when Belacqua 'enlivened the last phase of his solipsism […], and began to relish the world with the belief that the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place' (31). We can easily connect this anxiety with Beckett's letter on *Imitation*: unlike its author, Belacqua is *sad* going out and *glad* coming in (32).

The unraveling of the story suggests that we are dealing with a pure case of psychoanalysis which Beckett hardly tries to conceal. What does make the quietist abandon his inwardness? The question is posed to Belacqua: 'he was at pains to make it clear to me, and to all those to whom he exposed his maneuver, that it was in no way cognate with the popular act of brute labour' (32). This anxiety stems from his need 'to live a Beethoven pause', that is to make art. The 'Beethoven pause' is an artistic credo ('unfathomable chasms of silence') which Beckett opposes to Joyce's 'apotheosis of the word' in his letter to Axel Kaun.[140] But as we know, Joyce's motto was 'Silence, Exile and Cunning'. This link suggests that Belacqua is a caricature of Joyce's strategy and Beckett is eager to expose its hypocrisy. But in caricaturing his rival, he wishes to win by Joyce's rules: the difference between silence and the apotheosis of sound is as radical as it is abstract, given that the two coincide on the same object: the art that requires 'bomb-shell perfection'. 'Ding Dong', however, mocks this strategy by presenting us with an extraordinary confession:

> Nay, this anxiety in itself, or so at least it seemed to me, constituted a breakdown in the self-sufficiency, which he never wearied of arrogating to himself, a sorry collapse of my little internus homo, and alone sufficient to give him away as inapt ape of his own shadow (32).

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[139] Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 32; subsequent references will be indicated in the main body of the text.
[140] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. 1, p. 519.

To treat this mimetic entanglement, the narrator puts the hero on a journey that the latter, being 'sinfully indolent', resists as much as he can. Before we follow Belacqua, let us consider the excuses he makes, trying to justify his self-defeating need to go out – that is to say, to write. We are told that he could not bear his solipsism any longer, and therefore he decided that 'the mere act of rising and going, irrespective of whence and wither, did make him good' (31). He apologizes before the narrator that he did not enjoy the means to indulge this humour as he would have wished, on a larger scale, on land and sea. Hither and thither on land and sea! He could not afford that, for he was poor' (31). But the narrator, who had been keeping an eye on Belacqua's movement, defines it as 'boomerang, out and back [that was] the only one that he could afford for many years (31).

Whence could Beckett draw this observation? Belacqua with his dreams about larger scale travels and with his real-life boomerang addiction is strikingly cognate with the life of the underground man described in part II of *Notes from the Underground*. The hero acknowledges that he has exhausted his store of dreams which he was dreaming for a long time in his underground and that an unidentifiable force drives him out ('I could no longer bear my solitude').[141] His dreams were marvelous. Though poor in his real life, in his dreams, he moved – just as Beckett puts it – 'hither and thither on land and sea!' He imagines himself as a writer successfully propounding new ideas; he is everywhere received, welcomed and admired. As his fame grows, he is invited to 'a ball for the whole of Italy' which takes place 'at the Villa Borghese'; and 'specifically for this occasion, Lake Como is transported' to the city; and then, 'a scene in the bushes, etc. – as if you did not know!' (52). The reader, captivated by these movements, is suddenly shocked by the author's interference that is so typical of Dostoevsky's narrators. This authoritative voice tells us that 'all such journeys ended extremely happily, in a lazy and intoxicating transition into art, that is, into beautiful, ready-made forms of existence, forcibly stolen from poets and novelists and adapted to every possible kind of use and requirement' (52).

At this point, the underground man tries to explain to himself his desire to leave the underground and 'plunge into society'. 'Of course', he says, 'it would be better not to go at all' (63). The paradoxical thing is that all such trips end up in a good deal of pain and frustration. 'But all this was useful and good for me', he insists, 'When I return home I would temporarily set aside my desire to embrace all mankind' (53). But then again, he is driven out, for 'dreadful ennui was seething within me, a hysterical craving for

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[141] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground*, p. 54; further references are in the main body of the text.

contradictions and contrasts' (43). In *Dostoevsky*, Gide describes the moment when the underground man is fascinated by the spectacle of a man thrown out of a window in a tavern. The dreamer exclaims: 'How I envied the ejected gentleman!' (44). Just as we follow his boomerang bouts, the narrator-psychologist helps us again:

> I could not imagine myself playing a secondary role and this was exactly why in reality I quite happily adopted the last. Either a hero or muck – there was nothing in between. And this was my undoing, since in the muck I consoled myself with the thought that at other times I was a hero, but a hero who was disguising himself in the muck (51).

The structure of 'Ding Dong' reveals its significance as a search for pain, which Beckett calls a search for signs. We see Belacqua 'emerging, on the particular evening in question, from the underground convenience in the maw of College Street' (33). Soon, it becomes clear that Belacqua is a writer who 'has nothing to say'. Beckett repeats almost verbatim Dostoevsky's reproach to the underground man: 'Yet he durst not dally. Was it not from brooding shill I, shall I, dilly, dally, that he had come out? […] Was it not from sitting still among his ideas, other people's ideas, that he had come away?' (33). Having found himself 'good for nothing', Belacqua is forced to 'wait for a sign' (33). 'There were signs on all hands' – the narrator's reflection on these signs, and on 'the big Bovril sign' in particular, suggests that they played a certain significant role in a narrative of another writer, Joyce:

> There was the big Bovril sign to begin with, flaring beyond the Green but it was useless. Faith, Hope and – what else? – Love, Eden missed, every ebb derided, all the tides ebbing from the shingle of Ego Maximus, little me (33).

This coupled identity, 'Ego Maximus, little me', begins to move and the story camera dwells complacently on the signs of evil: a little girl was run down by one of the buses 'in a most pleasant street' (34); the people standing in the queue for the Palace Cinema are 'torn between conflicting desires: to keep their places and to see the excitement' (35). Having received a sufficient dose of pain, Belacqua enters a low public house where his grotesque figure is 'tolerated' (35). The narrator protests: 'When I inquired how he squared such visits with his anxiety to keep on the move, as when he had

come out of the underground in the mouth of College Street, he replied that he did not' (35). Belacqua finally rebels, declaring that he has 'a perfect right' to 'make the raid in two hops instead of non-stop' (35).

While the hero is indulging in his drink, the narrator continues to read his thoughts: 'the objects in which he used to find […] recreation and repose lost gradually their hold upon him, he became insensible to them little by little, the old itch and algos crept back into his mind' (37). We have heard this complaint in *Proust*: the impossibility of the identification of subject and object. 'Ding Dong' confirms that without 'a sign', no object is good enough (37). The next scene reveals that Belacqua longs for an Absolute of some kind rather than 'the sign in default' (37).

Suddenly 'a mysterious peddler', 'a hatless woman', enters the pub, hawking some wares. Her speech, described as that 'of a woman of the people, but of a gentlewoman of the people' (37), signals a theoretical construction of a foreign origin. The first thing that comes to mind is Dostoevsky's hazy demand for 'a return to the soil' by which he meant the innate spiritual values of the Russian common people. This 'sign' is so strange that we feel a kind of relief when the narrator tells us 'to take notice that this sweet style' is not his but 'Belacqua's' (38). Also, we are invited to take notice of the wares she is advertising: they are 'not studs or laces or matches or lavender or any of the usual articles' (37). Whatever they are, she calls them 'seats in heaven' (38). 'I am almost sold out', she says to Belacqua. These 'seats' must have had some material equivalent since Belacqua asks her, 'Do you have them on you?' To this she replies that 'they go round and round and round and round' (39). Beckett repeats this phrase three times as though expecting the reader to guess the riddle. Belacqua 'takes four'. The woman departs and it seems that the story goes nowhere: 'Amen', said Belacqua into his dead porter' (39). If we link the title 'Ding Dong' to 'the music' which Belacqua 'tarried to listen', it would appear that he had bought some bells.

'Ding Dong' seems to allude to the famous scene from Goethe's *Faust* in which 'Ding Dong' is a mocking sign from God. Faust pushed back the sea and erected a gorgeous Palace but the 'Ding Dong' coming from the chapel on the shore reminds him that his Palace is a temporary structure. This allusion is all the more appropriate given that Belacqua on his search for signs has been described as the 'Ego Maximus' standing on the shingle ('all the tides ebbing from the shingle of Ego Maximus, little me'). The divinity which appears to the artist through the agency of 'mocking signs' is the major theme of Joyce's poem 'Epiphany':

The eyes that mock me sign the way
Whereto I pass at eve of day
Grey way whose violet signals are
The trysting and the twining star
Ah star of evil! Star of pain!
Highhearted youth comes not again
Nor old heart's wisdom yet to know
The signs that mock me as I go.[142]

Joyce took the familiar carol 'We Three Kings', and transformed 'a star of wonder, star of night' into the 'star of Evil! Star of pain!' 'Way', repeated twice, becomes Joyce's *Via Dolorosa* and the artist himself a scapegoat, betrayed by his Father.

The analysis contained in 'Ding Dong', however schematically handled, recalls Dostoevsky's conclusion which sums up his hero's journey: 'for a long time I remained pleased with my windy rhetoric about the usefulness of insults and hatred'.[143] The search for signs that inflict pain, contrasted with 'the seats in heaven', suggests that Beckett was continuing to examine Joyce's idea of the 'French triangle'. In 'Le Concentrisme', he attacks the establishment fond of metaphysical desire 'in the style of the day': 'Raskolnikov, Rastignac and Sorel sacrifice themselves and bring the Trinity in the style of the day, triangle scalene or phallic symbol, as you would like it, comrades'. 'A woman of the people' selling 'the seats in heaven' seems to be Beckett's alternative to the 'phallic symbol' – the alternative he calls 'too sweet'. Although the story lacks conclusion ('because it is the conclusions and not the premises that are lacking from the enthymemes of the art'),[144] the self-defeating trajectory has been brought out in all its paradoxical nuances. He must have thought this exposure important, given that in April 1933 he added 'Ding Dong' to the two reworked episodes from *Dream* and send them to the to *Dublin Magazine* in April 1933. All three were rejected.[145]

A trajectory of frustration and failure is the distinctive motif of *More Pricks Than Kicks*. It opens with a story 'Dante and The Lobster', written, according to John Pilling, as

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[142] James Joyce's 'Epiphany' was first published on August 15, 1919 in the *Anglo-French Review*, London (www.haaretz.com).
[143] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 65.
[144] Samuel Beckett, 'Les Deux Besoins', in *Disjecta*, p. 57.
[145] John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's "More Pricks Than Kicks": In A Strait of Two Wills* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 56.

early as the late summer of 1930 (the time when Beckett was writing *Proust*). Most critics view this story as a blueprint of Beckett's humanism, his rejection of human suffering prescribed by Christian theology. As Ruby Cohn puts it, the main theme of the story is 'the impossibility of reconciling divine justice and mercy in this world'.[146] Having outlined Beckett's subject so concisely, Cohn ignores the fact that it deals with nihilism, and, more precisely, with its specifically Dostoevskian variety.

Gide was the first to notice the difference between the causes for nihilism provided by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. If for the former, this cause is the death of God, for the latter, it is the realisation of man's unlimited freedom in the absence of God: 'if God does not exist, everything is permitted'. The implications of this if-thought come down to the choice between good and evil and the realisation that there must be someone responsible for the very existence of this choice. Gide's doctrine of self-will driven by self-destruction was based on a perversion of Christ's suffering, interpreted as a gratuitous act.

Dostoevsky's nihilism finds its fullest expression in *The Brothers Karamazov*'s two chapters: 'Rebellion' and 'The Legend of The Grand Inquisitor'. 'Rebellion' mostly refers to cosmological nihilism, while 'The Legend' deals with its ethical consequences. Ivan's rebellion against the natural order, which he calls 'the Euclidean geometry', is aroused by his extreme perceptiveness to the suffering of innocent creatures:

> I can't understand why everything has been arranged as it is. I suppose men themselves are to blame; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom and they stole the fire from heaven, knowing perfectly well that they would become unhappy, so why should we pity them?[147]

Those who are themselves responsible for their suffering are adults who made their choice. But why should children and animals suffer? Ivan's store of stories about innocent victims, crying out for God's mercy, highlights the bestial cruelty of men who, unlike animals, have no innate break mechanism to check their own violence. If God is responsible for this arrangement why does he not interfere and protect the innocent? While refusing to accept this world as it is, Ivan formulates his credo before his godly brother Alyosha:

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[146] Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, p. 45.
[147] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 285.

> Let me put it another way. I don't want harmony. I don't want it, out of love I bear to mankind. I want to remain with my suffering unavenged. I'd rather remain with my suffering unavenged and my indignation unappeased, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price has been placed on harmony. We cannot afford to pay so much for admission. And indeed, if I am an honest man, I'm bound to hand it back as soon as possible. This I am doing. It is not God that I do not accept, Alyosha. I merely most respectfully return him the ticket.[148]

Alyosha defines his brother's position as 'rebellion' which would become a catchword for Dostoevsky's cosmological nihilism. Whence did the writer derive this thought? We have already discussed his response to Kant's rational cosmology in the *Diary of a Writer*, presenting an anecdote about a man (the future engineer Kirillov) who, like Schiller, decided 'to walk out'. Let us now look at the passage that opens Kant's *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*:

> That 'the world lieth in evil' is a plaint as old as history, old even as the oldest art, poetry; indeed, as old as that oldest of all fictions, the religion of priest-craft.[149]

Kant's solution was a moral governor of the world who will give humanity a reasonable Metaphysics instead of the Gospel. Dostoevsky could not accept this arrangement and responded with 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' – the only imaginative piece composed by the critic Ivan Karamazov. The Grand Inquisitor denounces Christ's freedom based on the choice between love and hate as pure nihilism.

As Peter Kaye rightly observes, Dostoevsky's ironic distance from these characters remained unnoticed by his modernist readership ('The intense immediacy and chaotic effects of Dostoevsky's narratives further contributed to the impression that he artlessly reported the volcanic fury within his mind. Unaware of his conscious effort to break down the distance between text and reader, audiences believed that he lacked the disciplines to achieve aesthetic distance and control').[150] D.H. Lawrence, for example, saw 'The Legend' as the expression of Dostoevsky's cynicism that could not be refuted by a rational counter-argument. Gide, on the contrary, saw Christ's silence as the expression of Dostoevsky's

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[148] Ibid., p. 287.
[149] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 15.
[150] Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism: 1900-1930*, p. 25.

optimism with regards to numerous choices offered by relativity. For Gide, suffering is the form of rebellion against the ethics of practical reason (the reverse of Protestant ethics). How else can man affirm his self-will if not by imitating the "Superman" who died on the cross? In his lectures on Dostoevsky, Gide taught his fellow-artists:

> Let us make no mistake as regards what was in Dostoevsky's mind. I repeat that even though he clearly formulated the problem of the *superman* which insidiously reappears in each of his works, we witness the glorious vindication of none but Gospel truths. Dostoevsky perceives and imagines salvation only in the individual's renunciation of self; but on the other hand, he gives us to understand that man is never nearer to God than in his extremity of anguish.[151]

In the previous section, we have addressed Beckett's reference to Ivan's fading faith in 'the centripetal force on our planet' ('so that Chas had a social life as you have a centripetal life, namely, unconsciously and indifferently'). Ivan Karamazov has no social life whatsoever. While positioning himself as a lover of mankind, he dwells in a perennial self-exile from a proposed Paradise ('I want to remain with my suffering unavenged'). In other words, man avenges himself in the name of his freedom and becomes a *superman*. Christ's crucifixion, in Gide's view, is a gratuitous act. With regards to Joyce's triune credo – Silence, Exile and Cunning – Girard erred in supposing that the Joyce of *Exiles* was an idealist in comparison with the clear-sighted Joyce of *Ulysses*.

While discussing exile as a founding pattern for all Joyce's books, Ellmann illuminates the writer's pseudo-masochistic tendency:

> Joyce needed exile as a reproach to others and a justification of himself. His feeling of ostracism from Dublin lacked, as he was well aware, the moral decisiveness of his hero Dante's exile from Florence, in that he kept the keys to the gate. He was neither bidden to leave nor forbidden to return […]. But like other revolutionaries, he fattened on opposition and grew thin and pale when treated with indulgence.[152]

To solidify his 'intransigence' and to reaffirm the 'rightness of his voluntary absence', Joyce readily embraces his portrait as an Irish Dante cast by Oliver Cogarty: 'He

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[151] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 168.
[152] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 109.

tried not unsuccessfully to form his style on the precision and tersity of Dante. That and his intensity, self-absorption and silence caused me to call him Dante'.[153] Stressing that 'Joyce's heroes were to seek freedom, which is also exile, by will and by compulsion', Ellmann points to the scenes in *Ulysses* in which Joyce identifies Shakespeare's triangle with Trinity: 'Stephen finds the same paradoxes in God and in Shakespeare. God begets himself, sends himself between himself and others, is put upon by his own fiends. As to Shakespeare, "His unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer"'.[154]

'Dante and the Lobster' is a humorous story, in so far as everything that we encounter in it is exaggerated. Beckett plays with grotesque even in the title which compares the incomparable: Dante and the Lobster. The story introduces the hero who embodies another motto of Stephen Dedalus – 'Non-Serviam': 'I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church'.[155] Belacqua's prototype is a minor character from Dante's Divine Comedy whose figure strikes a sharp contrast to Dante and Virgil rushing up the slope of the mountain Purgatory to meet God and become his servants (he is among 'a group of persons lounging in the shade […] whose attitude displayed extreme fatigue').[156] The context we have presented above invites us to read Beckett's indolent Belacqua is a caricature of Joyce's artist in self-exile measured against Beckett's own solipsistic ideal.

Belacqua is a grotesque: 'he was so bogged in indolence that he could move neither backwards nor forward', which means that he was too lazy to make art.[157] The story introduces Belacqua late one morning studying a passage from *The Paradiso* with a good deal of Joycean scepticism. Beckett selected the scene in which Beatrice explains to Dante 'the spots on the moon' (4). She laughs at the poet's superstition that God punished Cain by exiling him on the moon. She explains to Dante that people on earth are prone to forming illusions – with the rise of science they will be able to see clearer (*The Paradise*, 2:19). 'She had it from God', the narrator reads the hero's mind. Belacqua is bored. He finds Dante 'impenetrable':

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[153] Oliver Cogarty, quoted in Howard Helsinger, 'Joyce and Dante', in *ELH*, Vol. 35, No 4 (Dec 1968), p. 592.
[154] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 110 (a footnote).
[155] James Joyce, *A Portrait of The Artist as A Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 268 – 269.
[156] Dante Alighieri, *Purgatory* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 98.
[157] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante and the Lobster', in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 3; further references are in the main body of the text.

> Still he poured over the enigma, he would not concede himself conquered, he would understand at least the meanings of the words […]. He scooped his fingers under the book and shoveled it back till it lay wholly on his palms […]. He held it aloft for a time, squinting at it angrily, pressing the boards inwards with the heels of his hands. Then he laid it aside (3).

As in 'Ding Dong', Belacqua is forced to leave his purposeful isolation. The narrator interferes and places before the hero 'three large obligations': 'First lunch, then the lobster, then the Italian lesson. That would do to be going on with (4).

As we continue to read, the same quest for pain becomes a distinctive structure. It begins with Belacqua's preparation of breakfast. In the process of making toast, he suddenly feels a sadistic surge rising inside him. He identifies himself with the innocent bread he is going to "kill": 'He laid his cheek against the soft of the bread; it was spongy and warm, alive. But he would very soon take that plush feel off it, by God but he would very quickly take that fat white look off its face' (5). From this example, it is clear that Beckett deals with the sado-masochistic double bind that underpins his character's motivations. But we can hardly make sense of the swift passage from Belacqua's contemplation of Cain's and McCabe's crimes to the killing of 'the bread' without resorting to Girard who explains this phenomenon through the metamorphoses of metaphysical desire:

> The sexual masochist tries to reproduce in his erotic life the conditions of the extremely intense metaphysical desire. Ideally his partner and mediator would be the same person. But this ideal, by definition, cannot be achieved, for if it were it would cease to be desirable, the mediator having lost his divine power. Thus the masochist is reduced to imitate his impossible ideal. He wants to act with his sexual partner the role, which he would play – or so he thinks – with his mediator. The brutalities demanded by the masochist are always associated in his mind with those to which a truly divine model would probably subject him.[158]

Beckett's plot lacks exposition, and the "scapegoating" of the bread appears completely gratuitous.

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[158] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 184.

Only the next scene gives us a glimpse of the hero's mediator. As Belacqua leaves his lodging, the moon is invoked as this sadistic divine power that perturbs his imagination: 'The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast [Cain] might not die quickly' (5). Gradually we begin to see the moon is playing the role of 'phallic symbol' reminding the hero that the "outcast" in him must suffer. This planet is also the apex of the triangle, throwing its dim light on the objects, which turn Belacqua's wanderings into hell.

The scene in the grocery shop isolates 'the cadaverous tablet of cheese' that the grocer wanted to sell Belacqua (7). Outraged, the poet sees the grocer as a Pontius Pilate, who, instead of 'simply washing his hands flung out his arms in a wild crucified gesture of supplication' (7). On the way to his Italian lesson, Belacqua envisages his teacher's reaction to his comments on the spots on the moon. He also wants to ask 'his Professoressa' how she would translate a 'pun' from Dante's *Inferno*: '*qui vive la pietà quando e ben morta*' ('here pity lives when it is dead'), meaning Dublin (13). But he knows in advance that 'the old hen' would only 'cluck like Pindar' (9). After 'The Ottolenghi' has justified Belacqua's worst expectations, we see him heading for his aunt's house.

The reader is disoriented when the narrator suddenly commands: 'Let us call it Winter, that dusk may fall now and a moon rise' (13). The moon is up in the sky when Belacqua turns around the corner and comes across 'a gone down horse' with 'a man sat at its head': 'I know, thought Belacqua, that that is considered the right thing to do. But why?' (14). This 'quasi-medieval encounter', as John Pilling aptly describes it,[159] is odd in modern Dublin, and it is particularly incongruous that 'that is considered the right thing to do'. Who would consider the infliction of suffering on a horse 'the right thing to do'?

Beckett seems to be engaging in a dialogue with Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Nietzsche hated Christianity for its commitment to the victims ('it wants to break the strong […], convert their proud assurance into unease and distress of conscience').[160] Raskolnikov's theory that the breach of morality is permitted for the strong was written as though to illustrate Nietzsche's thought. After butchering two old ladies with an axe, Raskolnikov dreams a terrible dream. He dreams of a time when he was a child, walking with his father through a provincial town. Suddenly they see a peasant flogging his horse

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[159] John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's 'More Pricks than Kicks': In A Strait of Two Wills*, p. 49.
[160] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, p. 146.

outside a pub ('so brutally, so brutally, sometimes even across the eyes and muzzle').[161] The child runs forward, throws his arms around the horse's neck, kisses her muzzle, and then, in the next scene, the hero awakes in cold and sweat. Gide believed that Nietzsche would certainly ascribe the failure of Raskolnikov to 'the cowardice of the last man'.[162] It is more than a little strange that Raskolnikov's dream would actually become an event in Nietzsche's life. On 3 January 1889, the philosopher lost his sanity when he saw a horse flogged by its owner in Turin. We can find this haunting image in 'Rebellion' (in *The Brothers Karamazov*) when Ivan quotes Nekrassov's poem 'about a peasant who flogs a horse about its eyes, "its gentle eyes"', putting this case before his brother Alyosha as a proof that God, if he exists, is certainly evil.[163] Belacqua almost repeats Ivan Karamazov's phrase (quoted earlier in this section: 'I can't understand why everything has been arranged as it is'), adding the word 'sacrifice': 'Why not pity even down below? Why not mercy and Godliness together? A little mercy in the stress of sacrifice, a little mercy to rejoice against judgement' (31). It is clear that Beckett hardly intended to invent his own "horse" story; he needed the 'sign'. More importantly, he was eager to connect it with the moon that is up above, symbolizing the agency of the apex in triangle scalene. We begin to expect another 'sign', seeing Belacqua approaching his aunt's house with a lobster he bought for lunch (or dinner, given that the moon has risen).

The next scene confirms our expectation, as we see the lobster 'exposed cruciform on the oilcloth' while the preparations for its boiling are under way:

> "My God", [Belacqua] whined "it's alive, what'll we do?" […]
> "Boil the beast", she said, "what else?"
> "But it's not dead"
> "Have sense", she said sharply, "lobsters are always boiled alive. They must be" […]. She caught up the lobster and laid it on its back. It trembled. "They feel nothing", she said. "You make a fuss […] and upset me and then lash into it for your dinner" (14).

With a little prayer Belacqua concedes: 'It's a quick death, God help us all'. The story ends with the narrator's response: 'It is not'.

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[161] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 74.
[162] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 161.
[163] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 281.

Ruby Cohn has found this ending 'intrusive' because it does not accord with 'the narrative point of view – that of Belacqua'.[164] But we have seen Belacqua acting as a moralist, as a righteous person, all the way through the story. Why does this final 'denial' feel so disappointing? Because he does not care about the lobster who was brought into play only for the purpose to display the hero's metaphysical desire, his addiction to rivalry in the absence of a rival. Unfortunately, the arrangement with the moon is not effective, as it does not allow us to recognise Belacqua's identification with the lobster, 'exposed cruciform on the oilcloth'. The cynicism of this identification was supposed to accomplish the collection of people and objects treated as mocking signs to justify the hero's suffering 'down below'.

Being a caricature, as it is, 'Dante and the Lobster' is a failure, in the sense, that it might have been conceived as such. Some gratuitous scapegoating has taken place in 'the fashion of the day' but this surreptitious laughter has no cathartic effect. Empty moralism triumphs at the end, suggesting that either Beckett resents the suffering inflicted by the "Moon" or that he is simply a cynical caricaturist of his rival, James Joyce. The moon resurfaces in his later fiction. In *Molloy*, it beams in the sky to remind the hero that he is a prisoner (when in reality he is a guest in his benefactress's house): One night, 'for all of a sudden there was the moon, a huge moon framed in the window. Two bars divided it in three segments […]. How difficult it is to speak of the moon and not lose one's head, witless moon' […] it must be her arse she shows us always'.[165] The moon works as "phallic symbol" meant to satisfy the hero's addiction to humiliation and pain.

At the end of this chapter, let us address the allusion to Dante, which Beckett's narrator has been corralling us towards throughout the story. The phrase 'here pity lives when it is dead' ('qui vive la pietà quando e ben morta') refers to the scene in *The Inferno* in which Virgil rebukes Dante for taking pity on the magicians who created miracles on the earth because they rendered God's compassion inactive:

> [Virgil]: '… "Are you as foolish as the rest?
> Here pity lives when it is dead;
> For who can be more impious than he
> Who links God's judgement to passivity?" (Inf. XX, 27-30)

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[164] Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 45.
[165] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 39.

Virgil is a pagan but Dante resorts to his expertise because it helps to restore the reality that the poet's sense of justice obliterates. Finding himself in "hell", i.e. the place he invented as the author of his comedy, he identifies with its inhabitants, prone to forget that the world is a larger place than his consciousness.

In 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', Beckett argues that nothing can be 'more definitely utilitarianism?' than the idea of Divine Providence guiding the world – this is why he defends Vico as 'a scientific historian'.[166] Joyce's 'Purgatorio' is described as 'the machine' that implies 'neither prize nor penalty', which 'must in turn be purged down to spirits of rebelliousness'.[167] Do 'Ding Dong' and 'Dante and the Lobster', and any other story in *More Pricks Than Kicks* present and mock Joyce's point of view? James Knowlson's account of one particular event in Beckett's life could be helpful.[168] On 9 June 1936, the young writer came to Ireland to speak in defense of his relative, 'Boss' Sinclair. As a witness he had to be questioned about his convictions on the basis of his professional activity. The judge addressed the scene from *More Pricks Than Kicks* in which 'a Jesuit' presents Christ as a megalomaniac solipsist:

> "The Lebensbahn" ['Fount of Life], he was saying, for he never used the English word when the foreign pleased him better, "of the Galilean is the tragi-comedy of the solipsism that will not capitulate. The humilities and *retro me*'s and quaffs of *sirreverence* are on a par with the hey presto's, arrogance and egoism. He is the first great self-contained playboy. The cryptic abasement before the woman taken red-handed is as great a piece of megalomaniacal impertinence as his interference in the affairs of his boy-friend Lazarus. He opens the series of slick suicides, as opposed to the serious Empedoclean variety".[169]

Upon being asked whether he kept this view of Christ, Beckett replied that 'the character who spoke these words and the priest were both fictitious and that, as a writer, he could put words into their mouths that he did not agree with'.[170]

The Jesuit's blasphemy makes no sense without the context of the literary establishment which Beckett perpetually addresses in his stories. Moreover, the passage in

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[166] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', p. 19.
[167] Ibid., p. 33.
[168] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 279.
[169] Samuel Beckett, 'A Wet Night', in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, p. 50.
[170] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 279.

question will make more sense if we take into account Joyce's mocking prayer to 'the Galilean' in *Ulysses*, which Ellmann associates with Joyce's self-imposed exile in Trieste. This prayer is worth quoting at length as it reflects, in Ellmann's view, 'this splendid attack' that Joyce launched on his rivals in Ireland, to maintain the meaning of his exile:

> By the Lord Christ I must get rid of some of these Jewish bowels I have in me yet […]. I sniffed up all the fragrance of the earth and offered up the following prayer […]. O Vague Something behind Everything! For the love of the Lord Christ change my curse-o'-God state of affairs. Give me for Christ's sake a pen and an ink bottle and some peace of mind and then, by the crucified Jaysus, if I don't sharpen this little pen and dip it into fermented ink and write tiny little sentences about the people who betrayed me send me to hell. After all, there are many ways of betraying people. It wasn't only the Galilean suffered that. Whoever the hell you are, I inform you that this is a poor comedy you expect me to play and I'm damned to hell if I'll play it for you. What do you mean by urging me to be forbearing? For your sake I refrained from taking a little black fellow from Bristol by the nape of his neck and hurling him into the street when he spat some of his hatched venom at me. But my heroic nature urged me to do this because he was smaller than I. For your sake, I allowed a cyclist to use towards me his ignoble and cowardly manners, pretending to see nothing, pretending that he was my equal. I sorrowfully confess to you, old chap, that I was a damn fool. But if you only grant me that thing I ask you for I will go to Paris where, I believe, there is a person by the name of Anatole France much admired by a Celtic philologist by the name of Goodbetterbest and I'll say to him "Respected master, is this pen pointed enough?" Amen.[171]

This passage highlights Beckett's motivation to write in order to 'to get over J.J. before [he] dies'.

