

**Beckett and French,
1906-1946:
A Study**

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and is entirely my own work.

.....
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31st March, 2018

SUMMARY

This thesis constitutes a study of Samuel Beckett and French during the years 1906-1946, up to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. It proposes a significant revision of the most widely-held understanding of Beckett's motivations for turning to French in 1946, while also contributing towards a better understanding of his engagement with French during this period of his life and advocating a re-evaluation of the literary writings he produced in French prior to the post-War linguistic turn.

The introduction justifies the value of the present study by showing that prevailing critical thinking on Beckett's post-War linguistic turn has, since at least the 1960s, remained grounded in an explanation that this thesis refers to as the Linguistic-Stylistic Hypothesis (LSH) and which is shown to be ill-founded by way of the 'Suite' Notebook. In this way, the need for both a new hypothesis to explain Beckett's post-War turn to French, and a revision of existing critical discourse around Beckett's French in the pre-War period, is demonstrated.

Adopting a biographical-historical approach, Part I focusses on Beckett's engagement with French up to the moment of the 1946 linguistic turn and prepares the ground for that novel explanation of this turn which will be offered in Part III by 'situating' Beckett's French in a broader context. Divided into four chapters, Part I enlarges upon and, in certain respects, corrects existing accounts of Beckett's engagement with French up to 1946. The first chapter ('Learning: Beckett's Early French (1911-1923)') looks at Beckett's earliest experience as a student of French and argues for the need to recognise French as a language that was already important to him by the time he entered TCD. The second chapter ('Reading/Writing: Beckett's French at Trinity and Beyond (1923-1937)') examines Beckett's experience as a student and reader of French Literature, spotlighting some of the ways in which his engagement with this literature influenced his evolving aesthetics and his own English-language writing. The third chapter ('Reading/Writing/Living: Beckett's French in France (1937-1946)') looks at Beckett's experience of French from his 1937 move to Paris up to the moment of his post-War linguistic turn, paying particular attention to his use of colloquial French, as well as to what archival evidence can tell us about the degree to which he already understood his French and his English as interchangeable prior to 1946. The final chapter ('Beckett's (Pre-War) Idea of French') contextualises Beckett's pre-War statements on the subject of the French language, thereby troubling the idea that these statements provide unambiguous evidence in support of the LSH.

Grounded in close readings of Beckett's French-language, literary compositions of the pre-War period, Part II is divided into two chapters and proposes a thorough revision of existing critical discourse around these texts while also offering close readings of works that have long suffered from critical disregard. In the first chapter ('1930-1937'), the French-language texts that Beckett wrote prior to his move to Paris are analysed and it is argued that French played an integral role in Beckett's earliest development as a literary artist. In the second chapter ('1938-1939'), the poetry that Beckett produced after moving to Paris is considered in depth, with particular attention being paid to Beckett's use of allusion in these poems. Taken together, these chapters argue for the necessity of fundamentally rethinking the way in which Beckett Studies conceives of Beckett's French-language literary output of the pre-War period.

Part III returns to a more biographical-historical approach. Chapters 1-3 ('Beckett's Use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1930-36'; 'Beckett's Use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1937-44'; 'Beckett's Use of French in the Post-War Period: 1945-46') collectively propose a novel interpretation of Beckett's motivations for turning to French at various points during the period 1930-1946. This novel interpretation holds Beckett's turns to French up to and including the post-War turn of 1946 to be indissociable from the contexts in which he found himself, and the various forces that impacted upon him during these years. Part III concludes with a chapter ('Beckett's Post-War Idea(s) of the Linguistic Turn') devoted to Beckett's post-War statements on his linguistic turn of 1946. Like the final chapter of Part I, this discussion contextualises these statements and highlights the uncertainties underlying these remarks that have too often been cited as unproblematic proof of the LSH.

The conclusion recapitulates the discussion of the foregoing chapters, summarises the thesis' contribution to knowledge, and highlights a number of avenues for future research opened up by the present study of Beckett and French during the period 1906-1946.

The appendices provide materials relevant to the discussion in the main body of the thesis that would otherwise be unavailable to the reader, namely: transcriptions of texts that are the subject of close readings and which are either not available in print, or which are currently only available in an incomplete or otherwise imperfect form; a full list of set texts studied by Beckett as part of his undergraduate degree in French Literature; and an overview of the surviving evidence for Beckett's first radio sketch, written for French broadcaster Paris-Mondial, a composition that is not mentioned in any existing study of the writer.

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The assistance without which and all those without whom this thesis would not have been completed are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

The errors and infelicities that mar this completed thesis are also hereby acknowledged, regretfully and as mine alone.

ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Samuel Beckett

<i>CDW</i>	<i>The Complete Dramatic Works</i> (London: Faber & Faber, 1990 [1986])
<i>CIWS</i>	<i>Company / Ill Seen Ill Said / Worstward Ho / Stirrings Still</i> , ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)
<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Poems</i> , ed. by Seán Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber & Faber, 2012)
<i>CSP</i>	<i>The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989</i> , ed. by S. E. Gontarski (New York, NY: The Grove Press, 1995)
<i>D</i>	<i>Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment</i> , ed. by Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983)
<i>DN</i>	<i>Beckett's Dream Notebook</i> , ed. by John Pilling (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999) [Citations from this book refer to item number]
<i>Dream</i>	<i>Dream of Fair to Middling Women</i> (Dublin: The Black Cat Press, 1992)
<i>ECEF</i>	<i>The Expelled / The Calmative / The End / First Love</i> , ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)
<i>LSB I-IV</i>	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett I-IV</i> , ed. by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: CUP, 2009—2016)
<i>MPTK</i>	<i>More Pricks Than Kicks</i> , ed. by Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber & Faber, 2010)
<i>Murphy</i>	<i>Murphy</i> , ed. by J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)
<i>Murphy (1947)</i>	<i>Murphy</i> (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1965 [1947])
<i>NTPR</i>	<i>Nouvelles et Textes pour rien</i> (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958)
'Suite'	'Suite', in <i>Les Temps Modernes</i> (Vol. 1, No. 10 – 1er juillet, 1946), 107-119
<i>TFN</i>	<i>Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950—1976</i> , ed. by Mark Nixon (London: Faber & Faber, 2010)

Samuel Beckett – Archival Material

LC	'Le Concentrisme', Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading, MS 1396/4/15 [= Appendix I (a)]
JRYR (MS/TS)	'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' (manuscript/typescript), James and Elizabeth Knowlson Collection, The University of Reading, JEK A/3/68 [= Appendix I (c) (1/2)]
MNLP	'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', Getty Research Institute, E.L.T. Mesens papers, 1917-1976, Box 15/2 [= Appendix I (b)]
SN	'Suite' Notebook, Calvin Israel-Samuel Beckett Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, MS 91-1, Box 2/4
Suite TS	UoR JEK A/2/296 ['Folder entitled Van Velde, Bram and Geer: Suite Typescript']
WN	'Whoroscope' Notebook, Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading, UoR MS3000

Works about Samuel Beckett

DTF	James Knowlson, <i>Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett</i> (London: Bloomsbury, 1997 [1996])
SBAB	Deirdre Bair, <i>Samuel Beckett: A Biography</i> (London: Vintage, 1990 [1978])

Journals devoted to Samuel Beckett

JoBS	<i>Journal of Beckett Studies</i>
SBT/A	<i>Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui</i>

Library Archives

JEK	James and Elizabeth Knowlson Collection, University of Reading
TCD	Department of Manuscripts, Trinity College Dublin Library, University of Dublin, Trinity College
UoR	Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

text	Material written by Beckett
[text]	Uncertain reading of material written by Beckett
XXX	Indecipherable material written by Beckett
text	Material deleted by Beckett
[text]	Uncertain reading of material deleted by Beckett
text text	Material deleted as unit by Beckett
text text	Successive separate deletions by Beckett
{ text }	Material, within a deletion, deleted by Beckett.
^{text}	Material inserted by Beckett
[^{text}]	Uncertain reading of material inserted by Beckett
^{text}	Inserted material deleted by Beckett
^{text} ^{text}	Material inserted within insertion by Beckett
/	Line break between lines of verse
//	Break between two stanzas of verse
	Line skipped between lines of prose
	Page break between pages of prose
text	Material emphasised in transcription by present author
<text>	Material inserted into transcription by present author

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Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée : car chacun pense en être si bien pourvu, que ceux même qui sont les plus difficiles à contenter en toute autre chose, n'ont point coutume d'en désirer plus qu'ils en ont. En quoi il n'est pas vraisemblable que tous se trompent...

René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*

Introduction

As its title indicates, this thesis constitutes a study of Samuel Beckett and French during the years 1906 to 1946. Covering the period from Beckett's first exposure to French in his early childhood up to the moment of his post-War linguistic turn – that is, the moment at which he abandoned English and embarked on a period of some eight years during which French became his sole language for original literary composition¹ –, this thesis covers years and considers texts that are of singular importance for Beckett's engagement with French but which, as will be seen over the course of this study, have not been accorded the attention they deserve.

Taking as its *terminus ad quem* the precise moment in 1946 when Beckett began the French version of what would eventually become his first published, French-language short-story, Part III of this thesis will offer novel answers to two intimately-linked questions pertaining to the composition of this story and the decision to switch from writing in English to writing in French that it signalled. The first of these questions is very simple and, by now, exceedingly well-worn: Why did Samuel Beckett turn to writing prose in French at this particular moment in 1946? The second question is equally simple but, to date, has not yet been the object of any particular attention on the part of scholars interested in Beckett's writing: Why is it that the first 30 pages of 'Suite', the story whose composition marked Beckett's post-War turn to French, were written in English?²

¹ The term 'post-War linguistic turn' will be used in this thesis to refer to Beckett's 1946 decision to begin using French as his primary language for original, literary expression. The term 'pre-War linguistic turn' will be used to refer to Beckett's decision to use French as his primary language for poetic expression in the late 1930s – For the circumstances of Beckett's pre- and post-War linguistic turns, see Part III, Chapters 2 and 3.

² *DTF*, 358 – The number of pages Beckett is said to have written in English prior to his turn to French varies between critics: Knowlson states that Beckett had written 'twenty-nine pages' (*DTF*, 358) while Ruby Cohn, discussing the 'Suite' Notebook in her *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), states that Beckett's turn to French took place 'ten lines down on the twenty-eighth page of his manuscript' (Cohn, *op. cit.*, 129). In actual fact, both Knowlson and Cohn are correct: Cohn is closer to the letter of events, Knowlson to the spirit. Cohn is correct that Beckett signalled his turn to French by drawing a horizontal line on what he numbered as the twenty-eighth page of his manuscript. The numbering system used by Beckett was, however, peculiar; pages '2(a)' and '2(b)' are included between 2 and 3 (*viz.* 'Suite' Notebook, 2r-3r). When this irregular numbering system is taken into account, it may be seen that Beckett was in the process of composing his thirtieth page of English prose when he decided to turn to French.

These two questions relating to Beckett's linguistic turn cannot be discussed in isolation, however. Any attempt to explain why Beckett turned to French in 1946 must take account of his engagement with French during the decades prior to the moment of his linguistic turn. Even more importantly, such an attempt must also include consideration of the writing that Beckett had already produced in French prior to the linguistic turn – and, above all, the literary texts that Beckett composed in French in the pre-War period –, since it is only by examining how Beckett used French prior to the linguistic turn that we can fully appreciate what it may have meant for him to turn away from English in 1946. To these ends, and as a necessary preliminary step to approaching the questions directly pertaining of Beckett's linguistic turn in Part III, Parts I and II of this study provide the requisite exploration of Beckett's experience of French up to 1946 – an exploration that embraces at once his experience as a student of the language, as a reader of French Literature, and as a writer of French-language texts in the years prior to the linguistic turn – as well as the necessary close engagement with the literary writing that he produced in French during the pre-War period.³

Prior to embarking on this study of Beckett's French up to the moment of the linguistic turn, however, and the better to justify its value as an original contribution to knowledge, the present Introduction will provide an overview of the understanding of Beckett's French that currently prevails within Beckett Studies and demonstrate the need for that fundamental re-thinking of longstanding critical convictions – both about Beckett's post-War linguistic turn and the effect that the use of French had on the kind of writing he produced – which will be offered by this thesis.

The following Introduction will comprise three sections: The first aims to clarify the extent to which contemporary critical treatments of Beckett's French continue to be shaped by an interpretation of the post-War linguistic turn that was first formulated over fifty years ago and which, for the purposes of this thesis, will be referred to as the Linguistic-Stylistic Hypothesis (LSH).⁴ As well as outlining the importance of this particular hypothesis to critical thinking of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn and the relationship between his use of French and his writing, this section will also identify certain key problems with the LSH and suggest why, despite these problems, the interpretative model it proposes acquired, and continues to hold, such an important place within Beckett Studies. Having established the origins of the

³ The decision to concentrate Part II on Beckett's original, French-language literary texts will be explained below, when we come to outline the corpus of texts with which this thesis engages.

⁴ The meaning of this term will be clarified in due course.

LSH and highlighted its ongoing influence within Beckett Studies, the second section shows that this hypothesis is demonstrably unsound and that there is pressing need for an alternative. The evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook will be central to this section; it will be shown to offer an empirical refutation of the supposed connection between Beckett's turn to French and his embrace of stylistic impoverishment in the post-War period, a connection that is crucial to the LSH. At the same time, the second section will also shed light on the detrimental influence that the LSH has had on Beckett Studies, and the manner in which conviction in the veracity of this hypothesis amongst scholars of Beckett's writing has led many of them either to entirely ignore the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook or prevented them from adequately accounting for what it reveals about Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. In this way, the second section will confirm the need for a new hypothesis by which Beckett's linguistic turn might be explained, one that more adequately accounts for the currently-available evidence, and for what this evidence tells us about the relationship between Beckett's writing and his use of French. Having clarified the contribution that this study of Beckett's engagement with French during the period 1906-1946 hopes to make to knowledge, the Introduction will conclude by briefly outlining how this study will proceed, as well delimiting the corpus of texts with which it will engage.

* *
*

I. THE LINGUISTIC-STYLISTIC HYPOTHESIS, GENALOGY OF A CRITICAL COMMONPLACE

As previously noted, the question of precisely why Beckett turned to French in the post-War period is an exceedingly well-worn one. Writing in *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* – first published in 1964 –, in fact, John Fletcher could already say that there had been 'many attempts to explain why Beckett adopted French'.⁵ In that study, Fletcher drew attention to two of the possible explanations that had already been proposed for Beckett's linguistic turn: Firstly, that Beckett turned to French because he was 'reacting against Ireland, and/or English civilization'; secondly, that his abandonment of English was an expression of the fact that he 'determined to woo...for himself' the 'sophisticated public' of French readers to whom Joyce had yearned to appeal.⁶ For Fletcher, neither of these explanations was convincing, and it

⁵ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1964), 98 – Emphasis mine.

⁶ *Ibid.*

was therefore necessary to propose an alternative.⁷ Before we turn to the particular explanation that Fletcher proposed in 1964, it is worth noting that, had he been writing now, Fletcher might well have chosen to considerably extend his list of possible explanations for Beckett's post-War turn to French by adverting to any number of those other explanations that have been proposed in the decades since *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* first appeared.

In the early 1980s, for example, Patrick Casement, posited that Beckett's rejection of his mother tongue should be understood as tantamount to a rejection of his own mother, with whom he had such a difficult relationship.⁸ Leslie Hill, meanwhile, writing at the start of the 1990s, interpreted Beckett's choice of French as a form of linguistic exile, the continuation by another means of that physical exile that he chose when he moved to Paris in 1937.⁹ What is notable about these two explanations is that they both view Beckett's linguistic turn as a response to something internal – namely, a personal desire to escape from his mother, or from the land of his birth. In this respect, they agree with those two explanations that Fletcher found so unconvincing, both of which give pride of place to Beckett's personal desires, whether that be the desire to reject Anglophone culture or the wish to appeal to Francophone readers. This appeal to strictly internal motivating factors constitutes one of the major currents of thinking about Beckett's reasons for turning to French: Finding the causes for Beckett's linguistic turn within Beckett himself – whether in his biography, his writing, his personal relationship to language and to literature, or in some combination of these factors –, critics belonging to this school of thought tend to minimize, or entirely ignore, the role that external factors – such as the city in which he lived, his economic situation, or the constraints placed upon him by the world of publishing – may have played in the linguistic turn.

Alongside this internal current of thinking on the linguistic turn, however, there also exists another current, one that pays particularly close attention to just such external factors and locates the reasons for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn either wholly outside Beckett himself or somewhere in the complex interaction between Beckett and external factors beyond his control. For critics of this class, explaining Beckett's turn to French requires us to look beyond Beckett himself and beyond his work. Instead, we must think about what other factors might have led him

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Patrick Casement, 'Samuel Beckett's relationship to his Mother tongue', *International Review of Psychoanalysis* (Vol. 9, No. 1 – 1982), 53-44 – For details of Beckett's difficult relationship with his mother, see *DTF*, 20-23, 130, *passim*.

⁹ In *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), Hill comments that 'the decision to write in French seems to have corresponded more to a wish, after *Watt*, to dispossess himself' (*op. cit.*, 36-37).

to turn away from English, and we must imagine that, in the absence of these factors, the choice to turn to French is one that Beckett might never have made at all. This school of thought is very much in the minority and those critics who belong to it have, by and large, found the root of the linguistic turn in one external factor in particular – namely, the world of English-language publishing. Even before Fletcher’s 1964 monograph appeared, in fact, Brian Coffey, a friend of Beckett’s, had already suggested that the shift to French might be viewed as a consequence of Beckett’s unhappy relationship with English-language publishing and, more particularly, as a response to his inability to find a publisher for *Watt*.¹⁰ Many years later, much the same position would be advanced by Deirdre Bair in her contribution to the *Cahier de l’Herne* volume devoted to Beckett.¹¹ At the start of the 2000s, Pascale Sardin reaffirmed the role played by Beckett’s experience with the world of English-language publishing in his decision to turn to French when she contended, as part of a refreshingly frank appraisal of certain critical commonplaces associated with Beckett’s linguistic turn, that ‘indépendamment du fait que Beckett était installé en France et qu’il vivait avec une Française, sa difficulté à être publié en Angleterre dut jouer dans le passage initial au français’.¹²

While it cannot be known whether Fletcher would have found any of the explanations that have been offered for Beckett’s linguistic turn since the initial publication of *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* more convincing than those he rejected in 1964, it is noteworthy that, over a decade after the publication of *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, Fletcher himself explained the linguistic variety of Beckett’s mature writing in externally-rooted terms: In that article, Fletcher explained the linguistic diversity of Beckett’s literary production from the late 1950s on as an effect, not of Beckett’s supposed personal desires, but of the external factors that impacted upon him and, more particularly, the circumstances in which he found himself: ‘Ce seraient donc les circonstances qui dictent le choix de la langue chez Samuel Beckett’.¹³

¹⁰ viz. ‘It was, as I believe, when [Beckett] did not find an English publisher for *Watt*, that he finally accepted the necessity of writing in French (“dans une langue qui n’est pas la mienne”)’ (Brian Coffey, ‘Memory’s Murphy Maker: Some notes on Samuel Beckett’, in *Threshold* [No. 17 – 1962], 35).

¹¹ viz. ‘L’impossibilité de trouver un éditeur anglais pour *Watt* fut sans aucun doute l’un des motifs principaux qui persuadèrent Beckett d’écrire directement en français, s’il voulait espérer établir jamais sa réputation d’écrivain’ (Deirdre Bair, ‘La vision, enfin’, in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman [eds], *Cahier de l’Herne: Samuel Beckett* [Paris: L’Herne, 1976], 67)

¹² Pascale Sardin-Damestoy, *Samuel Beckett auto-traducteur ou l’art de « l’empêchement » : Lecture bilingue et génétique des textes courts auto-traduits (1946-1980)* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002), 27

¹³ John Fletcher, ‘Écrivain bilingue’, in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (eds), *Cahier de l’Herne : Samuel Beckett*, 209

As will become clear in Part III of this thesis, my own response to the question of why Beckett turned to French in 1946 has much in common with those proposed by Bair, Coffey, and Sardin. Like them, I too will argue that the source of the linguistic turn lies not exclusively within Beckett himself, but somewhere without – in the environment and the situation(s) in which he found himself. At the same time, however, the explanation of the linguistic turn that will be proposed here is also intended to expand upon the insights of these earlier writers by suggesting that Beckett's post-War linguistic turn was an effect, not simply of his unhappy relationship with the world of English-language publishing, but of a much broader context: The decision to turn to French in 1946, in short, will here be presented as a decision born of the situation in which Beckett found himself in the Paris of 1946, but also a decision made possible by a change in Beckett's attitude to writing and publishing in French that took place in 1938.¹⁴

In this regard, the explanation for Beckett's turn to French that will be proposed in this thesis can be described as a development on that connection between Beckett's linguistic choices and the circumstances in which he found himself that John Fletcher proposed in 1976. This thesis' response to the question of the post-War linguistic turn can be described as a 'development' on Fletcher's intuition insofar as it expands its scope far beyond what is to be found in Fletcher's article. There, as noted, Fletcher's proposition concerning the determining role played by circumstance in Beckett's choice of one language or another did not apply to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. On the contrary, when Fletcher stated that '[c]e seraient donc les circonstances qui dictent le choix de la langue chez Samuel Beckett', he was referring to a period long after the moment of the 1946 linguistic turn, to a time when

¹⁴ In her recently-published article 'Becoming Beckett', Pascale Sardin has in fact argued for the need to recognise Beckett's place as an actor within broader systems and the manner in which his awareness of such systems may have impacted upon his linguistic choices (*viz.* Pascale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30: The Poetics of Bilingualism in the Work of Samuel Beckett / La poétique du bilinguisme dans l'oeuvre de Samuel Beckett* [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018], 70-84). Although Sardin's article does not specifically address Beckett's 1946 decision to turn to French – being concerned, rather, with Beckett's bilingualism and his work as a (self-)translator –, her focus on contextualisation has much in common with the approach adopted in this thesis and a number of incidents that she adduces as part of her article are examined in similar terms in the course of the present study. Unfortunately, as Sardin's article was published while the current thesis was in the final stages of its completion, it was not possible to effectively incorporate her insights into the body of this thesis. As such, points of agreement between Sardin's 'Becoming Beckett' and the present study of Beckett's French are signalled in footnotes.

Beckett's fame was such that he was frequently called upon to provide original texts for broadcasters, theatre companies, and even academic symposia.¹⁵

Fletcher's appeal to circumstance, in other words, was designed to explain, not the 1946 linguistic turn, but rather the 'series of blurry zigzags' that, as Sam Slote has noted, are a defining feature of the linguistic make-up of Beckett's mature *œuvre*.¹⁶ These 'blurry zigzags' constitute the multiple linguistic turns and returns that first punctuate and later define Beckett's literary practice from the 1950s on: Initial efforts at collaborative self-translation from French into English – 'La Fin' / 'The End' with Richard Seaver; *Molloy* with Patrick Bowles¹⁷ – were followed by a post-War return to English as a language for original composition – firstly (abortive) prose (*From an Abandoned Work*), then (successful) radio-drama (*All That Fall*)¹⁸ – and, subsequently, by his embrace of near-fully bilingual writing practice, whereby almost every work written in one language was carried into the other by way of self-translation, and which Corinne Scheiner has defined as an 'integral reworking of [Beckett's] literary idiosyncrasies into a bilingual mode of production'.¹⁹ Latterly, we even find instances of concurrent composition, where it becomes almost impossible to separate the French- and English-language versions of certain works, such as *Company / Compagnie*.²⁰ It is the linguistic richness of this mature period that Fletcher sought to explain by way of circumstance and, in so doing, he was simply recognising the fact that, during this period of his career, Beckett's choice of one language or

¹⁵ The late play *Ohio Impromptu*, for example, began life as a response to a request Beckett had received from S. E. Gontarski for a play that might be staged as part of a symposium due to be held at Ohio State University in honour of Beckett's seventy-fifth birthday (viz. 'Ohio Impromptu', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Work, Life, and Thought* [New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004]).

¹⁶ Sam Slote, 'Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn', in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 114

¹⁷ For Seaver's work with Beckett, see Richard Seaver, 'Richard Seaver on Translating Beckett', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett: Uncollected Interviews with Samuel Beckett and Memories of Those Who Knew Him* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 100-107; For Bowles work with Beckett, see Patrick Bowles, 'How to Fail: Notes on Talks with Samuel Beckett', in *PN Review* 96 (Vol. 20, No. 4 – March-April, 1994), 24-38.

¹⁸ For the composition of *From an Abandoned Work*, Beckett's first original English-language composition since the linguistic turn of 1946, see *TFN*, xi-xii

¹⁹ Corinne Scheiner, 'Self-Translation', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 370

²⁰ For details of the 'bilingual genesis' of *Company / Compagnie*, see Charles Krance (ed.), *Samuel Beckett's Company/Compagnie and A Piece of Monologue/Solo: A Bilingual Variorum Edition* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1993), xix-xxiv – A thorough study of the composition of this text will soon be provided by Georgina Nugent-Folan as part of the *BDMP*: Georgina Nugent-Folan, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's Company* (London: Bloomsbury, [Forthcoming]).

another was often explicable as a linguistically-appropriate response to the exigencies of a particular moment: The demands of French-language broadcasters were met, unsurprisingly, with French-language material; English-language plays were proposed in response to requests originating from the Anglophone world; and Beckett's publishers on both sides of the linguistic divide were satisfied as works written in one language were almost always translated into the other.²¹ Fletcher's particular appeal to circumstance thus serves us well for the mature period of Beckett's writing, but it is not intended to account for the particular moment in 1946 when Beckett began to write prose in French. Whatever about the 'blurry zigzags' that were to follow in later years, that precise moment was indisputably a linguistic turn. For, as Slote reminds us, '[a] turn...implies a sense of determined direction' and, when Beckett began to write in French in 1946, he was making the conscious and determined decision to set aside one language and take up another.²² The question at the heart of this thesis, therefore, is what exactly Beckett's linguistic turn of 1946 was 'determined' by.

Given his awareness of the role played by circumstances in Beckett's later linguistic choices, it may strike one as surprising that, when it came to explaining what determined Beckett's conscious decision to turn away from English and begin writing in French in the immediate post-War period, Fletcher's proposed something quite far removed from the necessity of external circumstance in his 1976 article:

Par le fait de sa traduction de *Murphy* (achevée *avant* la guerre), par le fait aussi des poèmes écrits directement en français entre 1937 et 1939, et par le fait, enfin, des gallicismes qui se glissèrent, à son insu ou avec son approbation, peu importe, dans *Watt*, Beckett devait se sentir attiré par le français comme moyen d'expression littéraire. [...] Le français devait en outre lui offrir une manière plus nue, plus directe de s'exprimer, moins sujette aux artifices de style qui toujours le séduisaient en anglais, plus sobre, et mieux appropriée aux sujets qui lui tenaient maintenant à cœur [...] Et puis, enfin, comme il le dit lui-même, c'était plus « amusant » : il avait épuisé les ressources de l'anglais dans *Watt*, il était temps de tenter autre chose... Le français représentait pour lui un nouveau départ, une manière de relancer son œuvre après la guerre.²³

To understand the significance of the explanation that Fletcher here proposes for the post-War linguistic turn, it is important to clarify what distinguishes it from those that have already been mentioned.

²¹ viz. 'Si on lui demande une pièce pour New York, il l'écrit en anglais, et lorsque l'ORTF lui demande un texte radiophonique, il l'écrit en français' (John Fletcher, 'Écrivain bilingue', in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman [eds], *Cahier de l'Herne : Samuel Beckett*, 209)

²² Sam Slote, 'Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn', in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 114

²³ John Fletcher, 'Écrivain bilingue', in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (eds), *Cahier de l'Herne : Samuel Beckett*, 209 – Emphasis in original.

As has already been noted, there is, in Fletcher's presentation of the 1946 linguistic turn that has just been offered, no reference to those external circumstances that not merely justified but impelled the decision to compose a work such as *All That Fall* in English, or *Cascando* in French.²⁴ In this regard, it is obvious that Fletcher's explanation for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn cannot be classed among those externally-focussed interpretations that were offered by Coffey, Bair, and Sardin. Instead, Fletcher's explanation of the post-War linguistic turn belongs to that class of internally-rooted explanations, which locate the reasons for the turn to French within Beckett himself. At the same time, the internal forces that Fletcher makes responsible for the linguistic turn are obviously different from those proposed by the other internally-focussed explanations that we have already seen: Hill and Casement, for instance, remained primarily focussed on biographical concerns – namely, the desire to escape, whether from a much-hated homeland or an overbearing mother –, and a similar preference for biography can be seen behind the contention that Beckett's turn to French was an expression of his desire to abandon the cultural inheritance of the Anglophone world. The explanation that Fletcher's proposition most closely resembles is that according to which the choice of French was a result of Beckett's desire to appeal to a Francophone readership that he imagined as being more cultured than its English-speaking counterpart, and which, in his monograph, Fletcher attributes to Maria Jolas.²⁵ Like Jolas, Fletcher points towards an exclusively literary explanation for Beckett's linguistic turn. Unlike Jolas, however, Fletcher's explanation situates Beckett's reasons not without his literary production – that is, in the person of his intended readers – but squarely *within* this production and, more particularly, in the style of this production.

In Fletcher's estimation, the primary motivation for the linguistic turn was the attraction that French exerted upon Beckett and this attraction, while it may be traced back to pre-War engagements with French-language composition and to the translation of *Murphy*, is rooted by Fletcher in the particular form of literary expression that French is held to have allowed Beckett. What Beckett sought in French was a 'moyen littéraire' and, more particularly, the means of creating the kind of literature that he sought to produce in the post-War period. This kind of writing is defined by Fletcher as one that was 'plus nue, plus directe...moins sujette aux artifices de style qui toujours le séduisaient en anglais, plus sobre, et mieux appropriée aux

²⁴ The first of these was Beckett's response to a commission from the BBC, while the latter was a response to a commission from the R.T.F. (*viz.* Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* [Åbo/Turku: Åbo Akademi, 1976], 28, 116).

²⁵ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 98

sujets qui lui tenaient maintenant à cœur'. If French was 'amusant', Fletcher suggests, it was precisely because it afforded Beckett the possibility of moving beyond a language whose resources he is deemed to have expended in the 'artifices de style' that defined his English-language production. French, Fletcher contends, was a means to 'relancer son œuvre après la guerre', but the manner in which Beckett's writing was revitalised by French is not an effect of new publishing opportunities, or the chance to appeal to a more sophisticated readership, but a consequence of that new style which the embrace of French facilitated: To understand Beckett's decision to begin using French as his primary language of literary composition, Fletcher contends, we must look to the newly simplified style of his post-War work. The change in style is linked to the change in language, and the change of language is linked to the change in style; taken together, these factors present the linguistic turn as a wholly literary phenomenon, and a response to personally-rooted motivating factors that are primarily, indeed exclusively, aesthetic.

The aesthetically-oriented, personally-focussed understanding of the linguistic turn that we find in Fletcher's explanation for Beckett's post-War turn to French – an understanding grounded in the idea of an intimate association between Beckett's embrace of a new language and a new style – is precisely that explanation to which this thesis refers as the Linguistic-Stylistic Hypothesis (LSH) and, though it has already been made clear that there are a number of alternatives to this hypothesis, none of the alternatives enjoys the same authoritative position as the LSH. Nor, as will now be seen, has any other hypothesis enjoyed the same remarkable longevity.

The widespread acceptance that the LSH enjoys within Beckett Studies will most likely already be familiar to the reader. Almost anyone who has consulted a critical study of Beckett's writings in which the linguistic turn is mentioned will already have encountered the idea of a fundamental link between Beckett's turn to French and the emergence of a new literary style.²⁶ The authoritative place that is accorded to this particular hypothesis is well-evidenced by a work such as the *Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*, which forms part of a series 'designed to introduce students to key topics and authors' and which is described as '[c]oncise, yet packed with essential information'.²⁷ In line with the stated aims of the series to which it belongs, we can assume that this volume will provide us with all the necessary factual

²⁶ This is also the vision of the linguistic turn that is to be found in the authorised biography of Beckett, *DTF*. Knowlson's own presentation of the LSH will be analysed in detail in Section 2 of this Introduction.

²⁷ Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), [ii]

information that a student interested in Beckett's writing might require. Naturally, one of these essential pieces of information concerns why exactly Beckett turned to writing in French in the post-War period and, for Rónán McDonald, the author of this *Introduction* and at the time the Director of the Beckett International Foundation at the University of Reading, the reasons for this turn were clear: In that text, he confidently asserts that Beckett made 'the decision to write in French...in order to shake off the stylistic accretions and tics that he had accrued in English'.²⁸ If McDonald can be so confident in proposing such an intimate link between Beckett's use of French and his turn to a new style, it is because this link between language and style has become integral to thinking about Beckett's linguistic turn, and finds its place in any overview of, or introduction to, Beckett's work. Thus, the entry on 'French' in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* informs us that '[l]inguistic expatriations enabled [Beckett] to recast his literary lineage...by sloughing the heritage of English style'.²⁹ More particularly, the French language is held to have allowed him to escape 'Joycean allusion, complexity, and compression' and to reject 'the grandiloquence of Modernism'.³⁰ In choosing French, in other words, Beckett chose to abandon this richness and embrace an aesthetics of impoverishment. Much the same explanation is to be found in the *Dictionnaire Beckett*, a French-language corollary to the *Grove Companion*, which, as part of the entry on 'Bilinguisme', informs us that '[c]e choix [du français] témoigne...d'une volonté de dépouillement. [...] Lui dont l'écriture tend vers un extrême minimalisme, il trouve dans la langue étrangère le moyen d'épurer le style en supprimant tout ornement superfétatoire afin de se rapprocher au plus près de l'indicible, du noyau dur de l'être'.³¹

The presence of this explanation for the linguistic turn in publications of the sort that has just been mentioned demonstrates the authoritative position that it holds within Beckett Studies, but it fails to properly convey the homogeneity of critical engagements with Beckett's linguistic turn. Works such as those that have been just cited have, after all, certain particularities that colour their presentation of the linguistic turn. The most notable of these particularities is that works of this sort are occasionally obliged, for reasons of space, or in the interests of clarifying matters for their intended audience, to provide abridged treatments that overlook deeper complexities. The authors of such works allow themselves these abridgements

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15

²⁹ 'French', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Marie-Claude Hubert, 'Bilinguisme', in Marie-Claude Hubert (ed.), *Dictionnaire Beckett* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011)

because they are aware that those seeking more in-depth treatments of any individual issue can turn to specialist monographs that can use their greater scale and tighter focus to tease out niggling matters that an introduction, guide, or *dictionnaire* is obliged to overlook. In this regard, it is even more revelatory of the position that the LSH holds within Beckett Studies that the very same vision of the linguistic turn – the very same association of the turn to French and the turn away from stylistic excess, towards stylistic ascesis – is to be found in a monograph such as Leland de la Durantaye's *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, which takes as its subject Beckett's literary style. For de la Durantaye, Beckett's turn to French occurred 'under intense...*aesthetic* pressure', thereby situating the rationale for the linguistic turn firmly within Beckett himself.³² When the nature of this 'pressure' is subsequently clarified, moreover, we find the very same stylistic terms familiar from the texts that have already been cited: Beckett's choice of French, de la Durantaye tells us, 'had first and foremost to do with weakening his narrative strength, with diminishing a richness of means at cross purposes with the aesthetic of "impoverishment" Beckett often praised'.³³ Although published a decade after texts such as McDonald's *Introduction* or Ackerley and Gontarski's *Companion*, therefore, and despite focussing exclusively upon the question of Beckett's literary style in a manner that should have facilitated a more complex and nuanced appraisal of the linguistic turn, the presentation of Beckett's 1946 decision to turn to French that we find in de la Durantaye's monograph is no more complex, no more nuanced, nor even any different, than what we find in these earlier, generalist texts.

If particular attention has been drawn to de la Durantaye's treatment of the post-War linguistic turn in his monograph, it is only because it is among the most recent available at the time of writing. His presentation of the post-War linguistic turn, and his rooting of this turn in the linguistic-stylistic nexus that constitutes the foundation of the LSH, is by no means exceptional. Time and again, in monograph-length treatments of aspects of Beckett's writing that oblige their authors to pay particular attention to the moment of the linguistic turn – works written by critics belonging to both the English- and French-language traditions of Beckett Studies –, we find Beckett's turn to French explained in terms derived from the LSH. The influence of

³² Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 2016), 67 – De la Durantaye is here distinguishing Beckett from Nabokov who is deemed to have 'changed literary language under intense financial...pressure' (*Ibid.*). For a correction of de la Durantaye's presentation of Beckett's financial circumstances at the time of his post-War turn to French, see Part III, Chapter 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 68 – The manner in which de la Durantaye draws Beckett himself in to his LSH-informed understanding of the linguistic turn is itself significant for reasons that will become apparent in due course.

this hypothesis is to be found, for example, in the work of a Francophone critic like Chiara Montini, who, evoking the moment of Beckett's linguistic turn in the course of her study of Beckett's bilingual poetics, aligns the turn to French with a turn toward a more austere style: '[L]e passage au français', we read, 'marque un véritable changement de style, une simplification'.³⁴ A decade before Montini, meanwhile, Pascale Casanova had already argued in favour of reading Beckett's turn to French in precisely this way: 'Écrire en français, avec la difficulté même que cela suppose, va le [= Beckett] conduire sur le chemin de l'ascétisme, l'empêcher de verser dans la surenchère stylistique, le contraindre à s'interdire les assauts d'érudition et de virtuosité rhétorique qui marquaient tous ses premiers textes'.³⁵ If, according to Casanova, French 'convenait mieux au projet de Beckett', it was precisely because of this greater stylistic asceticism that it allowed him.³⁶ Elsewhere, and returning both to the world of Anglophone criticism and to a more recent time, we find the very same interpretation of Beckett's linguistic turn in Sinéad Mooney's *A Tongue Not Mine*, where we are told that '[t]he Beckett of the early part of the "siege in the room" ...seized on his adoptive language as a linguistic strategy which both represented a desired form of relative "weakness" – the "relative asceticism of French" compared with "the temptation to rhetoric and virtuosity" of his mother tongue – and served his increasingly evacuative aesthetic, with its compact with breakdown, silence, and failure'.³⁷

Time and again, in English and in French, the LSH recurs as critics invite us to view Beckett's linguistic turn as a fundamentally aesthetic decision, one rooted in

³⁴ Chiara Montini, *La bataille du soliloque: Genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-46)* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), 25

³⁵ Pascale Casanova, *Beckett l'abstracteur: Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 156

³⁶ *Ibid.* – Although Casanova does raise the possibility of more external motivating factors for Beckett's turn to French, she evokes them in such a way as to relativize them and instead stress the primacy of aesthetic necessity: 'Le français, outre qu'il s'imposait évidemment à un écrivain qui cherchait à se faire connaître à Paris, convenait mieux au projet de Beckett [...]' (*Ibid.* – Emphasis mine). For Casanova, in other words, there may well be other factors that might serve to explain Beckett's turn to French, but he was *primarily* responding to his personal need for a language better-suited to the expression of a new, post-War prose style and for a language 'nécessaire à l'instauration de son esthétique du rien' (*Ibid.*). As will be seen below, this approach to Beckett's linguistic turn, which evokes the existence of external factors only to subordinate them to internal stylistic ones, is also to be found in James Knowlson's *DTF*.

³⁷ Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 80-81 – Mooney, for her part, is well aware of the complex linguistic character of Beckett's mature writing (*viz. Ibid.*, 7-9) and it is thus significant that she associates the drive for a newly ascetic style with '[t]he Beckett of the *early part* of the "siege in the room". As in Fletcher's article, in other words, the LSH is used with particular reference to the immediate circumstances of the post-War linguistic turn.

Beckett himself, and which is best understood when read in terms of a supposedly inextricable link between his change of language and his change of style. It is thus scarcely any wonder that, when called upon to provide students with 'essential information' on Beckett, Rónán McDonald decided to explain the linguistic turn in terms of the LSH.

Thus far, our demonstration of the authoritative position that the LSH enjoys within Beckett Studies has drawn attention to the frequency with which (relatively) recent texts have used this hypothesis to interpret Beckett's linguistic turn. By the time the critics that have already been mentioned contended that Beckett's linguistic turn was inseparable from his embrace of a new style, however, the LSH had already been a cornerstone of critical discourse around Beckett's linguistic turn for decades. As the reader will recall, the first formulation of the LSH that we examined was found in an article by John Fletcher that was first published in 1976. Even in the late 1970s, there was nothing revolutionary about his belief in a fundamental connection between Beckett's turn to French and the search for a new style of literary expression. To find the earliest examples of the LSH, in fact, one must look back to some of the first extended critical treatments of Beckett's writing that appeared in the early 1960s.

In 1964, for instance, Richard Coe, writing in his study *Samuel Beckett*, had already announced that 'Beckett's reasons for turning to French are *by now fairly clear*', thereby suggesting that they were, in his estimation, already well-established facts.³⁸ The 'reasons' in question were precisely those that the LSH would lead one to expect: Beckett turned to French in the hope of producing a particular kind of writing, a kind of 'rigorously disciplined' writing that could be more easily produced in French.³⁹ Not only is Coe's presentation of the reasons underlying Beckett's linguistic turn the same as that which is to be found in countless studies that have been published in the decades since his monograph, they are also to be found in another critical study of Beckett's writing that appeared in the same year as Coe's, John Fletcher's *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*. In that monograph, as has already been noted, Fletcher evoked and rejected two particular interpretations of the linguistic

³⁸ Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (Edinburgh, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 13 – Emphasis mine.

³⁹ *viz.* 'Beckett...is trying to say what cannot be said [...] Only when language is, as it were, defeated, bound hand and foot; only when it is so rigorously disciplined that each word describes exactly and quasi-scientifically the precise concept to which it is related and no other, only then, by the progressive elimination of that which precisely *is*, is there a remote chance for the human mind to divine the ultimate relation which *is not*. And this relentless, almost masochistic discipline...Beckett achieves by writing in a language which is not his own – in French' (*Ibid.*, 13-14 – Emphasis in original).

turn that he found to be unconvincing. In their place, he proposed a different interpretation; one whose terms will be immediately recognisable as those of the LSH.

For Fletcher, the true motivations for Beckett's linguistic turn were a matter of style and, more particularly, a matter of the style in which Beckett wanted to write in the post-War period. According to Fletcher, it was in the post-War period that Beckett

realized that he no longer wished, or longer could, indulge in the ironic intricacies of *Murphy* or the Sternian intricacies of *Watt*, but wanted to turn away from the language in which he naturally expressed himself elaborately and tortuously, and adopt what amounted to another literary personality in a language in which he could make a fresh start and refashion, after an austerer mould, sharper tools for his trade. The naked, first-person, clipped sentences in French thus replaced the veiled, third-person, elaborate periods in English [...] ⁴⁰

The presentation of Beckett's motivations for turning to French that we find in Fletcher's 1964 monograph shows how little the terms of this hypothesis have changed over the decades: The move to French is a move to a new 'austerer' style; the abandonment of English is the abandonment of 'intricacies' and of a mode of expression deemed too 'elaborat[e] and tortuou[s]'. Language and style are already inextricably interwoven, and the linguistic turn is already a function of Beckett's own literary preoccupations.

Even in 1964, however, Fletcher and Coe were not the first critics to propose an intimate link between Beckett's change of language and his change in style. To find the first coherent expression of the LSH to appear in print, in fact, we need to go back to Martin Esslin and to his foundational work, *The Theatre of the Absurd*.⁴¹ There, in one of the first major critical engagements with Beckett's writing, Esslin proposed that Beckett 'chose to write his masterpieces in French because he felt he needed the discipline that the use of an acquired language would impose upon him'.⁴² Beckett chose to turn to French, Esslin contends, because only French could provide him with the thing he most needed: Namely, the discipline that would allow him to avoid stylistic excess, and to devote himself to the clear expression of what he sought to convey. In Esslin's estimation, 'while in his own language a writer may be tempted to indulge in virtuosity of style for its own sake, the use of another language may force him to divert the ingenuity that might be expended on mere embellishments of style in his own idiom to the utmost clarity and economy of expression'.⁴³ Beckett's turn to

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961)

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8

⁴³ *Ibid.*

French was the turn away from ‘embellishments of style’ and towards ‘discipline’ and ‘economy of expression.’

Finally, in 1961 and in a text that is among the first major critical treatments of Beckett’s writing, we have found one of the earliest examples of a fully-realised expression of the LSH.⁴⁴ We have also found a description of Beckett’s turn to French that might well have been derived from any number of critical works published in English and French between 1961 and 2016.

Retracing appearances of the LSH across over five decades of research into Beckett’s writings reveals this particular hypothesis to have been a cornerstone of critical enquiry into Beckett’s linguistic turn since the very earliest days of Beckett Studies. It is, however, important to recall that the LSH is not the *only* explanation that has been proposed for Beckett’s post-War turn to French – a number of other explanations for this turn have already been alluded to. Nor, indeed, despite its widespread popularity, is the LSH an entirely unproblematic explanation. Strikingly the problem at the heart of the LSH was already at least partially evident to some of those who provided us with the earliest formulations of this hypothesis in the 1960s. This can be seen when one looks more closely at Fletcher’s and Esslin’s formulations of the LSH in *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* and *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

Read in isolation, the reader would be forgiven for assuming that Fletcher and Esslin are in total agreement concerning the manner in which Beckett’s linguistic turn should be interpreted: Both critics explain the linguistic turn as the product of a personal, aesthetic desire on Beckett’s part, and both critics find their evidence for this explanation in the relationship they perceive between Beckett’s use of French and the style of the writing that he produced in this language. It is, however, in precisely this relation between Beckett’s use of the French language and the style of his writing that a key point of disagreement between Esslin and Fletcher resides. Equally, it is the precise nature of their disagreement that serves to reveal an important uncertainty that lies at the heart of the LSH.

⁴⁴ Esslin’s articulation of this hypothesis can only be described as ‘one of the earliest’ because there does indeed exist an earlier one. This earlier expression of the LSH, however, is not to be found in a published monograph; rather, it is to be found in a lecture given by Kay Boyle, during which Boyle cited an explanation of the post-War linguistic turn that agrees precisely with the terms of the LSH and that she derived from a letter written to her by an unidentified mutual friend of Beckett and herself. Given its very particular origin and its position outside – or, at least, on the extreme periphery of – the critical record, this earlier expression of the LSH does not belong in the current discussion. It will be evoked, and its possible importance clarified, in the final chapter of Part III.

The nature of the disagreement between Esslin and Fletcher is not at all difficult to pinpoint since Fletcher himself draws explicit attention to it in his study by way of an attempt to distance himself from what he considers the flaw with Esslin's view of the linguistic turn.

For Fletcher, the problem with Esslin's view lies in the causal relationship that Esslin establishes between the turn to French and the emergence of a new style, whereby the choice of writing in a foreign language necessarily diminished Beckett's means as a literary artist and thus helped him to avoid being drawn inexorably towards 'mere embellishments of style'. In Fletcher's estimation, such a vision of the linguistic turn overlooks the fact that 'for a man of more than ordinary linguistic gifts who has lived for many years in France, it is not harder to write well in French than in English'.⁴⁵ In this regard, Fletcher is surely correct: When he turned to French in the post-War period, Beckett may well have been turning to a language that was not his mother tongue, but it was by no means foreign to him. Beckett, on the contrary, had been studying French since his very earliest youth and, by the time of the linguistic turn, had been living in France for almost a decade, and primarily through French for a number of years.⁴⁶ The degree to which such a writer would have felt constrained or 'discipline[d]' by the choice of French is far from certain.

While Fletcher is obviously alert to the flaws in Esslin's formulation of the LSH, he is decidedly less aware of the problems that underlie his own. Once again, the problem resides in the nature of the precise relationship between the turn to French and the turn towards a new style. Where Esslin argues that using 'an acquired language' helped Beckett to avoid 'indulg[ing] in virtuosity of style for its own sake', Fletcher contends that '[Beckett] was not...seeking an antidote to virtuosity, but a different kind of virtuosity'.⁴⁷ More specifically, Fletcher proposes that Beckett abandoned English because this language was no longer suited to 'the things he wanted to say'.⁴⁸ These things – 'things about exile and the self, about death, about the body and the mind'⁴⁹ – demanded a mode of expression different from what he was capable of achieving in English and so, Fletcher contends, Beckett turned to French and 'adopt[ed] what amounted to another literary personality in a language in which he could make a fresh start and refashion, after an austerer mould, sharper

⁴⁵ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 98

⁴⁶ For these years of Beckett's life and their impact on his French – particularly his use of colloquialism and non-standard forms –, see Part I, Chapter 3; Part III, Chapter 3.

⁴⁷ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 98

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

tools for his trade.’ There is, however, very clearly a problem with Fletcher’s reasoning here; the problem is one of causation.

Esslin’s hypothesis, flawed though it may be, at least has the virtue of clearly articulating cause and effect: Beckett turned to French in search of simplicity, French allowed this by virtue of its being a foreign language that obliged him to write more simply. If, as Fletcher contends, however, it was for Beckett ‘no harder to write well in French than in English’, then why did Beckett turn to French in particular when seeking ‘a fresh start...an austerer mould [and] sharper tools for his trade’? Why could Beckett not simply ‘refashion’ his English and make a ‘fresh start’ in his first language? Why was it necessary for him to abandon English entirely in favour of French? Fletcher’s response to this question is to suggest that what French offered Beckett was ‘another literary personality’, one that tended less easily towards ‘veiled, third-person, elaborate periods’ than did his English, but such an explanation is too vague to be helpful and serves only to raise a fresh set of questions: What constitutes a ‘literary personality’? Why exactly did Beckett’s ‘literary personality’ in French lead him away from ‘elaborat[e]’ and ‘tortuou[s]’ expression? Does Fletcher have any proof for this difference in ‘literary personality’ apart from the change in style itself?

The problem revealed by comparison of Esslin and Fletcher’s opposing formulations of the LSH is thus quite simple: What *exactly* is the relationship between language and style, and how do we prove it? Is it the case that Beckett’s use of a foreign language obliged him to write differently, or is it the case that there was some other characteristic about Beckett’s French that made it easier for him to write simply in this language? This fundamental problem takes us to the very heart of the LSH because it concerns the precise relationship between language and style. If this relationship is itself uncertain, the hypothesis as a whole is called into question and, by extension, so too is the idea that Beckett’s turn to French was primarily a response to internal, aesthetic exigencies. Certainly, both Esslin and Fletcher are in agreement that Beckett chose to turn to French for aesthetic reasons – and, specifically, in search of a new style – but if we cannot prove the nature of this connection between language and style, we are left with nothing more than a correlation between the linguistic and stylistic shifts, and a correlation alone will not serve to explain why Beckett chose to turn to French in 1946.

Bearing this uncertainty in mind, the frequency, and the confidence, with which the LSH has been invoked as a means of explaining the linguistic turn in the decades since Fletcher and Esslin’s books first appeared looks rather odd. How is it that this particular hypothesis, which was evidently shown to be built on a rather shaky foundation in the early 1960s, now enjoys near universal approbation five

decades later? How is it possible, moreover, that it should have so totally displaced the more externally-orientated explanations?

If the LSH has come to be the most significant, the most frequently advanced, and the most long-lived of the explanations for Beckett's linguistic turn, it is because it, unlike other explanations that have been proposed by persons such as Casement, Hill, Coffey, Bair, and Sardin, benefits from a rich array of supporting evidence derived from Beckett himself. This Beckett-derived supporting evidence for the LSH takes two forms – pre-turn evidence, and post-turn evidence – and, when taken together, this evidence provides what appears to be a coherent and persuasive argument in favour of the LSH. We will now briefly examine both of these classes of evidence in turn, beginning with the pre-turn evidence.

The pre-turn evidence in favour of the LSH takes the form of a number of statements that Beckett is known to have made in the pre-War period, and which concern the French language and its relationship to style. This evidence, although it may in certain cases precede the linguistic turn by almost two decades, is notable for agreeing with what we would expect to find were the LSH an accurate explanation for Beckett's linguistic turn. What this evidence provides us with, in other words, are pre-turn prefigurations of that connection between Beckett's use of French and a turn away from stylistic excess upon which the LSH reposes.

These statements take various forms: The most widely-known, and widely-cited, derives from Beckett's first-written, but posthumously-published, novel *Dream*; the two remaining statements were made by Beckett, in his own voice, in 1931 and in 1937. When taken together, these statements seem to offer us with an insight into Beckett's 'idea' of French in the pre-War period, and to prove that this 'idea' was strikingly similar to what the LSH propounds. In the novel *Dream*, for example, Belacqua muses on the manner in which French writers 'write without style' and ponders the possibility that '[p]erhaps only the French language can give [him] the thing [he] want[s]'.⁵⁰ Clearly, it is easy to read such a statement as an indication that Beckett himself thought he could find what *he* wanted in French and, more importantly still, that what he wanted was also to be able to 'write without style'. Such a reading of Belacqua's statement is all the more tempting in light of those two other statements that Beckett is recorded to have made *in propria persona* during the pre-War period: In 1931, for instance, Beckett is reported to have said that an 'English sentence can justify itself by looking well – French can't'.⁵¹ Years later, Beckett

⁵⁰ *Dream*, 48

⁵¹ TCD MIC 60 ('Rachel Dobbins [Burrows] – Notes on Beckett Lectures at TCD')

described himself in a diary entry as having 'boost[ed] the possibility of stylelessness in French, the pure communication'.⁵² Taken together, these three statements seem to confirm that Beckett conceived of the French language as a particularly effective means of turning away from stylistic excess, of writing 'without style', of achieving 'stylelessness', something that was impossible in English, a language where '[a] sentence can justify itself by looking well.' So read, these statements strongly argue in favour of the validity of the LSH, since they seem to confirm that the association between French and stylelessness has roots in an idea of French that Beckett already held as early as 1931.

To take these statements together, however, is to ignore their specificity and all that separates them: These statements were, in fact, made in vastly differing contexts, were directed towards vastly different audiences, and were made by vastly differing 'Becketts'. When one replaces each of these sentences in its particular context and attempts to read it in terms both of its intended audience and of what we can reconstruct about the particular 'Beckett' who was speaking at the time – as will be done in the final chapter of Part I –, one sees that none of these statements offers unqualified proof of a connection between a turn towards French and a turn away from style. Properly contextualised – in other words –, and even when taken together, these statements serve less to prove that Beckett had a coherent and unchanging vision of French, than that critical appraisals of these statements have too often ignored their particularity and, in some cases, have even misrepresented these statements the better to help them accord with the terms of the LSH.

Even were these particular statements not affected by such serious issues, moreover, there would be another problem with them – namely, the fact that all of them date from a time before, sometimes long before, the linguistic turn. As such, none of them can be said to provide an insight into Beckett's frame of mind at the moment he made his decision. Certainly, none of them can be said to constitute an explicit response to the question of why Beckett turned to French in 1946. It is for this reason that the second class of evidence is of even greater importance for the widespread popularity that the LSH enjoys among critics.

This evidence too takes the form of statements made by Beckett. Unlike the statements that have just been mentioned, however, these statements were all made *after* the linguistic turn. Not only that, these post-War statements were also all offered by Beckett himself with the express intention of answering the question of why he turned to French in 1946: Asked on one occasion why he had turned to French, Beckett responded that it was '[p]arce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire

⁵² German Diaries [11th March, 1937] *qtd* in *DTF*, 257

sans style'.⁵³ On other occasions, when asked the same question by different people, he said that 'French had the right "weakening" effect'⁵⁴, that 'French represented a form of weakness by comparison with his mother tongue'⁵⁵, and that 'you couldn't help writing poetry in [English]'.⁵⁶ Later still he remarked that, following the Liberation of Paris, he '[s]e remi[t] à écrire – en français – avec le désir de [s]'appauvrir encore davantage' and that this search for still greater impoverishment was 'le vrai mobile' of his turn to French.⁵⁷ Finally, in the last decade of his life, he provided a recapitulation of what had gone before, explaining how the turn to French was an '[e]scape from mother Anglo-Irish exuberance & automatisms' and a move '[f]rom ex[c]ess to lack of colour'.⁵⁸

Coming from Beckett himself and all responding directly to the question of why he turned to French, these post-turn statements seem not only to afford us an incomparable insight into Beckett's reasons for abandoning English in 1946, but also to provide us with proof of the validity of the LSH. Certainly, when they are gathered together, as they have been here, it seems impossible to find in them anything other than confirmation of all that the LSH would lead us to suspect. The value of these statements for the LSH, and for Beckett Studies more largely, was succinctly expressed by Ruby Cohn in her monograph *Back to Beckett* when, having presented all the remarks that Beckett had made on the subject of his turn to French up to that point, she remarked that '[i]f we collate these remarks, it is evident that Beckett views French as a way to strip his language to the bare essentials of his vision'.⁵⁹ The understanding of French that can be extracted from Beckett's statements on the topic of his turn to French is thus precisely in line with the terms of the LSH: The linguistic turn was motivated by the author's own will to weakness, by his keenly felt personal desire to impoverish his art by way of the 'weakening strength' that he felt the use of the French language afforded his writing.⁶⁰

Given how closely Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his linguistic turn mirror what we find in the LSH, it is tempting to view them as

⁵³ Samuel Beckett [hereafter SB] *qtd* in Niklaus Gessner, *Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache: eine Untersuchung über Formzerfall und Beziehungslosigkeit bei Samuel Beckett* (Zurich: Juris-Verlag, 1957), 32 (unnumbered footnote)

⁵⁴ Herbert Blau, 'Meanwhile Follow the Bright Angels', in *The Tulane Drama Review* (Vol. 5, No. 1 – September 1960), 91

⁵⁵ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 196

⁵⁶ Richard Coe, *Beckett*, 14

⁵⁷ SB *qtd* in Ludovic Janvier, *Samuel Beckett par lui-même* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1969), 18

⁵⁸ *LSB IV*, 592-93 (SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982])

⁵⁹ Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973), 59

⁶⁰ 'The Weakening Strength of French' serves as the title of that chapter of *Back to Beckett* devoted to Beckett's change of language (*viz. Ibid.*, 57).

confirming the LSH beyond reasonable doubt. (This is, indeed, generally how they are offered within Beckett Studies, being frequently cited – whether as a group, or in isolation – in such a way that they serve at once to clarify and to corroborate the terms of the LSH.⁶¹) And yet, one must remember that not even these statements provide us with incontrovertible proof that Beckett’s turn to French was motivated exclusively, or even primarily, by a desire to change the style of his writing, by a desire to find a tool better-suited to his post-War literary ends. The problems with these statements are much the same as those that have already been noted concerning the pre-turn statements: Critical treatments tend to abstract them from their particular contexts, and thus to ignore that, when read within these contexts, the story they tell ceases to be one of unambiguous support for the LSH, and becomes instead one of Beckett’s changing attitude to the question of why he turned to French. Additionally, when looked at more closely – and in their totality, for what was offered above is only a selection of the responses Beckett is reported to have offered to the question of why he turned to French –, one finds that Beckett’s post-War statements are inconsistent, a number of them presenting the linguistic turn as having been motivated by something other than a desire for greater ‘weakness’ or an ‘escape from mother Anglo-Irish exuberance & automatisms’ – namely, a desire to be noticed by others, or to amuse himself.

The story these statements tell, and the inconsistencies that exist between them, will be carefully examined in the final chapter of Part III. What must be recognised at the present time, however, is that even if these post-turn statements did provide us with unproblematic, unambiguous, and irrefutable proof that Beckett’s true motivation for turning to French in 1946 was a desire to escape the prison-house

⁶¹ In fact, Esslin himself already cited two of these statements in support of his expression of the LSH (*viz.* Martin Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 8). The very same statements are to be found in Coe’s study, where he also adds a comment Beckett made to him personally on the subject of the English language (*viz.* Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett*, 14). More recently, Chiara Montini’s previously-cited contention that ‘le passage au français marque un véritable changement de style, une simplification’ is supported by way of a remark that Beckett made to Ludovic Janvier about a desire for impoverishment being ‘le vrai mobile’ of his linguistic turn (*viz.* Chiara Montini, “*La bataille du soliloque*”: *Genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-46)*, 25) and Leland de la Durantaye cites both a large number of Beckett’s post-turn statements, and a number of his pre-turn statements, in support of his LSH-aligned view of the linguistic turn as a strictly aesthetic decision born of a desire to ‘diminis[h] a richness of means at cross-purposes with the aesthetic “impoverishment” Beckett often praised in his essays, novels, letters, interviews and poetry’ (Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett’s Art of Mismatching*, 68). These critics are, it must be stressed, merely an indicative sampling; the list of critics who have cited these statements to support interpretations of the linguistic turn that accord with the model of the LSH might be greatly extended.

of style that he felt his English to have become, it remains the case that the evidence of these statements would not be direct evidence in the truest sense of the term. On the contrary, these statements continue to hold us at a remove from the precise moment of the linguistic turn, forcing us to access it only through statements made by Beckett after the fact. The reality of this distance and of this mediation between us and the moment of the linguistic turn introduces a sliver of doubt which, slim though it may be, we must acknowledge: Until we have seen direct evidence that proves the change in language to have affected Beckett's style – evidence provided by a source that is strictly contemporaneous with the linguistic turn – we cannot be entirely sure of that intimate association between Beckett's use of French and his embrace of a more attenuated style upon which the LSH is founded. If we cannot be sure of this foundation, of course, we cannot be sure of the strictly internal, literary vision of the linguistic turn that the LSH proposes either.

The necessity of approaching Beckett's *post facto* statements with caution is all the more necessary given that there does indeed exist at least one archival source that allows us that direct and unmediated access to the moment of the linguistic turn that we require if we are to prove the LSH. This source is the 'Suite' Notebook.⁶² It is in this notebook that we find the horizontal line Beckett drew across a page and which signalled his 1946 turn from English- to French-language composition. If there is direct evidence of the LSH to be found, it is to be found in this notebook and, more specifically, in comparison between the 30 pages of English-language prose that Beckett wrote before his turn, and in the French-language prose of the short-story that 'Suite' eventually became when it was published in *Les Temps Modernes*.⁶³ If what the LSH proposes – and what so many statements made by Beckett, both before and after the linguistic turn, are taken to confirm – is indeed true, we will discover a notable change as we move across that horizontal line, a shift from 'poetry' to 'weakness', 'from ex[c]ess to lack of colour'. Having clarified the origins, the history, and the various doubts that hang over the LSH, it is to the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, and to the horizontal line on its thirtieth page, that we will now turn.

II. READING THE 'SUITE' NOTEBOOK THROUGH, AND AGAINST, THE LSH

Amongst the many revelations afforded critics by James Knowlson's authorised biography of Beckett, one of the more intriguing has already been mentioned and

⁶² The 'Suite' Notebook is held by Boston College, where it forms part of the Calvin Israel-Samuel Beckett Collection (*viz.* Calvin Israel-Samuel Beckett Collection, Burns Library, Boston College, MS 91-1, Box 2/4).

⁶³ 'Suite', in *Les Temps Modernes* (Vol. 1, No. 10 – 1er juillet, 1946), 107-119

provides the focus for this second section. This particular revelation concerned the existence of that notebook to which has just been referred and which contains the earliest manuscript version of 'Suite', the first short-story to be written by Beckett in French. By way of introducing the new insights that the 'Suite' Notebook offered into Beckett's post-War turn to French, Knowlson first recapitulated popular critical understanding of Beckett's turn to French as it had existed up to that point:

It has always been thought that [Beckett's] first postwar story was written exclusively in French. But it was not. The manuscript shows that he started writing it in English on 17 February 1946, wrote twenty-nine pages, then, in mid March, drew a line a third of the way down the page and wrote the remainder of the story in French.⁶⁴

The importance of what the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about Beckett's turn to French can scarcely be over-estimated. As Knowlson reminds us, Beckett's turn to French was previously understood to have been announced by the composition of a new work in a new language – that is, by an original work begun, pursued and completed in French. Furthermore, as discussed in the preceding section of this Introduction, Beckett's adoption of a new language was further understood to have been inextricably linked with his adoption of a new, impoverished style, and a novel use of the first-person. This connection between language and style underpinned a particularly literary vision of the linguistic turn, whereby Beckett's turn to French was both a result of his desire for a newly diminished mode of artistic expression and a means of satisfying his corresponding need for a language in which it might be easier to 'write without style'.