The bicycling Belacqua, opening *Dream*, could be a bicyclist from Trieste, now transposed to Dublin to maintain 'this tragi-comedy of solipsism that will not capitulate'. To be victorious in his own eyes, Beckett must beat 'the Penman' at his own game; he must win by his rules, thus making victory impossible. All caricatural repetitions are one with the desire to do away with repetition, which turns the creative process into a mimetic

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[171] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 201.

hell despite all his self-awareness and his wide reading, as it appears, in philosophical anthropology (Jules de Gaultier and Ernst Cassirer), including Dostoevsky's novels.

CHAPTER 4: BECKETT LEARNING COMEDY

INTRODUCTION

Two forms of nihilism, cosmological and ethical, merge into a single pattern if we consider this type of desire as a negative imitation or *ressentiment*. Girard calls this pattern 'internal mediation' and asserts that towards the beginning of the twentieth century, 'the triangle of desire [had] interested hardly anyone but vaudevillists and novelists of genius'.[1] Hegel and his successors believed that the dialectic of master and slave is the outgrowth of a violent past. As soon as material needs are satisfied, the era of reconciliation must begin. Speaking of the type of the novel we call 'metaphysical', Girard points to Stendhalian vanity, Proustian snobbism and the Dostoevskian masochism ('the underground') as 'the new forms assumed by the struggle of consciousnesses in a universe of physical non-violence'.[2] In terms of psychology, the transition from Stendhal to Dostoevsky marks the transformation of the triangle, representing the relationship between subject, model and object, into the relationship between two or multiple rivals, representing model/obstacles for one another. Castigating modern philosophers' blindness to the fact that desire is intersubjective, Girard does not mean that 'internal mediation' did not exist in 'a violent past'. Joyce, for example, found this type of relationship in Shakespeare's theatre and called it 'the bawd and cuckold' (an unhealthy appetite for one's neighbor's envy). For Joyce, even Hamlet's delayed revenge can be reinterpreted as a masqueraded bawd-and-cuckold provincial drama ('*Hamlet ou Le Distrait, pièce de Shakespeare*').[3]

Beckett's early interest in vaudeville could have been due to the same clockwork conflict for which this genre is so renowned. Thus, according to Deirdre Bair, as a student of Trinity College, he liked to pay solitary visits to the Queens, which was the centre of melodrama in Dublin, and also to the Theatre Royal and the Olympia, and afterwards 'he would often launch into detailed, technical discussions of the dramatic unities – "of how it worked"'.[4]

In his 1934 review on Sean O'Casey's *Windfalls*, entitled 'The Essential and The Incidental', Beckett singles out 'the principle of disintegration' as the major dramatic unit

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[1] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 111.
[2] Ibid., p. 110.
[3] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 304.
[4] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 48.

of comic art: 'the dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation'.[5] He praises O'Casey as 'a master of the knockabout in this very serious and honorable sense – that he discerns the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities and activates it to their explosion'.[6] 'The principle of disintegration' is the one that underpins 'the unhappy consciousness' – this inexorable desire in the individual 'to rise above himself', as Jules de Gaultier put it.[7] This desire suggests that rivalry is indeed primary and internal; that the object upon which two conflicting desires converge is unimportant. Rather, we are again reminded of the self-defeating behaviour characteristic of the will to power.

This chapter focuses on 'the principle of disintegration' as the major comic device, underpinning Dante's *Inferno* and Dostoevsky's "hell" represented in his mature novels. Both of these sources are congenial with Beckett's interest in metaphysical comedy. The third source from which Beckett drew much of his knowledge about the mixture of comedy and tragedy is Bergson's essay *Laughter*, dedicated to a specific form of romantic 'absentmindedness'. The latter is nothing other than the individual's proneness to blindness precisely at that moment when he or she feels extremely self-assured: 'When La Bruyère came across this particular type, he realised, on analyzing it, that he had got hold of a recipe for the wholesale manufacture of comic effects'.[8]

This next section aims to demonstrate that Beckett had read *Laughter* before he started writing *Proust* in which his polemic with Bergson on the matter of habit and memory resurfaces now and then. Particularly, Beckett never stops assailing Bergson's theory of *élan vital* as one of the patent philosophical solidities. The fact that he was keen on discussing laughter as an effective weapon against illusion manifests itself at the beginning of his essay. Saying that Proust as a writer was 'not all together at liberty to detach effect from cause', Beckett insists that 'it will be necessary to interrupt the luminous projection of the subject desire with the comic relief of features'.[9] Speaking of desire and its disappointments ('but what is attainment?'), Beckett is ahead of his time in discussing reason and imagination as fundamental manifestations of the individual's will. The very term 'Habit', encapsulating this will, indicates that Beckett approaches memory as an anthropologist: 'The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit.

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[5] Samuel Beckett, 'The Essential and The Incidental', in *Disjecta*, p. 82.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Jules de Gaultier, *From Kant to Nietzsche*, p. 205.
[8] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 6.
[9] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, in *Disjecta*, p. 11.

Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability'.[10] Agreeing with Schopenhauer that the world is the objectivation of the individual will, Beckett is concerned with numerous objectivations of individual wills as desires for personal security based on the principle of possession. Although such memory is organized to avert danger, 'an automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of its existence has […] little moral significance'.[11]

He discusses some of Proust's 'masks' as interruptions of habit memory. Thus, he evokes 'the full horror of a Duval omelette' which confronts Francoise in the kitchen; Marcel 'is tortured by a high ceiling' because he has developed a 'friendship with the low ceiling'; his 'habit has not had time to silence the explosion of the clock' and 'reduce the hostility of the violet curtains'.[12] Such examples, however, are few, and it seems that in the course of his argument Beckett abandons the idea of comic interruptions. Only in his conclusion does he argue that Proust's relativism is 'employed as an element of comedy'.[13]

The first section of this chapter focuses on Bergson's *Laughter*; the second section examines the implementation of some of Bergson's ideas (particularly "hats") across Beckett's novels; the third section considers 'the wanderings in hell' in Dante's *Inferno* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the fourth section studies Beckett's comedy in *Murphy* in the context of his essay 'Recent Irish Poetry'.

SECTION 1: BERGSON

Having submitted *Proust*, Beckett wrote to Charles Prentice: 'I wrote the conclusion in a hurry. Would you let me add 5 or 6 pages to the last 9? I would like to develop the parallel with Dostoevsky and separate Proust's intuitivism from Bergson's'.[14] By raising the subject of 'intuitivism' Beckett refers to Bergson's attempt to correct Kant's treatment of Time.[15] According to Kant, we establish contact with the world through sensuous intuition, which, in turn, is possible to us under the forms of space and time. Consequently, in our

[10] Ibid., p. 19.
[11] Ibid., p. 23.
[12] Ibid., pp. 22, 24.
[13] Ibid., p. 85.
[14] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 52.
[15] One of Kant's most basic definitions of Time is to be found in The *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the chapter 'The Antinomy of Pure Reason': 'Time is in itself a series, and it is also the formal condition of all series – i.e. the right way to think about any series', p. 208.

cognition we are dependent on our finite faculties of sense and reason. Although Kant admitted that 'only experience can teach what brings us joy', 'in the end', he argues, 'it teaches us only to become prudent […]'. According to him, 'only the teachings of morality command for everyone, without taking into account of his inclinations, merely because and in so far as he is free and has practical reason'.[16] Bergson's first work on intuition was *Time and Free Will* (1889), in which he reproaches Kant for confusing the categories of time and space in such a way that makes us 'acknowledge the fragility of every edifice that we have built'.[17] Bergson called Kant's sceptical approach 'proud modesty' and Kant's *a priori* principle 'a preliminary declaration' and 'habit memory':

> This preliminary declaration enables reason to apply its habitual methods of thoughts without any scruple, and thus, under the pretext that it does not touch the absolute, to make absolute judgements upon everything.[18]

Instead of Time, Bergson introduced the notion of *duration* (*la durée*) as a sort of 'mental sympathy' by means of which one may 'transfer himself into the very being of the object'.[19] As we have seen with Beckett and Amiel, the fusion with objects had become a kind of obsession among romantic poets, but for Bergson, the desire for objects is based on common sense and *science*: '*time does not bite into material objects*' (*Creative Evolution*).[20] Bergson's intuitivism thus consists in his belief in what he calls *élan vital* or the power of life as 'a tendency to change and create divergent directions by its own growth'.[21] Under this condition, human intuition is said to be capable of a higher 'elasticity' and adaptability to ever-changing life. Bergson believes that 'on this hypothesis, past, present and future would be open at a glance to a superhuman intellect capable of making the calculation'.[22]

The summary of Bergson's intuitivism presented above illustrates the complexity of his concept of *élan vital*, which does not really explain how Bergson's intuition can replace *a priori* practical reason. Although Beckett does not mention Bergson in *Proust*, it is clear that his counterpoint to *la durée* is Proust's 'involuntary memory', whose triumph

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[16] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 9, 10.
[17] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, quoted in Paola Marrati, 'Time, Life, Concepts: The Newness of Bergson', in *MLN*, Vol. 120, No. 5, 2005, p. 1100.
[18] Ibid., p. 1106.
[19] Ibid., p. 1104.
[20] Ibid., p. 1103; Bergson's emphasis.
[21] Paola Marrati, 'Time, Life, Concepts: The Newness of Bergson', p. 1106.
[22] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, quoted in Paola Marrati, p. 1104.

over Time and Habit he celebrates throughout his essay. Proust himself borrowed the term from the psychology and philosophy of his time. However, as Gontarski reminds us, Proust himself was highly opposed to the opinion that his novels were Bergsonian.[23] Here it is important to show that Beckett adapts the term 'involuntary memory' to his purpose concerning the proof of the reality based on 'religious' experience (in the previous chapter we discussed the scene in which Marcel recovers his dead grandmother). His vocabulary attests to this purpose. Thus, he claims that involuntary memory makes possible 'the extraction of some truth from the world', that it 'salvages the reality of his [Proust's] lost self', that it manifests itself as 'a divine familiar presence', and even 'the resurrection of the soul' – such metaphors are numerous and their agency is not a matter of decorum.[24] The reality of "the sacred" becomes even more intense when he approaches 'the type-tragedy of the human relationship' – the Marcel/Albertine liaison. Beckett describes Marcel's desire as 'a current that forces him to bow down and worship an obscure and implacable Goddess'.[25] We may see that what is passed here for 'religion' is nothing other than the realm of intersubjective phenomena whose experiences differ in quality and intensity. Shall we then attribute all of them to 'involuntary memory'?

When Girard refers to Proust's term 'affective memory', he demonstrates that it is combined with the worshipping of the 'benevolent gods', most of whom are the 'gods of Combray', i.e. the members of Marcel's family and their nearest circle. As Marcel goes further from Combray, 'the positive unity of love develops into the negative unity of hate, into the false unity which hides duplicity and multiplicity'.[26] The distance between Combray and the life of the salon 'is not the distance that separates a pious and useful lie from the cold truth. Nor can we agree with Heidegger that the gods have "withdrawn". The gods are nearer than ever'.[27]

Girard points to the numerous descriptions of 'suffering' as 'Habit' in *Remembrance of Things Past*. What Beckett views a necessary attribute of an artistic and religious experience,[28] Proust's narrator bemoans as his 'habit of having Albertine with

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[23] 'My work is dominated by the distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory, a distinction which not only does not figure in the philosophy of M. Bergson but is even contradicted by it', quoted in S.E. Gontarski, *Creative Involution: Bergson, Beckett, Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 23.
[24] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 33.
[25] Ibid., p. 57.
[26] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 203.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 28 ('suffering […] opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience').

me': 'This suffering itself had become a Habit […], a dread deity, so riveted to one's being, its insignificant face so incrusted in one's heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from one, this deity, that one had barely distinguished inflicts on one suffering more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself'.[29] It is amusing that Habit and suffering are lumped together and, moreover, treated as a religious experience. Beckett himself refers to Marcel's 'adoration' of Albertine as 'envy': 'She appears to him for the first time, absorbed in the radiance of the "little band" at Balbec […] seeming to the envious adoration of the narrator as eternally and hermetically exclusive'.[30] According to Girard, this religious experience stems from Marcel's envy of Albertine's putative self-sufficiency. We may notice that the subtlety of Proust's humour did not escape Beckett's attention in so far as he reveals that as 'a captive' Albertine 'prevents [Marcel] from working, separates him from his friends'; when the captive becomes 'a fugitive', 'from this moment […] the "reciprocal torture" of their relations dates'.[31] In his conclusion, he writes that Proust's 'relativism' or 'perspectivism' is 'employed as an element of comedy'.[32]

It is easy to understand why Beckett was disappointed with *Proust*. Shortly after its publication he wrote to McGreevy: 'I read the book through and really wondered what I was talking about'.[33] With regards to the difference between Proust and Bergson's intuitivism, if we set 'involuntary memory' and the 'duration' side by side, both notions will appear to be the opposition of the same to the same. For Beckett, 'absentmindedness' is analogous to 'involuntary memory' and both are the opposite of Habit. For Bergson, absentmindedness is the same thing as Habit and both are the opposites of what he calls 'intuition' or '*élan vital*' (analogous to "involuntary memory"). Beckett tries to "object" to Bergson by arguing that 'Proust had a bad memory – as he had an inefficient habit'.[34] Given that for Bergson, 'absentmindedness' and 'habit' constitute the essence of the ridiculous, there must be a certain connection between Beckett's desire to separate Proust and Dostoevsky from Bergson's 'intuitivism'. It is possible that Beckett wanted to advance his disquisition on the 'comic elements' in the novel in relation to Bergson's *Laughter*: *An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*.

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[29] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, 3 volumes (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), vol. 3, p. 426.
[30] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 45.
[31] Ibid., pp. 56, 51.
[32] Ibid., p. 85.
[33] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 42.
[34] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 29.

Laughter is a curiosity, for it harbours a discovery of which its author remained unaware, at least within the framework of his research. Nevertheless, it contains numerous revelations of which he was justifiably proud. One such revelation concerns the social signification of laughter. Unlike previous scholars, Bergson refuses 'to make the comic into an abstract relation between ideas: "an intellectual contrast", "a patent absurdity"'. He wants to treat it as 'a spirit', 'a living thing', 'a pert challenge at philosophic speculations', akin to art and begotten of life.[35] In other words, Bergson places laughter within its natural environment, i.e. society. It needs to be pointed out that Bergson's attitude towards society is somewhat equivocal. At the beginning of his essay, it appears to be almost identical with his concept of *élan vital* – Life – this mysterious force, whose evolution is creative and protracted in time and space: 'Life presents itself to us as evolution in time and complexity in space' (44). In such a case, what Life and society require of each of us is 'a constant alert attention' to our surroundings.

Bergson observes that 'man has been defined as 'an animal, which laughs', but what has escaped the attention of all previous philosophers is that 'there is nothing comic in nature apart from man': 'a landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not a piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it' (65, 2).

Bergson approaches laughter as a scientist, trying to detect a general comic element in man, which separates him from the rest of nature. Thinking, perhaps, of Life as a kind of melody, Bergson imagines what would happen if in dancing hall, one were to stop up one's ears to the sound of the music: the moving bodies will turn into a **'**clock-work arrangement which utterly contradicts vitality of life' (18). He does not mention silent film, but his account of the comic as 'the hallucination of a mechanical effect' must have been suggested by his early cinema experience. Such observations enable Bergson to define this ridiculous human element as the 'lack of elasticity of an intellect bent upon a practical need'. Hence, his account of the comic as '*du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant*' – 'something mechanical has encrusted on the living' (18). Somewhat surprisingly or unsurprisingly, Bergson begins with the most Cartesian, Kantian logic. He opposes 'the infinitely supple soul (*l'esprit*) subject to *no laws of gravitation*' to 'the stiff body', the

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[35] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, pp. 1, 2; further references are in the main body of the text.

'recalcitrant matter', and finally defines the comic as 'absentmindedness' (18, my emphasis). Habit is thus this absentminded behaviour causing our mind to "forget" its innate elasticity and suppleness and submit to the body.

Assuming that 'the stage', i.e. low comedy, is 'a magnified and a simplified view of life', he begins with typical slapstick: 'A man running along the street stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing' (5). The reality, which interfered in this case, is an accidental obstacle, which the man should have avoided by changing his trajectory. Instead of that, 'habit has given the impulse': 'the muscles continue to perform the same movement, when the circumstances of the cause called for something else' (5.) Still more laughable, he argues, is the absentmindedness in the over-romantic type of character. He considers the "fall of Don Quixote" as slapstick of this kind. Indeed, the comic effect caused by the fall of this 'whimsical wild enthusiast' is incomparably more hilarious than the fall of the man 'who attends to the petty occupations of his everyday life with mathematical precision' (5). The romantic 'falls' because 'he was intent upon a star'.

The idea that the essence of the comic is rooted in 'automatism, *inelasticity*, habit' is further reinforced in his analysis of comic faces (12, Bergson's emphasis). Our attention is drawn to 'a fixed grimace' which society dislikes; though, of course, it is not a 'material offense' (12, 13). Bergson merely wants to stress that laughter is not a punishment but 'a social gesture', a means to tone down all inconveniences, which impede a smooth adjustment of social organisms to one another. A slightly less persuasive point is the 'inelasticity' in fashion. This moment has attracted our attention because Beckett would employ Bergson's treatment of hats as a sign of a certain "absentminded" identity in *all* his novels. Bergson considers top hats as perennially ridiculous because a top hat can never become one with the head it covers because the latter is innately supple and elastic, given 'the living suppleness of the object covered' (19). The garment that is not ridiculous would be the one, which is indistinguishable from the individual.

Continuing along this path, Bergson arrives at the most important part of his work – 'the loftiest manifestations of the comic' (65). As low comedy is left behind, he begins to perceive the far-reaching consequences of the law he has established. 'Absentmindedness' in the comic drama and in the novel throw into relief this equivocal nature of laughter. For example, he observes that Molière's Alceste (in *The Misanthrope*) is a paragon of earnestness but still his behaviour is ludicrous. Bergson does not give up. He characterizes Alceste's "fault" as a 'rigid virtue' – 'it is rigidity that society eyes with suspicion' (69). However, he observes that the higher a comedy rises the more it approximates '*real life*',

and we may see that by 'real life' he no longer means *élan vital*, but 'a dry agreement between the individuals' (60). Now he views society as a hostile force, which confirms his previous observation that laughter is incompatible with emotion and pity: 'in laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate' (67). He wants to understand how we come to laugh at a character for he believes that laughter 'alienates our sympathy' – hence his accurate conclusion: '*whether a character is good or bad is of little moment; granted he is unsociable, he is capable of becoming comic*' (71, my emphasis). Unsociability or self-withdrawal which he has hitherto regarded as Habit and an impediment to his notion of 'duration', now appear to him as something merely superficial, 'something that lives upon a person without forming part of his organism' (83). He returns to his favourite comic character, Don Quixote, whose 'systematic absentmindedness' he characterizes as 'the most comical thing imaginable', and realizes that he sympathizes with this eccentric. In such a case, he wants to reduce his ridiculousness and therefore redefines 'absentmindedness' as 'unawareness' (72). With this definition, it appears that laughter is nothing other than 'a kind of social "ragging"' (66). Given that a ridiculous person is generally ridiculous in proportion to his ignorance of himself, Bergson begins to see absentmindedness as a lesser evil than laughter (67).

Marking this "irrationality" of laughter, Bergson emphasises that a successful comedy feeds on an unawareness of some kind. Only due to this unawareness does laughter go off spontaneously and achieves its full effect. For Bergson, this condition shall be an impediment to the comic writer's *nosce se ipsum* (know thyself). If a ridiculous person is blind to a reckoning of his own ridiculousness, the comic writer is condemned to direct his predatory comic gaze outwards. Here, as though in contradiction to himself, Bergson makes his most important discovery. He notices that the only "vice" of which we are perennially unaware is *vanity*. Bergson defines it as 'an admiration of ourselves based on the admiration we think we are inspiring in others' (84). Given that one does not feel vain in a desire to be liked by others, vanity ever partakes of the unconscious. This dependence on others for our self-admiration could have prompted in Bergson the idea of imitation. As we know, Girard defines vanity as a desire to be another. Shall we not suggest then that Cervantes in his ability to create Don Quixote as an imitator of chivalric romances has achieved a profound knowledge of his own comic nature? Bergson overlooks the most important agency of high comedy – disillusionment.

Bergson's next move is a comparison of comedy and tragedy. Quite paradoxically, the more he wants to distance them the nearer they come together. He stresses that comedy

and tragedy are ‘two radically different methods of observation’ (81). While the former deals with classes, the latter is concerned with ‘the individual’s own uniqueness’ (79). ‘A humourist is a moralist disguised as a scientist who practices dissection with the sole object of filling us with disgust’ (63). A tragedian ‘does not need to study other men’ because he strives to impart ‘the impressions of life, which are the poet himself, – a multiplication or division of the poet, – the poet plumbing the depths of his own nature’ (82). The comic writer is interested in revealing ‘that mechanical element [in our personality] which resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically. It is, if you will, that which causes us to imitate ourselves’ (79).

Strangely enough, the sameness of the tragic inner divisions and the clockwork self-imitation totally escapes him. At one point, he arrives at another important discovery. It turns out that this tragi-comic self-imitation is inextricable from revenge: ‘[Tragic drama] stirs something within us which luckily does not explode […]. It offers nature her revenge upon society’ (78). By ‘nature’ here Bergson means ‘the fire of individual passions’ (79). He begins to view comedy as totally antagonistic to art, and, above all, to his theory of *élan vital*. He points out, with an air of bitterness, that ‘by organizing laughter, comedy accepts social life as a natural environment; it even obeys an impulse of social life. And in this respect, it turns its back upon art’ (83). Now, reflecting on Don Quixote, Bergson begins to feel that he no longer finds this character ridiculous; rather he recognizes in him one of those dreamers and madmen (indulging ‘in *dolce far niente*’) on whom society lavishes torrents of scorn and by doing so brings them back to reality (96).

His final verdict is strict. Laughter may be a social gesture, but its nature is arbitrary and even insane (‘it goes off spontaneously and returns tit for tat’). One cannot improve morality by ‘natural means instead of conscious reflection’ and ‘in this sense laughter cannot be absolutely just. Its function is to intimidate by humiliating’ (97). Thinking that laughter is rather a means of some base relaxation, Bergson finally revokes his quest, for such a means ‘has nothing to do with justice or even kindness’ (95).

Like many critics who write about laughter, Bergson cannot abandon the attitude of a moralist and an idealist. On the one hand, he wants to celebrate laughter for its spontaneity and its ability to combat isolationism; on the other hand, he craves for justice without noticing how absentminded this ideal justice can be. It should have occurred to Bergson that the ‘piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically’ could be that ‘conscious reflection’ itself – one which is always just. Blaming laughter for the lack of sympathy, Bergson, nevertheless, prescribes revenge as an

indispensible accessory of tragic drama. The outcome of his argument is this: while comedy takes revenge upon the individual, tragedy takes revenge upon society.

What Bergson fails to discover is that high comedy challenges the divide between good and bad characters. In this respect, Ivan Karamazov's rebellion against 'the Euclidean geometry' is the epitome of cosmological comedy. Here, the principle of disintegration reaches its zenith: 'mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation'. This kind of 'dehiscence' is reflected in Hegel's claim, according to which 'the freedom of self-consciousness is indifferent to natural existence and has therefore let this equally go free'.[36] According to Yakov Golosovker, Ivan's tragic gesture of returning his 'ticket of admission' to future harmony has made this character into a type.[37]

In the light of Bergson's definition of the comic as 'withdrawal' and 'unsociability', Beckett's 'involuntary memory' and Bergson's 'intuitivism' are symmetrical notions, both plumbing 'that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being' where 'the essence of ourselves is stored' and 'to which Habit does not possess the key'.[38] Perhaps in reaction to Bergson's account of the tragic identity with its self-divisions and self-multiplications, Beckett defines tragedy as the 'expiation' for an 'eternal sin' that has nothing to do with human justice:

> Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organized by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'socii malorum', the sin of having been born' (67).

This tragic view changes when Beckett takes on a different method of observation in his conclusion. Here he dismisses Curtius' interpretation of Proust's multiplicity as the manifestation of the hero's freedom: 'Proust extends his experience to all human relations, the multiple aspects did not bind into a positive synthesis' (85). He compares Proust's 'literary statement' with 'a book of accounts' registering the characters' disillusionments: 'when Saint-Loup sees Albertine's photograph, he cannot conceal his astonishment that

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[36] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 122.
[37] Яков Голосовкер, *Достоевский и Кант*, стр. 54.
[38] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 35; further references are in the main body of the text.

such a vulgar nonentity should have attracted his brilliant and popular friend' (86). Finally, he states that Proust's 'relativism is negative and comic' (85).

More importantly, contrary to Bergson's claim that comic observation cannot reveal to the writer his own comic nature, Beckett discovers in Proust's novel a mode of representation that depicts characters as 'parasitic plants':

> Flower and plant are unconscious and so in a sense are Proust's men and women, whose will is blind and hard, but never self-conscious. They are victims of their volition, active with a grotesque predetermined activity, within the narrow limits of an impure world (89).

Reading that 'Proust is conscious of humanity as flora, never as fauna. (There are no black cats and faithful hounds in Proust)', we may perceive the sharp contrast between Proust's perception and that of Jean du Chas, who is conscious of humanity as fauna.[39] The function of the novel, as Beckett describes it towards the end of his essay, consists in gathering together the wills, yielding to the 'dispersion of concentrisme'. The novelist is 'a pure subject' – not a moralist preoccupied with his justice. No "Manichaeism" (these divisions into the mind and the body, the individual and the social, the good and the bad) remains in this art and 'this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental apperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, The Thing in itself' (90).

Although Bergson was not among Beckett's 'philosophical preferences', he would never cease to resort to the philosopher's findings in the domain of wit. Bergson, for example, discusses in detail such comic devices as symmetrical plotting, exaggeration, repetition, transposition and inversion. Symmetrical plotting is particularly interesting because it recalls Girard's account of the symmetry of action in Greek Tragedy. Seeking justice, the tragic antagonists slide into 'reciprocal violence', consisting in the imitation of each other's blows, which transforms them into doubles or 'warring twins'.[40] The hallucination of a mechanical effect produced by the alterations of their acts is horrifying. As Girard puts it, 'the antagonism that is produced signals the end of distinction' and 'the end of all human justice'.[41] We have also observed (in the 'Methodology') that the symmetrical

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[39] Ibid.
[40] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 57.
[41] Ibid.

structure emerges in Menander whose characters seek justice on the domestic level. In *The Arbitration*, the prudent and sensible judge falls the victim of his own judgement. As Vellacott has pointed out, Menander's plays contain frequent references to Tragedy, often implying that 'the making-up of a quarrel is an easy and obvious theme for comedy'.[42] Vellacott, however, believes that Menander was not a comic writer because he treated justice 'seriously' – 'he was similarly concerned with the real predicaments of humanity'.[43] It is somewhat strange that we are constantly reminded that comedy cannot be serious. Meanwhile, nothing can be more mechanical and farcical than interminable revenge.

It seems that Beckett's earliest exercise in comic drama, which he produced in collaboration with George Pelorson, was based on this structure. Both of them were involved in preparing a play for the annual celebration at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin, in early January 1931. They came up with the idea of a parody of Pierre Corneille's four-act tragedy *Le Cid*: a classical tragedy based on revenge and written in accordance with the dramatic precepts of the French Academy, requiring the unity of time, place and action. Beckett and Pelorson transformed *Le Cid* into a one-act burlesque *Le Kid*, which was described in the programme as 'a Cornelian nightmare'.[44] The playscript has not survived, but we may reconstruct some of its salient features. According to Knowlson, Beckett's specific contribution was

> an alarm clock on stage with him for Don Diègue's monologue in the first act: he was knelt down, placed the clock very carefully on the floor and was midway through his famous 'Ô rage! Ô désespoir!' Ô vieillesse ennemie!' speech when the alarm went off infuriating him and waking up the man on the ladder. This, combined with the speeded-up movements of the hands of the big clock, forced him to go faster until he built up a wild, crazy momentum, producing a torrent of sound […].[45]

Deirdre Bair also describes 'a huge alarm clock with movable hands painted onto a backdrop at the rear of the stage'.[46]

Given the centrality of the clocks, Beckett and Pelorson must have intended to give an emphasis to the disproportion between Time and Action. Revenge in Greek

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[42] Phillip Vellacott, 'Introduction' in *Menander Plays and Fragments; Theophrastus The Characters*, p. 19.
[43] Ibid.
[44] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 120.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 127.

Tragedy implies a complex action, the growth of which Aristotle compared with that of 'a living organism'.[47] As Humphry House has rightly observed, 'this comparison is important because it refutes the charge that Aristotle is describing a formal, dead, mechanical kind of unity'.[48] For the French Academy, revenge was an indispensable element of a 'noble quarrel'.[49] As it appears from Mary Shelley's essays on eminent French writers, the basis on which 'theatrical interest rested' during the Age of Reason was not concerned with the accurate representation of "facts", but with 'the struggle of passions'.[50] Spanish tragedy in the day of Corneille was offering an array of admirable plots. A former secretary of Maria d'Medici prompted Corneille to rewrite "the Cid" of Guillen de Castro, which narrated the story of '*the blow*'[51] received by the father of the "Cid" (played by Beckett) from the father of Chimène (played by Pelorson) – the death of the latter by the youthful hand of the avenging son was the obstacle for Chimène's marrying the slayer of her father. The revenge takes place and the struggle between honour and love ensues.

Beckett and Pelorson must have been delighted to remove the romance from the play and focus on rivalry – especially because Don Diègue's eternal enemy had already been dead by the beginning of the action. A large ladder next to the big clock with Pelorson atop was apparently a prop pointing to "heaven". Beckett's use of an alarm clock as a stage prop was excellent, because it emphasized the discrepancy between two temporal dimensions: the bliss of Pelorson's abiding in something like Bergson's 'duration' and the twenty-four hours of Hell for the eternal victim of injustice. The ringing alarm clock in Beckett's hands must have also been an emblem of 'a wound-up mechanism' (a habit of taking revenge).

The premiere of *Le Kid* was a howling success, though not with Professor Rudmose-Brown. As Knowlson describes it, he sent for Beckett and Pelorson after the performance and told them that their experiment was 'stupid, shameful charade that reflected badly on the entire Department. By the second night Beckett had come to feel that the whole thing was a terrible mistake and dreaded to face an audience again'.[52] It is strange that Rudmose-Brown did not consider that Corneille himself had presented his play as a tragicomedy. It is also noteworthy that the founder of the French tragedy, 'the poet of Glory', started his

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[47] Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 45.
[48] Quoted in T.S. Dorsch's 'Introduction' to *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 19.
[49] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Montaigne, Corneille, Rochefoucauld, Molière, La Fontaine, Pascal* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), p. 63.
[50] Ibid, p. 63.
[51] Ibid, p. 66.
[52] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 120.

career as a writer of comedy, and that it had been his success in comedy that enabled him to go to Paris and establish a company of players in the first place. There he learnt that the action of a play ought to be confined within the space of twenty-four hours; also he heard that his comedies were censored for the meagerness of their plots and the familiarity of their language. According to Mary Shelley, the young Corneille, 'in a sort of bravado, to show what he could do, undertook to write a tragedy full of events all of which should occur during the space of twenty-four hours, and raised the language to a sort of tragic elevation'.[53] Surprised that Corneille had not started out as an outright tragedian, Mary Shelley finds it 'strange' that 'a writer whose merit consists in energy and grandeur should have spent his youth in writing tame and mediocre comedies'.[54]

Before *Le Cid* Corneille had written a comedy called *L'Illusion Comique* in which he transposed the themes of magic, romance and rivalry into a farcical masquerade disguising trivial motivations of the characters. Mary Shelley, a romantic reader, reminds 'the Frenchmen' that Corneille owes his 'initiation into true tragic interest to the Spanish drama'. The Spanish, she insists, are more akin to 'the heroic subjects', which 'the Frenchmen' treat artificially: 'they take ancient names but express modern sentiments'.[55] With regards to 'modern sentiments', one should, perhaps, bear in mind that Corneille was a lawyer in Rouen; he must have been aware that the quarrel between two elderly men could have been easily resolved by a legal suit within the span of twenty-four *real* hours.

Comedy is not in high repute in a society that ties its morals to ideality separated from experience. Beckett and Pelorson were not "revolutionaries" in applying to Corneille 'the method of transposition' on which Bergson dwells at length. 'It excites so much laughter', Bergson writes, 'that some writers have been led to define the comic as exaggeration, just as others have defined it as degradation'.[56] While distinguishing this device as peculiar to the mock-heroic genre, Bergson points out that 'far more refined is the transposition *upwards from below*'.[57] Indeed, to express in reputable language some disreputable idea, to take some 'low-class calling' and describe it in terms of 'the uttermost respectability' would be the easiest way of avoiding moralism. According to Bergson, many instances of this transposition may be found in Thackeray and Gogol – both give us a glimpse of 'an entire system of transpositions' in a hypocritical society. Bergson coins a

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[53] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Montaigne, Corneille, Rochefoucauld, Molière, La Fontaine, Pascal*, p. 63.
[54] Ibid., p. 65.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 62.
[57] Ibid.

witty term – 'a moral organization of immorality', and quotes Gogol: 'Your peculations are too extensive for an official of your rank'.[58] Unfortunately, he fails to connect these transpositions to the question of justice with which he is so much preoccupied at the end.

SECTION 2: HATS AND DOUBLES IN BECKETT'S NOVELS

Earlier on, we mentioned that Bergson describes the rigidity of hats as the dovetailing of the living human soul and the mechanical overlay into each other. Like the natural man of Rousseau, he considers 'a garment' to be generally 'a mechanical tampering with life'.[59] Wearing hats is akin to the crystallization into a type, and, of course, nothing is more ridiculous than the individual becoming a type. While considering 'essential' comic situations in high-class comedy, he suddenly reveals that '*all* character is comic, provided that what we mean by character is the ready-made element in our personality, capable of working automatically'.[60] Bergson speaks of a special case of hypocrisy, which merges with the identity of the character: 'He enters so thoroughly into the *rôle* of a hypocrite that he plays it almost sincerely'.[61] Given this sincerity, there is a danger, Bergson asserts, that such an action may simply stop being comic.

In *Proust*, Beckett rivets top hats to the Boredom – this extreme type of Habit 'with its host of tophatted and hygienic ministers', which he opposes to the 'suffering that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience'.[62] In *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Belacqua meets 'a hatless woman' who sells him four seats in heaven. It seems that her "hatlessness" means that she is not one of those signs that function as mere obstacles, supplying this perverted masochistic transcendence, but a real messenger from "heaven". But in fact, this apparition is only another idealistic construction borrowed, perhaps, from Dostoevsky's faith in the spiritual values of the "common people".

A remarkable rupture in terms of hats occurs in *Murphy*. The eponymous hero is 'not a puppet', it is said, and therefore he never wears hats: 'Murphy never wore a hat, the memories it awoke of the caul were too poignant, especially when he had to take it off'.[63] This comment invites us to appreciate the author's self-irony. Beckett ridicules his own

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 21.
[60] Ibid., p. 73; Bergson's emphasis.
[61] Ibid., p. 71.
[62] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 28.
[63] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Calder Publication, 1993), p. 45.

famous craving after the state of prenatal unconsciousness, the blissful autonomy of an intact narcissist. Murphy's nostalgia for his caul indicates that even the unborn is a creature of Habit. Beckett uses hats to build dual oppositions only to show that they are false or, to put it more accurately, mimetic. Thus, Cooper, Neary's agent, who never takes off his hat, is supposedly a "type" while Murphy is spontaneous. But towards the end of the novel, their identities are swapped. Commanded to take Murphy's ashes to Ireland, Cooper, who no longer wears a hat, pops in a pub, gets drunk and drops the precious ashes on the floor where they become 'one with the vomit'.[64]

In *Watt*, we find a further elaboration on this vomit/hat identity. At one point, Arsene dares to remove his hat: 'without misgiving he takes off his hat […] unbuttons his coat and sits down, proffered all pure and open to the long joys of being himself like a basin to a vomit'.[65] The state of being oneself like a basin to a vomit points to the relationship of the double which consists in the existence of another "me", a reflection in a mirror with which the "I" is always unhappy, although half-consciously. In *Proust*, Beckett links eccentricity – faithful to itself as a basin to a vomit – to 'self-plagiarism'.[66]

In the *Trilogy*, it appears that the hat can be the opposite of Habit because it can be used to salute the other. For Molloy, this gesture is impossible, although he has his hat fastened to his buttonhole by a long elastic lace. This device, reminiscent, no doubt, of Bergson's 'mental sympathy', is used each time when he fancies seeing another human being to remind himself that '[he] is still alive'.[67] We have already seen that the colour grey symbolises a half-acknowledged presence of a rival (as in the case of Foma Fomich Opiskin). 'Flattened against a rock the same colour as myself, that is grey', Molloy 'crouched like Belacqua, or Sordello' aiming to approach a stranger (11). The raising of a hat is such an essential gesture that no theory of *élan vital* is needed to confirm the presence of another human being, 'but in spite of my soul's leap out to him, at the end of its elastic, I saw him only darkly', Molloy insists (11).

Structurally *Molloy* is organized as the hero's quest for his mother. How does Molloy identify his mother? She, who gave birth to him, is hated for this act. The quest for his mother is nothing other than the hero's journey to his womb-tomb, i.e. his being as a 'not-yet-being'. As Ethel Cornwell points out, 'the Beckett hero is crushed by the burden

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[64] Ibid., p. 154.
[65] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 45.
[66] 'It [habit] insists on that most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism – the plagiarism of oneself', in Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 33.
[67] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 11; further references are in the main body of the text.

of consciousness […]. He has neither a god to assume it for him, nor the courage to escape through self-destruction – which he yearns for perpetually'.[68] This desire for the womb-tomb is prior to Molloy's need to write, to create characters: 'unfortunately it is not of them I have to speak but of her who brought me into the world through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct' (16).

Molloy's quest begins on a bicycle, symbolising the process of making art – just as it is described in 'Les Deux Besoins'. It is thus not surprising that the worlds of the *Trilogy* are doubling. Ruby Cohn describes this phenomenon in terms of constantly increasing violence: 'the interplay between fact and fiction […] is so constant, and so increasingly intense, that there is no clear boundary between pain and parody, personal and artistic anguish. The protagonist and his fiction are so closely blended that we can scarcely distinguish one from the other'.[69] Indeed, it seems that the very effort to distinguish between numerous dual oppositions in these texts would go against the author's intention to bring to the foreground their mimetic character. Thus, Molloy speaks of passers-by as 'hard to distinguish from yourself'; Moran, the narrator in the second part of the novel, thinks of Molloy as his double: 'he had only to rise up within me for me to be filled with panting' (113). Whilst insisting on the arbitrariness of mimetic oppositions, Girard blames structuralism for its inability to perceive 'the effacement of differences in the senseless violence of the relationship of the doubles'.[70] But for what purpose did Beckett engineer this mimetic hell? We vaguely sense that his motive had something to do with the very business of writing a novel and with its reception by the public.

At one point, Molloy loses his bicycle and continues to walk on his crutches until his journey takes him to the forest, which resembles Dante's *selva oscura*. In the forest, Molloy meets a stranger whom he asks for the road, but neither of them can understand each other's speech. The murder takes place in a manner resembling the killing of a buzzing insect: 'he wanted to keep me near him', Molloy decided, 'So I smartly freed a crutch and dealt him a good dint on the skull' (84). As a result of this senseless violence, the concretion of the hat with the head takes place and sums up the entire journey: 'I kept losing my hat, the lace had broken long ago, until in a fit of temper I banged it down on my skull with such violence that I could not get it off again' (90). As soon as the hat and the head form a monolithic but never a singular unit, Molloy's quest becomes a perpetual

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[68] Ethel F. Cornwell, 'Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self', in *PMLA*, Vol. 88, No 1, (January 1973), p. 41.
[69] Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, p. 119.
[70] René Girard, 'The Underground Critic', in *To Double Business Bound*, p. 42.

turning, 'describing if not a circle, at least a great polygon', leading him, nonetheless, 'to hope that I was going in a straight line, in spite of everything, day and night, towards my mother' (90). This self-imposed blindness – Molloy keeps his eyes closed – propels him to a ditch: 'The forest ended in a ditch, I don't know why, and it was in this ditch that I became aware of what had happened to me. I suppose it was the fall into the ditch that opened my eyes' (90). The analogy with Dante, ending his wanderings in Hell in nine ditches – one after another – and then escaping from them, is clearly suggested. Molloy's eyes open to 'the light of the plain […] rolling away as far as the eye could see' (90). He recognises the town, the season of the year, which is spring, and begins to hear the birds' singing. Above all, he hears the voice that tells him: 'don't fret Molloy. The help is coming' (91). He also realises that the question about his mother as all other questions are 'ludicrously idle' for the man 'on the plane of pure knowledge' (91). But unlike Dante, Molloy 'lapsed down to the bottom of the ditch' (91). Beckett simply forbids him to escape from hell and the rest of the *Trilogy* continues with the blurring of all differences.

The issue that has been raised in all critical works on the *Trilogy* is summed up by Sharon Jebb in the following way: 'To what extent can the narrator's voices be seen as *representative* of Beckett himself – Molloy, Moran, Malone and the Unnamable?'[71] She seems to be upset that despite the variety of responses, 'the vast bulk of scholarly opinion holds that the *Trilogy* is a kind of autobiographical fiction'.[72] According to Celia Hunt, for example, 'the implied author is a fictional construct which embodies certain norms and values of the real author at the time of writing'.[73] It is not surprising that this bold invitation to associate the unsavoury characters with the values of their creator has produced a counter-reaction (like, for instance, Matthew Feldman's insistence on the opacity of Beckett's fiction). Shall we then forsake any effort to interpret Beckett's 'hell' from an autobiographical perspective?

The fear to recognise the author's intention behind the narrative voices would be fatal to the perception of irony – it would prevent us from responding to Beckett's invitation to share in his awareness of a creative process that always consists in some form of sacrifice. As we have seen, in his letter on I*mitation* and in 'Les Deux Besoins', the process of making art is compared to an author's crucifixion before the public. Beckett's

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[71] Sharon Jebb, *Writing God and the Self: Samuel Beckett and C.S. Lewis* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), p. 12.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Celia Hunt, 'Autobiography and the Psychotherapeutic Process', quoted in Sharon Jebb, *Writing God and the Self*, p. 12.

initial intention to excel in the genre of the novel in order 'to get over J.J.' resulted in the satirical *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* – indeed, "a crucifixion for which there was no demand". He would not agree to publish it until 'some little time after [his] death'.[74] The success and demand came with *Waiting for Godot*, which was largely received as 'an atheist-existentialist play'.[75] In a letter to Alan Schneider, Beckett wrote 'I cannot help feeling that the success of *Godot* has been very largely the result of a misunderstanding or of various misunderstandings'.[76] Quite ironically, *Godot* placed him firmly within the framework of Continental nihilism – the "movement" which he had started to satirise as early as 1929, in 'Assumption' and then in 'Le Concentrisme'. One may speculate on Beckett's reasoning in the following way: If my satire on nihilism is misunderstood and condemned to failure, I have no other choice than to push my subject to the limit of its logical consequences. The principle of disintegration – 'the dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation' – will be the means of taking my critics to hell, which they celebrate as "the limit of writing" and "the limit of consciousness" and "the limit of speech". Indeed, why not give the public what it desires by doing a really honest job? Girard likes to speak of an evolution of an oeuvre in terms of 'a rupture' that confers on the works that follow it a critical attitude towards the earlier works. Perhaps, in Beckett's case, his earlier work – *Dream* – could be used by critics to clarify his later works. Unfortunately, this task does not fit in the framework of this thesis. To continue with the principle of disintegration, we must wander for a while in Dante and Dostoevsky's hells.

SECTION 3: DANTE AND DOSTOEVSKY'S HELL

The analysis of 'Dante and the Lobster' (chapter 3, section 4) has shown that the caricatural figure of Belacqua embodies an anti-Dantean attitude, denying the poet's values. Beckett endowed his hero with a remarkably Joycean mindset regarding Dante. In a review of Ibsen's *Catilina*, published on 21 March 1903, Joyce disparages Dante's modern imitators who 'choose to wander amid [their] shapeless hells and heavens, a Dante without

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[74] Richard Seaver, 'Publisher's Note' to *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, p. vi.
[75] A review in *Times* (13 April, 1956), quoted in Lawrence Harvey, 'Art and the Existential in *en Attendent Godot*', in *PMLA*, Vol. 75, No 1 (March 1960), p. 137.
[76] A letter to Alan Schneider (11 January, 1956), quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 420.

the unfortunate prejudices of Dante'.[77] To avoid such miserable wanderings, Joyce chose to pattern his terrestrial Paradise on Ulysses – not least because Dante had placed this worldly wanderer in hell. According to Dante, Ulysses delayed his return home because of his ambitious pursuit of knowledge. In Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*, Ulysses says:

> Neither fondness for my son nor reverence for my aged father, nor the due love that should have cheered Penelope, could conquer in me the ardor that I had to gain experience of the world, and of human vice and worth.[78]

As we have seen, Joyce identified with Dante as a perennial *expulsé*, a scapegoat, not unlike Shakespeare whom Stephen enigmatically characterizes as 'Christfox in leather trews, hiding, a runaway in blighted treeforks from hue and cry'.[79] Ellmann points out that in all Joyce's texts, the one real poet is always a collective victim. Apart from this role, Joyce treated *The Divine Comedy* as 'Europe's epic' in which he found an inexhaustible supply of 'its phantasms, its allegories and its allusions'.[80]

When Daniela Caselli discusses the distinctiveness of Beckett's attitude towards Dante, in her 'Beckett, Dante and the Archive', it appears similar to Joyce's. She argues that in Beckett's oeuvre the energetic modernist Dante ('the big Dante' of Joyce) 'is supplanted by the image of Laziness itself'.[81] But does 'Laziness' stand in opposition to modernism? Caselli herself discards this dichotomy when she argues that Beckett's interest in Dante was that of 'an archivist'[82] which is the same modernist operation of borrowing material for specific poetic purposes.

The approach proposed in this section tries to avoid mimetic oppositions. 'Dante and the Lobster' and Molloy's end in a ditch suggest that Beckett read Dante as a genius of metaphysical comedy which deals with the vicissitudes of the unhappy consciousness, i.e. a consciousness suffering from its duality. It is this modern mindset, which allowed Beckett, a lecturer on French modernism, to identify Racine, Stendhal, Flaubert and

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[77] James Joyce, a review on Ibsen's *Catilina*, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 101 (footnote).
[78] Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Joyce*, p. 361.
[79] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 314.
[80] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 103, 596.
[81] Daniela Caselli, 'Beckett, 'Dante and the Archive', in *COSMO: Comparative Studies in Modernism*, academia.edu, p. 31.
[82] Ibid., p. 37.

Dostoevsky (MIC 60, 19, 17).[83] For such a consciousness, heaven and hell are not theological or aesthetic categories but a living experience.

Already the opening scene of *The Inferno* presents this experience as the collapse of all significations. The obscure wood in which Dante finds himself symbolises a state of spiritual confusion, stupefaction and boredom: 'I do not know, I cannot rightly say' (I, 10).[84] He knows that a poet is born to praise the beautiful world of God just as it was created 'when Holy Love first moved to being all those lovely things' (I, 39). This truth is visibly represented by a hill – but as he begins to ascend it, 'the foot that drives me always set the lower. I lost all hope of reaching to those heights' (I, 54). Three beasts block his path; the leopard, the lion and the wolf are traditionally interpreted as disordered passions and desires. But soon we learn that Dante's major passion is poetic glory. A stranger whom he encounters in the wood is Virgil, 'the light and glory of all poets' (I, 82), who has always been Dante's model:

> You are my teacher. You, my lord and law. From you alone I took the fine-tuned style that has, already, brought me so much honour (I, 85).

This care for honour and fine-tuned style points to self-irony. Dante is conscious of his poetic oeuvre as imitation. The value of poetry in ancient Rome was that of the superior truth 'when all the gods were lying cheats' (I, 71). Dante's hope that Virgil will confer this faculty on him, Dante, his faithful disciple, is hardly wholehearted (Molloy, as we have seen, killed his "woodman" like a buzzing fly). Thus, we read that Dante was obsessed with Virgil's 'words', which 'flow wide' – '(a river running full)' – he comments in brackets, and continues:

> May this will serve me: my unending care, the love so great, that's made me search your writings through! (I, 81-84)

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[83] 'Similarly [to Racine], Stendhal and Flaubert (the 'Pre-Naturalists' in Beckett's terminology) are presented as 'the real ancestors of the modern novel' because of 'their Dostoevskian duality', quoted in John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, p. 20.

[84] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin Books, 2013), pp. 3, 6; further references are in the main body of the text.

The text reveals that Dante did not envisage an easy restoration of his poetic authenticity. The purpose for which Virgil is invoked is to invite Dante to Hell: 'There is another road. And that, if you intend to quit this wilderness, you are bound to take' (I, 92).

We might be surprised to reveal that Dante's marvellous ironic invention did not escape his modernist readership. Thus, an issue of the *London Literary Gazette* of 7 January 1926 announced that Rossetti's edition of Dante's *La Divina Commedia*, published in the same year, contained a discovery, according to which Dante's *Inferno* ought to be read as an accurate description of 'this present world and its existing inhabitants'.[85] As the reviewer explains, Rossetti called 'the attention of the world' to the message delivered by Dante himself in his dedicatory epistle – '*Poeta agit de Inferno isto in quo peregrinando mereri et demereri possumus*' ('the poet speaks of Hell as a place in which we wander as strangers and pilgrims, and in which we are capable of guilt or merit, becoming obnoxious to punishment, or entitled to reward').

The same phrase from Dante's epistle emerges in an article by J.A. Scartazzini, entitled 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (January-April 1888), an American periodical that examined the relevance of historical philosophers to contemporary thinkers.[86] For Scartazzini, Dante is a modern man because he no longer adheres to popular Christian belief according to which eternity lies beyond our earthly existence. Dante, Scartazzini insists, is concerned with 'the most individual thing in man, his consciousness', and this consciousness is 'subjected to a mighty change as soon as the journey through the dark valley is completed' (21). Consequently, Dante's message to us, the inhabitants of this present world, is this: 'the life hereafter' which we deem non-existent, might lie in wait for us, and become the completion of what we desire in this life. Although Scartazzini does not touch on the question of genre, for us this approach is a good opportunity to elucidate the question why Dante *twice* refers to the *Inferno* as a comedy, and in the second case, it is in obvious contrast to the *Aeneid*, which Virgil designates as an *alta tragedia*.[87]

It is also important that Scartazzini's analysis presents a striking analogy to Bergson's account of high-class comedy, which derives its edge from various stylistic transpositions, striving to reveal hypocrisy or an inverted order of some kind. The comic

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[85] *The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts and Sciences* of January 7, 1926, p. 8.
[86] J.A. Scartazzini, 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vo. 22, No 1/2 (January-March 1888); further references are in the main body of the text.
[87] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, vol., XVI, 127; XXI, 1-2, pp.73, 90.

architectonics of the *Inferno* reveals this style: the deeper Dante and Virgil go to the centre of Hell – '*bolgia*' or 'ditches', inhabited by the hypocrites – the more organic becomes the congruence of 'sins' and 'punishments'. The identity of a hypocrite occupies the place remotest from God and nearest to the ego centre, located by Dante at the centre of the universe. It may be that Dante's descent into hell is 'tragic' in the sense that it is undertaken with the purpose of 'plumbing the depths of the self' inside which he finds his rival Virgil. In this sense, the first Canto describing Dante's confusion, his loss of memory echoes the last circle whose inhabitants experience eternal confusion (Nimrod).

The movement towards the ego centre begins with a vast panorama of unhappiness. The inhabitants of the upper region of hell are the 'wretched souls' who pass their life in a 'comfortable repose', although they never stop complaining and suffering. In this regard, it is necessary to recall Dante's definition of comedy as elegy.[88] In *De vulgaris eloquentia*, Dante asserts that in 'the vernacular, one writes tragically by using the *vulgaris illustris* (the language of noble deeds); comically by using now the *mediocris*, now the *humilis*; and elegiacally by using only the *humilis*'.[89] In Dante's day (see, for instance, John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria* 1231-1235), elegy was defined as the genre 'dealing with the misery of love or as something being joined with the bucolic'.[90] As we listen to the stories told by various characters in the *Inferno*, the combination of the elegiac and the comic is sometimes hard to spot, due, perhaps, to the translation or our remoteness from the context. It is, however, obvious that Dante's language of sentiment is based on the transposition 'upwards from below', in that he expresses in pitiful language some of the vain preoccupations of his characters. Belacqua's complaint about Dante's 'rare movements of compassion in Hell' may be read as Beckett's appreciation of Dante's irony. At least, Dante the poet takes particular care for providing the maximum satisfaction to the desires of his characters. For instance, those who are 'unhappy' in their 'repose' are constantly turned with the wind in a circle; those who suffer from strong passions are turned by 'a mighty storm'; the gluttons are heaped with food.[91]

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[88] According to A. Marigo's theory, Dante's threefold paradigm was based on John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria* (1234); Garland defines elegy as dealing with the misery of love and as something being joined with the bucolic'. At the same time, he says that 'every comedy is an elegy'. There is no doubt that the poets of Dante's day were well acquainted with comic transpositions; quoted in Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante*, p. 6.
[89] Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 3.
[90] Ibid., p. 6.
[91] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, quoted in J.A. Scartazzini, 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', pp. 26, 28.

Those who indulged in sadness and bitterness during their earthly life continue in the same way in Inferno. A sort of satisfaction arises from constant alterations between two extremes – something that Beckett defines in 'Ding Dong' as 'boomerang movement'. While describing the inhabitants of the five upper circles, Scartazzini is surprised that Dante lumped them all together under the category of *Incontinentia*.[92] For instance, "the indolent" and "the angry", grouped together, make no sense. Both types lie 'in the far-extended, dark, greyish-red swamp', differing in that 'the ones in the swamp rise above its surface and storm against one another, whilst the others are under water and, instead of beating each other, scream out miserable lamentations in a gurgling tone and only make known their existence through the bubbles on the surface of the water'.[93] Is not Dante entertaining us here with mimetic oppositions? He comments upon their passion as '*portammo dentro accidioso fummo*' ['we brought inside the assiduous']. The existing translation of '*accidioso*' as 'slothful' is perhaps inaccurate. Both "the angry" and "the indolent" are assiduously *resentful* whereupon the latter pride themselves: 'So, stuck there fast in slime, they hum: "Mournful we were. Sunlight rejoices the balmy air. We, though, within ourselves nursed sullen fumes and come to misery in this black ooze"' (VII, 121).

The story of Paolo and Francesca, the romantic lovers, around whom the late nineteenth-century artists created a cult, is a good example of 'love by another's eye' – Girard uses this phrase from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to encapsulate the two lovers' mimetic fascination for each other (Hermia: 'Oh, Hell! To choose love by another's eyes').[94] Francesca tells the pilgrim that she and Paolo fell in love because they took each other for Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere: 'One day we read together, for pure joy, how Lancelot was taken in Love's palm' (V, 127). Now she resents the author of the romance, Galleotto, calling him 'the pander-penned, the pimp' (V.137). Eternally united, Paolo and Francesca are nonetheless eternally divided by 'that Love which permits […] to know these doubtful pangs': 'And all the while, as one of them spoke on, the other wept' (V, 118, 139).

As we pass the threshold of Dis ('the city of Hell!'), an inverted world opens out before us in which everything is based on what might be called the principle of "distinguishing oneself". Dante is the first to be distinguished for his birth in Florence – his accent betrays him ('your accent manifests that you were born a son of that great

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[92] J.A. Scartazzini, 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', p. 34.
[93] Ibid., p. 33.
[94] René Girard, 'The Mimetic Desire of Paola and Francesca', in *To Double Business Bound*.

fatherland' (X, 25)). Traditionally the inhabitants of this circle are marked as "heretics". Dante, however, does not use this term. Instead, he recognises them as the representatives of the Florentine nobility, lying in their sepulchres. Scartazzini does not really discern the theme of nobility running throughout the canto. Eager to establish the congruence of sins and punishments, he jumps at the conclusion, suggested by Virgil, that these sinners are allowed to enjoy their sepulchres because they did not believe in the immortality of their souls. 'All of them', Virgil says, 'are the disciples of the Epicurus school, who say the body dies, so too the soul' (X, 13). Dante, however, focuses on their enduring "noble" souls and we begin to sense the subtlety of his irony. One of these nobles – a Ghibelline – questions Dante about his forbears. Having learnt that the poet's ancestors stood against his ancestors 'in fierce hostility', he is glad to announce that Dante's ancestry was 'scattered wide' (X, 46). 'The other noble soul' – a Guelf – disdains his political rivals, 'how dare those burghers, in their laws, oppose themselves so viciously to mine?' (X, 82). The word 'sepulchre' suggests that Dante's nobility is not unlike the scribes and the Pharisees whom Christ calls 'whitewashed sepulchres' (Matthew 23: 27, 29): 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets, and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, "if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets"'. But they are already prepared to crucify Christ just as they would crucify anyone who threatens their establishment.

Dante was condemned to exile by patriots of this kind. The Florentines, proud of their land, never stopped fighting with each other because each faction deemed itself worthier than the other. Due to their symmetrical rivalries, the language in which they expressed their noble sentiments became corrupt. Dante, who himself 'drank from Arno before [he] had teeth', mocks those who are so proud of their particular dialect as though it was 'the very one which was Adam's'.[95] Caselli finds 'Dante's indignation with anyone who gives primacy to his own narrow reality' contradictory: 'the passage in which Dante describes himself as someone "for whom the world is fatherland as the sea is for fish" is followed by the declaration of his affection for Florence'.[96] It is, perhaps, difficult for modern scholars to link 'fatherland' (inhabited by human patriots) to the sea (inhabited by fish) – and both to their timeless creator to whom Dante refers. His comedy helps to remove this contradiction. As one of the entombed nobles observes: 'all our knowledge

[95] Quoted in Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante*, p. 4.
[96] Daniela Caselli, 'Beckett, 'Dante and the Archive', p. 30.

will be wholly dead when all the doors of future time are closed' (X, 106). We may define the congruence of the "noble" soul's sin and punishment in the following way: one who worships his or her narrow reality will be comfortably entombed within its limits.

Beckett addresses the theme of patriotism and language in his comparative essay on Dante and Joyce ('Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce'). He quotes the fragment in which Dante reminds the Tuscans that reality is a broader place:

> On reading his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* we are struck by his complete freedom from civic intolerance. He attacks the world's Portadownian: '*Now whoever reasons in so repugnant a way as to think that his birthplace is the most delightful place under the sun, he will also cherish above all others his own dialect, i.e. his mother tongue. To me, however, for whom the whole world is my fatherland* […]'.[97]

Beckett is no less ironic than Dante when he draws comparison between Dante and Joyce's ways of creating their languages ('an adequate literary form'). Like Joyce, Dante found the dialects spoken by his compatriots inadequate because of 'the corruption common [to all of them]'.[98] Beckett quotes another passage from *De vulgari eloquentia* in which Dante declares that he is seeking a new language ('vernacular') for his comedy: 'almost all the Tuscans are stuck in their foul manner of speaking … there is no doubt whatever, that the vernacular language we are seeking must be something very different from the one used by Tuscans'.[99] What was that ideal language which Dante was seeking? Beckett observes that it '*could* have been spoken by an ideal Italian […], but which in fact was certainly not spoken nor ever had been'.[100] Why not? For a very simple reason: 'Dante wrote what was being spoken in the streets of his own town, whereas no creature in heaven or earth spoke the language of *Work in Progress*'.[101] Not to dispose of 'this [would be] attractive parallel' between Dante and Joyce, Beckett assures his readers that with regard to the latter's linguistic innovation, 'it is reasonable to admit that an international phenomenon might be capable of speaking it, just as in 1300 none but an inter-regional phenomenon could have spoken the language of the Divine Comedy'.[102] One has a strong suspicion that by the 1300

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[97] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', the passage quoted above is trans. by Lawrence Rainey, in *Modernism: An Anthology*, p. 1069; Beckett's italics.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid; Beckett's ellipse.
[100] Ibid., Beckett's emphasis.
[101] Ibid., p. 1070.
[102] Ibid.