While it has already been remarked that there are a number of problems with the LSH and it has already been intimated that there is good reason to regard much of the evidence upon which this particular vision of the linguistic turn is founded with suspicion, it is equally the case that, for decades, this interpretation appeared to be the only one capable of fully accounting for the available material evidence. This connection between Beckett's linguistic and stylistic shifts agreed perfectly with the textual evidence provided by his first literary publication in French: a short-story entitled 'Suite' published by *Les Temps Modernes* in 1946.⁶⁵ When critics compared

⁶⁴ *DTF*, 358 – Knowlson's dating for the composition of 'Suite' is to be preferred to that of February 7th, offered by Cohn as part of her discussion of 'La Fin' / 'The End' in *A Beckett Canon* (viz. Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 129) – Cohn's misdating can be attributed to the fact that Beckett's handwriting, scarcely legible at the best of times, is more than usually difficult to decipher in this particular notebook.

⁶⁵ Even within the context of Beckett's peculiarly muddled corpus, the publication history of 'Suite' is exceptionally convoluted. Much of the subsequent convolution stemmed from the fact that the text published by *Les Temps Modernes* under the title 'Suite' represented only the first half of a longer short-story, the full – and revised – version of which would finally be retitled as 'La Fin' / 'The End'. The story's initial,

this story with examples of Beckett's pre-War, English-language fiction, it became clear that 'Suite' was separated from the writing that had preceded it by far more than the language of its composition. It seemed, rather, that 'Suite' testified to a fundamental stylistic shift in Beckett's literary prose: The third-person narrative voice, as well as the verbal pyrotechnics and florid erudition, of his earlier English-language work were gone, having given way to what James Knowlson has termed 'an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence', an exploration undertaken and recounted, in a newly muted manner, by an unnamed first-person narrator-protagonist.⁶⁶ The scale of that stylistic shift between 'Suite' and pre-War texts such as the stories of *More Pricks Than Kicks (MPTK)* or the novel *Murphy*, both defined by their recondite vocabulary, syntactical complexity and frequent indulgence in learned allusion, gave critics good reason to presume the existence of an intimate connection between Beckett's abandonment of his earlier literary mode and that of his mother tongue. Certainly, there may have been some disagreement about the precise modality of this transformation – was it a necessary effect of the turn to writing in a language other than his First Language and in which he was thus less comfortable, or had Beckett chosen to turn to French because, even though he could write in it as well as he wrote in English, he knew French to somehow be better suited to his artistic aims? –, such disagreements were nevertheless insufficient to call into question the fundamental connection between language and style: In seeking to explain the contrast between Beckett's 'veiled, third-person, elaborate periods in English' and his use of 'naked, first-person, clipped sentences in French', the change in language was the obvious explanation.⁶⁷ Perhaps owing to the fact that the change in language provided such an obvious explanation for the transformation in Beckett's style, few critics thought to examine the matter in any great depth. Certainly none examined the

partial publication was, for example, directly responsible for the curious fact that the full version of this short story, the first to be composed by Beckett in French, was actually published for the first time in English: It first appeared, under the title 'The End' and in a collaborative translation produced by Beckett and Richard Seaver, in a 1954 issue of the Paris-based Anglophone journal *Merlin*. The complete version of the French text would not be published for another year, when 'La Fin' appeared as part of the collection *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* (1955) – For fuller details on the publication history of 'Suite'/'La Fin', see Dirk Van Hulle, 'Publishing "The End": Beckett and *Les Temps modernes*', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett* (London: The British Library, 2011), 75-81

⁶⁶ *DTF*, 357 – The term 'narrator-protagonist' is used by Ruby Cohn (*viz.* Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 129) to refer to the first-person protagonists of Beckett's major post-War fiction, and has been adopted for use throughout this thesis.

⁶⁷ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 98

question of Beckett's post-War style so closely, or in such an original manner, as J.M. Coetzee.⁶⁸

Coetzee undertook his analysis of Beckett's English fiction because he wanted to understand what Beckett's turn from English to French revealed about the relation between content and form, both as it informed Beckett's writing particularly and literary expression more largely:

The fact [Beckett] moved from English to French may turn out to be of only biographical interest. But the chances are better that the crisis in his relations with English points to a crisis in the relation of form and content in his fiction, one in which a certain kind of form, associated with the English language, is no longer adequate to express a certain kind of content. If such a conflict is not necessarily peculiar to Beckett [...] the importance of Beckett's move is clearly vast.⁶⁹

It was in search of a response to this question of the relation between language and form that Coetzee devoted his doctoral thesis to a systematic, stylistic study of Beckett's English-language fiction, with a particular focus on *Watt*. Coetzee hoped that, if he could define the stylistic features of Beckett's fictional writing in English – especially the style of his last novel to be written in this language –, it would further understanding of the exact nature of Beckett's post-War change of style and, one day perhaps, permit scholars 'to explore and compare the expressive potentials of English and French' via engagement with the objectively-described terms of Beckett's differing styles in these two languages.⁷⁰

While Coetzee's careful attention to the question of language and form as this is revealed by the composition of *Watt* is certainly interesting, the precise relevance of his thesis to the present enquiry owes to his recognition of the fact that, as a means of understanding Beckett's post-War change of style, such close stylistic analysis of Beckett's last, English-language novel prior to the linguistic turn was no more than *faute de mieux*. In Coetzee's own estimation, there was only one way to arrive at a perfect understanding of what exactly constituted Beckett's post-War change of style:

⁶⁸ J. M. Coetzee, 'The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1969)

⁶⁹ J. M. Coetzee, 'The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis', 3

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 – For Coetzee, a full comparison of the French and English languages through Beckett's writing would require a three-stage process, involving 'description of the relation of form to content in Beckett's English works, description of the same relation in his French works, and comparison of the results, the crucial comparison being between the last work in English and the first in French' (*Ibid.*)

In its plainest form, the question [of Beckett's post-War style] is, "Why was 'Suite' (Beckett's first story published in French) not written in English?," and an immediate answer requires at the very least the existence of an English 'Suite' in order that we may make a comparison. But no such work exists.⁷¹

Sadly, Coetzee's statement of the problem faced by those who enquire into the origins of Beckett's post-War style appears to have had little effect upon critical engagements with the question of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. This is to be lamented, for, in this question, Coetzee provides a cogent elucidation of the problem that lies at the heart of the LSH: Simply put, one cannot view Beckett's linguistic shift as an expression of his desire for a newly ascetic aesthetic unless one has previously been in a position to evaluate the precise manner in which his style was impacted by the change of language. In other words, and as Coetzee rightly remarks, the very least that is required to answer the question of why Beckett turned to French in 1946 is an English-language version of 'Suite', Beckett's first French-language literary text of the post-War period.

Once account has been taken of Coetzee's insight regarding the necessary conditions for a just appraisal of Beckett's post-War change of style, two things become clear: The first is that the imbrication of language and style upon which the LSH reposes is fundamentally unsound. It is unsound because, to date, it has only ever been supported by invalid comparisons between unequal terms as, rather than being grounded in isomorphic evidence, evidence for this hypothesis has been drawn from an array of heterogeneous sources. In simpler terms, comparisons between the prose style of the French 'Suite' and that of Beckett's earlier English-language texts – texts that were, in some cases, composed decades prior to the linguistic turn (e.g. *MPTK*, *Murphy*) – cannot be taken as proof of an essential connection between the change of language and the change of style. On the contrary, they merely serve to prove a more general evolution in Beckett's style. Granted, this unsatisfactory and heterogeneous textual evidence is supported by the authorial pronouncements that have already been mentioned and which lend credence to precisely this connection between a change of language and a change of style. Such pronouncements cannot serve to confirm the validity of the LSH either, however. As has already been noted, some of Beckett's statements on the subject of the post-War linguistic seem to point towards other explanations for his turn to French. Even those that explicitly associate the turn to French with a turn towards stylistic impoverishment, meanwhile, serve only to confirm that the hypothesis met with Beckett's approbation. There is thus a problem at the root of the LSH which nothing shy of an English-language version of Beckett's

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4

first French-language literary text of the post-War period can resolve. Thankfully, the second thing that becomes clear is that Coetzee's hypothetical *desideratum* of an English 'Suite' is not hypothetical at all, nor indeed is it a *desideratum*. Thanks to the evidence of the 30 pages of English-language prose that precede Beckett's turn to French, we find ourselves in the fortunate position of being able to address the underlying deficiencies in earlier analyses of the linguistic turn and, in so doing, to reassess the question of why Beckett turned to French.

By offering us an original, English-language version of Beckett's first French-language story, the 'Suite' Notebook allows us either to place the LSH on a sound evidentiary footing, or to disprove this hypothesis by way of empirical evidence. If comparison of the English-language version of 'Suite' and the French-language text that followed demonstrates a drastic change in style, then the connection between language and style is confirmed and the LSH with it; If comparison of Beckett's writing in English and French shows the change of language to have left the style of his work largely unchanged, however, the connection between language and style will be shown to be illusory. In either event, it will be made possible to move beyond an hypothesis that has been present in Beckett Studies since at least the publication of Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* and according to which the linguistic turn was an effect of Beckett's quest for a newly impoverished style and a more rigorous form of stylistic discipline. Either this hypothesis will be recast as an established fact, and it will become possible to set aside the question of why Beckett turned to French, or the LSH will be revealed as a misprision and we will be obliged to set it aside and to look for an explanation of the linguistic turn that lies beyond the purely aesthetic and the strictly literary.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the existence of the 'Suite' Notebook and the 30 pages of English-language prose that it contains was first brought to the attention of the scholarly community by way of *DTF*. There, Knowlson clearly signals the importance of this notebook and underlines the degree to which it corrects what was, at that time, the long-standing presumption 'that [Beckett's] first postwar story was written exclusively in French.' As Knowlson would have been well aware, the presumption that Beckett's first post-War short-story was composed 'exclusively in French' underpins the similarly long-standing presumption of an intimate connection between Beckett's post-War turn to the French and that change in his literary style which occurred in the post-War period. Given that *DTF* makes no explicit mention of what the English and French versions of 'Suite' reveal about the connection between Beckett's turn to French and the style of his prose – and bearing

in mind that Knowlson's biography repeats the well-rehearsed associations between Beckett's turn to French and his adoption of a new style⁷² –, one might reasonably assume that, having compared these versions, Knowlson found the expected stylistic differences between an initial English-language section, written in something approaching the baroque, allusive, third-person mode that characterises much of Beckett's pre-War writing, and a subsequent French-language section composed in the anaemic manner and first-person voice that is held to be characteristic of Beckett's post-War prose. Naturally, such a contrast would have served to confirm the traditional understanding of Beckett's post-War style as having been dependent upon his turn to French and this confirmation would itself have obviated the need for any commentary on the English- and French-language versions of the text since such commentary would have served only to repeat what a majority of critics interested in Beckett's writings would already have thought to be the case.

For the reader of *DTF*, in other words, Knowlson's lack of engagement with the 'Suite' Notebook and his explicit appeal to the familiar terms of the LSH might be taken as tacit confirmation that this notebook proves the validity of this hypothesis. When one turns to the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, however, one finds that this is not the case at all: In fact, the 'Suite' Notebook shows that the initial English-language section of the notebook already displays not only the use of the first-person but also that transition to a 'simpler, more direct kind of prose' that was long thought only to have been enabled by Beckett's turn to French.⁷³ Far from proving Beckett's change of language to have effected a drastic stylistic change, in other words, the 'Suite' Notebook proves that Beckett's style was largely *unaffected* by his turn to French. Where Knowlson's engagement with the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook suggested that it proved the validity of the LSH, in other words, the 'Suite' Notebook actually serves to prove quite the opposite. Before clarifying the degree to which the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook contradicts the LSH by way of closer examination of the notebook, however, it is worth taking a moment to ask the question of why this notebook is so little mentioned in discussions of the linguistic turn.

Given what the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about Beckett's turn to French, it seems astonishing that, in the decades since it was first brought to the

⁷² viz. '[B]y adopting another language, [Beckett] gained a greater simplicity and objectivity. French offered him the freedom to concentrate on a more direct expression of the search for "being" and on an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence. Using French also enabled him to "cut away the excess, to strip away the colour" and to concentrate more on the music of the language, its sounds and its rhythms' (*DTF*, 357).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 358

attention of scholars interested in Beckett's writing, this notebook should have made so little impact upon critical understanding of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. The better to clarify the degree to which the 'Suite' Notebook has failed to effect any major development in critical thinking on Beckett's turn to French, it is helpful to consider the place that this notebook holds in John Pilling's *Beckett before Godot* and Chiara Montini's *La bataille du soliloque*.

The interest of these two studies is principally chronological: In the first instance, Pilling and Montini's attention is focussed exclusively on the earliest stage of Beckett's career – Pilling, as his title implies, is interested in exploring Beckett's writing 'before *Godot*', while Montini concentrates on the period 1929-1946 –, secondly, both of these works were published after the appearance of *DTF*, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that both critics were aware of the existence of the 'Suite' Notebook and what it revealed about the English-language origins of Beckett's first French-language short-story.⁷⁴ Taking these factors into account, one might assume the 'Suite' Notebook and its evidence would have been given an important place in both monographs. In actual fact, however, the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook has entirely no effect upon either Pilling or Montini's engagements with Beckett's linguistic turn.

In *Beckett before Godot*, for instance, Pilling informs us only that the 'Suite' Notebook reveals Beckett's first post-War short-story 'was begun in English [...] [b]ut within a month Beckett had switched to French'.⁷⁵ At the same time as he neglects to engage with the stylistic evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, Pilling provides us with an explanation of the linguistic turn that does nothing more than repeat the familiar tenets of the LSH: French was, for Beckett, a 'work language', a means of escaping from the 'flower value' he found in English and of permitting him to 'write without style'.⁷⁶ Given that Montini's study takes as its focus the 'processus graduel' that led towards the development of Beckett's bilingual poetics, her treatment of the 'Suite' Notebook is even more anomalous.⁷⁷ Despite devoting two separate chapters to the novels *Watt* and *Mercier et Camier*, the *Nouvelles* – that is, those four short-stories of which 'Suite' / 'La Fin', begun in February, was not only the first to be composed but

⁷⁴ Pilling and Montini's familiarity with Knowlson's biography is indeed confirmed by its inclusion in the bibliographies of their respective volumes (viz. John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot* [Cambridge: CUP, 1997], xiv; Chiara Montini, "*La bataille du soliloque*": *Genèse de la poésie bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-46)*, 309).

⁷⁵ John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot*, 202

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 201 – For a correction of Pilling's characterisation of English in terms of 'flower value' and French as a 'work language', see Part I, Chapter 4.

⁷⁷ Chiara Montini, "*La bataille du soliloque*": *Genèse de la poésie bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-46)*, 23 – For an overview of this process as described by Montini, see *Ibid.*, 23-28.

also the first to signal Beckett's post-War switch to French⁷⁸ – are mentioned only in passing and no allusion whatsoever is made to the bilingual composition of 'Suite'.⁷⁹ Though it fails to mention the 'Suite' Notebook or to engage with what this evidence has to tell us about Beckett's turn to French, Montini's study does provide us with a reiteration of the conviction that lies at the heart of the LSH. For Montini, as noted, 'le passage au français marque un véritable changement de style, une simplification'.⁸⁰ In both of these texts then, composed a decade apart, but both written in the wake of Knowlson's biography, we find that the 'Suite' Notebook has not only failed to make any lasting impact on critical discourse, but appears to have been entirely forgotten almost as soon as it was brought to light.

While Pilling's passing mention of the 'Suite' Notebook and Montini's complete lack of reference to it are particularly striking since the focus of their studies should have led them to accord a more substantial place to the evidence this notebook provides, recognition of the manners in which they respond to this evidence – namely, by either greatly minimizing it or by ignoring it entirely – serves to alert us to the fact that these two approaches, what might be called the 'Pilling' and the 'Montini', are far from being confined to these two studies. On the contrary, the differing, but uniformly unsatisfactory, treatments accorded to the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook by Pilling and Montini are of a piece with wider critical practice within Beckett Studies: On the one hand, discussions that follow the Montini model include de la Durantaye's *Beckett's Art of Mismaking* and McDonald's *Introduction to Beckett*. In each case, these scholars simply ignore the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook entirely and make no effort to incorporate the bilingual composition of 'Suite' into their presentation of the linguistic turn.⁸¹ On the other, both Dirk Van Hulle's contribution to *Publishing Samuel Beckett – 'Publishing "The End": Beckett and Les Temps modernes'* – and Sinéad Mooney's *A Tongue Not Mine* follow Pilling's approach, briefly evoking both the evidence of the notebook and what it reveals about the English-language origins of Beckett's first French-language short-story, but failing to pursue their engagement with this notebook further by discussing what it reveals about the *style* of these English-language origins.⁸²

⁷⁸ DTF, 358

⁷⁹ Chiara Montini, « *La bataille du soliloque* »: *Genèse de la poésie bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-1946)*, 177-78

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25

⁸¹ *viz.* Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 67-71; Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*, 15-16

⁸² *viz.* Dirk Van Hulle, 'Publishing "The End": Beckett and *Les Temps modernes*', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 74; Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation*, 81

Read in isolation, Pilling's and Montini's studies might be seen as indicative of nothing more than the individual perspectives of two critics. Understood as representative of wider tendencies within Beckett Studies, however, they attest to a pervasive disregard for the 'Suite' Notebook, as well as a persistent unwillingness to make productive use of the insights into Beckett's linguistic turn that this notebook affords. So curious is this disregard for what has justly been called 'a Beckett manuscript treasure', and so counter-intuitive the dearth of critical engagement with a manuscript that brings us so close to one of the key moments of Beckett's career, that one feels obliged to seek out some kind of explanation.⁸³ One feels all the more obliged to do so given that, as demonstrated in the previous section, critics have been engaging with the question of *why* Beckett turned to French for almost as long as they have been engaging with Beckett's writing. Given the interest that this particular question inspires in critics interested in Beckett's writing, why have the overwhelming majority of these same critics shown such little interest in a notebook that allows them unparalleled access to the precise moment of the linguistic turn? More importantly still, being now faced with evidence that disproves the most widespread explanation for why Beckett turned to French – namely, the LSH –, why do the overwhelming majority of critical engagements with Beckett's turn to French continue to explain the linguistic turn in terms of a stylistic shift that the 'Suite' Notebook shows to have occurred *in English*?

One explanation for such critical oversight has already been proposed by way of the preceding remarks on that treatment of the 'Suite' Notebook that is to be found in *DTF*. As noted, the fact that Knowlson makes no reference to the style of the English-language version of 'Suite' could justifiably be read as an indication that the two versions of this story agree with what has long been supposed about Beckett's linguistic turn and thus with the terms of the LSH. Given the authoritative position that Beckett Studies accords to *DTF*, it is easy to imagine subsequent critics assuming that, if Knowlson did not think to compare the French and English versions of 'Suite' and made no attempt to challenge expectations about the primarily linguistic origin of Beckett's post-War stylistic shift, it was because such a comparison had nothing to offer and because the 'Suite' Notebook itself contained nothing to challenge such expectations.⁸⁴

⁸³ Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 128 (unnumbered footnote)

⁸⁴ The status accorded to Knowlson's biography is writ large in that entry on 'Biography' found in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: 'Damned to Fame [...]'* is indispensable to anyone interested in SB, or in the literary pulse of the twentieth century' (*viz.* 'Biography', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to*

This explanation has the notable advantage of allowing us to justify the decision made by so many otherwise accomplished critics to make little or no mention whatsoever of the 'Suite' Notebook, even where this notebook would have proved an eminently valuable primary source. There is, however, a serious problem with this explanation. Crucially, it cannot account for Knowlson's own discussion of the 'Suite' Notebook: While others may have been (mis)guided by *DTF*, Knowlson himself engaged directly with the notebook and was thus the very first both to recognise, and to ignore, its true value. As a result, and unless we wish to follow a conspiratorial line of enquiry of the sort proposed by Stephen Dilks in his *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace* – whereby Knowlson would have been acting in accordance with the dictates of a shadowy cabal orchestrated by the 'Beckett Truth Society' and in the interests of preserving a particular view of Beckett⁸⁵ –, we must explore other possible explanations.⁸⁶

Thankfully, an infinitely less dramatic explanation for Knowlson's handling of the 'Suite' Notebook does exist. This explanation is rooted, not in a shadowy cabal that seeks to control Beckett Studies, but in Beckett Studies itself.

Writing in his *Critique of Beckett Criticism*, P. J. Murphy noted that

It is quite amazing to see the degree to which the huge mass of Beckett scholarship in the Anglo-American tradition is founded upon a series of essentially unexamined and unchallenged assumptions established in the first handful of critical analyses. In the period 1961-65 a number of highly problematic judgements about the nature of Beckett's art assume to a surprising extent an almost axiomatic status that has largely predetermined the various strata of subsequent critical enquiry.⁸⁷

Samuel Beckett). That Knowlson's biography enjoys a similarly superlative reputation amongst Francophone critics is attested by the glowing terms in which *DTF* is described in the corresponding entry of the *Dictionnaire Beckett*, where Knowlson's biography is described as 'un monument où le lecteur trouvera à la fois les données factuelles les mieux attestées et des propositions de compréhension des œuvres particulièrement informées et riche de perspectives tant sur le plan factuel que sur le plan interprétatif' (viz. Michèle Tournet, 'Biographies', in Marie-Claude Hubert [ed.], *Dictionnaire Beckett*).

⁸⁵ Stephen Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2011), 7 – The 'Beckett Truth Society' is how Dilks (re)imagines the Beckett Estate.

⁸⁶ In support of his conviction that Beckett Studies is still constrained by factors other than disinterested academic inquiry, Dilks draws his readers' attention to the legal bar placed upon him by the Beckett Estate, which prevented him from including in his monograph citations from Beckett's correspondence – both archival and previously published (*Ibid.*, 7).

⁸⁷ P. J. Murphy, 'Beckett Criticism in English', in P. J. Murphy, Werner Huber, Rolf Breuer, Konrad Schoell (eds), *A Critique of Beckett Criticism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 17

Although Murphy is not here referring to critical thinking on Beckett's linguistic turn – rather, he is thinking particularly of the manner in which Martin Esslin's 'Introduction' to his own 1965 edited collection *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* crystallised a 'Beckett "triplex"' of critical commonplaces that still continued to structure critical engagement with Beckett's writing into the 1990s⁸⁸ – what he says is wholly applicable to the case of the LSH.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, the emergence of this hypothesis can be traced back to that very period of 1961-1965 to which Murphy refers. By this time, the LSH was already a recurring feature in critical treatments of Beckett's writing – as attested by its appearance in studies by Esslin, Fletcher, and Coe – and had already established itself within critical discourse as the standard answer to the question of why Beckett turned to French in the post-War period. Even then, the LSH was a demonstrably 'problematic judgement' – as proven in the preceding section, the precise nature of the relation between Beckett's linguistic and stylistic shifts was, even in 1964, a matter of disagreement between critics, and it has been seen that Beckett's own statements on the subject of his linguistic turn are more ambiguous than generally allowed – but it nevertheless came to enjoy an 'axiomatic status' and has endured essentially unaltered down to the present day, even as the dating for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn has been amended from 1945 to 1946, and the archival record has revealed that Beckett's first French-language short-story was begun in English.⁸⁹

In line with Murphy's remarks concerning the role played by certain 'problematic judgements' that, having been formulated in the early decades of research into Beckett's writing, came to 'predetermin[e] the various strata of subsequent critical enquiry', I believe that Beckett Studies' failure to integrate the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook into critical discussions of the linguistic turn may be traced back to the axiomatic position of the LSH within Beckett Studies. In essence, I

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18

⁸⁹ 1945 was the standard dating for the linguistic turn amongst Beckett's earliest critics (*viz.* Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 7; Ruby Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, 95; John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 242, 248; Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett*, 13). In this dating, critics were following Beckett's own indications (*viz.* *LSB II*, 461 – SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]; *Ibid.*, 468 – SB to Gian Renzo Morteo [after 20th February, 1954]); *LSB III*, 636 –SB to John Fletcher [21st November, 1964]; *LSB IV*, 592 – SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982]). While this dating is correct in the sense that Beckett's first French-language composition of the post-War period ('La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon') was composed in 1945, it was not until 1946 that Beckett wrote his first literary composition in French. By 1973, Ruby Cohn was able to accurately identify 'Suite' as Beckett's first post-War literary text to be written in French, and to accurately date its composition to 1946 (*viz.* Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, 61).

would contend that persistent critical conviction in Beckett's having turned to French for primarily personal, artistic reasons tied to his desire for a new style of literary composition has become part of an interpretative *doxa* to the extent that, even when critics are presented with material evidence to the contrary – as was Knowlson when he was confronted by the stylistic evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook –, they are unable to look beyond what they are convinced to be true and thus unable to perceive the new avenues of critical enquiry that open up before them. Knowlson, in other words, was not wilfully refusing to share with Beckett Studies the insights that the 'Suite' Notebook affords into Beckett's linguistic turn. Rather, he was himself unable to recognise them and thus unable to integrate them into his understanding of Beckett's post-War turn to French.

Seen through this lens, it becomes possible to make sense of the various inconsistencies that are to be found in Knowlson's treatment of the linguistic turn in *DTF*. On the one hand, Knowlson is too attentive to the probable influence of the contexts in which Beckett found himself to entirely ignore the role played by external factors in his decision to abandon his mother tongue. (These factors include Beckett's pre-War experimentations with writing in French, and the period spent in Roussillon, during which French was both 'the language of [Beckett's] everyday life' and the language in which he did almost all of his reading.⁹⁰) It is his recognition of the undeniable importance of such external factors that leads Knowlson to affirm that 'Beckett's decision to write [...] in French [...] was *partially* influenced by circumstance'.⁹¹ At the same time, however, Knowlson continues to follow the model provided by the LSH and thus accords preeminent importance to the supposedly stylistic, and thus personal, origin of Beckett's turn to French. It is this uneasy co-existence of context and the LSH that explains his decision to constrain the importance of circumstantial factors by way of the restrictive adverb *partially*. In essence, Knowlson's explanation of the linguistic turn is of precisely that two-tier sort that we previously noted in Casanova's study. Like Casanova, Knowlson is willing to admit the importance of circumstantial factors but he is also careful to relativize them – 'The change to French', we read, 'was not [...] entirely circumstantial'⁹² – and chooses instead to argue for the determining importance of a direct, causal connection between Beckett's use of French and the embrace of a newly simplified literary style. Or, as Knowlson puts it: '[B]y adopting another language, [Beckett] gained a greater simplicity and objectivity'.⁹³ Knowlson's analysis thus serves to

⁹⁰ *DTF*, 356

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 356 – Emphasis mine.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 357

⁹³ *Ibid.*

obscure the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook behind a repetition of those familiar associations between Beckett's turn to French and a turn away from stylistic excess: *DTF* may have obliged Beckett Studies to correct its longstanding presumption that Beckett's first short-story of the post-War period 'was written exclusively in French', but it served only to reaffirm the equally false, and equally longstanding, presumption that it was the turn to French that allowed Beckett to gain 'a greater simplicity and objectivity in his writing'.⁹⁴

In saying that the axiomatic value attached to the LSH has prevented critics – including Knowlson – from taking full cognizance of the 'Suite' Notebook and what it reveals about Beckett's turn to French, it must be stressed that I am not attempting to suggest that it is now, or has indeed ever been, *impossible* for critics to look beyond the LSH and to propose other interpretations for Beckett's linguistic turn. The ability of critics to look beyond the explanation offered by the LSH is proven by those alternative hypotheses that were evoked at the outset of the first section of this Introduction. What a recognition of the LSH's axiomatic status does help us to understand, however, are certain otherwise intriguing features of the manner in which Beckett Studies engages with the post-War linguistic turn: In the first instance, it helps us to understand why, as previously noted, none of the other explanations that have been offered for this linguistic turn has enjoyed anything like the authoritative position that the LSH has long held within Beckett Studies; secondly, it helps us to understand why such authority has accrued to the LSH even while troubling uncertainties that have lain at its heart since the early 1960s have gone largely unexamined; thirdly, it helps us to understand why this hypothesis has remained essentially intact and essentially unchanged even as Beckett Studies itself has been transformed by a greater access to manuscript and archival evidence – whether by way of publications such as *DTF* and *LSB*, or through online resources such as the *Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP)*⁹⁵ –, and by a greater attention to the historical context out of which Beckett's works emerge and to which they respond;

⁹⁴ In this regard, it may be noted that Knowlson's treatment of the 'Suite' Notebook agrees with that provided by Ruby Cohn when she discusses this notebook as part of *A Beckett Canon*: In that work, and having noted that 'La Fin' is 'a radical new departure in Beckett's fiction' (Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 128), Cohn signals to her reader that the 'Suite' Notebook 'modifies that view of Beckett as a French writer' according to which 'Beckett...shifted after the war to creation in French' (*Ibid.*, 129). Apart from her acknowledgement that the English-language version opens with a 'banal sentence, where "they" is active and "me" passive' (*Ibid.*), however, she leaves entirely unremarked and unexplored the stylistic evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook and thus neglects to advert her reader to the fact that this evidence equally demands a modification of how Beckett Studies views the stylistic consequences of the linguistic turn.

⁹⁵ viz. *BDMP* <www.beckettarchive.org> [accessed: 5th March, 2018]

finally, and most importantly, the axiomatic status accorded to the LSH serves to explain why the 'Suite' Notebook, which should have led to a radical re-evaluation of this hypothesis, has failed to bring about any notable change in prevailing critical interpretations of the post-War linguistic turn.

It is a nice paradox that the best evidence for the critical astigmatism which prevents Beckett Studies from recognising what the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about Beckett's post-War linguistic turn is to be found in what are, to the best of my knowledge, the only two critical monographs to offer any close textual analysis of the 'Suite' Notebook. These discussions are to be found as part of lengthier chapters in monographs by John Bolin (*Beckett and the Modern Novel*) and David Tucker (*Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a literary fantasia'*).⁹⁶ Both of these authors seek to incorporate the textual evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook into their thinking about Beckett's literary art. At the same time, however, their vision of the post-War linguistic turn continues to be shaped by a shared conviction in the personally-rooted understanding of Beckett's 1946 turn to French that the LSH espouses. As will be seen – and in keeping with what was previously noted about Knowlson's treatment of the 'Suite' Notebook in *DTF* –, it is not the case that either Bolin or Tucker is blind to the importance of the manuscript evidence with which he is dealing: They see the value of the 'Suite' Notebook quite clearly; what they appear unable to see is what this notebook reveals about the need to abandon the LSH.

Paradoxically, the case of Bolin is the most revelatory of the axiomatic position enjoyed by the LSH precisely because he rejects the connection between language and style that is the very cornerstone of this hypothesis. As it appears in his 2013 study, his engagement with the 'Suite' Notebook forms part of a broader consideration of Beckett's experiments with narrative voice as these develop from the composition of *Watt* through to *Molloy*. More specifically, Bolin takes as his starting point what the 'Suite' Notebook shows about Beckett's use of the first person – namely, the fact that this 'was fully established *before* the shift into French'⁹⁷ – and, with this in mind, seeks to explain Beckett's move from third- to first-person narration in terms other than the linguistic turn. Explanations that presented Beckett's turn to the first-person as having been brought about by his turn to French were, Bolin recognised, nothing more than 'red herrings'.⁹⁸ In place of this linguistic explanation,

⁹⁶ John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 98-107; David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a literary fantasia'* (London: Continuum, 2012), 97-117

⁹⁷ John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, 99 – Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

therefore, Bolin proposes an alternative genealogy for the emergence Beckett's use of the first-person narrative voice, one that stresses the importance of *Watt* as a staging post on the way towards the first-person narrator-protagonists of the post-War period, and argues for the determining influence of that use of first-person narration that Beckett found in Sartre's *La Nausée*.⁹⁹ In dismissing this association between the emergence of the first-person and the turn to French, Bolin dismisses one of the key terms of the LSH as one of the central novelties of Beckett's post-War style is his embrace of the first person.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, and despite his focus on the question of narrative voice, Bolin is equally alert to what the opening of the English-language 'Suite' demonstrates about Beckett's post-War style. In the same way as this notebook shows the idea of an intimate connection between Beckett's use of the French and his use of the first-person to be a 'red herrin[g]', so too does it reveal that 'the relative brevity of the sentences and the simplicity of their syntax and vocabulary were in evidence' prior to the turn to French.¹⁰¹ Guided by the textual evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, in other words, Bolin has been led to dismiss the linguistic-stylistic foundation of the LSH as nothing more than a 'red herrin[g]'. And yet, despite his obvious awareness of the fact that the material evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook disproves this hypothesis – indeed, despite himself providing a succinct dismissal of the grounds upon which the LSH is based – Bolin's appraisal of the linguistic turn itself testifies to the continued influence of this hypothesis, and its exclusively literary vision of Beckett's motivations for turning to French.

Prior to examining more closely the manner in which Bolin's study continues to be affected by the terms of an hypothesis that he himself dismisses, it is worth taking a moment to briefly consider what the opening of the 'Suite' Notebook shows about Beckett's style. For, although Bolin draws attention to the manner in which the style of the English-language 'Suite' prefigures features that are traditionally believed to have emerged only after Beckett's linguistic turn, he does this by way of comparing the first fourteen lines of the 'Suite' Notebook with the opening of the 1967 Grove text of 'The End'.¹⁰² Undoubtedly, such comparison is worthwhile as it proves the proximity between the style of Beckett's post-War English-language fiction and the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-104

¹⁰⁰ This association between the turn to French and the turn to the first-person is particularly explicit in Patrick A. McCarthy's contribution to a recent *Companion to Samuel Beckett*: 'Moving from English to French and from third to first person narration, Beckett sought a form of expression closer to his own uncomfortable and bewildered experience of the world than to literature' (Patrick A. McCarthy, 'Molloy, or Life without a Chambermaid', in S. E. Gontarski [ed.], *A Companion to Samuel Beckett* [Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 263).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 99

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 98-100

initial, English-language version of ‘Suite’, thereby testifying to the degree to which Beckett’s post-War style was already in place by the time he began working on ‘Suite’, in English, in February 1946. Bolin’s focus on a subsequent English-language translation of the text is nonetheless somewhat unhelpful in that it obscures what the English-language opening of the ‘Suite’ Notebook reveals about the stylistic consequences of the linguistic turn. To see these consequences, we need to compare this English-language opening, not with Beckett’s subsequent self-translation of the finished version of ‘La Fin’, as does Bolin, but with the first-published French-language version of this text – namely, the version that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* under the title ‘Suite’.

When we compare the same lines as they appear, in English, in the ‘Suite’ Notebook and, in French, in *Les Temps Modernes*, we see very clearly that, far from being the catalyst for the emergence of Beckett’s post-War style, Beckett’s first-published French-language short-story was merely a faithful rendering of that austere, pared-back style that Beckett first employed in English when he began work on ‘Suite’ in February 1946:

They dressed me and gave me money. I knew what the money was for, it was for to ~~pay~~ ~~cover~~ pay my way. When that was finished, they said, I could ~~earn~~ ~~procure~~ some more, if I wished to continue. It was the same for my boots, when they were worn out I could have them repaired, or ~~buy~~ ~~procure~~ another pair, or continue my way barefoot if I wished to continue, [as] they said. The same ~~was true for my~~ remarks applied to my coat and trousers, I ~~need~~ ~~did~~ not need to be told that, ~~though~~ ~~though~~ I could pursue my way very well if necessary in my shirt sleeves, especially in warm weather, if I ~~wished~~ ~~chose~~ to do so.¹⁰³

Ils me vêtirent et me donnèrent de l’argent. Je savais à quoi l’argent devait me servir, il devait servir à payer mes frais de route. Quand je l’aurais dépensé je devrais m’en procurer d’autre, dirent-ils, si je voulais continuer ma route. De même pour mes chaussures, quand elles seraient usées je devrais les faire réparer, ou m’en procurer une autre paire, ou continuer ma route pieds nus, si je voulais la continuer. De même pour ma veste et pour mon pantalon, ils n’avaient pas besoin de me le dire, à cela près que je pourrais très bien au besoin continuer ma route en bras de chemise, notamment par temps chaud, si je voulais.¹⁰⁴

Comparing the passage as it appears in *Les Temps Modernes* with the version that we find in the ‘Suite’ Notebook, one does find a small number of differences between the English- and French-language texts. Many of these differences – such as the presence of pronouns in the French text that find no equivalent in the English (e.g. ‘[...] en

¹⁰³ SN, 1r – For Bolin’s transcription of these lines, see John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, 99.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Suite’, 107

procurer une autre [...]’, ‘[...] si je voulais *la* continuer’) – may be discounted, however, as they are not attributable uniquely to Beckett’s choice but are instead attributable to differences between French and English usage with regard to pronouns.¹⁰⁵ More interesting therefore are the other small alterations that are to be observed between the vocabulary and phrasing of the original English-language opening and its subsequent French translation: The noun phrase ‘frais de route’, for instance, is closer to ‘travel costs’ – or, as it appears in Beckett and Seaver’s translation: ‘travelling expenses’¹⁰⁶ – than the vaguer expression used in the original English.¹⁰⁷ The conditional of possibility (‘could’) has equally been replaced by a conditional of obligation (‘devrais’) in all save the last instance, thereby more explicitly positioning the narrator-protagonist in a subordinate position before the unnamed ‘ils’ who have provided him with money and clothing. The French thus makes clear that the speaking subject will be obliged to take the necessary steps to fulfil his own wants, where the English merely notes that he will be in a position to do so. Finally, there has also been a slight shift in the final sentence, as the narrator-protagonist has been displaced from the subject to the indirect object. Interesting those such changes may be, they are uniformly minor and essentially cosmetic, doing little to alter either the style, syntax, or structure of the text. What comparison of these two versions reveals, therefore, is not a remarkable stylistic shift as Beckett crossed from one language to another, but a remarkable degree of consistency.

¹⁰⁵ At this point, it may be remarked that some critics have attributed to the differences between French and English a determining role in shaping Beckett’s prose style. The most extensive statement of this argument is offered by Lance St. John Butler (viz. Lance St. John Butler, ‘Two Darks: A Solution to the Problem of Beckett’s Bilingualism’, in Marius Buning and Sjeff Houppermans [eds], *SBT/A 3: Intertexts in Beckett’s Work/Intertextes de l’œuvre de Beckett* [Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994], 115-135). Ultimately, St. John Butler’s line of argument is unconvincing; the very text from which Butler derives his understanding of the differing *génies* of French and English, J. P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet’s *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais*, makes access to strictly comparable source texts that are both the product of a ‘cerveau monolingue’ (Vinay and Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais: Méthode de traduction, Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée* [Paris: Éditions Didier, 1977], 20 – Emphasis mine) the primary condition of study into the differences between French and English and such texts are obviously unavailable to the scholar of Beckett’s writing. Nevertheless, the contention that dissimilarities between the French and English versions of Beckett’s texts are attributable, not to Beckett’s own artistic intentions, but to ‘[t]he incommensurability [...] between the English and French languages’ (Lance St. John Butler, ‘Two Darks: A Solution to the Problem of Beckett’s Bilingualism’, 116) does provide us with a notable variation on the LSH.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Beckett, ‘The End’, trans. by Richard Seaver and Samuel Beckett, in *Merlin* (Summer 1954), 144

¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, Beckett would return to the vaguer formulation found in the ‘Suite’ Notebook: ‘Je savais à quoi l’argent devait servir, il devait servir à me faire démarrer’ (*NTPR*, 71); ‘I knew what the money was for, it was to get me started’ (*ECEF*, 37).

Both texts, for instance, begin with an ill-defined third-person plural ('they'/'ils') and proceed to detail the ministrations offered by this 'they'/'ils' to an unnamed first-person narrator-protagonist. (Elsewhere, the English-language version of 'Suite' makes clear the particular importance that was already accorded by Beckett to the development of impersonality as an all-pervading and vaguely threatening presence.¹⁰⁸) The detailed advice offered by 'they' to 'me' is recounted in great depth and in a manner reminiscent of the permutational style of *Watt* but which never falls into the dizzyingly contorted syntax that defines much of that earlier novel. The extremely close attention that Beckett paid to repetition as a structuring element in these opening sentences becomes clear when we consider his revisions: Initially, we find a delicate patterning structured around the repetition of the verbs 'continue' and 'wish', with the particularity of the final sentence in this set of three being signalled by the use of the verb 'pursue' in place of 'continue'. Then, as part of revisions, Beckett further distinguished the final sentence by replacing 'wished' with 'chose'. As demonstrated by the version published by the *Temps Modernes*, however, Beckett finally preferred to privilege repetition over variation, reverting to 'wish' ('voulais') and amending 'pursue' to 'continue' ('continuer').¹⁰⁹

Finally, and most importantly, the English-language opening of the 'Suite' Notebook confirms the centrality of two notions that would later appear in the opening of the *Temps Modernes* text, and which would be of defining importance to much of Beckett's major French-language prose texts of the post-War period, namely: the isolated self at the mercy of impersonal forces, in the same manner as would later be seen in *Molloy* ('Moi je voudrais maintenant parler des choses qui me restent, faire mes adieux, finir de mourir. Ils ne veulent pas.'¹¹⁰) and the manner in which that self may, can, and must continue, upon which *L'Innommable* would conclude ('[...] il faut

¹⁰⁸ A key example of this is to be found in the exchange between the narrator-protagonist and Mr Weir, during which the former attempts to convince Mr Weir to keep him on as a worker. In his revisions to this exchange, Beckett appears to have been guided by an effort to ensure that Mr Weir appears, not as an individual with whom the protagonist can engage, but merely as the representative of an ill-defined, all-powerful third-person plural: 'Encouraged no doubt by my silence ^^After a time^^ he added ^^continued^^, if + ^^we^^ ^^they^^ really thought you would help in the garden, or even in the kitchen, + ^^they^^ would keep you ^^on^^ willingly, ^^I am sure^^ [...]' (SN, 3r)

¹⁰⁹ For a more extensive discussion of Beckett's use of repetition, see Georgina Nugent-Folan, "'Ill buttoned'": Comparing the representation of objects in Samuel Beckett's *Ill Seen Ill Said* and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* in *JoBS* (Vol. 23, No. 2 – 2013), 54-82

¹¹⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Double, 1982 [1951]), 7 – These lines would be translated by Beckett as follows: 'What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my goodbyes, finish dying. They don't want that.' (Samuel Beckett, Shane Weller [ed.] *Molloy* [London: Faber & Faber, 2009], 3).

continuer, je vais continuer'¹¹¹). Already, as he began working on the opening passage of 'Suite' in English Beckett was looking forward, both thematically and stylistically, to the major, French-language works that he would compose during his 'frenzy of writing'.¹¹² All that remained for him to do was to make the turn to French.

As previously noted, Bolin is well aware that the English-language version of 'Suite' reveals the supposed connection between Beckett's turn to French and the emergence of his post-War style to be but a 'red herrin[g]'. This being so, it might be assumed that, when he came to the moment in the 'Suite' Notebook that signals Beckett's transition from English to French – that is, the line drawn across page '28' of this notebook and which separates the story's English-language beginning from its French-language continuation¹¹³ –, he would seek to explain Beckett's linguistic turn in terms other than those that are popularly found in existing critical discourse. Bolin cannot contend, for instance, that the turn to French was impelled by a desire for a new literary style – as do critics such as Fletcher and Mooney –, nor can he follow Esslin or Casanova's model of assuming that the turn to French compelled Beckett to alter his style. This being so, it is all the more surprising that, when Bolin mentions the divide between the English- and French-language sections of 'Suite', he provides us, not with a cogent explanation of *why* Beckett turned to French, but with the opaque contention that the linguistic turn is indicative of the fact that 'Beckett...clearly wanted his narrative to take a new direction'.¹¹⁴

While Bolin's proposition that Beckett 'wanted his narrative to take a new direction' may be singularly unhelpful as an explanation for Beckett's turn to French – why was this new direction linguistic rather than thematic, or narrative? Can it really be said that Beckett's narrative took a 'new direction' when the style and themes remained rigorously the same after the linguistic turn? –, it does help us to better appreciate the degree to which his analysis of the 'Suite' Notebook remains indebted to, and constrained by, the axiomatic value that is accorded to the LSH. For, even though Bolin explicitly rejects the connection between Beckett's use of French and the

¹¹¹ Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1953), 262 – This is how the first edition of *L'Innommable* concludes. Subsequently, Beckett would amend the French text to the more familiar '[...] il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer' (*L'Innommable* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Double, 2004 (1953)], 213), thereby introducing into his French text the emendation he had made when translating the text into English (*viz.* '[...] you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' [*The Unnamable*, Steven Connor [ed.] [London: Faber & Faber, 2010], 134) – For the composition and translation of *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable*, see *Ibid.*, vii-xxiii.

¹¹² *DTF*, 355 – For details of this period of Beckett's life, see *Ibid.*, 356-387.

¹¹³ *viz.* SN, 28r

¹¹⁴ John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel*, 106

emergence of his post-War style, the terms in which he explains Beckett's linguistic turn are nothing more than a refashioning of that strictly *literary* understanding of this turn provided by the LSH. For Bolin, in other words, as for countless critics before him, the explanation for Beckett's linguistic turn is to be found *within* Beckett and his writing, not without. Rather than proposing that Beckett's turn to French might have been occasioned by external factors – even any of those that were proposed by earlier critics, such as his unhappy experiences with English-language publishers or his relationship with his mother – Bolin instead chooses to ground the linguistic turn in Beckett himself and, more particularly, in his private artistic needs as these existed at the time he was working on 'Suite'. The linguistic turn is thus construed as a fundamentally *literary* decision. In fact, Bolin's literary explanation for the linguistic turn actually goes even further than many of his predecessors insofar as it appears to present the linguistic turn as merely an expression of Beckett's own 'compositional practice' as this existed at the time.¹¹⁵

For Bolin, this compositional practice came into being during Beckett's work on *Watt* and one of its key factors was the manner in which Beckett utilized the difficulties he experienced while writing and incorporated them into that narrative, thereby transforming the various stumbling blocks of literary composition into narrative catalysts that drove his writing forward. The turn to French is thus associated by Bolin with other means that Beckett found of compelling his narrative to advance, including doodling – 'trying to get the narrative going by stimulating himself visually'¹¹⁶ – and 'fictionalising his own struggle to continue'.¹¹⁷ It is in precisely these terms of fictionalising the struggle to continue that Bolin invites us to interpret Beckett's turn to French when he examines the particular moment of the linguistic turn as it is captured in the manuscript:

Beckett's shift to French in the manuscript...reveals a related move that joins the act of writing with the narrator's struggle to continue. On 13 March and by now on page 25...Beckett begins the final passage of the first part of his tale. As he did when neither writer nor narrator knew 'where [he] was' in the *ur-Watt*, he begins a new episode with the theme of 'continuing' uppermost in his speaker's mind: 'Once on the road', he pens hopefully, 'the way was all downhill' ([SN], 25r). But Beckett also clearly wanted his narrative to take a

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105 – As an example of the latter technique, Bolin proposes the 'sudden and unexplained disorientation of that speaker upon arriving at the Turkish [*sic*] woman's house and his "vision" of his emergence from another house' (*Ibid.*, 104). Here, Bolin contends that the true source of the narrator-protagonists' 'disorientation' is Beckett's own: 'Beckett immerses his speaker in the "dark" and then allows his visual imagination to double as his narrator's, thereby conjuring up a "vague picture"' (*Ibid.*, 105).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

new direction and on page 28 draws a line about a third of the way down the page and begins again in French. [...] Beckett's first sentence in French...was actually excised from the 1946 Temps version. But once again it is likely that we hear Beckett's own writerly concerns behind this portentous new beginning – as he transfers his own refusal to 'rest' to his (then immobile) character 'for the moment': 'Je [*sic*] ne me restait donc...' ([SN], 28r).¹¹⁸

Undoubtedly, the idea that Beckett's turn to French might be seen as an expression of his own desire to 'go on' by other linguistic means is not without a certain charm. Its chief charm, however, is that it allows Bolin to preserve by other interpretative means the literary foundation of the LSH whose stylistic foundations he previously recognised to be untenable: Rather than making the linguistic turn dependent upon a desire for a new style, Bolin makes the turn to French dependent upon Beckett's efforts to bring his 'Suite' to an end. Beckett's French-language post-War voice can thus be seen to have emerged as an answer to the stuttering of his efforts at English-language composition. Charming though it may be, however, Bolin's interpretation is also utterly wrong, since it is dependent upon an inexcusable misreading of the French text. As it appears in the notebook, the phrase reads as follows: 'Il ne me restait donc, [*entre autres choses*], que de me couvrir le bas du visage d'un drap noir et de demander l'aumône à un coin ensoleillé'.¹¹⁹ Much as '-ait' cannot be a first person ending, so too is it impossible to read the impersonal use of *rester* in the sense of *se reposer*. It is thus impossible to read this sentence in the manner suggested by Bolin and, by extension, impossible to view Beckett as having turned to French simply as an effect of his own 'refusal to "rest"' and his desire for a 'new direction'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 106

¹¹⁹ SN, 28r

¹²⁰ Bolin's erroneous reading of the French 'Suite' has troubling implications for his monograph. In light of the fact that these implications have not been raised in any of the reviews of Bolin's text, it seems pertinent that they should be raised here: The central problem raised by Bolin's misreading is that, even allowing for Beckett's exceptionally challenging handwriting, it can only be explained by a lack of basic reading comprehension in French. The misreading is particularly worrying as it is not an isolated occurrence. A similar example of apparent misinterpretation of French that is to be found elsewhere in *Beckett and the Modern Novel* concerns a moment when, having referred to 'the change' (John Bolin, *op. cit.*, 101 – Emphasis mine) as a central theme in Sartre's *La Nausée*, Bolin offers the French term as '(un changement)' (*Ibid.*, 101 – Emphasis mine). Given that Bolin's monograph is explicitly presented as a mediation on Beckett's preoccupation with, and debt to, the 'European novel', Bolin's apparent inability to comfortably engage with the original, French-language versions of texts that he believes to have influenced Beckett – i.e. his inability to engage with the versions that Beckett himself would have read and been influenced by – casts serious doubts on the reliability of the interpretations and readings put forward in his monograph and what they reveal about Beckett's debts to the tradition of the European novel.

Even if it were possible to read the narrative in the terms proposed by Bolin, however, his explanation would still fail to answer either of the questions that were earlier evoked: Why was Beckett's 'new direction' linguistic rather than thematic, or narrative? Can it really be said that Beckett's narrative took a 'new direction' when the style and themes remained rigorously the same after the linguistic turn? In the first case, Bolin's broader discussion of Beckett's compositional practice actually argues against viewing the turn to French as a desire for a new direction since, in every other case proposed by Bolin, Beckett's 'fictionalising of his own struggle to continue' had strictly narrative effects and Bolin provides no evidence to explain why, at this point in the narrative, those effects suddenly became linguistic. In the second case, Bolin himself specifically remarked upon the fact that Beckett's style and use of the first-person were already present in his narrative prior to the turn to French. Why would a 'new direction' have led Beckett down precisely the same path? Having revealed the supposed association between Beckett's post-War linguistic and stylistic shifts to be a 'red herrin[g]' through analysis of the English-language opening of the 'Suite' Notebook, in other words, closer analysis of that same notebook reveals Bolin's own explanation for the linguistic turn to be nothing more than a red herring of a different shade, one that depends, not upon a misconception of the association between style and language, but on a fundamental misreading of Beckett's French and on that long-standing conviction in the essentially literary nature of the linguistic turn which can be traced back to the LSH.

Unlike Bolin's discussion, which only accords passing mention to the section of the 'Suite' Notebook that reveals the precise moment of the linguistic turn, Tucker's focus on the place that Arnold Geulincx holds in Beckett's writing leads him to accord pre-eminent importance to this particular passage owing to the fact that Beckett's turn to French did indeed occur shortly after the narrator-protagonist had evoked Geulincx – and, more particularly, the copy of Geulincx' *Ethics* that he received from his tutor. Like Bolin, however, both Tucker's engagement with this notebook and his vision of the linguistic turn clearly betray the determining influence of the LSH. In Tucker's case, in fact, the effect of the LSH is even more direct than in Bolin's.

Bolin, as has been seen, at least recognised that Beckett's turn to French had no impact on his style, and that the strictly linguistic-stylistic vision of the linguistic turn was untenable. In its place, of course, we have already seen that he substituted a motivation that preserved the personal, literary perspective on the linguistic turn that is central to the LSH by proposing that Beckett was motivated to turn to French by his compositional practice and his desire to take his narrative in a 'new direction'. What

Bolin did, in other words, was to explicitly discard the association between language and style upon which the LSH depends even while he preserved the deeper essence of the hypothesis – namely, the conviction in an essentially internal and literary motivation for the linguistic turn. For Tucker, on the contrary, the turn to French continues to be understood as an effect of language and style and, more particularly, an effect of the kind of style that English supposedly prevented Beckett from achieving.

That this is the case is made clear when, having provided a summary of the final part of the English-language version that precedes the horizontal line which marks the linguistic turn, Tucker clarifies Beckett's turn to French as follows:

Something was lacking in this English version, and it was presumably in a somewhat 'pioneering spirit' (that which Molloy lacks), perhaps also one of some frustration, that Beckett struck a blow across the English page and began again in French. While he had written a number of poems and critical pieces in French by 1946, something in English at precisely this point gave Beckett the impetus to shift languages and not return to English as a language of prose composition for some eight years.¹²¹

In this discussion of the linguistic turn, we find Beckett's switch to French construed in terms that will by now be familiar to the reader as precisely those provided by the LSH: Beckett's turn to French is presented as an internally-rooted decision, one that found its impetus in Beckett's own aesthetic desires and, more particularly still, in the language in which he was working. Even the stress that Tucker lays on the repulsive force of English rather than the attractive force of French ('something *in English* at precisely this point gave Beckett the impetus to shift languages') is nothing more than a variation on what we find in many other critics who have appealed to the LSH – such as Fletcher, Harvey, and Knowlson – according to whom it was at least in part the kind of writing to which Beckett felt himself prone in English that drove him towards the comparative paucity that he was supposedly only capable of achieving in French. Where Tucker differs from critics who have advanced this view, however – including Fletcher, Harvey, and Knowlson –, is that he does not explicitly state that it was the richness of English that Beckett sought to escape by turning to French. Rather, he merely informs us that Beckett's linguistic turn was attributable to an ill-defined 'something' that Beckett either found 'in English', or found to be 'lacking in [the] English-version' of his text.¹²²

¹²¹ David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a literary fantasia'*, 108

¹²² That Tucker should propose a vague 'something' rather than a specific richness of expression is perhaps due to what the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about the proximity of style between the English- and French-language versions of 'Suite.' Unlike Bolin,

Before looking more closely at what Tucker holds that ‘something’ to be, it should be recalled that he was not the first to draw attention to this particular passage of the notebook, nor the first to underline the proximity between what this passage recounts about the death of the narrator-protagonist’s tutor and Beckett’s linguistic turn. In *A Beckett Canon*, Ruby Cohn had already noted the nice irony whereby ‘[t]he death of the tutor was the occasion of Beckett’s birth as a major French writer’.¹²³ In that work, however, Cohn did not elaborate any further on what this proximity might mean. Tucker was thus the first critic to have attempted to tease out the possible implications of the textual proximity between Beckett’s mentioning of Geulincx’s *Ethics* – a text of great and, as Tucker’s book amply demonstrates, lasting importance to Beckett¹²⁴ – and his turn to French.

Undoubtedly, the possibility suggested by Tucker (i.e. that the impetus behind Beckett’s decision to abandon his mother tongue may be found somewhere in the language of this particular passage) is a tantalising one. It is, however, precisely because this possibility is so tantalising that both Tucker’s contention and the passage itself require careful interrogation. The precise manuscript passage upon which Tucker bases his analysis is given below. Also given, separated from the English by a horizontal line, as it appears in the notebook, is the French-language translation of this passage that constituted the earliest evidence of Beckett’s post-War turn to French:

Being now for the moment virtually dumb & paralysed[,] as far as my face was concerned, capable of no expression but the other than that of [*imXXXed purity*]¹²⁵ nor of any sound-~~[not]-the formal XXX~~ but the ^{^^most^^} formal sound, I imagined to cover its lower part with a black cloth and to entreat alms on a sunny corner, a south-western corner. For ~~it was my belief ^^I suspected^^~~ that my eyes were not as yet totally extinguished, thanks no doubt to the smoked glasses that my tutor had given me, together with the *Ethics* of Geulincx at the age of ^^when I was^^ 13 or 14 ^^years old^^. He ~~had the foresight to~~ They were a very fine pair of glasses, [*full*] size, with gold branches. He was a far-seeing man. He was found ~~^^dead^^~~ one morning

however, Tucker does not draw any explicit attention to this stylistic proximity, beyond what the material that he cites from the ‘Suite’ Notebook tacitly reveals.

¹²³ Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 129

¹²⁴ Beckett first sustained encounter with Geulincx dates from 1936, when he engaged in close study of the *Ethics* (*DTF*, 219) – For more on the origin of Beckett’s interest in Geulincx, and the Belgian philosopher’s place in Beckett’s *œuvre* more generally, see David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing ‘a literary fantasia’*, 6-41 and *passim*

¹²⁵ Tucker suggests that the first of these words may be read as ‘insufficient’ and reads the second as ‘gravity’ (*viz.* David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing ‘a literary fantasia’*, 107)

^^on the floor^^ in his W. C., his dress in shocking disorder, ~~fulminated by a cerebral haemorrhage~~ dead of an infarct

Il ne me restait donc, [*entre autres choses*], que de me couvrir le bas du visage d'un drap noir et de demander l'aumône à un coin ensoleillé. Car il me semblait que mes yeux n'étaient pas complètement éteints, grâce peut-être aux, comment dit-on, aux lunettes ~~ΔΔfuméesΔΔ~~ ^^noires^^ que mon tuteur m'avait données quand j'étais petit. Il m'avait donné à la même occasion l'Éthique de Geulincx. C'était une belle paire de lunettes, ~~avec la monture la monture des d'hom~~ lunettes [~~de m~~] d'homme avec la monture en or. C'était un homme prévoyant. On le trouva mort, un matin, sur le plancher de son W.C., les vêtements dans un désordre terrible, ~~terrassé~~ ^^foudroyé^^ par un infarctus.¹²⁶

Though admittedly a more difficult passage to decipher, comparison of the final English-language portion of the 'Suite' Notebook with the opening of the notebook's French-language portion tells much the same story as did our earlier comparison of the notebook's opening and the opening of the *Temps Modernes* 'Suite'. As in the opening, Beckett's English is once again broadly defined by a preference for comparatively factual sentences written in language far more comprehensible than that which defined Beckett's English-language writing of the pre-War period. In comparing the English-language material above the line that marks the linguistic turn with the French-language material that follows, in other words – and as when we compared the English-language opening of the 'Suite' Notebook with the opening of the French-language 'Suite' published by *Les Temps Modernes* –, we find no evidence that might serve to support the idea that Beckett attempted to divest himself of his Anglophone stylistic excesses via a rejection of his mother tongue. There is, in the final English section of 'Suite', precious little – if anything – of what might be termed 'the old style'.¹²⁷ Though the syntax here is admittedly more complex than that of the opening, it never spills over into the overwrought excesses of either *Watt* or *MPTK* at their most elaborate.¹²⁸ Nor is this passage lexically arcane. Most illuminating in this respect is the substitution of the common or garden term 'dead' for the decidedly *recherché* 'fulminated', seeming to confirm that Beckett was already being guided by a

¹²⁶ SN, 27r-28r – For Tucker's transcription of the English-language passage, see David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a literary fantasia'*, 107

¹²⁷ CDW, 141

¹²⁸ One admittedly striking feature of this passage is Beckett's use of 'imagine'. In this instance, Beckett is indulging in a Gallicism – *imaginer* can be used in the sense of 'contrive' or, as *imaginer de faire*, to mean 'have the idea to do something'. What makes Beckett's Gallicism noteworthy is that it is by no means an isolated instance in the English-language portion of this notebook. The subject of Beckett's Gallicisms in the English-language section of the 'Suite' Notebook will be discussed in more detail below.

wilful refusal to indulge in the sort of 'striking' words that studded his early English prose.¹²⁹ (Notably, Beckett's decision to partially reinstate this verb as part of his translation – this being done via his substitution of the verb *terrasser* with *foudroyer* – should not be interpreted as an attempt to reinstate a register that was previously rejected in English; although *foudroyer* has much the same meaning and etymology as 'to fulminate' it belongs to a decidedly less arcane register.)

In terms of style, meanwhile, and as was observed when the opening of the 'Suite' Notebook was compared with the *Temps Modernes* text, we see here there are some divergences between the original version of the final passage of the English-language story and its French translation. Once again, however, these divergences are to be found in a broader context that shows the change of language to have effected no corresponding change in Beckett's style. The most notable of these changes are surely Beckett's removal of those specifications concerning the precise aspect of the sunny street corner where his narrator-protagonist proposes to beg for alms and the details of his age at the moment he received book and glasses from his tutor. Another notable change is the introduction of the phrase 'comment dit-on' before the reference to the smoked glasses that were given to the narrator-protagonist by his tutor. At first glance, it might be suggested that these changes provide proof positive of the effect that turning to French had upon Beckett: Obliging him to move away from specificity towards opacity, and leading him to introduce a note of explicitly linguistic uncertainty as language itself seems to escape the now French-speaking narrator. Certainly, these changes are worthy of closer examination. What such examination shows us, however, is that, far from being the signs of a fundamental change effected upon Beckett's writing by his turn to French, these changes prove that Beckett's thematic and stylistic aims remained consistent as he crossed from English into French.

In the case of the first emendation – namely, the deletion of precise geographical and temporal references –, this should be viewed, not as a consequence of the turn to French, but as an effect of that general tendency towards 'vaguening' that is evident across Beckett's post-War work and which is widely recognised as a cornerstone of his post-War compositional practice.¹³⁰ Crucially, this stylistic practice

¹²⁹ *viz.* 'She had lost her looks, the virtuous girl, supposititiously, in Dickens's striking adverb, through her passion for Steinhägers and later hours' (*Dream*, 95).

¹³⁰ In addition to the removal of geographic and temporal markers mentioned above, Beckettian 'vaguening' can also involve the obscuring of quotations, allusions and sources to the point of their becoming unrecognisable to the reader. The term 'vaguening' derives from a note, written by Beckett to himself on a typescript of *Happy Days*, whereby he directed himself to 'vaguén' his writing. The term was popularised by Rosemary Poutney's *Theatre of Shadows* (*viz.* Rosemary Poutney,

story, he would have seen that this ‘desire to be less explicit or less definite’ was already at work during the earliest stages of this story’s composition.

If the first emendation thus attests to a well-established, and well-researched, aspect of Beckett’s compositional practice, the second emendation to the French text alerts us to an equally well-established and equally well-researched feature of Beckett’s post-War writing, namely his interest in deliberately troubling the boundaries between his languages. As has already been noted, this particular emendation serves to introduce a note of explicitly linguistic uncertainty; the narrator-protagonist of the French-language text is now heard groping for a term that posed no difficulty for the narrator-protagonist of the English-language version. There are a number of ways in which this uncertainty might be interpreted: One might, for example, view this uncertainty as no more than a linguistic variation of the same kind of uncertainty that can already be seen at work in the English-language section of the notebook. The narrator’s inability to immediately seize upon the correct term for ‘smoked glasses’, in other words, can be seen as a corollary to his inability to tell whether his landlady is Turkish or Greek.¹³⁴ It is equally possible to interpret this ‘comment dit-on’ as indicative of the fact that Beckett, as part of his decision to continue his short-story in French, decided to stress his narrator-protagonist’s uncertain grasp of the non-native language in which he was now expressing himself.

This second interpretation would be wholly in line with instances that are to be found in other French-language works composed by Beckett during his ‘frenzy of writing’, where we find characters explicitly alerting us to their struggles with the particularities of the language in which they express themselves. Instances of such linguistic uncertainty are to be found, for example, in the second act of *En attendant Godot*, where Vladimir reminds a forgetful Estragon that they previously came within a hair’s breadth of hanging themselves from the stage’s lone tree and then takes a moment to ensure that his syntax is in order: ‘Il s’en est fallu d’un cheveu qu’on ne s’y soit pendu. (*Il réfléchit.*) Oui, c’est juste (*en détachant les mots*) qu’on – ne – s’y – soit – pendu’.¹³⁵ In *Malone meurt*, meanwhile, Malone alerts the reader to his uncertain grasp of French when he comments that Mme. Louis ‘écartait [ses bras] de ses flancs,

¹³⁴ viz. ‘This woman was a Greek, I think, or Turkish’ (SN, 10r) – This same uncertainty will, of course, make its way into the version of the story published in *Les Temps Modernes*: ‘Cette femme était grecque, je crois, ou turque’ (‘Suite’, 112).