'inter-regional phenomenon' Beckett meant the dwellers of Dante's hell who speak that mixture of the *vulgaris humilis* and the *vulgaris mediocris*, which Dante found appropriate for his comedy. Dante's attitude towards the worshipping of ancestry must have cautioned Beckett against partaking as a critic in one of the most tenacious modernist obsessions – namely, the revival of national roots or 'tradition', led by Eliot, Yeats and Pound. The authors of *Samuel Beckett's Library* have captured the writer's scepticism concerning this fashion, expressed in his marking of the following passage in Jules Renard's *Journal*: 'Honour your father, your mother and Divine Virgil''.[103] In *Proust*, Beckett refers to Dante as a true prophet ('because he was an artist and not a minor prophet') whose allegory cautions us against the worship of the dead gods[104] – those noble myths of the past which often serve the purposes of the narrow-minded patriots striving to achieve national unity at the expense of their victims.

The fifth *bolgia* of Dante's *Inferno* gives a broad panorama of the symmetrical rivalries raging between its inhabitants, the *barattieri*. It is this circle where Dante refers to his work as 'a comedy' ('So on we went from bridge to bridge, speaking of things that I shan't, in my comedy, commit to song' (XXI, 1)). It is rather difficult to find an exact equivalent for the word '*baratteria*' in Dante's sense, as it is difficult to say in what their sin and punishment consist. For all one can see, they belong to numerous factions (including literary factions; XXI, 78), each stealing each other's ranks and rewards – and, above all, finding in this business the fulfilment of their passions. Dante does not even try to separate one 'gang' from another, though he never forgets to emphasize the mirroring effect they produce: 'If I', [one of them] said, 'were leaded mirror glass, I could not make your outer image mine more swiftly than I grasp your inward stress' (X, 100). Scartazzini provides an interesting comment: 'They all mediate nothing but revenge and treason against one another. And the traitor at last betrays himself, as he knows only too well that the betrayed would betray him and he begrudges them that *pleasure* – the pleasure of revenge'.[105]

Dante's ditches begin with Canto XVIII, and so far, we have been through four of them. The hypocrites appear as '*frati gaudenti*' (the Knights of Saint Mary, boasting among its members elite politicians and poets) at the end of Canto XXIII, and the tone of Dante's verse changes. Instead of the raucous humour of Cantos XXI and XX, an

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[103] Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, pp. 107, 108
[104] According to Beckett, Dante 'could not prevent his allegory from becoming heated and electrified into anagogy', i.e. a scriptural exegesis, in *Proust*, p. 79.
[105] J.A. Scartazzini, 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', p. 79

atmosphere of solemnity and holiness sets in. Dante himself partakes of this atmosphere as he commences a solemn invective against one of the 'good brothers': '"O brothers! All the harm that you …" but said no more' (XXIII, 109). Suddenly, the image of 'the One Crucified' appeared to him and reminded him of 'the Pharisees' (XXIII, 110). To depict the holy and the knightly, Dante resorts to a clothes metaphor as an element of identity that is *worn* rather naturally possessed. Dante calls his hypocrites 'the painted tribe' ('*gente dipinta*') – the souls that grew together with their garments – just as Molloy grew together with his hat. Their exterior and interior outfit express their disdain for the contingent world. They wear cowls (XXIII, 61), the garment of the monk, a sign of inner ascesis. The hood covers their eyes ere they were tempted by evil (XXIII, 61, 62). They are 'faint in appearance and overcome with toil' (XXIII, 60). The congruence of their sin and punishment is so perfect that Scartazzini calls it 'reality': 'The appearance that the hypocrites wished to give themselves has become a terrible reality'.[106]

As readers of the *Inferno*, we are safe in the sense that we can easily identify 'the painted tribe' as well as other sinners as a species of degradation. However, the very title 'Inferno' rather suggested to the majority of Dante's modernist readers that the inhabitants of hell deserve their pity and even admiration. If Dante's irony (something that Bergson calls 'comic transpositions') is not necessarily obvious, it would be relevant to pose the following question: why can't the writer of metaphysical comedy be more direct and more persuasive in his opinions? The answer, perhaps, can be found in the ninth bolgia devoted to the sowers of scandal (civil discord). It contains political and religious figures from antiquity to Dante's time. It has rarely been observed that Dante included in this category a representative of the *belle lettres* – the troubadour poet Bertran de Born whose poetry he had previously praised in *De vulgaris eloquentia*. Now, Bertran appears carrying his own severed head like a lantern. Dante presents this surreal apparition as the emblem of the double: 'Himself he made a lamp for his own light. So here were two in one and one in two' (XXVIII, 124). How does this image respond to our question?

It certainly highlights the poet's self-awareness as a potential sower of dissent. The poetic word is so powerful that the statement of the poet's values, which are only the values of a moralist partaking in the rivalries of his day, can lead to even greater harm than that caused by politicians and the clergy. Conscious of this danger, Dante does not exclude Virgil and himself from the number of these 'melancholic madmen' who inhabit the ninth

[106] Ibid., p. 53.

ditch. One of them takes the travelling couple for the condemned: 'who are you, who there sniff down at us and so perhaps are slow to meet the harm that you've been sentenced to for your own crime?' (XXVIII, 43).

One time, Dante was passionately engaged in a debate about the nobility, held by poets of the period. Initially, he supported Guido Guinizzelli, who extolled the ennobling power of love, asserting that nobility was not dependent upon birth alone. The rival party, led by Guittone d 'Arezzo (a member of the *frati gaudenti*) defined nobility as a status granted by ancestry. Eventually, Dante refuted both views and wrote in the fourth canzone of his *Convivio* that nobility is 'the flowering of the seeds of happiness and virtue, seeds placed in the soul by God and nourished to fruition by love'.[107] Although nobody has ever doubted that Dante's genius sprang from such seeds, Scartazzini points out that for his contemporaries, 'it did not require any particular penetration to take from the essay on monarchy and from some of the poet's letters, the plausible proof that he too incited the children against the mother – on the one hand the Christians against the Church, on the other, the Florentines against their native city'.[108]

In making this point, Scartazzini refers to the lines in which Dante admits that all the truths of this world are relative and therefore the poet should, perhaps, remain silent: 'Always, to every truth that looks, in face, like lies, one ought (quite firmly) bar the lip lest, guiltless, what one says should still bring shame' (XVI, 124). However, he cannot remain silent ('I cannot, though, be silent') and 'swears' loyalty to truth by 'every rhyme of his comedy' (XVI, 128). Shall we not then consider Dante's wanderings in hell as this *practical via negativa* that eventually has entitled his comedy to reward – one that is ratified, even if unwittingly, by the "judgement" of posterity? Scartazzini concludes his study on the congruence of sins and punishments with Dante's epistle: 'the poet speaks of Hell as a place in which we wander as strangers and pilgrims, and in which we are capable of guilt or merit, becoming obnoxious to punishment, or entitled to reward'.

Dante's wanderings in Hell end in the ditch, which contains the traitors against sovereigns and benefactors. The figure par excellence is Satan whose three faces are parodic reflections of the Trinity. While upon his entering 'Great Dis', the pilgrim had been prepared to die of fear, now, as he is about to leave hell, he throws his last glance on Lucifer only to see him as a kind of minus sign: 'Raising my eyes, I thought that I should

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[107] Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, quoted in Sarah R. Blanchei (*Politics and Justice in Late Medieval Bologna, in The Edinburg Law Review*, vol. 16, 2019), p. 297.
[108] J.A. Scartazzini, 'On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante's *Inferno*', p. 72.

see Lucifer where I, just now, had left him, but saw instead his legs held upwards there […]. Where is the ice? And why is that one there fixed upside down? (XXXIV: 88, 103). It could be said that the last ditch opened his eyes to his own resentment which had motivated him to write his comedy and which he is now leaving behind. Some commentators claim that Dante called his poem 'a comedy' because it has a happy ending, but the happy ending is no longer a comedy. Dante's reward is poetry: 'Yonder the one awakens and finds himself in heaven. He sits up yonder and thinks of nothing but singing hallelujah'.[109]

Dostoevsky considered *The Divine Comedy* a model work in which the author managed to capture the essence of his era. The annals of Dostoevsky's life and work contain only three references to Dante,[110] but, as Golosovker rightly observes, in order to understand how the Hell in Dostoevsky's work is made, it is necessary to address the writer's vocabulary, in which the word 'hell' has a particular meaning. The motif of 'wearing hell on the heart' is manifested in his early works – particularly in *The Double* in which the recuperation of meaning is achieved through a mere recognition of the doubles. The protagonist Golyadkin is a government clerk whose life is so dull that when he meets his double – a certain Golyadkin Junior – this does not surprise him in the least. Later, however, the double begins to treat Golyadkin Senior with a contemptuous disrespect. Occasionally, Golyadkin believes that it is possible to make peace with his double, but just as his enthusiasm grows, the appearances of the double multiply and Golyadkin ends up in a lunatic asylum.

An attentive reader of 'The Devil: Ivan's Nightmare', in *The Brothers Karamazov*, may recognize in Ivan's hallucination a continuation of Dante's Inferno. In the first place, Ivan's devil is recognizably Ivan's double. He appears wearing an old-fashioned suit and looks like a member of the declining nobility ('a well-bred gentleman who was rather hard up. It looked as though he belonged to the class of idle landowners').[111] Ivan dislikes him greatly, although he never stops insisting that the devil is not 'an independent entity', but he, Ivan himself (749). The devil perceives Ivan's disappointment. Marking his 'romantic strain' ('so much derided already'), he understands why such an aestheticist like Ivan is

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[109] Ibid., p. 83.
[110] For instance, Dostoevsky refers to *The Divine Comedy* in the 'Preface' to Hugo's *Notre Dame*, published in his journal *Time* (1862). Here he asserts that Dante encapsulated the main task standing before modern humanity, consisting in 'the salvation of dead souls', in M.G. Kurghan, Dante's Concept of Hell in Dostoevsky's Creative Perspective (М. Г. Курган, «Дантовская Концепция Ада в Творческой Перцепции Достоевского», http://journals.tsu.ru/imago/en/&journal_page=archive&id=1192&article_id=24721
[111] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 2, p. 747; further references are in the main body of the text.

angry (761). The latter would rather prefer to see his Lucifer appearing 'in a red glow, "in thunder and lightning", with scorched wings' – instead of this 'vulgar devil' (761). The whole show smells of a bad 'vaudeville' (760). The devil, in fact, reveals his 'secret', consisting in his role of being 'the indispensable minus sign' (762). If that sign is taken away, he says, there will be nothing to do except singing 'hosannah' (755). The ecclesiastic idea of a constant singing of praises, praying, and hearing sermons, hardly promises a very intellectual life. This is what the devil asserts, and, suddenly, we find the most hilarious parody of the writer Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, composed by Dostoevsky himself.

A writer like him, the devil says, is not happy with just singing hosannah. It is necessary that his "hosannah" should 'be tried in the crucible of doubt, and so on in the same vein' – and that is what this comedy is for (755). The poor devil, we are told, was employed to negate by "a critical department", and the agency of the genre consists precisely in the demand of self-annihilation. The devil mentions "they" as his employers: '*We* understand this comedy: for instance, I frankly and openly demand annihilation for myself. No, they say, you must live because there'd be nothing without you'.[112]

We might be surprised to learn that Dostoevsky would quote exactly this phrase as his own words while assailing a liberal critic, a year later, in one of the critical periodicals for which he was writing.[113] As a critic, he declares that 'It is not like a child that I believe in Christ and confess his faith, but my hosannah has passed through the great crucible of doubts'.[114] In his novel, the devil notes that 'people accept this comedy as something serious for all their indisputable intelligence. That is their tragedy' (755). What did Dostoevsky mean by thus colliding comedy and tragedy? He himself called them (referring to comedy as 'satire') the 'two sisters who go hand in hand, and the name of both of them, taken together, is *truth*'.[115] He wrote these words in his *Diary of a Writer*, in an entry dated December 1876 – an intermediate period between *Demons* (1870) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Just like Dante attacking *frati gaudenti*, the Dostoevsky of the period was immersed in the endless quarrelling between the Slavophile and the Occidentalist factions around this perennial concern with identity and nobility.

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[112] Ibid. In the original text, there is the word 'comedy' instead of 'farce', in Ф.М. Достоевский, *Братья Карамазовы* (Москва: Издательство Акт, 2018), стр. 821.
[113] Steven Cassedy mentions this circumstance in his *Dostoevsky's Religion*: 'The response was to appear in that journal in the months following what turned out to be the final number (for January 1881, when Dostoevsky died)', in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 90.
[114] Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, quoted in Steven Cassedy, *Dostoevsky's Religion*, p. 90
[115] Quoted in the 'Introduction' to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, p. x; Dostoevsky's emphasis.

To describe the level of the Hell in *The Devils*, one may perhaps apply Dante's term '*baratteria*' to the symmetrical passions of the possessed gravitating around the centre of Dostoevsky's 'Dis', Stavrogin. Stavrogin is doomed to boredom since everything which comes into his possession loses its value in the very act of being possessed. His "askesis" has reached the limit beyond which there is nothing to write about, but his *ennui* is enough to engender the hysteria of idolatry around him. Dostoevsky's satire can be exemplified by the 'knockabout' between Stavrogin and Verhovensky – a leader of the local socialists – who explains to Stavrogin why the movement pursuing the goal of providing happiness for the Russian people offers him 'the honour of a job':[116]

> [Verhovensky]: "There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before … Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, the earth will weep for its old gods. … Well, then we shall bring forward … whom?"
> [Stavrogin]: "Whom."
> "Ivan the Tsarevitch".
> "Who-m?"
> "Ivan the Tsarevitch. You! You!"
> Stavrogin thought a minute.
> "A pretender?" he asked suddenly, looking with intense-surprise at his frantic companion. "Ah! So that's your plan at last!"
> "We shall say that he is 'in hiding' […]. Do you know the magic of that phrase, 'he is in hiding'? […] You are beautiful and proud as a God; you are seeking nothing for yourself, with a halo of the victim round you 'in hiding'. The great thing is the legend".[117]

Having only slaves around him, Stavrogin cannot desire. He simply goes off, not with a bang but with a whimper. Kirillov plays the leading part in this comedy demanding self-annihilation. We have discussed Kirillov's prototype – Kant – on whose "case" against the laws of nature Dostoevsky based Kirillov's self-destruction. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, we find a philosopher resembling Kant in hell. When Ivan, tortured by the question whether God exists or not, asks the devil, the latter replies that he does not know and that he is not the only one like that.

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[116] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, tran. by Constance Garnett (New York: Dover Publications, 2017), p. 429.
[117] Ibid.

It goes, he says, that in hell, we have a certain philosopher, who repudiated laws of nature and, above all, the future life: 'He died thinking he'd go straight to death and darkness, and, lo and behold, there was the future life before him. He was astounded and indignant. "This", he said, "is against my principles". So, for that he was condemned […] to walk in darkness a quadrillion kilometres (we have adopted the metric system, you know), and when he had finished the quadrillion, the gates of heaven would be opened to him' (756). Given that Kant's method of the understanding is based on the totality of the series of conditions, it seems that Dostoevsky's Hell is also organized on the principle of the congruence of sins and punishments. In *The Devils*, the interval between these terms is narrowed to such a degree that the danger of taking Kirillov for a saint is ever possible. In participating in the socialists' activities Kirillov suddenly realizes that they are in hell. So, he comes up with his idea of "salvation". By killing himself Kirillov would become the man-god. The inverse of the imitation of Christ would open the gates of the terrestrial paradise based on the principle of mortality.

We can see that in Dostoevsky, the transposition "upwards from below" has reached its limit. This tragicomedy, however, did not bring him satisfaction. We know that he had planned to write a "poem" (a novel) based on a tripartite structure similar to Dante's *Commedia*, which suggests that he needed to *form* his Paradise, or at least a Purgatory. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, he accomplished this task.

Although this section deals with this "tragi-comedy of self-annihilation" and the Inferno, one aspect of Dostoevsky's escape into Paradise requires attention because it is related to Beckett's comedy in *Murphy*. In a letter to McGreevy dated 7 July 1936, Beckett speaks about the 'Aliosha mistake', which he had tried to avoid during the composition of *Murphy* but could not avoid in 'the mortuary scene'.[118]

Beckett might have been referring to Alyosha's expectations concerning the dispensation of justice from God upon the death of his beloved elder Zossima. Alyosha and the elder is the main theme of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The writing of the novel was affected by Dostoevsky's personal tragedy. In May 1878, his three-year-old son Alyosha died. The grief-stricken Dostoevsky went to visit the Optina Pustyn' monastery famous for its elders. The novel contains a detailed description of this institution as an alternative to the official ecclesiastical establishment.

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[118] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 350.

The elder dies and the whole town expects a sign from God ('such immediate expectation of something extraordinary', one of the monks notes, 'shows a levity possible to worldly people but unseemly in us').[119] The body is brought into a cell and the crowds are gathering. As a monk reads the Gospel, the question of opening the windows is raised, but this thought is already a blasphemy. A scandal breaks out when the breath of corruption begins to spread. Although the elder 'never did any harm to anyone', the question "Why do they think him so saintly?" begins to be asked and repeated (388). Dostoevsky is mocking collective idealism: 'After three o'clock the rush of worldly visitors was greatly increased and this was, no doubt owing to the shocking news' (389).

Alyosha was in the crowd outside, and soon we see him leaving the monastery. The next scene is the atheist Rakitin coming upon Alyosha lying supine under a tree. The knockabout between them helps Alyosha to realize his mistake, but prior to this, Dostoevsky's narrator questions his faith: 'But again, it was not miracles that he needed, but only "higher justice", which, according to his belief, had been violated, and it was this that dealt such a sudden and cruel blow to his heart. And what does it matter that this "justice" had in Alyosha's expectations inevitably assumed the form of miracles to be performed immediately by the dust of his former beloved guide?' (398).

Rakitin brings him down to the earth by sneering at his grief: 'Oho, so that's how we are!', he exclaims when Alyosha sulkily sends him away, 'Started shouting at people like other mortals, have you? And one of our angels, too! Well, Alyosha, old man, you have surprised me, you know. I mean it […]. But, surely, you are not so upset because your old man is stinking the place out? You did not seriously believe that he'd start pulling miracles out of the air? […] So now you're angry with your God now, are you? Up in arms because he hasn't been promoted, that his name hasn't appeared in the Honours List! Oh, you fools!' (400). Alyosha suddenly recognizes in himself his brother Ivan: '"I haven't taken up arms against God", he says, "I simply "don't accept his world"', Alyosha quotes Ivan with a forced smile (400).

The 'Aliosha mistake', Dostoevsky shows us, comes from the confusion of faith with fact. This is not only Alyosha's mistake. Each person in the crowd expects a miracle as the proof of the fact that the elder was a saint. Paradoxically, for modern idealistically minded rationalists, kindness and goodness do not prove a person's saintliness. Dostoevsky highlights the absurdity of linking justice (which should be common to all people) to

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[119] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 2, p. 384; further references are in the main body of the text.

miracles, which are understood as a higher justice for a particular individual. Paradoxically, the lack of faith forces the idealist-rationalist to reject the laws of nature presumed to be incompatible with his moral principles. This division between the mind and the body, the individual and the other, is the object of comedy in *Murphy*.

To contrast this 'bad faith' to what Dostoevsky understood by faith, we need to turn to 'the elder's story according to Alexey Karamazov's manuscript' written after the elder's death. Therein we find the vision of life where there is no place for death. It begins with the elder's memory of his brother dying of consumption. His features resemble those of Dostoevsky himself ('short-tempered, irritable, but good-natured and not sarcastic, and quite unusually taciturn'). Markel's conversion occurs within the period of a few weeks following Palm Sunday. Previously opposed to religion he suddenly begins fasting and going to church. What astounds the people around him is that joy which overwhelms him, and which they ascribe to his illness. '"Don't cry, mother darling", he used to say, "I shall live for a long time […]. Life is a paradise and we are all in Paradise, only we don't want to know it, and if we wanted to we'd have heaven on earth tomorrow'.[120]

In the light of this vision, the question of justice is resolved once and for all times. The natural order established by God is wrought with miracles. The Alyosha-Ivan identity manifests itself as the choice between self-certainty and faith. What Ivan sees as a horrible series of conditions or Euclidean geometry is 'harmony' from Markel's point of view. It is the world where responsibility is shared: 'everyone of us is responsible for everyone else in every way, and I most of all'.[121] In the original text, we have the word 'guilty' (виноват) instead of 'responsible', therefore this responsibility suggests the relegation of final justice to the 'only being [who] can forgive everything, everyone and everything and for everything': 'Thou are just, O Lord, for thy ways are revealed'.[122]

In Dante's Inferno we find those who deem 'God's judgement passive' in the *bolgia* assigned to the miracle performers, 'each wondrously seemed to be reversed […]; and because none might before him look, they were compelled to advance with backward gait' (XX, 34). Belacqua, resenting Dante's line '*Here pity lives when it is* dead' refers to this bolgia. We have also seen Watt moving 'back to front' and Dostoevsky's Kant walking his quadrillion kilometers. Dante, Dostoevsky and Beckett so much coincide in their desire to renounce the only sin which they invariably expose as the most absurd – the

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[120] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 338.
[121] Ibid., p. 339.
[122] Ibid., p. 288.

sin of rejecting the world and establishing instead metaphysical justice. This comedy laughs at the tragedy of 'the dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation'.

SECTION 4: MURPHY

In the autumn of 1934, while living in London, Beckett began work on a story about a young Irishman, a down-at-heel intellectual and solipsist like himself, also living in London. Gradually the story evolved into the novel *Murphy*. By the spring of 1936 Beckett felt that he had reached the point where he could submit it for publication. After a familiar scenario of repeated rejections, *Murphy* was accepted by Routledge in December 1937. It came out in March of the following year.[123]

While working on *Murphy*, Beckett felt that it was 'really a most unsavoury and not very honest work', and often reported to McGreevy that it was going 'from bad to worse' and that he had lost any interest in it.[124] It will be interesting to connect this disappointment to the problem of identity, which comes to the surface in the reviews Beckett published over that period and later on. We have already mentioned 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin' and 'The Essential and the Incidental'. In the latter, Beckett praises O'Casey's knockabouts because they allow his 'material to escape' from being stated in terms of opinion.[125] In 'Intercessions', he defines art as an activity related to the 'two needs': one is stating opinion ('no more (!) than the approximately adequate and absolutely non-final formulation'), and the other is 'the absolute predicament of particular human identity'. A statement of opinion is referred to as something that should be avoided by all means: if 'art is necessarily critical', it is 'not of opinion, still less of faction', but something that is 'in haste to be abolished' though 'it cannot pause to be stated'.[126]

The key to such hesitations and contradictions may be found in his 1935 letter to McGreevy (on *Imitation*) in which he refuses 'to read "goodness" and "disinterestedness" every time for "God" and therefore would like to 'replace a principle of faith, absolute and infinite, by one personal and finite of fact […], in the interest of a very baroque

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[123] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, pp. 234, 269, 284.
[124] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 337.
[125] 'The Impulse of material to escape and be consumed in its own knockabouts', in Samuel Beckett, 'The Essential and the Incidental', in *Disjecta*, p. 82.
[126] Samuel Beckett, 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin', in *Disjecta*, p. 91.

solipsism'.[127] What he refuses to admit, however, is that the principle of 'personal and finite fact' means nothing other than stating an opinion. This dichotomy between 'fact' and 'faith' is related to the problem of identity qua nobility, which was at the centre of the literary and political life of the 1930s. With W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, the positivist approach to history came under fierce attack as inadequate to account for the truth of the individual. In one of his proclamations, Pound wrote: 'great works of art are lords over fact, over race-long recurrent moods, and over tomorrow'.[128] In his review of Ezra Pound's *Make It New*, Beckett ironically repeats Pound's statements of 'fact', and eventually refers to his teaching as 'education by provocation' and 'Spartan maieutics'.[129]

In 'Recent Irish Poetry', published in 1934, Beckett launched a satirical attack on the principle of individuation stated as an index of advanced self-awareness. He proposed to divide all 'Irish poets' (some of whom are not Irish) into two camps – the antiquarians and the thermolaters. Those who have a higher self-awareness belong to the thermolaters; those whose self-awareness is not so advanced belong to the antiquarians. The result is the same, 'rupture in the lines of communication':

> I propose as rough principle of individuation in this essay, the degree in which the younger Irish poets evince awareness of the new thing that has happened, or the old thing that has happened again, namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook. The thermolaters – and they pullulate in Ireland – adoring the stuff of song as incorruptible, uninjurable and unchangeable, never at a loss to know when they are in the Presence, would no doubt like this amended to the breakdown of the subject. It comes to the same thing – rupture in the lines of communication.[130]

Speaking about 'the breakdown of the object' and the 'rupture of the lines of communication', Beckett addresses the same concern, which he raised in 'Le Concentrisme': in the absence of God ('Kant's Thing'), everyone becomes a god and therefore cannot avoid the 'anti-social braying' ('dispersion of concentrisme'). In 'Recent Irish Poetry', he refers to both groups as 'victims of the centrifugal daemon'.[131] That

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[127] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 258.
[128] Quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 6.
[129] Samuel Beckett, 'Ex Cathezra', in *Disjecta*, p. 79.
[130] Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', in *Disjecta*, p. 70.
[131] Ibid., 73.

Beckett is acting as a satirical writer is evident from the very first page of the review. He makes "a proposal" whose absurdity transpires in its epithets ('the thermolaters'), its advices (enumerated as various possibilities of what should be done) and, overall, indicates the style typical of all such proposals, namely, that *of false enumerations and false antitheses*. They are stated to reveal the sameness of the oppositions:

> This position [based on the 'principle of individuation'], needless to say, is not peculiar to Ireland or anywhere else. The issue between the conventional and the actual never lapses, not even when the conventional and the actual are most congruent. But it is especially acute in Ireland, thanks to the technique of our leading twilighters.[132]

More specifically, Beckett reacts to the quarrel between the proponents of the literary tradition. He quotes loosely a line from Yeats's epigrammatic poem 'The Three Movements' (1932) in which Yeats derided the modernists, calling them 'the fish gasping on the shore'.[133] Railing against the bankruptcy of modernity, Yeats identified himself and those of his school as 'the last romantics'. For Eliot, Yeats was a man whose feelings were 'crude', being 'directed to the objects […] which are not fixed', therefore, 'His remoteness is not an escape from the world, for he is innocent of any world to escape from; his procedure is blameless, but he does not start from where we do. His mind is, in fact, extreme in egotism, and as often with egotism, remains a little crude; crude indeed, as from its remoteness one would expect'.[134] Yeats, on the contrary, saw his poetry as the 'ancestral memory' without which 'no new man' could discover beauty and achieve 'the understanding of himself'.[135]

Yeats dedicated his poetic gift to the Anglo-Irish 'minority',[136] which became increasingly unhappy in the Irish Free State. Quite ironically, at the early stage of its formation, Yeats contributed a lot to the national dignity. Thus in 1914 he wrote to his

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[132] Ibid., p. 70.
[133] See the discussion of this poem in David A. Ross, *Critical Companion to William Butler Yeats: A Literary Reference to His Life*, p. 245.
[134] T.S. Eliot, quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry*, p. 112.
[135] W.B. Yeats, *Poetry and Tradition* (1907), quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry*, p. 72.
[136] In his famous eulogy on the Anglo-Irish in the Free State's Senate, in 1925, Yeats objected to the voted decision to outlaw divorce: 'I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority […]. You have defined your position and gave us a popular following. If we have not lost our stamina then your victory will be brief, and your defeat final, and when it comes this nation will be transformed'; quoted in Graham Price's 'Purgatory Lecture: Edinburgh University', July, 2013.

friend Olivia Shakespear: 'Politics are growing heroic […] and their organizer [De Valera] tells me it was my suggestion'.[137] However, in 1922 he was not far from the opinion of his friend George Russell who told Yeats that Ireland was 'a country given over to the Devil'.[138] Russell was, in a sense, Yeats's spiritual father, having inspired his interest in Oriental mysticism when Yeats studied in the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. What Eliot attacked as 'crudeness', Yeats rendered as 'a symbolism handled by the generations, a mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks'.[139] Beckett enumerates Yeats's 'disembodied' gods as 'an iridescence of themes – Oisin, Cuchulain, Maeve, Tir-nanog, the Tain Bo Cuailgne, Yoga, the Crone of Beare – segment after segment of cut and dried sanctity and loveliness'.[140]

Although Sinead Mooney argues that 'Recent Irish Poetry' should not be read in terms of 'a straightforward binarism', her conclusion that 'we are on firmer ground reading 'Recent Irish Poetry', as John Pilling suggests, if we regard it as 'a precipitate in prose'', does not really neutralize this binarism.[141] It is possible to suggest that Beckett ridiculed *both* camps, which deemed to be radically different. Blaming Yeats for formalism ('Mr W.B. Yeats, as he wove the best embroideries, so he is more alive than any of his contemporaries or scholars'), Beckett is hardly sympathetic with 'the artist' from the other group:

> The artist who is aware of this [the breakdown or the rupture of the lines of communication] may state the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects; he may state it as no-man's-land, Hellespont or vacuum, according as he happens to be feeling resentful, nostalgic or merely depressed.[142]

Beckett ridicules George Russell (A.E. mocked in *Murphy*), who was notable for his kindness and peacemaking amongst his quarrelling colleagues.[143] Picking up on his theosophical activities, Beckett describes him as 'thoroughly galvanized by the protracted

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[137] *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry*, p. 2
[138] According to Seamus Deane, 'the effect of [Yeats's] re-writings [of the Irish romantic tradition] was to transform the blame for the drastic condition of the country from the Ascendancy to the Catholic middle-classes or to their English counterparts', in 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' (Derry, 1985), pp. 7-8.
[139] W.B. Yeats, 'The Tragic Theatre', quoted in *Yeats's Mask: Yeats's Annual No. 19*, edited by Margaret Mills Harper, Warwick Gould, p. 25.
[140] Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', p. 71.
[141] Sinead Mooney, 'Kicking Against The Thermolaters: Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry", in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, vol. 15, 2005, p. 36.
[142] Ibid., p. 70.
[143] Frank O'Connor, *My Father's Son* (London: Pan Books Edition, 1971), p. 111.

apathies, rigidities and abstractions, [which] enters his heart's desire with such precipitation as positively to protrude into the void'.[144]

The problem of identity in 'Recent Irish Poetry' is stated as the 'flight from self-awareness': 'the device common to the poets of the Revival and *after* in the use of which even beyond the jewels of language they are at one, is that of flight from self-awareness'.[145] The feature that Beckett ridicules as common to all modern poets is the desire to worship something, or attach their traumatized identities to a certain mythical absolute.[146] Beckett reminds his fellow-writers that the amount of freedom, generated by their movements along 'the circumference' is reducible to the 'montage' ('the wan bliss on the rim').[147] As a result, the self is 'is either most happily obliterated or else so improved and enlarged that it can be mistaken for part of the décor'.[148] But what is the opposite of this mimetic hell? Beckett provides no solution.