¹³⁵ Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2005 [1952]), 102 – So inextricably linked is this comment to the specifics of French syntax that Beckett simply excised it from the English translation (viz. *CDW*, 56).

je dirais brandissais [*sic*] si j'ignorais encore mieux le génie de votre langue'.¹³⁶ In this case, Malone's admission that he 'ignor[e]...le génie' of the native tongue of the imagined Francophone reader is underscored by his incorrect conjugation of the verb 'brandir'.¹³⁷

Naturally, these two explanations are by no means mutually-exclusive: Confusion and uncertainty are key themes of Beckett's post-War writing, and it is unsurprising that he should occasionally have given them a particularly linguistic form as he does here, and elsewhere in the text.¹³⁸ There is, however, still another way in which this 'comment dit-on' may be interpreted, and that is as an example of Beckett's attempts to carry over into the text a particularly hesitant relationship to language that is already present in the English-language section of the 'Suite' Notebook, where it is evidenced primarily by way of the multiple Gallicisms that are to be found in the English-language section of the text, examples of which include:

'A little ^{^^}boy^{^^} holding out his hands and looking up at the *clear* ^{^^}blue^{^^} sky, asked his mother **the reason of that**'¹³⁹

'Closer inspection would have **discovered many changes to me** [...]'¹⁴⁰

'I walked along now till I found one of [*those*] seats that are ^{^^}so considerably^{^^} hollowed out to **espouse** the ~~eurv~~ form of the body'¹⁴¹

'The woman respected our **conventions** to the best of her ability'¹⁴²

The last of these Gallicisms is, in fact, to be found only shortly before the linguistic turn, where the narrator-protagonist's use of the verb 'to imagine' in the sense of 'to devise', 'to contrive', 'to come up with [the idea of]' ('I imagined to cover its lower

¹³⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Malone meurt* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Double, 2004 [1951]), 46

¹³⁷ For an alternative explanation for this misconjugation, see Linda Collinge, *Beckett traduit Beckett: de Malone meurt à Malone Dies, l'imaginaire en traduction* (Genève: Droz, 2000), 143

¹³⁸ By the time 'Suite' had reached the typescript stage, Beckett had removed the hesitancy that had previously been attached to the mention of these glasses (*viz.* 'Car il me semblait que mes yeux n'étaient pas complètement éteints, grâce peut-être aux lunettes noires que mon tuteur m'avait données, quand j'étais petit' ['Suite' TS, 1]). At the same time, he introduced other instances of uncertainty that accomplish precisely the same thing: 'On pouvait y voir de temps en temps des fleurs, feuilles, pétales, épis et de cette herbe **qui s'appelle je crois** [~~aué~~] aux hémorroïdes, enfin ce que je trouvais' (*Ibid.*, 2 – Emphasis mine); 'Je ne parle pas du sommeil, je parle de **ce qu'on appelle je crois** l'état de veille' (*Ibid.*, 4 – Emphasis mine).

¹³⁹ SN, 5r – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7r – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 11r – Emphasis mine.

part with a black cloth') is archaic in English, but such a use of the verb *imaginer* is entirely commonplace in French.

Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether these Gallicisms are attributable to stylistic choice or to the unwelcome influence of French syntax on Beckett's English. The fact that the 'Suite' Notebook shows Beckett correcting at least one of these Gallicisms – namely, replacing the plural 'excrements', which is the standard in French, with the singular which is more natural in English¹⁴³ – might suggest the latter, but it remains that a number of glaring Gallicisms are allowed to remain. Moreover, we also have the evidence of *Watt* manuscripts which, as Ann Beer demonstrated, show Beckett consciously introducing Gallicisms into his text.¹⁴⁴ Taken together, this evidence suggests that, even while working on the English text, Beckett actively sought to trouble the linguistic framework of his writing by introducing Gallicisms. Following the transition to French, he emended this practice accordingly: At some points, the linguistic framework of the text was unsettled by explicitly invoking the narrator-protagonist's uncertain grasp of certain phrases and, as attested by the *Temps Modernes* text of 'Suite', the introduction of glaring Anglicisms to replace the glaring Gallicisms that were necessarily lost during the text's translation into French:

'Je vous suis *très obligé* pour ces vêtements, dis-je, et pour cet argent'¹⁴⁵

'un petit garçon, tendant les mains et levant la tête vers le ciel bleu, demanda à sa mère *la cause de cela*'¹⁴⁶

'Les longs mois de calme, *oblitérés* en un instant'¹⁴⁷

'Il répéta l'histoire de sa cabane dans la montagne, que j'avais oubliée. *Même alors c'était comme si je l'entendais pour la première fois*'¹⁴⁸

The Anglicisms that are signalled here are taken from a list of those identified by John Fletcher, and all of them were subsequently removed by Beckett when he revised 'La Fin' for publication in *NTPR*.¹⁴⁹ For Fletcher, the presence of these Anglicisms in 'Suite' and Beckett's decision to remove them, and others like them, when 'La Fin' was published as part of *NTPR*, is indicative of the fact that 'Beckett's early French prose contains Anglicisms that ten years later, when he was much surer of his new medium

¹⁴³ viz. '^^Excrements abounded^^' (SN, 23r)

¹⁴⁴ Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987), 180-182

¹⁴⁵ 'Suite', 108 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 109-110 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 114 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 117 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁹ viz. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 93

[i.e. French], he took good care to eradicate'.¹⁵⁰ In Fletcher's estimation, in other words, these Anglicisms are evidence of nothing more than inadvertence or uncertain French on Beckett's part.

To the present writer's eyes, however, Fletcher's line of argument is not entirely convincing. Anglicisms such as the ones to which he draws attention are sufficiently anomalous in French that it seems improbable that Beckett would have been entirely unaware of their oddity when he employed them when composing the version of 'Suite' that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*. Such Anglicisms are, in fact, quite as odd in French as the Gallicisms that Beckett included in the initial English-language version of 'Suite' were in English. Rather than providing evidence of Beckett's uncertain French therefore, I would suggest that these Anglicisms were conscious stylistic decisions taken by Beckett in 1946.¹⁵¹ Similarly, it seems probable that the removal of such obvious Anglicisms during Beckett's revision of the text in advance of its appearance in *NTPR* attests, not to any notable improvement in Beckett's French, but to a change in his attitude to the stylistic possibilities of such obvious Anglicisms.¹⁵² It should, indeed, be recalled that, while Beckett frequently draws attention to the linguistic uncertainty of his characters in his earliest French-language writing, instances such as those that are to be found in *En attendant Godot* or *Malone meurt* do not recur in the later work.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Significantly, in this respect, at least one of the obvious Anglicisms that Fletcher found in 'Suite' (i.e. 'la cause de cela') translates one of those equally obvious Gallicisms that the 'Suite' Notebook shows to have appeared in the original English-language version of the text (i.e. 'the reason of that').

¹⁵² Although it is here being argued that a number of explicit Anglicisms – namely, lexical items and syntactic constructions used in a manner that is recognisably alien to the norms of French but which are consistent with English usage – are the product of conscious stylistic decisions on Beckett's part, that is not to say that the unconscious interference of Beckett's English had no effect whatsoever on his French-language compositions, or *vice versa*. Recently, for example, Karine Germoni has drawn attention to the manner in which Beckett's use of commas in the *Les Temps Modernes* 'Suite' – and the earliest published version of another *nouvelle*, 'L'Expulsé' – frequently follows English usage, rather than French (*viz.* Karine Germoni, 'Les anglicismes de Beckett à l'époque de la "French frenzy"', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30*, 97-112). As Germoni notes, such features of language 'consistent...un des lieux les plus sûrs d'appartenance d'un scripteur à un domaine linguistique parce qu'un des plus spontanés, de l'ordre de l'automatisme' (*Ibid.*, 98). By its very nature, then, the norms of punctuation in a foreign language are less readily integrated by non-native speakers – and transgressions against such norms less easily perceptible to non-native speakers – than those associated with lexis or syntax. It thus seems probable that, in the case of Beckett's punctuation – as in the case of 'his disregard for French practice in capitalization' (George Craig, 'French translator's preface', in *LSB I*, xxxiv), to which George Craig draws attention in his preface to *LSB I* –, inconsistencies are likely to have been an effect of inadvertence rather than conscious stylistic practice.

Clearly, there is much of interest that might be said about the changes that Beckett made to this passage of the 'Suite' Notebook when he translated it as part of his transition to writing in French. What is equally apparent, however, is that neither of these changes in any way suggests that these emendations should be interpreted as an *effect* of Beckett's turn to French since neither of them can be seen as having been dependent on this linguistic turn. On the contrary, what we find in these changes are expressions of stylistic practices that are already in evidence in the English-language portion of this notebook: By times, these practices are pursued by comparable means in English and in French – such as the substitution of Gallicisms for other means of troubling the linguistic stability of the text –, and by times the means used by Beckett are rigorously identical whether he is working in English or in French – such as the use made of vagueness. In short, the change of language has had no determining effect on Beckett's style of writing. If, as Tucker contends, there is indeed 'something' about this particular passage that, either by its presence or its absence, drove Beckett to turn to French at this particular moment in the composition of 'Suite', it would appear that it is not to be found in either French or English, nor in the move from one language to another.

As already noted, however, it is precisely to language that Tucker turns in an attempt to clarify the nature of that 'something' which he identifies as having played a key role in Beckett's decision to switch to French. More particularly, Tucker suggests that Beckett's linguistic turn may have been motivated by a desire to 'perturb his own conventions and to trust...an instinct, in what can surely be characterized at this nascent stage as his *experimental* decision to write prose in French'.¹⁵³ As was the case with Bolin, what one notes about Tucker's proposed explanation for the linguistic turn is at once how impressionistic it is and how it locates the motivations for Beckett's turn to French firmly within the author himself. Where Bolin at least drew on what he believed the 'Suite' Notebook to reveal about Beckett's compositional practice, however, Tucker makes little effort to root his explanation for the linguistic turn in the evidence of this notebook. Rather, he invites us to read the turn in terms of what two texts from the 1930s seem to reveal about Beckett's attitudes to English and French respectively.

¹⁵³ David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing 'a literary fantasia'*, 109 (Emphasis in original) – The degree to which Beckett's decision can be termed 'experimental' will be indirectly challenged over the course of Part II, which will show Beckett to have been using French for the composition of complex texts – both in poetry and prose – since 1930.

We are thus informed that, when he turned to French, ‘Beckett might have come to similar conclusions to those Belacqua had mused over regarding his own desire to “write without style”¹⁵⁴ and are subsequently invited to view Beckett as having been moved to reject English on account of the fact that he came to realize ‘the English absolutisms of connections such as “together with”...constituted in part that frustrating “imperturbability” of grammar and style imagined in 1937 as the outmoded formal mannerisms of a...gentleman’.¹⁵⁵ The reference to ‘writ[ing] without style’ is taken from *Dream*; the reference to ‘imperturbability’, meanwhile, is taken from the so-called ‘German Letter’, written by Beckett to Axel Kaun in 1937, where it appears as ‘die Unerschüttlichkeit eines Gentlemans’.¹⁵⁶ Given that Tucker’s engagement with the moment of the linguistic turn proposes that ‘something in English *at precisely this point* gave Beckett the impetus to shift languages and not return to English as a language of prose composition for some eight years’ it is curious that the evidence that he calls upon to corroborate his explanation of the turn is derived from texts written by Beckett many years – in the case of *Dream*, almost fifteen years – before he began writing ‘Suite’. Tucker’s attempt to ground his interpretation of the linguistic turn in these particular texts is, however, far less curious if one recognises that his explanation is merely a product of the interpretative model provided by the LSH. As the reader will recall, the statement from *Dream* that Tucker cites is frequently taken as an early indication of that association between French and stylelessness that would apparently lead Beckett to turn to French in 1946. Beckett’s ‘German Letter’, meanwhile, although it does not explicitly refer to French at any point, is also frequently taken as providing an early indication of that association between the use of a foreign language and the turn away from style upon which the LSH is founded.¹⁵⁷ In seeking to ground his explanation for the turn to French in these phrases, in other words, Tucker is led by his conviction in the validity of the LSH.

Read alongside the textual evidence of Beckett’s published works – his stylistically rich English-language writings that preceded the linguistic turn and his more barren French-language writings that immediately followed it –, these documents do seem to offer support to the LSH and its understanding of the turn to

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 108 – The conclusions to which Tucker here gestures are those to be found in *Dream*, where Belacqua comments: ‘Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want’ (*Dream*, 48).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 109

¹⁵⁶ *viz.* *LSB I*, 514 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937])

¹⁵⁷ Other critics who have associated the German Letter with the linguistic turn, and with that explanation for the turn provided by the LSH include: Leland de la Durantaye (*viz.* *Beckett’s Art of Mismaking*, 64-67), Sinéad Mooney (*viz.* *A Tongue Not Mine*, 82), and Chiara Montini (*viz.* “*La bataille du soliloque*”: *Genèse de la poésie bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-46)*, 60-65).

French. It has already been noted, however, that Belacqua's contention that French writers 'write without style' is by no means an unproblematic confirmation of the LSH. Nor, indeed, is Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun an unproblematic source either since, as has been noted, it nowhere refers explicitly to French; in fact, although it speaks of the pleasure Beckett derives from writing in a foreign language – something that should itself be read in light of the fact that this section of the letter opens with a barely disguised plea to Kaun that Beckett be allowed to use their correspondence as a chance to practise his German, despite Kaun's evident preference that Beckett write in English¹⁵⁸ – it actually articulates a desire to undo the 'Unerschüttlichkeit' of English by writing at once in and *against* Beckett's native language, rather than a desire to turn to a foreign language for literary purposes.¹⁵⁹ What the 1937 German Letter provides us with, in short, is a letter that reaffirms Beckett's literary commitment to English, while making no reference to French and appealing to Kaun for the possibility to pursue correspondence in German. Taken together, these factors radically diminish this letter's value as an insight into Beckett's reasons for turning to French almost a decade later.¹⁶⁰

More importantly still, however, and what Tucker evidently fails to realise, is that these two pieces of evidence – already problematic in and of themselves – must be read in light of the textual evidence of Beckett's French-language writings. Rather than reading Beckett's linguistic turn, or the French-language writings that followed it, through such indirect evidence as is to be found in *Dream* or Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun, in other words, Beckett's turn to French must be read, in the first instance, in light of the direct evidence of the writings that he produced in French. And it seems clear that the indirect evidence to which Tucker appeals becomes essentially meaningless when read against the direct evidence for the 'precis[e]' moment of the linguistic turn provided by the 'Suite' Notebook. The evidence from *Dream* and the German Letter is, after all, supposed to corroborate the LSH by confirming a connection between language and style evidenced in Beckett's *published* writings and,

¹⁵⁸ viz. 'Es freut mich immer, einen Brief von Ihnen zu bekommen. Schreiben Sie also möglichst häufig und ausführlich. Wollen Sie unbedingt, dass ich Ihnen auf englisch [sic] das gleiche tue? Werden Sie beim Lesen meiner deutschen Briefe ebenso gelangweilt, wie ich beim Verfassen eines englischen? Es täte mir Leid, wenn Sie das Gefühl hätten, es handele sich etwa um einen Kontrakt dem ich nicht nachkomme' (*LSB I*, 513 – SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937]).

¹⁵⁹ viz. '[V]on Zeit zu Zeit habe ich wie jetzt den Trost, mich so gegen eine fremde Sprache unwillkürlich vergehen zu dürfen, wie ich es mit Wissen und Willen gegen meine eigene machen möchte und – Deo juvante – werde' (*LSB I*, 516 – SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937]).

¹⁶⁰ Further problems with attempting to interpret Beckett's turn to French in terms of the 'German Letter' will be examined in Part III, Chapter 3.

by extension, this evidence is also supposed to confirm that internally-rooted and literary-focussed vision of the linguistic turn that the LSH advances and with which Tucker evidently agrees. The evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook flatly contradicts the interpretative value of both the statement derived from *Dream* and the letter to Kaun, however: Belacqua may well muse on the possibility that 'only the French language can give you the thing you want', but the 'Suite' Notebook proves that what French gave Beckett in 1946 was not a matter of language, style or literature, since the only thing about his writing that changed following the linguistic turn was that it was the literary strategies earlier pursued in English were now pursued in French. Similarly, Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun may well refer to the increasing difficulty Beckett experienced when trying to write in 'ein[em] offizielle[n] Englisch' but, when writing 'Suite' in 1946, the manner in which he wrote does not appear to have been in any way impeded by the use of English, nor in any way facilitated by the use of French.¹⁶¹ The evidence of these two texts, in short, though it may long have been taken to substantiate the LSH, is fundamentally compromised by the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook and thus quite unable to support Tucker's own contention that Beckett was driven from English by 'something in English at precisely this point'. If Tucker thinks to call upon such evidence at all, in fact, it can only be because he continues to be guided by the interpretative model provided by the LSH, rather than the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook to which he has direct access. It is this continued reliance on the LSH that explains why Tucker, having proposed that an explanation for the linguistic turn might be found in close engagement with the precise moment of Beckett's turn to French, finally leads us away from the evidence of the notebook and the precise historical circumstances of Beckett's turn to French as it occurred in 1946 and instead offers evidence drawn from texts written in the 1930s and intended to support an explanation for this turn much the same as what critics of Beckett's writing have been offering since at least the early 1960s.

As has been demonstrated, Bolin, Knowlson, and Tucker all fail to adequately account for what the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about Beckett's turn to French. In each case, moreover, their failure to do so owes to their continued reliance on the LSH, an hypothesis that has come to enjoy near-axiomatic status in Beckett Studies. It is this widespread conviction in the LSH – whether such conviction takes the form of belief in the imbrication of language and style upon which the hypothesis is based, in the essentially literary understanding of the linguistic turn that it proposes, or both – that has prevented Beckett Studies from pursuing the particular line of enquiry demanded

¹⁶¹ *LSB I*, 513 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937])

by the 'Suite' Notebook, the most important piece of evidence that we have for the linguistic turn. This line of inquiry is one that would endeavour to take cognizance of what the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about the LSH, and about the post-War linguistic turn.

When the LSH was first advanced by critics such as Esslin and Fletcher, it was based upon the evidence of the published textual record as this was available to scholarship; this evidence strongly suggested that the linguistic turn accompanied a number of key stylistic changes in Beckett's writing (i.e. the emergence of a new prose style, the use of the first-person). There may have been uncertainty about what the precise nature of the relationship between Beckett's language and the style of his writing, but such a relationship – and, by extension, the LSH – did appear to be confirmed by the material evidence available. Subsequently, the LSH could be supported not only by the textual evidence of that divide between Beckett's English- and French-language literary writings, but also by Beckett's own remarks on the subject of his turning to French, and, later still, by the evidence of pre-War statements on the subject of French – such as Belacqua's remarks on how French writers 'write without style' in *Dream* – and even statements on language that were to be found in Beckett's private correspondence by way of the 'German Letter'. Taken together then – and up until 1996 –, the available evidence all seemed to accord with that understanding of the linguistic turn proposed by the LSH, and such ample supporting evidence was unsurprisingly taken as clear corroboration. That situation has now changed, however, and the currently-available manuscript evidence tells a very different story. Access to the manuscript of Beckett's first French-language short-story, the notebook that allows us to see the moment of the linguistic turn, demonstrates that the linguistic turn had no discernible impact on Beckett's writing; it shows that the style, the syntax, and the thematics of his post-War writing was entirely unaffected by the choice to write in French. A change in style there certainly was, but the 'Suite' Notebook demonstrates this change to have occurred *before* the linguistic turn. This notebook demonstrates, in short, that the LSH is wrong and, if the LSH is wrong, we are obliged to do a number of things.

In the first instance, we are obliged to propose a new hypothesis by which to explain the linguistic turn, one that allows us to account not only for Beckett's decision to turn to French, but for the English-language origins of his first post-War short-story, and for the fact that his change of language had no effect on the style of his writing. Indeed, owing to the fact that the change in language and the change in style clearly occurred separately it seems clear that two separate hypotheses will be required: One to explain the linguistic turn, and another to explain the stylistic change

in Beckett's writing. At the same time, the fact that the direct evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook so obviously contradicts the LSH demands that we re-evaluate the statements that were once taken to confirm the LSH, the better to discover why it is that these statements should have been taken to corroborate an hypothesis that is demonstrably false. In addition to proposing a new hypothesis for the linguistic turn and re-evaluating the evidence upon which this hypothesis was based, we are also obliged to reconsider Beckett's French-language writings, since it seems probable that, much like Knowlson, Bolin and Tucker, other critics too may have been led to misread Beckett's French-language writings or, at the very least, to miss certain aspects of what these writings have to tell us about Beckett's use of French owing to an unswerving conviction in the validity of the LSH. Finally, and as a necessary preliminary to all the above, we are obliged to reconsider the biographical evidence for Beckett's engagement with French. It has already been suggested that *DTF*, the most widely-used biography of Beckett, may have negatively impacted critical discourse around the linguistic turn by presenting a distorted view of the 'Suite' Notebook, one that was filtered through the LSH. Is it possible that other details of Beckett's experience of French may have been distorted, misunderstood, or minimised by previous critical treatments? What might a novel examination of this engagement be able to bring to light?

Naturally, a full response to all these various obligations is beyond the scope of the present thesis: It will not be possible, for example, to provide hypotheses for both the linguistic and the stylistic shift; instead, and in line what the 'Suite' Notebook reveals about the lack of any essential link between Beckett's linguistic and stylistic shifts of the post-War period, it has been decided to concentrate in this thesis solely on the linguistic turn and Beckett's engagement with French, thereby leaving the subject of Beckett's stylistic progression to other scholars.¹⁶² Similarly – and even

¹⁶² Naturally, certain aspects of Beckett's style will be addressed in the course of this study; such mention will, however, be kept to a minimum, as it will be restricted to what is necessary for this study's principal engagement with Beckett's French – The reader particularly interested in the issue of Beckett's evolving prose style may be interested in consulting the following works: Richard Coe's 'Beckett's English', in Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (eds), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983); Konrad Schoell, 'Exakte Beschreibung und vorsichtige Einschränkung. Bemerkungen zu Becketts Prosastil', in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* (Vol. 96, No. 1 – 1986), 12-21; M.R. Axelrod, *The Politics of Style in the Fiction of Balzac, Beckett and Cortázar* (New York, N.Y.: St Martin's, 1992); Steven Connor, "'Was That a Point?': Beckett's Punctuation", in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014); Georgina Nugent-Folan, "'Say it simply [...] say it simpler": Samuel Beckett and Gertrude Stein's aesthetics of writing worser' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2016); Karine Germoni, 'Les anglicismes de Beckett à l'époque de la "French frenzy"', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez (eds),

concentrating on the linguistic aspect of Beckett's turn to French –, it will not be possible to re-evaluate the totality of Beckett's French-language writings, nor to propose an entirely novel biographical treatment of Beckett's engagement with French over the entire course of his life. As such, and in keeping with the decision to take the moment of the post-War linguistic turn as a *terminus ad quem*, this thesis will treat these issues up to the moment of this linguistic turn only. While respecting this chronological limit, however, every effort will be made to ensure that the study of Beckett's French proposed by this thesis is as thorough as possible. In what remains of this Introduction, I will clarify both how I intend to go about meeting these obligations and the texts upon which my analysis will be based.

III. STRUCTURE AND CORPUS

As noted, this thesis will comprise three parts: Part I ('Situating French') will be devoted to a biographical treatment of Beckett's engagement with French up to the 1946 linguistic turn; Part II ('Beckett's Pre-Turn Writing in French') will look at the French-language writing that Beckett produced in the years prior to his linguistic turn of 1946; and Part III ('Beckett's Turn(s) to French'), will examine Beckett's reasons for turning to French at various points in his career up to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. Within these broader formations, the discussion will progress as follows.

As its title implies, the purpose of Part I is to situate Beckett's French within the historical and biographical context necessary to understand what French meant for him at the moment of his linguistic turn. In essence, this part will act as a corrective to a vision of Beckett's French that was most strongly advocated by Daniel Katz and which clearly owes much to the opposition between English and French that underlies the LSH. For Katz, '[Beckett] avait une langue maternelle, et puis, il a appris des langues étrangères'.¹⁶³ Consequently, his decision to write in French 'représente...une déréalisation de son propre passé et de son histoire personnelle'.¹⁶⁴ To see Beckett's French in these terms, however, is to ignore the fact that French was itself an integral part of Beckett's 'propre passé et de son histoire personnelle'. It is, indeed, precisely because of the degree to which French was an integral part of

SBT/A 30, 97-112; as well as essays collected in Julien Piat and Philippe Wahl (eds), *La Prose de Samuel Beckett* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2013).

¹⁶³ Daniel Katz 'Beckett et les huit langues', in Matthijs Engelberts, Sief Houppermans, Yann Mével, and Michèle Touret (eds), *SBT/A 10 : L'Affect dans l'œuvre beckettienne* (Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2000), 223

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 224

Beckett's life that the first part of this thesis must be devoted to tracing the particularities and nuances of his engagement with this language from his earliest youth to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. In place of this neat, but fallacious, division between Beckett's English and the 'langues étrangères' with which he was familiar the chapters of Part I will demonstrate that Beckett's French – like all of his languages, mother tongue or otherwise – has its own particular history and its own vital place in Beckett's biography.

This history will be traced chronologically over the course of three chapters: The first ('Learning: Beckett's Early French') will focus on the period stretching from Beckett's initial acquisition of French as a child up to his entry into TCD in 1923, and will underline what place French appears to have acquired in Beckett's life by the time he began studying this language as an undergraduate. The second ('Reading/Writing: Beckett's French at Trinity and Beyond') will consider his engagement with French Literature as it began at Trinity and developed over the years that preceded his 1937 move to Paris. This chapter will highlight some of the ways in which this engagement with French Literature filtered in to his English-language writing, while also shedding light on the fact that Beckett's study of French at TCD contributed to the development of his aesthetics in ways other than simply deepening his familiarity with French Literature.¹⁶⁵ Beckett's engagement with French as it developed in the years following his decision to make France his home will be the subject of the third chapter ('Living/Writing/Reading: Beckett's French in France'), which will focus on the period from 1937-1946. This chapter will draw particular attention to how both Beckett's acquisition and use of an oral register of French, and his use of French in surviving notebooks and manuscripts from this period, attest to the increasing parity in the way he used French and English – whether in his literary, or his personal, writings.¹⁶⁶ As it is impossible for an enquiry such as the present to treat even a single matter – like Beckett's engagement with French – as fully as can be achieved in a true biography, these chapters have been conceived with the primary aim of helping the reader to

¹⁶⁵ Although the discussion of Beckett's engagement with French Literature at TCD will be relatively brief, a full list of the set texts that Beckett studied as part of his degree in French is included as Appendix II (a). It is hoped that this list will be of assistance to readers who may be interested in pursuing the importance of these years for Beckett's evolving literary sensibility in more depth than has been possible here. Any such readers are equally directed towards the discussion of Beckett's reading during his undergraduate studies that is provided as part of Veronica Bălă's 2014 thesis, 'Samuel Beckett's Student Library and the Modern Novel' (*viz.* Veronica Bălă, 'Samuel Beckett's Student Library and the Modern Novel' [Unpublished PhD Thesis, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2014], 29-78).

¹⁶⁶ Beckett's turn to French itself, meanwhile, will be examined as part of the historical contextualisation of the linguistic turn that will be the subject of Part III.

make better use of the existing biographical and critical record. These chapters, in other words, will serve to correct certain critical misassumptions about Beckett's experience with French and to present the reader with relevant points of biographical fact concerning Beckett's engagement with French and his life in France that have previously been either underexplored or entirely ignored by Beckett Studies.¹⁶⁷

Finally, and in this same spirit of helping critics to make better use of available evidence by correcting prevailing misassumptions, Part I will conclude with a chapter devoted to re-examining prevailing critical discourse surrounding Beckett's 'idea' of French in the pre-War period. Focussing on the earlier-mentioned pre-turn statements that have been taken as providing anticipatory proof of the LSH, this chapter will draw on the improved understanding of Beckett's engagement with French allowed by Chapters 1-3 to propose a different way of looking at each of these statements, one that reads them, not in terms of the French-language writer that Beckett would become, nor in terms of the hypothesis that was developed to explain the style of this writer's published work, but in terms of each statement's own particularity and the person who Beckett was when these various pre-War statements were made.

After the biographic focus of Part I, Part II adopts an explicitly literary approach and takes as its subject the French-language literary texts composed by Beckett in the period prior to his linguistic turn. Divided into two chapters, of which the first ('1930-1937') is devoted to the literary texts that Beckett composed in French prior to his 1937 move to Paris, and the second ('1938-1939') to the French-language poetry that Beckett wrote after this move, Part II proposes close readings of all of the literary texts that Beckett is known to have composed in French prior to the linguistic turn of 1946.¹⁶⁸ Such close readings not only provide an opportunity to examine in depth the degree to which Beckett's literary style was affected by his use of French in the pre-War period – thereby allowing us to expand considerably on the querying of the LSH that was begun in this Introduction and which will constitute the primary focus of Part III –, they also respond to a need that currently exists within Beckett

¹⁶⁷ It is with this in mind that an overview of surviving evidence for Beckett's first radio 'sketch', which he prepared for French broadcaster Paris-Mondial in late-1939/early-1940, has been included as Appendix II (b). Although surviving evidence does not allow us to confirm the language in which this text was composed, the possibility that it was composed in French – and the fact that it was previously unknown to scholarship – justifies its mention here. It is hoped that the information provided will prove of assistance to future researchers.

¹⁶⁸ For reasons that will be clarified in Part II, Chapter 2, the decision has been taken to exclude from this discussion the so-called 'Petit Sot' poems, a suite of French-language poems whose authorship remains disputed.

Studies for a thorough and coherent treatment of Beckett's pre-War French-language writings. Currently, no such treatment exists and critical studies that do engage with Beckett's pre-War literary writing in French have overwhelmingly concentrated on the *Poèmes 37-39*, French-language poems that Beckett composed following his move to France and which he published after the War. These studies, moreover, as will be seen, have invariably read these poems through the lens of the LSH and thus viewed them principally as providing early evidence of the stylistic impoverishment that this hypothesis leads critics to assume must necessarily have accompanied Beckett's use of French. This vision will be corrected by the discussion of Part II, which will show that the earliest of Beckett's French-language literary texts of the pre-War period show Beckett deploying – indeed, even elaborating – in French the very stylistic strategies that are to be found in his early English-language writings, while his French-language poetry of the late-1930s is notable for attesting to a wide variety of styles, including some that clearly look forward to the vaguened aesthetics of the post-War period.

Like the biographical revisions of Part I, the close readings of Part II are intended not merely as an opportunity to re-read Beckett's own writings, but also as an opportunity to re-read and correct the critical discourse that currently exists around these writings. In the case of Part II, a particular concern will be showing how such criticism has been negatively impacted by presumptions concerning these texts. It will further be shown that these presumptions are due not simply to the adverse influence of the LSH, but also to preconceptions about genre and about the kind of reading strategies that are deemed appropriate to Beckett's French-language texts.

Sadly, it is impossible to provide in-depth engagement with every text that Beckett composed in French during the pre-War period. With this in mind, and in recognition of the fact that the LSH – the hypothesis which this thesis seeks to correct – was initially elaborated to explain the impact that turning to French-language composition had upon Beckett's style of *literary* composition, it has been decided to limit the close textual engagements of Part II to the literary texts – both prose fiction and poetry – that Beckett's composed directly in French.¹⁶⁹ These limitations mean that Beckett's non-literary, French-language writings of this period – namely, pre-War letters written in French, and the philosophical essay 'Les Deux Besoins' – as well his French-language translations from English – namely, the translation of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' and *Murphy*, but also poems that were translated into French from English-

¹⁶⁹ Owing to the fact that some of the texts that will be the subject of close readings in Part II are either currently unavailable in print, or only available in a partial or incomplete form, transcriptions of these materials have been provided for reference purposes in the form of appendices (i.e. Appendices I [a]-[c]).

language originals (e.g. 'they come', 'Dieppe') – will not be subjected to close readings in Part II. Although excluded from Part II, these texts will feature as part of the discussion in Part III.

Following on from the literary analysis of Part II, Part III returns to a more biographical-historical mode of enquiry and examines Beckett's turns to French up to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. As its title implies, Part III goes beyond the isolated example of the 1946 linguistic turn and attempts to answer the question of why Beckett turned to French on numerous occasions up to March 1946: Chapters 1 and 2 look at Beckett's reasons for writing in French prior to 1946. More specifically, Chapter 1 ('Beckett's use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1930-36') focuses on Beckett's use of French prior to moving to Paris, while Chapter 2 ('Beckett's use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1937-44') looks at Beckett's reasons for writing in French following his 1937 move to Paris. Beckett's linguistic turn will be the primary focus of Chapter 3 ('Beckett's Use of French in the Post-War Period: 1945-46'), where an answer will be offered to the question of why Beckett turned to French in 1946.

Taken together, these chapters propose a new hypothesis by which to explain not just the post-War linguistic turn, but all of Beckett's various turns to French. This hypothesis, which will be referred to as the Contextual Hypothesis, will be shown capable of accounting for the full range of evidence that we possess for Beckett's use of French in the period up to 1946. Through careful contextualisation of circumstance, allied with appeals to relevant historical facts, it will be shown that Beckett's decision to write in French invariably responded to a diverse array of factors, at once external and internal. In Chapter 1, for instance, it will be shown that Beckett's reasons for turning to French were by times inextricable from the narrative demands of the texts he wrote, by times from the difficulties of discussing taboo topics in print. Chapter 2 will demonstrate that the most important moment in Beckett's progression towards choosing French as his primary language for original literary expression in 1946 can actually be dated to 1938, when Beckett made the decision to begin writing in French for French-speaking audiences. In Chapter 3, meanwhile, this Contextual Hypothesis will serve as the basis for an explanation of the post-War linguistic turn that clarifies not only Beckett's decision to turn to French, but also why this decision was immediately preceded by 30 pages of English-language prose, and why this decision was taken during the composition of the first original short-story Beckett had written in over a decade. Throughout these chapters, and the better to propose as full an account as possible of Beckett's reasons for turning to French, reference will be

made both to Beckett's literary and to his non-literary French-language texts – including letters, translations into French, and reviews.

Finally, and as a pendant to the last chapter of Part I, Part III will conclude with a chapter devoted to Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his linguistic turn ('Beckett's post-War Idea(s) of the Linguistic Turn'). By contextualising each of these statements, this chapter attempts to demonstrate both why these statements are such problematic sources upon which to base an hypothesis for the linguistic turn and why a certain number of them exactly corroborate the terms of the LSH. Reading these statements in the broader context of Beckett's attitude to art and to interpretation, as well as his relationship with the discipline of Beckett Studies as this field of study evolved and expanded over the course of his life, this chapter will suggest that the story these statements tell is at once more interesting and more surprising than has long been assumed. Finally, it will be proposed that the true origin of the LSH – this theory that has been used to explain Beckett's turn to French for over fifty years – is to be found, not within Beckett's writings, nor even within Beckett's life, but in Beckett Studies itself.

Having thus attempted over Parts I-III to follow to its conclusion the line of enquiry demanded by the 'Suite' Notebook by proposing both a novel explanation for the post-War linguistic turn and, more largely, by contributing towards a fundamental revision of how Beckett Studies understands Beckett's engagement with French during the period up to and including the moment of his linguistic turn in 1946, this thesis will end with a brief Conclusion that will recapitulate its findings and draw attention to possible avenues for future research that will have been opened up by its study of Beckett and French.

PART I: Situating French

Chapter 1

Learning: Beckett's Early French (1911-1923)

Beckett's engagement with French did not begin when he embarked on that intense period of writing, stretching from 1946 to 1950, which Bair reports him to have described as 'the siege in the room'.¹ About that there can be no doubt. If Beckett's engagement with French clearly did not begin with 'the siege in the room', however, critics sometimes appear uncertain as to when exactly this engagement may be said to have properly begun. Angela Moorjani, for instance, has stated that '[Beckett's] impassioned interest in and then practice of French writing had their beginning...at Trinity College'.² Beckett's years at TCD, and the in-depth study of French Literature that he undertook during those years under the guidance of Thomas Brown Rudmose-Brown, were obviously of fundamental importance to the writer he would become. It would nonetheless be wrong to say that Beckett's interest in and practice of French writing had their 'beginning' at TCD. On the contrary, by the time Beckett entered TCD at the age of seventeen, he had already been developing his interest and competency in French for over a decade. His engagement with French up to that point may have been mediated chiefly through formal education, but that does not mean that Beckett's more than decade-long exposure to French prior to entering TCD is any less worthy of consideration. Indeed, if we are to properly understand Beckett's engagement with French as it developed from his time at TCD towards the moment of the post-War linguistic turn, we must first examine these early years of Beckett's French. Such an examination is all more necessary since, as shall be seen, the little that has been published on this period of Beckett's life is either incomplete or factually incorrect. Moreover, certain critics have been too eager to ground Beckett's earliest years in an exclusively Anglophone world, and others still to find in Beckett's later treatments of pedagogic violence an enduring trace of his earliest years as a student of French. The following chapter will correct these misunderstandings, and permit a fuller account of Beckett's earliest years of exposure to French than is currently available elsewhere.

¹ *SBAB*, 367

² Angela Moorjani, 'French Literature', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 229

Like most authors, Beckett's first exposure to the languages in which he would come to write was essentially an accident of history. In the case of English, it was chance that led him to be born to English-speakers and in a predominantly English-speaking part of Ireland. In the case of French, Beckett's earliest interactions with the language owed nothing whatsoever to either personal attachment or personal desire on the young Beckett's part. Instead, he was led to study French by the same ineluctable forces of social history that would later lead him to study Latin. In the case of Latin, social history intervened relatively late: It appears that Beckett's formal study of Latin began when he arrived at Portora, where Latin was a compulsory subject.³ French, on the other hand, was part of Beckett's life from his earliest childhood. The importance of French to Beckett's early life owes to the fact that, as Anthony Cronin informs us, the language was a vital element of middle-class sociability in the Ireland of Beckett's birth:

French played a big part in the education of the upper middle classes in Ireland at the time: Catholics liked to imagine themselves as part of the Catholic culture of the Continent as opposed to the Protestant culture of England, and Protestants looked upon speaking French as an aristocratic accomplishment.⁴

Given the social cachet associated with French in the Ireland of Beckett's childhood and early youth, it would always have been expected of Beckett that he should gain some degree of fluency in this language. It was undoubtedly with this aim in mind that, from the ages of five to nine, he was sent to the kindergarten run by the Elsner sisters, Ida and Pauline, where Beckett's own teacher was Ida Elsner.⁵ Although the sisters were German by birth, Beckett is not known to have learnt any German during

³ *DTF*, 41 – At Portora, Beckett was first taught Latin by Mr A.T.M. Murfet, the school's Classics teacher, and later by Ernest Seale, the school's Headmaster (*viz.* UoR MS 1227/7/17/2 ['Personal Interview']). Although Latin was taught to the senior classes at Earlsfort House – William Ernest Exshaw, co-headmaster of the school being responsible for these classes – Beckett left Earlsfort House to attend Portora at the age of 13 and so would appear not to have studied Latin during his time there (*viz.* *DTF*, 31).

⁴ Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 34 – Deidre Bair offers a comparable statement of the importance of French within upper-middle-class social circles, such as they existed in the Ireland of Beckett's birth and youth: '[...] there existed a remarkable appreciation of French culture in many upper-class Dublin families, and children whose families were on the fringes of this class often benefited indirectly because of this affinity for France. May and Bill, who were in this second category, wanted their children to have French lessons because it implied that their education was one of refinement' (*SBAB*, 24-25).

⁵ *DTF*, 24 – As noted by Knowlson, Ida Elsner was listed as a 'teacher of languages' in the 1913 edition of *Thom's Official Directory* (*viz.* *DTF*, 709 [n.132]).

his time at the Elsners' kindergarten.⁶ Instead, it was during this time that he was first introduced to French.⁷

That Beckett began learning French when he entered the Elsners' kindergarten at the age of five is not without importance. This is something that Jean-Michel Rabaté recognises when he states that 'Beckett had the advantage of having learned French young'.⁸ In what respect, however, does the fact that Beckett began learning French as a small child constitute an 'advantage'? Primarily, the advantage of Beckett's having begun his study of French at the age of five lies in the fact that he began learning the language within what have been identified as the Critical Periods for second language acquisition. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), first formulated by E. Lenneberg, suggests that there is a *critical period* in biological development beyond which it becomes impossible for a learner to acquire nativelike ability in a foreign language.⁹ What this means, in essence, is that when a child begins their study of a foreign language at the age of five, as Beckett did, they are wholly capable of achieving nativelike fluency in all the major areas of language acquisition – including phonology, morphosyntax, and lexicon.¹⁰ That Beckett, by virtue of the age at which he began learning French, was *capable* of attaining nativelike fluency in all areas of the French language would naturally mean very little if he had not found himself in an environment propitious to such attainment. Research suggests that nativelike acquisition of a second language depends particularly upon 'the nature of input' that

⁶ For a full treatment of Beckett's study of the German language, see Marion Fries-Dieckmann, 'Beckett lernt Deutsch: *The Exercise Books*', in Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann (eds), *Der unbekannt Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 208-223.

⁷ It may have been similar socio-cultural factors that ensured Beckett was not exposed to German while at the Elsners' kindergarten. According to Nicola McLelland, there existed in Ireland 'at least up until 1945' a belief that German was more suited to girls than boys ('The History of Modern Foreign Language Teaching' <<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/readwatchlisten/features/historyofmodernforeignlanguage/anguageteaching>> [accessed: 31st March, 2017]).

⁸ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', in *CR: The New Centennial Review* (Vol. 16, No. 3 – Winter, 2016), 137

⁹ For details of the CPH, including Lenneberg's original formulation, see Kenneth Hyltenstam and Niclas Abrahamsson, 'Maturational Constraints in SLA', in Catherine J. Doughty and Michael H. Long (eds), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (Malden, MA; Oxford, et al.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003), 558-59.

¹⁰ In the original formulation, Lenneberg suggested that puberty marked the end of this critical period (*Ibid.*). Subsequent research has suggested the existence of different critical periods for different aspects of language – namely, between 6 and 12 for phonology; up to age 15 for morphology and syntax; and between 6 and 7 for morphosyntax, or morphosyntax and lexicon (*Ibid.*). As may be observed, Beckett's exposure to French at the age of 5 means that, by any of these measures, his exposure began within the bounds of the critical periods for acquisition of fully nativelike fluency in French.

the child receives in the second language – ‘nature’ being understood both in terms of ‘amount [and] quality’.¹¹ In other words, acquisition of nativelike levels of proficiency in a second language depends upon the learner being frequently exposed to the target language and upon the quality of the language to which the learner is exposed, with exposure to the language as spoken by native speakers obviously being of particular value. In Beckett’s case, then, the possibility of his acquiring nativelike fluency in French would have depended primarily upon his having access to frequent French-language input of a high quality, ideally from a native speaker. Once again, the insights afforded by research into second language acquisition show themselves to be worthy of consideration since, although there is no evidence that the Elsner sisters were native speakers of French, it was precisely such an ideal environment in which Beckett found himself following on from his years spent at the Elsner kindergarten. From the age of nine to thirteen, in fact, Beckett attended a school that not merely taught French, but which placed particular emphasis upon the acquisition of the language and which offered Beckett, and the other students of the school, the opportunity of acquiring this language by way of instruction from a native speaker.

The school in question, Earlsfort House, was located at Earlsfort Place and had been founded by Alfred Le Peton in 1906.¹² Le Peton, who remained director of the school during Beckett’s time there, was himself a native speaker of French, having been born in Manchester to a French father.¹³ As a result of Le Peton’s status as a native speaker, it is certain that the time Beckett spent at this school played an important role in helping him to build on that grounding in French that he had acquired while a student at the Elsner kindergarten. Sadly, no records pertaining to the modes of language instruction then in use at Earlsfort House appear to have survived. Nevertheless, even if it is not possible to speak with confidence about the precise sort of language instruction that Beckett would have received during his time there, it is possible for us to make certain educated guesses about the place that

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 545 – Indeed, it is recognised that such input ‘is much more decisive in the second language context...than in first language contexts’ (*Ibid.*).

¹² *viz.* ‘Mr. A.E. Le Peton, Late House Master at Mr. Strangway’s School, Assisted by an Efficient Staff of Masters, OPENED A PRIVATE DAY SCHOOL FOR SENIOR AND JUNIOR BOYS, On the 17th September’ (‘Classified Ad: “Private School”’, in *The Irish Times* [20th September, 1906], 10).

¹³ *DTF*, 31 – That Le Peton was English, albeit of French extraction, is important to note as it corrects the misidentification of him as a ‘Frenchman’ that is to be found in the works of Beckett’s other biographers: Cronin speaks of ‘Frenchman, Alfred le Peton’ (Cronin, *The Last Modernist*, 34), while Bair informs us that ‘Monsieur Le Peton was one of a considerable number of French men and women who were employed in Dublin as teachers and governesses [...]’ (*SBAB*, 24).

French-language instruction held at the school and, more broadly, about the sort of instruction that Le Peton is likely to have offered his students.

Before seeking to outline the sort of instruction that students of Earlsfort House are likely to have received, it must be recognised that it is exceedingly difficult to establish any concrete facts in relation to this school since relevant documents – such as brochures, prospectuses, or examination papers – do not appear to have survived. Moreover, the fact that the school closed decades ago means that relevant records have almost certainly been lost. Thankfully, however, Earlsfort House was not the only school founded by Alfred Le Peton and the school that he founded after leaving Earlsfort House – that is, Sandford Park School – continues to function to this day. That school’s website affords us the following insight into Le Peton’s views on education:

He [= Le Peton] believed that education had to embrace the whole person and his regime at the school [= Sandford Park School] allowed for the experiences which would foster this ideal. In the few documents which contain his writings there is a recognition that the young will benefit only by a growing awareness that they must take responsibility for their own lives; and that the role of the educator was to provide the opportunities and the motivation to bring about this desired end. If he believed in independence of spirit and individualism he also believed strongly in a sense of community, often expressed in the catch phrase of “esprit de corps”.¹⁴

What is striking about Le Peton’s vision of education, as expressed above, is the emphasis that it places on developing ‘the whole person’, on providing students with ‘the opportunities and the motivation’ required to facilitate ‘growing awareness that they must take responsibility for their own lives’. We are here very far from a purely academic view of education; the importance of recognising this will become apparent shortly.

Admittedly, it would be wrong to suggest that the ethos upon which Sandford Park School was founded necessarily allows limpid insight into the sort of education Beckett received at Earlsfort House – Le Peton’s views may have changed in the interim, or may in practice have borne little relation to their theoretical expression. The value of this ethos is, however, supported by the fact that this description of the ethos espoused by Le Peton for Sandford Park School closely echoes comments made by Walter Starkie about the ethos of Earlsfort House: During a prize-

¹⁴ ‘History of Sandford Park School’ <<http://sandfordparkschool.ie/about/history/>> [accessed: 18th April, 2017] – Despite contacting Sandford Park School directly, I have been unable to locate copies of those ‘writings’ by Le Peton to which this passage refers.

giving ceremony held at the school in the late 1920s, Starkie, himself a former teacher at Earlsfort House, is reported to have ‘congratulated the school on its success in preserving what he called the Greek ideal of education – the making of the man’.¹⁵ The ‘Greek ideal of education’ to which Starkie is reported to have referred is almost certainly the notion of *paideia* which embraces the entirety of the individual and intends to ‘give pupils a rounded cultural education...with a view to public life’.¹⁶ This holistic vision of education as aiming to develop rounded individuals, capable of taking their place in the world beyond their school, clearly parallels Péron’s approach to education as outlined by the Sandford Park School website – namely, his focus on the development of the individual self, and that commitment to developing the students’ sense of belonging to, and having their place within, a broader community. There are also clear parallels between the ethos upon which Sandford Park was founded and the ethos of Earlsfort House as this was described by former pupils of the school. Speaking with James Knowlson, former pupils of the school stressed that there was ‘great emphasis in [Earlsfort House] on *esprit de corps*’¹⁷ – this being, of course, the same phrase that is to be found in the description of Le Peton’s vision for education as recorded by Sandford Park School.

Such correspondence of evidence strongly implies that Earlsfort House too sought to ‘embrace the whole person’ by way of an education that went beyond the purely intellectual. Not only is this vision of the school’s ethos very far from a solely scholastic view of academic achievement, it is also wholly removed from ‘[t]he violence of Pim’s treatment by his pedagogue’ in *Comment c’est / How It Is* which, according to Anthony Cordingley, ‘harkens back to Beckett’s immersion in a culture of “cruelty and inhumanity” at his preparatory school, Earlsfort House’.¹⁸ Cordingley’s presentation of the school’s culture is wholly inaccurate. For, though the term ‘cruelty and inhumanity’ may occur in that chapter of *DTF* where Knowlson discusses Beckett’s time at Earlsfort House, the reference to ‘cruelty and inhumanity’ quoted by Cordingley is not concerned with the school itself, as Cordingley implies, but rather with an incident witnessed by Beckett while he was a pupil there.¹⁹

¹⁵ ‘Earlsfort House School: Distribution of Prizes’, in *The Irish Times* (23rd December, 1929), 3

¹⁶ ‘paideia, *n.*’, in *OED* <www.oed.com> [accessed: 30th January, 2018] – For a thorough treatment of the ideal of *paideia*, and its place in Greek culture, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, 3 vols (Berlin, *et al.*: de Gruyter, 1959 [1934-47]).

¹⁷ *DTF*, 36

¹⁸ Anthony Cordingley, ‘Beckett’s “Masters”’: Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation’, in *Modern Philology* (2012), 535

¹⁹ The incident in question involved a rabid dog being beaten to death by a policeman. This was something that occurred during Beckett’s time as a student at Earlsfort

The inaccuracy of Cordingley's appraisal of the 'culture' of Earlsfort House is all the more worthy of correction given that it is indicative of another fundamental error underling his article and which pertains to Beckett's earliest study of the French language. In light of the fact that Cordingley's article is one of the very few treatments of Beckett's earliest education in French, and in keeping with Part I's aim of helping scholars interested in Beckett's French to make better use of the existing biographical and critical record, it is important that Cordingley's error should be corrected here.

In his article, Cordingley purports to offer 'a genealogy of the methods of foreign language instruction in Latin *and French* to which Beckett had been exposed' prior to composing *Comment c'est / How It Is*.²⁰ To these ends, Cordingley provides the following outline of French-language instruction as he contends that Beckett is likely to have experienced it:

[M]ost Irish students, including those at Portora, would have learned [French] without access to a native French teacher. With no access to recorded materials or Francophones with whom to converse, Beckett at this stage would have learned French through the recitation of sounds and sentences from the blackboard, the tedium of homework, and, above all, reading and translation.²¹

As this passage makes clear, Cordingley's focus in his article is on the kind of instruction that Beckett would have received at Portora – that is, the school Beckett went on to attend after leaving Earlsfort House – and, admittedly, the little evidence about Beckett's time at Portora that survives suggests that the school offered its students an education broadly in line with what was offered by the majority of Irish schools at the time. At Portora, French was indeed taught to students by non-native speakers, and, at least in the case of other subjects, particular focus was certainly placed on rote-learning.²² We must not forget, however, that Beckett's study of French was not *confined* to his time at Portora. As has already been noted, he first studied the language at the Elsner kindergarten and then spent three further years studying it at Earlsfort House.²³ More importantly still, with regard to Beckett's time at

House and which, according to James Knowlson, remained etched in Beckett's mind throughout his life (*viz. DTF*, 35-36).

²⁰ Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 511-12 – Emphasis mine.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 519

²² Beckett's time at Portora, as well as the gaps in our knowledge about this period of Beckett's life, will be discussed in more detail below.

²³ Cordingley himself acknowledges the existence and possible importance of Earlsfort House when he comments: 'One might wonder what education Beckett received in French or Latin at Earlsfort House' (Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 522).

Earlsfort House, it is not true to claim, as does Cordingley, that ‘no relevant records appear to have survived’ for that particular period of Beckett’s education.²⁴ While it is certainly true that we lack much of the documentation that we would like to have concerning Beckett’s time at Earlsfort House, evidence does exist that allows us to make reasonable assumptions about this period of Beckett’s education and the effect it may have had on his acquisition of French. Crucially, that surviving evidence suggests the education in French that Beckett received at Earlsfort House was very different from what Cordingley describes.

The most important piece of evidence in this regard has already been mentioned, and it serves to contradict much of what Cordingley states regarding Beckett’s early experience of learning French. *Pace* Cordingley, we know that Beckett *did* learn French from a native speaker while at Earlsfort House because Beckett specified to James Knowlson that Alfred Le Peton himself was in charge of the French lessons there.²⁵ That Le Peton should have taken personal responsibility for teaching French to students of Earlsfort House is quite understandable: Not only was Le Peton a native speaker of the language, he also appears to have accorded a central place to the French within his school. Such, at least, may be inferred from advertisements for Earlsfort House that appeared in *The Irish Times* and which make clear that this language played an important role in differentiating the school from its competitors.²⁶ The prominence given to French in advertising for the school underscores that a focus on French was the major selling point of Earlsfort House. Naturally, taken in isolation, reference to French in advertising material cannot confirm that French played an important role in the day-to-day running of the school. The fact that Le Peton himself was responsible for teaching the language remains significant, however, insofar as it both suggests the importance he attached to these classes and tells us something about the way in which Beckett is likely to have learned French while at Earlsfort House.

That Beckett spent three years studying French with a native speaker means, in short, that we cannot assume his education followed that standard, ‘grammar-translation’ method of foreign language instruction, which, as described by Cordingley, ‘focused on the production of successful written translation and

²⁴ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

²⁵ ‘The Young Samuel Beckett: School’, in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 20

²⁶ An advertisement from 1911, for example, informs the parents of prospective students that ‘French [was] Spoken in the House’ (‘Classified Ad: “Earlsfort House School”’, in *The Irish Times* [9th January, 1911], 1).

composition'.²⁷ On the contrary, it is quite possible that Le Peton – in keeping with his vision of education as ideally focussing upon the 'whole person' – adopted a less bookish approach to language instruction, one which made active use of the spoken language in class and encouraged the students to do likewise. If such an hypothesis is not confirmed, it is certainly not invalidated by the fact that Earlsfort House was a very small school. One of Beckett's fellow students put the total number of students at 'only 100 or so'.²⁸ Another advertisement for the school, dating from the time that Beckett was a student there, further clarifies that '[n]umbers in each class [were] limited to 10'.²⁹ Such small class sizes would have greatly facilitated a more interactive mode of language teaching and, when taken together with the fact that Beckett's teacher was a native speaker of French who was interested in helping his students to develop as people rather than in merely assisting them in acquiring knowledge, it seems probable that, during the three years Beckett spent at Earlsfort House – three years that the CPH tells us are of key importance to the acquisition of a foreign language –, Beckett benefited from an environment that provided him with frequent French-language input of a high quality and from a native speaker, precisely the sort of environment that current research into second language acquisition would describe as an almost ideal environment for language acquisition.³⁰

Obviously, to say that Beckett benefited from an almost ideal environment for language acquisition during his time at Earlsfort House is not to imply that, by virtue of this environment alone, Beckett was guaranteed to achieve nativelike fluency in French and to make of this language his preferred method of literary composition in later life. (Those of his fellow pupils who did not go on to become French-language writers in later life would be enough to disprove such an implication.) Nor do I intend to suggest any such thing. Rather, my aim is to draw attention to the particularities of Earlsfort House such as they may be recovered by way of the (admittedly) partial evidence that survives and, in so doing, to underline that Beckett's earliest experience of the French-language was profoundly atypical. The importance of recognising the

²⁷ Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 522 – For a thorough description of this method of foreign language instruction, as well as other methods of instruction used during the period, see Claude Germain, *Évolution de l'enseignement des langues : 5000 ans d'histoire* (Paris: Clé international, 1993), 101-138

²⁸ 'The Young Samuel Beckett: School', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 19

²⁹ 'Classified Ad: "Earlsfort House School"', in *The Irish Times* (8th September, 1913), 6

³⁰ The only environments more propitious to acquisition of French would have been growing up in a French-speaking country, as did the Paris-born Julien Green, or, failing that, benefiting from a French-speaking governess of the sort from whom Vladimir Nabokov learned French in his youth (*viz.* Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1990], 60).

atypical nature of Beckett's early interaction with French lies in the fact that this particular incidence of the atypical has broader implications for how we should go about interpreting Beckett's engagement with French and, more broadly, Beckett's turn to French. The implication is, in short, that we must pay attention to context. As has already been demonstrated in the Introduction, and as will be made clear time and again, contextualisation is a key focus of the present thesis, and the example of Earlsfort House offers a welcome opportunity to demonstrate both the value and the necessity of such contextualisation.

As already underlined, information about Beckett's earliest interaction with French is scarce and in situations where information is scarce it is tempting to turn to the general for want of the specific. Such, as we have seen, is the approach adopted by Cordingley in his article, where the 'genealogy of the methods of foreign language instruction...to which Beckett [was] exposed' that he proposes is based, not upon specific evidence concerning the specific sort of education that Beckett received in the institutions where he was a student, but instead upon a general idea of what we know about the language learning experience of '[m]ost...students' during the period of Beckett's schooling. One particularly eloquent example of this reliance upon the general for want of the specific concerns Cordingley's attempts to account for the fact that precise records of Beckett's education at Earlsfort House have not survived. This example in fact serves to throw considerable light on the dangers of such a reliance on the general:

One might wonder what education Beckett received in French or Latin at Earlsfort House, the private Protestant [*sic*] elementary school he attended in Dublin that, unfortunately, no longer exists and for which no relevant records appear to have survived. Yet a survey of the examination papers of the British Board of Education for the entry of elementary school teachers between 1910 and 1917 reveals that the same skills were required across all ancient and modern languages. Candidates were invariably compelled to identify the parts of speech, perform written translations of short pieces into and out of the foreign language and compose a short passage in the language on a given theme or question. This mode of assessment reflects the goal of all foreign language instruction in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and Irish schools.³¹

³¹ Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 522 – Earlsfort House was not, as Cordingley claims, a Protestant establishment. Rather, as stated by James Knowlson, it was a 'deliberately multidenominational' (*DTF*, 36) institution. Knowlson further clarifies the wide variety of religious perspectives that Beckett would have encountered there by noting that 'although it had a large majority of Protestants, [Earlsfort House] accepted Catholics, Jews and Freethinkers as well' (*Ibid.*).

As can be seen, Cordingley, for want of specific information, here chooses to substitute the general – that is, he chooses to substitute for the records of Earlsfort House that have not survived evidence obtained via ‘a survey of the examination papers of the British Board of Education for the entry of elementary school teachers between 1910 and 1917’. In the case of Earlsfort House, however, the value of such information is greatly compromised by the fact that, as the Sandford Park School website informs us, Le Peton ‘had no formal qualifications for his role’ as teacher and educationalist.³² Consequently, it is probable that he was either unfamiliar with or unconcerned by the modes of foreign-language instruction that would have been inculcated at teacher-training colleges of the time and which would have been tested by the kind of examination papers to which Cordingley refers. This fact is not without importance since, much like Le Peton’s status as a native speaker of French, his lack of any formal qualification – a lack that, in the eyes of parents keen for their children to learn French, would have been more than compensated for by the fact of his being a native speaker – would have served to distinguish him from the common run of French teachers operating in Irish schools of the period and, by extension, contributed to distinguishing Beckett’s experience of learning French at Earlsfort House from that of ‘most...students’ in the Ireland of his youth.

My aim in criticising the approach adopted by Cordingley in his article is, it must be stressed, not in the interests of advocating a slavish reliance on only such facts as can be definitively confirmed with absolute certainty, nor do I propose that critical enquiry be based exclusively on such information as can be directly tied to the specific object of any particular study. Obviously, it would be unrealistic to demand of literary critics that they base their enquiries solely on such facts and such information. There are, indeed, times when general information – information touching on a period, rather than a person; a society, rather than a subjectivity – is not merely a necessary evil, but a true benefit to scholarly inquiry: If the general can be a veil that serves to obscure the nuance of the specific, it can also be a foil against which this nuance is revealed more starkly. A recognition of the potential value of generalised evidence should, however, go hand-in-hand with a recognition of its potential pitfalls. Of these pitfalls, the most immediate is that, through the wholesale substitution of the general for the specific, we may be led to forget that an individual experience is not reducible to the aggregate of the majority. Or, to rephrase that with reference to the matter at hand, a generalised vision of ‘foreign language instruction’ in the early

³² History of Sandford Park School’ <<http://sandfordparkschool.ie/about/history/>> [accessed: 18th April, 2017]

twentieth century is not necessarily commensurate with Beckett's individual experience of learning French between 1911 and 1923.

This fact gets to the heart of what is wrong with many existing discussions of Beckett's engagement with French, not merely as a schoolboy but throughout his life – namely, that tendency to discuss Beckett's French in generalised, de-contextualised terms. Beckett's French is too often viewed, not as a specific language, but merely as one 'foreign language' among many others. Similarly, and for much the same reasons, Beckett's turn to French is too often discussed as if it took place in a void, being not a specific event that occurred in a specific historical context and involved a particular individual writing in a particular language, but simply the rejection of one generalised kind of language ('a mother tongue') for another equally generalised ('a foreign language').

The vision of Beckett's engagement with French that has just been outlined is expressed with particular clarity in an article by Michael Edwards, which may be taken as representative of a pervasive strain of thinking about Beckett's French.³³ In that article, Edwards identifies as a key factor in Beckett's decision to turn to French the gulf that he believes to exist between French and English or, rather, between one's native language and a 'foreign language':

One can certainly not inhabit a foreign language, as if it were the country of one's childhood. *Les nuages* are not exactly what "clouds" are for an English speaker. Even *la lune*, which we observe at the same time, is not "the moon." *Nuages* and *lune* are at the same distance, more or less, as what appears in a poem or a painting. A foreign language is also a kind of art work.³⁴

In this passage, Edwards argues that Beckett's French may be understood in terms of a generalised assumption about 'foreign language[s]' as a class, and how the non-native speaker necessarily perceives such languages. To say, as Edwards does, that '[a] foreign language is...a kind of art work' – or, as it puts it elsewhere in his article, that 'a foreign language is...a kind of fiction'³⁵ – is to assert that all 'foreign language[s]' and, by extension, all mother tongues, are experienced by all individuals in the same way. What we find here, of course, is simply a variant of the critical position advocated by Katz that was mentioned in the Introduction, whereby Beckett should not be understood as *truly* bilingual because 'il avait une langue maternelle, et puis, il a appris des langues étrangères'. The same divide between mother tongue and foreign language underlies Edwards' position: A native language, he claims, is one that can be

³³ viz. Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French' in *Translation and Literature* (Vol. 1 – 1992), 68-83

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-75

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 70

‘inhabit[ed]...as if it were the country of one’s childhood’, it is intimately experienced in a way that no ‘foreign language’ can ever be. This divide, however, depends upon a conviction that there is a single generalised manner in which one interacts with, and experiences, a ‘foreign language’. This, however, is not the case: Edwards, certainly, may perceive *nuages* and *lune* to be at an irreducible remove from the ‘clouds’ and ‘moon’ of his youth, but Michael Edwards’ experience of French is of very little consequence to a discussion of *Beckett’s French* – which is what Edwards’ article purports to offer. Every person’s experiences of language – be it their ‘mother tongue’ or of a ‘foreign language’ – is specific to them, and the relationship that the bilingual individual has with their various languages will be similarly unique, and will evolve over time and in accordance with circumstance.³⁶

Beckett’s French, like all of those languages with which he was familiar, was a specific language and, as such, his experience of it was shaped by a particular history and coloured by a specific set of circumstances. In the case of his French, for instance, we have already seen that Beckett had begun to learn this language from the age of five. French may not have been the language of his family home, but it did have a place in his life – and, by extension, in his personal landscape – from his earliest childhood. More importantly still, from the time he first encountered French as a young boy the language continued to have an important part to play in his life up until the time of his death and was, for a substantial part of his life – as we shall see in Part I, Chapter 3 –, the primary language of his daily interactions. Whether first encountered at the age of five or thirty-five, a ‘foreign language’ can scarcely remain ‘a kind of art work’ when it is the language in which one experiences, or endures, *le quotidien*. If I have spent time discussing Beckett’s years at Earlsfort House, it is precisely because this period of Beckett’s life constitutes an important part of what made his experience of French specific and personal to him, as well as quite different from his experience of those other languages with which he was more or less familiar. This difference, and the necessity of recognising it, may be briefly demonstrated by way of two radically different examples: German and Irish.