'Recent Irish Poetry' appeared in *The Bookman*, protected by the anonymity of a pseudonym. Given that the date of its publication (August 1934) is approximately the same time when Beckett started writing *Murphy*, one may suggest that the novel was meant to solve 'the absolute predicament of particular human identity'. He would later define *Murphy* as a comedy, writing that its 'wild and unreal dialogues […] are the comic expressions of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy'.[149] This mixture of the comic and the elegiac (Dante's *mediocris* and *humilis*) allows us to suggest that Beckett's search for identity had to take the same route as it takes in Dante. The poet has to wander in the labyrinth of his mind in order to emerge from it a conqueror over his *ressentiment*.

The most positive image of a free identity appears in a letter to McGreevy of 8 September 1935 in which Beckett reflects on how he is going to proceed with his work. Here he writes that his 'next old man, or old young man, not of the big world but of the little world, must be a kite-flyer'.[150] He describes to McGreevy his walk near the Round Pond in Kensington where he saw a group of old men and their grandchildren flying kites. He was impressed most of all by the solidarity and the serenity of that group of people:

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[144] Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', p. 71.
[145] Ibid.; my emphasis.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', p. 71.
[149] 'The wild and unreal dialogues cannot be removed without darkening and dulling the whole thing. They are the comic expressions of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy', Samuel Beckett to George Reavey 13 November 1936, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 380.
[150] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 274

'they fly them almost out of sight […] into an absolutely cloudless viridescent evening sky […]. There seems to be no competition at all involved'.[151]

In *Murphy*, however, the 'old kite flyer' is not a pleasant hero or rather not a hero at all. He is Mr Willoughby Kelly, Celia's paternal grandfather. It is perhaps with him 'Celia left Ireland at the age of four'.[152] Mr Kelly's most salient feature is his 'dingy, stingy repose'; each and every day he 'lay back in bed doing nothing' (11). Beckett's use of repose equally applies to Murphy, who identifies this state with Belacqua's bliss. In Dante's *Comedy*, the indolent Belacqua of the *Antepurgatory* traces his ancestry back to the 'lukewarm' or 'the apathetic' whom Dante so much despised that he placed them in the entrance to hell – their state of suspense is eternal because their inner indecision cast them double: 'naked and drained' they are constantly turned by the wind (III, 100).

The images of Murphy and Mr Willoughby Kelly are constantly paired through Celia's perception. Thus, at the beginning, she tells her grandfather 'You are all I have in the world […], you and possibly Murphy' (11). Further on, Celia compares the songs which both of them sang to her. When she was with Murphy, her nights were 'serenade, nocturne and albada' (46). Her childhood memory evokes herself in 'her cot' with 'a high rail all the way round' and 'Mr Willoughby Kelly came, smelling strongly of drink […]. Sometimes he sang

> Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee
> When thou art old, there's grief enough for thee

Other times:

> Love is a prick, love is a sting,
> Love is a pretty pretty thing (131).

Deirdre Bair has called Beckett's style 'a shocking understatement'.[153] We may easily recognize the transposition 'upwards from below' (irony) in such scenes where some scandalous matters are expressed in terms of the utmost respectability. When Celia's parents died, 'she went to the streets […]. While this was a step to which Mr Willoughby Kelly could not wholeheartedly subscribe, yet he did not attempt to dissuade her. She was a good girl, she would do well' (11). The condemnation of Murphy is even more severe

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[151] Ibid., p. 274
[152] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 11; further references are in the main body of the text.
[153] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 227.

given that he accepts Celia's reluctance to return to her work as 'the imponderables of personality […]. Liberal to a fault, that was Murphy' (15). An understatement gives way to verbosity when Murphy argues his case against the prospect of employment:

> "What do you love?" said Murphy. "Me as I am. You can want what does not exist, you can't love it". This came well from Murphy. "Then why are you all out to change me? So that you won't have to love me", the voice rising here to a note that did him credit (25).

The final scene on the Round Pond where Celia accompanies Mr Kelly in his wheelchair suggests that Murphy merged into 'the old kite flyer' who 'was as fond of his chair in his own way as Murphy had been of his' (155). While flying his kite, Mr Kelly enquires about Celia's business and marks with satisfaction that it goes well. Suddenly he let out the string of his kite and it vanished into the sky: 'He fixed with his eagle's eye a point in the empty sky where he fancied the kite to swim into view […]. Celia also looked at the sky, not with the same purpose, but simply to have that unction of soft sunless light on her eyes that was all she remembered of Ireland' (157).

It seems that this 'unction of soft sunless light' on Celia's eyes is an emblem of a truly Christian soul. Celia is free – not because she has decided to be so – 'her brain was not very large for the best way to say it' – but simply because she has a loving heart (14). 'I bow to passion', Mr Kelly tells his niece because her 'need' in Murphy is purely inexplicable. Celia is capable of loving another human being for nothing. Such love equals to faith. Beckett seems to be hinting that freedom (a free identity of the individual) is related to the position of *detachment* from any reason. On one occasion the narrator exclaims, 'Celia, thank God for a Christian name at last' (128). In the mortuary scene, Celia is the one who sets all the other characters free. She identifies Murphy's body by a birthmark on his buttock, and by doing so proves to be the only person who had access to his body – that part of Murphy's identity to which he himself denied any relation during his lifetime. Miss Counihan is relieved because Murphy is dead rather than unfaithful; 'in a somewhat similar way Neary, for whom the sight of Celia had restored Murphy from being *an end in himself to his initial condition of obstacle* (or key), had cause to be pleased with the turn events had taken' (145). Cooper, Neary's servant who has found Celia and whose 'only visible human characteristic was a morbid craving for alcoholic depressant', goes off the wagon, begins to take off his hat and sit down – the freedoms, which he hitherto

forbade to himself (153). And to Wylie, 'between jolts and corners, the only phrase to propose itself was: "Didn't I tell you she would lead us to him?"' (145). Given such a role, Celia must have been conceived as the opposite of the solipsist Murphy.

Murphy is an idol, a false god whose almost complete detachment attracts all other characters. In the middle of the novel, the narrator emphasises that the structure of the novel is based on the five quests for Murphy: Celia's, on the one hand, and that of Neary, Miss Counihan, Wylie and Cooper (113). Perhaps, the mortuary scene was meant to elevate Celia to the position of a non-heroic heroine, to make her the point of relief from all quests. But this does not happen. According to Anthony Uhlmann, Celia's character fails to achieve 'the kind of pathos she effortlessly carried with her in the first half of the book' because of 'an overly categorical use of philosophical material' and because of 'the clowning of the Engels sisters'.[154] While one might agree that Beckett's play with philosophy is overdone, it is hard to ascribe Celia's failure as a heroine to 'the clowning of the Engels sisters'. The latter play an important role in Beckett's metaphysical comedy, which we will discuss shortly. In the meantime, it suffices to say that they stand out as birds of a different feather with regards to the heroine. Miss Counihan introduces Neary, Wylie and herself to Celia: 'We are the Engels sisters […], come to stay' (127). Could it be that Celia's role does not coalesce because her goodness is no less inexplicable and irrational and, therefore, no less idealistic than Murphy's own quest for 'the best of himself' (44)?

Uhlmann insists that towards the middle of the novel, 'the tone changes from a playful irony to a cloying seriousness, in which one kind of experience is put forward not only as true but as *the truth of the elect*', Murphy.[155] It is true that 'the cloying seriousness' obstructs the comedy. As we remember, Beckett was upset that his potential publishers had failed to understand that 'the unreal dialogues' were 'the comic exaggerations'. The categorical tone was thus meant to intensify the absurdity of the unhappy consciousness ('to reinforce that from which it relieves').[156] This does not work very well. What is the role of 'the Engels sisters'? The partnership of the clowns represents collective desire, picking up on the *mariage à trois* between the co-founder of communism and the Byrne sisters (the latter were lovingly described by Eleanor Marx as "the working class", "illiterate" Irish women). In the first part of the novel, 'the philistine' stands in sharp

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[154] Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and The Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2006), p. 75.
[155] Ibid., p. 76; Uhlmann's emphasis.
[156] Samuel Beckett to George Reavey 13 November 1936, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 380.

contrast to ‘the elect’. Towards the end, the opposition is erased. Beckett’s insistence on the transposition from elegy to comedy suggests that to show ‘the elect’ as the form of ‘the philistine’ could be his intention. The reason as to why this comic transposition is not sufficiently effective will be discussed in conclusion. The up-coming analysis focuses on the dynamic of this transposition.

As has been mentioned, the narrator insists that everyone in this story needs Murphy: ‘Murphy then is actually being needed by five people outside himself’ (113). The statement is ironic because the need for Murphy is purely metaphysical. In order to highlight the emptiness of Murphy’s aspiration to self-sufficiency, Beckett creates his minor copies: ‘the Engels sisters’. He is keen to show that the desire for self-sufficiency is a collective obsession and that it is extremely contagious.

The fourth chapter, which introduces the Engels sisters, opens with the scene in the Dublin GPO with a spotlight on Neary dashing his head against the buttocks of the statute of the dying hero Cuchulain. His desperation is caused by his unrequited love for Miss Counihan. It is at the GPO, this ‘sacred ground’, where the desires of Neary, Wylie and Miss Counihan come together. Their tripartite bond is formed in Dublin when Murphy had already been in London for about a year. Murphy knows nothing about his role as ‘the obstacle’ or ‘the key’ to the sisters’ madness.

In the genesis of this madness, rivalry plays the primary role. Each character desires to outdo the other, or, at least, to use one another as a means to an end. To Miss Counihan, London is a better place than Dublin: ‘she was set aside for Murphy, who had torn himself away to set up for his princess, in some less desolate quarter of the globe, a habitation meet for her’ (32). Neary is drawn to Miss Counihan because her ‘breast is occupied’ by Murphy (31). For Wylie, Miss Counihan is a means to get closer to Neary and finally to London; and all of them want to steal a portion of Murphy’s being, because Murphy desires nothing – he alone seems to imitate nobody. The mediocre Wylie has spotted the attractiveness of this feature which he displays before his employer Neary: ‘My superiority to nothing has often been complemented’ (123). The ‘nothingness’ becomes an asset.

The ironic significance of the mortuary scene is the discovery that nobody really wanted to find Murphy. His role is set aside as ‘a flea’ towards which all these quests for self-possession are striving. Neary’s interior monologue prior to the mortuary scene foreshadows this revelation:

> He thought of his latest *voltefesses*, at once so pleasant and so painful. Pleasant, in that Miss Counihan had been eased; painful, in that Murphy had been made worse: fesses, as being the part best qualified by nature not only to be kicked but also to mock the kicker […]. Was his need any less for the sudden transformation of Murphy from *the key* that would open Miss Counihan to the one and only earthly hope of friendship and all that friendship carried with it? (Neary's conception of friendship was very curious. He expected it to last. He never said, when speaking of the enemy: "He used to be a friend of mine", but always, with affected precision: "I used to think he was a friend of mine"). Was his need any less? It felt greater, but might well be the same […]. But keeping his head resolutely buried and enveloped he groaned: *Le pou est mort. Vive le pou*! Is there no flea that found at last dies without issue? No key-flea? (113).

Murphy will make almost the same discovery after the game of chess with Mr Endon when he will see himself as 'a speck in Mr Endon's unseen' (140).

Murphy is Neary's former student. Neary, in his turn, is presented as a former Pythagorean, now converted into a Newtonian. Neary's conception of friendship and love as a '*tetrakyt*' seems to be Beckett's acknowledgement of Joyce's French triangle. The same bawd-and-cuckold scheme is described in the following way:

> Of such was Neary's love for Miss Dwyer, who loved a Flight-Lieutenant Ellimann, who loved a Miss Farren of Ringsakiddy, who loved a Father Fitt of Ballinclashet, who in all sincerity was bound to acknowledge a certain vocation for a Mrs West of Passage, who loved Neary (7).

This description comes from the narrator, while the character, Neary, deems, at that point of his acquaintance with Murphy, that the object of his love was 'the one closed figure in the waste without form and void. My tetrakyt!' (7). He believes in requited love: '"Love requited', said Neary, "is a short circuit", a ball that gave rise to a sparkling rally', the narrator adds (7). Indeed, once the rival is not interested in the object, it is no longer desired:

> No sooner had Miss Dwyer, despairing of recommending herself to Flight-Lieutenant Ellimann, made Neary as happy as a man could desire, than she became one with the ground against which she had figured so prettily. Neary wrote to Herr Kurt Koffka [his psychotherapist] demanding an immediate explanation. He had not yet received an answer (31).

Neary's realisation that his desire for Miss Counihan was due to his desire for Murphy as a perennial *absentee* is the result of his quest.

Beckett never stops drawing comparisons between his puppets, including Murphy, who, as we have seen, is characterized as 'not a puppet'. One comparison is especially interesting as it refers to that "secret knowledge" which makes Neary superior to Ticklepenny, but inferior to Murphy:

> Ticklepenny was immeasurably inferior to Neary in every way, but they had certain points of contrast to Murphy in common. One was this pretentious fear of going mad. Another was the inability to look on, no matter what the spectacle […]. But even here Neary was superior to Ticklepenny, at least according to the tradition that ranks the competitor's spirit higher than the man sneering at what he cannot understand (54).

'The man sneering at what he cannot understand' could be Murphy who cannot understand Neary's way of love. Murphy is not attracted by secondary objects. He strives for himself. With Miss Counihan, his relationship 'was tired' (8). For him, freedom is intellectual ascesis which renounces desire itself. Unlike Neary, Murphy is 'the elect' because he desires himself.

The novel, however, opens with Murphy sitting in his rocking chair, pretending he was free. The reader has to make a comparison between Murphy tied by seven scarves to his chair and the world behind the curtain: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free' (5). Is Murphy not free? What does separate him from self-love? He has no power over his heart and his body. He had come 'to sit Neary's feet' because he heard that Neary could stop his own heart whenever he liked. This exercise, called 'Apmonia', did not work for Murphy – 'for Murphy had such an irrational heart' that Neary finally decided that his pupil was inept and dismissed him (6).

The narrator, however, is keen to emphasise that Murphy's metaphysical desire is more acute than that of 'the professor', who appears to be 'an antiquarian' still believing in the strength of passion. Neary, it is said, was the author of a tractate called *The Doctrine of the Limit*, which could be a parodic allusion to Yeats's Doctrine of the Mask. Yeats first developed the idea of a mask as a protective device against 'the representatives of collective opinion'.[157] Identifying his worst fault as 'petulant combativeness', he decided that certain self-discipline must be imposed: 'it is always inexcusable to lose one's self-possession […]. I fear the representatives of the collective opinion. And so rage stupidly and rudely, exaggerating what I feel and think' (6). The mask also assisted him in his complex relationships with women: 'In wise love, each divines the high secret self of the other and, refusing to believe in the mere daily self, creates a mirror where the lover or the beloved sees an image to copy in daily life. Love also creates the mask' (7). Neary, we read, applied his Apmonia 'frugally', reserving it for situations 'irksome beyond endurance, as when he wanted a drink and could not get one, or fell among Gaels and could not escape, or felt the pangs of hopeless sexual inclination' (6).

If Beckett was acquainted with Yeats's doctrine, it could not have escaped him that with the assistance of the mask, Yeats had overcome his paralysis as a writer:

> My isolation from ordinary men and women was increased by the asceticism destructive of mind and body […]. Burning with adoration and hatred I wrote verse that expressed emotions common to every sentimental boy and girl […]. I remember saying as a boy to some fellow student in the Dublin art schools, "the difference between a good draftsman and a bad is one of courage. I wrote prose badly [my] prose unlike verse, had not those simple forms that like a masquer's mask protect us with their anonymity (13).

In the Abbey Theatre, the mask represented a tragic or a comic hero that 'grows more and more distinct, more and more a being in his own right as it were, but more and more loses grasp of the always more complex world' (9). Yeats' mask had become his 'anti-self' ('an

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[157] W.B. Yeats writes in his *Autobiographies*: 'Last night there was a debate at a political question at the Arts Club. I was for a moment inclined to use arguments merely to answer something said by one speaker or the other. In pursuit of the mask I resolved to say only fanciful and personal things, and so to escape out of mere combat'; quoted in *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual No. 19*, edited by Margaret Mills Harper, Warwick Gould (www.books.google.co.uk); further references in the main body of the text.

interior personality'), identified as a moral being or 'moral sense', which, according to Yeats, had to necessarily possess a 'theatrical element' (7, 8).

Murphy's last will, which is discovered in the mortuary scene, demands his ashes be brought to the Abbey Theatre and flushed there in the toilet. This, perhaps, was "the bitter scorn of a son whose father wasted a life in vain". Murphy is the heir of the same Cartesian malady; he is not free because he is 'split in two, a body and a mind' (64). Whereas Neary believes in passion, 'the seedy solipsist' recognizes 'a system of benefits […], an indefatigable apparatus for doing sums with petty cash of current facts' (50, 101). To come alive in his mind, he needs to desire nothing.

Before this comedy of self-annihilation is enacted, we are presented with the chapter containing the 'justification of the expression Murphy's mind' (63). Murphy's mind pictured itself as 'a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without' (63). It is thus not surprising that Murphy does not understand how his mental experience is related to the physical one. Therefore, he distinguishes between the actual and the virtual mental experiences: 'The form of kick was actual, that of caress virtual' (63). The masochist, transformed into the ascetic, thinks of God as 'a non-mental non-physical kick from all eternity […]. But where then was the supreme Caress?' (64). That part of him which never left 'this mental chamber' tried to move as little as possible so that he could 'come alive in his mind'. Still Murphy was split. That part of him where he wanted to be alive had three zones.

These zones, presented as 'the justification of that intellectual love with which Murphy's mind loves itself', resemble Kant's three types of self-love, universally present in each individual in the form of certain 'predispositions': to animality, to humanity and to personality (in *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*).[158] The *predisposition to animality* is the lowest category, which Kant brought under the general title of 'physical and purely mechanical love for which no reason is required'.[159] As such, it is responsible for 'self-preservation', 'the propagation of the species' and 'for community with other men'. As we have seen, Murphy disdained this kind of activity. Kant's second category – the predisposition to humanity – seems to correspond to that zone in Murphy's mind, which he calls 'the forms with parallel' (65). Beckett describes this experience as Murphy's predisposition to revenge: 'Here the kick that the physical Murphy received, the

[158] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 22.
[159] Ibid., p. 21.

mental Murphy gave' (65). Thus, the chandlers who mocked him in reality 'were available for slow depilation. Miss Carriage for rape by Ticklepenny, and so on' (65).

Kant's *predisposition to humanity* manifests itself as the desire for equality, which, quite essentially, implies comparison with others. The description that follows contains such a spectacular panorama of rivalry that it deserves to be quoted at length:

> The predisposition to humanity can be brought under the general title of a self-love which is physical and yet compares (for which reason is required); that is to say, we judge ourselves happy or unhappy only by making comparison with others. Out of this self-love springs the inclination to inquire worth in the opinion of others. This is originally a desire merely for equality, to allow no one superiority above oneself, bound with a constant care lest others strive to attain such superiority; but from this arises gradually the unjustifiable craving to win it for oneself over others, upon this twin stem of jealousy and rivalry may be grafted the very great vices of secret and open animosity against all whom we look upon as not belonging to us – vices, however, which really do not sprout of themselves from nature as their root; rather are they inclinations, aroused in us by the anxious endeavours of others to attain a hated superiority over us, to attain for ourselves as a measure of precaution and for the sake of safety such a position over others. For nature, indeed, wanted to use the idea of such rivalry (which in itself does not exclude mutual love) only as a spur to culture.[160]

This extraordinary description displays to what extent rivalry is central to the desire for equality. Beckett emphasises that in this zone, Murphy felt 'sovereign and free', but only in the third zone, he 'could move as he pleased from one unparalleled beatitude to another', because here 'there was no rival initiative' (65). This movement corresponds, perhaps, to Kant's *predisposition to personality*.

According to Kant, man's freedom, i.e. pure practical reason, should be accountable for its decisions: 'the predisposition to personality in man, taken as a rational and at the same time an *accountable* being'.[161] Kant italicized 'accountable' but provided a footnote, which states that reason is accountable only before itself for choosing between good and evil maxims, which it itself establishes. Murphy's third zone is a comment on

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., p. 23.

Kant. This 'dark zone' was 'a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms […] the world of the body broken up into the pieces of a toy. Here Murphy was not free, but *a mote* in the dark of absolute freedom' (65, 66; my emphasis). Murphy would later associate this zone with the word 'gas'. This metaphor will occur to him when he will take residence in a garret of the building accommodating the staff of MMM (the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat) where his journey will end. An ingenious device will be arranged to supply heating to the garret (symbolizing his mind) and the explosion, which will occur accidentally, will also be most congruent with Murphy's expectations.

Murphy's progress towards his end invites a comparison with *More Pricks Than Kicks*. As an heir to Belacqua, Murphy would hardly undertake any activity. He does not really need Celia nor does he need to work; he is looking for a sign – the obstacle, which would reveal to him his superhuman essence. He asks Celia 'to procure a corpus of incentives based on the only system outside his own in which he felt the least confidence, that of the heavenly bodies' (17). As we find Murphy on his 'jobpath', it comes out that 'the only thing [he] was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration – the best of himself' (44).

The narrator constantly draws analogies between Murphy's type of desire and that of the others. Neary's tetrakyt implies at least a minimal distance between the object and the obstacle. Neary still looks for 'love requited' or friendship, even if it is for the sake of rivalry. Murphy goes straight to the obstacle. 'Murphy', on his jobpath, 'required for his pity no other *butt* but himself' (44). This description shows that Beckett was a good expert in triangular desire, and unlike Joyce, did not seek to present its mechanics as the character's spontaneity. There is a powerful image of this destructive drive when Celia watches Murphy from the window as he emerges on the street below:

> His figure so excited the derision of a group of boys playing football in the road that they stopped their game. She watched him *multiplied* in their burlesque long after her own eyes could see him no more' (83, my emphasis).

Celia's vantage point gives a symbolic perspective of Murphy's progress towards self-destruction. Murphy, as we have seen, had 'no fear of going mad'. Beckett provides a different perspective on madness by commenting on his hero's aspiration: 'Stimulated by all those lives immured in mind, as he insisted on supposing, he laboured more diligently than before at his own little dungeon in Spain' (102). 'The little dungeon in Spain' could

be an allusion to Gogol's titular councillor Poprishchin, the "writer" of the *Memoirs of a Madman*, who believes himself to be a king of Spain while spending his life in a lunatic asylum. Gogol followed the tradition of Russian literature, which depicts madness from a perspective, which, perhaps, is unique in the annals of world literature.[162]

This foreshadowing of Murphy's fragmentation makes one recall Beckett's admiration for Dostoevsky's dynamic in *The Devils*: 'I'm reading the 'Possèdes' in a foul translation […] but the movement, the transitions!'[163] Commenting on the destructive nature of the advanced form of metaphysical desire, Girard describes the novel's dynamic in the following way:

> The power of pride cannot but end in the fragmentation and ultimately disintegration of the subject. The very desire to unify oneself disperses, and here we have arrived at the definitive dispersion. The contradictions caused by internal mediation end by destroying the individual. Masochism is followed by the last stage of metaphysical desire, that of self-destruction in all Dostoevsky's characters who are dedicated to evil.[164]

Murphy's idea of a lunatic asylum begins with an opposition, which he finds extremely attractive – that is, the patients, on the one hand, and the staff, on the other. The job as a male nurse came about through Austin Ticklepenny, 'the pot poet', who is anxious to quit his job because he fears madness. Inspired by the opposition between 'a lunatic' and 'a custodian' (indicated in his horoscope), Murphy seizes the job. Is this an unimportant detail? Beckett emphasises this dual opposition only to reinforce the symmetrical sameness of its parts:

> He would not have admitted that he needed a brotherhood. He did. In the presence of this issue (psychiatric-psychotic) between the life from which he had turned away and the life of which he had no experience […] he could not fail to side with the latter […]. The issue therefore, as lovingly simplified and perverted by Murphy,

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[162] 'The 25th. – Today the Grand Inquisitor came into my room; when I heard his steps in the distance, I hid myself under a chair. When he did not see me, he began to call. At first, he called "Poprishchin!" I made no answer. Then he called "Axanti Ivanovich! Titular Councillor! Nobleman!" I still kept silence. "Ferdinand the Eighth, King of Spain!" I was on the point of putting out my head, but I thought, "No, brother, you shall not deceive me! You shall not pour water on my head again"', in Nikolai Gogol, *Memoirs of A Madman*, trans. by Claude Field (fliphtml5.com), p. 32.
[163] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 79.
[164] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and The Novel*, p. 279.

> lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter (101).

Now we are approaching the centre of Beckett's Inferno, which the narrator has already outlined as the place in Murphy's mind where he 'once beheld the beatific idols of his cave – in the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx: '*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*' (where you are worth nothing you desire nothing). Being convinced that this bliss resides in the world of lunatics, he is no longer looking for escape from his nothingness in desire ('for Celia, ginger and so on'); rather he seeks 'to clinch' this radical mental ascesis, which he hitherto had to obtain by 'every available means', like his rocking chair (102). Although he notices that 'the patients did sometimes feel as lousy as they look […] one had merely to ascribe their agitation, not to any flaw in their self-seclusion, but to the investment of the healers' (101).

As Uhlmann has pointed out, Beckett distinguishes between the cogito of Descartes and that of Geulincx. '*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*' (where you are worth nothing you desire nothing) reveals a version of restricted freedom ensuing from '*I think therefore I am*'. Life is a boat where you are free to crawl along the brief deck, but you cannot control the boat.[165] It is basically the same Kantian *predisposition to personality* where you are accountable for making decisions only before yourself. Since a person might not like to be accountable on such terms, his freedom comes down to a whim. The next step to take is suicide. Uhlmann points to another allusion:

> The ship image recurs on two occasions in *The Unnamable* with a voice imagining itself as a slave on board the ship heading beyond the Pillars of Hercules, who has slipped out of the galley at night unnoticed and crawling between the thwarts, wonders perhaps whether he might throw himself from the boat to find freedom. Suicide is considered, then, as a means of thwarting the horror of predetermined existence.[166]

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[165] Uhlmann quotes Beckett's explanation of his allusion to Geulincx in *Molloy* to the German translator Dr. Franzen: 'This passage is suggested by the Ethics of Geulincx where he compares human freedom to that of a man, on board a boat, carrying him irresistibly westward, free to move eastward within the limits of the boat itself, as far as the stern'; Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and The Philosophical Image*, p. 78

[166] Ibid., p. 78.

The truth of metaphysical desire is death. Beckett reveals this truth by presenting Murphy's model as 'Mr Endon'. This patient is an exceptional case. He is Murphy's 'tab' (a patient 'on caution') because he attempted a suicide by Apnoea (cessation of breathing). Mr Endon seems to be enjoying life in 'the third zone' of his mind: 'Mr Endon did not dress, but drifted about the wards in a fine dressing-gown of scarlet byssus faced with black braid, black silk pyjamas and neo-merovingian poulains of deepest purple' (105). Murphy is struck by the serenity of Mr Endon's state, 'a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain' (105). Mr Endon's only 'frivolity' is his addiction to the chessboard. It is through a game of chess that Murphy hopes to enter the blissful 'cave' and remain clinched there. The initiation takes place during a night shift. As he enters the empty corridors, he suddenly feels an inseparable gulf that divides him from the patients:

> By day there was Bom and other staff, there were the doctors and the visitors, to stimulate his sense of kindred with the patients […]. But in the night of Skinner's there were none of these adminicles, no loathing to love *from*, no kick from the world that was not his, no illusion of caress from the world that might be (134, my emphasis).

Perhaps Beckett could have left Murphy in the empty wards of Skinner's house with that sensation of suspense and eternal separateness, in which case, Murphy would have remained a perennial puppet of his unacknowledged resentment. His evacuation from hell begins with a series of painful but sobering revelations. Murphy approaches Mr Endon's cell and first looks at him through the judas. He is somewhat disappointed when he finds that Mr Endon responds only to a rival eye, like a Pavlovian dog to a lamp:

> The little blue and olive face, wearing an expression of winsome fiat, was upturned to the judas […]. Mr Endon had recognized the feel of his friend's eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly. Friend's eye? Say rather, Murphy's eye, the chessy eye. Mr Endon had vibrated to the chessy eye upon him (135).