German, like French, was a language that held an important place in Beckett’s life and in which he eventually achieved a high degree of fluency.³⁷ Unlike

³⁶ For a thorough study of the importance of speakers’ individual, subjective experience in relation to their understanding, and experience, of the language(s) that they speak and write, see Claire Kramsch, *The Multilingual Subject* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

³⁷ The place that German held in Beckett’s life is attested by the large number of German-language texts to be found in his library at the time of his death (*viz.* Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library* [Cambridge: CUP, 2013], 82-102).

French, however, German was a language that Beckett did not begin learning until the 1930s.³⁸ German was also, for Beckett, intimately connected in his mind with his paternal relatives the Sinclairs – most notably, his cousin and first love, Peggy Sinclair, upon whom he would base the character of the Smeraldina-Rima (Smeraldina) who appears in his first novel, *Dream*, and the collection *MPTK*³⁹ –, who lived in Germany and through whom he had first experienced German during his frequent visits there. The association between the Sinclairs, Germany, and the German language in Beckett’s mind is well-evidenced by a letter of 1932 in which Beckett informed Thomas MacGreevy: ‘I am reading German and learning a little that way. Always when its [*sic*] coming up to Xmas I get the German fever for the Tannenbäumchen and the Bierreisen through the snow’.⁴⁰ In the years preceding the writing of this letter, Beckett had been a frequent visitor to the home of the Sinclairs, who had moved to Germany in the early 1920s.⁴¹ The majority of these visits had indeed taken place around Christmas time, with Beckett spending the Christmas and New Year period with the Sinclairs in Kassel in 1928, 1929, and 1931.⁴² Unable to travel to the Sinclairs and missing the genial environment that he found there – as described by Knowlson, Beckett ‘enjoyed himself with the Sinclairs’ and ‘got on extremely well with his Aunt Cissie’⁴³ –, Beckett turned to the German language as an *Ersatz* for what he would not be able to experience during the Christmas of 1932.⁴⁴ Beckett’s French, for its part, was radically different to his German in that it does not appear to have been tied to any particular person or environment in his mind – since, at least up until early adulthood, no one individual with whom Beckett had an intimate connection either spoke French as a first language or lived in France –, rather he first encountered it as a language of his own, one that he had experienced since childhood and in which, thanks to the period during which he began learning the language, he had the potential to achieve total and nativelike fluency.

³⁸ For Beckett’s study of the German language, see Marion Fries-Dieckmann, ‘Beckett lernt Deutsch: *The Exercise Books*’, in Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann (eds), *Der unbekannte Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur*, 208-223

³⁹ For Beckett’s relationship with Peggy Sinclair, see *DTF*, 79-86

⁴⁰ TCD MS 10402 (SB to Thomas MacGreevy [hereafter TMG] [21st November 1932])

⁴¹ *DTF*, 79

⁴² John Pilling, ‘Beckett und “the German fever”’: Krise und Identität in den 1930ern’, in Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann (eds), *Der unbekannte Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur*, 112

⁴³ *DTF*, 109

⁴⁴ For another perspective on the affective dimension of German for Beckett, one that stresses the melancholic associations that the language may have had for Beckett, see Thomas Hunkeler, ‘Un cas d’hyperthermie littéraire: Samuel Beckett face à ses “juvéniles expériences de fièvre allemande”’ in Matthijs Engelberts, *et al.* (eds), *SBT/A 10*, 213-22

Beckett's experience of French was equally radically different from his experience of Irish, a language in which Beckett appears to have had neither a personal interest nor any real fluency.⁴⁵ Irish was nonetheless important for Beckett insofar as it appears to have been for him a symbol of the worst aspects of the Ireland from which he wished to, and from which he would eventually, escape. Beckett's association of the negative feelings he experienced towards Ireland with the Irish language is evident in his decision to title his piece for *The Bookman* 'Censorship in the Saorstát [sic]'.⁴⁶ Obviously, there was no obligation on Beckett to refer to the Free State by its Irish-language name (i.e. Saorstát); he could easily have chosen to use the English-language name (i.e. Free State). In choosing to use the Irish-language name, however, he chose to make explicit what he saw as the connection between the Irish language and the repressive excesses of the Free State.⁴⁷ Where Irish was thus experienced primarily in negative terms, the manner in which Beckett experienced French – learning it from his youngest boyhood, in a society where French was valorised by his class as a gateway to Continental culture – would have contributed to developing in the young Beckett's mind positive associations with this language.⁴⁸

Certainly, any vision of what French may have meant to Beckett as a young man can only be speculative and we may never be able to establish with certainty the

⁴⁵ Beckett's lack of interest in Irish is evident in the total lack of books in or about the language in his personal library, which is well-stocked with books on all the languages with which he was familiar, including dictionaries, grammars and etymological works pertaining to English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish (viz. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 193-198). Beckett's lack of fluency in Irish, meanwhile, is evidenced by a letter in which he speaks of 'tous les mots en gaélique pour licou, selon l'animal, alors qu'il n'y en a pas un seul pour le terme vague et général bête, au lieu de jument, cheval, demi-sang, pouliche, etc.' (*LSB II*, 414 – SB to C. G. Bjurström [4th November, 1953]). Beckett's assertion is entirely mistaken: Although, the Irish language, like the English language, does include a number of words for 'halter' – such as *dán*, the sort of halter that is attached to a cow's horns and which, in English, is called an 'ox-riem' –, it also possesses terms for the general class of animal/beast (i.e. *ainmhí/beithíoch*), both of which are cognate with the English and French terms.

⁴⁶ Never published owing to *The Bookman* ceasing publication before it could appear, Beckett's essay was first published as part of *Disjecta* (viz. *D*, 84-88).

⁴⁷ In associating Irish and the Free State in this way, Beckett was merely responding to a State-sponsored policy whereby the language was appropriated as a means of solidifying the nascent state – For a fuller treatment of Beckett's experience with the Irish language that pays close attention to the politicisation of the Irish language in the Free State, see Alan Graham, "'So much Gaelic to me": Beckett and the Irish Language', in *JoBS* (Vol. 24, No. 2 – 2015), 163-179.

⁴⁸ Later in life, Beckett's would admit that he 'fe[lt] unexpectedly pleased' (*LSB II*, 624 – SB to TMG [4th June, 1956]) to learn that *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot* was being translated into Irish by Liam Ó Briain. Beckett's description of his pleasure as 'unexpecte[d]' nevertheless serves to underscore that the language was for him – or, at least, had until that point been –, primarily, a matter of negative emotions.

facts of his subjective experience of this language. Nevertheless, it is obvious that we have nothing to gain – as critics or readers – by ignoring the (uncertain) specificity of Beckett’s French and the irreducible particularity of his experience of this language, in favour of the (fallacious) generality of how French was experienced by ‘most Irish students’ or, worse still, in favour of grounding our discussion of Beckett’s French in a generalised vision of purportedly universal truths about what it means, or feels like, to engage with a ‘foreign’ language. The vastly differing places other ‘foreign languages’, such as German and Irish, could hold in Beckett’s life clearly demonstrate that to speak of ‘foreign languages’ as if they were a homogenous group is wholly unjustifiable, and serves only to blind us to the particularities of Beckett’s individual experience of each of the languages with which he was familiar. With that in mind, let us now further our attempt to clarify Beckett’s own particular experience of French by moving on to the next stage of his experience as a student of this language, namely his years at Portora Royal School.

While I have been keen to stress the positive aspects of that atypical environment in which Beckett was fortunate enough to learn French from the ages of 9 to 13, it would be wrong to make of the atypical the rule and to imagine that Beckett’s engagement with French up until the time he entered TCD was uniformly ideal. On the contrary, surviving evidence suggests that Portora Royal School, the school Beckett attended between the ages of 13 and 17, provided him with a learning environment that was far more in line with the kind of rote-learning-based education outlined by Cordingley. In the case of Latin, at least, a contemporary of Beckett’s at Portora described how ‘the boys learnt large slabs of Latin by Ovid, Cicero and Virgil by heart, mainly taken from *Kennedy’s Latin Primer*, the book favoured by the headmaster, E. G. Seale’.⁴⁹ To say that Beckett’s study of Latin was defined by rote-learning is not to say that he necessarily had the same experience of learning French, however. Vivian Mercier, for example, who arrived at Portora five years after Beckett left, lauded the ‘lenient tutelage’ of his own French teacher at Portora and further remarked that ‘unlike most school-boys’ he and his classmates had been taught ‘real spoken French’ at Portora.⁵⁰ It should be noted however that, although he does not identify his French teacher by name in this article, Mercier later clarified that the French Master in question was ‘S. B. Wynburne...an exact contemporary and close

⁴⁹ Russell Smith, ‘Childhood and Portora’, in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 17

⁵⁰ Vivian Mercier, ‘The Old School Tie’, in *The Bell* [Vol. 11, No. 6 – March, 1946], *qtd* in Michael Quane, *Portora Royal School (1618-1968)* (Monaghan: Cumann Seanchais Chlochair, 1968), 58

academic rival of Beckett at Trinity College Dublin'.⁵¹ As such, it is evident that Mercier's experience at Portora cannot serve as an unproblematic guide to Beckett's own.

All of this to say that, in truth, we are not necessarily much wiser about the kind of education that Beckett received at Portora than we are about the education he received at Earlsfort House. Where the lack of information about Beckett's time at Earlsfort House is, for those reasons outlined above, readily comprehensible, the lack of solid information about Portora is more perplexing. Certainly, the fact that Portora continued to exist until very recently – the school was only dissolved in 2016, when it amalgamated with another local school to form Enniskillen Royal Grammar School⁵² –, coupled with the fact that Beckett's Portora years have been the subject of more extended consideration than his time Earlsfort House, one would expect that we would know quite a bit about Beckett's time there.⁵³ In actual fact, however, at least as far as French is concerned, we know frustratingly little.⁵⁴

Setting such frustrations to one side for a moment, let us focus on what we can know: As noted, surviving evidence suggests that Portora, quite unlike Earlsfort House, provided Beckett with a French-language-learning environment in keeping with the standards of the time. Certainly, of the two French teachers who taught Beckett during his time at Portora – namely, Miss Evelyn Tennant and then, following the departure of Miss Tennant upon her marriage, Miss Harper⁵⁵ –, neither is known to have been a native speaker of French, nor does either appear to have been possessed of particularly original ideas with regard to pedagogy. Sadly, scant information on either of these teachers is to be found in either Knowlson or Bair's biographies.⁵⁶ Knowlson's biography, for instance, suggests that Miss Tennant, at

⁵¹ Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), ix

⁵² 'Enniskillen Royal Grammar School: Our School' <<http://enniskillenroyalgs.com/our-school/welcome/>> [accessed: 18th August, 2017]

⁵³ For one such a treatment, see Russell Smith, 'Childhood and Portora', in in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 13-17 – In justification of the time that has been spent elucidating how Beckett's time at Earlsfort House may have impacted his study of French, it should be noted that Smith accords only a few lines to Beckett's years there (*Ibid.*, 13).

⁵⁴ Given the aims of this thesis, the discussion here will be restricted exclusively to Beckett's study of French while at Portora. Readers interested in a more general discussion of Beckett's time at this school are directed towards the previously-mentioned article, or to the relevant sections of Bair's, Cronin's, or Knowlson's biographies.

⁵⁵ *DTF*, 41

⁵⁶ Slightly more information on Beckett's experience as a student of French at Portora is, in fact, provided by Bair. Informative though it may be, Bair's description of Beckett's time at Portora is compromised by the errors that are known to exist elsewhere in her account of Beckett's early education – such errors include that one, already mentioned, concerning the nationality of Le Peton, and Bair's

least, was probably a teacher of some ability.⁵⁷ As recorded by Bair, Beckett's teachers were defined more by their (unequal) skill as disciplinarians than by any particular flair for the subject that they taught, while Beckett himself was defined – in the eyes of Miss Tennant, at least, who referred to him as 'Inky Sam'⁵⁸ – less by any talent for French than by the fact that 'his papers were sloppy both in form and in content'.⁵⁹ Certainly, if Bair is to be believed, the one thing Beckett's French teachers at Portora may be said to have achieved is that they introduced into his spoken French the dulcet tones of (Northern) Ireland.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, while Bair and Knowlson at least provide us with a little information concerning Beckett's French teachers at Portora, no information whatsoever regarding the French-language curriculum at Portora during Beckett's time there is provided by *any* of his major biographers.⁶¹ As a consequence,

misinterpretation of the Junior Exhibition examination that Beckett sat prior to entering Trinity, which she incorrectly describes as an exam 'required of students whose ability to do college work was questionable' (*SBAB*, 38), rather than an elective examination for entrants hoping to win a Junior Exhibition. Thus, while the information provided by Bair has been referred to here in the hope of providing the reader with as complete a picture as possible, the reader should take information derived from Bair with a measure of circumspection – For a correction of Bair's comments on the Junior Exhibition examination, see John V. Luce, 'Samuel Beckett's undergraduate course at Trinity College, Dublin', in *Hermathena: A Trinity College Dublin Review* (No. 171 – Winter, 2001), 35

⁵⁷ Such, at least, may be inferred from his description of her as 'talented' (*DTF*, 41).

⁵⁸ *SBAB*, 32

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* – Sloppiness in form and content, it should be remarked, may not necessarily be a byword for 'bad French', merely lazy composition.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* – Beckett's accent when speaking French is a subject about which there has been a surprising amount of disagreement. To get a sense of just how diverse opinion on this matter is, one may profitably consult the compilation of opinions gathered together by Nathalie Léger at the conclusion of her short book on Beckett: *Les Vies silencieuses de Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2012). There we are treated to a selection of – sadly, unattributed – memories, which serve to reveal that Beckett's accent in French was imperceptible ('l'accent on ne l'entendait pas' [*Ibid.*, 109]), or possibly slight ('Très, mais alors très peu d'accent' [*Ibid.*, 110]) or possibly strong ('Son accent assez marqué, oui' [*Ibid.*, 109]), or possibly very strong indeed ('Et un accent oui bien sûr un accent' [*Ibid.*, 110-111]). Though seemingly a small matter of no great consequence to literary criticism or those who indulge in it, the confusion that surrounds Beckett's accent is, I would contend, worthy of consideration since it offers a (necessary) reminder that we are wise to doubt any one individual's recollection, and wiser still to doubt that comparison invariably brings clarity.

⁶¹ No doubt owing to an understandable preference for close engagement with Beckett's later life, none of Beckett's biographers appears to have taken any great interest in the French-language curriculum that Beckett would have followed at Portora. As a consequence, Bair, Cronin and Knowlson all overlooked the value of those yearly *Calendars* that were produced by Portora Royal and which detailed, amongst other things, the schoolbooks required for the coming year. (The existence of such *Calendars* is confirmed by the isolated survival of two *Calendars* from the late 1860s, now held by the National Library of Ireland – i.e. *Calendar for 1867: with prospectus of terms, regulations, arrangements, etc...* [NLI – Ir 370 p 16]) – and by the library of TCD – i.e. *Calendar for 1866: with prospectus of terms; to which is appended*

we know nothing about the kind of introduction to French Literature, if any, that Beckett might have received at Portora. Nor, indeed, do we know anything about the kind of French-language textbooks that were in use at Portora during Beckett's time there.

This question of the textbook(s) from which Beckett may have studied French while at Portora is worth dwelling on for a moment as this question constitutes another major error in Cordingley's account of Beckett's earliest study of French. According to Cordingley, J.A. Moran's *French Grammar and Composition* was 'the French grammar that Beckett was made to follow at Portora'.⁶² In making this claim, Cordingley cites an article by Phil Baker that proposes the author of this grammar as a possible source for the name Moran.⁶³ Baker, however, makes no reference to Portora in his article. Rather, he argues that Beckett may have studied French through Moran's *French Grammar and Composition* while at Earlsfort House.⁶⁴ Moreover, Baker's argument is based, not on any concrete proof of Beckett's having used this textbook, but solely upon that particular volume's frequent reprintings and the belief that 'it would be difficult for the privileged minority who learned French to do so without being exposed to a copy of Moran'.⁶⁵ While it is perhaps true that a majority of 'the privileged minority who learned French' did so with the assistance of Moran's text, it has already been underlined that, owing to the particular case of Alfred Le Peton – a native speaker who had no formal qualification as an educationalist –, Beckett's own study of the language at Earlsfort House is likely to have been unorthodox. It is thus impossible to be sure whether Beckett ever encountered J.A. Moran's *French Grammar and Composition*, and certainly inaccurate to assert, as does Cordingley, that Beckett worked from this text while at Portora.⁶⁶

a list of University honors [150.g.40]). Sadly, whatever materials may once have been held in Portora's archives, the new establishment does not possess any *Calenders* from Beckett's time at the school (Personal communication: Alison Stronge [Portora Bursar] to Stephen Stacey – 6th September, 2017]).

⁶² Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 519

⁶³ viz. Phil Baker, 'Beckett's Bilingualism and a Possible Source for the Name of Moran in *Molloy*', in *JoBS* [Vol. 3, No. 2 – 1994], 81-83

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 81-2

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 81

⁶⁶ For what it is worth – that is to say, very little – we can be sure that, in the late 1860s, students of Portora studied French using grammars by 'Noel & Chapsal' and 'Havet', as well as a composition guide by 'Havet' (viz. *Portora Royal School Calendar for the year 1867; with prospectus of terms, regulations, arrangements, &c.: To which is appended, a list of university honours and other distinctions obtained by former pupils*. [Dublin: The UP, by M.H. Gill, 1867], 24-25). It seems likely that 'Noel & Chapsal' refers to Noel and Chapsal's *Nouvelle Grammaire française* (1845), while the guide to French-composition by Havet seems almost certain to be Alfred Havet's *How to turn English into good French; French Composition* (1867). Although such

The uncertainty that hangs over both the French curriculum at Portora and the particular aptitudes, or failings, of Beckett's French teachers there is compounded by the lack of certainty concerning the grades that Beckett achieved and the form taken by the examinations that he sat there, it is thus impossible to know whether or not such examinations included any engagement with French Literature, or whether Beckett's study of French was confined to the language itself. Bair, once again, provides slightly more information than Beckett's other biographers, being the only biographer to offer any concrete figures concerning the grades achieved by Beckett while at Portora.⁶⁷ Happily, for the purposes of the present enquiry, French is one of only two subjects for which Bair gives any precise marks.⁶⁸ As reported by Bair, Beckett's performance rarely rose above average during his final two years at the school and, insofar as French was concerned, he remained at precisely the midpoint for the latter half of his Portora career, achieving 200 points, out of a maximum 400, in his French examinations during both his third and his final years at the school.⁶⁹

What then, based upon the information that is to be gleaned from Beckett's biographers, can be said about Beckett's study of French during his time at Portora? Well, if Beckett appears to have been a generally mediocre student – 'The best that can be said of his academic career [at Portora]', writes Bair, 'is that it was competent'⁷⁰ –, it is by no means clear that French was among his worst subjects.⁷¹ On the contrary, his results in French appear, overall, to have been better than in the

information is obviously of no real assistance with regard to Beckett's own education, it is at least a reminder of the potential value of the Portora *Calendars* and an encouragement to other scholars to seek out surviving copies of those *Calendars* that bear directly on Beckett's time at the school.

⁶⁷ The figures provided by Knowlson in a footnote are merely a citation of details given by Bair (*viz. DTF*, 712 [n 44]).

⁶⁸ *viz. SBAB*, 30 – In the case of the other subjects – namely, Arithmetic, Algebra, Chemistry, English, Geometry, History, Physics, and Trigonometry – precise marks are eschewed and Beckett's results are described only as being 'average or above', 'normal or above', or 'slightly worse' than those achieved in other subjects (*Ibid.*).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 – Knowlson seems keen to nuance the grades achieved by Beckett at Portora in his biography. There, in a footnote, he informs us that 'Dr Bair was advised by Dr J. A. Wallace who, with the benefit of the mark books, could write in 1969: "He [Beckett] was in a class of outstanding academic excellence, and, to those junior, he did not seem to be of more than good average ability, and this was backed up by the exam results."' (*DTF*, 712 [n.44]). If Portora examinations were marked on a curve at this time, then Beckett's performance is undoubtedly best understood in the context of the ambient academic environment in which he found himself. If not, of course, then the comparative ability of his fellow students was of entirely no importance to Beckett's performance in school examinations. Knowlson offers no evidence that grades were assigned on a curve at Portora.

⁷⁰ *SBAB*, 31

⁷¹ In fact, Cronin's only reference to Beckett's study of French at Portora comes from a contemporary of Beckett's who remembers him as having been 'particularly good at English and French' (Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, 49).

majority of his other subjects.⁷² Indeed, it is striking that one of the few prizes Beckett is noted as having won during his time at the school was ‘a school prize for French composition’ which, according to Bair, Beckett was awarded in Michaelmas term of 1921.⁷³ Bearing in mind the fact that this award was won relatively early on in his career at Portora – he had entered the school in September of 1920 –, it may be posited that, much like his accent, the years at Portora did little to add to, and perhaps did something to detract from, what Beckett had learned during his time at Earlsfort House School. Another possibility, of course, is that, over time, Beckett, who had grown accustomed to the more intellectually stimulating lessons that a native-speaking teacher and small class sizes would have made possible, grew increasingly bored with, and thus increasingly detached from, the study of French over the course of his time at Portora.⁷⁴ Though it is obviously impossible to say with certainty whether either of these scenarios is correct, it may be noted that such a decline – in achievement, attention, or both – would be wholly in keeping with what one would expect given the transition from an environment where he was being taught by a native speaker of French unschooled in the traditional methods of language instruction, to a thoroughly traditional environment in which he was dependent upon instructors who were themselves learners of the language. There is, moreover, another source of information that goes some way to supporting the idea that Beckett, despite his seemingly mediocre performance in French at Portora, actually maintained a far better command of the language than his Portora examination results alone would lead us to believe. This information comes from the Junior Exhibition examination that Beckett sat prior to entering TCD.

At the time of Beckett’s entry into TCD, the Junior Exhibition was a rigorous examination that allowed those students who met its demanding standards to enter the university as Junior Exhibitors, and thus enjoy a number of privileges not available to ordinary members of the student body, including a scholarship tenable during the

⁷² Once again, Bair’s phrasing makes comparison difficult. What we can at least say with certainty is that, in his third year at Portora, Beckett’s results in French were better than those he achieved in ‘English, history, geometry, physics, and chemistry’ (*SBAB*, 30). We also know that, in his final year at Portora, Beckett’s French was decidedly better than his Latin, in which he achieved only 187 out of the possible 400 (*Ibid.*).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29 – Bair notes that Beckett was ‘one of three students’ (*Ibid.*) to be awarded such a prize.

⁷⁴ This second possibility is, I would suggest, one that finds some support in the fact that his grades in French appear to have plateaued in later years at Portora, rather than simply deteriorating.

first two years of their undergraduate studies.⁷⁵ This test, which Beckett sat immediately after having left Portora, is thus the best measure that remains to us of his ability in French as it stood after his years of studying the language at the Elsners' kindergarten, Earlsfort House and, finally, Portora. It also gives us a sense of how Beckett's level of French compared to other students of his own age, with a high mark in this elective, Exhibition examination demonstrating a considerably higher than average degree of proficiency in the language.

Given what has just been said about the fact that – French and English aside – Beckett's academic performance during his final years at Portora was relatively mediocre, it is unsurprising that, as J.V. Luce informs us, 'only in English and French did [Beckett] achieve anything like the Exhibition standard'.⁷⁶ What may come as slightly more of surprise is that, even if Beckett did best in English and French, Beckett's performance in French was far better, overall, than his performance in English. More surprisingly still, indeed, given the prevailing critical vision of the young Beckett's deep affinity for English Literature – a vision which finds expression in Knowlson's biography through the story of how, while at Portora, the young Beckett and a friend of his 'stopped to sit under a tree and learned by heart the "Ode to a Nightingale"' one Sunday afternoon⁷⁷ –, Beckett's result in English was entirely dependent upon the excellent result that he achieved on the essay portion of the exam (75/100); his showing on the English Literature paper, on the other hand, was abysmal (17/80).⁷⁸ Unlike the hugely imbalanced results he achieved in the English section, Beckett's standard in the Modern Language section of the Junior Exhibition examination – that is, in the French exam – was uniformly high. At the time, the Modern Language section of the examination comprised both a *viva voce* and a more general paper, Beckett's scored 33/60 for his *viva*, and 88/120 on the general paper.⁷⁹ In so doing, as Luce notes, Beckett achieved a very respectable overall score of 67.2% on the French paper, which would then have been the equivalent of a First.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ For details of the Junior Exhibition examination and the benefits awarded to successful Junior Exhibitors, see *The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1923–1924*. (Dublin: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1923), 184-86

⁷⁶ John V. Luce, 'Samuel Beckett's undergraduate course at Trinity College, Dublin', 36

⁷⁷ *DTF*, 42

⁷⁸ John V. Luce, 'Samuel Beckett's undergraduate course at Trinity College, Dublin', 36

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* – During Beckett's time in TCD, any mark of over 60% was deemed to be First Class for Freshman students (*viz. DU Calender 1923-1924* [Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1923], 50); for Sophister students, meanwhile, First Class was awarded for any mark over 65% (*viz. DU Calender 1926-1927* [Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1926], 61).

Beckett's very impressive score in the French section of the Junior Exhibition examination is all the more worthy of mention when set against the thoroughly unimpressive results that he achieved in subjects such as Mathematics (118/340), Experimental Science (35/150) or, as has already been remarked, English Literature (17/80).⁸¹ Viewed in terms of Beckett's overall performance in the Junior Exhibition examination, the results he achieved in the French paper serve to put paid to the idea, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, that Beckett's engagement with French had its 'beginning' in TCD. By the time he arrived at TCD, Beckett had already acquired a level of French that met the standard required of a Junior Exhibitor. The fact that Beckett was capable of achieving this standard in French is a testament to how far advanced his French already was; these results set him apart from the majority of other students entering the university since, as noted, the Junior Exhibition examination was intended to identify students of notable ability. By the same token, these results also serve to set Beckett's French apart from his other subjects, in which he fell (very) far short of the required standard. Even his knowledge of English Literature, as has been noted, fell well below what was required of Junior Exhibitors. In this way, Beckett's results in this examination confirm the importance of taking this pre-TCD period into account when considering Beckett's engagement with French, and of re-evaluating the place that French held in Beckett's life prior to 1923. Were it true that French was of little interest to Beckett during his earlier life – that French was 'one of [his] subjects, no more, no less', as Bair describes Beckett's experience of the language while at Earlsfort House⁸² – it seems highly unlikely that he would have achieved such impressive scores in his French language paper. On the contrary, his results in the Junior Exhibition examination argue for seeing French as a language in which Beckett took a keen interest, even as a schoolboy. In this way, indeed, these results serve to confirm what Beckett's decision to study French at TCD already suggests, namely: a love for the subject. By 1923, after all, French was not merely a subject at which Beckett did particularly well in during examinations, but also a language in which he was sufficiently interested to have *chosen* to study it at TCD.

At the start of this discussion, it was noted that French, like Latin, was a language that Beckett began to study, not because of any personal desire on his part, but because studying French was, at that time and in the social context into which he was born, 'the done thing'. Like Latin, in other words, Beckett began learning French

⁸¹ viz. John V. Luce, 'Samuel Beckett's undergraduate course at Trinity College, Dublin', 36

⁸² *SBAB*, 25

because he had to. At the time of his entering TCD in 1923, he had been studying French, in one form or another – and still because he had to – for over a decade. In that time, he had benefited from language-learning environments that were both in keeping with, and in advance of, what was offered to the majority of Irish students at the time. In the process, he had acquired, not only a firm grounding in French, but also a passion for the subject. That this was the case would seem to be confirmed by his decision to pursue the subject at university level, even after he was no longer obliged to by either social convention or educational necessity. (Latin here offers a particularly important counter example: Beckett, having been obliged to continue his study of the language during his first two years at TCD, is known to have abandoned Latin as soon as this became possible. Indeed, even before he abandoned it, he chose to study it at the less demanding Pass level, while pursuing French, alongside English Literature and Italian, at the Honours level during these first two years.⁸³) The significance of Beckett's decision to pursue French at third level is something critics too often miss when they speak of Beckett's engagement with this language: French was not simply a 'foreign language' that came to be grafted on after Beckett had received an 'intellectual grounding [that] lies in English and Irish literature'.⁸⁴ Certainly, English was Beckett's mother-tongue, but the surviving evidence that has been sketched out in this chapter suggests that French very soon came to occupy an important role in his life. The proof of this lies not only in the attention he accorded to that subject above all others – an attention proven by the results he achieved in the Junior Exhibition examination – but also in the fact that, at the age of 17, French was quite obviously more than just an academic subject for Beckett. It was, rather, a language he was sufficiently passionate about to choose to devote four years of his life to while at TCD.

The idea of 'passion', subjective and difficult to quantify as it may be, must be acknowledged when discussing Beckett's engagement with French because, by ignoring it, we further an idea according to which Beckett's first, and deepest, love was for the English language and, by extension, for English Literature. This idea that English was of unique importance to Beckett has become foundational to a particular critical *idea* of Beckett and is, for example, fundamental to the image of Beckett presented by a number of his biographers. In the case of Knowlson's *DTF*, for example, it is striking that, although we find no mention of the composition prize that Beckett

⁸³ For details of Beckett's study of Latin while at TCD, see John V. Luce, 'Samuel Beckett's undergraduate course at Trinity College, Dublin', 37-42

⁸⁴ In their study of Samuel Beckett's library, Van Hulle and Nixon speak of how 'much has been said about Beckett's multilingual, polyglot cultural formation, so much that it is often forgotten that his intellectual grounding lies in English and Irish literature' (Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 20).

won in French – noted by Bair –, we are carefully informed about the English essay prizes that a contemporary of Beckett’s remembered him being awarded at Portora and are elsewhere presented with the (unattributed) image of Beckett ‘realizing, at the age of eleven or twelve, that what he liked best was English composition’.⁸⁵ By stressing Beckett’s particular fondness for English composition, Knowlson establishes the idea of English – and English Literature – as being at the heart of Beckett’s *imaginaire*, his interior world. A similar aim may be discerned behind Knowlson’s decision to end one of the sub-sections of that chapter devoted to ‘Beckett’s Schooldays’ by recounting that story which has already been mentioned, according to which the young Beckett and a friend, George Thompson, one day ‘stopped to sit under a tree and learned by heart the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’’.⁸⁶ Beckett, this image tells us, was, from his earliest days, shaped by the great works of the English literary canon. Seen in this light, his post-War decision to set aside English in favour of French, a language whose poets he is not reported to have read under a tree as a schoolboy, seems all the more remarkable, and all the more like the abandonment of a deeper, even an essential, part of himself, in favour of something less personal and less intimate – a ‘kind of art work’, and a language ‘foreign’ in more ways than one. The discussion of Beckett’s earliest engagement with French that has been offered in this chapter serves to demonstrate, however, that French *was* an intimate language for Beckett, one that had a place in his life from his earliest youth, and one about which he was clearly already passionate when he entered TCD at the age of seventeen.

Obviously, we cannot know whether Beckett’s youthful passion for French yet extended to French Literature, we cannot know if he ever recited French poetry under a tree, nor even whether or not he may have recited French poetry in a classroom. What we can know is that, if English was important to Beckett from an early age, so too was French; if Beckett’s later vocation as an English-language writer had a childhood prehistory of early passion, so too did his later vocation as a French-language writer. Having now examined that more than decade-long pre-history of Beckett’s engagement with French prior to entering TCD, and having in the process become aware of the roots of Beckett’s abiding passion for French, we may now move on to study the next stage in his engagement with French – above all with French Literature –, namely his time at TCD and through the years beyond.

⁸⁵ *DTF*, 32 – For details of the English essay prizes Beckett is reported to have won at Portora, see *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁶ The same story is recounted by Anthony Cronin in his biography (*viz.* Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, 47-48).

PART I: Situating French

Chapter 2

Reading/Writing: Beckett's French at Trinity and Beyond (1923-1937)

The years 1923—1937 were of fundamental and enduring importance to Beckett as both an individual and a writer. At times a fruitful period of personal success – one need only think of his years at TCD, which saw him awarded a Foundation Scholarship and, subsequently, that Large Gold Medal that he received in recognition of having graduated first among the First Class Moderators in Arts¹ –, at times these years were also a period of deep personal doubt and intense unhappiness that eventually led Beckett to spend time in London, undergoing a lengthy course of psychoanalysis in the hopes of finding release from the problems that plagued him.² This was also, above all, a period that saw Beckett deepen his experience of the world – even before the move from Dublin to Paris in 1937, Beckett had already lived in France for a number of years and spent a year travelling through Germany³ –, and evolve from a student and critic of literature to a writer, albeit an unsuccessful one.

In addition to being a period of key importance in Beckett's life, the years 1923-1937 are also a complex one, a time during which Beckett's poetics began to take shape and which saw the occurrence of events that would prove of great importance in years to come.⁴ It would thus be quite impossible for a single chapter – or even a single thesis – to provide a comprehensive treatment of this period. With this in mind, this chapter takes as its particular focus Beckett's engagement with French Literature during these years. More particularly, and in keeping with the aims of this part of the thesis as outlined in the Introduction, this chapter is intended, not to entirely revise current critical thinking on Beckett's engagement with French

¹ *The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1928—1929*. (Dublin: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1928), 505 – At the time, all Moderators who placed in the First Class were awarded a Gold Medal, while the Large Gold Medal was reserved for the Moderator placing first of the First Class (viz. *Ibid.*, 497).

² For this period of psychoanalysis, see *DTF*, 171-197

³ For Beckett's time as a *lecteur* at the ENS, see *DTF*, 87-119; For Beckett's travels through Germany, and their role in his developing poetics, see Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), 1-36, *passim*.

⁴ It was, for example, during this period that Beckett met James Joyce, while a *lecteur* at the ENS; it was also during these years that Beckett's father, William Beckett, died – For more on Beckett's meeting with Joyce, see *DTF*, 97-103; For more on this death, and its importance to Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s, see Part II, Chapter 2.

Literature in this period of his life, but rather to shed fresh light on particular aspects of this engagement over these years, as well as to correct certain misassumptions that have entered the critical discourse around this particular topic. In this way, the present chapter will further Part I's broader focus on assisting researchers to make better use of the existing critical record on the subject of Beckett's French by acting as a supplement to more comprehensive treatments of these years that have already been offered by other scholars – chiefly James Knowlson, but also Veronica Bălă⁵ –, treatments to which readers interested in aspects of these years not covered in this chapter are directed.

I. FRENCH LITERATURE AT TCD (1923-27)

During Beckett's time at TCD, the course in French that he pursued was overwhelmingly devoted to literature. Admittedly, this is not the sense that one is afforded by the overview of the course provided by the *Calendar* of the time. As set out by the *Dublin University Calendar* for the year in which Beckett began his studies at TCD, the French curriculum was tripartite in its aims:

The studies in this department fall into the following three divisions:

1. Practical exercises in the use of the spoken and written languages: Pronunciation, Conversation, Composition.
2. Theoretical Study of the French Language: Grammar of Modern French, History of the French language.
3. History of French Literature, and detailed study of selected Literary Works.⁶

Although the description of studies offered in the *Calendar* establishes no explicit hierarchy between the three elements of the curriculum, and thereby leaves the possibility open that each of these subjects was accorded equal consideration, the same cannot be said for the title of the broader Honor Course and Moderatorship within the context of which Beckett studied French as an undergraduate. The course that Beckett followed during his time at TCD, and the Moderatorship that he was finally awarded upon graduation, is listed in the *Calendar*, not as 'Modern Languages'

⁵ For Knowlson's treatment of this period of Beckett's life, see *DTF*, 47-77; For an extensive study of Beckett's reading habits during the years 1923-1931, and how this reading – including his reading of French Literature – affected his later writing, see Veronica Bălă's 2014 thesis, 'Samuel Beckett's Student Library and the Modern Novel' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2014).

⁶ *The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1923–1924.*, 109 – The *Calendar* further stipulates that '[s]tudents are expected to make themselves acquainted with the outlines of the History of France so far as it bears on the literary period studied in each Term' (*ibid.*).

but, rather, as 'Modern Literature'.⁷ The emphasis upon matters literary over matters strictly linguistic that such a title implies is confirmed upon closer consideration of the texts set for examination during the first three years of Beckett's four-year degree. As outlined by the relevant *Calendars* for the years of Beckett's time at the University, it is evident that, its ostensibly tripartite aims notwithstanding, the French course in Modern Literature was devoted almost entirely to the study of literary texts during Beckett's time in TCD.⁸ Recognition of the degree to which the course of study in French that Beckett undertook at TCD was so heavily weighted towards the study of literary texts is important because it serves to correct a tendency, already noted in Knowlson's biographical portrait of the young Beckett and observable elsewhere in recent Anglophone criticism of Beckett's writing, to lay particular stress on the

⁷ *The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1923—1924*, x – The naming system of the courses in TCD during Beckett's time there was notably complicated. As such, and in the interests of clarifying how this complication impacts upon the point made above concerning the centrality of literature, it is worth elucidating certain aspects of this system: Although 'Modern Literature' was indeed the title of Beckett's Moderatorship, and the Honor Course that he followed throughout his time at TCD, the *Calendar* shows that the broader School to which Beckett belonged was the 'School of Modern Languages and Literature' (*Ibid.*, 3). The Scholarship for which he successfully competed in 1926, meanwhile, is listed as a 'Scholarship in Modern Languages' (*The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1925—1926*. [Dublin: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925], 157). By its very nature, the system of Foundation Scholarship is rooted in the Statutes of the University and thus immensely difficult to amend. (Admission of women to the rank of Scholar, for example, required the creation of an entirely new class of scholarship, namely: Non-Foundation Scholarships for Women [viz. *Ibid.*, 155].) As such, it seems likely that the name of the Scholarship which Beckett was awarded in 1926 derived from the fact that, up until 1925, candidates for the Scholarship in Modern Languages were required to 'compete in two of the three languages, French, German, Italian' (*The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1924—1925*. [Dublin: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1924], 160). In other words, candidates could only compete for Scholarship if they were students of at least two modern languages; students of English Literature, meanwhile, were prevented from competing for Scholarship. The fact that it was only in the academic year 1925-26 – that is, the year in which Beckett sat the competitive examination – that the terms of the Scholarship were altered to allow students to compete 'in two of the six languages, English, French, German, Irish, Italian, Spanish' (*The Dublin University Calendar, for the year 1925—1926*, 157) raises the intriguing possibility that Beckett may have been led to turn away from English Literature and to focus on French and Italian on the assumption that he would be required to compete in these languages were he to pursue a Foundation Scholarship. Naturally, surviving evidence obliges this suggestion to remain firmly within the realm of pure speculation.

⁸ Of the 68 texts that were set for examination during Beckett's course of study in French, only three were not literary texts or selections of works by authors considered part of the French literary tradition, such as Montaigne and Sainte-Beuve. These three 'non-literary' texts, moreover, were uniformly works of literary criticism or literary history, namely: Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française*; Émile Faguet's *Dix-huitième siècle*; and Rudmose-Brown's own *A Short History of French Literature* – For details of the set texts studied by Beckett as part of his course in French at TCD, see Appendix II (a).

grounding that Beckett received in the English literary tradition while a student at TCD. This tendency is clearly observable in Mark Byron's contribution to *Samuel Beckett in Context* where, despite acknowledging that Beckett's 'study of English literature in the earlier phases of life was complemented by that of other modern European languages', Byron is particularly keen to underline the role played by English Literature in Beckett's life up until the late 1930s.⁹ When discussing Beckett's eventual turn to French, for example, Byron comments that

Beckett's shift to French as his preferred language of composition in the late 1930s is reflected in his reading predilections at the time: having *internalised an English literary sensibility at university and by his own devices* – a sensibility particularly shaped by Renaissance drama and eighteenth-century fiction – Beckett immersed himself in the literary heritage of his adopted home on his way to becoming, in his way, an authentically French writer.¹⁰

Naturally, it would be wrong to entirely deny the value of the grounding in English Literature that Beckett received as a student of TCD – a grounding which stretched from Chaucer to Tennyson, and beyond. To do so would be to ignore the profound degree to which Beckett's writings, especially his earliest writings, are marked by the English literary canon that he encountered as an undergraduate.¹¹ At the same time, however, it is equally wrong to imply, as does Byron, that it was only in the late 1930s that Beckett's began to 'immers[e] himself in the literary heritage' of France in earnest. On the contrary, if the two years that Beckett spent studying English Literature at TCD provided him with an 'English literary sensibility', his *four* years of studying French must certainly have provided him with a *French* literary sensibility. Indeed, the fact that he finally chose to abandon the study of English Literature, while continuing to pursue French throughout his undergraduate career – and even during his brief, and eventually abortive, post-graduate career¹² –, confirms that Beckett's

⁹ Mark Byron, 'English Literature', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 218 – In Byron's text too, it may be noted, we find that image of the young Beckett devoting himself to learning Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' while a schoolboy at Portora (*Ibid.*, 219).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 226 – Emphasis mine.

¹¹ The very title of Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, is intended to echo Tennyson's own 'A Dream of Fair Women'.

¹² Following Beckett's graduation, and in fulfilment of the requirements attendant on an award of £50 which he had received, he wrote a research essay on Pierre-Jean Jouve, Jules Romains and *Unanimisme* (*viz. DTF*, 75-77). Although the research essay has not survived, traces of his engagement with these poets, and with the doctrines of *Unanimisme*, are to be found in some of his early writings, including 'Assumption' (*viz. CSP*, 4). Later still, the doctoral project that Beckett proposed while a *lecteur* at the *École normale supérieure* – namely, a study of James Joyce and Marcel Proust (*viz. DTF*, 100-101) – again shows his commitment to French Literature and, more broadly, to European Literature, over any decidedly 'English' literary tradition.

interest in French Literature was more profound than his interest in English Literature. This being so, it is evidently unwise to privilege the idea of Beckett's having developed an 'English literary sensibility' at TCD, when we know him to have devoted himself with, not merely equal but even greater, care to the study of French literary texts during his time there, and to have accorded many of the French texts he studied a central place in his early, English-language writings. After all, if echoes of Tennyson are to be heard amidst the allusive polyphony of *Dream*, so too are Balzac, Gide, Lautrémont, Mallarmé, Musset, Perrault, Rimbaud, and Beckett's beloved Racine, amongst others.¹³ At the same time, of course, it is not enough simply to recognize that Beckett developed a French literary sensibility while at TCD. Rather, the question that must be asked is: What *kind* of French literary sensibility did Beckett develop during his years as a student of French at TCD? And how did this sensibility manifest itself in later years? Given that Beckett's course of study was overwhelmingly focussed on French Literature, it would surely be inaccurate to suggest that *every* work studied by Beckett stayed with him – and unhelpful to suggest that every author he studied had an equal impact on his own writing – it is nonetheless surprising to note just how many works *did* leave a lasting impression on Beckett. In this regard, and to get a sense of the degree to which Beckett's years at TCD provided him with a particularly French literary sensibility that he carried with him throughout his life, it is helpful to consider the manner in which even texts that Beckett encountered on the course and which we do not now generally associate with his writing left a lasting impression on him. For the purposes of the present chapter, I would like to briefly focus attention on two such works, namely: Alfred de Vigny's *La Mort du loup*, and the Medieval *chante-fable Aucassin et Nicolette*.

It may be safely assumed that neither of these works immediately spring to mind when one thinks of Samuel Beckett. Certainly, no article has thus far been devoted to the presence of either of these works within Beckett's writing. Both works did, however, feature on the undergraduate French course that Beckett pursued at TCD and Beckett would thus have studied both works closely.¹⁴ That Beckett retained

¹³ *viz.* *Dream*, 119-120, 46, 137, 31, 70, 77, 22, 144 – This is merely an indicative list, for fuller details of the various instances at which these authors, and others, are evoked in *Dream*, see John Pilling, *A Companion to Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, in *JoBS* (Vol. 12, Nos 1-2 – 2003), *passim*.

¹⁴ For more information, see 'Appendix II (a): Set Texts For French During Beckett's Undergraduate Degree (1923-27)' – Although *La Mort du loup* is not listed as a set text, it is included as part of E. Allison Peers' anthology of the poet's work, which was a set text for Senior Freshman students (*viz.* Alfred de Vigny, E. Allison Peers' [ed.], *Poèmes choisis*, 72-74). This, it may be noted in passing, is the same anthology that seems likely to have provided Beckett with his (fleeting) introduction to the work of

some memory of these works beyond his initial exposure to them is confirmed by the fact that both Vigny and 'Nicolette' are briefly mentioned in *Dream*.¹⁵ For a work or author to have been accorded fleeting mention in *Dream*, however, does not tell us very much: Beckett's earliest novel is, in important ways, little more than a tissue of literary references, including references to a number of works and authors whom Beckett is not known ever to have read.¹⁶ As such, the fact that neither Vigny's *La Mort du loup* nor *Aucassin et Nicolette* appear to be explicitly mentioned anywhere else in Beckett's literary writings would seem to suggest that his engagement with them was, at best, superficial. By the same token, his seemingly superficial engagement with these works would appear to confirm that, a few rare exceptions aside – most notably, an author such as Racine, whose lasting place in Beckett's *imaginaire* will be discussed in more detail below –, Beckett's study of French at TCD contributed little of any profound or enduring importance to his literary sensibility. In actual fact, however, there is evidence that both Vigny's poem and *Aucassin et Nicolette* remained important reference points for Beckett long after he had left TCD.

In the case of the Medieval *chante-fable*, the evidence for this importance is relatively slim. There was, for example, no copy of this text to be found in Beckett's library at the time of his death.¹⁷ There is equally scant reference to this tale in Beckett's early literary output. In addition to those explicit references that are to be found in *Dream*, C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski have suggested that the scene in *Murphy* which depicts Beckett's protagonist walking 'through the long grass among

the Spanish poet Espronceda – his poetry is mentioned as evincing a melancholic tendency similar to that found in Vigny's own (*viz. Ibid.*, xxii) –, who features alongside Vigny in *Dream* (*viz. Dream*, 62), and whose work Beckett does not appear to have engaged with directly at any point in his life.

¹⁵ *viz.* '[Belacqua] declined the darkest passages of Schopenhauer, Vigny, Leopardi, Espronceda, Inge, Hatiz, Saadi, Espronceda, Becquer and the other Epimethei' (*Dream*, 62 – Emphasis mine); 'Afraid of staining the gown I caught it up, like *Nicolette* in the dew, and tiptoed over to the foot of the stair' (*Ibid.*, 84 – Emphasis mine).

¹⁶ The key examples in this respect would seem to be *Dream*'s references to the Persian poets 'Hatiz [*sic*] [and] Saadi' (*op. cit.*, 62). This is the only reference to these two figures that is to be found anywhere in Beckett's writing – published or unpublished – and it thus seems likely that his only encounter with them was restricted to a work wherein they were mentioned together, such as the entry on 'Mysticism' in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*viz. Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. [Cambridge: CUP, 1910], 'Mysticism'). The possibility of Beckett's coming across these names via the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry is all the more possible given that mysticism was a subject in which he was keenly interested, as attested by the notes taken from W. R. Inge's *Christian Mysticism* that are to be found in the *Dream* Notebook (*viz. DN*, [672]-[687]). Inge, of course, also features as part of those 'Epimethei' whose 'darkest passages' Belacqua declines (*viz. Dream*, 62).

¹⁷ In their study of this library, Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon note that '[t]he earliest period of French literature represented in Beckett's library is the fifteenth century' (Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 43).

the trees' at dawn, trying and failing to recall the faces of a number of people in his life – including his lover Celia – is intended to echo a scene from the *chante-fable* where Nicolette 'steals out before dawn to see her imprisoned lover'.¹⁸ While such evidence would already demonstrate that Beckett's interest in this Medieval tale remained with him for a number of years after leaving TCD, the most interesting reference to *Aucassin et Nicolette* is not to be found until 1952. This evidence comes by way of a letter to Jacoba Van Velde in which Beckett, seemingly responding to a query from Van Velde on the subject of ill-starred love in literature, places *Aucassin et Nicolette* alongside Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* amongst those literary works of which '[il] pense tout de suite'.¹⁹ Both the fact that *Aucassin et Nicolette* was one of the works Beckett immediately thought of and the illustrious company in which he placed this text – Fontane's *Effi Briest* was one of Beckett's favourite novels²⁰ –, testifies to the high esteem in which he continued to hold the Medieval *chante-fable*, even in the 1950s. By extension, it suggests that a more careful study of Beckett's later works might reveal still further traces of Nicolette and her lover.

The case of Vigny's poem is even more striking, since this text appears to have remained of key importance to Beckett up to the final weeks of his life. Evidence for that text's lasting importance to Beckett is to be found in a story recounted to James Knowlson by Édith Fournier, who knew Beckett intimately for many years, and translated a number of his texts in to French. Following on from conversations with Fournier, Knowlson noted down a number of stories that had struck him during their conversations. One of these related to the poems that Beckett recited during the last weeks of his life:

First of all, one of the things that he quoted was Vigny's *Le Loup* [*La Mort du loup*] which he said was – and he quoted it by heart – and he said was 'un peu grandiloquent'. He also quoted Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, a familiar kind of quotation for him.²¹

Although Beckett may have been moved to describe Vigny's poem as 'un peu grandiloquent' when he recited it in the Le Tiers Temps nursing home, the fact that he still knew the poem, and even remained capable of reciting it by heart after so many

¹⁸ '*Aucassin et Nicolette*', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* – For this scene in *Murphy*, see *Murphy*, 156-158

¹⁹ *LSB II*, 342 (SB to Jacoba Van Velde [25th November, 1952])

²⁰ In the same letter, Beckett refers to Fontane's novel as 'formidable' (*Ibid.*), and Van Hulle and Nixon note that Beckett 'returned to [Fontane's *Effi Briest*], somewhat obsessively, on several occasions during his life' (Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 98).

²¹ JEK A/7/45 ('Notes made on conversations with Édith Fournier, Barbara Bray and Alfred Péron's son, Alexis') – Square brackets in original.

years, confirms the lasting impact that it made on him. Even more significant is the fact that Vigny's poem should have been recited alongside Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'. As previously remarked, the story of Beckett's boyhood affection for Keats has served to confirm the idea of Beckett as having been, from his earliest youth, deeply engaged with writers of the English literary canon. What we find at the end of his life though is that Vigny too remained with him. His French literary sensibility, in short, remained every bit as significant as those English-language poems that critics have long recognised as being a foundational element of his *imaginaire*.

The examples of Vigny's poem and *Aucassin et Nicolette* that have been cited here are doubly important since they serve to do much more than merely confirm the lasting impact of Beckett's exposure to French Literature during his time at TCD. Rather, they serve as a vital reminder that Beckett's engagement with the French literary canon was far richer than critical discussions of Beckett's writing have at times allowed. An examination of the sort of articles that appeared on the subject of Beckett and French Literature during the earliest decades of Beckett scholarship suggests that, for a long time, critics remained fixated upon a small number of central figures – most notably Marcel Proust and René Descartes, both of whom were the subject of multiple publications by scholars of Beckett's writing.²² Thankfully, the situation has changed greatly in recent years, and one need only think of recent studies exploring Beckett's previously-overlooked engagement with writers such as Maurice Scève and Pierre de Ronsard to recognise this to be the case.²³ The examples of Beckett's longstanding affection for Vigny's *La Mort du loup* and *Aucassin et Nicolette* suggest that there remains much that might be gained from attentive study of Beckett's time as student of French at TCD, and good reason to assume that careful examination of the manner

²² Evidence for this overemphasis on the purportedly tutelary figures of Proust and Descartes is readily available in the form of the records of the *MLA International Bibliography* <http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk/home/home_mla.jsp> [accessed: 7th September, 2017]: Restricting ourselves to scholarly studies and publications (i.e. books, book articles, dissertation abstracts, and journal articles) that appeared during Beckett's lifetime, we find that 24 such works dealt with Beckett's relationship to Marcel Proust and 8 dealt with Beckett and Descartes. Over the same period, meanwhile, only one publication – namely, Marjorie Perloff's 'Lucent and Inescapable Rhythms: Metrical "Choice" and Historical Formation' – is recorded to have touched on Beckett's engagement with Arthur Rimbaud, a figure who was known to be of importance to Beckett. Obviously, the figures provided by the *MLA International Bibliography* cannot be taken as entirely accurate, as it is entirely possible that some studies may have been overlooked. Imperfect though they may be, these figures are nonetheless reliable enough to be taken as indicative of wider trends.

²³ For Beckett and Scève, see Thomas Hunkeler, 'Samuel Beckett lecteur de Scève', *Fabula: Colloques en ligne – Maurice Scève, Délie, Object de la plus haulte vertu* <<http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document1809.php>> [accessed: 1st March, 2017]; for Beckett and Ronsard, see James Knowlson, 'A note on Ronsard, Beckett's *Dream* and his early poem "Return to the Vestry"', in *JoBS* (Vol. 25, No. 2 - 2016), 243-243.

in which his engagement with French Literature at this point in his life may have trickled into his writing will be amply rewarded.

With this in mind, and prior to considering one previously unremarked aspect of how Beckett's engagement with French Literature after he left TCD filtered into his pre-War English-language writing, I would like to turn to a key aspect of the manner in which Beckett was introduced to French Literature during his years at TCD and how this appears to have affected his subsequent literary production. For it must be recalled that Beckett's study of French Literature was not pursued autodidactically. On the contrary, he was guided in his studies by lecturers and professors who then worked in the university. Of these individuals, none had a more lasting impact than the then Professor of Romance Languages, Thomas Brown Rudmose-Brown.

When considering the impact of the years that Beckett devoted to the study of French Literature while at TCD, the role played by Thomas Rudmose-Brown must be given particular consideration. In his capacity as Professor of Romance Languages, Rudmose-Brown did more to shape Beckett's engagement with French Literature than any other individual: Not only did he devise the course of study that Beckett followed, he also contributed to shaping Beckett's approach to this literature through the lectures he gave on texts covered as part of the course, as well as by way of his own *A Short History of French Literature* (1923), which was a set text for students of French during Beckett's time as an undergraduate at TCD.²⁴ Taken together, these factors demonstrate just how profoundly the course of study that Beckett undertook was influenced by Rudmose-Brown's own approach to literary art and his own particular conception of the French literary canon.

That Rudmose-Brown had a determining influence on the young Beckett has long been acknowledged. James Knowlson, for example, rightly notes that Rudmose-Brown 'strongly influenced Beckett's own tastes in literature and undoubtedly affected his attitudes to life'.²⁵ Judging by historical accounts of Rudmose-Brown's tenure as Professor of Romance Language, as well as both personal accounts and critical dismissals of the man himself, Rudmose-Brown was far from being an irreproachable scholar of the Romance languages as whole, or even an unimpeachable scholar of the French language.²⁶ His particular skills appear to have been literary and

²⁴ T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900* (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland Ltd., 1923)

²⁵ *DTF*, 49

²⁶ In their history of TCD, R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb note that, despite his title as Professor of Romance Languages, Rudmose-Brown 'never laid claim to any deep knowledge of [Romance] languages other than French and Provençal' (R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592-1952: An academic history* [Cambridge:

it thus seems probable that it was as a literary scholar – rather than as a scholar of language *per se* – and as an individual that Rudmose-Brown would have most impressed the young Beckett. And impress the young Beckett Rudmose-Brown most certainly did; Knowlson records that, as a student, Beckett ‘was highly intrigued and vastly entertained by some of his Professor’s more outrageous idiosyncrasies and fiercely held prejudices, as well as flattered by the interest that he [took] in him’.²⁷ Indeed, although Beckett’s opinion of Rudmose-Brown may have changed somewhat in later years, as he came to recognise something both of Rudmose-Brown’s failings and the sense that Rudmose-Brown himself had of them, Beckett continued to remember his former teacher with admiration and affection.²⁸ That Beckett should have continued to think of Rudmose-Brown fondly is unsurprising. Rudmose-Brown – who was known to play favourites²⁹ – quickly took a marked shine to Beckett and worked exceedingly hard to assist him, both while a student and during later years.³⁰

If Rudmose-Brown undoubtedly did much for Beckett personally and professionally – Beckett himself recalled how Rudmose-Brown ‘opened all kinds of

CUP, 1982], 458). In an interview with James Knowlson, meanwhile, Georges Belmont (*né* Pelorson) reports Alfred Péron as having told him that Rudmose-Brown ‘had the reputation of not liking French lecturers because they knew French too well, and his French was a bit “retardé”’ (JEK A/7/13 [‘Interview with Belmont, Georges’]). Elsewhere, the weakness of Rudmose-Brown’s command of French – or, at the very least, his lack of appreciation for the nuances of the language – is implied by H.C. Lancaster’s criticism of his interpretation of the possessive ‘son’ as employed by Corneille in his *La Galerie du Palais*, which Rudmose-Brown edited, see ‘La Galerie du Palais’, in *Modern Language Notes* (Vol. 37, No. 2 – February, 1922), 118.

²⁷ DTF, 49

²⁸ Evidence for the admiration Beckett felt for Rudmose-Brown comes to us from Vivian Mercier, himself a student of Rudmose-Brown, who records ‘being surprised by the intensity of Beckett’s admiration for [their] former French professor’ (Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett*, 34). Beckett made his affection for his former teacher equally clear to Roger Little, remarking that: ‘Much needed light came to me from “Ruddy”, from his teaching and friendship. I think of him often and always with affection and gratitude’ (SB to Roger Little *qtd* in DTF, 48).

²⁹ Eileen Williams, a contemporary of Beckett’s at TCD, recalled that Rudmose-Brown ‘took a fancy to somebody and that person was everything at the time and the rest of us were very small fry’ (*Ibid.*, 48-48).

³⁰ In fact, even following Beckett’s resignation from the lecturing position at TCD, which one would have imagined enough to sour their relationship, Rudmose-Brown appears to have remained very supportive of Beckett. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 1932, for example, Beckett, short on money and supplementing hand-outs from his father by giving grinds to students, notes that ‘Ruddy has been very good recommending [him]’ to prospective clients, thus moving Beckett to ‘wish there was no P.B. in Dream’ (*LSB I*, 121 – SB to TMG [13th September, 1932]). Elsewhere in his correspondence with MacGreevy, Beckett signals his ongoing relationship with Rudmose-Brown by recalling dropping in on, or speaking with his former mentor (*viz.* *LSB I*, 351) and even much later, in 1938, Beckett notes to TMG how he has recently received a ‘[l]ong affectionate letter from Ruddy’ (*LSB I*, 590 – SB to TMG [21st January, 1938]).

doors for [him]³¹ – it is equally important to note Beckett’s intellectual debt to his mentor. Some aspects of this debt have long been recognised, including the opportunity that he provided to Beckett – and, indeed, to all his students – of engaging with what were then radically contemporary works by authors such as Marcel Proust and André Gide.³² As noted by Roger Little, Rudmose-Brown’s focus on contemporary French Literature constituted something of an exception within the academic world of the time and the introduction to French Literature which Beckett was afforded under Rudmose-Brown’s tutelage thus differed substantially from what he would have experienced had he gone to a different institution:

One of the most exceptional features of Rudmose-Brown’s scholarship is his interest in contemporary French writers. At the time, the approach to language learning was essentially philological and to literature historical, not to say archaeological. The contemporary was considered the prerogative of journalists and *littérateurs*. The fact that Rudmose-Brown “taught Vielé-Griffen, Le Cordonnel [*sic* for Le Cardonnel], and Laraud, Fargue, and Jammes” (Bair, p. 42)...was therefore highly unusual, something we may overlook now that the pendulum has swung so far (and often so wildly) in favour of the near-contemporary.³³

In this respect, Beckett’s introduction to an author such as Proust – an author who would have an important role to play in his earliest career as a writer by providing him with his earliest solo publication³⁴ – may be viewed as a direct consequence of the fact that his study of French Literature was pursued in accordance with how this literature was envisioned by Rudmose-Brown. Rudmose-Brown’s predilection for the contemporary did not blind him to the appeal of canonical writers, however, and it has also been recognised that Rudmose-Brown fostered in the young Beckett a lifelong love for figures who would be of importance to his later writing, such as Pierre de Ronsard and, above all, Jean Racine.³⁵ By the same token, Rudmose-Brown also provided Beckett with that marked aversion for Corneille that he would carry with him into later life.³⁶ In the realm of ideas, meanwhile, a number of Rudmose-Brown’s positions on social issues have clear parallels to those adopted by Beckett – particularly the young Beckett. A striking example of such a parallel is to be found in Rudmose-Brown’s rejection of subservience to dogma of any kind, whether of Church, State, or otherwise: ‘I accept no dogma and deny none’, he wrote in his unpublished

³¹ SB to Lawrence Harvey *qtd* in *DTF*, 48

³² Gide’s *Isabelle* (1921), for example, was scarcely six years old when Beckett would have studied it as part of his final Moderatorship Examination in 1927.

³³ Roger Little, ‘Beckett’s Mentor, Rudmose-Brown: Sketch for a Portrait’, in *Irish University Review* (Vol. 14, No. 1 – Spring, 1984), 36 – *Sic* in original.

³⁴ *viz.* Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931)

³⁵ *DTF*, 49

³⁶ *Ibid.*

memoirs, where he also characterised himself as ‘neither Fascist nor Communist, Imperialist nor Socialist’.³⁷ Equally, his corresponding conviction that ‘[e]very one of us much strive, unflinchingly, to be himself’ is one by which Beckett himself may be seen to have lived when he abandoned the security of a career in academia in favour something as-yet-unknown but which would be actively desired, rather than actively despised.³⁸

Although this last aspect of Rudmose-Brown’s influence admittedly has little to do with Beckett’s study of French Literature, it is important to recognise that Beckett’s study of literature under the guidance of Rudmose-Brown had consequences that reached beyond the realms of his appreciation for literary art. Indeed, while Knowlson is right to stress the degree to which Beckett’s ‘attitudes to life’ were affected by Rudmose-Brown, it is equally important to acknowledge that Rudmose-Brown’s influence on Beckett’s own attitude to art – that is to say his approach to art and to artistic creation, rather than merely his ‘taste’ for, say, Racine over Corneille – was more profound, and more lasting, than has generally been recognised.³⁹ The key evidence for Rudmose-Brown’s enduring influence on Beckett’s vision of art is to be found in those notes taken by students of the lectures that Beckett himself gave in TCD, during Michaelmas Term 1931.

Towards the end of what was intended to be a two-year post as Lecturer in French at TCD, one of the courses for which Beckett was responsible was ‘Racine and the Modern Novel’ and the hazards of history have permitted the notes taken by

³⁷ T. B. Rudmose-Brown, unpublished memoirs *qtd* in *DTF*, 50 – It is an indication of the degree to which Rudmose-Brown allowed his personal attitudes to filter into his teaching that traces of this rejection of popular dogmas are to be found in questions that he set for examinations during his tenure as Professor of French. In 1929, for instance, one of the titles for that essay which all candidates for Scholarships in Modern Languages were required to write was on ‘The limits of the functions of the state in its relations to the individual’ (Professor Rudmose-Brown, ‘English Essay (Trinity Term, 1929) – Scholarships in Modern Languages’, in *University of Dublin, Trinity College: Honor Examination Papers, 1929*. [English. French. German. Irish. Italian. Spanish.], [n.p.]). In 1930, meanwhile, candidates for the Dompierre-Chaufepié Prize were required to treat in French one of a list of topics including the following: ‘The best government is the one which charges you the least for leaving you alone’ (Professor Rudmose-Brown, ‘Dompierre-Chaufepié Prize’, in *University of Dublin, Trinity College: Honor Examination Papers, 1930*. [English. French. German. Irish. Italian. Spanish.], [n.p.]).

³⁸ *DTF*, 51

³⁹ A partial exception to this would be Ann Beer, who has noted that the style and voice adopted by Beckett in his early literary criticism sounds, at times, like ‘almost a parody’ of Rudmose-Brown’s own purple style (*viz.* Ann Beer, ‘The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett’s Art’ [Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987], 106).

some of Beckett's students who followed this course to come down to the present day.⁴⁰ In recent years, these sets of notes have been seized upon by critics for the insight that they are held to offer into Beckett's *own* thinking on art and literature in the early 1930s. In presenting her study of Rachel Burrows' notes, for example, Brigitte Le Juez comments that Burrows' student notebook 'méritait d'être connu d'un public plus large...parce qu'il laisse transparaître *une vision de la littérature propre à Beckett*, dont certaines préceptes se retrouveront plus tard dans ses écrits'.⁴¹ Similarly, presenting the extracts from Grace McKinley's notes that appear as part of *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, the editors of that volume speak of how 'Beckett's views on Racine [i.e. those recorded in McKinley's notes] were then highly idiosyncratic'.⁴² It is, however, not necessarily the case that the vision of Racine which we find in Beckett's lectures is 'idiosyncratic'. On the contrary, close comparison of Beckett's lectures, as recorded by his students, with the opinions of Rudmose-Brown, as these survive in his *Short History of French Literature*, reveals striking similarities of approach and focus, similarities which suggest that Beckett's vision of Racine, and of theatre more largely, was shaped by Rudmose-Brown in enduring ways.⁴³

A particularly eloquent example of the filiation between ideas expressed by Rudmose-Brown and one of Beckett's supposed 'idiosyncrasies', as highlighted by

⁴⁰ Those notes taken by Rachel Burrows – by far the most complete set of notes on Beckett's lectures on 'Racine and the Modern Novel' – are now held by TCD, where they may be consulted on microfilm (MIC 60). Burrows' notes are also quoted extensively as part of Brigitte Le Juez's *Beckett avant la lettre* (Paris: Grasset, 2007), which proposes itself as something of an 'edition' of Burrows' notes. The University of Reading, meanwhile, holds notes by both Grace McKinley (JEK A/4/2) – from which the material on Racine was printed as part of *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett* (*viz. op. cit.*, 306-313) – and Leslie Daiken (JEK A/2/7/1).

⁴¹ Brigitte Le Juez, *Beckett avant la lettre*, 11-12 – Emphasis mine.

⁴² 'Appendix: Beckett on Racine', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 307

⁴³ In her article 'Beckett's Racinian Fictions', Angela Moorjani has also noted the potential impact of Rudmose-Brown's vision of Racine upon Beckett. She acknowledges, for example, that '[i]n hitching together the most classical of French dramatists with the modern novel in his 1931 lectures, [Beckett] was following the lead of his mentor Thomas Rudmose-Brown' (Angela Moorjani, 'Beckett's Racinian Fictions: "Racine and the Modern Novel" Revisited', in Angela Moorjani, Danièle de Ruyter, Dúnlaith Bird, and Sjef Houppermans [eds], *SBT/A 24: Early Modern Beckett/Beckett et le début de l'ère moderne – Beckett Between/Beckett entre deux* [Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2012], 41). Elsewhere, she rightly comments that, in preparing for his lectures, Beckett 'no doubt relied in part on his undergraduate notes [i.e. lectures that would have been given by Rudmose-Brown] and secondary sources including 'Rudmose-Brown's edition of *Andromaque* and the pages on Racine in his mentor's *Short History of French Literature*' (*Ibid.*, 43). Although she acknowledges the potential importance of Rudmose-Brown on Beckett's vision of Racine as expressed in these lectures, Moorjani does not draw attention to the manner in which aspects of Beckett's thinking beyond literature may have been affected by the influence of Rudmose-Brown, as will be done here.

James and Elizabeth Knowlson, concerns Beckett's focus on the use of light in *Phèdre*. In *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, we read that:

Beckett's concern with light and dark contrasts in his late plays also seems to echo the psychological oppositions and their physical manifestations in the stage lighting that *he* saw in *Phèdre*, as well as *his* fascination with the tradition of spotlight painting in art.⁴⁴

In proposing that this material provides us with privileged insight into Beckett's own perspective as they do here, James and Elizabeth Knowlson are echoing remarks made by Grace McKinley, the student whose notes are cited in *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*. Years later, she recalled: 'One of [Beckett's] favourite phrases was "Phèdre is bathed in white light" [...] It was a dark play. And all the light is on the front of the stage. *Beckett* seemed very conscious of lighting. *He* had a very acute sense of dramatic effects'.⁴⁵ While Beckett may have been personally struck by the use of light in *Phèdre*, and while he certainly appears to have been moved to make use of a similar conceit in his later plays – *Happy Days / Oh les beaux jours*, particularly⁴⁶ –, the comments that Beckett made about the use of light in *Phèdre* do not, in fact, appear to be unique to him. On the contrary, these comments on the place that light holds in the staging of *Phèdre* are strikingly similar to remarks that Beckett would have been familiar with from his own time as an undergraduate, when he would have encountered precisely the same views advanced by Rudmose-Brown.

McKinley's notes, for example, record Beckett as having evoked 'Phèdre standing in marble white gown in front of marble pictures – tall and slim with grey eyes with corn coloured hair twisted in ropes round her head – "all bathed in white light"'.⁴⁷ Obviously, it would be tempting to read this focus on light in the terms suggested by James and Elizabeth Knowlson and to see it as evidence of '*Beckett's own concern with light and dark contrasts in his late plays [...] as well as his fascination with the tradition of spotlight painting in art*'. Read in such a way, this passage becomes an insight into a uniquely Beckettian perspective, that '*vision de la littérature propre à Beckett*' which Le Juez argues is to be found in Rachel Burrows' notes on the same course of lectures. Reading the passage in this way would also allow us to trace a particular aspect of Beckett's mature dramaturgical practice back to interests that

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 306 – Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Grace West [*née* McKinley] *qtd* in *Ibid.*, 57-58 – Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the relationship between *Phèdre* and Beckett's use of light in *Happy Days / Oh les beaux jours*, see Cal Revely-Calder, 'Racine Lighting Beckett', in *JoBS* (Vol. 25, No. 2 – 2016), 225-242.

⁴⁷ 'Appendix: Beckett on Racine', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 312

animated him even in the early 1930s. To see this passage in such a manner, however, does not help us to answer the question of where these interests may have come from, nor does it help us to clarify to what Beckett may have owed his initial fascination with the dramaturgical use that might be made of light and dark. Certainly, one might contend, following Le Juez, that such a fascination was, quite simply, 'propre à Beckett'; that he arrived at it by himself without the need for an intermediary, and that such an early interest in the dramaturgical potential of light and dark suggest Beckett was already honing his own eye as a theatre-maker, even while still engaged in the 'grotesque comedy of lecturing'.⁴⁸ To read the passage in this manner, however, and to imagine that these comments have a purely Beckettian origin, would be to ignore the fact that this particular presentation of *Phèdre* is, in fact, an almost verbatim rendering of what we find in Rudmose-Brown's *A Short History of French Literature*, a volume with which Beckett would have been intimately familiar from having studied it himself as an undergraduate student.⁴⁹

As part of his treatment of *Phèdre* in that *Short History*, Rudmose-Brown speaks of 'Phèdre against the pure white light and the marble pillars of Thésée's mythological palace, in the blazing splendour of the sun, her ancestor'.⁵⁰ The parallels between Rudmose-Brown's and Beckett's phrasing here are too striking to be merely coincidental. (Indeed, an awareness of Rudmose-Brown's text as the source for Beckett's statement even helps us to understand the rather curious phrase that we find in McKinley's notes: Her reference to the 'marble *pictures*' against which *Phèdre* stands is likely nothing more than her mishearing of the 'marble *pillars*' that are referred to in *A Short History of French Literature*.) Once this particular phrase has been traced back to Rudmose-Brown's *A Short History of French Literature*, one quickly recognises that the interest in light that seemed so peculiarly Beckettian is actually indicative of an interest that Beckett himself would have originally encountered via Rudmose-Brown, since the passage that has just been cited is by no means the only one in his *Short History of French Literature* to devote particular attention to the place of light in *Phèdre*.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *LSB I*, 53 (SB to Charles Prentice [27th October, 1930])

⁴⁹ For details of the passages from this volume that Beckett was required to read during the first three years of his four-year degree, see Appendix II (a)

⁵⁰ T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 85

⁵¹ Only a page later, in fact, Rudmose-Brown returns to the place of light in Racine's play, offering an image that, once again, strongly recalls by Beckett's description of *Phèdre* as 'bathed in white light': 'Light is everywhere [in *Phèdre*]: we see *Phèdre*, standing in the light that streams across the pillars, overwhelming her troubled and shame-torn spirit. All the play is full of the clear morning: its whiteness contrasts with the terror and horror of the passions that are loosed and of the fate that pursues,

Where initially Beckett's comments on light might be imagined to provide an insight into a uniquely Beckettian perspective, it can now be seen that this perspective on light in *Phèdre* actually derives from Rudmose-Brown. Recognition of such parallels is important for a number of reasons: In the first instance, such recognition might have helped to calm the confusion experienced by a colleague of James Knowlson's who, when studying notes taken by Leslie Daiken – another of Beckett's students –, was of the firm belief that 'one of the lectures...said to be by Rudmose-Brown, *cannot* be by Rudmose-Brown because all the allusions in it are Beckettian allusions'.⁵² As the verbal echoes to be heard between Beckett's lectures and Rudmose-Brown's writings on Racine attest, what appear at first sight to be strictly Beckettian allusions can, only closer inspection, reveal themselves to be every bit as Rudmose-Brownian as they are Beckettian.⁵³ Secondly, and far more importantly, recognition of these parallels shows us that the vision of art we find in the lecture notes taken by Beckett's students is not merely Beckettian, nor merely Rudmose-Brownian; it is both at once.

Clearly, it would be wrong to suggest that, simply because these statements on the place of light in *Phèdre* can be shown to derive from Rudmose-Brown's treatment of the play, they have nothing at all to tell us about Beckett's own vision of Racine, or about his own aesthetics more largely. On the contrary, these statements tell us

unrelenting, the high soul of *Phèdre* till it breaks her, and death "A mes yeux dérobant la clarté / Rend au jour qu'ils troublaient toute sa pureté" (*Ibid.*, 86-87).

⁵² JEK C/1/105 Side A (James Knowlson, during an interview with Grace West [*née* McKinley])

⁵³ The echoes that are to be found between Beckett's and Rudmose-Brown's focus on the place of light in *Phèdre* are by no means isolated. On the contrary, comparison of Beckett's and Rudmose-Brown's treatments of the play shows that similar patterns of verbal echoing are to be found throughout, and serve to reinforce the idea that the vision of Racine that we find in these lectures, while certainly Beckett's, had been arrived at by way of Rudmose-Brown. Beckett's comment that '[i]n Racine...we have this great originality that the *objet* [i.e. the object of a character's affections] is not merely unobtainable but unaware' ('Appendix: Beckett on Racine', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 311) finds its direct echo in Rudmose-Brown's statement that '[t]he object of passion [in Racine] is unobtainable' (T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 87). Elsewhere, in clarifying that 'politics never provide a pole for his [= Racine's] antagonism, although they provide the whole situation' ('Appendix: Beckett on Racine', in *op. cit.*, 310), Beckett seems to be echoing Rudmose-Brown's distinction between Corneille, who wrote of royalty because the workings of state interested him, and Racine, who took 'no interest in kingship as such' (T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *op. cit.*, 84). Even a comment that is held to express a particularly Beckettian overemphasis on psychological inwardness, such as his contention that '*Phèdre* is almost a pathological study' ('Appendix: Beckett on Racine', *op. cit.*, 311) – a comment that Angela Moorjani takes as evidence of Beckett 'overstat[ing]' an inwardness that he would have found in other critics (Angela Moorjani, 'Beckett's Racinean Fictions: "Racine and the Modern Novel" Revisited', 42-43) – is striking in the degree to which it echoes what we find in Rudmose-Brown, who writes that Racine is 'occupied only in the study of a "cas psychologique"' (T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *op. cit.*, 83).

something extremely important about both Beckett's vision of Racinian drama and about his own evolving aesthetics precisely because they can be shown to derive from Rudmose-Brown. What they reveal, is that Rudmose-Brown's contribution to Beckett's vision of art was more important than has previously been thought. For the focus on light, the careful attention to the interplay of light and dark, is indeed profoundly Beckettian, and it does provide us with an insight into an aspect of Beckett's own artistic vision that would later come to be of defining importance of his post-War dramaturgy. Beckett's approach to Racine, in short, does not cease to be Beckettian simply because we find that Beckett himself was quite probably introduced to it by Rudmose-Brown. What we see now, however, is that Beckett most likely did not come to his careful awareness of the theatrical potential of light and dark entirely by himself. Instead, it seems probable that Rudmose-Brown had an important role to play in bringing this awareness about. Much as Beckett owed to Rudmose-Brown a love of Racine, a dramatist who would later come to play a determining role in a great deal of his own literary production, Beckett may equally be shown to have owed to Rudmose-Brown a particular way of viewing Racine, a particular way of understanding the stage, and, more importantly still, a particular way of engaging with art. For, perhaps the most important thing that the connection between Rudmose-Brown's and Beckett's remarks on *Phèdre* reveals is not actually confined to the subject of the great French dramatist, nor to the subject of light and dark. On the contrary, these remarks on the place of light in *Phèdre* reveal a more remarkable, and a more surprising, aspect of Beckett's aesthetic debt to Rudmose-Brown and, by extension, his debt to the study of French Literature that he undertook under the guidance of Rudmose-Brown while at TCD. To appreciate this importance, we must recognise that Grace McKinley's notes record Beckett to have raised the matter of light in the context of a discussion of Racine's pictorial and sculptural qualities:

Influence of painting and sculpture on Racine. Andromaque. Notice in all Racine the way he can call up pictures. This is especially seen in Andromaque, Act I scene 2: a picture of Troye before and after the war – also note the description on page 112. [...] In Bérénice this is not so much – it is more statuary. Picture nevertheless of imperial grandeur. Phèdre standing in marble white gown in front of marble pictures – tall and slim with grey eyes with corn coloured hair twisted in ropes round her head – “all bathed in white light.”⁵⁴

The fact that Beckett was a 'passionate connoisseur of painting and sculpture' was one of those novel aspects of his subject that James Knowlson felt he had

⁵⁴ Appendix: Beckett on Racine', in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 312 – Emphasis mine.

demonstrated in his biography.⁵⁵ Since the publication of *DTF*, Beckett's close engagement with visual art, and its importance for his literary and dramatic compositions, has been restated, confirmed, and developed by a number of critics.⁵⁶ In this regard, the younger Beckett's eagerness to alert his students to the pictorial and sculptural qualities of Racine would seem to be a relatively early indication of how Beckett's interest in visual art could influence his vision of literary art. This focus on Racine's pictorial qualities would, in other words, seem a clear instance of a particularly Beckettian idiosyncrasy – Beckett's alertness to visual qualities of Racine prefiguring the artist he was to become. Similarly, the manner in which Racine is said to be able to 'call up pictures' might well be viewed as an aspect of Racine's art to which Beckett himself was preternaturally aware as a consequence of that profoundly visual imagination that would later be realised in his own habit of staging his plays in such a way as to call to mind sculptures and paintings with which he was himself familiar.⁵⁷ Guided by what has already been said about Beckett's debt to Rudmose-Brown's focus on the role of light in *Phèdre*, however, it may be seen that there is another way to read this focus on pictorial and sculptural qualities: One that serves, not to diminish their importance to Beckett or his later literary output, but that allows us to propose an answer to the question of how the visual arts came to occupy such a vital space in Beckett's literary imagination.

To date, and despite the attention devoted to Beckett's engagement with the visual arts and the role that these arts play in his own literary production, the question of whence Beckett may have derived his passion for visual art has, to the best of my knowledge, not previously been asked. Certainly, in *DTF*, Knowlson revealed that it was during his undergraduate years at TCD that Beckett 'was captured...by a deep love of painting'.⁵⁸ Knowlson, however, made no suggestion that anyone else may have played a part in developing this love – commenting, rather, that Beckett 'followed no formal history of art classes and appears to have been largely self-taught'.⁵⁹ Although Beckett may not have followed any formal course of study in the History of Art, an awareness of the precise form that his study of French Literature took reveals that there was no need for him to be 'self-taught'. On the contrary, it seems likely that

⁵⁵ *DTF*, xxi-xxii

⁵⁶ For a fuller treatment of the way in which visual art contributed to Beckett's evolving poetics, see Georgina Nugent-Folan, 'Personal Apperception: Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein, and Paul Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*', in Conor Carville and Mark Nixon (eds), *SBT/A 27: 'Beginning of the Murmur': Archival Pre-texts and Other Sources* (Amsterdam: Brill / Rodopi, 2015), 87-101.

⁵⁷ *viz. DTF*, 609-610

⁵⁸ *DTF*, 57

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Beckett's 'deep love of painting' and his lifelong attention to visual art may in fact be traced back to his study of French Literature and, more particularly, to the idiosyncratic manner in which Beckett was introduced to French Literature by Rudmose-Brown.

Beckett's Professor clearly brought to the study of French Literature a profound affection for visual art, and was not averse to drawing his students' attention to the parallels that could exist between the fields of painting, sculpture, and literature. Rudmose-Brown's attention to the interplay between visual and literary art is, in fact, particularly evident in the section on Racine in his *Short History of French Literature*, where he identifies a number of complementary pairs of literary and visual artists:

Poussin is the typical painter of the earlier Classical period, Le Brun of the later. One is the analogue of Corneille, the other, not indeed of Racine, although Racine undoubtedly drew inspiration from him, but of the Classicists above whom, like Girardon and Coysevox in sculpture, Racine rose, individual and conforming only in externals and in his preoccupation with the universal. The *Bain des Nymphes* of Girardon, like an ancient bas-relief, is most Racinian in its lyricism and its purity of conception and form. Racine, more than any of his contemporaries except Fénelon, has the ambiance and light of Claude Lorrain, that precursor of the impressionists.⁶⁰

For Rudmose-Brown, as can be seen in the extract cited above, Nicolas Poussin is to Corneille as Claude Lorrain is to Racine. Critically, this connection between literary and visual art is not evoked in passing. On the contrary, Rudmose-Brown makes of Claude Lorrain's art a defining element of Racine's dramaturgy. Rudmose-Brown writes, for example, that Racine 'was haunted by the memory of Claude Lorrain'.⁶¹ Nor is Rudmose-Brown's focus restricted to the probable influence of Claude Lorrain on Racine. Elsewhere in his *Short History* we find a careful recapitulation of the various parallels that he observes between the arrangement of particular scenes in plays by Racine and Classical sculptures or 17th-century historical paintings:

Andromaque kneeling at Hermione's feet recalls the *Arria et Paetus* of Le Pautre in the Tuileries, or the *Didon* of Poultier at Versailles. Phèdre is full of statuesque effects. Hippolyte, especially, is like the figure, in white marble or in bronze, of a young god. All is "net et serré": there is no looseness at all. Le Brun, too, is there. Abner, directing the ceremonial of the temple, Néron's picture of Junie, Bérénice's of Titus, are "composed" after the manner of Louis XIV's historical painter.⁶²

⁶⁰ T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 86

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 87

As these examples make clear, Rudmose-Brown was profoundly interested in visual art, and its relation to works of literature. (It must moreover be stressed that Rudmose-Brown's taste in visual art was no less far ranging than his taste in literature: If he could appreciate the beauty of Poussin and Lorrain, he was equally receptive to modern painters, such as 'Picasso or Derain or Matisse'.⁶³) Not only that, but it is also clear that Rudmose-Brown passed this interest on to Beckett, since what Rudmose-Brown is describing in the passage that has just been cited is precisely that Racinian habit of 'call[ing] up pictures' to which Beckett is recorded as having referred during his own series of lectures on 'Racine and the Modern Novel'. If Beckett found pictures in Racine, in other words, it is because his eye was trained to recognise them under the tutelage of Rudmose-Brown. Crucially, we can be sure that Rudmose-Brown taught Beckett to recognise the place the visual arts could hold within the literary realm because evidence from the examination papers set by Rudmose-Brown during Beckett's time as an undergraduate shows that Rudmose-Brown's interest in the relations between visual and literary art was not purely personal; he expected his students to recognise and to show a similar concern for these relations. (As part of his Trinity Term examination in 1924, for instance, one of the subjects on which Beckett himself would have been invited to write an essay was 'The relations of Literature with the other arts during the age of Louis XIV'.⁶⁴)

As a young man reading Rudmose-Brown's *Short History of French Literature*, and attending Rudmose-Brown's lectures and tutorials, during which Beckett's Professor would have had far more time to expand and elaborate upon the connections between visual art and literary art than was possible within the confines of a *short* literary history, a young student preparing for such examination papers – papers for which, as his academic performance demonstrates, he was at great pains to prepare –, and a young man deeply impressed by, and full of admiration for, the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 35 – Perhaps the most striking remark on the subject of those connections between painting and literature that is to be found in his *Short History*, in fact, concerns Cézanne, a modern artist whom we know to have left a deep impact upon Beckett. In that volume, Rudmose-Brown comments that 'Cézanne and his successors, have used a method in painting equivalent to metaphor in poetry' (*Ibid.*). While we cannot be sure what role, if any, Rudmose-Brown may have had to play in Beckett's discovery of Cézanne, the connection between Cézanne's pictorial manner and the use of metaphor in poetry which we find in a textbook written by Beckett's erstwhile Professor is certainly tantalising. Indeed, it is all the more tantalising given that Beckett's earliest reference to Cézanne makes a similar connection between the visual and the verbal: In *Dream*, the narrator admits that 'we were once upon a time inclined to fancy ourself as the Cézanne, shall we say, of the printed page, very strong on architectonics' (*Dream*, 178).

⁶⁴ Rudmose-Brown, 'Junior Freshman (Trinity Term, 1924) - Honor Examination-French', in *University of Dublin, Trinity College: Honor Examination Papers, 1924. [English. French. German. Irish. Italian. Spanish.]*, [n.p.]

Professor who had written that *Short History*, who delivered those lectures, and who set those examination papers, it seems only natural that Beckett would have been moved to follow Rudmose-Brown's lead and to pay close attention to visual art, perhaps even to begin spending time in the National Gallery, where he might examine more closely works by some of those painters that had been mentioned in Rudmose-Brown's lectures and whose pictorial compositions had been connected with literary compositions he was already coming to care for deeply, and which would remain with him for the rest of his life.⁶⁵ In this way, it seems likely that, if Beckett's own literature accords such an important place to visual art – not only his later dramaturgy, but even an early work such as his first novel, *Dream*, where we find characters explained through reference to visual artists⁶⁶ –, this place was carpentered by Rudmose-Brown, who opened Beckett's eyes, not only to the manner in which visual art could found its way onto the stage, but also the connections that can exist between visual art and exclusively verbal forms of literary art on the page.⁶⁷ At the root of the peculiarly visual imagination of Samuel Beckett, in other words, can be found the enduring influence of Rudmose-Brown and of the years that Beckett devoted to the study of French Literature while at TCD.

If time has been spent clarifying Beckett's debt to Rudmose-Brown – the way in which he helped to shape Beckett's vision of individual literary artists, and the role he appears to have had in leading Beckett to the study of visual art – it is not merely because such facts help to flesh out our understanding of Beckett himself, but because, as I hope to have demonstrated, Beckett's debt to Rudmose-Brown is inextricable from Beckett's engagement with French Literature during his years at TCD, and this engagement is itself inextricable from the literary writing that Beckett would go on to produce. Much as the examples of *Aucassin et Nicolette* and Vigny's *La*

⁶⁵ We know, for example, that Beckett was 'stunned' (*DTF*, 58) by Poussin's *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, which he saw at the National Gallery of Ireland. The National Gallery also holds a work by Claude Lorrain – *Juno Confiding in the Care of Argus* (1660) –, that painter whom Rudmose-Brown identified as a key source for Racine.

⁶⁶ Such as when the eyes of the Alba are described in terms of an El Greco painting (*viz. Dream*, 174).

⁶⁷ *viz.* 'The *Fables* [of La Fontaine] belong to the same inspiration as the "Labyrinthe" of Versailles, which from 1667 to 1674 was being decorated with motives from Aesop. The "Cabinets des Animaux" on the Terrace of Versailles are Van Clève's contribution to the same fashion. It is true, perhaps, that the genius of La Fontaine is more akin to that of Callot and of the Dutch "petits-maîtres" – Fyt or Snyders or Paul Potter, Wynants or Huysmans of Malines. Perhaps, too, and this is even more significant, his conception of natural beauty, his response to the impressions of nature, precludes rather to Watteau, Pater, and Lancret [...]' (T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 91).

Mort du loup demonstrate that the importance of Beckett's study of French Literature while at TCD cannot be confined to that small selection of seminal authors who immediately come to mind when we think of Beckett – Proust, Racine, Descartes... –, the example of the enduring influence of Rudmose-Brown's attention to the visual arts, meanwhile, demonstrates that the importance of Beckett's study of French Literature cannot be confined to the literature he read as an undergraduate. What these years offered him was something far more valuable, namely: A new way of *seeing* art, one that brought together the verbal and the visual and which, in so doing, prepared the way for the visual artistic current that would run through so much of his own mature art. What these examples prove, in other words, is that, once again, French is not simply a foreign language, nor a 'literary sensibility' that he acquired late in life: Beckett's engagement with French lies at the very heart of his aesthetics, and at the origin of much of what we now think of as fundamentally Beckettian.

II. FRENCH LITERATURE BEYOND TCD (1927-1936)

As has been seen, Beckett's exposure to French Literature during his years at TCD – and to Rudmose-Brown's ideas on the subject in particular – was of foundational importance to him, to his view of certain key writers and, indeed, to his conception of literary art more broadly. In this respect, Beckett clearly remained profoundly influenced by his years as a student of French Literature long after he had left TCD. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to imagine that Beckett's engagement with French Literature was limited to those texts, and those perspectives, that he encountered as an undergraduate. In this respect, in fact, we find another particularity of Beckett's engagement with French as the case of French Literature presents a striking contrast to that of Italian Literature, that other language to which he devoted such careful study during his years at TCD.⁶⁸

Although Italian Literature – most notably, via the tutelary figure of Dante – was of great importance to Beckett's writing, his engagement with this literature was not nearly as extensive, nor as important to him or to his writing, as was his engagement with French Literature. Evidence of the relative lack of importance that Beckett himself viewed his engagement with Italian Literature to have for his work is to be found in a letter that he wrote in response to a request for information concerning the degree to which his work had been influenced by Italian culture, and in

⁶⁸ Unlike French, the most important influence on Beckett's understanding of Italian Literature is to be found outside of TCD, in the person of Bianca Esposito, with whom Beckett took private lessons in Italian – For more on Esposito's role in Beckett's study of Italian Literature, and his discovery of Dante in particular, see *DTF*, 51-54

which he prefaced his remarks on the subject by noting: ‘Can’t conceive by what stretch of ingenuity my work could be placed under sign of italianità’.⁶⁹ Another sign of the comparatively reduced scale of Beckett’s engagement with Italian Literature is to be found in the fact that his appreciation of it never really moved beyond what he read as an undergraduate. Of the Italian writers who were of greatest importance to him – namely, Petrarch, Dante, and Leopardi⁷⁰ –, for instance, all were already encountered while a student at TCD.⁷¹ At the end of Beckett’s life, moreover, those works of Italian Literature that were to be found on the shelves of his library remained, save a few rare exceptions – such as the works of Ludovico Aretino, present in French translation –, those he had purchased in the course of his undergraduate degree.⁷² The case of French Literature was clearly radically different from what has just been sketched out with regard to Italian. In the case of French, most notably, Beckett’s appreciation of French-language writing continued to deepen, to grow and to evolve, throughout his life, as he encountered – and, in some cases, developed a deep affection for – writers whose work found no place on even TCD’s eclectic curriculum.

In this respect, it is not, perhaps, Beckett’s post-TCD engagement with writers such as Proust, Racine or Ronsard that is most worthy of consideration, since Beckett would have encountered them as an undergraduate.⁷³ Far more interesting, I would

⁶⁹ *LSB III*, 136 (SB to A.J. Leventhal and Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal [21st April, 1958]).

⁷⁰ In that same letter to Leventhal and MacCarthy, these are the three writers of whom Beckett makes specific mention when clarifying the ‘Italian elements’ (*Ibid.*) in his work.

⁷¹ Works by Dante and Petrarch featured as set texts on Beckett’s undergraduate course in Italian (*viz.* John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology*, 11). Although no text by Leopardi featured as a set text on the course, a number of his poems were included as part of *Le cento migliori liriche*, an anthology that appears amongst the set texts for students of Italian (*viz.* Luigi Ricci [ed.], *Le cento migliori poesie (liriche) della lingua italiana* [London & Glasgow: Gowans and Gray, 1909], 66-81).

⁷² For details of the Italian Literature to be found in Beckett’s library, see Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library*, 103-116.

⁷³ The interest of Proust and Racine is also somewhat lessened by the fact that they have also been the subject of more focussed critical analysis than many of the other writers whom Beckett is known to have read. No doubt in large part due to his having been the subject of Beckett’s only academic monograph, Proust has been an object of intense study by Beckettians for decades. As of January 2018, the *MLA International Bibliography* records no fewer than 191 treatments of the relationship between Beckett and Proust, with the earliest recorded treatment of their relationship being Melvin J. Friedman’s ‘The Novels of Samuel Beckett: An Amalgam of Joyce and Proust’, which appeared in the journal *Comparative Literature* in 1960. Racine’s importance, meanwhile, has been recognised since at least the 1970s, having been noted by Vivian Mercier in his *Beckett/Beckett* (*viz.* Vivian Mercier, *op. cit.*, 73-87) and has more recently been the subject of articles such as those by Angela Moorjani and Cal Revely-Calder that have already been cited, and by Danièle de Ruyter (‘Fascination de la

argue, are those authors, whom Beckett sought out on his own: authors such as Charles Perrault – whose *Contes* provided Beckett with some of the material to be found in his *Dream* Notebook⁷⁴ –, the Marquis de Sade – whose writings were of great interest to Beckett during the pre-War period on account of their ‘extraordinary’ composition, and whose most (in)famous text, *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*, Beckett would seriously consider translating in the 1930s⁷⁵ – or Jules Renard – an author whose works Beckett first appears to have encountered in early 1931, via Renard’s *Journal*, and whom Beckett then continued to read with much relish for many years.⁷⁶ Amongst the innumerable French-language authors whom Beckett is known to have read after leaving TCD, however, the most worthy of our consideration are that select trio that Beckett is known to have considered writing critical studies on, namely: André Gide, Louis-Ferdinand Céline and André Malraux.⁷⁷

Although Beckett would never write a critical study on any of these three authors, traces of Beckett’s engagement with each of them is known to have survived in his texts, both published and archival: Gide, for example – whom Beckett first encountered at TCD, but whose work he maintained an interest in after completing his studies –, is present in Beckett’s *Dream*⁷⁸, and in his early French-language lecture, ‘Le Concentrisme’⁷⁹; material from Céline’s *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, meanwhile, is to be found in Beckett’s ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook⁸⁰; Malraux, finally, provides the epigraph for chapter nine of *Murphy*.⁸¹ Interesting as such textual traces of Beckett’s engagement with these writers may be, the fact of his having cared enough about

tragédie racinienne: Résonances dans *Oh les beaux jours*’, in Angela Moorjani, *et al.* [eds], *SBT/A 24*, 57-71).

⁷⁴ For material in Beckett’s *Dream* Notebook derived from the *Contes* of Charles Perrault, see *DN*, [1069], [1070], [1119]-[1121], [1131]-[1141]

⁷⁵ *LSB I*, 607 (SB to TMG [21st February, 1938]) – For Beckett’s engagement with Sade, see John Pilling, ‘Beckett/Sade: texts for nothing’, in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 117-130

⁷⁶ *viz.* *LSB I*, 69 (SB to TMG [24th February, 1931]) – For Beckett’s engagement with Jules Renard, see Angela Moorjani, ‘Beckett’s Parisian Ghosts (Continued): The Case of the Missing Jules Renard’, *Limit[e] Beckett* (Issue 1 – Autumn 2010) <<http://www.limitebeckett.paris-sorbonne.fr/one/moorjani.html>> [accessed: 1st March, 2017] – The analysis provided by Moorjani will be supplemented by a discussion of the possible influence of Jules Renard on Beckett’s unpublished poem ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ in the present thesis. For this discussion, see Part II, Chapter 2.

⁷⁷ By way of suggesting that TMG consider writing an essay on Yeats for Houghton Mifflin, Beckett mentions that he himself came close to writing ‘[s]omething of the same kind...i.e. a Gide & a Céline or Malraux to eke out the Proust’ (*LSB I*, 462 – SB to TMG [7th March. 1937]).

⁷⁸ *Dream*, 46

⁷⁹ *D*, 39

⁸⁰ *viz.* Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library*, 78-79

⁸¹ *Murphy*, 99

their work to have pondered devoting a critical study to them confirms that these particular writers held a special place in Beckett's estimation – one quite removed from that of the other writers to whose work he is known to have alluded, or whom he is known to have read. In this regard, Beckett's stated intention to devote critical studies to these three writers reveals that we would do well to pay close attention to Gide, Céline, and Malraux. Indeed, had Beckett published these critical studies, it is certain that each and every one of these authors would by now have been the subject of exhaustive comparative study, demonstrating, in minute detail, how Beckett's art was irrevocably altered by his encounter with each of them.⁸² In the particular case of André Gide, the process of critical re-evaluation has already begun and discussion of Beckett's interactions with the Nobel Laureate have indeed proved to be very fruitful.⁸³ Given that Beckett's engagement with Gide, has thus already been the subject of critical consideration, and in light of the fact that Beckett's reading of, and debt to, Céline has also been discussed – and, as I will go on to argue in the following chapter, perhaps overestimated – by critics such as Helen Astbury and Ruby Cohn, it is on André Malraux that I would like to concentrate here. More particularly, I would like to close this chapter by focusing on an examination of one particular instance of Malraux's importance to Beckett. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that, even after decades of research, the full importance to Beckett's writing of his interactions with French Literature in the years after he left TCD remains to be explored.

Despite Beckett's obvious interest in his work, the place of Malraux in Beckett's writings has received precious little attention from critics. The most widely-acknowledged appearance – indeed, the only acknowledged appearance – of Malraux

⁸² When Angela Moorjani asks, in the abstract of her article on Beckett and Gide, '[w]hat would Gide's stature be in Beckett Studies...if Beckett had completed the monograph he planned to write on Gide as he had on Proust' (Angela Moorjani, 'André Gide among the Parisian Ghosts in the "Anglo-Irish" *Murphy*', in Sjef Houppermans, Angela Moorjani, Danièle de Ruyter, Matthijs Engelberts, and Dirk Van Hulle [eds], *SBT/A 21: Where Never Before: Beckett's Poetics of Elsewhere / La Poétique de l'ailleurs. In Honor of Marius Buning* [Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2009], 209), the question is clearly rhetorical: Moorjani knows what that stature would be, and it would be towering.

⁸³ After decades of neglect, Gide has finally been given the attention that he warrants, most notably by John Bolin (*viz.* 'Beckett's *Murphy*, Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican*, and the "Modern Novel"', in *Modernism/modernity* [Vol. 18, No. 4 – November, 2011], 771-788; *Beckett and the Modern Novel* [Cambridge: CUP, 2013], *passim*) and Angela Moorjani ('André Gide among the Parisian Ghosts in the "Anglo-Irish" *Murphy*'). While there is, quite probably, little of real value left to be said about Beckett's engagement with Proust, Beckett's engagement with Gide remains deserving of further consideration – provided such attention is paid to his engagement with the Gidian *œuvre* beyond *Les Caves du Vatican* and *Les Faux-monnayeurs*.

in Beckett's *œuvre* is, of course, that sentence, drawn from *La Condition humaine*, which serves as an epigraph to the ninth chapter of *Murphy*: 'Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens'.⁸⁴ Critical focus on this particular citation, and, by extension, on this particular novel, is wholly understandable given the evidence for its preeminent importance that is to be found in Beckett's correspondence. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 1936, for instance, Beckett himself identified the citation he had drawn from *La Condition humaine* as being of key importance to his novel:

I suddenly see that Murphy is break down between his [= Geulincx's] ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis (positive) & Malraux's Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens (negation).⁸⁵

Later still Beckett included Malraux's novel among that list of French books that his then lover Pamela Mitchell might like to read, thereby demonstrating that his affection for Malraux's text persisted until at least 1954.⁸⁶ While it thus seems clear that *La Condition humaine* held a special place in Beckett's estimation, it would be wrong to imagine that it was the only one of Malraux's novels with which he was familiar. The simple fact that he pondered writing a critical study on Malraux already argues in favour of a deeper familiarity with the author, since it would, surely, be highly surprising for Beckett to have pondered writing a critical study on Malraux if he had only read a single text. (It would, indeed, be all the more surprising given that we know that he was familiar with a large number of works by Gide and Céline, those other authors about whom he mentioned having considered writing critical studies.) Such an intuitive sense of Beckett's having enjoyed a deeper than generally recognised familiarity with Malraux's writings is confirmed by a reference to two further novels by Malraux that we find in Beckett's early correspondence.

Writing to Thomas MacGreevy in 1931, Beckett asked him if he had read Malraux, specifically the novels *Les Conquérants* (1928) and *La Voie royale* (1930).⁸⁷ In the same letter, Beckett goes on to add that he himself has 'had a peer at the opening

⁸⁴ *Murphy*, 99 – For a lengthy discussion of this citation, its context in Malraux's novel and its relation to Beckett's, see C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy*, 145-46 ('156.1 [90]')

⁸⁵ *LSB I*, 299 (SB to TMG [16th January, 1936])

⁸⁶ *LSB II*, 493 (SB to Pamela Mitchell [19th August, 1954]) – Beckett suggested the following texts to Mitchell: Sartre's *La Nausée*; Malraux's *La Condition humaine*; Julien Green's *Léviathan*; Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*; Jules Renard's *Journal*; and, finally, Camus' *L'Étranger*.

⁸⁷ *LSB I*, 62 (SB to TMG [25th January, 1931]).

of the latter [i.e. *La Voie royale*], & it looked promising'.⁸⁸ Such a fleeting reference by Beckett to his having had a 'peer at the opening' of a novel would, of course, scarcely be of anything other than anecdotal interest – and even then, not very much of that – were it not for the fact that the opening pages of *La Voie royale* actually seem to have provided Beckett with one of the most memorable moments of his own novelistic *œuvre*. In fact, it appears to be the case that it was from Malraux's early novel that Beckett derived the image of Murphy 'naked in his rocking chair', upon which his first published novel opens.⁸⁹

Currently, *Murphy's* opening scene is not known to have its source in any particular text. In his annotations on this novel, C. J. Ackerley, for example, proposes, by way of Samuel Mintz, a complex origin for this scene, one which involves 'L[atin] *nudus*, "merely," and...Geulincx's *Ethica*'⁹⁰, as well as 'the opening sentence of part IV of Spinoza's *Ethics*'.⁹¹ Comparison of the opening of Malraux's and Beckett's novels, however, strongly suggests that Beckett's image of Murphy's self-bondage derives not from Latin and the philosophy of Geulincx and Spinoza but from *La Voie royale*. More particularly, the source of this image appears to be found in a discussion between Perken, a world-weary Dane and one of the main characters of Malraux's novel, and Claude, a much younger Frenchman and fictional surrogate for Malraux himself. During that discussion, which focuses on eroticism, sexuality, the self, and the other, Perken describes the very particular manner in which an old acquaintance of his indulged a thoroughly personal form of sexual perversion:

Perken avança le bras droit, comme pour accompagner d'un geste une phrase, mais hésita, luttant contre sa pensée.
 « L'essentiel est de *ne pas connaître* la partenaire. Qu'elle soit : l'autre sexe.
 - Qu'elle ne soit pas un être qui possède une vie particulière ?
 - Dans le masochisme plus encore. Ils ne se battent jamais que contre eux-mêmes... À l'imagination on annexe ce que l'on peut, et non ce que l'on veut. Les plus stupides des prostituées savent combien l'homme qui les tourmente, ou qu'elles tourmentent, est loin d'elles : savez-vous comment elles appellent les irréguliers ? Des cérébraux...
 [...]
 - Des cérébraux, reprit Perken. Et elles ont raison. Il n'y a qu'une seule
 « perversion sexuelle » comme disent les imbéciles : c'est le développement

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* – Beckett further adds that his friend Georges Pelorson 'has much admiration for "Les Conquérants"' (*Ibid.*), an admiration that may eventually have led Beckett to 'peer' into Malraux's earlier novel too.

⁸⁹ *Murphy*, 3

⁹⁰ C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy*, 29 ('1.5 [5]')

⁹¹ *Ibid.* ('2.2 [5]) – While it is certainly possible that Beckett's particular usage of the bondage image was informed, coloured, or otherwise enhanced, by other texts with which he was familiar, I believe that the similarities between the openings of Beckett's and Malraux's texts are sufficient to strongly argue in favour of viewing Malraux's novel as the primary source for the image upon which *Murphy* opens.

de l'imagination, l'inaptitude à l'assouvissement. Là-bas, à Bangkok, j'ai connu un homme qui se faisait attacher, nu, par une femme, dans une chambre obscure, pendant une heure...

- Eh bien ?

- C'est tout ; c'était suffisant. Celui-là était un « pervers » parfaitement pur... »⁹²

In Beckett's novel too, we find a character who has been tied up, naked, in a darkened room, in the hopes of indulging his own particular perversion and, by the same token, of achieving his own particular form of pleasure:

*He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed teak, guaranteed not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode, or creak at night. It was his own, it never left him. The corner in which he sat was curtained off from the sun, the poor old sun in the Virgin again for the billionth time. Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. [...] He sat in his chair this way because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind... And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word.*⁹³

Malraux's image of an individual of a 'cerebral' sort whose unique form of psycho-sexual perversion consists in going to a brothel so that one of the women who work there can tie him up, naked, and then leave him to spend one hour alone in a darkened room, clearly provides a direct parallel for the opening scene of *Murphy*. This parallel is not simply a matter of these two characters engaging in similar actions, moreover, it is also clear that both Murphy and the figure described by Perken seek the same thing when bound in the dark: The figure described by Perken – later revealed to be his friend Grabot –, seeks to develop his imagination ('le développement de l'imagination'). Murphy, meanwhile, seeks to escape the wider world and 'to set him[self] free in his mind', an aim that obviously echoes that of Grabot.⁹⁴ In this way, both the 'cérébral' Grabot described by Perken and the cerebral Murphy – to whose mind chapter 6 of Beckett's novel is devoted – may be seen to seek the same ends by the same means. Once these connections have been recognised, the suggestion that Beckett discovered something of lasting value when he took 'a peer at the opening' of Malraux's novel becomes difficult to dismiss.

To raise the possibility that *La Voie royale* may have had a role to play in Beckett's elaboration of the opening of *Murphy* is not in any way to suggest that

⁹² André Malraux, *La Voie royale*, in *op. cit.*, 373-74 – Emphasis in original.

⁹³ *Murphy*, 3 – Emphasis mine.

⁹⁴ *Murphy*, 3-4

Beckett's first published novel may be rendered down to an exercise in Malraux pastiche, nor to suggest that Malraux should be understood as a defining influence upon the novel. To suggest the former would be absurd, while to suggest the latter would require a more extensive treatment of *Murphy* than is here possible. My aim, rather, is to highlight Malraux's novel as one of that vast array of elements that went into the composition of *Murphy* – some of which, as 'Whoroscope' Notebook reveals, Beckett was eager to 'keep...out of sight'.⁹⁵ It is, moreover, an element that, despite that careful attention that has been directed towards *Murphy* by critics such as C. J. Ackerley, had previously been missed by scholarship. In pointing out the possibility of this connection between the opening of Malraux's *La Voie royale* and opening of *Murphy*, my aim is thus not solely to propose another allusion within Beckett's first-published novel. I also hope to make clear to the reader once again that Beckett's debt to French Literature – to the authors he read while at TCD, and the authors he read after leaving the university –, is very far from having been fully explored. It is, indeed, possible that the influence of Malraux's text is to be observed even before *Murphy*, in Beckett's very first novel, *Dream*.

In *DTF*, James Knowlson drew attention to the moment in Beckett's earliest attempt at a novel when the character of Lucien 'catching sight of his hand in a glass...began to whinge'.⁹⁶ In his biography, Knowlson related this, and another similar moment, to examples of 'a sense of alienation from the body' that prefigured concerns Beckett would later find in Sartre's *La Nausée*, then still unpublished.⁹⁷ Once one has been alerted to the role that *La Voie royale* probably played in the composition of *Murphy*, however, it becomes possible to suggest that Beckett, rather than anticipating Sartre, may instead have been influenced by Malraux's novel. In this instance, the probable source of this influence is to be found in a scene that takes place towards the end of *La Voie royale*: Perken, by now dying and aware he will not make it back to his lands in Siam, begins to see his own hand as something alien – by times a spider, by times an eye – and detached from himself:

Il l'avait vue plusieurs fois ainsi depuis quelques jours: libre, séparée de lui. Là, calme sur sa cuisse, elle le regardait [...] cette main était là, blanche, fascinante, avec ses doigts plus hauts que la paume lourde, ses ongles accrochés aux fils de la culotte comme les araignées suspendues à leurs toiles par le bout de leurs pattes sur les feuilles chaudes [...] simple, naturelle, mais vivante comme un œil.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ viz. 'But keep the whole Dantesque analogy out of sight' (WN 2 *qtd* by Daniela Caselli, 'Italian Literature', in Anthony Uhlmann [ed.], *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 244)

⁹⁶ *Dream*, 47

⁹⁷ viz. *DTF*, 153

⁹⁸ André Malraux, *La Voie royale*, in *op. cit.*, 503

If Perken does not whinge like Lucien, he is certainly every bit as unsettled by the sight of his own hands, from which he has come to feel entirely estranged.⁹⁹ What we find in this passage, in short, is a model of precisely that ‘alienation from the body’ to which Beckett would later give voice in *Dream* and, quite possibly, another example of the manner in which Beckett’s interest in Malraux, an interest that almost led him to devote a critical monograph to the French writer, exerted a subtle but intriguing influence on Beckett’s earliest English-language fiction.

As noted at the outset, the aim of this chapter was not to propose an exhaustive study of Beckett’s engagement with French Literature, but rather to shed fresh light on particular aspects of this engagement over the years 1923-1937. In Part II, we will have the opportunity to study the importance of some of the texts Beckett encountered during these years in more detail as part of the close readings of Beckett’s pre-War French-language texts. Even that discussion, however, can only hope to be, at best, partial. The scale of Beckett’s engagement with French Literature over these years, and its importance for his writing, is simply too vast to be covered in any single study. As such, it is my hope that the discussion that has been offered in this chapter will have served, if nothing else, to confirm the importance of Beckett’s specifically French literary sensibility – a sensibility, shaped by his time as a student at TCD and a student of Thomas Rudmose-Brown, upon which he continued to expand in later years – and, more largely, that this confirmation will motivate future researchers to pursue the avenues of enquiry – into Vigny, Malraux, and countless others – that I have been obliged to let slip by.

⁹⁹ In this respect, in fact, Perken’s relationship with his hands towards the close of *La Voie royale* recalls, even more explicitly than Lucien’s response to his hands, Belacqua’s fascination with his own in the closing lines of *Dream* (viz. *Dream*, 241).

PART I: Situating French

Chapter 3

Reading/Writing/Living: Beckett's French in France (1937-1946)

If the preceding chapter's discussion of Beckett's French focussed on his engagement with French Literature, and how this engagement filtered into his English-language writing, it is because, during and following his years at TCD, Beckett's French remained an essentially literary phenomenon. Certainly, Beckett had already spent a reasonably substantial amount of time in France during the period covered by the previous chapter – in his capacity as a *lecteur d'anglais* at the *École normale supérieure* (ENS) he had indeed spent no less than two consecutive years there, from 1928-1930.¹ When one looks more closely at the texts that Beckett composed in French during the period covered by the previous chapter, however – namely, 'Le Concentrisme', the French-language letter in *Dream*, and the poems 'Tristesse Janale' and 'C'n'est au Pélican' –, one finds them to be written in what is essentially a literary register of French and to be characterised overwhelmingly by literary references.² The influence of specifically oral and colloquial varieties of French, meanwhile, is almost entirely absent from these early texts.³ Yet, when commenting on 'La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon' – Beckett's first French-language text of the post-War

¹ In addition to these two years that Beckett spent as a *lecteur d'anglais* at the ENS, rue d'Ulm (*viz. DTF*, 87-119), there were also a number of other periods spent in France prior to 1937: His cycling holiday around Touraine and the Loire as an undergraduate (*viz. Ibid.*, 64-65), and the months he spent in Paris in 1932 during which he worked concertedly on the composition of *Dream* (*viz. Ibid.*, 145-46, 156-60).

² For close readings of these pre-1937 French-language texts and elucidations of many of the literary references they contain, see Part II, Chapter 1.

³ The only markedly colloquial features that are to be found in these French-language writings of the early 1930s are in the French-language letter in *Dream*, which makes playful use of the phrase *avoir un polichinelle dans le tiroir*, an expression meaning 'to be pregnant' that is to be found amongst those popular expressions listed by Henri Bauche in his *Le Langage populaire* (*viz. Henri Bauche, Le Langage populaire : Grammaire, syntaxe et dictionnaire du français tel qu'on le parle dans le peuple de Paris avec tous les termes d'argot usuel* [Paris: Payot, 1920], 254), and where the title of the poem 'C'n'est au Pélican' elides the 'e' of the demonstrative *ce* in a manner frequent in popular French (*viz. Ibid.*, 98) – For more on this letter, and the role played by its pun on the French expression *avoir un polichinelle dans le tiroir*, see Part II, Chapter 1.

period, written in 1945⁴ –, Ruby Cohn was able to describe this essay as ‘assured and colloquial, with vulgarities uncustomary in art criticism’.⁵

Clearly, between the literary excesses of the French-language texts of the early 1930s, and the colloquialisms and vulgarities of a text such as Beckett’s 1945 essay on the painting of the Van Velde brothers, a marked change had occurred in Beckett’s French. This chapter will be devoted to providing the reader with the biographic details that help us to understand this development in Beckett’s writing, and will also draw attention to what this development tells us about the place that both French and English held in Beckett’s life at the moment of his post-War linguistic turn in 1946.⁶

I. 1928-1930: ENS

Given its status as one of the signal events in Beckett’s life during the pre-War period, to say nothing of the stated chronological focus of this chapter, it might be imagined that the present discussion would begin with Beckett’s move to Paris in 1937.⁷ To properly understand the importance of this move, and the effect that it had on his integration of colloquial forms of French into his style, however, one must first take a step beyond the chronological bounds of this chapter to consider the linguistic environment that Beckett inhabited during his years as a *lecteur*.

Although Beckett spent the years 1928-1930 in Paris, it has already been noted that these years appear to have had exceedingly little, if any, effect on the kind of French in which he wrote. Despite these years of residence in Paris, the French-language writings of the early 1930s remained indebted to specifically literary models, and a specifically literary mode of French, of just the sort that Beckett would have encountered through his studies at TCD. Indeed, these earliest texts actually display a degree of discomfort and uncertainty with colloquial forms of expression.⁸ In seeking

⁴ For more on the composition of this essay, see Part III, Chapter 3.

⁵ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 126

⁶ For analysis of the style of ‘La peinture des Van Veldes ou le monde et le pantalon’ and a partial correction of Cohn’s characterisation of this text, see Part III, Chapter 3.

⁷ Beckett arrived in Paris on 26th October, 1937 (*viz.* John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology*, 71).

⁸ This discomfort is evinced by the first line of the poem ‘C’n’est au Pélican’, as it appears in *Dream*. As noted, the elision of the ‘e’ from *ce* is a feature of popular, colloquial French, which suggests that Beckett was, in this opening line at least, endeavouring to approximate colloquial speech. If this is indeed what he is attempting to achieve, however, the elision of the *pas* from the negation testifies to a lack of familiarity with such colloquial forms since, where it is highly common to drop the *ne* in spoken negation – something noted by Bauche: ‘On supprime presque toujours “ne” en LP [= langage populaire] et souvent en fr[ançais] familier’ (Henri Bauche, *Le*

to understand why Beckett's first extended stay in the city that he would eventually decide to make his home failed to leave any obvious trace of colloquial French on his earliest French-language writings, it is helpful to recall that, during the period 1928-1930 – the very period when one would expect Beckett to have begun to develop a more intimate familiarity with non-literary varieties of French –, Beckett's social circle was defined by a number of features that, when taken together, help to explain the almost exclusively literary mode of his earliest French-language writings.

In the first instance, and despite the fact he was living in Paris, Beckett's social circle during the years 1928-1930 remained primarily English-speaking. The preponderance of English-speakers in Beckett's life during these years is made evident when one considers that the most important relationships that Beckett formed during these years were both with Irishmen, namely: Thomas MacGreevy and James Joyce.⁹ Both men, admittedly, had been established in Paris for some time before Beckett arrived in the city but neither one appears to have afforded Beckett entry into a specifically Francophone social circle. Thus, although MacGreevy brought Beckett into his existing circle of friends, this circle is described by James Knowlson as having been comprised of a large number of 'Irish, British or American expatriates'.¹⁰ Similarly, when one examines those literary and professional connections that Beckett made through his friendship with Joyce, one finds that – *pace* Angela Moorjani's description of these years at the ENS as a time during which Beckett immersed himself in 'the avant-garde literary circles – both Anglophone *and* Francophone – orbiting around Joyce'¹¹ – it was not with the French-language publishers and editors that surrounded Joyce, but rather with Joyce's friends amongst the publishers and editors of the English-language magazines, little reviews and private presses that flourished in Paris during the inter-War period – most notably, Nancy Cunard, Eugène Jolas, Samuel

Langage populaire, 146) –, the elision of the *pas* is not a feature of popular French. Beckett's decision to drop the *pas* rather than the *ne* thus suggests that, while he understood that the negation was amended in colloquial speech, he was not sufficiently familiar with such speech to amend it correctly, thereby producing a line which reads not as colloquial, but rather as curious. Subsequently, it may be noted, Beckett amended the line to conform with the tenets of standard French: 'Ce n'est pas au pélican' (*viz.* CP, 315) – For what the various versions of this poem reveal about its meaning, see Part II, Chapter 1; For what these various versions reveal about Beckett's attitude to the publication of French-language works in the early 1930s, see Part III, Chapter 2.

⁹ For the circumstances of Beckett's meeting with MacGreevy, see *DTF*, 89-90; For his meeting for Joyce, see *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91

¹¹ Angela Moorjani, 'French Literature', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 229 – Emphasis mine.

Putnam, and Edward Titus¹² – that Beckett associated most closely and with whom he forged the more significant relationships.

This is not to suggest that Beckett's two years in Paris provided him with no opportunity whatsoever to engage directly with the French language, nor that he failed to develop friendships with any native Francophones. The number of Beckett's close friends was, however, relatively small at the time, as it would remain throughout his life, and Beckett's circle of close, French-speaking friends appears have been correspondingly limited. In fact, while Beckett was a *lecteur* his circle of native, Francophone friends seems to have been restricted to three people: Alfred Péron, Georges Pelorson, and Jean Beaufret.¹³ There were, moreover, certain facts about these three individuals that are likely to have profoundly influenced the linguistic environment that Beckett occupied during the years 1928-1930 and which help to explain why these years did not suffice to endow Beckett's French-language writing of the early 1930s with the particular cadences and resonances of colloquial French.

In the first instance, Péron and Pelorson were both fluent English-speakers, and each also possessed a keen interest in English Literature. Both Péron and Pelorson were in fact students of English Literature – Péron, moreover, was an *agrégé d'anglais* –, and both executed translations from English into French.¹⁴ Moreover, their interest in English extended to a keen interest in the English-speaking world, an interest that is reflected by the fact that both men elected to spend time as *lecteurs* at TCD.¹⁵ Such a keen interest in English would have had an impact upon the conversations they had with a native-speaker of English, such as Beckett: In the first instance, Beckett himself would have been free to make use of English terms, while his bilingual, Anglophile friends would no doubt have been keen to make use of their fluency in the language they were passionate about. Evidence for the place that English held in Beckett's exchanges with his three friends is to be found in the fact that they conferred an

¹² *DTF*, 107-108

¹³ *Ibid.*, 95-97 – While Beckett met Pelorson and Beaufret at the ENS, his friendship with Péron had begun during the Frenchman's tenure as a *lecteur* at TCD, while Beckett was still a student there (*viz. Ibid.*, 66).

¹⁴ Péron, for example, assisted Beckett with both the translation of the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section of *Finnegans Wake*, which was eventually published as part of the *Cahiers de l'Herne: James Joyce* (*viz. op. cit.*, 417-422), and later translated Beckett's poem 'Alba'; Pelorson, meanwhile, translated works including Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (*viz. Retour à Brideshead* [Paris: Robert Laffont, 1946]), and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn* (*viz. Tropic du Capricorne* [Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1976]) – For a discussion of Péron's translation of Beckett's 'Alba', see Part III, Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Péron occupied this role during Beckett's final year as an undergraduate; Pelorson, meanwhile, served as *lecteur* at TCD during Beckett's unhappy year as a lecturer in French (*viz. DTF*, 122).

English nickname ('Bowsprit') on the only one of their number who is not known to have had a marked interest in English Literature, or the English-speaking world – namely, Jean Beaufret, who was a student of Philosophy, rather than English Literature, and a specialist of German philosophy.¹⁶

If the English-derived name that was given to Beaufret is any guide, it suggests that, even when spending time with his French friends during the period 1928-1930, Beckett was not necessarily immersed in a purely Francophone world. On the contrary, the particularities of these friends – coupled with Beckett's own fondness for moving between languages, as attested by his surviving correspondence¹⁷ – suggests that his interactions with them would have been characterised by a high degree of bilingualism.¹⁸ There was, moreover, another factor that is likely to have affected the kind of French to which Beckett was exposed by Péron, Pelorson, and Beaufret: They were all students of the ENS.

The ENS is indeed a very particular environment. Although a public institution, it is also indisputably an elite institution, which students enter by way of a far-reaching examination, only undertaken after two – sometimes three – years of extensive study in *classes préparatoires (prépas)*. At the time Beckett was working as a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96 – For more on Jean Beaufret, see Part II, Chapter 1.

¹⁷ A number of letters included in *LSB I* attest to Beckett's fondness for intermingling French and English in his correspondence, even in the early 1930s. Thus, in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of March, 1931, Beckett asks his friend 'what could be more blafard, gritty like the Civic Guard's anus' (*LSB I*, 71 – SB to TMG [11th March, 1931]).

¹⁸ It is perhaps possible to get some sense of the linguistic character of the conversations that Beckett might have had with Péron and Pelorson at least from the interview that James Knowlson conducted with Pelorson – who had by that time changed his name to Belmont – while researching for *DTF*: During this interview, Knowlson and Pelorson's discussion moves easily between English and French and this movement is determined, not by Knowlson, but by Pelorson's willingness to switch between languages. Even when French is the dominant language, in fact, Pelorson often uses English words or phrases and, on occasion, even responds in English to questions posed in French. To the question 'Est-ce qu'il y avait d'autres gens à qui Sam donnait des cours privés?', for instance, Belmont provides a lengthy response almost entirely in, occasionally French-tinged, English: 'I was the only one of my promotion. The following year certainly there must have been an angliciste. I was admitted in July 1928 but at the Sorbonne it opened on the 1st of November, the School as well [...]' (JEK A/7/1 ['Interview with Belmont, Georges']). This linguistic fluidity is particularly well-evidenced in the response offered by Pelorson to a question concerning the living conditions for students at the ENS during his time there. In answering that question, Pelorson describes the dormitory in the following terms: 'C'était un grand dortoir comme dans les lycées avec les "cubicles" pour les étudiants. *Not even closed cubicles, but a curtain hanging there, no private ceiling but a common ceiling and des cloisons qui montaient comme ça un peu et puis on avait un placard pour ranger ses vêtements etc, pas beaucoup de place dans ce placard'* (*Ibid.*). As can be seen, English and French are here inextricably linked: English words intrude into the French, and a sentence in French is followed by one begun in English but concluded in French.

lecteur d'anglais there, prospective students seeking to pursue the humanities at the ENS – as did all of Beckett's three close friends – were required to sit an examination that 'focused on either translation or essay composition: Latin translation, Latin composition, Greek translation (replaceable with a modern language for those aiming to teach a modern language in a secondary school) and three separate exams responding to a single essay question in French literature, philosophy and history'.¹⁹ As the details of this examination suggest, the standard demanded of prospective students was at once high and geared towards instilling in them a profoundly literary culture similar to that which Beckett himself acquired while a student at TCD. Those who were successful in the examination thus entered the ENS with not only an affirmed sense of belonging to an intellectual elite, they also became part of a student body whose collective bond was all the stronger for their possession of a shared *fonds culturel* born of their years of study of the same texts and with an eye towards the same examinations. To be a student of the ENS was thus not merely to pursue a course of study, it was to acquire a particular place among the intellectual and cultural elite of French society, and to be supremely conscious of this fact. This aspect of the ENS and its students is well expressed by George Pompidou's contention that 'On est normalien comme on est prince du sang'.²⁰

It is important to be aware of the reputation of the institution where Beckett spent the years 1928-1930, as well as the shared intellectual background of the students that he associated with there, since it is likely that these factors would have had an effect upon the sorts of French to which Beckett was exposed during these years and would thus serve to explain why these years did not provide him with the first-hand introduction to colloquial French that he might have been expected to gain from two years of residence in Paris.

Within the walls of the ENS – where Beckett was also living for the duration of his time as a *lecteur* –, he found himself in a world marked out by its self-conscious intellectualism, one whose language was defined not by colloquial expressions but by the *argot* peculiar to the students of the ENS. This *argot* itself attests to the particular character of the institution. Including multiple terms derived from Latin (*canular*, *forum*) and Greek – whether true Greek, as in the prefix *hypo-* (*hypotaupe*, *hypotaupin*), or faux-Greek, as in the term *khâgneux*, whose orthography Hellenizes *cagne* –, the cant of the *normaliens* signals the familiarity with Classical culture that, as suggested by the description of the examination faced by prospective students,

¹⁹ Anthony Cordingley, 'École Normale Supérieure', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 43

²⁰ Georges Pompidou *qtd in Ibid.*

humanities students of the ENS were required to possess.²¹ While Latin and Greek find their place in the *argot* of the ENS, however, the popular forms of colloquial speech would have been as little welcome in such an elite space as the forms of inner-city Dublin English would have been within the walls of TCD when Beckett himself had only recently been a student there.²² Without the walls of the ENS, meanwhile, Beckett, as has been noted, was primarily associating with Anglophones, who were most likely incapable of offering him any direct access to these colloquial forms of French.

The years 1928-1930, in short, though they may have been spent in France, were also spent in environments, and amongst people, who were either highly unlikely or strictly unable to provide him with the explicitly colloquial forms of French of which he would make use in post-War writings, such as 'La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon'. On the contrary, these years would have served primarily to further reinforce that kind of formal, self-consciously intellectual, and literary French that he had been acquiring through his studies at TCD. It is thus wholly unsurprising if Beckett's French-language writings of the early 1930s are written in precisely this form of resolutely literary French and attest to a certain unease on Beckett's part with the forms of non-standard and colloquial French.

II. 1937-1946: PARIS AND BEYOND

The particularities of the kind of French to which Beckett was exposed during the period 1928-1930 are all the more worthy of mention because he was exposed to a very different linguistic environment, and very different kinds of French, following his definitive move to France in 1937.

Initially, the change in linguistic environment was not as dramatic as it would later become. Upon his arrival in Paris, and up until the early 1940s, Beckett continued to associate with many of the same figures whom he had come to know during the

²¹ For a fuller list of terms derived from the *argot* of the ENS, see: Yann Ollivier, 'Les mots de l'École normale supérieure' <<http://www.yann-ollivier.org/etymo/normale>> [accessed: 5th February, 2018]; 'Petit vocabulaire à l'usage du normalien' <<http://www.ens.fr/des-campus-au-coeur-de-paris/traditions-et-particularismes/petit-vocabulaire-l-usage-du-normalien>> [accessed: 5th February, 2018].