Murphy's defeat is preordained. Seeing himself as a speck in Mr Endon's eye ('Mr Murphy is a speck in Mr Endon's unseen'), Murphy realises that his idol also has a 'flea' of which he is not aware (140). And in addition to that, Mr Endon also has habits: 'Mr

Endon always played Black. If presented with White he would fade' (137). The clockwork mechanism prevails even in this unrivalled case. After having been defeated by Mr Endon, Murphy retreats to his garret – not only in the physical but also in the metaphorical sense. The resulting explosion suggests that Murphy reunited with himself in his third zone. Beckett describes this end in a letter to McGreevy, dated 7 July 1936, in which he expresses the fear that the readers can take this end too seriously:

> I saw the difficulty and danger of so much following Murphy's own 'end'. There seemed two ways out. One was to let the death have its head in a frank climax and the rest be definitely epilogue […]. And the other, which I chose, and tried to act on, was to keep the death subdued and go on as coolly and finish as briefly as possible. I chose this because it seemed to me to consist better with the treatment of Murphy throughout with a mixture of compassion, patience, mockery and 'tat twam asi' that I seem to have directed on him throughout, with the sympathy going so far and no further (then losing patience) as in the short statement of his mind's fantasy on itself. There seemed to me always the risk of taking him too seriously and separating him too sharply from the others. As it is I do not think the mistake (Aliosha mistake) has been altogether avoided. A rapturous recapitulation of his experience following its 'end' would seem to me exactly the sort of promotion that I want to avoid: and an ironical one is I hope superfluous. I find the mistake in the mortuary scene, which I meant to make more rapid but which got out of hand in the dialogue. Perhaps it is saved from anticlimax by presence of M. all through.[167]

It is impossible to perceive 'the presence of M.' amongst 'others' in the mortuary scene. The fact that Beckett discusses this possibility makes one suspect that he intended to punish his solipsist by denying him mortality and submitting him to the punishment by the "Eternal Return". Was Beckett hoping to avoid the 'Aliosha mistake' through this solution?

Murphy, intended as a comedy (through the reinforcement of Murphy's 'hermetism'),[168] was received as such, but in the way, which was, perhaps, opposite to

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[167] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 350.

[168] 'Do they not understand that if the book is slightly obscure, it is so because it is a compression […]. The wild and unreal dialogues cannot […] be removed without darkening and dulling the whole thing. They are the comic expressions of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy, namely if you like the hermetism of the spirit […]. There is no time and no space in such a book for mere relief. The relief has also to do work and reinforce that from which it relieves', Beckett to George Reavey 13 November 1936, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, p. 113.

Beckett's expectations. Thus, the Irish novelist Kate O'Brien characterized the book as very Joycean, though she emphasised that Beckett was 'not like Joyce evocative of tragedy or Hell'.[169] Not many critics (Scartazzini with his study on 'the congruence of sins and punishments' was an exception) read Dante's *Inferno* as a comedy. Nobody read Dostoevsky's novels as a satire on individualism. So, it is not surprising that the Neary 'tetrakyt' – a hilarious depiction of collective madness – remained unnoticed by Beckett's critics. He did not intend to separate Murphy 'too sharply' from other characters (the 'Aliosha mistake'), but he systematically undermines Murphy's mimetic desire by presenting the opinion of his hero as his own. As Dylan Thomas, another critic of that period, observed: 'the story never quite knew whether it was being told objectively from the inside of its characters or subjectively from the outside'.[170] Was Beckett afraid of stating his 'point of view'? Perhaps, Celia's attachment to the Irish sky was supposed to counterbalance Murphy's 'hermetism'. But the problem is that this attachment is even more idealistic than Murphy's detachment from his body. Celia is not a Sonya Marmeladova (a virtuous prostitute from *Crime and Punishment*); her character lacks exposition and the Round Pond scene, in which she is coupled with Murphy's reincarnation, Mr Kelly, leaves both a living reproach to heaven.

We may well understand why Beckett decided that his work was not 'very honest'. While wandering in hell with his hero, he had no real purpose except trying to persuade himself that the problem of faith can be resolved through an honest depiction of the human predicament – the clockwork mechanism of the French Triangle. In the result of these wanderings, he felt that

> The real consciousness is the chaos, a grey commotion of mind, with no premises or conclusions or problems or cases or judgements. I lie for days on the floor, or in the woods, accompanied and unaccompanied, in a coenaesthesic of mind, a fullness of mental self-aesthesia that is entirely useless. The monad without the conflict, lightless and darkless. I used to pretend to work, I do so no longer. I used to dig about in the mental sand for the lug-worms of likes and dislikes, I do so no longer. The lug-worms of understanding.[171]

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[169] Quoted in Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: the Last Modernist*, p. 295.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Beckett's letter to Mary Manning Howe, 20 August 1937, quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 269.

CHAPTER 5: WATT AND HISTORY

The focus of this study has moved from the analysis of the psychological and philosophical aspects of nihilism on to the question of identity and politics. This chapter treats *Watt* as a historical indictment of nihilism, a testimony of its consequences. As we have seen, Dostoevsky's account of the cause of nihilism in *The Brothers Karamazov* emphasises the hypocrisy of secular modernity unwilling to accept men's responsibility for their own violence. Far from Nietzsche's representation of God as an exploded fiction, Dostoevsky follows the development of Kant's moral metaphysics, which holds God responsible for the evil and suffering that mankind experiences. The last section of this chapter called 'Religion' reads *Watt* against 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' in order to finally illuminate the relation between Beckett's and Dostoevsky's anthropological projects.

SECTION 1: HISTORY IS LITERATURE/LITERATURE IS HISTORY

The fact that Beckett began writing *Watt* in Paris in February 1941, five months after he joined the Resistance, has led some critics to suspect that the novel's silence on the dreadful reality outside it could have been a deliberate strategy. Picking up on Beckett's later pronouncement that *Watt* provided him with 'a means of staying sane', Deirdre Bair describes work on the novel as his 'daily therapy' without, however, clarifying the nature of the illness.[1] According to Matthew Feldman, Beckett decided to abandon 'the pursuit of meaning' and began to 'write phenomenologically' – that is to say, indifferently to the outer reality.[2] James McNaughton is a rare critic who reads *Watt* as a political satire attacking 'Watt's propagandistic psychology' that seeks to 'saddle' all surrounding phenomena with 'meaning and a formula' and achieve 'peace of mind'.[3] Assessing Beckett's 'German Diaries' and the notebooks of the period preceding *Watt*, McNaughton finds numerous recordings of the National Socialist vocabulary, which leads him to suggest that Beckett was sharpening his satirical tools in the manner of Louis-Ferdinand

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[1] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p. 328.
[2] Matthew Feldman, '"But What Was this Pursuit of Meaning, in this Indifference to Meaning?": Beckett, Husserl, Sartre and Meaning Creation', in *Beckett and Phenomenology* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 14.
[3] James McNaughton, *Samuel Beckett and the Politics of Aftermath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 61.

Céline' whose *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was read at the time as a deliberate pastiche of Nazi language and strategies.

Despite the fact that absurdity is the salient feature of Beckett's satirical style, it is hard to agree with McNaughton that the language in *Watt* echoes 'various forms of media propaganda'.[4] Rather, Beckett truly began 'to write phenomenologically' in the sense that his style emulates Kant's method of synthesising the various phenomena that confront the hero in Mr Knott's house. Politics implies conflict between subjective points of view. To grasp the political aspect of Beckett's allegory it may be helpful to recall Lady McCann's attack on Watt, which interrupts his progress towards Mr Knott's house. If Beckett's style of writing mimics phenomenology, there is a clear suggestion that in Beckett's mind there are parallels between phenomenology and what McNaughton calls 'propagandistic psychology'. It is worth bearing in mind that phenomenology is a method of thinking that makes judgements on the principle of *a priori* reason.

During the late 1930s Beckett himself was no stranger to the consolation of philosophy, especially Schopenhauer's. In September 1937, he wrote to McGreevy:

> When I was ill I found the only thing I could read is Schopenhauer. Everything else I tried only confirmed the feeling of sickness. It was very curious. Like suddenly a window opened on a fug. I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time to begin to understand now why it is so. And it is a pleasure to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet, with an entire indifference to the apriori forms of verification. Although it is a fact that judged by them his generalisation shows fewer cracks than most generalisations.[5]

The comparison of Schopenhauer's philosophy and the other forms of 'generalizations' can be better understood in the context of the major political obsession of the 1930s: the search for historical sense. The 'pleasure to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet' had been shared by the generation of intellectuals that no longer believed in 'the apriori forms of verification'. After the First World War, the nineteenth-century European ideology based on Kant and Hegel's views of history was beginning to show a large number of cracks.

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[4] Ibid., p. 61.
[5] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. 1, p. 550.

A brief excursion into Beckett's correspondence of the late 1930s may clarify this disappointment. In January 1938, he reported to McGreevy that 'the entire work of Kant arrived from Munich'.[6] In a letter to Arland Ussher dated May 1938, Kant is mentioned again: 'I read nothing and write nothing unless it is Kant'.[7] A few months earlier Ussher sent Beckett the manuscript of his essay 'The Age of Shadows' containing an analysis of the political crisis of the late 1930s. A passage from this work summarises its causes:

> In the eighteenth century, the static world of antiquity had broken thread after thread that suspended it from the arch of heaven until it hung by a single gossamer; now the last thread has snapped … Then came the first collision, the Great War; and since then we have become a little still, a little frightened. Yet most are drunken with the intoxication of speed, though a few are trying to attach the careering world to some subjective absolute of the Beautiful or the Useful (which is like hoping to break one's fall by pulling at one's own garters.[8]

Ussher was a philosopher and art critic, specializing in Swift, Berkeley, Hegel and Kant.[9] 'The Age of Shadows' was published in December 1938 together with two other essays ('Sadness and the Spring' and 'Hope, Faith and Charity'), containing a profound analysis of individual psychology and international affairs. Summing up the issues of his time as the loss of faith, Ussher calls upon his contemporaries to cultivate Christian charity:

> Only when men have recovered faith in their subconscious to set over against the present hope in the unborn will they regain that third virtue, said to be the greatest – the Christian charity – and the milk of human kindness will once more begin to flow; for charity is a delicate balance of faith and hope, and implies a deep self-respect in each as individuals, as well as co-operation among all for the remoter purposes of the race.[10]

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[6] Ibid., p. 581.
[7] Samuel Beckett, a letter to Arland Ussher, 12 May 1938, Ibid., p. 622.
[8] Arland Percival Ussher, *Three Essays*, in *Nineteenth Century and After* (1938) quoted in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 623; Ussher's ellipsis.
[9] See Arland Percival Ussher, Correspondence, 1921-1959, Southern Illinois University, https://archives.lib.siu.edu/?p=collections/controlcard&id=491
[10] Arland Percival Ussher, *Three Essays*, in a monthly review *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. CXXIV, July-December1938 (London: Constable & Co, 1938), p. 736.

Although those 'few' who were 'trying to attach the careering world to some subjective absolute of the Beautiful or the Useful' are not named in Ussher's essay, it is not hard to guess that he was referring to Yeats, Eliot and Pound – all three poets passionately committed to 'the remoter purposes of the race'. Ussher was clearly sceptical about their promise to "rejuvenate" the past.[11]

Cairns Craig's study *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* investigates the three poetical projects aiming to redeem history by rejuvenating the myths of the past. The return to tradition, to the Beautiful and the Sublime was supposed to resist the crisis that was already felt in 1900. Writing retrospectively of this year, Paul Valéry recalled: 'C'est en 1900 que le mot *Beauté* a commencé à disparaître. Il a été remplacé par un autre mot, qui, depuis a fait son chemin: le mot 'Vie'. Et cela est capital'.[12] The decline of the cult of beauty and the rise of the cult of life had entailed an earnest interest in all things irrational. During the same period, Sigmund Freud published the first results of his research into sexuality, dreams, and the unconscious, which, in a sense, toppled the last vestiges of the hegemony of reason. That reign of the irrational will was what Spengler's *The Decline of the West* gave voice to: 'We no longer believe in the power of reason over life', wrote Spengler in 1918, 'we feel that life governs reason'.[13]

Craig reminds us that Schopenhauer was the first to question the validity of the historical discipline based on Hegel's concept of history as the First Mover that would lead humanity to Absolute Knowledge. Claiming to be Kant's only true successor,[14] Schopenhauer maintained that the making of philosophical sense is the prerogative of literature. Craig's summary of Schopenhauer's pivot towards poetry is worth quoting at length:

> Schopenhauer argued that history could know only particulars and that any general conclusions it drew were no more than a misuse of language, treating abstract terms as though they were equivalent to the general laws of the physical sciences. History, Schopenhauer insisted, was essentially literature: its value lay in its fulfilment of the same criteria we apply to works of literature, and it had to stop, therefore, trying to

[11] 'The longevity of the modern civilized man has slowed down the pulse of life, and the "rejuvenation" now promised us would certainly take away first youth', in 'Hope, Faith and Charity', p. 735.
[12] Paul Valéry's contribution to *Enquête sur 1900*, quoted in Alexander McCabe, 'Dostoevsky's French Reception', p. 73.
[13] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, quoted in Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 147.
[14] William Caldwell, 'Schopenhauer's Criticism of Kant', *Mind*, vol. 16, No. 63, July, 1891 (Oxford University Press), p. 355.

> unpack the significance of events, by tracing chains of cause and effect, and to begin to find significance where literature found it, 'in an event's expression of a unique personality, in its revelation of the depths of the human heart.[15]

Hegel's heir in nineteenth-century historiography was Marx. Schopenhauer's heir was Nietzsche – 'his attack on history', Craig specifies, 'went beyond a merely abstract debate about its value as truth, to a moral debate about history's effect on our capacities as human agents'.[16] Man's awareness of his own mortality, Nietzsche asserted, would sap his capacity to believe in the significance of his actions. Therefore, for Nietzsche, action is born out of 'forgetfulness'. In a series of his essays on art and history, he compares an excess of historical sense with 'an enormous heap of indigestible knowledge stones that occasionally rattle together in man's body'.[17] This image brings to mind the sucking of stones in *Molloy*: instead of exploring the 'region' lying beyond his 'realm', i.e. beyond the sea, the eponymous hero takes 'advantage of being at the seaside to lay in a store of sucking stones'.[18] For Nietzsche, man, having too many stones rattling around inside his organism, ceases to be an actor in the world and collapses into *aboulie*, i.e. a state of bloated apathy. As a remedy against this plight Nietzsche advised his successors to focus on their inner nature: 'The deeper the roots of a man's inner nature, the better will he take the past into himself'.[19] Molloy's preoccupation with the mechanics of bicycle riding as a substitute for writing gives us an insight into Beckett's satirical attitude towards the universal obsession with literature as history.

According to Craig, it is 'the challenge of Nietzsche's concept of history – implicitly if not explicitly – which Yeats, Eliot and Pound met through their poetry of memory'.[20] In using the word 'challenge', Craig wishes to emphasise that the poets in question were not so much being influenced by Nietzsche as reacting to the spread of nihilism. According to John Burt Foster, Yeats, for instance, found Nietzsche a 'strong enchanter' and was so entranced that he 'injured his eyes in reading him'.[21] What Yeats and many others found

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[15] Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 147.
[16] Ibid., p. 148.
[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thoughts Out of Season*, quoted in Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 148.
[18] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, p. 69.
[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thoughts Out of Season*, quoted in Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 150.
[20] Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 147.
[21] John Burt Foster, *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 563.

unchallengeable and what Craig does not take into account was Nietzsche's feverish competitiveness: 'I attack only causes that are victorious […]. I attack only causes against which I cannot expect to find allies […]. I attack only causes against which I shall stand alone'.[22] It was precisely this hyper-individualism, threatening to destroy a notion of national unity and the common cause that the three poets intended to challenge.

Between 1913 and 1915, Yeats became the leader of the national revival in Ireland. On 13 July 1914, in high excitement, he wrote to his friend Olivia Shakespear: 'Politics are growing heroic […]. Our chosen colour is blue, and blue shirts are marching all over the country, and their organiser tells me it was my suggestion'.[23] During that time, Pound, acting as Yeats's secretary and the "modernizer" of his poetry, succeeded in bringing the new movement in the arts to public attention through his ceaseless propaganda. In 1939, Eliot published *The Idea of A Christian Society* in which he specified what such an idea should include: 'an understanding of the end to which Christian society, to deserve the name, must be directed'. The end in question is a national unity for which poetry is the means: the practice of poetry need not in itself to confer wisdom or accumulate knowledge, [but] it ought at least to train the mind in *one habit of universal value*'.[24]

Despite Eliot, Yeats and Pound's unanimity regarding the value of literature and tradition, it was precisely this 'one habit of universal value' upon which they disagreed. For Eliot and Pound, Yeats's 'gods' were 'remote' and 'crude', never achieving 'objectivity'. Craig's comparative analysis reveals, however, that 'Eliot may well have owed more to that remote Irish mind than he realized or cared to admit'.[25] Quite remarkably, Craig, just like Beckett in 'Recent Irish Poetry', discusses the strange phenomenon of the *breakdown of the object*. For instance, the landscape in Yeats's 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' is both 'familiar and unlike itself, a puff of wind and the whole pattern suddenly [turning] the tower from aesthetic and symbolic artefact back into military stronghold'.[26] James Redner, an Eliot scholar, points to the same transformation of objects in *The Waste Land*. In 'Death by Water', Eliot introduces his sailors as ordinary Yankee lads who have the usual expectation of 'home and dollars', but 'suddenly something uncanny begins to happen and they are transformed into "the horror

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[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 167.
[23] *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 812.
[24] T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of A Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 8.
[25] Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 113.
[26] Ibid., p. 146.

of the illimitable scream"'.[27] Avoiding such general terms as 'expressionism', Craig examines the problem of objectivity, that is, the historical sense which Eliot, Pound and Yeats considered so important. Why, he asks, does the art of memory treat its objects with such disrespect for detail, for causes and effects? According to Craig, the poets tend to isolate particular myths rather than create a sense of objectivity. For Craig as a literary historian, this tendency is synonymous with political propaganda:

> Theoretically, Nietzsche's conception of history was as 'open' as the associationist conception of poetry, for history was there to be 'played' in as many different melodies as there were historians and artists to perform it, but in effect it was precisely its own theoretical openness, which the mythic conception of historical knowledge had, in performance, to deny.[28]

Having rejected the mythic concept of historical knowledge based on a single myth, Craig also denounces the idea of 'inconclusiveness' – that is, in Eliot's words, 'the inexhaustible, strange incoherence' of the work of art, offering us presumably multiple interpretations of a created myth. From Craig's point of view, such a claim is unsustainable because the ambiguity created by such works impedes a philosophical historian from intervening to prevent our acceptance of the presiding myth. Incoherence is nothing other than the 'closure of memory'.[29]

The issue that Craig has raised can be traced in the critical writings of Eliot, Pound and Yeats. If we look at Eliot's 'Tradition and Individual Talent' where he famously stated that 'tradition involves, in the first place, the historical sense', the need for 'a particular point of view' prevails over 'the materialistic interpretation of history':

> The materialistic interpretation of history […] asserts itself to be the 'fundamental' interpretation: and if one went into the matter thoroughly, one would question it, not from the point of view of any other interpretation, but from the point of view of an observer who believes that any interpretation of history is merely a selection of a

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[27] Harry Redner, *Ulysses and Faust: Tradition and Modernism from Homer till The Present* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 64.
[28] Cairns Graig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 151.
[29] Ibid., p. 151.

> particular abstracted series of causes and effects, and is valid only from a particular point of view.[30]

A particular point of view, however, never fixes itself on a specific object, but *compares* itself with other points of view – ironically, it is the condition, which Kant defines as 'the predisposition to humanity'.[31] In an article in the eighth issue of *Criterion* (July 1929), Eliot compares his point of view with that of the communists:

> I confess to a preference for fascism in practice, which I daresay most of my readers share; and I will not admit this preference is itself wholly irrational. I believe that the fascist form of unreason is less remote from my own than is that of the communists, but that my own is a more reasonable form of unreason.[32]

As Craig rightly observes, Eliot's avoidance of Pound's commitment to fascism was achieved 'on the basis of the *status quo* of Church, State and King' during the year of Eliot's active engagement with Charles Maurras' *Action Française*. In another article published in *Criterion* in 1931, Eliot's historical sense emerges as a real need for what Arland Ussher calls 'some subjective Absolute':

> The Bolsheviks at any rate believe in something, which has what is equivalent for them to a supernatural sanction; and it is only with a genuine supernatural sanction that we can oppose it. The theory of nationalism, as advanced in Italy, is not good enough; it becomes both artificial and ridiculous.[33]

Warning us against the treatment of history as literature, Craig contends that the study of history should be entrusted to philosophers who can make real sense of it instead of 'forging a single shared future'.[34] But one may well suspect that philosophers (even the Marxists to whom Craig belongs) are also prone to the closures of memory.

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[30] T.S. Eliot, *Criterion* (1929), quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 153.
[31] As suggested in the previous chapter, Beckett dramatises this predisposition as the second zone of Murphy's mind where he avenges himself. In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant insists that the individual needs to compare himself with others because he demands 'equality'.
[32] Quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 8.
[33] T.S. Eliot, *Criterion*, XI (October 1931), quoted in Cairns Craig, *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and The Politics of Poetry*, p. 282.
[34] Ibid., p. 154.

Perhaps, the need to create historical sense that was so keenly felt by the great modernist poets can be better explained through the lens of metaphysical desire. Even a cursory glance through existing interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology* draws our attention to such words as 'cryptic', 'mysterious', 'obscure'. For instance, Tom Rockmore's *Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* accounts for the chapter 'Absolute Knowing' as 'the most cryptic chapter'.[35] Moreover, Hegel viewed the 'Unhappy Consciousness' as the only objectivity represented by internalized conflict between the master and slave. Although he had predicted that the Unhappy Consciousness would transform itself into 'Spirit' when society achieves complete equality, in reality, the rise of democracy was accompanied by competitive nationalism. The modernists' aversion to 'mass culture', 'mass mind' or 'ill-breeding' indicates, among other things, that the ideal of equality could hardly be the cure for the need which Beckett described as 'the absolute predicament of particular human identity'.[36]

'Recent Irish Poetry' which presents the modernist movement as a quarrel between 'the antiquarians' and 'the thermolaters' takes us to the realm of mimetic rivalry which Beckett himself could not have possibly avoided by presenting his 'particular point of view'. Let us return to his situation in 1937. After *Murphy* was eventually accepted by Routledge Beckett felt 'disgust' at the idea of writing another prose work ('Don't give a bugger who publishes the blasted book'). [37] John Pilling, commenting on 'Assumption' (1929) marks 'the awkward problem of "point of view"' and quotes a passage in which Beckett's narrator explains why he does not permit his hero to speak: 'lest [his] apostolic fever colored what was at its worst the purely utilitarian contrivance of a man who wished to gain himself a hearing'.[38] In the German Letter to Axel Kaun (9 July 1937), Beckett contrasts his 'silence' to Joyce's abundance of words.[39] According to Dirk Van Hulle, the opposition is illusory: Beckett was no less erudite than Joyce and even 'the barest of his late writings are still saturated with intertextual references'.[40] One would assume, however, that the abundant praise of silence was simply an ironic posture. The letter was a response to Axel Kaun, a bookseller, who contacted Beckett as an expert in and faithful disciple of James Joyce. To Kaun's enquiry about his aesthetics, Beckett replies: 'I know there are

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[35] Tom Rockmore, 'Chapter 8', in *Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 453.
[36] Samuel Beckett, 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin', in *Disjecta*, p. 91.
[37] Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 249.
[38] John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 30.
[39] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 519.
[40] Dirk van Hulle, 'Beckett and Shakespeare on Nothing' in *Limit{e } Beckett 1* (Autumn 2010), p. 123.

sensitive and intelligent people […] for whom there is no lack of silence. I cannot help but assume that they are hard of hearing'.[41] His silence between 1937 and 1941 indicates that, unlike Goethe and his modern successors (to whom he refers in the Letter to Kaun), Beckett did not uphold the opinion that '*better to write Nothing than not to write*'.[42]

SECTION 2: THE WAR AND *WATT*'S GENRE

The existing interpretations of *Watt* roughly fall into two traditions: it is either a satire or an art of allusion. A notable example of the latter is Chris Ackerley's *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (2005). This study is the most detailed examination of the novel's allusions. Ackerley has found the keys to many an obscure lock, however, the lock that the current study is trying to open, namely, Beckett's historical sense, remains stubbornly shut. Ackerley argues that Beckett intended *Watt* to be an incomplete, unfinished project, and 'in a sense, it has to be'.[43] According to S.E. Gontarski, *Watt*'s 'incompletion is the principal rhetorical trope of the novel [as] an acknowledgement of the irresolution that dominates both physical and metaphysical worlds'.[44] If the novel's incompletion 'has to be' any further attempts at its interpretation will be futile. Robert Kiely's 1993 review of criticism on Beckett notes this danger: 'If an opinion can be expressed about Beckett's fiction that might sum up a critical consensus, it would be that […] "Beckett's art proclaims its independence from the material world" or "that no relationship exists between the artist and an external reality"'.[45] Writing on Beckett's relation to Ireland and its history, Kiely disagrees with this opinion and suggests that Beckett's 'inconclusiveness' should not be accepted as conclusive.

We have mentioned James McNaughton's *Samuel Beckett and The Politics of Aftermath* (2018) as an example of historical reading. One of his valuable points holds that 'Beckett, like many experimental modernists, uses allusion that purposefully misleads us in order to question what kind of cultural reconstructions are legitimate or even possible in a

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[41] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, p. 519.
[42] Ibid., p. 517.
[43] Chris Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No.14 (Fall/Spring 2004-05), p. 22.
[44] S.E. Gontarski, 'An Art of Incompletion: A Preface' to *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt*, p. 3.
[45] Robert Kiely, 'Samuel Beckett Harping: No Place to Go, No Place to Go', in *Harvard Review*, No. 5 (Fall 1993), pp. 74-94.

modern society'.[46] Unfortunately, McNaughton does not consider the myth-making role of literature, concentrating exclusively on media clichés noted in 'German Diaries' – hence the narrowing of Beckett's intention to certain political purposes: 'learning such vocabulary prepared Beckett to debate Germany's right to possess colonies'.[47] The question why Beckett's allusions are deliberately misleading remains open.

James Knowlson's comment on *Watt* in *Damned to Fame* sets forth the novel's feature which the current study takes up as a navigating point. Holding that *Watt* is 'a comic attack on rationality', Knowlson insists that 'there is a degree of conscious control [on Beckett's part] that suggests the very opposite of this [rationalism]'.[48] The fact that 'this very opposite' is not defined as 'inconclusiveness' is important because it indicates that *Watt* is not a work of propaganda but derives from the author's awareness that he himself is guilty, that he is the first rationalist among Mr Knott's servants. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that the 'risus purus' is the laughter which should excoriate 'the understanding'. In Kant's terms, 'the understanding' means the absolute totality of the conditions of a given present event.

Beckett's aim to achieve 'understanding' stands in sharp contrast to the one that Stephen Dedalus assigns to Shakespeare's laughter: 'he laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage'.[49] The first entries in Beckett's six notebooks on *Watt* are dated '11 February 1941' – less than a month after Joyce's death. Beckett went to his birthday party on 2 February, organized by their mutual friends. The fact that Arsene, Watt's predecessor in Mr Knott's house, bequeaths 'the risus purus' to a new arrival, suggests certain continuity between the two writers which is always open for examination.

In any discussion of genre, biography always plays an important role. In real life, Beckett's historical sense was acute. He saw the Nazis as an objective evil and wanted to fight. Later in life, he would tell James Knowlson: 'You simply could not stand by, with your arms folded'.[50] Quite ironically, when he decided 'to place [himself] at the disposition of France' in April 1939, for the French, according to Germaine Bree, even in the early part of 1941, 'the choice between collaboration or resistance, between Vichy and De Gaulle […]

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[46] Ibid., p. 62.
[47] Ibid., p. 60.
[48] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 334.
[49] James Joyce's *Ulysses*, p. 345.
[50] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 304.

were matters of endless debate'.[51] When the war was announced, Beckett volunteered to drive an ambulance, but unsurprisingly, his application to the French authorities was never taken up. Following on de Gaulle's speech on the BBC on 18 June 1940, for the majority of Europeans it was not obvious that the war was 'a world's war'.[52] In January 1941, Beckett became actively involved in the Resistance, having joined the Paris-based cell 'Gloria' of British SOE as an information handler and a translator of secret reports. In an interview with James Knowlson, he would refer to this activity as 'boy-scouting'.[53]

In *Watt*, we come across a constant complaint about 'the obscurity of Watt's communications'.[54] The documents released at Kew, containing Beckett's 1945 interview, reveal how little he knew of the wider cell outside his immediate circle. Intelligence warfare with its atmosphere of suspicion, its usual practice of smelling a rat, is notable in *Watt*. Thus, we are struck by Watt and Sam's strange attraction to rats. They like to feed them, sometimes with fledgelings or sometimes they would seize 'a plump young rat' and would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative'.[55] The narrator often repeats that 'Watt's attention was extreme, in the beginning', but towards the end of his stay in Mr Knott's house, 'this constant tension of some of his most noble faculties tired Watt greatly. And the results, on the whole, were meagre. But he had no choice'.[56]

Overall, it seems that for Beckett, his secret service activity turned out to be a disappointing experience, contrary to what he might have expected from his role in resistance. As we read through *Watt*, it becomes evident that 'the unhappy' are those who rely on their rampant intelligence. In a sense, Watt behaves like an intelligence agent. He collects and 'when necessary, interrogates' information, such as the number of visitors, knocks at the door, changes of light, 'all that came and went and paused and stirred'.[57] By the end of Part II, we learn that the narrator, Sam, is the person to whom Watt hands over his reports on everything that goes on in Mr Knott's house. It is, however, impossible to grasp what is really happening because Watt's reports are not concerned with the present, but with 'the past and the future'.[58]

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[51] Quoted in Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 325.
[52] De Gaulle: 'This war is not limited to the unfortunate territory of our country […]. This war is a world war' (http://thetimes.co.uk).
[53] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 307.
[54] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 62.
[55] Ibid., p. 133.
[56] Ibid., p. 71.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., p.62.