²² It is indeed telling that, although Anthony Cordingley describes Beckett as being 'immersed in French at the École normale' (*Ibid.*, 45), the only novel linguistic register that Cordingley highlights as emerging in Beckett's French-language correspondence from his time at the ENS is that of 'bureaucratic French' (*Ibid.*). As a public institution, the ENS would certainly have provided Beckett with extensive exposure to the very particular features of bureaucratic French and it is no doubt for this reason that traces of this register are to be found in his correspondence.

period 1928-1930: 'Alan and Belinda Duncan, the Jolases, Georges and Marcelle Pelorson...Alfred Péron and the Joyces'.²³ Nevertheless, even if Beckett found certain members of his social circle from his years at the ENS unchanged, the changed historical circumstances of the late 1930s meant that much of the vibrant Anglophone community that had been such a feature of the Paris he experienced while a *lecteur* was already gone, and what was left of it would have vanished entirely within a few years.²⁴ Consequently, in 1937 there was substantially less scope for Beckett to partake in a predominately Anglophone social scene in Paris, as he had done in 1928-1930. This change is powerfully evidenced in the fact that, where the most important relationships that Beckett formed during his years at the ENS were with native English speakers – namely, MacGreevy and Joyce – the most significant relationship that he formed during the years that followed his 1937 move to Paris was with a monoglot Francophone – namely, Suzanne Dumesnil, the woman who came to be his partner and later his wife.²⁵

As his relationship with Dumesnil suggests, Beckett's engagement with French from the time of his 1937 move to Paris on was to be of a different order than what had previously been the case. Increasingly, over the years that followed his 1937 move, Beckett's engagement with the French language was no longer to be mediated primarily through French Literature, nor would it pass primarily through interaction with individuals who had a passion for the English language, English Literature, or the English-speaking world. Nor, indeed, would Beckett necessarily be engaging with

²³ *DTF*, 274

²⁴ In his study of American writers in Paris, Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno notes that '[t]here had been...by the middle of the late thirties, a gradual but decided drop in the number of [English-speaking] exiles in Paris' (Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris, 1944-1960* [London: Bloomsbury, 1992], 125) – For more on the decline of English-speaking communities in Paris, and the probable effect of this decline on Beckett's literary career, see Part III, Chapters 2 and 3.

²⁵ Beckett had first come to know Suzanne Dumesnil while a *lecteur*, when himself and Péron would occasionally play doubles matches of tennis against Dumesnil and her partner (*viz. DTF*, 94). It would only be after his return to Paris in 1937 that he would develop a personal relationship with her, however. – At this point, it is worth taking a moment to briefly discuss Dumesnil's surname: Although 'Deschevaux-Dumesnil' is the most widely-used spelling in Anglophone publications – this is the spelling used in Knowlson's biography (*viz. Ibid.*, 848 ['Index']) and in the *LSB* (*viz. LSB I*, 689, *passim*), for example – it appears to be incorrect. Her name appears as 'Suzanne Déchevaux-Dumesnil' on her gravestone, and 'Déchevaux-Dumesnil' is also the spelling used by the Bibliothèque nationale de France to catalogue her publications. Given this confusion, it is interesting to note that Dumesnil herself signed her letters simply 'Suzanne Dumesnil' (*viz. LSB II*, 175-76, 236-38, 242-246, *passim*). The better to avoid any confusion, and in recognition of her own preferred usage, this thesis will therefore refer to her as Dumesnil throughout.

individuals who, like himself, were the products of institutions that instilled in those that attended them a sense of belonging to a cultural and intellectual elite, and whose own use of language had been shaped by years spent acquiring ‘the perennial cultural capital of the intellectual aristocracy’.²⁶ Instead, as a resident of Paris, living, not in the rarefied confines of the ENS, as he had done in 1928-1930, but in a series of hotels and, eventually, in his own apartment on the rue des Favorites, Beckett’s engagement with the French language was now to be rooted in the ambient sounds of the city which he had chosen to make his home. It was only from this point on, in other words, that he began to be directly and extensively exposed to the colloquial Parisian French that, as Jean-Michel Rabaté notes, ‘durably impacted Beckett’s works’.²⁷

And yet, while there are certainly traces of this ‘slangy idiom’ of Parisian French to be found in some of the French-language texts that Beckett composed after his 1937 move – texts such as the French-language translation of *Murphy* that Beckett prepared with the possible assistance of Alfred Péron²⁸, or some of the French-language poems that he wrote during the late 1930s, most notably ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’²⁹ –, it is important to recognise that, as we will see shortly, the influence of this colloquial register of French was not yet a pervasive and determining influence on Beckett’s French-language writings. On the contrary, Beckett’s French-language works of the later 1930s continue to be profoundly influenced by literary modes of expression and literary works, while colloquial forms of French remain largely confined to instances of direct speech.

Recognition of both the change in the kind of French to which Beckett’s was exposed following his 1937 move to Paris and the relatively limited impact that this exposure to vernacular French had on the French-language texts that he produced in the late 1930s, is particularly important as it allows us both to correct a misconception about the origin of Beckett’s more extensive deployment of colloquial French in his post-War writings, and to demonstrate by another means a point that was made in the Introduction about the fundamental commonality of Beckett’s style, whether he is writing in French or English. For, while the almost complete absence of colloquial forms of French from Beckett’s earliest French-language compositions can be viewed as a consequence of a particular feature of Beckett’s French at the time – that is, his lack of exposure to these colloquial forms of French at that point in his life –, his

²⁶ Anthony Cordingley, ‘*École Normale Supérieure*’, in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 43

²⁷ Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Paris, Roussillon, Ussy’, in *Ibid.*, 53

²⁸ For more on the French-language translation of *Murphy*, and a reassessment of Péron’s role in this translation, see Part III, Chapter 2.

²⁹ For the text of this poem, see Appendix I (b).

restricted use of such forms in the work composed following his 1937 move to Paris is not simply explicable in terms of a particular feature of his French. On the contrary, such a restricted use of colloquial French is consistent with a stylistic strategy that is evident in Beckett's English-language works of the pre-War period. Prior to demonstrating the commonality between Beckett's deployments of vernacular French in his French-language writings of the late 1930s and his use of comparable forms of English in his pre-War English language prose, however, let us endeavour to correct a longstanding misconception according to which Beckett's use of vernacular French in his post-War writing betrays a specifically *literary* origin.

The idea that Beckett's use of colloquial French can be traced back to a literary source has been propounded most explicitly by Ruby Cohn and Helen Astbury. For both of these critics, the kind of French in which Beckett wrote his post-War works – and both of these critics are essentially concerned with Beckett's French-language works of the post-War period – bears the unmistakable imprint of Louis-Ferdinand Céline. In her *The Comic Gamut*, Cohn contended that 'Beckett...learned from Céline a grim, comic, colloquial French'.³⁰ Helen Astbury, for her part, has seen 'Céline's stylistic influence in [Beckett's] French' and especially in Beckett's use of 'binary-turned sentences' – that is, sentences which include both a pronoun (either object or subject) and the noun to which the pronoun refers.³¹

Certainly, Cohn was prescient in positing the importance of Céline to Beckett, as subsequent scholarship has proven Beckett to have had a keen interest in the French author from as early as 1936, when his so-called German Diaries show him to have been reading *Mort à crédit* with great pleasure.³² Similarly, Astbury's focus on binary-turned sentences is not without merit as such sentences are indeed to be found frequently in Beckett's post-War, French-language writings – most notably the novels of the *Trilogy*³³ – and it is entirely true that 'Céline's novels are full of sentences

³⁰ Ruby Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, 101 – Emphasis mine.

³¹ Helen Astbury, 'How To Do Things With Syntax: Beckett's Binary-Turned Sentences in French and Their Translation into English', in Angela Moorjani and Carola Veit (eds), *SBT/A 11: Endlessness in the year 2000 / Fin sans fin en l'an 2000* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2001), 449 – Astbury adopts this term from Léo Spitzer (*viz. Ibid.*, 447).

³² *DTF*, 231 – For Beckett's interest in Céline, see Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 78-79.

³³ An example of just such a phrase would be the Unnamable's oft-cited threat: 'Je vais le leur arranger, leur charabia' (*L'Innommable*, 63) – That example is just one of a large number of such sentences provided by Astbury in her article, for further examples see Helen Astbury, 'How To Do Things With Syntax: Beckett's Binary-Turned Sentences in French and Their Translation into English', 448-49.

of this type'.³⁴ Moreover, Astbury is equally right to draw attention to the fact that Céline's particular use of such sentences, which he introduced into the narrative voice of his texts, constituted a relative novelty when he deployed them in his novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932).³⁵ Up to that point, as noted by Jérôme Meizoz, the use of explicitly popular oral forms in French literary fiction remained confined to moments of direct speech, with the narrative voice holding steadfastly to the established norms of literary expression.³⁶ If Beckett's use of colloquial and non-standard forms necessarily had a literary origin, therefore, Céline – a writer whose work Beckett is known to have appreciated, and who played a key role in introducing just such forms of language into French Literature – would undoubtedly have a strong claim to being named as this origin. It is, however, not necessarily the case that Beckett's use of colloquial French had to have a literary origin.

To see why this should be the case, we need only recognise that, if Céline's *Voyage* may be said to have broken new ground by 'ma[king] use of syntactical structures that were, at the time, limited to spoken French', Céline did not *invent* the structures he used.³⁷ The novelty of his literary language, such as it was, lay in the fact that he was taking what were thoroughly natural features of colloquial French as he heard it spoken around him and introducing them into a literary environment to which they had previously been alien – that is, the controlled space of the narrative voice. Consequently, Beckett would not have needed to read Céline to encounter the kind of language that Céline's narrators used in his novels. On the contrary, for Beckett to deploy syntactical features of colloquial French in his own writing, he might have followed Céline's example without necessarily relying upon Céline's literary writings as a model. In other words, he might simply have opened his ears and made literary use of what he heard around him.

Taken together, these factors strongly suggest that Beckett's colloquial French, should not be viewed as a sort of 'butin verbal' pillaged from the texts he

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 447

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 446-447

³⁶ *viz.* 'Jusqu'aux années 1930...un « cloisonnement des voix » sépare le discours familier du littéraire : le récit se donne en français national, alors que les dialogues des personnages transposent à leur gré des formes orales socialement marquées' (Jérôme Meizoz, 'La « langue peuple » dans le roman français', in *Hermès, la revue* [Vol. 2, No. 42 – 2005], 102) – Although Céline is generally acknowledged as having played a key role in introducing the register of colloquial spoken French into French literature, he was not the very first writer to do so. Amongst the pioneers of orally-marked writing in French, Jérôme Meizoz mentions '[I]a fiction monologuée depuis Hugo...le courant naturaliste et les récits autobiographiques de Jules Vallès' (*Ibid.*).

³⁷ Helen Astbury, 'How To Do Things With Syntax: Beckett's Binary-Turned Sentences in French and Their Translation into English', 446-7

read, such as the novels of Céline.³⁸ Rather, it should be understood as evidence of his active engagement with the particular forms of the living language to which he was exposed. Beckett's post-War use of colloquial French syntax thus serves to do two things: Firstly, it retrospectively justifies the title of this subsection, since, for Beckett's post-War writing, living through French was every bit as important as reading in French. Secondly, it shows, yet again, the critical importance of recognising that Beckett's writing – right down to the particular forms of language that he used – is inseparable from the contexts in which he found himself. Obviously, for the reasons that were outlined previously, the context in which Beckett found himself during the years that he spent in Paris between 1928-1930 meant that these years did not suffice to provide him with any significant exposure to such colloquial forms, and it is undoubtedly for this reason that they are so scarce in his pre-1937, French-language writings; like the acquisition of a foreign language, the acquisition of a linguistic register requires lengthy exposure. Indeed, such exposure is even more necessary in the case of a colloquial register as it is, almost by definition, largely confined to speech.

From the time of his 1937 move, however, Beckett's access to colloquial and non-standard forms of French became every bit as direct as his exposure to colloquial, non-standard forms of English had been while he was living in Dublin; the cadences of inner-city Dublin speech or the syntactic quirks of Hiberno-English, forms of language alien to Beckett's idiolect of English – a fact attested by works written in his own voice, such as his correspondence³⁹ –, find their place in his literary writings because he was familiar with them and so was able to insert them into his own work, whether in the voice of the ticket-seller whom Belacqua meets in 'Ding Dong', one of the stories of *MPTK*, and who invites Belacqua to buy a ticket 'For yer frien'...yer da, yer ma an' yer motte, four fer a tanner'⁴⁰, or in *Murphy*, where Ticklepenny asserts that he has endeavoured to switch on the gas in the following terms: 'Amn't I after

³⁸ The term 'butin verbal' is used by Beckett in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy (*LSB I*, 93 – SB to TMG [8th November, 1931]) to describe his habit of extracting material from his reading matter for future use in his own writings, a habit he elsewhere refers to as 'notesnatching' – For more on Beckett's 'notesnatching', see *DN*, xvi-xviii.

³⁹ There is, for example, no trace of popular terms such as 'shawly' or 'jarvey' to be found in the letters collected as part of *LSB I*, nor do we find any examples of markedly Hiberno-English syntax, such as the 'do be' or 'after + past participle' constructions – These particular aspects of popular English are notable for the fact that, although absent from those personal writings composed in his own voice, they are to be found in his literary writings (*viz.* *MPTK*, 44 ['shawly', 'jarvey']; *Murphy*, 75 ['do be']; *Ibid.*, 109 ['after + present participle']).

⁴⁰ *MPTK*, 39

trying?'.⁴¹ Living in Paris, rather than the ENS, and no longer associating primarily with English-speakers, Beckett was free from 1937 on to develop a familiarity with comparable forms of French, forms that he now regularly heard about him in the streets of Paris, and which he might make use of in exactly the same way as he had made use of the English that he had heard on the streets of Dublin in his English-language writings.

The key word here is *exactly*. For what is most notable about Beckett's French-language writings of the late 1930s – that is, the writings he composed after his 1937 move to Paris – is that they do indeed show him to have made *exactly* the same kind of use of these colloquial, non-standard forms of French as he had earlier made of similar forms of English. Crucially, in terms of Cohn and Astbury's contention that Céline played a determining role in introducing Beckett to the literary possibilities of colloquial French, Beckett's use of colloquial forms in his French-language writings of the late 1930s serves at once to align his own practice in French and English, and to profoundly separate his practice from that of Céline.

As noted, the originality of Céline's writing lay in the fact that he drew non-standard forms of colloquial French into the previously refined space of the narrative voice. In Beckett's case, however, where non-standard forms of language occur in his pre-War writings – whether these be non-standard forms of English in English-language writings of the pre-War period, or non-standard forms of French in his French-language writings of the late 1930s – these forms are essentially limited to instances of direct speech. Beckett's narrative voice, meanwhile, continues to adhere to forms and rules of formal, literary expression.

The existence of this division in Beckett's English-language writing of the pre-War period has already been suggested by the fact that the indicative instances of inner-city Dublin speech and Hiberno-English syntax that have just been mentioned were both moments of direct speech: The first occurring in the voice of the ticket seller, the second in the voice of Cooper. This divide between the narrative voice and the more colloquial possibilities of direct speech is not merely tacit, however. It is sometimes made perfectly explicit, as when the narrative voice in 'Ding Dong' signals the particularity of the ticket-sellers speech even before she opens her mouth, telling the reader that: '*Her* speech was that of a woman of the people, but of a gentlewoman of the people'.⁴² *Her* speech is avowedly her own and not that of the narrative voice for, in 'Ding Dong' – as elsewhere, throughout Beckett's pre-War

⁴¹ *Murphy*, 109

⁴² *MPTK*, 37 – Emphasis mine.

writing –, the narrative voice luxuriates in archaic diction ('Yet he durst not dally'⁴³) and esoteric vocabulary ('[...] all the aliquots of fatigue and ebriety'⁴⁴), but never veers into forms that could be described as colloquial or popular. An explicitly popular register, such as that practised by the aforementioned 'gentlewoman of the people', is confined to direct speech and, more particularly, to the direct speech of characters such as herself, since Belacqua's own voice remains as distant from the non-standard forms of popular speech as does the narrator.⁴⁵

If Beckett's use of non-standard and colloquial forms of French was primarily attributable to the influence of Céline, we might reasonably expect Céline's example to have led Beckett to experiment not only with colloquial French, but with the possibilities of introducing such forms into the narrative voice of his writings. What we find in the French-language *Murphy*, however, is a text that follows, not the Célinian model, but the model of Beckett's own English-language original by confining instances of an explicitly colloquial register to moments of direct speech. This register, indeed, is generally appealed to only when Beckett is required to translate instances of non-standard English that occur in the original *Murphy*. Cooper's uses of the 'do be' construction, for example, is invariably rendered by a popular form: Thus, 'I do be turned off' becomes 'Je suis été foutu à la porte'⁴⁶; 'I do be fond of Mr. Neary', meanwhile, is translated as 'Monsieur Neary, bon pote à moi'.⁴⁷ In the first case, Cooper's conjugation of the verb *être* using *être* as an auxiliary reflects what Bauche's *Le Langage populaire* records as having been a common feature of colloquial Parisian French in the early twentieth century.⁴⁸ In the second, a widespread, but non-standard, mode of forming the possessive using *à* is coupled with *pote* a popular variant of the more neutral *ami*, thereby according a decidedly colloquial tenor to the expression.⁴⁹ Similarly, but to a less extreme degree, something of the informality of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36

⁴⁵ The degree to which non-standard forms are alien to Belacqua's own speech are later made evident in 'Yellow' when, upon hearing the nurse who attends him speaking in Scots dialect – 'Such a lang tootsy' (*MPTK*, 160) – he responds with a short sentence including a word of the same dialect, a sentence delivered in a loud voice and derived from his familiarity of Robert Burns' well-known verse 'Auld Lang Syng': "'Soon to by syne" he said in a loud voice' (*Ibid.*). Belacqua is here for all the world like a foreigner speaking a language entirely unknown to them, relying on only the most commonly-known of phrases and endeavouring to make volume substitute for accuracy of expression.

⁴⁶ *Murphy*, 75; *Murphy* (1947), 89

⁴⁷ *Murphy*, 78; *Murphy* (1947), 92

⁴⁸ *viz.* '[A]lors qu'en fr[ançais standard] on dit « j'ai été », en LP [= langage populaire] on dit plus souvent *je suis étéé*' (Henri Bauche, *Le Langage populaire*, 120).

⁴⁹ Bauche notes *pote* as a popular equivalent for *camarade* (*viz. Ibid.*, 264).

Ticklepenny's own use of a non-standard, Hiberno-English construction – 'Amn't I after trying?' – is conveyed through the translation 'Mais je viens de regarder tout ça', since the informal *ça* was obviously understood by Beckett as a mark of familiar speech.⁵⁰ Such, at least, becomes apparent when one notes that the narrative voice of the French-language *Murphy* exclusively uses the more literary *cela*.

Naturally, the value of the French-language *Murphy* as a guide to Beckett's use of oral forms in his French-language writing is partially compromised by its status as a translation, which might lead one to assume that, if Beckett's usage of French mirrors his English, it is simply because he is trying to convey the original into French as faithfully as possible. In this regard, it is important to note that the restriction of explicitly colloquial forms of French to direct speech and the resolutely literary nature of the narrative voice is also to be observed in Beckett's original French-language compositions of the period. Thus, in the unpublished poem 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', which takes the form of a conversation between two lovers as recounted by the male partner and in which we would expect to find the colloquialisms that Beckett was willing to allow himself in instances of direct speech, we do indeed find only the more familiar and orally-marked *ça*.⁵¹ In the essay 'Les Deux Besoins', on the other hand – which, as a piece of criticism, is written entirely in a voice comparable to that of the depersonalised narrative voice of literary prose –, we find only the more formal *cela*, the same form that characterises the narrative voice of the French-language *Murphy*.⁵²

The divide that has here been identified between Beckett's willingness to deploy colloquialisms in direct speech while refusing them admittance to the space of the narrative voice is, of course, not a perfect one. There are instances where terms that clearly belong to a non-standard or colloquial register intrude into the narrative voice of these pre-War works – as, for example, when the narrator of 'A Wet Night' speaks of 'the solitary *shawly* like a cloud of latter rain in a waste of poets and politicians' or of how 'Belacqua shrank from *jarveys*'.⁵³ Or when, in the French-language *Murphy*, we are informed of how Cooper's instincts lead him to conceal the facts of Murphy's ongoing liaison from Miss Counihan: 'Car ou bien on l'avait sacrifiée à une vulgaire *salope*, ou bien il existait une femme plus belle qu'elle, deux propositions également insupportables dans la bouche d'un homme même d'un

⁵⁰ *Murphy* (1947), 127

⁵¹ viz. 'je me dresse dans le lit je m'écrie apporte-moi un algocratine / j'ai changé d'avis ça me fait chier' (MNLP)

⁵² viz. 'Cela avance à coups de oui et de non comme un obus à détonateurs, jusqu'à ce que la vérité explose.' (D, 57)

⁵³ *MPTK*, 44 – Emphasis mine.

homme comme Cooper'.⁵⁴ Such cases, however, are the exception rather than the rule and, certainly, we find no examples of explicitly non-standard syntax – along the lines of the constructions 'do be' or 'je suis été' – in the narrative voice of Beckett's pre-War writings, in either French or English. Moreover, and far more significantly, the divide between the narrative voice and the direct speech of these pre-War works functions in the same manner whether Beckett is working in French or English: As of the late 1930s, at least, 'colloquial[isms]' and 'vulgarity' of the sort that Cohn identifies as key features of Beckett's post-War essay 'La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon' remain the exception rather than the rule for Beckett's narrative voice, whether he is working in English or in French.

Identification of this divide serves to tell us two things of no small importance to our understanding of Beckett's French in the period 1937-1946: In the first instance, it provides us with yet another example of that essential commonality between the style of Beckett's English- and French-language writing that was earlier pointed out by way of the 'Suite' Notebook. It thus serves to demonstrate that this stylistic commonality did not begin in the post-War period. On the contrary, we see that Beckett's pre-War works too were written in much the same style, whether Beckett is working in French or English.⁵⁵ Secondly, it reaffirms the existence of a change in Beckett's style between his French-language compositions of the late 1930s and the French-language works of the late 1940s and beyond, as colloquial and vulgar expressions that had remained essentially the province of direct speech came to be an integral part of the narrative voice. The effect that this change of style had on Beckett's French-language writing will be examined in more detail in Part III, where we will have the opportunity to compare the style of Beckett's pre-War aesthetic essay 'Les Deux Besoins' and his post-War essay on the Van Veldes.⁵⁶ At the present time, however, it will be sufficient to sketch out the probable origin of this change. For, while it remains the case that, as outlined in the Introduction, this thesis is not concerned with tracing the origins of the stylistic progression that is evident when we compare Beckett's pre- and post-War compositions, there is one event which surely had a role to play in this development and which is also of direct relevance to the focus of this thesis, and this chapter, for it constitutes an important event in the

⁵⁴ *Murphy* (1947), 146 – In this case, ' salope' translates 'drab' (*Murphy*, 126).

⁵⁵ This stylistic parity is something that we will have the opportunity to examine in greater depth, and to demonstrate at greater length, when we come to examine Beckett's French-language literary writings of the pre-War period in Part II.

⁵⁶ For this comparison, see Part III, Chapter 3.

development of Beckett's French during the period 1937-1946 – namely, the years that Beckett spent in Roussillon.

Having moved to Paris in 1937 – and excepting his annual trips to Dublin, occasional trips to London, and the longer absence from Paris following the German invasion of France, when Beckett and Dumesnil joined the *Exode* and spent the period from June to September of 1940 in Arcachon, on the southwest coast of France⁵⁷ – the French capital remained Beckett's primary residence for five years. This relative stability was shattered in August 1942, however, when the betrayal of the Resistance cell of which Beckett and Dumesnil had been members drove them to flee Paris and, eventually, to find security in the village of Roussillon, in the Vaucluse, where they would spend two years immersed in a life, a world, and forms of French, unlike anything that Beckett at least had ever previously experienced.⁵⁸

To get a sense of the extreme novelty of the environment in which Beckett found himself while living in Roussillon, we need to recall that, up to that point, Beckett had been an essentially urban creature: Born in Dublin and having spent time in Paris and London, and well as travelling through the cities of Italy and Germany, nothing in Beckett's biography suggests any familiarity with, or even extended exposure to, a specifically rural way of life. Roussillon was thus an entirely new world for him.

This transition to an unfamiliar rural environment also had linguistic consequences as, even following his 1937 move to Paris, Beckett's social circle ensured that, although he was increasingly exposed to colloquial forms of French, this exposure was an addition to, rather than a substitution for, continued frequentation of the *normaliens* and *agrégés* that he had come to know while working at the ENS – persons such as Pelorson and Péron, as well as Péron's wife Mania, herself an *agrégée d'anglais*.⁵⁹ As such, for all his increased exposure to the colloquialisms of vernacular and popular French, many of Beckett's more intimate French-speaking acquaintances continued to speak the same sort of French to which he had been exposed during his years at the ENS. At the same time, he also continued to associate with a number of native English-speakers – most notably, Peggy Guggenheim, with whom he was romantically involved for a time⁶⁰ –, thereby ensuring that English continued to have

⁵⁷ viz. John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology*, 87-88

⁵⁸ For details of Beckett's work with the Resistance and his and Dumesnil's flight from Paris, see *DTF*, 303-318

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 361

⁶⁰ For details of this relationship, see *Ibid.*, 284-288

an important place in his social circle and his life during the early years of his residence in Paris. Beckett, in other words, may have been living in a Paris different from the one he had previously known as a *lecteur* – a Paris beyond the rarefied linguistic environment that existed within the sheltered world of the ENS –, but the Paris in which he lived was still an urban world, one in which Beckett seems to have frequented the same sort of people that he had always frequented. During his years in Roussillon, however, almost all of these remaining links to the life and the kinds of language that Beckett had known until this point in his life fell away as he found himself immersed in something entirely new.

Unsurprisingly, the novelty and specifically linguistic importance of these years that Beckett spent living in Roussillon has not gone unnoticed by scholars of Beckett's writing. Writing in *DTF*, Knowlson has detailed the manner in which, over the course of Beckett's years there, his relationship with the French language evolved:

Throughout their two year stay in Roussillon, Beckett had spoken little but French. Suzanne [Dumesnil] knew hardly any English. Consequently, he had used his native tongue only when he met Miss Beamish alone, for her companion, Suzanne Allévy, always spoke French. French was the language of his everyday life: working in the fields with Fernand Aude, talking in the farmhouse kitchen with the Aude family, discussing the progress of the war in Madame Escoffier's café, and conversing, sparingly, between moves during his regular games of chess with Henry Hayden.⁶¹

As Knowlson's characterisation of these years suggests, the linguistic significance of Beckett's experience in Roussillon cannot be underestimated: By this time, Beckett may have already made French his primary language of literary expression – having turned to French in 1938, and continued to write primarily in this language until 1941, when he began work on *Watt*⁶² – but he had not yet been in an environment where French was also, to all intents and purposes, the primary language of his 'everyday life', and from which English was almost entirely excluded. It was an environment of precisely this sort that Beckett inhabited during the years in Roussillon, as his circle of acquaintance became almost wholly and monolingually Francophone.

The intensity of Beckett's engagement with French during his years in Roussillon means that this period of his life undoubtedly had a key role to play in expanding and extending Beckett's familiarity with French, and it undoubtedly had an equally central role to play in leading him towards the writing of the post-War period,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 356

⁶² For details of this period of Beckett's life, as well as the factors that led to Beckett's turning to French as his primary mode of literary expression in 1938, see Part III, Chapter 2; For details of the radio sketch that Beckett wrote during these years, and which may have been written in French, see Appendix II (b).

where he took those colloquial forms of language that had previously been restricted primarily to moments of direct speech and made them an integral element of his writing, a foundational element of the narrative voice.

It has, however, already been noted that Beckett's restricted use of colloquial and non-standard forms of French in the late 1930s – that is, before Roussillon – cannot simply be explained as a particularity of his French, given that he made exactly the same restricted use of comparably colloquial and non-standard forms of English in his English-language writing. As such, it may be seen that the change in Beckett's use of such forms in the post-War period is suggestive, not merely of a change in his relationship to French, but in a change in his relationship to language more broadly.

This insight helps us to recognise an aspect of the years of Roussillon that is often ignored but which is of no less importance than the role that these years had to play in expanding the depth and breadth of Beckett's French. This aspect concerns the manner in which these years introduced him, not merely to new forms of French, but to new forms of language.

Generally, critics interested in these years of Beckett's biography have stressed the importance of the years in Roussillon for Beckett's French. That this should be the case is unsurprising given that, for the reasons that have already been outlined, these were years during which French was the primary language of Beckett's daily life and that, during these years, he was exposed to kinds of French that, up to that point, are likely have been largely unknown to him. These kinds of French are specified by George Craig, who remarks that the years in Roussillon were a time during which Beckett was 'exposed to an undifferentiated tide of French – no longer only the currency of artists and intellectuals, but the language of farm, forge, garage, and inn'.⁶³ While it is unquestionably true that the French 'of farm, forge, garage, and inn' were almost certainly largely unknown to a person like Beckett who, up to that point in his life, had lived exclusively in urban and largely socially-homogenous spaces, it should equally be acknowledged that, in 1942, 'the language of farm, forge, garage, and inn' would scarcely have been better known to him in English than it was in French. For, if Beckett had never before experienced the rural life that he experienced in French in Roussillon, he had never experienced it through English either. If he had up to that point primarily inhabited urban and socially-homogenous spaces in French, he had also inhabited much the same sort of spaces in English. The language that Beckett discovered in Roussillon was thus not novel simply by virtue of being a new

⁶³ George Craig, *Writing Beckett's Letters* (Paris: Sylph Editions, 2011), 34

kind of French for him, it was novel by virtue of being a form of language of which he had no prior intimate experience – in either French or English. The fact that these two years in Roussillon served to introduce Beckett to forms of language that he would never have experienced in English provides us with yet another reason why we must avoid thinking about Beckett's French as if it were a 'foreign language.'

It has already been made clear in previous chapters that thinking of Beckett's French in this way is unhelpful because it presumes that one can speak of an abstracted 'foreign language' that is experienced in a singular and consistent manner across individuals, and across 'foreign languages'. We have seen time and again that this is not true: We have seen that Beckett's experience of French, even his earliest experience of the language, differed markedly from his experience of other languages that were equally foreign to him – such as German, Irish, and Latin. A language, whether foreign or otherwise, is not merely a language, it is also the experiences that feed into it, and which can colour one's appreciation of it, either positively or negatively. Equally, a language – at least for a person such as Beckett – is also a literature, and here too it has been seen that Beckett's experience of French was distinct from, for example, his experience of Italian, since he appears to have ceased actively engaging with the latter's literature after his time in TCD, while his experience of French Literature continued to deepen and evolve throughout the following decades.

At the same time as it is necessary to acknowledge the failure of the term 'foreign language' to account for what distinguishes French from Beckett's other foreign languages, it must equally be recognised that Beckett's French is not merely distinct from his other foreign languages, it can also be distinct from itself: Over the different periods of Beckett's life, the kinds of French to which he was exposed, and the use that he made of this language changed dramatically. In this chapter especially, we have seen how radically Beckett's experience of French altered as he moved successively through the various linguistic environments of the ENS and of Paris, and we have seen how the change in his exposure to colloquial and non-standard forms of French was reflected in the kind of writing that he produced. The transformation as he moved from Paris to Roussillon was even more remarkable, and the years in Roussillon make it clear why it is impossible to think of Beckett's French – specifically, the French to which he turned in March 1946 – as merely another foreign language, to say nothing of 'a kind of fiction' or 'a kind of art work' as Michael Edwards asserts

foreign languages to be.⁶⁴ Neither 'fiction' nor 'art work', Beckett's French was, by 1946, the language through which he had lived almost exclusively for two years, years during which it had been the primary language of his daily interactions and the mother tongue – indeed, the only language – of almost all those with whom he associated.

What Beckett's years in Roussillon also make clear, however, and as has just been stated, is the degree to which, by this time, French had become for Beckett a language that could serve as the vehicle for original experiences. Rather than being simply a foreign language – a new way in which to replicate or approximate the scope and scale of what he had originally experienced in his native tongue –, French had become a means of engaging in entirely novel experiences, of living in a way that Beckett had never known in English. The world that Beckett inhabited in Roussillon was not a world in which he rediscovered what he had already lived in English; it was a world that he discovered through French.

In this way, the years in Roussillon serve as the point after which it is no longer possible to imagine that Beckett's French was, for him, a language any less intimate than his English. Biographically speaking, these years constitute something equivalent to the line that is drawn across the thirtieth page of the 'Suite' Notebook: Before these years, it is possible to see Beckett as a primarily English-speaking writer who only occasionally dabbled in French; after these years, one must recognise that French had become, for a time at least, the primary language of his lived experience. It is for this reason that the years that followed – the years during which Beckett worked for a time with the Irish Red Cross, during which he experienced poverty in Paris as he tried to establish himself as a writer and, finally, the point in 1946 at which he turned to French – will not be discussed here. Although they are certainly of biographical importance, and aspects of them will be evoked when we come to analyse the various factors that impacted on Beckett's decision to turn to French in 1946, it remains the case that Beckett's French did not dramatically change beyond this point: By the years in Roussillon, he had experienced the full panoply of linguistic environments that he would know; from that point on, he would flit between them – moving, most notably, between the urban space of Paris and the rural world of Ussy –, but he would not experience anything radically new.

While there would thus be nothing of great importance to gain from tracing the course of Beckett's French as it developed over the short span of time that stands between the years in Roussillon and the post-War linguistic turn of 1946, there

⁶⁴ Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French' in *Translation and Literature* (Vol. 1 – 1992), 70, 74

remains something important that may be gained from considering an aspect of Beckett's French, and the role it had come to play in his life by the late 1930s, that has not yet been evoked. Evidence for this aspect of Beckett's French is to be found in the 'Whoroscope' Notebook and the *Watt* manuscripts, and it is upon this evidence, and what it tells us about the point that Beckett's French had reached – not even by 1946, but by 1938 – that the present chapter will close.

The 'Whoroscope' Notebook is difficult to date, as it covers a diverse array of materials taken over a long period of time. Despite these difficulties, John Pilling has established that a number of entries from the 'Whoroscope' Notebook date from 'late 1937/early 1938', and are thus posterior to Beckett's move to Paris.⁶⁵ The dating is helpful because, although Pilling does not mention the materials relating to Pythagoras and Hippiasus that are to be found in the 'Whoroscope' Notebook in his article, it confirms the likelihood that they too date from this period.

Not only do these materials appear in close proximity to the 'Céline-Mauthner-Sartre-Kant/Cassierer pages of the 'Whoroscope' Notebook' that Pilling has dated to the end of 1937 or the beginning of 1938, these materials appear to have fed in to the composition of 'Les Deux Besoins', which is likely to have been composed in 1938.⁶⁶ The interest of these materials is not confined to their relation to Beckett's French-language essay, however. They are, in fact, most interesting for what they reveal about the degree to which, for Beckett, the use of French and English had become essentially interchangeable by the final years of the 1930s. The better to demonstrate this interchangeability, it will be helpful to cite the material that has just been mentioned in its entirety:

Hippiasus : 500 B.C. : fondateur de la secte pythagorienne des acousmatiques – prétendit que le feu est la cause des choses, que le monde se meut constamment en vertu de lois fixes – se sépara des autres pythagoriens en soutenant que le premier principe est un être matériel et non pas un nombre c'est-à-dire une substance immatérielle' | Pythagoras (b. Samos 569 – d. [Tarentum] 470) : Circumsized by priests of Diospolis in Thebes; settled in greater Greece, taught at Tarentum, set up school at Crotona. [At] 60 married the beautiful Theano, daughter of the doctor Brontinus. Led Crotona in war against Sybarites (Sybaris), who were defeated. Rewarded with gift of magnificent garden where he built a college on Egyptian and Chaldean model. This the famous Institute of Pythagoras. Neophyte only admitted after novitiate of several years in absolute silence. Stages of initiation: auditor, speaker, mathematician, [magtiris]. Secret des formes de rigueur comme dans les mystères. No meat, wine or love. | His doctrine of metempsychosis.

⁶⁵ John Pilling, 'Dates and Difficulties in Beckett's *Whoroscope* Notebook', in *JoBS* (Vol. 13, No. 2 – 2004), 44

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* – For details of the composition of 'Les Deux Besoins', see Part III, Chapter 2.

| Dieu unité primordiale s'unissant au nombre pair (néant) produit nombre impair (être, monde). As result of popular revolution in Crotona Pythagoreans slaughtered or banished; P. himself, at 80, finds refuge in Tarentum.⁶⁷

The material on Hippiasus and Pythagoras we find in the 'Whoroscope' Notebook was extracted by Beckett from the *Grand Dictionnaire universel* of Pierre Larousse, a work which, given its scale – seventeen volumes in all –, Beckett is almost certain to have consulted in a library.⁶⁸ What is notable about this material is that, where the information on Hippiasus has simply been extracted from Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel*⁶⁹, the *Dictionnaire's* lengthy entry on Pythagoras underwent a substantial degree of translation and condensation in its transposition to Beckett's notebook and it is to this partial translation that we must pay attention.

This material in particular is important for several reasons. In the first instance, Beckett's translation of some of the material on Pythagoras allows us to correct Matthew Feldman's assertion that 'Beckett never translated from one language to another while note-taking'.⁷⁰ These notes demonstrate that Beckett *did* occasionally translate across languages when taking notes.⁷¹ The value of this translation, however, is not limited to what it tells us about Beckett's notetaking

⁶⁷ WN, 45-46

⁶⁸ Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle : français, historique, géographique, biographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.*, 17 vols, (Paris : Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1877) – for Hippiasus, see *Tome 9 (H-K)*; for Pythagoras, see *Tome 13 (POUR-R)*.

⁶⁹ viz. 'HIPPIASUS, philosophe grec, un des plus anciens pythagoriciens, né à Métaponte ou à Crotona, vers 500 avant J.-C. Il fut, croit-on, le fondateur de la secte pythagoricienne des *acousmatiques*, prétendit que le feu est la cause des choses, que le monde se meut constamment en vertu de lois fixes, et il se sépara des autres pythagoriciens en soutenant que le premier principe est un être matériel et non pas un nombre, c'est-à-dire une substance immatérielle' ('Hippiasus', in Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle : français, historique, géographique, biographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.*, *Tome 9 [H-K]* [Paris : Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1877] – Emphasis in original).

⁷⁰ Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, 51

⁷¹ It is occasionally difficult to see that this material has been translated from Larousse's *Dictionnaire universel* owing to the fact that much of the material was greatly condensed by Beckett in the course of recording it into his notebook, the source is readily apparent when one compares the following material, however: 'Rewarded with gift of magnificent garden where he built a college on Egyptian and Chaldean model. This the famous Institute of Pythagoras' (WN, 45); 'Dans ce butin [i.e. of the war with the Sybarites], il échut à Pythagore des jardins magnifiques, où il fit bâtir un collège à l'imitation de ceux qu'il avait vus en Égypte et en Chaldée, où s'élevaient et s'instruisaient les prêtres. C'est le célèbre établissement connu sous le nom d'institut de Pythagore [...]' ('Pythagore', in Hippiasus', in Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle : français, historique, géographique, biographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.*, *Tome 13 [Pour-R]* [Paris : Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1877]).

practice. It also serves to illuminate an important aspect of Beckett's use of French and English.

Generally speaking, it may surely be said that the value of translation lies in making accessible to people materials that would be inaccessible to them in their original form. There is, as such, no need for a person who can consult a document in the original to turn to a translation, and there is certainly no need for the person capable of translating materials from one language into another to do so if these materials are intended exclusively for their own consumption.⁷² Clearly, Beckett himself had no need to translate the materials on Pythagoras that he derived from the *Grand Dictionnaire universel*. This is made eminently clear by the fact that he did not translate the materials on Hippasus that he took from the same source. And yet, when taking the notes on Pythagoras, Beckett did indeed choose to translate some of the materials, while leaving other material – namely, that pertaining to the importance of even and uneven numbers – in the original French. In seeking to understand why Beckett chose to translate some of these materials and not others we cannot appeal to any rationale beyond Beckett himself since this material was never destined for eyes other than his own: We cannot say, for example, that he was attempting to make the material comprehensible to a potentially non-Francophone audience; nor can we say that Beckett was obliged to translate because he had difficulties with the original, since his translation of this material into English presupposes his ability to understand the original French.

As it happens, it is not simply the case that we cannot look beyond Beckett to explain his decision to translate some of this material; there is no need to look beyond Beckett. The very fact that this material was destined for Beckett himself justifies the mixture of languages for, in Beckett's eyes, there was no difference between these languages – each was equally comprehensible, each came to him with equal ease in the privacy of his own mind, and each was thus equally available to him in the space of his own, personal writings. The language in which he recorded these notes was, quite simply, a matter of personal preference. Material could be drawn from and

⁷² The one exception to this would be when translation serves as a learning aid for a person endeavouring to improve their knowledge of the language from, or into which, they are translating. In fact, as part of his contention that Beckett never translated when taking notes, the only exception that Feldman allows to this rule concerns Beckett's use of translation 'as part of his self-education in German' (Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, 51) – For Beckett's use of translation as part of his study of German, see Marion Fries-Dieckmann, 'Beckett lernt Deutsch: *The Exercise Books*', in Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann (eds), *Der unbekannte Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur*, 212-3

recorded in either language, with the choice of French or English depending upon nothing other than Beckett's own whims.

What the commingling of English and French in this material provides us with, in other words, is a visual representation of the fact that, for Beckett, by the late 1930s at the very latest, there was no longer any divide between his French and his English. Although the latter may have once been his sole means of effective self-expression and the former may have been first encountered in the Elsner sisters' kindergarten, by this point in his life Beckett's fluency in French and English had reached the point where they had become porous, material could slip from one into the other without its meaning being affected. There was nothing to prevent French being translated into English, or remaining in the original. An awareness of the porosity that existed between Beckett's English and his French by this point in his life helps us to correct Ann Beer's interpretation of similar instances of linguistic porosity that are to be found in the manuscripts of the novel *Watt*.

Although written primarily in France and after a period during which Beckett had primarily composed material in French, *Watt* was composed in English – or, at least, in a particularly idiosyncratic form of English.⁷³ It is also, however, a novel that includes a certain amount of French. In her study, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art' – and in subsequent publications –, Ann Beer identified the composition of *Watt* as a key moment in the development of Beckett's bilingual art. For Beer, indeed, this text represents 'a point of extreme bilingual tension in Beckett's writing'.⁷⁴ This 'tension', in Beer's estimation, although apparent in the published text's abundant Gallicisms ('a merely *facultative* stop'⁷⁵) and the use it makes of French terms ('No trace of this *dollar* appeared on my face'⁷⁶), was most apparent in the *Watt* manuscripts:

The underlying pull away from the mother tongue, a psychological wrenching of linguistic foundations, can clearly be seen in the 'Watt' manuscript. As the years of war go on, French intrudes into the manuscript more and more forcibly, but in ways which the printed version of *Watt* does not yield up as blatant evidence. Doodles and comments around the developing narrative begin to be written in Beckett's adopted language: a picture of a man and a dog, with the caption "Pitié pour l'aveugle" ("Watt" Ms. A2, p. 26); addresses in France written in French; unrelated pieces of Beckett's everyday French such as drafts of letters. In 'Watt' Ms. A2 a poem (eventually printed in the

⁷³ For more on the composition of *Watt* and what may have led Beckett to return to English when writing this work, see Part III, Chapter 2.

⁷⁴ Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 213

⁷⁵ *Watt*, 13 – Emphasis mine.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 – Emphasis mine.

Addenda) including the phrases 'breathe head a while' and 'exile air' is tried out in both languages, the French being apparently a testing of the English in the increasingly important frame of a bilingual perspective. 'Airxielle' turns up...in Ms. A5, as part of an unsuccessful crossword puzzle in French. In Ms. A3, as word-combinations multiply, Beckett's English becomes affected by French spelling ('vitamins' appears as 'vitamines') ('Watt' Ms. A3, 46). And crucially instructions and reminders by the author to himself begin to be written in French. 'Watterise selon p. 8.' (i.e. put in the name 'Watt') in Ms. A3 (p. 62), 'à insérer p. 44', 'à insérer K' ('Watt' Ms. A4, p. 127 and p. 151).⁷⁷

For Beer, as may be observed, the *Watt* manuscripts provide evidence of a dramatic change in Beckett's engagement with French and, more broadly, with language itself. That this should be the case is unsurprising: Indeed, it has already been remarked that Beckett's years in Roussillon provided him with not only with novel forms of French, but with novel forms of language. As such, a transformation in Beckett's relation to French, and to language in general, is precisely what we would expect.⁷⁸ Where I believe Beer is mistaken is in her contention that the change in Beckett's relation to language that we find in these manuscripts is discernible in the non-literary use that Beckett makes of French in the manuscripts of this English-language novel.

For Beer, intrusions of non-literary French into the *Watt* manuscripts – that is, intrusions of the sort set out by Beer in the material cited above – are perceived as indicative of something unsettling and destabilising: These manuscripts supposedly provide us with a window into Beckett's mind as it 'pull[s] away from the mother tongue' and towards something less secure. What we must recall, however, is that the autograph manuscript of a literary work is, fundamentally, a private space. Never intended for public eyes, its status is far closer to that of a personal notebook – such as the 'Whoroscope' Notebook that was previously mentioned – than to the published text of the finished literary work that it may one day become, and that *Watt* finally did. That the *Watt* manuscripts belong firmly within the private space of a personal notebook is made abundantly clear by the those 'addresses in France written in French', 'pieces of Beckett's everyday French such as drafts of letters' and efforts at solving 'an unsuccessful crossword puzzle' that Beer acknowledges are to be found in the manuscript.

Once one has placed the manuscript within this private space, it becomes easier to understand why Beckett's spelling occasionally betrays the influence of French, or why he chose to write in French when indicating to himself work that needed to be carried out on the novel. Far from being the sign of a 'psychological wrenching of linguistic foundations', such instances are the sign of an internal

⁷⁷ Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 177-78

⁷⁸ For the stylistic evidence of this change, see Part III, Chapter 3.

equilibrium born of the fact that, as we earlier established, French and English were, by this point, essentially interchangeable for Beckett. When writing to and for himself, he could draw on French as readily as English and *vice versa*. The two languages had become equally natural to him and the choice between them, in the intimacy of his own mind and the private space of personal notebooks at least, was a matter of volition and preference, nothing more. Thus, if Beckett's spelling of 'vitamins' strays towards the French *vitamines*, or if he instructs himself 'Watterise selon p. 8.', 'à insérer p. 44', 'à insérer K' in the manuscript of the English-language novel upon which he was then working, such actions should be understood less as evidence of an 'underlying pull away from the mother tongue, a psychological wrenching of linguistic foundations', and far more as evidence of the degree to which French and English were both, for Beckett and by this time, fundamental to his linguistic selfhood. Far from being a sign of any 'bilingual tension', these instances, like the mix of French and English in the materials taken from the *Grand Dictionnaire universel*, demonstrate that, for Beckett, the only tension that might properly be said for exist between English and French, and the only tension that might serve to condition his choice of one language over the other, would have to come from outside himself. This was already the situation of Beckett's French by the time he worked on *Watt* in the early 1940s; this would be the situation of Beckett's French in 1946, and it is this crucial importance of external factors that we will need to bear in mind when we come to examine Beckett's post-War turn to French in Part III.

Over the course of the preceding chapters, we have examined Beckett's engagement with French from his earliest exposure to it as a child, up to the years that he spent as an adult living in the French countryside, immersed in French of a kind, and to a degree, quite unlike anything he had previously experienced. If this examination has entailed a return to much ground that has already been covered by other scholars, it has also enabled us to throw fresh light on Beckett's engagement with the French language and with French Literature up to the period of his post-War linguistic turn and, in so doing, allowed us to better situate Beckett's relationship to French prior to his emergence as a fully bilingual, self-translating writer in the post-War period. We have demonstrated that Beckett's French must be considered in its particularity and, at the same time, that a feature of this particularity was, by the time of the linguistic turn, the fact that Beckett understood it as being interchangeable with his English.

Already in this chapter, we have drawn attention to the manner in which the interchangeability of Beckett's French and English manifested itself in his use of

colloquial forms in the final years of the pre-War period. In the next part of this thesis, we will aim to further clarify the specifically literary aspects of Beckett's French in years prior to the linguistic turn by closely examining those literary texts that he produced in this language during the pre-War period. During the course of this analysis we will see that, during the pre-War period, the commonality between English and French does not simply manifest itself in Beckett's limited use of colloquialisms, and we will also see that, even in 1931, long before the years in Roussillon, Beckett was already discovering things in French that he would only subsequently bring into his English.

Before undertaking this analysis of Beckett's French-language literary writings of the pre-War period, however, there remains one question that must be asked regarding Beckett's pre-War engagement with French, namely: What was Beckett's *idea* of the French language during the pre-War period? This question is important since, as outlined in the Introduction, this idea of French is frequently seen by critics as prefiguring, and thus confirming the validity of, the association between language and style upon which the LSH reposes.

PART I: Situating French

Chapter 4

Beckett's (Pre-War) Idea of French

Beckett is known to have given expression to his 'idea' of French on at least three occasions in the pre-War period: Once in the classroom, once in his writing, and once in conversation. As noted in the Introduction, these pre-War statements of Beckett's 'idea' of French are often held to support the idea at the root of the Linguistic-Stylistic Hypothesis, or the LSH, according to which the turn to French was motivated primarily by a desire for a more austere form of literary expression. If these statements have been taken as offering unproblematic support for the LSH, however, it is primarily because these remarks have not been afforded the contextualisation that they deserve. Indeed, when one examines closely the precise wording of these statements and the particular context in which each was made – a context that, in many cases, only becomes readily apparent when viewed in light of all that the preceding chapters have allowed us to clarify about Beckett's pre-War engagement with French, whether as a student of the language or its literature –, one recognises the gulf that separates Beckett's pre-War comments on the relationship between French and style from the manner in which these comments have been presented in critical discussions of his post-War linguistic turn.

I. FRENCH IN THE CLASSROOM: A WORK LANGUAGE?

Dating from 1931, Beckett's earliest known remark on the subject of the French language was made during one of those classes on 'Racine and the Modern Novel' that, as has already been mentioned, Beckett taught during his brief and unhappy time as a Lecturer in French at TCD. Today, the remark survives only in the notes of Rachel Burrows, one of four surviving sets of notes taken by students during these literature lectures. In the course of Burrows' copious notes on Racine's *Andromaque*, we find the following¹:

1st sentence should contain the whole essay. Not flower value but foot pounds – work!

English sentence can justify itself by looking well – French can't

¹ This material is taken from: TCD MIC 60 ('Rachel Dobbins [Burrows] – Notes on Beckett Lectures at TCD')

French. [*Crebral* (sic)] transmission. Statement bare.²

Eng. [*Climatory*]³ – atmospheric – round pivot.⁴

To see how these comments and those other pre-War comments like them have been misinterpreted and how this misinterpretation, like the misinterpretation of the ‘Suite’ Notebook, testifies to the overreliance on the LSH within critical discourse around Beckett’s linguistic turn, it is helpful to consider the uses to which they have been put by critics. In the case of these comments made to students of ‘Racine and the Modern Novel’, John Pilling’s use of Beckett’s remarks is particularly noteworthy. In *Beckett before Godot*, Pilling evidently takes the LSH as his starting point and, reading them through that lens, presents these remarks from 1931 as a prefiguration of one of the most well-known of those explanations that Beckett offered for his 1946 linguistic turn:

In Beckett’s Trinity lectures of 1931, given after returning from his placement at the École normale supérieure in Paris, he had addressed the differences (as he perceived them) between French and English as languages, emphasizing that English had “more flower value” whereas French was “more of a work language”. For the young Beckett, apparently, English was a matter of “looking well”, French not. These judgements...anticipate one of Beckett’s most beguiling explanations as to why he had felt moved to substitute French for English as his primary expressive medium: “because in French it is easier to write without style” [= *Parce qu’en français c’est plus facile d’écrire sans style*]. Of the many reasons that Beckett was prompted to offer for this remarkable change of direction in mid-career – none of them wholly without an admixture of enigma – this is perhaps the most helpful, especially when buttressed by the remarks made some fifteen years earlier to a group of somewhat perplexed undergraduates.⁵

Sadly Pilling’s presentation of the remarks Beckett is recorded to have made while a lecturer in French has the unhappy particularity of having enjoyed a rather successful

² In an interview carried out in 1982, Burrows read this as ‘rare’ (viz. S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, ‘Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982’, in *JoBS* 11-12

<http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num1112/006_BURROWS.PDF> [accessed: 13th September, 2017]). The first letter is, however, appears to be a ‘b’, as it has a discernible loop.

³ This word is read as ‘climactory’ by Burrows (viz. *Ibid.*), but there is no discernible ‘c’ before the ‘t’.

⁴ TCD MIC 60 (‘Rachel Dobbins [Burrows] – Notes on Beckett Lectures at TCD’)

⁵ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 201 – For a fuller discussion of this ‘beguiling explanation’, which was first introduced into the critical discourse around Beckett by Niklaus Gessner, see Part III, Chapter 4.

critical afterlife, while also being fundamentally incorrect.⁶ Pilling's presentation of the remarks is, in fact, incorrect both factually and interpretatively. His factual error becomes apparent when one replaces the quotations that Pilling derives from Rachel Burrows' notes in their original context: Beckett, it may be seen, does not refer to French as a 'work language', nor is he referring to English when he speaks of 'flower value'. On the contrary, Beckett's reference to 'flower value' is made as part of a description of what he took to be the ideal first sentence for an essay – that is, one which seeks not to charm the reader by way of flowery expression, but to state the essay's aims in as clear a manner as possible. If the factual error – namely, the connection that Pilling establishes between the remark about 'flower value' and the English language – is obvious, his interpretative error requires a little more parsing. This error lies in Pilling's treatment of the remarks that Beckett does make about the differences between French and English. Here, the flaw derives not from simple misinterpretation, but from a lack of due regard for the fact that these earliest remarks on the differences between English and French were made in a classroom.

As Rachel Burrows herself explained during an interview in 1982, Beckett's comments on English and French were made while he was providing his students with a model essay for a question on the figure of Oreste, in Racine's *Andromaque*.⁷ It is for precisely this reason that Beckett's strictly linguistic remarks about English and French are prefaced by a general statement on how to begin an essay. The explicitly pedagogic context in which these remarks were made must be borne in mind when we are considering them because this context makes clear that, when Beckett drew his distinction between English and French, he was not speaking in a general sense about two languages. On the contrary, Beckett was speaking with a very specific aim in mind and addressing a very specific audience: In establishing a distinction between a necessarily practical French and a potentially florid English, Beckett was advising Anglophone students of French Literature how they should go about writing an academic essay on Racine and, more particularly still, he was advising them on how they should go about writing an essay *in French* if they wanted to pass their exams. We know that Beckett's remarks were made specifically with regard to how to write

⁶ Pilling's interpretation of 'Beckett's' views concerning the 'flower value' of English have found their way into critical studies such as Melanie Foehn's 'Samuel Beckett and the Writers of Port-Royal' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Kent/Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, 2012), and Shane Weller's *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (London: MHRA and Maney Publishing, 2005) – viz. Melanie Foehn, *op. cit.*, 9 [n.1]; Shane Weller, *op. cit.*, 33.

⁷ viz. 'He'd [= SB] show you how to write an essay on Oreste' (S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, 'Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982', in *op. cit.*)

an essay in French because the model sentence that he offered was in that language: ‘^{^^}Le pitoyable^{^^} Oreste, en tant que Racine le sépare du mouvement de clairvoyance progressive auquel ^{^^}il soumet^{^^} la plupart de ses personnages, [XXX XXX] ~~est un personnage qui~~ répond aux exigences de la psychologie moderne’.⁸

What does this pedagogic context mean for Beckett’s remarks and for Pilling’s contention that they serve to ‘buttre[ss]’ his later comments concerning the ease of writing ‘sans style’ in French, though? *Pace* Pilling, I would argue that these remarks cannot serve to buttress Beckett’s later comments. On the contrary, it is the later comments that Beckett made in the post-War period (‘en français c’est plus facile d’écire sans style’) that serve to buttress Pilling’s interpretation of the remarks Beckett made in 1931. The role that the post-War comments play in Pilling’s interpretation is obvious when one considers how he has been led to misread the evidence in front of him; guided by the idea of French as a language in which one can write ‘sans style’, he has assumed that ‘flower value’ – understood as empty style – must naturally be a quality of the English language, rather than of a particular kind of sentence. Even bearing this error in mind, and though the particular mention of ‘flower value’ may not refer to English, the comment that French is a language of ‘bare’ statement might initially seem to buttress a connection between French and a turn away from style. Or, rather, it might be made to do so provided it is abstracted from that pedagogic context to which has just been referred. For, what we must recall is that the Beckett we find in Rachel Burrows’ notes is not, as Pilling contends ‘address[ing] the differences (as he perceived them) between French and English as languages’. To speak of Beckett in this way is to imagine him as Beckett the Writer, commenting on these languages for an attentive audience as he would frequently be called upon to do in the post-War period. In 1931, however, this particular Beckett did not yet exist. On the contrary, the Beckett recorded by Rachel Burrows is Beckett the Lecturer, doing his best to assist his students. His words are explicitly intended for an audience of students, and that is how they must be interpreted.

The idea of Beckett as a lecturer attentive to the needs of his students is, admittedly, at odds with the opinion of some of his students – one of whom

⁸ TCD MIC 60 – This model sentence is also recorded – with slight differences of phrasing – in those notes taken by Grace McKinley (*viz.* ‘Appendix: Beckett on Racine’, in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 306-313). It may be noted, however, that McKinley did not record Beckett’s remarks on the difference between English and French, suggesting that these were off-hand comments, rather than a part of the lecture. In that 1982 interview, Burrows described herself as a ‘scribe’ (S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, ‘Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982’, in *op. cit.*) and her notes bear witness to the scribal attitude she adopted, her chief aim evidently having been to record as much of what Beckett said as possible.

remembered him in later life as ‘not a good lecturer’ and commented that ‘even the most earnest and serious students found him boring’⁹ –, to say nothing of Beckett’s own avowed dislike for teaching.¹⁰ In her interview with *JoBS*, however, Rachel Burrows was at great lengths to stress what she saw as Beckett’s efforts to assist his students: ‘People would say he couldn’t teach, but he even got down to the nitty-gritty of showing us how to write an essay on the lesson, with proper headings. He was really trying to help us pass the exam’.¹¹ A surviving essay by Grace McKinley, meanwhile, bears corrections that James Knowlson, on the basis of handwriting and course details, believes to be ‘almost certainly’¹² by Beckett and which bears out Burrow’s presentation of his teaching, as the corrections attest to his having devoted a considerable amount of time and attention to the essay of a single student.¹³

When viewed as an attentive lecturer in a classroom speaking to his students, rather than a writer discussing his craft as if he were being interviewed by *The Paris Review*, Beckett’s remarks are no longer a general statement on the subject of language, but a very practical – and, as anyone who has ever taught students preparing to write about literature in a foreign language will attest, a very necessary – appeal for clarity of expression. Certainly, the manner in which Beckett has phrased his appeal – couching it in terms of French as a language where sentences cannot ‘justify [themselves] by looking well’ – makes it easy to imagine that Beckett is giving

⁹ Mary A. McCormick (*née* Arabin Jones) *qtd* in James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, 53 – Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Beckett expressed his strong antipathy towards teaching in numerous letters to Thomas MacGreevy as well as in some of his literary writings of the period. One such literary expression of his hatred for teaching is to be found in ‘Le Concentrisme’, which will be studied in Part II, Chapter 1.

¹¹ S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, ‘Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982’, in *op. cit.*

¹² The essay, responding to the question ‘Compare & Contrast Phèdre, Bérénice & Hermione’, is to be found as part of Grace McKinley’s student notes (*viz.* ‘Notes taken by Grace West [*née* McKinley] at Trinity College, Dublin, 1931-32’, UoR BC MS 5284 [Notebook 1 of 4]). Affixed to the essay is a handwritten note by James Knowlson that states that this essay was ‘almost certainly marked by Samuel Beckett from handwriting & course details’ (James Knowlson, Handwritten note [30th August, 1998] in *Ibid.*).

¹³ The essay has been heavily underlined by the corrector in red-pen, and includes a number of lengthy interventions where the corrector patiently engages with points raised by McKinley. In response to McKinley’s assertion that, where ‘Bérénice [*sic*] stands for all that loyalty and sincerity implies’, while Phèdre ‘stands for disloyalty, insincerity and guilt’, for instance, the corrector comments: ‘I don’t altogether agree with this rather harsh contrast between the two women. Ph[èdre] is I think deeply sincere, deeply conscious of her guilt & makes no attempt to gloss it over. She is disloyal in thought only not in deed. In a curious line she even seems to [*assert*] that she has never plucked the fruit of her guilty passions but these words are uttered in a sort of delirium & are interesting as being entirely contrary to her usually scrupulously meticulous conscience’ (*Ibid.*).

voice to his personal beliefs. It is thus understandable that Pilling, and, indeed, Rachel Burrows herself, should have interpreted his remarks as being of a personal nature.¹⁴ In actual fact, however, when Beckett tells his students that a French sentence cannot ‘justify itself by looking well’, he is emphatically not giving voice to a personal conviction. Instead, he is advising his students – in an admirably tactful way, it must be admitted – that their primary concern when writing in French, a foreign language that many of them were far from having fully mastered, should be to get their point across clearly, rather than trying to express themselves beautifully.

That Beckett was, tactfully, leading his students away from verbal pyrotechnics of which he knew them to be incapable is further implied by the fact that Beckett is known to have had a very low opinion of his students’ abilities. A letter to Thomas MacGreevy, for example, recounts one occasion on which his students ‘guffawed’ at the word *glapissante* when it appeared as part of lines of verse by Jules Laforgue that Beckett cited in class – only when someone else explained it to him did Beckett realize they had been laughing at the ‘pissante’ of *glapissante*, and its proximity to the English ‘piss’.¹⁵ The fact that the guffawing students, who clearly did not understand the meaning of the verse cited by Beckett, were in their final year of study – something which is made clear by Beckett’s referring to them in the letter as his ‘foul Senior Sophisters’¹⁶ – suggests that Beckett had good reason to doubt their ability. Comments made to Lawrence Harvey many years later, when he commented that his students at TCD ‘couldn’t care less’, further testify to the enduringly negative impression left on Beckett by what he perceived as his students’ deficiencies.¹⁷

There is still another reason to doubt that Beckett’s remarks to his students at TCD are indicative of his own opinion of the differences between French and English, this evidence is to be found in his own French-language writing. For, if we wish to propose that the view expressed by Beckett to his students is indicative of his own perspective, it logically follows that Beckett’s use of French should accord with his vision of the language’s capabilities. And yet, the French in which Beckett himself writes in the early 1930s is baroque and contorted – Jean-Michel Rabaté has described ‘Le Concentrisme’, one of the French-language texts of the period, as being

¹⁴ In her interview, Burrows suggests that Beckett’s comments about the differences between French and English may be an indication of ‘why *he* found the French language so exciting’ (S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, ‘Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982’, in *op. cit.* – Emphasis mine).

¹⁵ *LSB I*, 73 (SB to TMG [11th March, 1931])

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *SB qtd.* in *DTF*, 127

written in a French that is 'wiry, imaginative, and muscular'¹⁸ –, and every bit as full of puns and literary references as his English of the same period.¹⁹ The fact that Beckett's own use of French directly contravenes the view that he expressed about it being a language of 'bare' statement clearly constitutes something of a quandary for critics who, like Pilling, seek to use these comments to 'buttre[ss]' Beckett's post-War association between French and a turn away from style. The disparity between the characterisation of French as a language of 'bare' statement and the stylistically-charged use that Beckett made of it himself becomes far less perplexing, however, if we interpret these comments in the manner that has been proposed here: Reading them, not as a prefiguration of what would be said in the post-War period, but in the context of their original expression and recalling that these comments were destined for an audience of students preparing to compose an essay in a language that they had not yet fully mastered. Unlike his students, Beckett was supremely confident in his linguistic capacities and, being every bit as concerned with 'looking well' in French as he was in English, fully prepared to write in French and in English with equal brio. When he spoke to his students, in other words, Beckett was presenting a rule for his students – mere learners of the language, whose abilities he held in the lowest regard –, not one that he himself would have felt obliged to follow, and certainly not one that provides us with any insight into his personal understanding of the differences between French and English.

The interpretation that has just been offered of those remarks that Beckett made in the classroom on the subject of French will, perhaps, not be one with which every reader can agree. Some may object that this interpretation of Beckett's comments about the respective values of French and English is, if anything, *more* tenuous than that offered by Pilling since, where Pilling's interpretation at least seems to find support in later comments associating French with stylelessness, the interpretation that has been offered here calls for admittance into evidence of a context to which we no longer have access – that is, the classroom context in which these words were first uttered. While such an objection would certainly not be without value, I would nevertheless contend that the previous chapters of Part I have made clear that context, no matter how difficult it may be to accurately reconstruct, is

¹⁸ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 138

¹⁹ We will have an opportunity to see just how far Beckett's own French was from 'bare statement' when we come to examine *Le Concentrisme*, which he wrote in November 1930, mere months before advising his students that a French sentence could not merely justify itself by 'looking well' – For discussion of this text, see Part II, Chapter 1.

precisely what we need to take into account when considering Beckett's engagement with French.

As has been observed, a lack of due attention to context can fundamentally warp our vision of things as various as Beckett's earliest study of French at Earlsfort House, or the origin of his attention to the pictorial aspects of Racine's drama. A lack of attention to context can also lead us to view Beckett's French as merely another 'foreign language', when it was actually a language whose place in Beckett's life and writing cannot be adequately understood unless we take account of its particularity, and the contexts in which Beckett acquired it. This insight into the importance of contextualisation is by no means limited to Beckett's acquisition of the French language, or his study of French Literature. It holds true in all cases, including the remarks that Beckett made on the subject of the differences between French and English: Such remarks were never made in a vacuum, and cannot be read in isolation. Rather, such remarks were made in very specific contexts and intended for specific audiences – indeed, in many cases, they were intended for audiences of one.²⁰ Beckett's remarks are, moreover, always made by a specific Beckett. And this specific Beckett is not always Beckett the Writer. Sometimes – as has been noted with reference to those remarks recorded by Rachel Burrows –, Beckett's remarks come from an unhappy lecturer speaking to the lacklustre students whose work he knows he will eventually lose hours correcting. On other occasions, what we hear most clearly in Beckett's words are the echoes of the attentive student that he himself once was. That student who spent four years carefully absorbing particular approaches to French Literature – approaches which, as we have already seen, often bore the imprint of the books he had studied, such as Rudmose-Brown's *A Short History of French Literature* – and, by the same token, particular understandings of the French language. It is just such an echo of Beckett the Student that can be heard behind those remarks on the subject of French that are to be found in Beckett's first novel, *Dream*.

II. FRENCH IN WRITING: A LANGUAGE WITHOUT STYLE?

As noted in the Introduction, the remarks made by Beckett on the subject of French in *Dream* have become an important source for many critical discussions of Beckett's relationship to the French language and, by extension, the reasons that led him to turn to French in the immediate post-War period. We have already seen, for example,

²⁰ Almost all of Beckett's post-War statements about his reasons for turning to French, for example, were made to individual literary critics and with the understanding that they would filter into the critical discourse around his writing. That this was the case is not without importance, as we will see when we come to the question of Beckett's own comments on his turn to French in Part III, Chapter 4.

how these remarks were cited by David Tucker as part of his attempt to explain Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. As was also noted in the Introduction, however, these comments or not as unproblematic a guide to Beckett's post-War writing as is generally supposed. The problem with taking these comments as an aid to the interpretation of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn becomes clear when we replace them in the broader context of their appearance in *Dream*.

In that novel, it is a turn of phrase employed by Lucien – one of Belacqua's French acquaintances, and the author of the 'rather disagreeable letter', written in French²¹ – that leads into a more general discussion of style as it pertains to writing, to French-language writing, and to the writing of the French Classical period in particular:

It was he [= Lucien] who one day let fall nonchalantly, à propos of what we don't happen to know, so nonchalantly that it must have been his and not another's: "Black diamond of pessimism." Belacqua thought that was a nice example, in the domain of words, of the little sparkle hid in ashes, the precious margaret and hid from many, and the thing that the conversationalist, with his contempt of the tag and the ready-made, can't give you; because the lift to the high spot is precisely from the tag and the ready-made. The same with the stylist. You couldn't experience a margarita in d'Annunzio because he denies you the pebbles and flints that reveal it. The uniform, horizontal writing, flowing without accident, of the man with a style, never gives you the margarita. But the writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamanté, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces. They have no style, they write without style, do they not, they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margaret. Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want.²²

As was the case with Pilling's treatment of Beckett's comments to his students, critics who engage with Belacqua's remarks in *Dream* frequently seek to interpret them in terms of Beckett's post-War comments on his reasons for turning to French. Thus, in her early study of Beckett's bilingualism, Ann Beer insisted that the material from *Dream* 'must' be taken in 'the context of Beckett's much quoted post-war remark about choosing French in order to write "sans style"'.²³ More recently, Leland de la Durantaye has made much the same argument, arguing that the remarks to be found in *Dream* are evidence that Beckett's later associations between French and weakness were 'a development of an idea long present to Beckett's mind, and long present in his writing'.²⁴ As Beer and de la Durantaye's comments testify, there has been very

²¹ *Dream*, 19-22 – For discussion of this letter, see Part II, Chapter 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 47-48

²³ Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 123

²⁴ Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 68

little change in thinking on this passage over the past three decades.²⁵ In 2016, as in 1987, these remarks continue to be interpreted as expressive of Beckett's own attitude towards French and, more particularly, as a prefiguration of remarks that Beckett would make on the subject of his own writing in the post-War period. In so doing, however, critics have been misled by surface similarities.

In essence, I would suggest that critics who connect these remarks with post-War comments of a similar nature have allowed the fact that the same word was employed by Belacqua in *Dream* and by Beckett as quoted by Niklaus Gessner – namely, 'style' – to justify ignoring all that separates these comments. The first thing that separates them is time: Over two decades stand between the composition of *Dream* and Beckett's remarks to Gessner. Obviously, it is possible that the same understanding of the French language lies behind Belacqua's invocation of 'style' and Beckett's explanation of his linguistic turn in terms of 'style'. It is possible, but it is by no means *certain*. As readers of a writer whose career spans decades – and, consequently, readers occasionally engaged in proposing conversations, not unlike those imagined by Beckett himself in *Krapp's Last Tape / La Dernière Bande* between a Beckett at the beginning and a Beckett at the close of his writerly life –, we cannot allow ourselves to indulge in easy connections. The same words do not always clothe the same ideas and it is our task as readers, engaged in closely considering works wrought of words, to pay attention to this fundamental epistemological uncertainty.

An instructive example of the dangers of ignoring the potential differences of intent that lie behinds similar vocabulary is provided by John Pilling's attempt to connect the 'Dissonanz' of which Beckett speaks in his letter to Axel Kaun with 'an idea basic to *Dream* and reappearing in the review of O'Casey's *Windfalls* which

²⁵ Anthony Cordingley is the only critic I am aware of who has attempted to propose an alternative interpretation of these remarks. In Cordingley's case, the radical reinterpretation he proposes lies in the suggestion that the vision of French expressed in *Dream* 'is...expressed by Lucien', rather than Belacqua (Anthony Cordingley, 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', 515). Cordingley's re-reading, however, is merely a misreading. More particularly, it is a reading of the *Dream* passage that ignores the phrase 'Belacqua thought' and the quotation marks which surround Lucien's comment about the 'black diamond of pessimism'. The quotation marks clearly signal this remark as Lucien's and, by the same token, serve to separate that remark from the narrative voice, which is here clearly assimilated to Belacqua by way of the phrase 'Belacqua thought'. Since this phrase is only cancelled at the end of the passage – when the disembodied narrator intervenes to inform us that Belacqua was 'studying to be a professor' (*Dream*, 48), it may be understood as applying to all that intervenes between its introduction and its cancellation (i.e. 'Belacqua thought you couldn't experience a maragita in d'Annunzio', 'Belacqua thought the uniform, horizontal writing...'). The remarks on 'style', 'French', 'tag and readymade' are thus, indisputably, Belacqua's.

speaks of “dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation”.²⁶ To posit a connection between the ‘Dissonanz’ of Beckett’s letter to Kaun and the ‘dehiscence’ of his review of *Windfalls*, however, is to be seduced by the surface commonality of the words that are being used to describe matters of unlike natures: The gulf between mind and world – between self and world – that Beckett lauds in O’Casey’s play is not that specifically linguistic desire to challenge, not the self or the world, but language itself – and, particularly, the English language – in its materiality, a desire ‘diese höhnische Haltung dem Worte gegenüber wörtlich darzustellen’, that we find in Beckett’s letter to Kaun.²⁷ There may be an apparent commonality between the words that Beckett uses (‘Dissonanz’ and ‘dehiscence’), but the intent behind these words is quite different.

Rather than seizing on the surface parity between Belacqua’s ‘without style’ and Beckett’s ‘sans style’, then, we must ask ourselves what these terms mean as employed on these separate occasions, and whether these meanings are connected or even comparable. We must reflect on the fact that the Beckett who wrote at the start of the 1930s was not the Beckett who spoke in the late 1950s. Equally, and more importantly still, we must never substitute Beckett’s pronouncements for Beckett’s practice: If turning to French enabled him to write ‘sans style’, what did the change in language actually do to his writing? And if that change in language did nothing to his style of writing, what does it actually mean to say that French enabled him to write ‘sans style’?

We have already seen in the Introduction that the change to French had no effect upon the style in which Beckett wrote: Every feature of his style that is generally associated with his turn to French was already evident in the earliest, English-language version of ‘Suite’. There is thus an obvious need to rethink our approach to, and our understanding of, Beckett’s linguistic turn and that, as has been made clear, will be the question at the heart of Part III of this thesis. There is, however, an equal need for reappraisal of the evidence that was long seen to justify a belief according to which Beckett’s use of French was tied to stylistic impoverishment: If this evidence was held to justify a faulty hypothesis, does this not suggest the evidence has been misinterpreted? It has just been shown that, once properly contextualised, the comments Beckett made in 1931 to his students at TCD cannot be seen as indicating that Beckett himself perceived a clear division between a stylistically-rich English and a stylistically-poor French. In Part III, meanwhile, we will

²⁶ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 154 – For the material in the Kaun letter and the review of O’Casey, see: *LSB I*, 515 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1932]); *D*, 82.

²⁷ *LSB I*, 514-515 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1932])

have an opportunity to consider in more depth what value might be attached to Beckett's words to Gessner. For the time being, we must focus on the statement to be found in *Dream* and ask ourselves what would we find if, rather than analysing the remarks made in *Dream* in terms of what Beckett *would go on to say* – as critics such as Beer, de la Durantaye, and Tucker have done –, we were to analyse them in their particularity: What, if anything, is particular to these remarks?

The most striking aspect of these remarks is that, unlike the remarks that Beckett would make after the War, they are not on the French language in general, but on a very specific form of French. Rather than commenting upon a characteristic of the French language *qua* language, in other words, Belacqua's discussion hinges on a particular mode of French literary expression, namely that form of Classicism of which Racine and Malherbe are viewed as the greatest exemplars. That Beckett has Belacqua make these remarks with reference to Classical writers, and especially to Racine, is in itself perplexing. As Jean-Michel Rabaté notes, '[n]ot everyone would agree that Racine writes without style'.²⁸ Not everyone would agree with this pronouncement, because not everyone would be of one mind as to what it means to write without style. What we must seek to do, therefore, is to establish what the Beckett who wrote *Dream* means when he refers to 'style' and when he refers to Racine and Malherbe as writers who write 'without style'.

Generally, the idea of 'writ[ing] without style' is clarified with reference to what French is assumed to have done for, and to, Beckett's own literary production. Thus, Leland de la Durantaye, as previously noted, cites the remarks from *Dream* in the context of clarifying Beckett's post-War comments about wishing to 'écrire sans style' in terms of 'weakening his narrative strength, with diminishing a richness of means'.²⁹ Although de la Durantaye does indeed cite the references to Racine and Malherbe, he does nothing to address why these writers, above all, should have been mentioned. For her part, Beer's discussion of these remarks has the merit of acknowledging, and attempting to rationalise, the particular importance of Racine and Malherbe in relation to Belacqua's comments. The explanation she offers, however, is unsatisfactory since, rather than proposing why they should have been important to the Beckett who wrote *Dream*, Beer views their presence in the texts as simply a prefiguration of what would later come to pass, when Beckett would draw on Racine, in particular, in his post-War plays.³⁰ There is, however, no need to turn to the 1960s

²⁸ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 137

²⁹ Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 68

³⁰ *viz.* 'The reference to Racine and Malherbe suggests these writers were for Beckett a standard of excellence even when reason itself came under suspicion; he would mention them again in the early 1960s in a way that showed the power, especially of

to clarify why Beckett's *Dream* includes a mention of Classical writers in relation to 'style'. On the contrary, it seems probable that an insight into Belacqua's comments – and into the particular sense in which the word 'style' is here being used by Beckett – is to be found in Gustav Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française*, a text that Beckett would have been required to read closely as a Junior Sophister student.³¹

Just how closely Junior Sophister students were required to read Lanson's work is demonstrated by the fact that, in 1930, they were being asked to re-translate back into French a passage that had been taken from Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* and translated into English as part of their Trinity Term exam.³² Indeed, the exam paper specifies that students are to '[r]eproduce the...passage, as far as you can, in the French of Lanson'.³³ Although this exam obviously dates from after Beckett's time as a student at TCD, the example is worthy of note as it may reliably be taken as indicating the importance accorded to Lanson in TCD and, by extension, helps us to explain the fact that Lanson's remarks on Racine's style in his *Histoire de la littérature française* so closely echo the formulation that we find in *Dream*:

Le style [of Racine] est...simple et naturel avant tout, juste, précis, intense, rasant la prose, comme disait Sainte-Beuve. Une admirable poésie...s'y fonde, et s'y résout en langage pratique. Point de *sublime*; point de mots à effets, de vers à détacher, à retenir. Racine ne fait pas de « pensées », ni de maximes. Le *Qui te l'a dit ?* d'Hermione, le *Seigneur, vous changez de visage* de Monime, le *Sortez* de Roxane, voilà le sublime de Racine, des mots de situation, terribles ou pathétiques par les causes qu'on saisit et par les effets qu'on pressent. Des mouvements de passion s'expriment avec une naïveté qu'on a trouvée presque comique... On serait étonné, si l'on y regardait de près, de ce qu'il y a chez Racine de mots familiers, de locutions de tous les jours ; la musique délicieuse de son vers nous empêche de remarquer les formes de la conversation courante qui souvent le remplissent.³⁴

Racine, over his dramatic and verbal imagination' (Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 124).

³¹ viz. Appendix II (a)

³² R.W. Tate, 'Junior Sophisters [Trinity Term, 1930] - Honor Examination-French', in *University of Dublin, Trinity College: Honor Examination Papers, 1930. [English. French. German. Irish. Italian. Spanish.]*, [n.p.] – Interestingly, in light of the present discussion, the passage in question (i.e. 'I fear that Racine was too much of a poet for an age which was beginning more and more alienated from poetry. The human truth of his work was better appreciated than its poetic greatness. One might feel surprise that the Romantics were so hard on it; but the pseudo-classics, who sheltered themselves behind Racine, caused them to misapprehend its real character. And, after all, Racine poetry is the exact opposite of Romantic poetry, for it is entirely objective and impersonal') is in fact taken from Lanson's chapter on Racine (viz. Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française* [Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1920], 553).

³³ R.W. Tate, 'Junior Sophisters [Trinity Term, 1930] - Honor Examination-French', in *University of Dublin, Trinity College: Honor Examination Papers, 1930. [English. French. German. Irish. Italian. Spanish.]*, [n.p.] – Emphasis mine.

³⁴ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 545

Obviously, the view that Lanson here advances was not peculiar to him.³⁵ Nor, indeed, was Lanson's the only formulation of this opinion that Beckett's would have encountered while an undergraduate, since the same view is proposed by Rudmose-Brown in his *Short History of French Literature*:

The conventional language of the time was transfigured in his [= Racine's] use. Every play of his is a perfect example of the Classical model. One of them, *Athalie* – "le chef-d'oeuvre de l'esprit humain," as Voltaire called it – is so perfect that in it he has, as if for a wager, tightened the net of rules and emerged nevertheless triumphantly. Never perhaps has a poet been content with a poorer instrument nor used fewer and less coloured and pregnant words.³⁶

Whether Beckett was more familiar with Rudmose-Brown's or Lanson's formulation of this view matters little, however. What does matter is that we recognise that these views existed and that they were to be found in texts that Beckett is known to have studied closely during his time as an undergraduate at TCD.

Once we have recognised the connection between these formulations and Beckett's comments, it becomes easier to understand why Beckett should have associated writers such as Malherbe and Racine with stylelessness. Certainly, an awareness of Lanson and Rudmose-Brown's remarks does not allow us to resolve this question entirely and definitively but it does give us an excellent starting point, since their comments on Racine clarify the particular sense that Beckett is likely to be according to the word 'style' when he employs the term in *Dream* with regard to Racine and Malherbe, the latter being another key proponent of French Classicism whose writing Lanson notes as having 'about[i] à la creation du style dont la première génération des classiques du XVII^e siècle usera'.³⁷

³⁵ Lanson himself makes clear in his text that the position he articulates had already been expressed by Sainte-Beuve.

³⁶ T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 89-90

³⁷ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 385 – Although Lanson's *Histoire* does not include a formulation of Malherbe's style that exactly parallels his discussion of Racine's, his presentation of Malherbe as having been engaged in a process of rendering the French language down to those elements that were part of standard courtly usage – '[Malherbe] voulait mettre dehors les archaïsmes, les latinismes, les mots de patois, les mots techniques, les créations arbitraires, mots composés ou dérivés enfin, tout ce dont l'ambition du siècle précédent avait surchargé, encombré la langue' (*Ibid.*, 361) – may be seen to agree with the vision of Racine in that both authors would be engaged in working with the language as they found it spoken. Similarly, although none of the fleeting references to Malherbe that are to be found in Rudmose-Brown's *A Short History of French Literature* (*viz.* T. B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900*, 16, 37, 44, 93) make any direct mention of his style, these glancing mentions do afford one the sense that Rudmose-Brown respected a certain simplicity in Malherbe, a form of expression devoid of 'exuberance and individualism' (*Ibid.*, 37). Most notably, when commenting

In short, Lanson's and Rudmose-Brown's formulations suggest that the 'stylist' is to writing what the self-styled 'conversationalist' is to speech, one who spurns the common currency of language as used by others – the 'humble tags and commonplaces', in Beckett's phrase; the 'mots familiers [et] locutions de tous les jours', in Lanson's; '[t]he conventional language of the time' in Rudmose-Brown's – in favour of forms of their own fabrication, money of their own mint. In the case of the written word in particular, Beckett's comments clearly echo Lanson and Rudmose-Brown's praise for Racine as a writer who was able to impress and delight precisely because he was not afraid to make use of commonplace forms, of language as spoken, as well as Lanson's contention that Malherbe formed his language after the model he found in the 'usage présent et vivant' that he heard around him in the French Court.³⁸

Not only does recognition of Lanson and Rudmose-Brown's texts clarify Belacqua's comments on style, it also provides us with another example of the enduring importance of Beckett's undergraduate exposure to French Literature during his time at TCD. Just as the vision of Racine's theatre that Beckett conveyed to his students bore the mark of the education he himself had received a few short years earlier, the vision of French Classical style that we find in *Dream* bears witness to Beckett's time as an undergraduate student. Of course, it is possible to view the presence of such a reference in another way: Rather than seeing it as an example of the enduring importance of this education, one might choose to interpret this passage of *Dream* in a parodic light – a means for Beckett to undercut and distance himself from the academic world on which he had turned his back shortly before embarking on the composition of his first novel.³⁹ Without necessarily rejecting the possibility

on the poetry of La Fontaine – a poet whom Rudmose-Brown greatly admired (*viz.* '[...] were there only La Fontaine to redeem it, the Classical period would be completely exonerated from the charge of having no lyric poetry, of being entirely intellectual, and not at all emotional' [*Ibid.*, 92]) –, Rudmose-Brown notes that 'he [La Fontaine] can...do the ordinary Seventeenth century madrigal as well as any one else, even better, as, for example, in the "stances" of the *Songe de Vaux*: "Flore, au prix des appas de vos lèvres écloses / N'a rien que de commun : / Telle n'est la beauté ni la fraîcheur des roses, / Ni même leur parfum..."'. It is Malherbe at his best – "Rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses." (*Ibid.*, 93). If the lines by Malherbe that Rudmose-Brown cites as 'his best' are any indication, it is the simple use of ordinary language that appealed to Rudmose-Brown in Malherbe. Such an understanding would position him, stylistically, in much the same bracket as Racine and justify Beckett's association of the pair. Clearly, however, it is impossible to say much of value based upon so little evidence.

³⁸ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 361

³⁹ It is precisely such a parodic reading of Belacqua's comments on 'style' in relation to Racine and Malherbe that is suggested by Melanie Foehn: In her discussion of this passage from *Dream*, Melanie Foehn too cites this passage from Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* (*viz.* Melanie Foehn's 'Samuel Beckett and the Writers of Port-Royal', 51 [n.5]). Foehn does so, however, only as part of a general contextualisation

that these lines were intended to be read as parody, I would suggest that there is no reason parody need be viewed as tantamount to total rejection. On the contrary, the fact that Racine, at least, remained of importance to Beckett throughout his life would seem to speak against such total rejection. Similarly, it seems important to recognise that the role Beckett here accords to the commonplace and the everyday spoken language as a key element of successful writing agrees with the use that he himself occasionally made of the forms of English that he heard spoken around him in the Dublin of his youth, and his later adoption of that colloquial register of French that he acquired following his move to Paris. If the words in *Dream* were merely parodic, it would be surprising to see Beckett himself make such effective literary use of the 'humble tags and commonplaces' that he found about him and which function in his own writing as the necessary corollary to his interest in the darker recesses of *OED* English or *Littré* French.

Regardless of whether one wishes to read this passage as parody or an honest expression of a mode of literary expression that Beckett admired at the time of his working on *Dream*, however, it is surely apparent that Belacqua's remarks are not best interpreted as a mere (p)restatement of a view that Beckett himself would go on to advance in the post-War period: What we have seen, on the contrary, is that these words most likely harken back to what Beckett had already read, and to visions of French Literature to which he had already been exposed. The Beckett who wrote *Dream*, we must not forget, was much closer to the undergraduate Beckett of 1923-27 than to the Beckett of the post-War linguistic turn. In other words, where earlier we stressed the need to recognise the particularity of Beckett's various voices – to separate the weary voice of Beckett the Lecturer from that of Beckett the Writer –, so too must we recognise the polyphony within Beckett's writerly voice. We should, in short, be wary of relying on the young writer of 1932 to clarify those explanations that the mature writer would go on to advance for his post-War turn to French, and equally wary of foisting upon the younger writer the opinions of the elder. If we wish to understand the 'things' that Beckett sought in the early 1930s, the late 1940s, or beyond, we must at all times be sure to take each period on its own terms, or we risk reading Beckett's writing in a manner that amounts to splicing Krapp's various tapes.

of the idea that Classical writing was somehow 'impersonal', of which Lanson's remarks are but one more iteration, and goes on to suggest that Beckett's remarks are part of an attempt to 'distance himself from this overwhelming academic representation of the seventeenth century writer' (*Ibid.*). Foehn does not seem to be aware that Beckett would have studied Lanson's text while an undergraduate, and would thus have been directly familiar with his comments on Racine.

Thus far, the comments on French that we have re-examined have demonstrated the importance of recognising the context in which Beckett spoke, as well as the fact that Beckett's perspective is rooted in a particular time and, more importantly still, in a particular Beckett. In each case, indeed, the comment was shown to be 'rooted' in Beckett himself – in his role as a lecturer, or his time as a student. The final comment that Beckett is known to have made on the subject of French in the pre-War period, less often-cited than the previous two but fully deserving of consideration, also demonstrates the importance of contextualisation since it too is rooted in a particular context. In this final case, however, the context in question is much broader than Beckett himself.

III. FRENCH IN CONVERSATION: PURE COMMUNICATION?

Beckett's final comment on the subject of the French language dates from his time in Germany in the late 1930s. More specifically, it derives from a conversation on the 'the nature of language' that Beckett had with Dr Hans Rupé in 1937, and which he subsequently recorded in his so-called German Diaries.⁴⁰ There, Beckett wrote that he and Rupé had discussed how

Every language [is] once ripe, then falls behind, i.e. once congruent with its provocation, then eclipsed. I boost the possibility of stylelessness in French, the pure communication.⁴¹

Before looking more closely at the history that lies behind Beckett's proposition that French allows for 'pure communication', it is worth noting that this remark is quite different from those that have already been analysed. Clearly, it is not the differences that most readily strike one, and it is hardly surprising that when this phrase is quoted it should regularly be amalgamated with the views already analysed – namely, those expressed by Beckett to his class in 1931 and that expressed by Belacqua in *Dream*. This passage from the German Diaries is, for example, cited by Leland de la Durantaye as evidence that the understanding of French as the only language that can 'give you the thing you want' which is to be found in *Dream* was 'still clearly on Beckett's mind years later'.⁴² Emilie Morin, meanwhile, presents (and slightly misrepresents) this statement in her *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness*, where she offers it in support of her claim that Beckett's discomfort with the nationalist sentiment at the

⁴⁰ German Diaries [11th March, 1937] *qtd* in *DTF*, 257

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 69

heart of the Irish Revival led him to turn to French after the War.⁴³ In actual fact, however, this comment is quite different from those made by Beckett in the classroom and in his novel. Not the least of these differences concerns what is meant by 'stylelessness'.

As has been seen, Beckett's 1931 reference to the English sentence being able to justify itself by 'looking well' – a phrase that might be deemed comparable to an idea of 'style' as aesthetic charm – is inseparable from the fact that Beckett was then explaining to students how to go about writing an essay; the French sentences Beckett had in mind were not those of any writer, but of his own students. In *Dream*, too, the 'style' invoked by Belacqua is not something intrinsic to the French language, but a feature of how French is used by two specific writers: If the French language can give Belacqua the thing he wants, it will be by virtue of his learning from the style of Racine and Malherbe.⁴⁴ In his conversation with Rupé, however, the 'style' of which Beckett speaks is clearly of a different order: There is here no examination looming in the background, Beckett is not speaking with a group of students whose incompetent grammar risks harming them should they stray off the beaten path of clarity and into briars of 'style'. There is equally no direct reference made to particular authors; Beckett does not 'boost the possibility of stylelessness' as it exists in the French of Racine, Malherbe, or any other writer. In the remarks Beckett recorded in his German Diaries, at last, we find Beckett commenting on French *qua* language. Moreover, the 'stylelessness' to which he refers is clearly defined in terms of communicative clarity: French, vaunted because of its capacity for 'pure communication', is clearly a language which remains 'congruent with its provocation'. The thing one wishes to express can, in French – perhaps only in French –, be clearly, purely, truly expressed. Here then, finally, in Beckett's record of his conversation with Dr Hans Rupé, we have found a comment made with general reference to French, and in the context of a general

⁴³ viz. 'In French, Beckett could engage with stylistic devices that were perceived in the context of the Revival period as a potential source of cultural revitalisation, while detaching himself from their cultural and historical weight... Something at the heart of English proved an ill fit for his artistic vision, in contrast with French, which he described as a means to "boost the possibility of stylelessness" and to reach "pure communication"' (Emilie Morin, *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009], 88).

⁴⁴ It is for this reason that I would disagree with Jean-Michel Rabaté's suggestion that 'Belacqua...seems to be talking less about literature than about the French language in general' (Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 137). On the contrary, it seems clear that, whatever the precise 'thing' that Belacqua desires, French in and of itself would not be sufficient to achieve it. Corneille's French – that is, French as handled in the style of Corneille –, for example, or Balzac's French, would certainly not be sufficient to Belacqua's needs, (kinds of) French though they be.

discussion of 'the nature of language'. As such, this comment – and, I would argue, only this comment, of all those made on the subject of French during the pre-War period – may be deemed expressive of a vision of the French language *qua* language held by Beckett in the pre-War period, at least at the time of his conversation with Rupé. Having established that much, we may now turn to the matter of contextualising this comment and, in so doing, we begin to see that it is not necessarily as revelatory of Beckett's personal perspective, or as reliable a guide to what he sought to achieve in his French-language writing, as it might at first appear.

It is certainly true that this remark attests to Beckett's defending a particular vision of the French language. To say that the vision of French he propounds is 'particular', however, is not to claim it is strictly *personal*. On the contrary, when viewed in the broader context of thinking about the French language as this existed around the time of Beckett's conversation with Rupé, one sees that Beckett's remarks are little more than a restatement of a long-standing vision of French that stretches back centuries and according to which French was defined primarily by its clarity.⁴⁵ The idea of French that informs Beckett's comments to Rupé was expressed most famously by Antonin de Rivarol in his *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française*. For Rivarol, '[c]e qui n'est pas clair, n'est pas français'.⁴⁶ In making this assertion, it should be stressed, Rivarol was not presenting an idiosyncratic opinion. At the time of his writing, on the contrary, clarity had already long been held to be a defining quality of the French language by many thinkers, a quality that was held to be attributable primarily to its syntax.⁴⁷ A succinct expression of this vision of French syntax is to be found in Rivarol's *Discours*:

Le français, par un privilège unique, est seul resté fidèle à l'ordre direct⁴⁸,
comme s'il était tout raison, et on a beau, par les mouvements les plus variés

⁴⁵ In his article 'Beckett's "Masters": Pedagogical Sadism, Foreign Language Primers, Self-Translation', Anthony Cordingley also draws attention to this myth about 'the French tongue and its capacity for clear and rational expression' (*op. cit.*, 514), but he examines it particularly as it has influenced certain critical appraisals of Beckett's writing, rather than how it influenced Beckett's own view of French. Cordingley's article also provides a concise treatment of the origins of the idea of 'l'ordre naturel', a notion intimately linked with this idea of French clarity, as it developed through the grammarians of Port-Royal (*viz. Ibid.*, 523-529).

⁴⁶ Antonin de Rivarol, *De l'universalité de la langue française* (Paris: Obsidiane, 1991 [1797]), 39

⁴⁷ For the history of this idea before Rivarol, including the disagreements that existed around it, see Ulrich Ricken, *Grammaire et philosophie au siècle des Lumières : Controverses sur l'ordre naturel et la clarté du français* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1978), 13-155

⁴⁸ The 'direct order' to which Rivarol refers is that whereby the sentence is structured according to the format: Subject + Verb + Object. This order will, of course, be familiar

et toutes les ressources du style, déguiser cet ordre, il faut toujours qu'il existe ; et c'est en vain que les passions nous bouleversent et nous sollicitent de suivre l'ordre des sensations : *la syntaxe française est incorruptible*. C'est de là que résulte cette admirable clarté, base éternelle de notre langue. *Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français* ; ce qui n'est pas clair est encore anglais, italien, grec ou latin.⁴⁹

For Rivarol, and those who shared his views, French alone, of all tongues, was in a position to express matters clearly – or, as Beckett puts it, to facilitate ‘pure communication’ – since it alone could give voice to the language of the mind in accordance with the true order of thought. French syntax was, unlike that of any other language, a means of pure, untroubled communication. Once one is aware of this idea of French, one sees that the view Beckett advanced in conversation with Rupé does not offer us an exceptional insight into Beckett’s unique thinking on French. Rather, it provides us with a linguistic variant of what has already been noted about Beckett’s view of French Literature, by way of Racine: What we find here, in other words, appears to be a view of the French language that Beckett has derived from a third-party source and which he regurgitates as his own. Where Beckett’s views on Racine can be traced back to Rudmose-Brown, however, the origins of his view of French as capable of facilitating ‘pure communication’ is slightly more obscure. Certainly, it has not been possible to trace them back to any single acquaintance, nor to any one text that Beckett is known to have read. In this particular case, however, it would not have been necessary for Beckett to encounter an explicit statement of the view according to which French is defined by clarity of expression since it was so long widespread in discussions of French – and, indeed, continued to be up until very recently⁵⁰ – that Beckett is almost certain to have encountered it prior to his conversation with Rupé.

In this conversation then, and while Beckett may be speaking of the French language in general, he is not advancing a personal view about French. On the contrary, he was advancing a view that he – and Rupé too, perhaps – would have known as a longstanding commonplace. Obviously, the fact that Beckett’s view was not an idiosyncratic conviction does not necessarily mean that he did not believe what

to any English speaker as the most common order for declarative sentences in standard English.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39 – Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ One can still find traces of this perspective in a publication as recent as Barbara Cassin’s *Vocabulaire européen des philosophes : dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004). There, in his entry on French, Alain Badiou writes that ‘*l’essence de la langue est la syntaxe*’ (*op. cit.*, 468 – Emphasis in original) and clarifies that French syntax, at least in the case of the Classical language, ‘*laisse peu de place à l’équivoque sémantique, parce qu’elle subordonne tout au placement syntaxique le plus énergétique, le plus court et le plus cadencé*’ (*Ibid.*) – this particular syntactic placement being that of subject, verb, object.

he said. It is quite possible that, as was the case with his vision of Racine, Beckett fully embraced this third-party-derived opinion as his own and held it to be true. At the same time, however, recognising that the view Beckett expressed to Rupé was, at heart, merely a *lieu commun* on the subject of French helps us to relativize its importance: The view Beckett expressed in 1937 did not emerge out his own experience of the French language, nor was it born of his own writerly practice in French; it was a commonplace derived from without, and which he might have found in any number of texts, or have heard expressed by any number of people. As such, the comments Beckett made to Rupé cannot be said to help us to clarify the underlying motivations for his post-War linguistic turn since, when Beckett ‘boost[ed] the possibility of stylelessness in French, the pure communication’ in 1937, he was not expressing an appreciation of French that he had derived from his decades of using the language. He was simply following in the footsteps of writers such as Rivarol, giving expression to a vision of French derived from other sources. If we seek to find insight into what French allowed Beckett personally to achieve, and thus into Beckett’s motivations for turning to French in the post-War period, we must look elsewhere than the commonplaces and *clichés* that he offered during his conversation with Rupé.

The importance of context that I have stressed throughout this chapter is, of course, precisely what I have sought to underline throughout Part I. My focus in the preceding chapters has not been on some overarching vision of French that carries us, and Beckett’s opinions, unchanged across decades, even as Beckett’s personal circumstances, his primary language of composition, his relation to French and even, that word that has haunted this entire discussion, his literary *style* underwent radical changes. Throughout Chapters 1-3, I have argued that Beckett’s French is always rooted in broader circumstances. So too, in the present chapter, I have argued that Beckett’s comments on the French language are always embedded in particular contexts; if these comments are to tell us anything, it will only be by our placing them within these contexts of their original expression. For each of these comments, as we have seen, the context in which Beckett speaks, and even the Beckett who speaks, has been slightly different: Beckett the Lecturer, in the classroom; Beckett the Student, as heard through Beckett the (young) Writer; Beckett the Conversationalist, rehashing ideas gleaned from others while conversing with a new acquaintance in a foreign country and noting it all down in his ‘absurd diary’.⁵¹ These comments are not

⁵¹ German Diaries [6th January, 1937] *qtd* in Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936-1937*, 48

interchangeable, nor should they be seized upon collectively, plucked from their context, and rendered down into something that might then be described as Beckett's *idea of French* and according to which French would be a language that, by virtue of its 'bare[ness]', allows a writer to 'write without style' and thus achieve 'stylelessness'. Shorn of their context and presented as a neat collection as they have just been, it becomes all too easy to believe that these pre-War statements do indeed attest to Beckett's idea of French and confirm this idea as being aligned with the tenets of the LSH. It becomes all too easy to claim, as critics so often do, that Beckett's pre-War idea of French at once contains the germ of, and proves the validity of, that conviction at the heart of the LSH according to which French was, for Beckett, always a language in which it was 'plus facile d'écrire sans style'.

What I hope the reader will have come to see, however, is that Beckett's comments are indissociable from the various contexts out of which they emerged and, when placed in the context of their original expression, Beckett's pre-War views on the French language are more ambiguous than they initially appear. Even if we are to accept this ambiguity, however, there are surely some who would find these comments clear enough: Surely, some will say, we can at least be certain that Beckett's idea of French – Beckett's idea of the kind of art that could be achieved in French – was, if nothing else and at the very least, *different* from his idea of English? Even if we can dismiss Beckett remarks to his students as intended solely for them, even if we can relativize the importance of the remarks made in *Dream* as pertaining, not to French, but to a particular kind of French, and even if we can trace the remarks made to Rupé back to an idea that Beckett derived from third-party sources, does it not remain the case that, when taken together, these comments prove that Beckett was convinced of some kind of essential divide between French and other languages? What must be recognised, however, is even if these comments prove that Beckett was convinced in the existence of a divide between French and English, they do nothing to prove the existence of a difference between how Beckett worked in English and in French. The possibility – or even the fact – of Beckett's having perceived a distinction between French and English, in other words, tells us nothing about how Beckett wrote in French and, as such, it cannot be a sufficient evidential foundation from which to extrapolate an explanation for his post-War linguistic turn.

Much as the proper way to read Beckett's pre-War comments on the subject of French is within the broader context of their initial expression, so too is the proper way to read Beckett's turn to French within, and against, the broader context of the writing that he actually produced in this language. The interpretative value of Beckett's *idea of French*, in other words, can only be judged after we have considered

Beckett's use of French. For it is entirely possible that Beckett, like Rivarol, gave voice to a vision of French that his own use of the French language contradicted.⁵² It is for that reason that, prior to attempting to answer the question of why Beckett turned to French in 1946 in Part III, Part II must be devoted to an examination of the literary texts that he produced in French during the pre-War period. When one examines the literary use Beckett made of French in this period, one finds confirmation of what the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook and the similarity between Beckett's use of oral varieties of language in English and French has already suggested: Persistent critical assumptions about Beckett's use of French are in need of drastic revision. Not only was Beckett's pre-War French-language style fundamentally the same as his English-language style but, more importantly still, the material he composed in French is best understood, not in opposition to his English-language writing, but as playing an integral role in his development as an (English-language) writer.

⁵² In his study, Ricken notes that 'Rivarol n'a pas suivi l'ordre direct, même dans les phrases par lesquelles il en a proclamé l'infailibilité en français' (Ulrich Ricken, *Grammaire et philosophie au siècle des Lumières : Controverses sur l'ordre naturel et la clarté du français*, 158).

PART II: Beckett's Pre-Turn Writing in French

Chapter 1

1930-1937

In his biography, James Knowlson was careful to correct a prevailing misconception according to which Beckett's use of French was an exclusively post-War phenomenon:

[Beckett's] shift from one language to another has commonly been regarded as taking place immediately after the war. Although this remains true for the prose fiction and the drama, Beckett did rather more than dip his toe into French waters in 1938-9.¹

The texts to which Knowlson here alludes are the *Poèmes 37-39*, a suite of twelve French-language poems that appeared for the first time only after the end of the War, when they were published in *Les Temps Modernes* as 'Poèmes 38-39'.² As Knowlson's remarks imply, these poems are generally considered to be important stepping stones towards Beckett's post-War turn to French – particularly insofar as their supposedly simpler style is held to point towards the stylistic evolution associated with Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. Despite this importance, however, these poems have only rarely been the subject of careful critical attention. Indeed, thus far, critical engagement with the *Poèmes 37-39* has been limited to a mere handful of studies.³

That this should be the case is striking given what they potentially reveal about Beckett's development as a writer and, particularly, about his post-War decision to write in French.⁴ By the time Beckett began work on the first of those French-language poems to which the extract from *DTF* that has just been quoted refers, however, he had, in fact, already composed two pieces of prose ('Le Concentrisme' and the French-language letter that appears in *Dream*), as well as two poems in French ('C'n'est au Pélican' and 'Tristesse Janale'). As such, and as important as the works that Beckett composed following his 1937 move to Paris are, these pre-1937 French-language works are perhaps even more important since they constitute nothing less than Beckett's earliest use of French as an outlet for creative literary

¹ *DTF*, 293

² Samuel Beckett, 'Poèmes 38-39', in *Les Temps Modernes II* (November 1946), 288-93 – For details of the circumstances surrounding the change of title, see *CP*, 372; For details of the composition of these poems, see Part III, Chapter 2.

³ For details of these critical engagements, see Part II, Chapter 2.

⁴ As will be demonstrated in due course by the close readings to which these poems will be subject, the *Poèmes 37-39* do indeed offer important insights into Beckett's early use of French – insights that serve to further undermine the supposed association between Beckett's linguistic and stylistic changes.

expression. In light of this fact, it is extremely surprisingly that these texts also constitute what is arguably the most understudied body of writing in the entire Beckettian corpus. None of the French-language prose works that Beckett composed prior to 1937, for example, is the subject of extended analysis in any of the recently-published companions to Beckett's writing, such as *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2015) or Wiley-Blackwell's *A Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2010).⁵ Somewhat ironically, in fact, given that Beckett's poetic output is by far the least-studied aspect of his writing, by far the best-studied of Beckett's pre-1937 French-language works are actually the poems – 'C'n'est au Pélican' and 'Tristesse Janale'. Even these two poems, however, have not benefited from extensive treatments in articles or monographs, but rather from that more limited degree of elucidation permitted by the explanatory notes offered as part of *CP*.⁶ Bearing in mind the paucity of critical enquiry devoted to these works – and to the two prose works, in particular –, the present chapter offers an important opportunity to contribute towards correcting the critical neglect from which these texts have suffered. Naturally, the constraints of the present thesis prohibit a truly exhaustive analysis of these texts. Even so, it is hoped that the discussion offered here will go some way towards filling a gap that currently exists within Beckett Studies.

In and of itself, such critical neglect would not necessarily justify the decision to devote a chapter to these pre-1937 texts. If these texts find their place in the present thesis, therefore, it is because, by deepening our understanding of them, we can better understand Beckett's engagement with the French language in the period prior to his post-War linguistic turn. More specifically, these texts represent an object of particular attention for the present thesis because they too call into question the purported correlation between Beckett's 1946 turn to French and his stylistic change in the post-War period by demonstrating the degree to which, in his pre-War writing, Beckett's French could be every bit as complex and allusive as his English.⁷ These texts are thus a key source of evidence in support of this thesis' argument against the LSH.

⁵ viz. Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*; S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*.

⁶ For notes on 'C'n'est au Pélican', see *CP*, 314-15; for notes on 'Tristesse Janale', see *CP*, 329-30

⁷ This point is made in passing by John Pilling and Seán Lawlor as part of their notes in *CP* (viz. *op. cit.*, 373), but its implications are not fully explored. Similarly, Jean-Michel Rabaté's acknowledgement that 'Le Concentrisme''s 'intensity is on par with the witty hyperboles and crazy conceits of *Murphy*' (Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 138) exists in a vacuum, since his article continues to take for granted the correlation between Beckett's use of French and his adoption of a new style, he simply proposes to explain this 'new style' as a product of contemporary trends in post-War French literature (viz. *Ibid.*, 143-148). The present chapter's analysis of this text will thus go further than either of these critics in developing the implications of 'Le Concentrisme''s style.

The relationship between Beckett's use of French and his literary style, however, is certainly not the only thing that close examination of these texts can help us to better appreciate. In the course of this chapter, I also hope to show that close engagement with Beckett's early French-language writing has the potential to radically alter current thinking about Beckett's earliest experiments with that literary voice – at once comic, autobiographic, and unabashedly allusive – which is generally assumed to have first found expression in English, through the writing of *Dream*.

My aim, in other words, is not simply to demonstrate that our presumptions about Beckett's use of French and his embrace of a less baroque literary style in the post-War period are ill-founded, but also to demonstrate that, by neglecting these pre-1937 French-language texts, Beckett Studies has arrived at false assumptions regarding the early history of Beckett's development as a literary artist. These assumptions can only be corrected by taking proper account of these pre-1937 French texts, by replacing them in the context of this early history and, more broadly, by recognising that, rather than incidental curios of merely linguistic interest, these French-language texts are important elements in Beckett's earliest development as a literary writer.

Obviously, the idea that any of the four texts that will be discussed in this first chapter could be described as important elements of Beckett's earliest development as a writer may strike those familiar with them as untenable given their brevity: 'Tristesse Janale' is no more than a sonnet, while 'C'n'est au Pélican' is a mere 12 lines long. The letter Belacqua receives from his friend Lucien, meanwhile, is simply a brief interlude in the broader context of *Dream* and accounts for no more than 800 words. Even 'Le Concentrisme', the lengthiest of these pre-1937 texts by far is scarcely more than 3,200 words.⁸ On top of this brevity, it is also true that, with the notable exception of 'Le Concentrisme', none of these texts was published in Beckett's lifetime. Indeed, it was not until the publication of *CP* in 2012 that 'Tristesse Janale' appeared in print.⁹

Taken together, these factors help to explain why these texts have been largely ignored by criticism and relegated to the deeper, unexplored recesses of Beckett's *œuvre*. Moreover, such factors make it quite possible that the uncharitable reader may be inclined to view the discussion that will be proposed here as, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, unjustified. It must be recalled, however, that a text's importance cannot be measured by its length. This is particularly true in the case of Beckett, some of whose briefer works have come to occupy privileged positions in the

⁸ This word count is based upon the surviving typescript of 'Le Concentrisme'.

⁹ *CP*, 329

critical discourse that surrounds his writing.¹⁰ Similarly, the fact of a text's having remained unpublished during Beckett's lifetime cannot preclude us from viewing it as an important part of Beckett's development as a writer since, whether or not it appeared in print, each work is, necessarily, a moment in Beckett's artistic development. Certainly, if works such as *Eleutheria* or *Dream* did not appear in print until after Beckett's death, few could deny our understanding of Beckett's artistic development has been greatly enriched by critical engagement with them. These texts are not solely of importance to critics, however. Beckett himself is known to have spoken of his books as a 'series', in a manner that strongly suggests that he saw his works as belonging to a broader whole, in which each text had its place.¹¹ In the present instance, my aim is nothing so grand as the suggestion that all of Beckett's works are directly connected, I merely wish to underline the fact that these works constitute discrete elements in the process of his literary development.¹² Every text composed by Beckett, in other words – whether as brief as a poem like 'Gnome', or as lengthy as a novel like *Comment c'est / How It Is*; whether it appeared in Beckett's lifetime and under his guidance, like the plays he staged, or remained unpublished and rejected by him, like *Eleutheria*; whether incomplete works that survive in the archive, like the dramatic fragments 'Coups de gong' and 'Espace souterrain', or completed works that have been lost, like Beckett's radio sketch for Paris-Mondial¹³ –, every text has 'its place in the series' of Beckett's writings because it has its place in Beckett's development as a writer.¹⁴ If we are to properly understand this

¹⁰ In this regard, one need only think of Beckett's earliest published work, 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce'. At heart, this text is no more than a brief work of commissioned criticism, prepared by a scarcely adult Beckett at the behest of – and, indeed, to the specifications of – James Joyce. Despite both its length and the circumstances of its composition, 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce' nonetheless continues to play an important role in critical discussions of Beckett's writing and has, indeed, become a standard reference point for critics interested in Beckett's idea of language, see for example Leland de la Durantaye's *Beckett's Art of Mismatching* (viz. *op. cit.*, 66-67) or Chiara Montini's « *La bataille du soliloque* » : *genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-1946)* (viz. *op. cit.*, 45-46).

¹¹ viz. 'I am now retyping...Malone meurt, the last I hope of the series Murphy, Watt, Mercier & Camier, Molloy, not to mention the 4 Nouvelles & Eleutheria' [LSB II, 80 – SB to George Reavey (8th July, 1948)].

¹² For a more extended discussion of Beckett's references to his works as a 'series', and a proposed interpretation of what this might mean for connections between his various texts, see Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismatching*, 109-116.

¹³ For details of the dramatic fragments 'Coups de gong' and 'Espace souterrain', see Mark Nixon, 'Beckett's Unpublished Canon', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 290-291; For details of Beckett's radio sketch for Paris-Mondial, see Appendix II (b).

¹⁴ This reference to 'a place in the series' is taken from a letter to Gottfried Büttner, in which Beckett described *Watt* as 'an unsatisfactory book' that yet had 'its place in the series' (SB to Gottfried Büttner [12th April, 1978] *qtd* in LSB II, xix-xx).

development, therefore, we must pay due regard to *all* of these texts, even those that might initially appear mere footnotes in the story of Beckett's literary career.

The term that has just been used – that is, *literary* – is an important one for, even if we can accept that a text's brevity, or its not having been published, is no bar to its being accorded a place in the canon of Beckett's progression as a literary writer, it might yet be argued that at least two of these pre-1937 French-language texts cannot be said to have contributed anything towards Beckett's development as a *literary* writer since they are not necessarily *literary* texts at all. In fact, even when viewed within the context of Beckett's particularly eclectic and disparate body of writing, the texts in question – namely, 'Le Concentrisme' and the poem 'Tristesse Janale' – constitute radical exceptions: As a poem, the literary status of 'Tristesse Janale' might initially seem assured. This poem is, however, intimately associated with 'Le Concentrisme', insofar as it was composed by Beckett to serve as an example of the kind of poetry composed by Jean du Chas, the poet whose life, works and theoretical movement – 'Le Concentrisme' – form the subject of the text to which this movement gives its name.¹⁵ This poem may therefore be viewed as nothing more than an outgrowth of 'Le Concentrisme', and the question of what relationship this text holds to Beckett's literary writings is, for reasons that will become clear, a vexed one. Vexed or otherwise, what can be said with certainty is that 'Le Concentrisme' is the earliest of the pre-1937 texts to be composed in French. For this reason, it is with 'Le Concentrisme' that our examination of these texts must begin.

1. 'LE CONCENTRISME'

Thus far, 'Le Concentrisme' has been referred to as a 'text' and, while this is undoubtedly true, the term covers a multitude and, in so doing, obscures precisely what makes this text's relationship to the rest of Beckett's literary output so difficult to quantify. This difficulty derives from the fact that 'Le Concentrisme' is a lecture. It is, indeed, the only lecture by Beckett that is known to have survived in its totality. Composed in late 1930, 'Le Concentrisme' was intended for presentation to the Dublin University Modern Languages Society on Tuesday, 11th November of that same year, as part of a series of lectures presented by the society.¹⁶ The question of where to place a lecture within Beckett's *œuvre* is yet further complicated by the fact that 'Le Concentrisme' is not even a lecture in the true sense of the word. It was, to use the term Beckett himself employed to describe 'Le Concentrisme' in conversation with

¹⁵ For more on this connection, see the discussion of 'Tristesse Janale' below.

¹⁶ The precise date of Beckett's lecture is confirmed by an article that appeared in *The Irish Times* on November 8th (*viz.* A Correspondent, 'Trinity College Notes: Society Suppers Armistice Day', in *The Irish Times* [8th November, 1930], 6).

James Knowlson, a 'spoof'.¹⁷ The atypical generic configuration and humorous character of this text clearly raise a number of questions about how it should be approached by criticism: Can a lecture, even one by Beckett, be viewed as a work of literature? Can a 'spoof' lecture, even one by Beckett, be taken seriously? And what would it mean to take Beckett's only 'spoof' lecture seriously as a work of literature?

The question of how we should view 'Le Concentrisme' takes us to the very heart of this chapter since much of the following discussion will be focussed on how criticism has viewed this text and, by extension, how the manner in which this text has been viewed has impacted critical appraisals of it and critical understandings of the relation it bears to Beckett's unambiguously literary output. Before we examine those questions, however, we need firstly to place 'Le Concentrisme' in its proper context, the better to understand how it came to be, how it came to be published, and what relation – if any – it bears to the rest of Beckett's body of writing.

Despite being relatively brief, 'Le Concentrisme' is rife with complications. Even its title raises questions for, although 'Le Concentrisme' is the more commonly used title in Beckett Studies, the text is also sometimes referred to as 'Jean du Chas'.¹⁸ Interestingly, the previously mentioned article that appeared in *The Irish Times* suggests that both of these titles may be partially correct: That article's closing paragraph announces 'Mr. Samuel Beckett, B.A., assistant lecturer in French will read a paper to the Modern Language [*sic*] Society on "*Jean du Chas et le Noncentrisme [sic]*"'.¹⁹ Given the error in the name of the Modern Languages Society, it seems probable that 'Noncentrisme' is merely a printer's error and that the title of the paper as delivered was 'Jean du Chas et le Concentrisme'.²⁰

If the text's title is a matter of some confusion, the very fact of its survival is no less puzzling. Although the typescript of 'Le Concentrisme' has been preserved, there is no evidence that Beckett intended for his spoof lecture to endure beyond the occasion of its initial delivery. In this respect, 'Le Concentrisme' might initially be thought of as belonging to the so-called 'grey canon' – that polymorphous body of unpublished materials, including drafts, notebooks, letters, and juvenilia, which

¹⁷ *DTF*, 122 – During that same conversation, Beckett made clear to Knowlson that, despite some claims to the contrary (*viz. SBAB*, 52), his original audience were fully aware that his lecture was intended to amuse, rather than to inform.

¹⁸ The variant titles come from the fact that different titles have been assigned to this text by the University of Reading and Dartmouth College, which both hold copies of the only surviving typescript of the work (*viz. Ruby Cohn, A Beckett Canon*, 21 [unnumbered footnote]).

¹⁹ A Correspondent, 'Trinity College Notes: Society Suppers Armistice Day', in *The Irish Times* (8th November, 1930), 6

²⁰ For the purposes of the present discussion, the text will be referred to as 'Le Concentrisme', this being the title most widely in use.

Beckett refused to see published in his lifetime.²¹ In truth, however, ‘Le Concentrisme’ cannot be said to fit comfortably within the (admittedly ill-defined) confines of the ‘grey canon’ since Beckett – who elsewhere showed himself perfectly willing to refuse permission to have certain works published²² – allowed this lecture to appear in print during his lifetime, when it was published as part of *Disjecta*.²³ At the same time, unlike ‘Human Wishes’, another work that Beckett consented to seeing included in *Disjecta*, ‘Le Concentrisme’ is not an unfinished draft, but rather a completed text.²⁴ The most exceptional aspect of ‘Le Concentrisme’, however, and the primary reason for its being discussed in the present context, is the fact that it constitutes the earliest surviving example of an extended piece of original, expressive writing to have been composed by Beckett directly in French.²⁵

Odd though this text may be, the fact that ‘Le Concentrisme’ offers us the first known example of an extended prose text to have been composed by Beckett directly in French means that it is of immense importance. And yet, despite this fact, ‘Le Concentrisme’ has, up until now, been the subject of remarkably little critical discussion. In fact, excepting those treatments of the text that have been provided in the context of works that adopt an explicitly ‘holistic’ approach – that is, works such as Ruby Cohn’s *A Beckett Canon*, which seeks to discuss all of Beckett’s ‘canonical’ writings, or John Pilling’s *Beckett before Godot*, which, as the title implies, embraces

²¹ The term ‘grey canon’, now widely-used within Beckett Studies, was first formulated by S. E. Gontarski – For this formulation, see his ‘Greying the Canon: Beckett in Performance’, in S. E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (eds), *Beckett after Beckett* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2006).

²² This was most notably the case for *Eleutheria*, the first play that Beckett wrote in French, and which ‘[t]hroughout his lifetime he adamantly refused to have...either published or produced’ (*DTF*, 362).

²³ *D*, 35-42 – A new edition of Beckett’s Critical Writings, edited by Mark Nixon and David Tucker, has been announced (*viz.* Mark Nixon, ‘Ruptures of the Visual: Beckett as Critic and Poet’, in Dirk Van Hulle [ed.], *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 84 [n.1]) and is likely to include a revised text of ‘Le Concentrisme’. Currently, however, ‘Le Concentrisme’ is only readily-available in *Disjecta* and the version included in that work is at once incomplete and marred by a number of errors. In light of its incompleteness and these errors, it is to the original typescript that reference will here be made. A transcription of this typescript has been provided as Appendix I (a).

²⁴ In this respect too, ‘Le Concentrisme’ differs not only from many of the texts that are generally classed as belonging to the ‘grey canon’, but also from the majority of those texts belonging to the ‘unpublished canon’, recently described by Mark Nixon (*viz.* Mark Nixon, ‘Beckett’s Unpublished Canon’, in S. E. Gontarski [ed.], *Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 282-305).

²⁵ Prior to ‘Le Concentrisme’, the only texts by Beckett to have been composed directly in French are a small number of letters written to Francophone correspondents (*viz.* *LSB I*, 9, 14, 38). Of these, the first two are official letters pertaining to Beckett’s time as a *lecteur* at the ENS, and the final letter concerns the French translation of ‘Anna Livia Plurabelle’, prepared by Samuel Beckett and Alfred Péron.

all writings ‘before *Godot*’ –, ‘Le Concentrisme’ has generally been ignored and, where it has been mentioned, such mention has essentially occurred in passing.²⁶ More surprisingly still, the text has even been absent from studies explicitly devoted to the question of Beckett’s engagement with the French language. Chiara Montini, for example, although explicitly concerned with the emergence of a Beckettian ‘bilingual poetics’, makes only the briefest mention of ‘Le Concentrisme’ in her 2007 study « *La bataille du soliloque* » : *genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-1946)*.²⁷ The glancing references that we find to this text in Montini’s study, moreover, are subsumed within a broader discussion of the earliest period of Beckett’s literary production (i.e. 1929-1937), a period that Montini describes as a time of ‘monolinguisme polyglotte’.²⁸ According to Montini, this period of Beckett’s literary life is one during which ‘il écrit dans sa langue maternelle, l’anglais, tout en manifestant son intérêt pour les langues par de nombreuses citations en langue originale’.²⁹ In this respect, the lack of attention that Montini accords to ‘Le Concentrisme’ is all the more unfortunate since it serves to trouble her definition of this early period of Beckett’s literary life as one of polyglot monolingualism. Far from being merely a long citation set within an English-language text, ‘Le Concentrisme’ is a fully-realised text composed directly and exclusively in French. More importantly still, ‘Le Concentrisme’ not only shows Beckett to be writing fiction in French as early as 1930, but to be finding his voice as a writer of *literary* fiction in French as early as 1930.

To say that ‘Le Concentrisme’ shows Beckett to be finding his voice as a *literary* writer in French clearly implies that ‘Le Concentrisme’ may be viewed as a literary work. Such a view is not necessarily one with which all readers will be in agreement. Indeed, it seems probable that the general neglect from which ‘Le Concentrisme’ has suffered is in large part attributable to the fact that, as a ‘spoof’ lecture, this text constitutes a generic Rorschach test: Depending upon the critic’s own perspective, ‘Le Concentrisme’ may be aligned with either Beckett’s comedic impulse – whereby the text will be seen primarily a ‘spoof’ –, or with Beckett’s theoretical

²⁶ Currently, only two publications deal with this text at any length, namely: Laura Salisbury’s *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (viz. Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012 (2015)], 62-73) and Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts* (viz. Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts* [Berlin: LIT Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2007], 35-39). Neither of these works treats ‘Le Concentrisme’ as a piece of literature in the manner that will be proposed here, however.

²⁷ viz. Chiara Montini, « *La bataille du soliloque* » : *genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-1946)*, 33, 56

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23

impulse – whereby the text will be seen primarily a ‘lecture’.³⁰ Obviously, neither of these approaches to Beckett’s ‘spoof’ lecture can be dismissed as simply incorrect; the text is clearly intended to amuse and it contains both obvious parallels with, and explicit quotations from, the academic monograph on *Proust* that Beckett was unhappily engaged in completing while he composed ‘Le Concentrisme’.³¹ At the same time, however, and without dismissing the importance of either of these aspects, I would contend that to view the text as comic or theoretical is insufficient, insofar as classifying ‘Le Concentrisme’ as a comic or a theoretical work – or even as a combination of the two – sets the text apart from Beckett’s fictional writing and thus justifies its exclusion from discussions of Beckett’s earliest fictional endeavours, when, in truth, ‘Le Concentrisme’ is fundamentally a work of fiction and must be placed in the company of Beckett’s earliest fictional compositions.

To present ‘Le Concentrisme’ as a work of fiction is, it must be stressed, not an idiosyncratic approach. As part of that discussion of ‘Le Concentrisme’ offered in his *Beckett before Godot*, John Pilling clearly states that this text is ‘from first to last fiction’.³² Ruby Cohn too has recognised this, saying of ‘Le Concentrisme’ that ‘[w]hat purports to be literary criticism is actually fiction’.³³ To say that ‘Le Concentrisme’ is a work of fiction, however, is not yet to claim it as a work of *literary* fiction. Moreover, recognising it as fiction is not yet the same thing as *reading* it as literature. And when one proposes to read this text as if it were a literary object – with all the attention and nuance that this implies –, then one is venturing on to unexplored territory. To appreciate why this should be the case, as well as the degree to which critical reading

³⁰ This text’s dual comic-theoretical character helps to explain why the only extended treatments of ‘Le Concentrisme’ that are currently to be found in print occur in those two previously-mentioned monographs, since they are devoted to, respectively, Beckett’s engagement with comedy (i.e. Laura Salisbury’s *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*) and to his theoretical writings (i.e. Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*).

³¹ The phrase with which ‘Le Concentrisme’ ends, for example – ‘parfaitement intelligible et parfaitement inexplicable’ (viz. LC, 5) – is a reworking of a citation, derived from Schopenhauer’s *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and, more particularly, from the French-language translation of this work in which Beckett, who began reading Schopenhauer while a *lecteur* at the ENS and at a time when he spoke no German, is most likely to have first encountered Schopenhauer’s text – i.e. ‘Elle [= music] est pour nous à la fois parfaitement intelligible et tout à fait inexplicable’ (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation, tome 1*, trans. by Auguste Burdeau [Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1912], 275-276). Beckett also makes use of this same citation towards the close of *Proust* (viz. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* [New York, NY: Grove Press, 1957], 71) – For details of Beckett’s engagement with Schopenhauer, see Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library*, 143-151.

³² John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 54 – Emphasis mine.

³³ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 21

of this text is affected by a refusal to recognise it as literature and read it accordingly, one must consider some of the critical readings that have been proposed to date.

Critical readings of this text, as previously noted, have thus far been few and far between. Those readings that have been proposed by writers who recognise 'Le Concentrisme' as fiction, moreover, invariably suffer from their inability to read this text as if it were a work of literary fiction. Ruby Cohn, for example, closes her discussion of 'Le Concentrisme' by explicitly advising us that 'one should not exaggerate the significance of a *canular* perpetrated by Beckett after his residence at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where such hoaxes are said to abound'.³⁴ The term *canular* that Cohn here uses requires a measure of explanation: Originating with the students of the ENS – who, in common with any tightly-knit group, possess their own argot –, the term refers at once to forms of hazing to which new students are subjected by older students, and to any kind of joke or farce that might be committed by members of the *École*, particularly one with a self-consciously intellectual bent.³⁵ To describe 'Le Concentrisme' as a *canular* is thus to view it as a work of facetious comedy, and, in so doing, to make of it an essentially superficial exercise in amusement, one perpetrated by a self-consciously intellectual person and intended for a self-consciously intellectual audience. What Cohn clearly intends us to understand is that, while 'Le Concentrisme' may well adopt the tropes of fiction – such as the (fictional) letter that serves to introduce the lecture and provide a (fictional) framing narrative for (the fictional) Jean du Chas and his (fictional) literary movement – it does not yet belong to Beckett's fictional corpus, it is not yet *a work of fiction* precisely because it is a comic exercise in the style of the *canular normalien*.

Viewing the text in this way, it becomes impossible to see it as *true* fiction – that is, as literary fiction – and, consequently, impossible to read it with the same attention as one might devote to Beckett's first novel, *Dream*. The same presumption, and the same consequence, is to be observed in that discussion of 'Le Concentrisme' offered by Laura Salisbury in her monograph, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*. For, though Salisbury may offer this text her attention, it is clear that she does not take it seriously. Or, rather, she does not take it seriously *as fiction*. For Salisbury, as for Cohn, 'Le Concentrisme' is essentially 'an elaborate parody in the manner fashioned at the ENS from which Beckett had just returned'.³⁶ Its importance, such as it is, resides in the fact that it is germane to Salisbury's analysis of Beckett's

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 22

³⁵ For a discussion of the *canular* and its place in the *ENS*, see Robert J. Smith, *The Ecole Normale Supérieure and The Third Republic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 84-86.