This strange preoccupation with the past and the future is inextricable from the art of writing, especially if it is a novel. The bulk of *Watt* was written in the small village of Roussillon, where Beckett found refuge after the Gestapo had infiltrated his resistance cell. Later in his letters to George Reavey and Lawrence Harvey, Beckett would describe work on the novel as 'an exercise', helping him to 'counter the long hours of ennui' as 'he waited for nothing to happen'.[59] In reality, he joined a local resistance group whose main activity consisted in collecting and storing supplies dropped from the air. According to Cronin, 'the arms were being kept for a final uprising, their number seemed to be out of proportion to the capacity of the potential users'.[60] Nevertheless, Beckett and the Galls (the French Maquis) had to regularly make 'a twenty-kilometer slog' to the mountains to collect arms and then store them till the end of the war. Apart from this resistance activity and writing *Watt*, there was a piano that Beckett had obtained from a local family.

As we read this story, it is difficult to resist the temptation to associate it with the incident of 'the Galls' – the piano-tuners who came '*all the way from town*' to tune Mr Knott's piano. They happened to be the only 'callers', the only 'fugitive penetration' during Watt's period of service on the ground floor.[61] Both of them were blind and the result of the tuning was blandly nothing. To make sense of this event Watt repeats obsessively that 'nothing has happened' and that 'nothing has happened again'. The Galls has been identified as an allusion to *King Lear* ('blind Gloucester led by his disguised son Edgar on the cliffs of Dover').[62] Since the Galls incident is declared to be 'the first and type of many [such incidents]', [63] it is important to find out what its archetypal significance in the novel is.

As the scene unfolds, a sense emerges that 'the Galls' is not an original allusion, but 'posterior to the phenomena destined to become them'.[64] This strange emphasis on imitation confirms what 'Irish Poetry' and *Murphy* already suggest: Beckett wants us to focus our attention upon the mimetic behaviour of his protagonist. So, we learn that 'Watt would never have thought or spoken of such incidents if he had not been under the absolute necessity of doing so'.[65] As discussed in the previous section, the necessity of evoking some myths of the past in order to make sense of the present was the intellectual

[59] Quoted in Chris Ackerley's 'Preface' to *Watt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. viii. further references are in the main body of text.
[60] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 334.
[61] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 57.
[62] Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, p. 9.
[63] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 62.
[64] Ibid., p. 65.
[65] Ibid.

habit of Beckett's time. In *Watt*, we find numerous allusions which expose their own imitative nature. Thus, the incident of the Galls from which Watt could deduce 'nothing' could be a reference to Eliot's integration of the 'nothing' from *King Lear* into his *Waste Land*. According to Redner, 'the word nothing, oft repeated, "Nothing again Nothing" is the extensive and far-reaching play on nothing in *King Lear*', which gives us 'a clue' to Eliot's alternations between 'the Christian kenosis, that of being bereft of everything in the light of the divine vision' and Hell, involving such negative states as 'not speaking, not thinking, not seeing and not living'.[66] In *Watt*, the role of 'Nothing' is assigned to Mr Knott,

> For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he was a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realised that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite.[67]

That humans might be termites was an apprehension that preoccupied many after World War 1. The termite leitmotif can be found in Eliot's correspondence with Lytton Strachey referring to the period of his full-time job at the bank: 'My evenings in Bridge. The effect is to make me regard London with disdain and divide mankind into supermen, termites and wireworms. I am sojourning among the termites. At any rate, that coheres'.[68]

Eliot presents himself with a pinch of humour as a superman sojourning among the termites, bound to train their minds 'in one habit of universal value'.[69] Equating God, men and termites, Beckett refers to 'our anthropologists', meaning, perhaps, Ernst Cassirer and Max Scheler, both of whom attempted to answer the same call for a clear and unified conception of human nature. To make more sense of Beckett's reference to anthropology, it would not be amiss to recall the concept of man as it emerges in 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor'. According to Dostoevsky's moral governor, Christianity failed to accomplish 'all that man seeks on earth, that is to say, whom to worship, to whom to

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[66] Harry Redner, *Ulysses and Faust: Tradition and Modernism from Homer till The Present*, p. 34.
[67] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 64.
[68] T.S. Eliot, A Letter to Lytton Strachey, quoted in James E. Miller Jr., *T.S. Eliot, The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922*, p. 325.
[69] T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of A Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 8.

entrust his conscience and how at last to unite all in a common harmonious, and incontestable ant-hill'.[70]

While laughing at the art of allusion as an imitative art, Beckett never gave it up but used it for his own anthropological project. In what follows we address three of its major realms: philosophy, literature and religion.

SECTION 3: PHILOSOPHY

The analysis of *Watt* in the chapter called 'Methodology' suggested that Beckett patterns his narrative on the style of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), which examines a 'series' of various conditions of some abstract x, y, z, hoping to elaborate a method which would allow the synthesis of all appearances ('the understanding'). This section aims to demonstrate that in terms of content, *Watt* owes a great deal to Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793). As indicated by its title, in this late work, Kant set out to grant his *Metaphysics of Morals* a status of religion in order 'to unite all in a common, harmonious and incontestable ant-hill'. This phrase from 'The Legend of The Grand Inquisitor' so perfectly describes Kant's project ('the union of men based on *a pure rational faith*')[71] that one simply cannot neglect this intertextuality. But we will not be able to prove satisfactorily this connection without first considering Beckett's satire of Kant's work as well as *Watt*'s anthropological project as a whole. Beckett will help us to clarify the meaning of 'The Legend', its grim satire – the text that had been largely misunderstood by his near contemporaries.

What makes us believe that Beckett engages with Kant's Religion? The overwhelming evidence for this source arises from the interaction of meaningful structures within *Watt*. We have already noted the relation between the names of Knott and Watt with regards to Watt's need for Mr Knott, his progress towards Mr Knott's house (see Chapter I). In the 'Preface' to *Religion*, Kant stresses a "what" sentence: '*What is to result from this right conduct of ours?* is to be answered, and towards what, as an end – even granted it may not be wholly subject to our control – we might direct our actions and abstentions so as at least to be in harmony with that end'.[72] For Kant, this "end-to-end What" suggests

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[70] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, p. 302.
[71] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 129.
[72] Ibid., p. 4; Kant's emphasis.

that 'we must postulate a higher, moral, most holy, and omnipotent Being which alone can unite the two elements of the highest good'.[73] Beckett duplicates Kant's metaphysical strategy by activating the quest (Watt as 'What') for a higher and omnipotent Being ('Not God') to make a historical sense ('what is this right conduct of ours?'). The problem with this strategy is its *necessary failure* embodied as Mr Knott (Not or Nothing).

According to Kant, God's absence from the phenomenal world propels man to surpass his nature and become a moral governor in the realm of phenomena. Beckett is of a different mind. Man is not a god and even the trick with ancestry will not justify this role. Watt wished he could make sense of his ancestors. 'Once his dead father appeared to him in a wood' but this was the same kind of appearance as the Galls: 'to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill'.[74] The agent's self-awareness stands in need of 'reassurance'. No father or mother can give it to him. The horrible sense of the Self's inferiority manifests itself in the structure that satirises three individualistic projects: Cartesian cogito, Kant's moral governor and Hegel's master and slave dialectic.

Descartes' proof of God opens this gallery of failed attempts at self-divinization. According to Knowlson, Descartes had been Beckett's anti-hero since his first year at T.C.D. (Beckett's literary tour to France in August 1926 opened with a visit to Descartes' headquarters at La Fleche).[75] Four years later, Beckett wrote a poem *Whoroscope*, having decided to take part in a contest for the best poem on Time, organized by Nancy Cunard, the editor of The Hours Press. The title points to the same "vulgarity" of the phenomenological outlook that he castigates in *Proust*: 'but our vulgar perception is not concerned with other than vulgar phenomena'.[76] In *Whoroscope*, Beckett employs the same method of satirical mimicking, playing on Descartes' petulant tone and accentuating his rivalries (in Baillet's 1691 *Vie de Descartes*, the philosopher is always victorious):

> What's that?
> An egg? […]
> Galileo how are you
> And his consecutive thirds!
> The vile old Copernican lead-swinging son of a sutler![77]

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[73] Ibid., p.130.
[74] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 63.
[75] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 64.
[76] Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 17.
[77] Samuel Beckett, 'Whoroscope', in *Collected Poems, edited by Sean Lawlor and John Pilling*, p. 40.

Descartes in *Watt* is less self-assured. In order 'to elicit something from nothing', Watt decides to identify himself with a pot, 'with one of Mr Knott's pots'.[78] The source that gave rise to this strange idea is the famous 'Trademark Argument for God's Existence' in Descartes' *Third Meditation*, subtitled 'The Existence of God'. Here Descartes asks himself how his judgments can be 'objective' if he denies that 'the cause of [his] truth was any knowledge [he] might have had'.[79] To assert his objectivity and answer this question positively, he realizes that the existence of God is absolutely indispensible: 'God, at my creation, implanted this idea in me that it might serve, as it were for the mark of the workman impressed on his work'.[80]

Once Descartes ascertained that his *cogito* was 'something' that could not be doubted by anyone, he asked himself whence he had derived this thought:

> I ask from whom could I then derive my existence? Perhaps from myself or my parents, or from some other causes less perfect than God. Now if I were independent of all other existence, and were myself the author of my being, I should certainly doubt nothing, I should conceive no desires, and finally I would lack no perfection; for I should have given myself all those perfections of which I have in me some idea, and thus I should be God.[81]

Although out of modesty Descartes decided that he could not be a god, the idea that he had been created in the image of his omnipotent father, who, for some reason, had created him imperfect, comforted him. For Watt, this trick does not work:

> It was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly […]. For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone, but Watt. Then, when he turned for reassurance to himself, who was not Mr Knott's, in the sense that the pot was, who had come from without and whom the without would take again, he made the distressing discovery that of himself too he could

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[78] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 63.
[79] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (London: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 234.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., p. 124.

> no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone'.[82]

Descartes also tried to identify himself with a stone: 'For when I think that a stone is a substance, or a thing which is capable of existing of itself, that I also am a substance, although I see clearly that I am a thinking and not extended thing'.[83]

Having outlined this inexorable paradigm of divinity, connecting God as 'Nothing' and a man as 'something', Beckett draws our attention to the strategy of rivalry underlying the relationship between the master and the servants. Watt never ceases to wonder why things in Mr Knott's house are ordered in this way and not in another way. On the ground floor, it is hinted, Watt had to do some dirty work, such as, for instance, emptying Mr Knott's slops. Why is that so, Watt asks, that his and Erskine's slops (Erskine is the servant on the first floor) go anywhere while Mr Knott's slops go on the flowerbeds: 'on some young thirsty thing at the moment of its most need'.[84]

The distinctive emotion of Kant's *Religion* is the same complaint that the laws of nature are arbitrary and despotic. We may easily recognise the source of the "Kirilov case" (as it appears in Dostoevsky's *Diary of A Writer*) in one of Kant's 'General Observations', building a lawsuit against 'Nothing', a Zero, whom the philosopher terms 'the Supreme Lawgiver':

> These doctrines ['the religion of most civilized people' of 'juridico-civil state'] assert, first, that we are to look upon the Supreme Lawgiver as one who commands not *mercifully* or with *forbearance* (indulgently) for men's weakness, or *despotically* and merely according to His unlimited right; and we are to look upon His laws not as arbitrary and as wholly unrelated to our concepts of morality, but as laws addressed to man's holiness.[85]

'Man's holiness' derives, to be sure, from those moral maxims which Kant had introduced as 'Science' in his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), written eight years before *Religion*. After the book had been criticised for its 'obscurity', Kant decided that 'morality leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful moral

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[82] Ibid., p. 68.
[83] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, p. 114.
[84] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 55.
[85] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 132, Kant's emphases.

Lawgiver, outside of mankind'.[86] This 'powerful moral Lawgiver' is not named but it is hinted that he is the author of 'morality which finds in the holiness of its law an object of the greatest respect'.[87] The Supreme Law Giver is called into "court" for the sole purpose of being politely asked to step aside and give way to 'a moral Governor of the world': 'This idea of a moral Governor of the world is a task presented to our practical reason'.[88]

Who is the rival of the moral Governor? Long before Nietzsche, Kant raised the problem of the Gospel which, he argues, had become harmful to men in creating for them 'the risk of degenerating into an anthropomorphic servile faith'.[89] According to Kant, the advocates of this faith are 'hermits' and 'monks' and all those 'great masses of people', who would like to appeal to the merciful God, trying to avoid their duties and responsibilities.[90] The very notion of "a servant of God" is detestable to him:

> It is tedious to be a good *servant* (here one is forever hearing only about one's duties); man would therefore rather be a *favourite*, where much is overlooked or else, when duty has been too grossly violated, everything is atoned for through the agency of some one or other favored in the highest degree – man, meanwhile, remaining the servile knave he ever was.[91]

For Kant, it is of the utmost importance that 'a free agent' could not be pardoned on the basis of his nature.[92] The moral governor of the world leans for his judgements on 'the pure faith of reason' which, as such, 'stands in need of no documentary authentication but proves itself.[93] The Gospels, on the contrary, require verification by 'scholarship' because their disseminators are unreliable and their instructions are obscure.

We read that Watt received a bizarre instruction that the remains of the food, which he cooks for Mr Knott, should be given to the dog: 'To whom, Watt wondered, was this arrangement due'.[94] There is little doubt that this arrangement is due to Matthew 15: 21-28

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[86] Ibid., p. 5.
[87] Ibid., p. 6.
[88] Ibid., p. 130.
[89] Ibid., p. 133.
[90] Ibid., p. 132.
[91] Ibid., p. 188; Kant's emphases.
[92] 'The eighteenth century has been called the century of reason, *le siècle de la raison*. I've never understood that; they're all mad, *ils sont tous fous, ils déraisonnes*! They give reason a responsibility, which it simply can't bear, it's too weak', Beckett's interview with Michael Haerdter, quoted in *Beckett/Philosophy*, edited by Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani, p. 197.
[93] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 132.
[94] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 74.

in which the stubborn Canaanite woman calls herself a dog while appealing to Christ's mercy. The story is preceded by Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees who rebuked Him for not obeying the law. 'In vain they do worship me', he tells his disciples, 'let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind'. His disciples themselves, however, behave like the Pharisees when they prevent the Canaanite woman from approaching Christ to whom she cries out for help. Initially he ignores her, speaking to his pupils: 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. As the woman persists, he turns to her only to say: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs'. She does not take offence and reminds him that 'even the dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their masters' table'. Faith triumphs over law and Christ tells "the dog" in the presence of his disciples 'O woman great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt'. It is hard to imagine a more insulting story for Kant than the story of the dog eating crumbs from its master's table.

From the rationalist point of view, the Canaanite woman is an example of an anthropomorphic servile faith. Beckett's comparison of "the dog's" faith with the rational faith of men is hilarious. Watt heard 'a little voice, Mr Knott's'. It reminded Watt of 'a man who was bitten by a dog […] and […] another man who was scratched by a cat, in the nose, and […] a missionary who was trampled to death by an ostrich, in the stomach, and he once knew a priest who, on leaving with a sigh of relief the chapel where he had served mass, with his own hands, to more than a hundred persons, was shat on, from above, by a dove, in the eye'.[95]

Kant's objection to the imponderables and illogicality of creation, all his 'other four-footed friends, about the place, and of his inarticulate bipedal brothers and sisters in God'[96] must have inspired Beckett to create his animals as real characters of his novel. As we shall see, the distinction between dogs and rats is also a distinction between two human types: a common man and an intelligent man. We read that Watt disliked dogs, being extremely fond of rats who, without a doubt, are the most intelligent "animals" in Beckett's comical anthropology. Watt envisages 'in this matter great difficulties […], notwithstanding the large number of hungry and even starving dogs with which the

[95] Ibid., p. 76.
[96] Ibid.

neighbourhood abounded'.[97] He wonders whether 'of its own free will the average hungry or starving dog [will] be constant in attendance, under such conditions'.[98]

There could have been no better setting for Watt's religious mission than Ireland. Yeats's concern with the 'ill-breeding of Ireland' by which he meant the indigenous population rushing after the privileges previously belonging to educated classes, could have been on Beckett's mind.[99] Watt imagines 'a real live famished dog as large as a life […] coming night after night as regular as a clockwork to Mr Knott's back door, led by and probably preceding an unmistakable specimen of local indigent proliferation'.[100] It seems that in portraying the Irish, Beckett went out of his way to demonstrate that man's nature *submits* to natural causes. The Lynches in *Watt* are typical of what Kant describes in *Religion* as 'the predisposition to animality for which no reason is required'. It is worth repeating here what this means: 'the propagation of the species, through the sexual impulse, and for the care of offspring so begotten', and 'for community with other men'. So we read that

> There was Tom Lynch, widower, aged eighty-five years, confined to his bed with constant undiagnosed pains in the caecum, and his three surviving boys Joe, aged sixty-five years, a rheumatic cripple, and Jim, aged sixty-four years, a hunchbacked inebriate, and Bill, widower, aged sixty-three years, greatly hampered in his movements by the loss of both legs as the result of a slip, followed by a fall, and his only surviving daughter May Sharpe, widow, aged sixty-two years, in full possession of all her faculties with the exception of that of vision. Then there was Joe's wife née Doyle-Byrne, aged sixty-four years, a sufferer from Parkinson's palsy but otherwise very fit and well […]. Then there was Joe's boy Tom, aged forty-one years, unfortunately subject alternately to fits of exaltation, which rendered him incapable of the least exertion, and of depression, during which he could stir neither hand nor foot, and Bill's boy Sam, aged forty years, paralysed by a merciful providence from no higher than the knees down and from no lower than the waist up […].[101]

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[97] Ibid., p. 76.
[98] Ibid., p. 77.
[99] *Yeats's Mask: Yeats's Annual No. 19*, p. 34.
[100] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 84.
[101] Ibid.

Providence was indeed merciful to Sam since it did not deprive him of his ability to increase the number of souls in the Lynch clan: 'the goal towards which the whole family was striving' was 'the millennium'.[102]

Such an undignified purpose has appeared scandalous to many Beckett scholars.[103] For Siobhan Purcell, for example, 'the Lynch episode is a microcosm of the anomalous in which the anomaly govern both content and form'.[104] What was the writer's intention in exposing human nature in all its animalistic manifestations? Are the Lynches so unworthy of our praise? On a closer look it turns out that the propagation of the species is not such a vulgar thing. Despite all their diseases and weaknesses, the Lynches exhibit an unheard-of staunchness – even in the face of death, presented in a quite unusual way:

> Then a moment passed and all was changed. Not that there was death, for there was not. Nor that there was birth, for there was not either. But puff puff breath again they breathed, in and out, the twenty-eight, and all was changed.[105]

The way in which death impedes the Lynches' purpose is cruel and unfair. Death makes no sense whatsoever in seizing those newborn and their mothers whose health and expectations are most promising and essential. Thus we read that Liz, the wife of Sam, 'lay down and expelled a child, her twentieth with the greatest of ease […], and she suckled the infant with great enjoyment […], the flow of milk being remarkably abundant […], and then after five or six days […] to the great astonishment of her husband […] she died'. The same misfortune befell 'Ann, May's spinster daughter'. She 'gave birth to a fine bouncing baby boy, and then to an almost equally fine bouncing baby-girl, and they did not remain fine very long, nor did they long continue to bounce'.[106]

The very idea of justice is shattered as the narrator draws our attention to the destiny of the Lynches' dogs – those faithful animals whose selection was meant to benefit the clan. 'If the dog had been set free, to run about, as it pleased, then it would have eaten

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[102] Ibid., p. 89.
[103] See, for instance, Daniela Caselli's 'The Child in Beckett's Work: Introduction', in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 15*: *Historicising Beckett* (2005), p. 259; Mary Bryden's Women in Samuel Beckett's prose and Drama: Her Own Other (Lanham: Barnes & Noble, 1993), p. 7; Paul Stewart's 'Samuel Beckett's Misopedia', in *Irish University Review*, Vol. 41, No 2 (2011).
[104] Siobhan Purcell, 'Defamiliarised Familial', in *Samuel Beckett and the 'Sate' of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), p. 156.
[105] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 89.
[106] Ibid.

the horsedung […] and so ruined its appetite' for Mr Knott's food.[107] As a result of the measures taken by Watt to prevent this foolish behaviour, the dogs, whose names were Kate and then Cis, were not long living either.[108] The poor animals were kept starved so that not a crumb was wasted, but despite of all these precautions the Lynches' numbers continued to decrease. The question 'Who had done this thing to Ann' began to be asked and several members of the Lynches' family confessed their sins to 'the priest, prior to being carried away, and the priest was an old and intimate friend of the family'.[109]

As the panorama of this "unweeded garden that grows to seed" unfolds, the narrator gives his version of Watt's failure on the ground floor. The feeding of dogs did not lead to the reconciliation between the Lynches, but resulted in the redistribution of their rivalries:

> And of those who had been in agreement, many were now in disagreement, and of those who had been in disagreement, many now were in agreement, though some that had agreed agreed still, and some that had disagreed still disagreed. And so new friendships were formed, and new enmities, and old friendships preserved, and old enmities. And all was agreement and disagreement and amity and enmity, as before, only redistributed.[110]

At some point, Watt decided to rebel against Mr Knott by refusing 'to assist at the eating, by the dog, of [his] remains' – but 'no punishment fell on Watt, no thunderbolt, and Mr Knott's establishment swam on, through the unruffled nights and days, with all its customary serenity'.[111]

The mission of the moral governor has failed on the ground floor. It is hinted that those whom it aimed to benefit were unworthy of the heavenly food cooked by Watt ('a pot of food so nourishing […] that only a thoroughly famished dog could get it down').[112] Afterwards Watt was long racking his brains about the role that the dogs played in connecting the Lynches with Mr Knott's leftovers: 'For reasons that remain obscure Watt was greatly interested, and even fascinated by this matter of the dog, the dog brought into the world, and maintained there, at considerable expense for the sole purpose of eating Mr

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[107] Ibid., p. 95.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., pp. 89-93.
[110] Ibid., p. 93.
[111] Ibid., p. 98.
[112] Ibid., p. 95.

Knott's food'.[113] The question as to why and for what purpose this 'venerable tradition, or institution' was established remains obscure until Watt moves on to the first floor.[114]

SECTION 4: MASTER AND SERVANTS

The service on the first floor is a privilege because according to the servants, Mr Knott's dwelling place is the master's bedroom. They want to be as near him as possible, because 'to many on the ground floor the nearness of Mr Knott must long be a horror, and long a horror to others on the first his farness'.[115] The structure of the floors is employed to guide us through a network of heterogeneous conflicts not only between the master and the servants but also between the servants themselves. In order to send his reports to Sam, Watt needs to compare his views of Mr Knott with the views of the other servants whose knowledge of Mr Knott appears to be greater: 'Not that Erskine, Arsene, Walter, Vincent and the others could have told […] something of Mr Knott. Then we would have had Erskine's Mr Knott, and Arsene's Mr Knott, and Walter's Mr Knott, and Vincent's Mr Knott, to compare with Watt's Mr Knott. That would have been a very interesting exercise'.[116]

The privileged first floor is reserved for the mythmakers, the writers. We are in the world of rats into which Watt desires to be initiated. Sometimes he blames himself for having decided to abandon the dogs ('It was in vain that he had no love for dogs, greatly preferring rats, he could not have done otherwise').[117] The object of desire in this domain is literature where words are used in such a way that they begin to make sense. For Watt, this is very important because 'since the age of fourteen […] he had experienced literally nothing', surrounded by the phenomena that 'seemed rather to belong to some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten'.[118] Watt was not particularly skilful in the art of applying words to his situation and the world around, so, at some point, his world had become 'unspeakable'.[119] When we read of Watt's competition with Erskine for proximity to Mr

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[113] Ibid., p. 98.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., p. 113.
[116] Ibid., p. 107.
[117] Ibid., p. 94.
[118] Ibid., pp. 61, 67.
[119] Ibid., p. 71.

Knott, we do not need to mine the archives in order to trace Beckett's sources which are, to a certain extent, biographical. It does not matter what writer he secretly admired or hated or both, because the entanglements of comic misunderstanding cannot be anything but mimetic.

Erskine, the servant of the first floor is exceptionally good at wrapping up the world into words, and 'Watt would have been glad to hear Erskine's voice'.[120] It is, however, in vain that Watt expected Erskine to communicate with him on the subject of Mr Knott. The former behaves like a high priest, although 'the song that Erskine sang, or rather intoned was always the same' *question mark* ('?').[121] Could it be an art of silence? The narrator tells us that sometimes 'Watt felt a feeling resembling the feeling of satisfaction […] at his being abandoned by the last rats'.[122] His apathy, however, did not last long, being interrupted by Erskine's voice:

> Erskine's voice, wrapping up safe in words the kitchen space, the extraordinary newel-lamp, the stairs that were never the same and of which even the number of steps seemed to vary, from day to day.[123]

This voice, being so powerful, wrapped up 'the bushes' and by doing so prevented Watt from 'taking the air even on the finest day, so that he grew pale and constipated'.[124]

As rivalry grows stronger, Beckett had to increase the dynamic of psychological reversals typical of the unhappy consciousness. Thus, we witness the same boomerang movement that urges Belacqua out – only in Erskine's case, it is the movement between the floors:

> forever [Erskine] was flying up the stairs from the first floor to the second floor and down them again from the second floor to the first floor and down the stairs from the first floor to the ground floor and up them again.[125]

Erskine's staircase adds to Beckett's gallery of characters attached to a certain prop, like, for instance, Murphy to his rocking chair, Mr Kelly to his kite or Molloy to his bicycle.

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[120] Ibid., p. 79.
[121] Ibid., p. 71.
[122] Ibid., p. 70.
[123] Ibid., p.69.
[124] Ibid., p. 69.
[125] Ibid., p. 100.

Erskine's stairs bring to mind Yeats' *Winding Stair* – a collection of poems published in 1933, which Beckett mocks in 'Recent Irish Poetry' as Yeats's 'bequest of his pride and faith to the "young upstanding men" […] something almost second-best bed'.[126] Analysing Shelley's double (his Zoroaster) as a mark of genius, Yeats wrote: 'I too had my conception of the Divine Man, and a few days before had schemed out a poem, praying that somewhere upon some seashore or upon some mountain I should meet face to face with that divine image of myself'.[127]

The naïve Watt makes a number of conjectures as to why Erskine had to be so restless instead of sitting quietly beside Knott and enjoying his presence:

> […] perhaps Erskine, finding the first floor trying, is obliged to run upstairs every now and then for a breath of the second floor, and then every now and then downstairs for a breath of the ground floor, or even garden, just as in certain waters certain fish, in order to support the middle depths, are forced to rise and fall, now to the surface of the waves and now to the ocean bed. But do such fish exist?[128]

As we have seen, such fish exist in Yeats's 'Three Movements'. Yeats wrote a prose version of this poem in his "White Manuscript Book" and dated it 20 January 1932. It reads: '*Shakespearean fish*: Passion in Shakespeare was a great fish in the sea, but from Goethe to the end of the Romantic movement the fish was in the net. It will soon be dead upon the shore'.[129]

The winding stair in Mr Knott's house is a hot spot. Passions rage not only in Erskine and Watt but also in Sam who now appears as a character. We see him standing at the bottom of the stairs or perhaps crouching under them, unable to take his envious eyes off Erskine running upstairs and downstairs now and then:

> But am I not here, below stairs, somewhere about, on the alert? But it may be that Mr Knott has more confidence in Erskine, who has been here longer than I, than in me, who have not been here so long as Erskine.[130]

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[126] Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry', p. 72.
[127] W.B. Yeats, quoted in *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual No. 19*, p. 42.
[128] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 101.
[129] Quoted in *Critical Companion to William Butler Yeats*, edited by David. A. Ross, p. 245.
[130] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 101.

The role of the poet as a moral governor of the world comes in the forefront towards the end of Part II dealing with Watt's obsession with the bell ('a divine call' that summons the 'agent' to his public duty is the only 'mystery' which Kant admits in his *Religion*).[131] Sharing the second floor with Erskine, Watt often heard the bell ringing in Erskine's room. Was it Mr Knott calling Erskine because he needed him or was it Erskine himself ringing, pretending that it was Mr Knott? Like in *Murphy*, the word 'key' is employed to create a hilariously comical obsession with potency. Whether it comes to sex or literature, the object of rivalry is unimportant – what matters is who gets on top: 'The question of who pressed the bell that sounded in Erskine's room, in the night, was a great source of worry to Watt, for a time, and kept him awake at night, on the qui vive'.[132] Burning with envy, Watt decided to steal Erskine's key in order to penetrate into his room to make sure that the bell was connected to Mr Knott's bedroom on the first floor: 'But to pick a pocket sewn on to the front of a man's underhose, even when the man was looking the other way, without arousing suspicion, was not, Watt knew, in his power'.[133]

The bawdy scene is evoked for the purpose of demonstrating the alternating presence and absence of potency both in physical and spiritual sense. When Watt finally penetrates into Erskine room he discovers that the bell was broken. The only object which detains his attention was a piece of abstract painting on the wall which reflects, it seems, Beckett' s thoughts on the relationship between masters and servants: 'was it not rather the circle that was in the background, and the point that was in the foreground? How the effect of perspective was obtained Watt did not know'.[134] The sentiments of the characters have become as mixed up as the seasons of the year or the servant's identities in *Watt*: 'what had the artist intended to say?' Our search for neat differentiations would miss the point entirely. In this no-man's-land it becomes impossible to define anything. At a certain point, the rivalries between the servants become rather dull since all actions and motivations are their own opposites. The crisis of identity has reached the most intimate recesses of the individual consciousness so that art becomes helpless to speak of tradition or historical sense. But Watt is still urged on towards Mr Knott's stronghold on the first floor.

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[131] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 133.
[132] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 104.
[133] Ibid., p. 108.
[134] Ibid., p. 109.

SECTION 5: RELIGION

Part III deals with Watt's service on the first floor where the servants are supposed to enjoy the 'nearness' of the master. But instead of Mr Knott, we see Sam stepping in as a full-fledged character and becoming Watt's double. In the course of this development, Beckett shows that Watt and Sam's collaboration leads to the mastery which invariably involves some sort of destruction for the sake of unity. In 'Ding Dong' we had Orestes and Pylades who were friends in the past but recently fell out; the quest for pain brings them together. Now we have a similar process of the two halves of the unhappy consciousness trying to reunite. Let us follow their progress step by step, which should take us to an understanding of the 'mechanism' underpinning Watt's public service, consisting in the feeding of Mr Knott's leftovers to the dogs.

As we pass on to Part III, the setting changes completely. Mr Knott's house and garden give way to the 'windowless pavilions' or 'mansions', surrounded by barbed wire. The allusion to St John 14:2 is clearly intended ('In my father's house there are many mansions', says Jesus to his disciples, 'I go to prepare a place for you') as if only to emphasise that in this no-man's-land, no communication is possible: 'For we seldom left our mansions', Sam says, 'Watt seldom left his mansion and I seldom left mine'.[135] But, typically, this apotheosis of silence and self-imposed exile does not last long. A certain kind of weather, we are told, urges Sam and Watt out, to walk together across the fields – on such occasions, 'the disappointment of one of us at least was almost certain'.[136]

This description suggests that we are dealing with the inner life of the writer-intellectual who deems himself as having nearly achieved the state of artistic omnipotence. We have seen this type of desire from the outside when Beckett presented us with Erskine's incomprehensible movement between the floors. Now we can see it from the inside: the god-like writer writes about himself; his creation is supposed to be a narcissistic reflection, that is, an unintelligible state of mind that has no contact with the real, that is completely self-sufficient. Beckett's caricatural art, however, emphasises the ridiculous and tragic aspects of this presumption. Sam and Watt's "friendship" is formed

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[135] Ibid., p. 129.
[136] Ibid., p. 130.

under the pressure of the desire to write which is already a desire to imitate a God who might not be even existent. The writer-intellectual must create an obstacle – a double – that is simultaneously his character and rival. Driven out by 'this kind of weather', they are forced to leave their mansions and walk together in the hope of producing art. Typically, their mutual attraction grows stronger once they begin to "engage" with the outer world, but this time, to our surprise, 'the art of failure' suddenly becomes heroic:

> Birds of every kind abounded, and these it was our delight to pursue, with stones and clods of earth. Robins, in particular, thanks to their confidingness, we destroyed in great numbers. And larks' nests, laden with eggs still warm from the mother's breast, we ground into fragments, with peculiar satisfaction, at the appropriate season of the year. But our particular friends were the rats that dwelt by the stream. They were long and black. We brought them such titbits from our ordinary as rinds of cheese, and morsels of gristle, and we brought them also bird's eggs, and frogs, and fledglings.[137]

The bloody feast finally results in "anthropophagy" if we can apply this term to the community of rats:

> Sensible of these attentions, they would come flocking round us at our approach, with every sign of confidence and affection, and glide up our trouserlegs, and hang upon our breasts. And then we would sit down in the midst of them, and give them to eat, out of our hands, of a nice fat frog, or a baby thrush. Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat, resting in our bosom after its repast, we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative. It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God.[138]

As we can see, the theme of feeding the "heavenly food" repeats with a slight modification. When Watt performed this mission on the ground floor, he deemed that he supplied to the Lynches' dogs the leftovers of Mr Knott's meals. Now the "heavenly bread" comes straight from the hands of the feeders. Their nearness to God points to the religious aspect

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

of their service. Earlier in this chapter we have related this aspect to Kant's religion whose aim is 'the union of men based on a pure rational faith'.[139]

The theme of feeding the "earthly bread" to a wider population while passing it off as "heavenly bread" is central to 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor'. In a famous introduction to a separate edition of 'The Legend', D.H. Lawrence gave this theme particular attention ('the earthly bread is leavened with the heavenly bread. The heavenly bread is life, is contact, and is consciousness […]. The sweat of the brow is the heavenly butter').[140] For him, Dostoevsky perverted the feeding by placing it in the hands of a wicked inquisitor. According to Lawrence, 'the wise old governor' seeks to save humanity from the horror of self-destruction that Christ's morality entails.

As we have seen, for Kant, the Gospels are inadequate as a moral law, for they fail to provide concrete instructions which men will respect as intelligible and practical. In a similar manner, the Grand Inquisitor accuses Christ of having overestimated human nature. To oppose Christ with practical reason, Dostoevsky resorts to the 'three temptations in the wilderness' (Matthew 4:1-11) where 'the spirit of the earth' warns Christ that humans will only follow an uncontestable authority – one that will feed them, prove its god-like power and rule over them, 'for the chief concern of those miserable creatures is not only to find something that I or someone else can worship, but to find something that all believe in and worship, and the absolutely essential thing is that they should do so *all together*'.[141] Christ disdained these 'adequate warnings' and decided to go into the world 'empty-handed', with literally *nothing*, except 'some promise of freedom which they in their simplicity cannot even comprehend'.[142] According to the Grand Inquisitor, God does not love humanity. In respecting men's freedom so greatly, Christ prepares the failure of his own kingdom. The Inquisitor predicts that 'ages will pass and mankind will proclaim in its wisdom and science that there is no crime and, therefore no sin, but that there are only hungry people'.[143] He also predicts that this humanism – the fruit of Christ's freedom – will end in the new Tower of Babel and anthropophagy – for no science will give them bread so long as they remain free. 'We alone shall feed them in your name', the Inquisitor

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[139] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 129.
[140] D.H. Lawrence, 'Introduction', *The Grand Inquisitor*, trans. by S.S. Koteliansky (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 19.
[141] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 298; Dostoevsky's emphasis.
[142] Ibid., p. 296.
[143] Ibid.

tells Christ, 'with us all will be happy and will no longer rise in rebellion nor exterminate one another, as they do everywhere under your freedom'.[144]

How can Christ be against religion? In 'The Legend', Christ remains silent all the way through the Inquisitor's monologue, responding to it only by kissing the old man 'on his bloodless, aged lips'.[145] For Lawrence, this means that Jesus is showing his acquiescence to the Inquisitor. The problem with 'The Legend' is that this text is like the negative of a photograph – everything the Inquisitor states is false and true at the same time. It is precisely this that the pure Alyosha observes to his older brother Ivan: 'Everything that you say serves not to blame, but to praise Christ'.[146] Indeed, what Christian would want to refute that Christ rejected all prestige and power, that he refuses to exercise the least pressure, and that he desires to be loved for himself? But if one is not a Christian then the notable *absence* of the redeemer leads to complete relativity. From both points of view, Christ's freedom left humanity empty-handed before its own violence. A world based on relativity tends to fall into the hands of all those "moral" feeders. Sam and Watt's feeding of the rats, for instance, ends in the triumph of the strongest:

> Then, our eyes meeting, we smiled, a thing we did rarely, when together […]. And then we did a thing we seldom did, we embraced. Watt laid his hands on my shoulders, and I laid mine on his (I could hardly do otherwise), and then I touched Watt's left cheek with my lips, and then Watt touched my left cheek with his (he could scarcely do less), the whole coolly, and above us tossed the overarching boughs.[147]

Beckett's message is clear: the writer-intellectual is responsible for the massacre because he performs a religious mission in the absence of God.

Commenting on Dostoevsky's religion in his lecture series, Gide asserts that 'Man is never nearer God than in his extremity of anguish'.[148] 'Anguish' is a key word. In the existentialist terminology, it is the equivalent of that type of mental disturbance that Sartre associates with the will to power. In 'Existentialism is a Humanism', he paraphrases

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[144] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vol. 1, pp. 297, 303.
[145] Ibid., p. 308.
[146] Ibid., p. 310.
[147] Samuel Beckett, *Watt,* p. 132.
[148] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 168.

Raskolnikov's question – "Am I really a man who has the right to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself by what I do" […]. All leaders know this anguish'.[149]

The Sam-and-Watt's "nearness" to God seems to be Beckett's response to the singular conception of man-God that had dominated the intellectual stage since the early 1910s. Gide concludes his lecture series on Dostoevsky with the analysis of the conversation between Stavrogin and Shatov (characters from *The Devils*) who project the 'steady activity of the mind' – one that succeeds 'anguish' – to the real-life activity of a national leader. Shatov tells Stavrogin that he does not 'reduce God to an attribute of nationality', but, on the contrary, 'raises the people to [his] God'. Gide does not so much comment on this scene as quotes it at length. Shatov continues:

> The object of every national movement, in every people and at every period of its existence is only the seeking for its God, who must be its own God, and the faith in Him as the only true one. God is the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end […]. Every people has its own conception of good and evil. When the same conception of good and evil become prevalent in several nations, then these nations are dying, and the very distinction between good and evil is beginning to disappear […]. Every people is only a people so long as it has its own God and excludes all other gods on earth irreconcilably, so long as it believes that by its God it will conquer and drive out of the world all other gods. Such from the beginning of time, has been the belief of all great nations […]. If a great people does not believe that the truth is only to be found in itself […], if it does not believe that it alone is fit and destined to raise up and save all the rest by its truth, it would at once sink into being ethnographical material, and not a great people.[150]

The Shatov-Stavrogin theory must have fallen on fertile soil. In Eliot's *After Strange Gods* (1934), one can find a similar set of ideas:

> What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites to our conventional way of greeting a

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[149] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Kaufmann, p. 352.
[150] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, quoted in André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 195-196.

> stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.[151]

With the theme of feeding "the heavenly/earthly bread" in *Watt*, Beckett resumes the problem of Christianity at the precise point where Dostoevsky abandoned it. 'The mechanism' and the 'venerable institution' that 'greatly interested, and even fascinated' Watt, were those of *scapegoating* ('for otherwise would he have gone into the Lynches family at such length?').[152] Long before Girard discovered 'the archaic sacred', Beckett had realised that sacrifice and religion is one and the same thing. In devising Watt's religious mission on the first floor, he certainly had in mind Ireland where religion was mobilized to serve the purpose of national cohesion. The outbreak of the Civil War proved the futility of this mission. The tactic of scapegoating was adopted in Germany in order to "unite the nation". Beckett's ironic comment on Hitler's activity – 'I heard Adolf the Peacemaker on the wireless' – reflects the prevalent mood of the 1930s. Joyce, for instance, sometimes praised Hitler for 'getting a whole people behind him'.[153]

Watt shows that it is this aspect of religion was persistently on Beckett's mind: 'But much more than with the Lynches or with Mr Knott's remains, Watt's concern, while it lasted was with the dogs'.[154] Beckett vaguely described the cohesive function of religion in 'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce' where he writes that 'religion produced society'. Modern history suggested to him that after the "death of gods" the venerable institution collapsed but left behind the mechanism, which is always at the disposal of the strongest. Nietzsche accused Christianity of destroying the pagan sacrificial mechanism by siding with the victims. According to Nietzsche, the Christian God delights in the weak and 'breaks the strong'. Gide spotted this tendency in Dostoevsky's works which suggested to him that *failure* is a necessary condition of victory: 'in Dostoevsky's eyes, it is intellect that individualizes, which is the enemy of the Kingdom of Heaven, life eternal, and that bliss where time is not, reached only by renouncing the individual self and sinking deep in a solidarity that knows no distinctions'.[155] We should not be too harsh on Gide and his followers. To finally do away with the "Dostoevsky virus", it is instrumental to quote a passage from Girard's psychoanalytic sketch of the writer:

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[151] T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1934), p. 18.
[152] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 99.
[153] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p. 304.
[154] Samuel Beckett, *Watt,* p. 99.
[155] André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 146.

> In Dostoevski, desire has no original or privileged object. This is a primary and fundamental break with Freud. Desire chooses its objects through the mediation of a model; it is the desire of and for the *other*, which is nonetheless identical to a furious longing to center everything around the self. […] Here lies the paradox of a pride identical with this desire, its inevitable failure. […] Desire is always an imitation of another desire, desire for the same object, and therefore, an inexhaustible source of conflicts and rivalries. The more the model transforms itself into an obstacle, the more desire tends to transform the obstacle into models. The more desire learns about itself, the more self-defeating it becomes; it believes that by adoring the obstacle it moves more quickly towards its goal. From then on, desire is rekindled each time the condition for a new failure seems to be present. In the psychiatrists' limited view, desire aims at this failure. Thus, psychiatrists invent for this misunderstood phenomenon a label, masochism, that definitively clouds its intelligibility. It is not failure that the so-called masochist seeks but the success of the rival that makes him fail.[156]

This psychology dominates all Dostoevsky's works; however, after *Notes From Underground*, the authorial point of view radically changes. Dostoevsky becomes his own caricaturist. Gide did not notice this 'rupture', but Beckett did when he wrote to McGreevy that Gide 'hopes to end where Dostoevsky began, with a 'Pauvres Gens'.[157] Girard claims that in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky 'finally makes his way to the freedom that comes from Christ and returns to him'.[158]

In *Watt*, Beckett celebrates his victory over nihilism with the assistance of Mr Knott. This is especially notable 'on the ground floor' which is the most hilarious part of the book. Here Mr Knott embodies this absolute otherness, which provides a point of view that stands apart from the characters' actions and the narrative voice whose judgements are often misleading. Thus, we are unlikely to confuse Watt's religious mission with Mr Knott's "arrangements". Unlike his servants, the master is the true artist who creates the world out of nothing and who is truly self-sufficient in his serenity ('the clothes that Mr Knott wore, in his room, about the house, amid his garden, were very various, very very

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[156] René Girard, 'The Underground Critic', in *To Double Business Bound'*, p. 39.
[157] A letter to McGreevy, 23 April 1933, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. 1, p. 154.
[158] René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, p. 61.

various').[159] On the first floor, however, the darkening of comedy begins. The vision that the Sam-and-Watt double inspires is more constraining and opaque.

The name of Sam for the narrator suggests that the parody of other writers or philosophers was not the primary task Beckett set out for himself. We can grasp the importance of the Sam/Watt relationship in the episode that at first glance seems to be pure burlesque. Sam describes his solitary walk along those channels where the limits of his garden and that of Watt 'follow the same course'. Suddenly he sees his double advancing backwards towards him 'until he lay against the fence' as if crucified. The next moment, Sam finds himself 'as though standing before a great mirror', viewing himself as Watt, who, in his turn, looks like the Christ Mocked, as depicted by Bosch:

> Then [Watt] turned, with the intention very likely of going back the way he had come, and I saw his face, and the rest of his front. His face was bloody, his hands also, and thorns were in his scalp. (His resemblance at that moment, to the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking, that I remarked it). And at the same instant suddenly I felt as though I were standing before a great mirror […] so that I looked at my hands, and felt my face, and glossy skull, with an anxiety as real as unfounded.[160]

Commenting on this scene, Connor Carville is surprised that the narrator 'does not exploit the calm, remote, meditative aspect of Bosch's figure', given Beckett's fondness of such qualities.[161] Beckett, however, *does* exploit these qualities – he caricatures his own nihilism, 'for I was very fond of fences, of wire fences, very fond indeed'.[162]

Carville reminds us that Bosch's picture, depicting 'a pale, mild, gentle Christ' was one of the major inspirations for the Surrealists.[163] This reference points to the context within which Sam's anxiety begins to make sense. The narrator recognizes in the quietist crowned with thorns the flattering image that he has carefully elaborated for himself. This could not have been an agreeable experience, so that 'I looked at my hands, and felt my face, and glossy skull, with an anxiety as real as unfounded'. The disconcerting return of

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[159] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 173.
[160] Ibid., p. 136.
[161] Conor Carville, *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 170.
[162] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, p. 135.
[163] Ibid.

the identical exactly where each believes he is different defines the relationship of the double. The mirror scene is nothing other than the moment of freedom.

So, what does this freedom in *Watt* and *The Brothers Karamazov* amount to? The latter concludes with a funeral speech which is undoubtedly one of the most sublime things the writer ever wrote. Dostoevsky does not use the word God at all. There is no reference to Christ or 'accursed questions' related to the suffering Son of God. The only reference to religion is the evocation of an afterlife in which we all see each other just as we did on earth.

The closing scene of *Watt*'s part II (the service on the ground floor) suggests that the hero's constant claims that he could learn 'nothing' about Mr Knott are not true. Watt thought that the servant who should know the most of Mr Knott was Mr Graves, the gardener who always puzzled Watt by his inconsequential outpourings concerning his private life. But Watt loved the garden. One day he was making his water 'behind a bush' when suddenly he saw the master, standing beside him and watching a flower. Looking in the same direction, Watt saw a worm. Knowing how things go in this world, Watt expected that the flower would fade and the worm would thrive. But to Watt's disappointment, 'on this particular day it was the flower that remained, and the worm that went'.[164]

When the time of Watt's service came to an end on both floors we see him making his way to the station from which he hopes to depart for 'the end of the line'.[165] On this journey, Watt is seen and reassured by some plants and animals: 'He walked on the grass edging, because he did not like the feel of gravel under his feet, and the flowers, and the long grasses, and the boughs, both of shrubs and of trees, brushed against him in a way that he did not find unpleasant'.[166] We may appreciate the contrast between Watt's arrival to and his departure from Mr Knott's house. Now there is no lady McCann, 'coming up behind', but only a strayed ass or goat: 'he met no human being on his way. A strayed ass, or goat, lying in the ditch, in the shadow, raised its head, as he passed. Watt did not see the ass or goat, but the ass, or goat, saw Watt'.[167]

Watt never departed from Mr Knott's grounds. The train arrived but Watt did not take it. His trace gets lost in a crowd of railway workers until a goat emerged from the hedges, 'dragging its pale and chain'. Is it Watt? The novel's end suggests this transformation:

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[164] Ibid. p. 125.
[165] Ibid., p. 199.
[166] Ibid., p. 193.
[167] Ibid.

> "All the same", said Mr Gorman, "life isn't such a bad old bugger". He raised high his hands and spread them out, in a gesture of worship. He then replaced them in the pockets. "When all is said and done", he said.
> "Riley's puckaun again", said Mr Nolan, "I can smell him from here".
> "And they say there is no God", said Mr Case.
> All three laughed heartily at this extravagance.[168]

There is a tradition in Ireland which is still celebrated as the oldest festival: during the Puck fair in Killorglin, County Kerry, a male goat – the "puckaun" – is placed in a small cage on a high stand for three days and crowned as the king Puck. In the fourth century, the puckoon was sacrificed to restore peace to the community. For some reason, Beckett decided to include in 'Addenda' another version of Watt's end. The narrator tells us that Watt became 'an old rose' and that he 'was now indifferent to the gardener', Mr Graves.[169]

[168] Ibid., p. 213.
[169] Ibid., p. 222.

CONCLUSION: BECKETT, DOSTOEVSKY AND SECULAR MODERNITY.

The examination of Beckett's comedy in the light of Girard's theory has proved to be productive. A mimetic reading of his works has provided an approach that highlighted the anthropological value of his texts, imbued with this sacrificial ambivalence which has always puzzled Beckett readers. It is this territory of anthropology on which Beckett and Dostoevsky's interests intersect. [1] *Proust* presented us with Beckett's appraisal of Dostoevsky's metaphysical comedy through the analogy with Proust's treatment of the sacred ('with pathological sobriety'). Although Beckett does not insist on Proust and Dostoevsky's immunity to 'the ineluctable gangrene of Romanticism', he passionately objects to the Gideans who treat them as Nietzschean writers. The term 'impressionism' that Beckett applies to both writers could be a trace of his acquaintance with Dostoevsky's critical texts.

The analysis of 'Le Concentrisme' has shown that "the Dostoevsky cult" annoyed Beckett. In this ironic work, he first admits his own vulnerability to the 'malady of the age' by portraying himself as 'the first European individual'. In the light of his brilliant satire, the 'ineluctable gangrene of Romanticism' emerges as a massive 'religio-geological feast', launched by Descartes, celebrated by the Enlightenment, serialized by Napoleon and his imitators, and perpetuated by 'the concentrists'. One might say that the Dostoevskian aspect of 'Le Concentrisme' was that proposed additional 'five or six pages' Beckett wanted to add to *Proust* (in a letter to Prentice) in order to reinforce the link between the two novelists but never did. It seems that during that period, Beckett was engrossed in Dostoevsky's novels (*The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from Underground*, *The Devils*) to only realise that the "Dostoevskian religion" would not allow any positive synthesis, and therefore would always invite a misinterpretation.

In this regard, it is important to restate an opposition that was suggested but not fully fleshed out in the body of this study, namely, that between nihilism and the *practical via negativa*: the first referring to what Girard calls 'metaphysical desire' or *ressentiment*, the second to the negation of this first negation ('the laugh laughing at the laugh'). The

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[1] For Joseph Long, for instance, Beckett's texts are 'theological space'; they are concerned with 'the writing of an absence', in Long's 'Divine Intertextuality', *Samuel Beckett Today /Aujourd'hui*, vol. 9, Beckett and Religion (2001), p. 156; see also Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*; according to John Pilling, 'Beckett continued to be obsessed, personally, by the fundamentally religious questions', in Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1976), p. 117.

comic specificity of Beckett and Dostoevsky's *l'absurde* consists in its being a part of that philosophical attitude which ascribes absurdity to the outer world. In the section called 'Doppelgänger' (chapter II), attention was drawn to the use of the doubles in the works of both novelists as indicative of this comical *via negativa*.

In the same section, a hypothesis concerning Beckett's acquaintance with Joyce's theory of the French triangle was ventured. The analysis of 'Ding Dong' and 'Dante and the Lobster' showed that Beckett was eager to expose the perversity of this structure ('triangle scalene or phallic symbol') and unpick his own mimetic rivalry with Joyce. Both of these stories contain copious references to Dostoevsky's type of nihilism: "justice versus mercy". By putting Belacqua on the quest for pain, Beckett adheres to the narrative structure strikingly resembling that of *Notes* – namely, the 'boomerang movement', characteristic of the underground dreamer.

The fourth chapter analysed the influence of Bergson's comic theory and Dante's *Divine Comedy* on Beckett's narrative methods. While rejecting Bergson's philosophical idealism, Beckett took on board the rule of 'absentmindedness' to which the comic writer must adhere in order to preclude the triumph of the 'elegiac' dreamer. The latter is the poet himself blinded by his righteous indignation at the evils of his time. In all likelihood, Beckett read Dante's *Inferno* as the poet's self-satire – namely, his 'wanderings in Hell' (Dante's practical *via negativa*) as the first stage of that purgatorial process which finally leads the poet to the denial of the necessary "minus sign" – the Satan 'fixed upside down' – existing only as a negative image of the ultimate truth.

The analysis of *Murphy*, presented in the same chapter, singled out Neary's 'tetrakyt' which could be Beckett's term for Joyce's French triangle. Its apex is occupied by a rival who possesses that 'key' that should open the bliss of divine autonomy or, at least, as in Neary's case, a temporary satisfaction. Beckett's reference to the 'Aliosha mistake' was contextualized within the framework of *The Brothers Karamazov*: it represents the same idealistic tendency to reject life (the world) in the name of higher justice. Beckett felt that he did not avoid this mistake in depicting Murphy's 'end'. The question as to whether he avoided it or not remains open. Quite clearly, the writer did not want to idealize his hero whose major obsession was the liberation of his mind from "its" body. Apparently, in his attempt to create a character free from mimetic hysteria – Celia – Beckett did not avoid the 'Aliosha mistake' in so far as Celia's addiction to the "Irish sky" involves the necessary depiction of her suffering body: Celia clings to her 'business' with a righteousness of a saint.

The analysis of *Watt* in the final chapter concluded our investigation of Beckett's philosophical subject, undertaken with the view of highlighting its essentially comic nature. To define this subject, we must recall Arsene's reflection on the unhappy consciousness and the laughter that should excoriate its 'understanding'. What can be more ridiculous and, at once, more tragic than the consciousness that deems itself as an independent "self-consciousness" which finds its reality in the bare abstraction of Ego? Declan Kiberd called Beckett 'a supremely religious artist', meaning that the Irish novelist mistrusted theology in its dealings with human suffering.[2] But Kiberd ignores the fact that with the death of God, modern philosophy (phenomenology) has replaced theology. Beckett and Dostoevsky are supremely religious artists in their testimonies to the violence lurking in the speaking "I", whether this "I" is the underground man or the quietist Belacqua or the unhappy Watt, or the omnipotent narrator Sam. As Simon Critchley rightly observes, modern 'philosophy begins in disappointment' ('Where does philosophy begin? It begins, I believe, in an experience of *disappointment*, that is both *religious* and *political*').[3] It commenced with Descartes, continued with Kant and Hegel and reached its apogee in Nietzsche's thought. This philosophical *via negativa* is the object of Beckett and Dostoevsky's satirical attacks.

Despite this shared attitude towards the religious moorings of secular modernity, the two men followed different paths with regards to their personal relationships with the God of Christianity. Beckett realised early on that Dostoevsky was a very "modern" man, deeply influenced by the malady of the age (Burrows lectures). Nevertheless, he did not confuse the Russian novelist with a Nietzschean metaphysician. Although there is no critical consensus on whether Dostoevsky found his way to absolute faith or not, it is hard to disagree with Girard that 'Dostoevsky finally makes his way to this freedom' which is celebrated in 'The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor'.[4] Watt and Sam's participation in the scapegoating of some 'unfortunate' rats and dogs suggests that Beckett appreciated Dostoevsky's satirical depiction of secular religion. It is, however, hard to speculate on Beckett's views concerning Dostoevsky's freedom based on the faith in the Christ Resurrected.

After *Watt*, Beckett began writing fiction in French. In late 1945, he started the first draft of a novel entitled *Les Bosquets de Bondy*, but soon abandoned it. Later, he wrote four Nouvelles: 'La Fin', 'L'Expulse', 'Le Calmant' and 'Premier Amour'. The business

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[2] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 454.
[3] Simon Critchley, *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, p. 2; Critchley's emphases.
[4] René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, p. 61.

of self-translation dates from that period. Three novels in French, *Molloy*, *Molone Meurt* and *L'Innommable* appeared between May 1947 and January 1950 with the subsequent obligation of translating these works into English. Commenting on *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, Knowlson singles out several quests, but admits that 'clues lead nowhere; plans appear aimless and go significantly awry; characters shade into one another, as in dreams; events lack importance […]. The characters are no longer closely modeled on real-life people anymore […], but their actions and activities derive from real-life sources: feeding the hens, killing the rabbits, burying the mule, slaughtering the pigs. These actions are used as part of a story that Malone tells himself, as he waits for his own ending'.[5] The period between 1946 and 1959, known as the 'Frenzy of Writing', resulted in the formation of what amounts to two parallel oeuvres, which, in its turn, has obliged Beckett scholarship to dedicate itself to a comparative study of both the original and the translated versions.

Considering this puzzling phenomenon, one wonders whether Beckett's bilingualism was more a part of his biography than his art. He told Lawrence Harvey that 'the self exists only by proxy'.[6] Harvey and subsequent critics link this notion to Beckett's desire 'to write homeward' – where home, in the writer's own words, is 'a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an *être manqué*'.[7] Does not this *être manqué* sound strikingly similar to Sartre's interpretation of human reality in terms of a fundamental but impossible desire to be God? In chapter II, we have referred to Sartre's definition of desire as a lack of Being. In his 2008 preface to *La Conversion de l'art*, Girard admits that his idea of mimetic desire is congenial with Sartre's notion of bad faith: 'According to Sartre, bad faith is fundamentally mimetic: the café waiter imitates the waiter who preceded him; he plays at being a café waiter, a bit like Don Quixote plays at being a knight errant'.[8] The existence of the self by proxy is nothing other than the mimetic life of Samuel Beckett.

The text of *Company*/*Compagnie* (1980) places this futile quest to be God in a nutshell: 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine. […] To one on his back in the dark a voice tells of a past. With occasional allusion to a present and more rarely to a future as for example, You will end as you now are. And in another dark or in the same another

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[5] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 372-373.
[6] Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett, Poet and Critic*, p. 247.
[7] Ibid.
[8] René Girard quoted in Robert Doran, 'René Girard's Concept of Conversion and the "Via Negativa": Revisiting *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*', p. 174.

devising it all for company'.[9] The opening episode takes us to the original trauma. Beckett is a small boy. One late afternoon, he is walking with his mother hand in hand. A strange thought occurs to him. He feels that the blue sky is much more remote from him in reality than it appears (in *The End*, his grief is projected to the earth that 'makes a sound as of sighs and the last drops fall from the emptied cloudless sky').[10] He shares this thought with his mother: 'Receiving no answer you mentally reframe your question and some hundred places later look up at her face again and ask her if it does not appear much less distant than in reality it is'.[11] May Beckett must have detected in her son's astronomic curiosity 'the sin of Luciferian concentration' and presently pulled him down to the earth: 'for she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten (in *The End*, 'fuck off, she said').[12] Girard would say that May Beckett fulfilled the role of a non-benevolent goddess: by inflicting on her little boy the *expected* punishment from "heaven", she unwittingly launched his 'existence by proxy'. She is also to blame for giving him birth thus ripping him away from his divinity. The speaking voice tries to pretend that he has never existed, that he is 'alone in the dark', but the 'use of second person marks the voice. That of the third that cantankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not'.[13]

The art of failure is literally an apocalyptic art, insofar as it makes one recognise the exhaustion of sacrificial resources in postmodern culture. As Laura Barge points out, 'Beckett and his protagonists […] apparently understand that a merely human Christ can function as a scapegoat, but not as a savior, a deliverer offering redemption'.[14] Beckett's mythology of the self, avenging itself *ad infinitum*, involving the gradual disappearance of bodies, places, names, colours, voices, makes one realise that this apocalypse is not about unleashing divine violence on the unrighteous. Rather it concerns our own self-destructiveness, which extends beyond literary texts. A great writer's invention does not have to coincide with the real world for the two are fundamentally the same.

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[9] Samuel Beckett's *Company/Compagnie and A Piece of Monologue/Solo*, edited by Charles Krance (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1993), p. 2.
[10] Samuel Beckett, *The End* in *The Expelled, The Calmative, The End and The First Love* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 39.
[11] Samuel Beckett, *Company*, p. 4.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., p. 2.
[14] Laura Barge, 'Beckett's Metaphysics and Christian Thought', in *Christian Scholars' Review*, Vol. 20, No 1 (September, 1990), p. 42.

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