³⁶ Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*, 66

engagement with comedy and, more particularly, in the way that 'Le Concentrisme', through a polyphony of narrative voices, allows Beckett to parody the role of writer, reader, and critic.³⁷ As a fundamentally comic text, Salisbury suggests, 'Le Concentrisme' warps even the values that would later find their way into Beckett's early fiction: '[E]ach centre, each narrative voice with which the reader might rest in comic identification – including ideas Beckett held seriously – ends up being "con": stupid'.³⁸ Here again, we are confronted with the idea that *Le Concentrisme*, as an essentially comic text, cannot be taken seriously: It is a farce that degrades everything, even ideas that, were they encountered in a short-story, *could* be taken seriously.

While there is obviously something of the *canular* about 'Le Concentrisme', and there is obviously a very strong vein of comedy running through this lecture, the question must be asked: Is it not possible for work of fiction to be at once comic *and* serious? In answering this question, we are again forced to situate 'Le Concentrisme' with regard to Beckett's literary works since, evidently, the comedy of a work like *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot* cannot be thought of as establishing an ontological divide between it and the realm of 'Serious Art'. Bearing this in mind, I would suggest that, for Cohn and for Salisbury, it is not really because 'Le Concentrisme' is a work of comedy that they believe it should not be taken seriously as a work of fiction. On the contrary, it is because they do not view Beckett's 'spoof' lecture as a true work of fiction that they judge it primarily for its comic value. There is, however, another way of viewing this text: Rather than privileging its comedy and thus denying its fictional-literary character, one might privilege its fictional-literary character and view it as a work of comic fiction. Viewed from this perspective, the importance of 'Le Concentrisme' for Beckett's development as a writer changes dramatically, since, once one has provisionally accepted it as being fundamentally literary in nature, the very thing that prevented Cohn and Salisbury from taking this text seriously – namely, the (academically-aware) humour that they identified as deriving from the tradition of *canulars normaliens* – actually provides a striking point of similarity between 'Le Concentrisme' and the kind of literary fiction that Beckett would go on to produce.

The first of the similarities, as has been suggested, lies in the use that this text makes of comedy – something which has long been recognised as a central

³⁷ viz. "'Le concentrisme" is...a tensely uncertain, dialogical articulation of the contradictory desires and obligations that writing, reading and criticism in particular demand.' (*Ibid.*, 66-67)

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 69

element of Beckett's writing.³⁹ Although it would eventually become a fundamental aspect of most of his writing, Beckett's use of comedy was not present from the beginning of his career. To see this, we need only consider Beckett's earliest short-story, 'Assumption', which first appeared in 1929.⁴⁰ There is very little in 'Assumption' to presage the kind of prose that Beckett would go on to write in the 1930s. It is, rather, a dour, turgid text, composed in a language which, as Ann Beer has correctly identified, 'repeatedly slips...into a loose Romanticism and faded idealism which sound oddly nineteenth-century in tone'.⁴¹ To say that 'Assumption' is a dour and turgid work, composed in a superannuated mode, is not necessarily to criticise it, but simply to recognise something very important about its relation to the fiction that followed after it. For, despite its dour turgidity, 'Assumption' does in fact include much of the raw material that Beckett would more skilfully develop in his subsequent early fiction, it simply deploys this material without any of the comic flair that Beckett would eventually become known for.⁴² For the first evidence of such comedy, it has generally been assumed that one need turn to Beckett's first novel *Dream*, which is clearly comic in tone.⁴³ (Indeed, it is surely noteworthy that the earliest allusion we have to *Dream* takes the form of a reference to the fact that Beckett is working on something he describes as 'the German *Comedy*'.⁴⁴) In this way, one of the major breakthroughs represented by *Dream*, as compared to 'Assumption', might be viewed as the degree to which *Dream* shows Beckett making use of his comic sensibility in fiction. I say it 'might', because, once we have accepted 'Le Concentrisme' as a work of fiction, one sees that it was, in fact, while writing his 'spoof' lecture in late 1930 that

³⁹ It is, indeed, the fundamental premise of Salisbury's monograph that Beckett's texts are 'comic', even if this comedy is often difficult to precisely isolate (*viz. Ibid.*, 1-4).

⁴⁰ For further publication details, see *CSP*, 279

⁴¹ Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 90 – In this respect, Beer is very right to note that 'Assumption' 'in part exemplifies what [Beckett] criticises in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce"' (*Ibid.*), insofar as his first short-story revels in precisely that kind of abstracted English that Beckett's essay praises Joyce for having eschewed.

⁴² As noted by Mary Bryden, for example, the vital theme of Beckett's earliest work – that is, the opposition between Art, Self and Woman – is already present and accounted for: 'Male artist pursues quest in seclusion; Woman intrudes, male colludes "in spite of himself"; disaster and fragmentation result' (Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other*, *qtd* in Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 6).

⁴³ Numerous examples of *Dream*'s comedic character might be offered, but the presence of the Smeraldina's letter to Belacqua alone – full, as it is, of jokes at the expense of the Smeraldina's poor grasp of the English language – would suffice to prove Beckett was already experimenting with comedy during the composition of his first novel – For examples of the Smeraldina's haphazard English, see Part II, Chapter 1 [n.237].

⁴⁴ *LSB I*, 78 (SB to TMG [29th May, 1931]) – Emphasis mine.

Beckett first allowed himself to leaven his fiction with laughter and try his hand at writing a *comic* narrative.

Certainly, one may disagree about the effectiveness of 'Le Concentrisme''s comedy, but it is interesting that Salisbury finds Beckett's lecture to have 'both too much sixth-form self-satisfaction and too much self-loathing about it really to succeed in *straightforward* comic terms'.⁴⁵ If 'Le Concentrisme' fails in 'straightforward comic terms', I would contend, it is because this text is not a straightforward piece of comedy. On the contrary, it is a work of comic fiction – the first to have been composed by Beckett, in any language. If this text may trace its origin to Beckett's exposure to the *canulars* of the ENS, in other words, it is perhaps to this same source that may be traced the comic vein that runs throughout Beckett's literary production. Obviously, this is a very large claim to make on the basis of such a small text. It is, moreover, a claim that currently rests on nothing more than the provisional acceptance of the idea that this text is fundamentally a work of literary fiction. Examining 'Le Concentrisme' more closely, however, reveals that comedy is very far from the only thing that Beckett's spoof lecture shares with the kind of fiction that Beckett produced in the 1930s. On the contrary, this 'spoof' lecture shares a number of key narrative patterns that are to be found elsewhere in Beckett's literary output of the period. A number of those narrative patterns followed by 'Le Concentrisme' were already sketched out in 'Assumption' and would continue to structure his prose fiction up until the composition of *Watt* – and, in certain cases, even well beyond that. Like the central character of 'Assumption', for example, Jean du Chas will be dead by the close of the narrative in which he features and the death of the central character will remain a constant throughout Beckett's early prose fiction.⁴⁶ Similarly, and once again like 'Assumption', 'Le Concentrisme' makes liberal use of literary name-dropping: Where 'Assumption' alludes to Browning and Meredith, 'Le Concentrisme' makes mention of a whole cavalcade of writers from Montaigne to Mallarmé and more besides. There is, however, a key difference between the way in which allusion functions in Beckett's first published short-story and his 'spoof' lecture, and this difference has important implications for how 'Le Concentrisme' fits into Beckett's fictional output.

As implied by the reference to 'literary name-dropping', 'Assumption' has not yet elevated the use of allusion to a key compositional practice. In other words, the allusions of 'Assumption' are not yet made to effectively further the text's thematic

⁴⁵ Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing*, 69 – Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ The same fate befalls not only Jean du Chas and the central character of 'Assumption', but also *MPTK's* Belacqua and *Murphy's* Murphy.

ends in the manner which would go on to become a hallmark of Beckett's writing. 'Dante and the Lobster', for instance, does not simply refer to Dante, it is structured around and responds deftly to issues raised by the *Commedia*. Most notably, the text explores the idea of *pietà*, at once pity and piety, which appears in Dante's text and is skilfully drawn to the reader's attention by way of Belacqua's questioning of how this idea might be translated into English and his teacher's questioning of whether such translation is necessary.⁴⁷ While 'Le Concentrisme' may not yet be on par with the compositional finesse of 'Dante and the Lobster', and certainly contains many references that are best classed as 'name-dropping' since they appear to have no more than surface importance – such as the reference to Valéry⁴⁸ –, it also includes a large number of allusions that, as will be seen in due course, go far beyond 'name-dropping' by serving to advance and clarify the thematic concerns of 'Le Concentrisme'. Beckett's use of allusion in 'Le Concentrisme' thus demonstrates that his 'spoof' lecture not only follows narrative patterns previously established by 'Assumption', but also establishes new narrative patterns that would be frequently deployed – and, in certain cases, greatly refined – in the course of Beckett's subsequent fictional compositions in English.

Recognition of 'Le Concentrisme' as a text in which Beckett experimented with modes of writing that would go on to become central to his early fictional output is all the more important given that it is not only with regard to its use of allusion as a core element of compositional practice that 'Le Concentrisme' looks forward to the other fiction that Beckett would later produce in English.⁴⁹ Beckett's lecture begins,

⁴⁷ viz. *MPTK*, 11-12

⁴⁸ The assertion that 'Valéry decompose en propositions absolues ce qu'il n'a pas lu' is a derisive allusion to Valéry's contribution to an *NRF* volume of texts dedicated to the memory Marcel Proust that was first published in January 1923, shortly after Proust's death in late 1922. Although Valéry's *hommage* to Proust is indeed rife with authoritative statements – 'Quant à ses moyens [i.e. those of Proust], ils se rattachent sans conteste à notre tradition la plus admirable' (Paul Valéry, 'Hommage', in *Œuvres complètes, Tome 1* [Paris: Le Livre de Poche, La Pochothèque, 2016] - EBook) –, it begins with a brazen acknowledgement of his near total ignorance of Proust's work: 'Quoique je connaisse à peine un seul tome de la grande œuvre de Marcel Proust, et que l'art même du romancier me soit un art presque inconcevable, je sais bien toutefois, par ce peu de la *Recherche du temps perdu* que j'ai eu le loisir de lire, quelle perte exceptionnelle les Lettres viennent de faire, et non seulement les Lettres, mais davantage cette secrète société que composent, à chaque époque, ceux qui lui donnent sa véritable candeur.' (*Ibid.*).

⁴⁹ The question of when Beckett began writing what would become his first work of extended fiction – that is, *Dream* – is something of a vexed one. It seems clear, however, that the novel had a much longer gestation that was once assumed. In the publisher's note to the US edition of *Dream*, for instance, Richard Seaver, spoke of the text being composed in a matter of weeks (viz. Richard Seaver, Publisher's Note, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* [New York, NY: Arcade, 1993], vi.) Beckett's correspondence, however, makes clear that this was not the case: Correspondence with Thomas MacGreevy, for example, shows Beckett to have already been working

for example, with a fictional letter that serves as a narrative framing device, introducing us to both Jean du Chas and ‘*Concentrisme*’, the literary movement he espouses. Such use of correspondence for narrative ends will be deployed again in *Dream*, which includes two letters written to Belacqua, one from his friend Lucien and the other the Smeraldina.⁵⁰ The first of these two letters, moreover, is composed entirely in French – thereby demonstrating, once again, the role that French could play as a vehicle for literary creation even at this early point in Beckett’s career.⁵¹

Not only does ‘*Le Concentrisme*’ prefigure Beckett’s narrative use of (fictional) letters, it also prefigures the narrative use that Beckett would go on to make of real-world events. Thus, where the narrative world of ‘*Dante and the Lobster*’, for example, is enriched by the presence of Henry McCabe, the Malahide Murderer – whose ‘rather handsome face’ stares up at Belacqua from an old edition of the *Herald*, and whose fate Belacqua later ponders as he unknowingly carries a still-living lobster to its painful death⁵² –, ‘*Le Concentrisme*’’s reference to ‘son Altesse Sérénissime de Monaco’ subtly alludes to the then recent news of Charlotte of Monaco’s separation from her husband, which had taken place in March.⁵³ More broadly, Beckett’s mention of the interest that noble personages take in virgins, even when such virgins lack the necessary credentials – ‘[J]e sais avec quelle violence les cœurs nobles sont activés par une matière intacte, même si elle ne dispose pas des pièces de conviction d’une amitié miraculeuse’⁵⁴ – may be an allusion to the fact that Princess Charlotte herself was originally an illegitimate daughter of the then Crown Prince of Monaco, Louis II, and had only been officially recognised as a legitimate heir to the throne – and thus been granted the necessary ‘pièces de conviction’ of her noble birth, if not quite of ‘une amitié miraculeuse’ – following her adoption into the family in 1919.⁵⁵ Admittedly, Beckett’s allusion to events in Monaco is neither as deftly-handled nor as

on ‘the German comedy’ (*LSB I*, 78 – SB to TMG [29th May, 1931]) – that is, material that would eventually form part of *Dream* – in May 1931. In other words, Beckett had begun work on his first novel less than 6 months after the composition of ‘*Le Concentrisme*’.

⁵⁰ *viz. Dream*, 19-22, 55-61

⁵¹ That French-language letter is also notable for its use of allusion to further thematic concerns, for more on which, see the discussion of this letter below.

⁵² *MPTK*, 4, 13 – For details of Henry McCabe and the Malahide Murders, see ‘McCabe, Henry’ in C. J. Ackerly and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*.

⁵³ Beckett could have read about this separation in either the Irish press (*viz.* Reuters Correspondent, ‘Prince Pierre and His Wife: Unsuccessful Family Council’, in *The Irish Times* [26th February, 1930], 11) or the French press (*viz.* H. Tourniaire, ‘Les incidents de Monaco’, in *Le Petit Parisien* [4th March, 1930], n.p.).

⁵⁴ LC, 2

⁵⁵ ‘L’invention de Monte-Carlo (des années 1860 à 1920 : Relations plus étroites avec la France (1919)’, in ‘Histoire et Patrimoine’ <<http://www.gouv.mc>> [accessed: 11th October, 2017].

narratively important as the reference to McCabe would be in his later short-story. That this should be the case is, however, unsurprising; ‘Le Concentrisme’ shows Beckett only beginning to experiment with techniques that he would go on to use, and refine, in his later literary writing. Perhaps the most striking of the parallels between ‘Le Concentrisme’ and Beckett’s fictional writing, however, is the integration of autobiographic material into the narrative. And, while Beckett’s integration of real-world events into his narrative still required some work in November 1930, ‘Le Concentrisme’ shows Beckett to already be surprisingly capable in his handling of that autobiographical material that plays such a central role in his fiction throughout his career.⁵⁶

Long before *Dream* and its *personnages à clef*, ‘Le Concentrisme’ shows Beckett incorporating autobiographical material into a fictional composition: Jean du Chas is, for example, given Beckett’s own date of birth of April 13th, 1906.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, as part of the presentation of Jean du Chas’s biography, we learn that, from the age of four, he spent his summers at his Grandmother’s home ‘aux bords de la Fulda, tout près de Kragenhof’.⁵⁸ This reference to Kragenhof alludes to the village in which the Sinclairs lived for a time upon their arrival in Germany and to which Beckett himself travelled with Peggy and Cissie Sinclair during one of his trips to visit the Sinclair family.⁵⁹ These allusions to Beckett’s own birthdate and his summers with the Sinclairs have long been known to scholarship.⁶⁰ Neither of them, moreover, could be characterised as making truly *narrative* use of autobiography. In other words, neither succeeds in integrating autobiographical experience into the very workings and thematics of the text. In this respect, ‘Le Concentrisme’ would not appear to represent a great advance on ‘Assumption’, which also included some superficial use of autobiographical material. Beckett’s first short-story refers, for instance, to the ‘close-

⁵⁶ So essential is this connection, indeed, that H. Porter Abbott proposed ‘mov[ing] him [= Beckett] out of fiction altogether and relocat[ing] him in that rarely occupied subset of autography...identified with key texts by Augustine and Wordsworth’ (H. Porter Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Authograph* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996], 17-18).

⁵⁷ viz. ‘Jean du Chas, fils unique, illégitime et posthume d’un agent de change belge, mort en 1906 par suite d’une maladie de peau, et de Marie Pichon, vendeuse dans une maison de couture à Toulouse, est né à l’ombre rouge de la Basilique St. Sernin, un peu avant midi le 13 avril 1906 [...]’ (LC, 2)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ JK and Morris Sinclair, interview 22-5-91 [UoR JEK A/7/72] – During the same interview, Morris Sinclair also confirms the description of the village that Beckett offers in his lecture: ‘Kragenhof is a small village which is called the way it’s called because a Kragen is a collar and the river Fulda makes a big bed, it’s on the Fulda [...]’ (*Ibid.*).

⁶⁰ Moreover, and just like the use Beckett made of his date of birth, it has already been recognised by other scholars – see, for example, *DTF*, 121.

fitting hat of faded green felt' worn by the protagonist's love interest.⁶¹ Peggy Sinclair is known to have possessed just such a green hat, and is in fact shown with it in a portrait painted of her by Karl Leyhausen.⁶²

Arguably, even if 'Le Concentrisme' merely repeated strategies first tested in 'Assumption', such repetition would remain significant insofar as it would serve to underline the connection between this lecture and an early *literary* text. Moreover, given that it was composed prior to *Dream*, it is precisely such (relatively) simplistic use of autobiography that we would expect to find in a literary text composed in November 1930. 'Le Concentrisme', however, does not simply repeat narrative practices that are to be found in 'Assumption.' On the contrary, this lecture provides us with what seems to be the earliest example of truly narrativised autobiography in Beckett's writing – that is, lived experience which enriches and adds depth to the literary composition in which it appears. The example in question concerns Jean du Chas's date of death, which is given by the lecture as January 15th, 1928.⁶³

To understand the probable significance of this date, we need first to recall that, prior to taking up his post as *lecteur d'anglais* at the ENS, Beckett spent two unhappy terms as a French and English teacher at Campbell College, Belfast.⁶⁴ Although *DTF* does not provide specific details of the date at which Beckett began teaching at Campbell College, the *Samuel Beckett Chronology* notes that Beckett left TCD to start teaching at Campbell College on January 9th 1928.⁶⁵ January 15th was a Sunday in 1928 and January 9th a Monday. Bearing in mind these dates – and taking account of the fact that Beckett is likely to have travelled up to Belfast in advance of the school term – it seems highly probable that Jean du Chas died on the very eve of Beckett's taking up his teaching position at Campbell College. If Beckett's decision to confer upon Jean du Chas his own date of birth and to have him spend his childhood summers in a place that Beckett frequented with the Sinclairs suggest some link between author and character, the date of du Chas' demise at once confirms this connection and serves to do much more. By making his fictional avatar's death coincide with the start of his time as a teacher at Campbell College, Beckett has conflated the start of his career in education with his own death – or at least some form thereof.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *CSP*, 6

⁶² *viz. DTF*, 81 – The same faded green hat will later be found in the possession of the Smeraldina who, as already noted, was based on Peggy Sinclair (*viz. Dream*, 4).

⁶³ *viz.* 'Jean du Chas est mort à Marseille le 15 janvier 1928, dans un petit hôtel' (LC, 2)

⁶⁴ For this period of Beckett's life, see *DTF*, 87-119

⁶⁵ John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology*, 16

⁶⁶ Even if the connection is not quite as exact as has been suggested here, there remains a very clear correlation between Jean du Chas' death and the start of

This connection between the date of du Chas's death and the beginning of Beckett's career in education is reinforced both by internal and external evidence. Internally, the connection between academia and death corresponds to the uniformly negative portrayal of the academic world that is to be found in 'Le Concentrisme' – where literary analysis becomes no more than a series of 'hoquets' and a library becomes 'une maison des morts et des moribonds'.⁶⁷ Externally, meanwhile, the connection between teaching and (spiritual) death is evident in the manner in which Beckett characterised the prospect of beginning work as a lecturer in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of July 1930, written only shortly after he submitted his application for the TCD lecturing post:

I haven't the courage...to flee to Italy, as I could, and let Trinity go to hell & all its works. The acceptance of this thing [i.e. the lectureship] makes flight & escape more & more complicated, because if I chuck Dublin after a year, I am not merely chucking Dublin – definitely – but my family, and causing them pain. I suppose I may as well make up my mind to be a vegetable.⁶⁸

The idea that returning to Dublin to teach required becoming 'a vegetable' – deadening the mind and the senses, castrating the intellect and the creative self – clearly associates teaching with a form of spiritual death, and thus serves to clarify Beckett's decision to link Jean du Chas' demise with his own first steps on that road that led to the TCD lectureship.⁶⁹

Incidentally, it should be noted that the connections between Beckett and the main character of 'Le Concentrisme' – that is, Jean du Chas – which have just been examined here, actually serve as an important point of contrast between the figure of Jean du Chas as he appears in the 1930 lecture and the Jean du Chas who appears in *Dream* as Belacqua's 'dear friend Jean du Chas'.⁷⁰ At first glance, the recurrence of the figure's name would seem to constitute another point of connection between the fictional world of the lecture and the fictional world of the novel. In actual fact,

Beckett's time teaching at Campbell College – a period in Beckett's life that left no positive memories whatsoever.

⁶⁷ LC, 1 – Perhaps significantly, the typescript shows that the 'maison des morts et des moribonds' to which author of the opening letter left Jean du Chas's surviving papers was originally a museum (*viz. Ibid.*). By amending 'musée' to 'bibliothèque', Beckett found both a more fitting institution for du Chas's papers and underlined the connection between death and an explicitly academic setting.

⁶⁸ *LSB I*, 32 (SB to TMG ['Friday' (18th or 25th) July, 1930])

⁶⁹ The fact that the antipathy – indeed, the morbid unhappiness – felt by Beckett as he took up his role as lecturer in French at TCD is thematised via the presence of disdain for academia as a narrative thread within 'Le Concentrisme' is also significant insofar as it constitutes yet another parallel between this lecture and Beckett's early fiction, which often emerged out of just such personal dissatisfactions. In this regard, it may be recalled that John Pilling has noted Beckett's emotional difficulties as a key source for Beckett's work on *Dream* (*viz. DN*, ix-x).

⁷⁰ *Dream*, 52

however, the du Chas of 'Le Concentrisme' has very little in common with the du Chas of *Dream*. Both are French, certainly, and both are poets, but, where the former has been shown to possess a strongly autobiographical cast, the latter – in line with the vast majority of characters to be found in *Dream* – was based upon people known to Beckett, rather than on Beckett himself. More specifically, the character to which Beckett accorded the name of Jean du Chas in *Dream* is an amalgamation of Alfred Péron and Georges Pelorson, two of Beckett's French friends.⁷¹ In this way, *Dream's* du Chas stands at a clear remove from the du Chas of 'Le Concentrisme' and bears a far greater similarity to the figure of Lucien – another of *Dream's* Frenchman, another friend of Belacqua's, and another character whom Beckett based upon real-life acquaintance.⁷² Even this distinction between the two du Chas, however, while certainly constituting a point of contrast between 'Le Concentrisme' and *Dream*, also reveals itself, on closer inspection, to be a point of connection between Beckett's lecture and his later fictional output. The connection derives from the fact that, while the various incarnations of Jean du Chas may differ, the rationale behind their difference testifies to an underlying compositional constant in Beckett's practice as a writer of fiction: In essence, the fact that the du Chas of *Dream* should no longer be an avatar for Beckett is entirely in keeping with Beckett's habit of associating himself with the central character of his texts. In *Dream*, the central character is Belacqua and it is thus this character whom Beckett imbues with similarities to himself.⁷³ In the earlier lecture, however, du Chas was the undisputed central character and thus the only fitting figure upon whom Beckett might have grafted materials drawn from his own biography.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The precise details of what Beckett borrowed from his friends and how he combined them to form the character of Jean du Chas that appears in *Dream* are provided by Knowlson, see *DTF*, 153-4.

⁷² Unlike *Dream's* du Chas, however, Lucien – following the model of characters like the Smeraldina and the Alba – appears to have been based primarily upon a single acquaintance – For more on the figure of Lucien and his real-life model, see the discussion of Lucien's letter below.

⁷³ These similarities, which run from shared, albeit inverted, initials (Samuel Beckett vs. Belacqua Shuah), through to shared affairs and heartbreaks, by way of shared admiration for shared teachers of Italian, are too numerous to list, let alone examine in the present context.

⁷⁴ The sole exception to this 'Biographical Central Character' rule would appear to be the figure of Walter Draffin who, in *MPTK*, is indisputably associated with Beckett – being described not only as an 'Italianate Irishman', but also as having been engaged 'for the past ten or fifteen years' on a work bearing the title '*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*' (*MPTK*, 134). This, however, is the exception that proves the rule: Walter Draffin is one of the entirely new characters to feature in *MPTK* – that is, he is not to be found in *Dream* – and plays no great role in the narrative, apart from being made the unhappy author of a work, bearing the title *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, that no one is ever likely to read. It thus seems probable that Beckett introduced him as a means of at once acknowledging the failure of his own *Dream* to find a publisher

Thus far, we have analysed a large number of correspondences between ‘Le Concentrisme’ and works that clearly belong to Beckett’s fictional output by way of focussing on what – in line with the terminology just used to describe Beckett’s autobiographication, as it were, of his ‘principal boy[s]’⁷⁵ – might be deemed compositional constants, and which have been shown to recur both in the one fictional text composed by Beckett prior to his 1930 lecture, and in a number of the fictional texts that he would go on to compose in subsequent years. Some of these correspondences serve to show that Beckett made use of strategies first tested in ‘Assumption’ when writing ‘Le Concentrisme’, something which evidently ties the lecture into Beckett’s nascent fictional *œuvre*. At the same time, and more importantly, the correspondences between Beckett’s lecture and the fiction that would come after it powerfully demonstrates that ‘Le Concentrisme’ was more than merely a spot of self-consciously intellectual amusement, since many of the strategies that he deployed for the first time while writing ‘Le Concentrisme’ – most notably, the use of humour – would form foundational elements of his later fiction. The correspondences between ‘Le Concentrisme’ and Beckett’s English-language writing of the 1930s are, however, far from being restricted to matters of structure and compositional practice. We also find important thematic correspondences. Of these thematic connections, the most interesting may be clarified by way of that passage from Beckett’s letter to MacGreevy of July 1930 which has already been quoted.

As that letter made clear, the true origin of Beckett’s personal dissatisfaction in the early 1930s lay, not with teaching itself, nor with TCD, nor even with Dublin, but with the sense that, while all of these things clearly contributed to his unhappiness, it was impossible to abandon them without altering his life irrevocably – most notably, by going against his family’s expectations. In this letter, the internal conflict between external expectation and personal desire by which Beckett felt himself gripped, and which would remain a constant in his life for years to come, is construed in terms of movement: Freedom would entail ‘flight’ and ‘escape’, and these are things that Beckett at once desires and fears.

This association between movement and the self was at the forefront of Beckett’s mind in the 1930s, and examples – sometimes identical examples – of the personal anguish this association inspired in Beckett are to be found in both his correspondence and his fictional writings. Some of these examples, moreover, make

– something that stung Beckett to the quick – and distancing himself from this failure by attributing its authorship to Draffin rather than Beckett’s true fictional double, Belacqua.

⁷⁵ The narrator of *Dream* refers to Belacqua as his ‘principal boy’ on four separate occasions (*viz.* *Dream*, 11, 19, 38, 113).

clear that there was another layer to the unease that Beckett felt around the idea of movement: Not merely did he fear its negative consequences, he also feared that it might not have any positive ones. In a letter to MacGreevy of 1932, for instance, Beckett wrote: 'I dream often of travelling Europe on a motor-bike – giving the furies of ennui the slip'.⁷⁶ This very same desire to change the self by means of merely physical locomotion then recurs, in the very same form, in the story 'Ding Dong', where the unnamed narrator informs us that Belacqua 'was pleased to think that he could give what he called the Furies the slip by merely setting himself in motion'.⁷⁷ As the narrator's tone makes clear, however, Belacqua is held to be mistaken in this belief: One cannot give the Furies the slip by 'merely' setting oneself in motion. It did not work for Orestes, it will not work for anyone else. Although 'the Furies' may not yet have their place in 'Le Concentrisme', that text too is profoundly influenced by the very same connection between movement and selfhood that we find in Beckett's correspondence and in 'Ding Dong.' Indeed, 'Le Concentrisme' already makes clear that, in this instance, Beckett was fully of a mind with the narrator of 'Ding Dong' – travel changes nothing.

To see just how important this connection between movement and selfhood is to 'Le Concentrisme', as well as Beckett's conviction that the connection between the two is by no means a simple matter of cause and effect – whereby setting oneself in motion would inevitably lead to change in one's self –, we need only consider this lecture's key phrase: *Va t'embêter ailleurs*. Meaning, literally, 'Go be bored elsewhere' – and more idiomatically translated by Beckett himself, in conversation with Ruby Cohn, as 'Feck off'⁷⁸ – the injunction to *s'embêter ailleurs* is described within 'Le Concentrisme' as 'la formule de son inquiétude [i.e. Jean du Chas' own], la constellation de tous ses déplacements...le stimulus qui finit par s'user à force de surmenage'.⁷⁹ Jean du Chas, in other words, finds himself in the same position that Belacqua will later occupy – and the one in which Beckett already found himself –, one of a drive towards perpetual motion, coupled with an awareness that movement, in and of itself, will bring, not true change, but merely stasis in another place.

The thematic importance that 'Le Concentrisme' accords to movement and (failed) escape is reinforced time and again within the text. We find it not only in 'la formule' of Jean du Chas's mental disquiet, but also in the title of what is – some scattered personal writings excepted – the only text that du Chas is stated to have

⁷⁶ TCD MS MF 179 (SB to TMG [21st November 1932])

⁷⁷ *MPTK*, 31

⁷⁸ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 22

⁷⁹ *LC*, 3

completed: *Discours de la Sortie*.⁸⁰ Generally, critical discussions of ‘Le Concentrisme’ have read this title primarily as an obvious allusion to Descartes’ *Discours de la Méthode*.⁸¹ While Beckett’s decision to ascribe to du Chas a *Discours de la Sortie* was clearly intended to put his audience in mind of Descartes’ more famous *Discours*, it would be quite wrong to imagine that this title was intended purely, or even primarily, as ‘an obvious invitation to whistle up the ghost of Descartes’.⁸² Du Chas’ own *Discours* is, after all, not merely any sort of discourse, but a discourse on *exits*. This title thus serves a dual purpose: It at once alludes to Descartes and, at the same time, directs attention to that nexus of movement and escape that forms one of the key thematic threads running through ‘Le Concentrisme’. This title, in other words, is not just a moment of (philosophic) name-dropping but serves, rather, as an example of how, in ‘Le Concentrisme’, Beckett is already deploying allusion to the work of others as a means of furthering his own thematic aims.

Having raised the matter of allusion. It behoves us to now consider another respect in which ‘Le Concentrisme’’s allusions to Descartes show Beckett to have progressed – namely, their complexity. For, though critics generally focus on the title of du Chas’ *Discours*, the association between du Chas and Descartes is by no means confined to that allusion alone. We are, for instance, informed that du Chas’ *Discours* was ‘conçu et composé parmi les chaudes vapeurs de la conciergerie, de toutes les conciergies [*sic*], poêles de ^{^^}Neuburg^{^^} novecenteschi’.⁸³ The terms of this description are clearly intended to recall the circumstances under which Descartes – warmed by a stove in Neuburg – embarked on the elaboration of that method which his own *Discours* would eventually set forth.⁸⁴ The connection between du Chas and Descartes is underlined still further by the fact that the reference to the former’s *Discours de la Sortie* is preceded by mention of ‘les sourcillades ^{^^}halsiennes^{^^} de notre indomptable capitaine [= Jean du Chas]’.⁸⁵ Here, the adjective *halsien* alludes to Dutch artist Frans Hals, who was responsible for a famous portrait of Descartes and to whom Beckett had previously alluded in his poem *Whoroscope*.⁸⁶ Lastly, the

⁸⁰ *viz.* ‘C’est en lui [= Jean du Chas] que nous saluons – et nous vous faisons l’honneur de vous inviter à en faire autant – l’auteur du *Discours de la Sortie*’ (*Ibid.*, 4)

⁸¹ See, for example, the discussion in *DTF*, 121.

⁸² John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 54

⁸³ LC, 4

⁸⁴ *viz.* ‘J’étais alors en Allemange...je demeurais tout le jour enfermé seul dans un poêle, où j’avais tout le loisir de m’entretenir de mes pensées’ (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* [Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966], 41) – Although Descartes’ text does not specify the precise location in which he found himself, Beckett would have known that the events recounted in the *Discours* occurred in Neuberg by way of his reading of Mahaffy’s *Descartes* (*viz.* J. P. Mahaffy, *Descartes* [Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1880], 23).

⁸⁵ LC, 4

⁸⁶ *viz.* ‘Who’s that? Hals? Let him wait’ (*CP*, 40)

description of du Chas as a man who 'a connu sa Suède' offers a final, morbid echo to the life – or, rather, the death – of Descartes, since it was shortly after his arrival at the royal court of Sweden's Queen Christina that the philosopher's death occurred.⁸⁷ (It is, indeed, for this very reason that *Whoroscope* had already alluded to her as 'Christina the ripper'.⁸⁸)

These myriad references clearly attest to the increased level of allusive complexity that Beckett was already capable of achieving in his prose – the fact that he was demonstrating such complexity in French should come as a surprise only if one persists in following the line of argument proposed by the LSH and thus in imagining French to have limited Beckett's creative possibilities. The allusions to Descartes, however, are not yet the most important examples of just how far Beckett's literary deployment of allusion had advanced by the time he wrote 'Le Concentrisme' since most of the allusions to Descartes do not really contribute to advancing any of the major themes of the lecture.⁸⁹ To properly understand the degree to which 'Le Concentrisme' shows Beckett to have grown capable of elevating allusion beyond simple name-dropping and of using it for the furtherance of his own thematic aims, one must consider that rich seam of allusions that serve to deepen and reinforce the text's previously-noted thematic engagement with movement and selfhood. The seam in question is to be found primarily in one of 'Le Concentrisme''s most densely allusive passages. To understand this passage, however, and to properly appreciate the use that it shows Beckett to make of allusions, we must be prepared to consider 'Le Concentrisme' as if it were a work of complex *literary* fiction, of a piece with the kind of fiction that Beckett is generally thought to have begun producing when he began work on *Dream*.

In this way it may be seen that we have been brought back to the question of whether or not 'Le Concentrisme' should be viewed as a literary text. While I hope that the evidence that has been presented thus far has already made clear that it is entirely possible to see 'Le Concentrisme' as a work of fiction, one intimately connected with the rest of Beckett's early fictional output, it is my conviction that the following discussion will prove that viewing 'Le Concentrisme' as a work of literary fiction is not merely a possibility, but a necessity.

Thus far, we have seen that 'Le Concentrisme' shares many structural, and even some important thematic, similarities with Beckett's prose fiction. We have also

⁸⁷ LC, 4 – For details of this death, see J. P. Mahaffy, *Descartes*, 133-36.

⁸⁸ CP, 43

⁸⁹ The major exceptions in this regard are the use of the title – *Le Discours de la Sortie* –, for the reasons already discussed, and the reference to du Chas as one who 'a connu sa Suède'. The thematic significance of that allusion will be considered below.

seen that the composition of 'Le Concentrisme' provided Beckett with a space in which to explore some of those tropes and patterns that would come to define his later fiction. To recognise structural – or even thematic – similarities, however, is not yet to accept 'Le Concentrisme' as a work of literary fiction. Cohn herself accepted that 'Le Concentrisme' was a work of fiction without recognising it as a work of *literature*. In now proposing to pay careful attention to this text's allusions, therefore, are we not falling into the trap to which Cohn adverted by taking this work of comedy far too seriously? The better to answer that question, we first need to recognise that determining the attention that a work merits is not simply a matter of how we view it – that is, as a piece of comedy, or a piece of literature – but also a matter of whether or not the work in question *repays* such attention.

The meaning that is here accorded to the idea of a work repaying critical attention can be illustrated by the manner in which the epigram, taken from Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women', that Beckett offered his first English novel rewards John Pilling's careful parsing of it in *Beckett before Godot*.⁹⁰ In that study, Pilling devotes particular attention to Beckett's decision to amend the material he takes as his epigraph so as to end it on a hyphen:

The 'But –' here is Beckett's as much as it is Chaucer's, since Beckett has omitted from the 'Legend of Good Women' the third line: 'And I acorde wel that hit be so'. The 'But –' is Beckett's way of saying that *Dream* will not 'acorde wel' with what men have told, or have heard, a thousand times and more; the pious fictions of heaven and hell are here beside the point. [...] Beckett's 'But –' opens up the gap which *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* is called upon to fill for the next 240 pages.⁹¹

Clearly, in another context, Pilling's extensive consideration of a single hyphen would be comically excessive. There are authors for whom such typographic niceties are of but nugatory importance. More importantly, there are works in which the intrusion of an unexpected hyphen signifies nothing more than laziness or inattention. Beckett, however, is not one of these authors, nor is *Dream* one of these works: *Dream* is a novel – a work of literature –, one written by an author who was preternaturally attentive to typography and punctuation, and for whom such matters could provoke strong emotional responses.⁹² Moreover, this particular hyphen is used in the context of an allusion and, as has already been noted, the development of allusion into a

⁹⁰ viz. 'A thousand sythes have I herd men telle, / There ther is joye in heven, and peyne in helle; But –' (*Dream*, [n.p.])

⁹¹ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 58-59

⁹² Evidence of the importance that Beckett accorded to questions of typography and punctuation is made readily apparent by his irritation at the treatment *From an Abandoned Work* received at the hands of *Trinity News*, where it was first published: 'Trinity News made a great hames of my text with their unspeakable paragraphs and varsity punctuation' (*LSB II*, 629 – SB to H.O. White [2nd July, 1956]).

determining element of Beckett's approach to literary composition – a means of conveying, and reinforcing, matters of structural and thematic importance – was a key component of Beckett's development as an author.⁹³ Consequently, any allusions that appear in Beckett's *literary* works – whether poetry or prose – necessarily call for a high degree of attention from critics. Bearing these facts in mind, it becomes apparent that, in this particular case, Beckett's decision to truncate his novel's Chaucerian epigraph *is* significant. As such, the careful attention Pilling pays to this hyphen, far from being an unjustifiable excess, represents a wholly legitimate literary critical approach that is perfectly attuned to the kind of fiction that Beckett produced in the 1930s. Pilling's careful reading of this hyphen is, moreover, further justified by the manner in which it allows him to clarify both the allusion itself and the relation between this allusion and the broader themes of a narrative profoundly interested in gaps and interstices.⁹⁴ Pilling's approach to *Dream's* epigram, in other words, is justified both by the nature of the novel under consideration and the fact that this approach is amply repaid by enriching our appreciation of both *Dream* and its epigram.

It must be recalled at this point that, as part of the discussion of 'Le Concentrisme' offered in *Beckett before Godot*, Pilling recognised that Beckett's lecture was 'from first to last fiction'. If this is indeed the case, we might expect Pilling to devote to the allusions and references that are to be found therein a similar level of attention to that bestowed upon *Dream*. Such attention would be all the more worthwhile given that, though obviously briefer than Beckett's first novel, 'Le Concentrisme' is every bit as allusive as the novel that it precedes. We have already noted the multiple allusions to Descartes that are to be found in this text, but Descartes is merely one of the plethora of persons who are explicitly mentioned (Dostoevsky, Gide, Proust, Mozart...), or whose work is evoked more subtly, in Beckett's lecture. Insofar as the more subtle of allusions go a great way towards demonstrating the leaps and bounds the Beckett's handling of allusion in 'Le Concentrisme' has advanced when compared with 'Assumption', we will now analyse more closely the manner in which two literary artists in particular are subtly integrated into the fabric of 'Le Concentrisme'.

The first of these figures is – perhaps unsurprisingly – Dante, to whom indirect reference is made by way of the term 'Tolomé' and that reference to 'le

⁹³ The degree to which this is the case is made abundantly clear by consultation of the 1181 separate entries that comprise Beckett's *Dream* Notebook, the vast majority of which take the form of extracts from works read by Beckett (*viz. DN, passim*).

⁹⁴ *viz.* 'The only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity' (*Dream*, 132).

subtil désaccord si souvent et si vainement poursuivi d'un caillou à peine visible contre un front exsangue'.⁹⁵ The former term derives from Dante's *Inferno* – 'Tolomea' being the third zone of the ninth circle of Hell, where those who betrayed their guests are confined⁹⁶ –, while the latter is an allusion to a passage from Dante's *Paradiso*, concerning a pearl on a white forehead, which Beckett copied into his *Dream Notebook*.⁹⁷ The fundamental importance of Dante to Samuel Beckett has long been appreciated and, in that sense, these allusions do not teach us anything new about Beckett's interests in the early 1930s.⁹⁸ Such, however, is not what makes them important; the significance of these allusions to Dante lies in the subtlety with which they are interwoven into the fabric of 'Le Concentrisme'. While the well-informed reader is able to recognise these as Dantean allusions, nothing in the text explicitly marks them out as such.⁹⁹ We are here very far from the 'name-dropping' of 'Assumption', and far closer to the manner in which Beckett would make use of allusion in, for example, *Dream* and the stories of *MPTK*, where explicit name-dropping and a more refined use of allusion co-exist. In this respect, the use that Beckett makes of Dante in 'Le Concentrisme' again demonstrates this seemingly innocuous lecture as an important precursor to the kind of fiction that Beckett would soon begin producing, one in which allusion could function as far more than names on a page. Anyone who might be tempted to question the degree to which 'Le Concentrisme' reveals Beckett as being capable of deploying allusion subtly – doing so, perhaps, by noting that the text's Dantean allusions are not yet so subtle as to be unrecognisable¹⁰⁰ – need only reflect on the second of those writers to whom Beckett subtly alludes in the course of his lecture: Paul Éluard.

If Beckett's allusions to Dante were skilfully integrated into the text, Beckett's allusions to Éluard are so unobtrusive that they have previously gone unrecognised by scholars. To say that these allusions are unobtrusive is not to say that they are hidden,

⁹⁵ LC, 2

⁹⁶ viz. Dante, *Inferno*, in M. Barbi, et al., *Le Opere di Dante* (Florence: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1921), 592-96 (Canto XXXIII)

⁹⁷ viz. 'As from transparent polished glass or from tranquil shining shallows the details of my face return so faint that a pearl on a white brow comes no sooner to my pupils, so I saw the eager faces and in me was reversed the error that lit a fire of love between the man & the pool' (*DN*, [1097])

⁹⁸ In fact, neither of these allusions is even unique to 'Le Concentrisme': *Proust* too evokes Tolomea, using it as a metaphor for Swann's jealousy (viz. *Proust*, 40), while the association of pearl and forehead will recur in *Dream* (viz. *Dream*, 174).

⁹⁹ The only explicit reference to Dante to be found in 'Le Concentrisme' occurs much later in the text, when Dante's name is adjectivized and 'la colère dantesque' (LC, 3) used to refer to a form of intense and elevated emotion of which the nineteenth century is apparently devoid.

¹⁰⁰ The *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, for example, clearly identifies the Dantean source behind the reference to 'un caillou à peine visible contre un front exsangue' (viz. 'Dante Alighieri [1265-1321]', in *op. cit.*).

however. On the contrary, it is almost impossible for the reader – or, in the case of the original audience, the hearer – to avoid being struck by them since they constitute some of the most curious elements that are to be found as part of biographical *précis* that Beckett provides for du Chas:

Le 13 avril 1927, il [= Jean du Chas] écrit dans son journal : « Me voici majeur, et malgré moi et malgré tout », et plus loin : « Ces miracles immotivés ne sont point à mon goût. » Les notes de ce jour-là s'achèvent sur une phrase biffée avec une telle violence que le papier en a été déchiré. J'ai réussi à ~~reconstituer~~ en reconstituer la seconde moitié. La voici : « et il faut battre sa mère pendant qu'elle est jeune. » Son journal abonde en ces étranges interpolations. Il s'interrompt au milieu de détails triviaux et intimes pour écrire, entre parenthèses et en lettres majuscules : « les éléphants sont contagieux ». Une autre fois c'est : « je suis venu, je me suis assis, je suis parti » ou « les curés ont toujours peur » ou « user sa corde en se pendant » ou « ne jeter aux démons que les anges ». Jean du Chas est mort à Marseille le 15 janvier 1928, dans un petit hôtel. L'avant-veille il avait écrit dans son Journal : « mourir quand il n'est plus temps ». ¹⁰¹

The strange sentences that are said to litter du Chas' private journal are, in fact, all derived from Paul Éluard's *152 proverbes mis au goût du jour*.¹⁰² As its title implies, Éluard's text includes 152 proverbs, each of them transformed in the spirit of Surrealism so that the traditional meaning is either subverted or entirely abolished. The abolition of meaning is well evidenced by the injunction to "battre sa mère pendant qu'elle est jeune", which uses the rhyme between *mère* and *fer* to beat the proverb *Il faut battre le fer tant qu'il est chaud* senseless. An example of more delicate subversion is provided by "Je suis venu, je me suis assis, je suis parti", which transforms Caesar's *veni, vidi, vici* – traditionally rendered in French, using the *passé simple* of literary expression, as *je vins, je vis, je vainquis* – into a suite of unremarkable actions, expressed in the *passé composé*, an unremarkable tense now primarily marked for oral expression: Far from the grandeur of Rome's first emperor and his conquest of Gaul, we are put in mind of an unremarkable individual recounting how they took a seat, in a café perhaps, before finally changing their mind and moving elsewhere.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ LC, 2

¹⁰² Paul Éluard, *152 proverbes mis au goût du jour en collaboration avec Benjamin Péret*, in Paul Éluard, Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (eds), *Œuvres complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1968), 153-161 – The proverbs borrowed by Beckett are as follows : 'Il faut battre sa mère pendant qu'elle est jeune' (no. 40); 'Les éléphants sont contagieux' (no. 4); 'Je suis venu, je me suis assis, je suis parti' (no. 113); 'Les curés ont toujours peur' (no. 24); 'User sa corde en se pendant' (no. 98); 'Ne jetez aux démons que les anges' (no. 84); 'Mourir quand il n'est plus temps' (no. 55).

¹⁰³ Beckett appears to have been particularly taken with this latter proverb since he would go on to reuse it in *Echo's Bones*, where it appears as 'I came, I sat down, I went away' (EB, 19).

As demonstrated by the passage in which these citations appear, Beckett offers no clear indication that these materials are literary allusions, and still less indication that they are taken from Éluard. That is not to say that there is no indication whatsoever of the foreign provenance of this material – the description of how these materials appear in du Chas’ journal, for example, enclosed in parenthesis and written in block capitals, strongly suggests that they are of foreign origin. Such cues, however, would likely have been missed by the text’s intended audience. (Another indication these materials are borrowings that would have been unavailable to Beckett’s original audience but which cannot but strike the critic familiar with his later work is the use of the term ‘interpolation’. This is the very term that Beckett would later use in his ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook to refer to materials he had derived from other authors with the express intention of using them ‘[f]or interpolation’ in his own writing.¹⁰⁴) The closest Beckett comes to admitting to his audience that he has borrowed from Éluard’s *152 proverbes mis au goût du jour* may be the suggestion that ‘Ces miracles immotivés ne sont point à mon goût’, which serves as a tacit introduction to the suite of borrowings from a work that specifically aims to fit proverbs to modern tastes. Similarly, in an entirely different section of the text, Beckett’s characterisation of ‘Raskolnikoff, Rastignac et Sorel’ as figures who ‘mettent la Trinité au goût du jour’ slyly recalls the title of the work from which he had earlier quoted while yet keeping the name of that work’s author firmly out of frame.¹⁰⁵ Even more so than was the case with the allusions to Dante, the use that Beckett here makes of Éluard shows him to have already made great strides beyond mere ‘name-dropping’ and towards that subtle, self-conscious deployment of literary allusion that he would later make a key principle of his literary writing – as when, in his preparatory notes towards *Murphy*, he cautioned himself to ‘keep...out of sight’ that novel’s ‘Dantesque analogy’.¹⁰⁶

As the allusions to Dante and Éluard reveal, ‘Le Concentrisme’ clearly repays close attention. This being so, one cannot help but be surprised by the superficiality of Pilling’s analysis of this text and of its allusions. In stark contrast to the careful attention paid to the use of allusion in *Dream*, Pilling makes no effort to examine how

¹⁰⁴ For more on these materials, and the strategy of interpolation in Beckett’s early writing, see John Pilling, ‘“For Interpolation”: Beckett and English Literature’, in Matthijs Engelberts, Everett Frost, and Jane Maxwell (eds), *SBT/A 16: Notes diverse holo: Catalogues of Beckett’s reading notes and other manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin, with supporting essays / written and compiled by Everett Frost and Jane Maxwell; essays edited by Matthijs Engelberts and Everett Frost* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006), 203-35.

¹⁰⁵ LC, 3

¹⁰⁶ WN *qtd* by Daniela Caselli, ‘Italian Literature’, in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 244

Beckett's use of allusion in his earlier lecture might contribute to the text's deeper thematic concerns. The superficiality of Pilling's engagement with 'Le Concentrisme' is evident in his assertion, made with reference to one of the text's most heavily allusive passages, that: 'The absurd notion that Jean du Chas was "le premier individu européen depuis l'expédition d'Egypte" underpins a bizarre attack upon the great writers of Europe from Montaigne to Gide'.¹⁰⁷ By speaking of 'Le Concentrisme' in such terms – 'absurd', 'bizarre' – Pilling demonstrates that he feels no need to devote to this text the kind of close textual analysis to which he subjected the opening epigraph of *Dream*. In choosing to speak about 'Le Concentrisme' in this way, however, it must be recognised that Pilling is not simply choosing to be superficial. On the contrary, he is undoubtedly adopting the reading strategy that he believes most appropriate to the sort of text he considers 'Le Concentrisme' to be. What his treatment of 'Le Concentrisme' makes clear is that, while he may view the text as 'from first to last fiction', he nonetheless shares the opinion earlier shown to be held by Cohn and Salisbury according to which 'Le Concentrisme' is not a work of literary fiction and is thus unworthy of the kind of rigorous analysis that a text like *Dream*, for instance, demands. In this respect, it is telling that Pilling speaks of 'Le Concentrisme' as 'begin[ning] with a device *borrowed* from fiction'.¹⁰⁸ If this device has here been 'borrowed' from fiction, then this surely implies that the (fictional) lecture 'Le Concentrisme' stands at a generic remove from (literary) fiction: This lecture may make use of fictional devices, but it is not yet comparable to a short-story. It is, in other words, a presumed ontological divide between 'Le Concentrisme' and Beckett's English-language fiction of the 1930s that, in Pilling's eyes, justifies his neglecting to try and work out what might be lurking behind the seemingly 'absurd' and 'bizarre' portion of the text that presents Jean du Chas as 'le premier individu européen depuis l'expédition d'Egypte'.

Certainly, the passage to which Pilling here refers does possess a density of allusion that makes it appear bizarre – and, indeed, absurd – at first glance. Much the same, however, might be said of almost any of the literary texts that Beckett produced during the early part of his career.¹⁰⁹ As critical attention devoted to *Dream*, as well as to the stories of *MPTK* and the poems of Beckett's first published collection *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates (EBOP)* has revealed, however, their surface chaos

¹⁰⁷ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 54

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁹ Certainly, a large part of the reason for *Dream's* having found no favour with publishers owed to the fact that it looks and reads less like a novel and more like an impenetrable mass of scarcely digested materials gathered from innumerable third-parties. Such a description of the text is not wholly inaccurate. At the same time, however, there *is* a deeper literary intent behind, and within, the often bizarre mass of that first novel.

often conceals a deeper coherence.¹¹⁰ Given what we know about Beckett's early English-language fiction, an acknowledgement of 'Le Concentrisme' as fiction means that it is incumbent upon us to try and look beyond the chaos of the text's surface in an effort to uncover whether or not there is any deeper meaning. Rather than dismissing it as impenetrable, we must accord to it the same careful attention that Pilling paid to *Dream's* epigraph. If there is any coherence behind all this chaos, only such careful attention can reveal it. Obviously, if there is no coherence to be found, all we will find is deeper chaos; all our careful attention will not have been for nothing, however, since we will have proven in this way that 'Le Concentrisme' is, in fact, no more than a superficial exercise in academic humour. If such coherence is revealed, however, then we will have proven not only that 'Le Concentrisme' is worthy of being treated as literary fiction, but also that this text holds an important place in Beckett's development as a writer, being the first occasion on which Beckett deployed – in prose – the particular voice that characterises his English-language writings of the 1930s: A voice at once academic and comic, allusive and autobiographic. As it happens, it is precisely this kind of deeper coherence that we discover when we pay careful attention to 'Le Concentrisme'.

To appreciate the coherence that lies behind this passage, we need firstly to contextualise it. The most obvious context in which this passage may be understood is suggested by Beckett's explicit allusion to the Egyptian expedition (1798-1801), led by Napoléon Bonaparte.¹¹¹ Beckett took an active interest in Napoleon during the early 1930s, something which is evidenced by the large number of entries drawn from J.G. Lockhart's *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte* and from M. de Bourrienne's *Memoirs of Napoleon* that are to be found at the beginning of his so-called *Dream Notebook*.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ It is a nice irony in this respect that, if we are now aware of the richness of these early English-language texts, it is in large part thanks to the attention paid to them by Pilling himself in works such as his monograph study of the stories of *MPTK* (viz. John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's 'More Pricks Than Kicks': In a Strait of Two Wills* [London: Continuum, 2011]), those notes to *Dream* that were provided in the form of a special issue of *JoBS* (viz. *JoBS* [Vol. 12, No. 1-2 – Spring, 2003]), or the extensive notes provided as part of the critical edition of Beckett's collected poems that he prepared with Seán Lawlor (viz. *CP*, 372-388).

¹¹¹ For a full account of this expedition, see Henry Laurens, *L'Expédition d'Égypte (1798-1801)* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

¹¹² In his introduction to *Beckett's Dream Notebook*, John Pilling shows – with reference to the material drawn from Augustine, whom Beckett mentioned reading in January 1931, and Jules Renard, whom Beckett mentioned reading a month later – that the order of the entries Beckett's in notebook likely follows the order in which Beckett read the texts from which he derived his material (viz. *DN*, xvi-xvii). The fact that the material concerning Napoleon appears at the start of the notebook – specifically, [2]-[77] – suggests that Beckett was likely reading about Napoleon around the time he was engaged in composing 'Le Concentrisme'.

A certain number of the entries recorded in the *Dream Notebook* – specifically, some of those derived from J.G. Lockhart’s *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte* – directly pertain to the Egyptian expedition, and it would thus be tempting to tie this reference to the Egyptian expedition principally to the Beckett’s contemporary interest in Napoleon’s biography.¹¹³ A passing interest in Napoleon as an historical figure is not the sole reason for Beckett’s allusion to his Egyptian expedition, however.

Evidence for the deeper significance of this allusion is to be found by way of notes taken by another of Beckett’s students, Aileen Conan, during the lectures on French literature that he gave in early 1931.¹¹⁴ Conan’s notes show Beckett to have evoked Napoleon during at least one of these lectures, which focussed on ‘Stendhal & Romantics’:

The Romantics were primarily Orthodox Catholic Royalists, called Napoleon the Usurpateur. Destutt de Tracy was a great Napoleonic pragmatist. Later on they detached themselves from Orthodox Catholicism. Stendhal was a Republican, loathed idea of Monarchy, had no religious sense, neither believed nor doubted.¹¹⁵

Although Conan’s note-taking style, which eschews the word-for-word scribal mode of Rachel Burrows in favour of a more traditional ‘key point’ approach, makes it impossible to say how exactly – if at all – Beckett connected Napoleon with Stendhal, certain aspects of the notes imply that Beckett drew an explicit connection between these two figures. There also exists evidence that the connection he drew has direct importance for our understanding of this passage of ‘Le Concentrisme’.

The first aspect of these notes that points towards an explicit connection between Stendhal and Napoleon is the mention of Antoine Destutt de Tracy. Now primarily remembered for having coined the term *idéologie*, Destutt de Tracy’s importance in the context of Beckett’s mention of Napoleon is initially unclear.¹¹⁶ (Certainly, no mention of Destutt de Tracy is made in either of the biographies of Napoleon from which Beckett’s *Dream Notebook* show him to have extracted notes.) His importance becomes more comprehensible, however, when one recognises that he serves as a direct point of connection between Napoleon and Stendhal. Destutt de Tracy was a key figure for Stendhal. (In his autobiographic text, *Vie de Henry Brulard*, Stendhal signals the intensity of his feelings towards Destutt de Tracy by singling him

¹¹³ viz. *DN*, [23]-[28]

¹¹⁴ Aileen Conan’s notes are currently held by TCD (viz. TCD MS 11354).

¹¹⁵ TCD MS 11354, 2

¹¹⁶ Destutt de Tracy used the term for the first time as part of his *Mémoire sur la faculté de penser* (viz. Pierre Macherey, ‘Idéologie : le mot, l’idée, la chose’, in *Methodos* (Vol. 8 – 2008) <<http://methodos.revues.org/1843>> [accessed: 3rd November, 2017].

out as one of those figures whom he offended by his excessive admiration.¹¹⁷) More particularly still, he played a role in the composition of Stendhal's *Vie de Napoléon*.¹¹⁸ Admittedly, it would be surprising if Beckett had been aware of the full extent of that role played by Destutt de Tracy in the composition of Stendhal's text. Crucially, however, Beckett would not have needed to have had such an awareness. It would have been sufficient for him to have read Stendhal's *Vie de Napoléon* in an edition that was readily available by the end of his years at the ENS – namely, the Le Divan edition, published in 1930. Although no copy of this text survives in Beckett's personal library, the likelihood of Beckett's having been familiar with it is greatly increased when one considers that the only overt reverence to Destutt de Tracy in Stendhal's *Vie de Napoléon* takes the form of a note that is to be found in a chapter relating to Napoleon's time in Egypt.¹¹⁹

The reference to Destutt de Tracy thus provides evidence for a connection between Stendhal and Napoleon. The second piece of evidence, however, is of a more negative variety and it comes from the Romantic rejection of Napoleon that we find detailed in Conan's notes. To understand the significance of this rejection, we must first recognise that, while Napoleon was indeed rejected by certain figures associated with Romanticism – most notably, Alphonse de Lamartine¹²⁰ –, Romantic attitudes towards him were by no means characterised by monolithic opposition. On the contrary, Napoleon was a source of inspiration for many Romantics.¹²¹ No Romantic, however, was more inspired by Napoleon than Stendhal who, in addition to being the author of that *Vie de Napoléon* which was previously mentioned, also wrote a volume entitled *Mémoires de Napoléon*, was personally involved in the Napoleonic Wars, and made use of Napoleon in his fiction.¹²²

¹¹⁷ viz. 'J'ai déplu à M. de Tracy et à Madame Pasta [i.e. the actress Giuditta Negri] pour les admirer avec trop d'enthousiasme' (Stendhal, Béatrice Didier [ed.], *Vie de Henry Brulard* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 1973], 340).

¹¹⁸ For this connection, see Jules C. Alicatore, 'Stendhal et Destutt de Tracy: La "Vie de Napoléon" et le "Commentaire sur l'esprit des lois"', in *Modern Philology* (Vol. 47, No. 2 – November, 1949), 98-107.

¹¹⁹ Stendhal, *Vie de Napoléon* (Paris: Le Divan, 1930), 36 [n.1]

¹²⁰ Certainly, Lamartine is known to have been one of those who referred to Napoleon as 'l'Usurpateur', insofar as he had usurped those Revolutionary and Republican ideals that had been conceived of as universal and made France a tool for the pursuit of his own grandeur (viz. Aurélie Loiseleur, "'La république imaginaire" ou la poésie au pouvoir l'intrication du poétique et du politique un cas exemplaire, Lamartine', in *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques* [Vol. 26, No. 2 – 2007], 308 – n. 31).

¹²¹ For more on the relationship between Napoleon and Romantic writing, see: Michel Arrous (ed.), *Napoléon, Stendhal et les romantiques : l'armée, la guerre, la gloire : actes du colloque du 16-17 novembre 2001* (Saint-Pierre-du-Mont: Eurédit, 2002); Jean Tulard, 'Napoléon, les romantiques et le mythe du grand homme', in Pierre-Jean Dufief (ed.), *L'Écrivain et le grand homme* (Geneva: Droz, 2005).

¹²² Julien Sorel, hero of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, for example, is a passionate defender of Napoleon, and at one point goes so far as to describe him as 'l'homme envoyé de Dieu

To this internal evidence for a connection between Napoleon and Stendhal may further be added the external evidence of Beckett's reading habits in the 1930s. For the interest Beckett took in Napoleon at this time was matched by an interest in Stendhal, and it is thus entirely possible that he might have been led to read texts such as those that have just been mentioned.¹²³ This seems all the more likely given that 'Le Concentrisme' itself bears witness to Beckett's contemporaneous interest in these two figures by way of those allusions that it contains to both Napoleon and Stendhal. While the major allusion to Napoleon has already been mentioned, allusions to the latter are less direct. The most obvious is to be found in the definition of his movement that Jean du Chas invites potential practitioners to offer to the masses: 'Le Concentrisme est un prisme sur l'escalier'.¹²⁴ This definition is a reworking of that famous definition of the novel form in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*: 'un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route'.¹²⁵ (It should be acknowledged that this reworking of Stendhal's definition is, just like the earlier reworking of Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*, far more than a simple act of name dropping since the definition has been warped in such a way as to lay stress on those issues of movement that we have already noted as being central to 'Le Concentrisme': Beckett's reworking not only makes the mirror a prism – that is, something that refracts, rather than reflects – but also renders this prism stationary – no longer do we find mention of how it 'se promène' –, even as this prism is made to permanently occupy a position that should, by definition, be transient – namely, on a stair.) Beckett's allusion to Stendhal's novel is then further reinforced in 'Le Concentrisme' when its hero, Julien Sorel, is mentioned as one of those engaged in bringing the Trinity up to date.¹²⁶

In light of this evidence, it seems highly likely that Beckett did indeed alert his students to a connection between Napoleon and Stendhal. It remains to be seen, however, in what respect this connection should be of importance to our understanding of 'Le Concentrisme'. Happily, this importance can be best clarified by

pour les jeunes Français' (Stendhal, Béatrice Didier [ed.], *Le Rouge et le Noir* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 1972], 104).

¹²³ The most extensive treatment of Beckett's engagement with Stendhal remains that provided, over two decades ago, by John Pilling: John Pilling, 'Beckett's Stendhal: "Nimrod of Novelists"', in *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* (Vol. 50, No. 3 – 1996), 311-317. A more recent, albeit briefer, discussion of this engagement may be found in Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon's *Samuel Beckett's Library* (*viz. op. cit.*, 57-59).

¹²⁴ LC, 4

¹²⁵ Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, 357 – This definition of the novel form is itself a subtle alteration of that definition which Stendhal, in the same novel, deploys as an epigraph to Chapter XIII (Book 1), where it is attributed to César Vichard de Saint-Réal: 'Un roman : c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long du chemin' (*Ibid.*, 88).

¹²⁶ *viz.* 'Raskolnikoff, Rastignac et Sorel se dévouent et mettent la Trinité au goût du jour, triangle scalène ou symbole [*sic*] phallique, comme vous voulez, camarades' (LC, 3).

way of the clearest evidence for Beckett's having drawn a connection between Napoleon and Stendhal during his lecture – namely, the passage in Gustave Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* that would have made this connection clear to Beckett when he himself was a student:

La préoccupation principale de Stendhal, dans son œuvre littéraire, se rattache à ce goût de l'action et de la volonté. [...] Ainsi s'explique le culte qu'il voue à Napoléon : Napoléon représente à ses yeux la plus grande somme d'énergie qu'il lui ait été donné de voir ramassée dans un individu.¹²⁷

This is precisely the connection that Beckett would have been so keen to convey to his students. It is also precisely the connection that allows us to understand why Jean du Chas should be set in opposition to Napoleon and, more generally, to the Egyptian expedition.

In essence, Napoleon's importance for Stendhal lay in the model of individuality that he proposed: Having risen from mere soldier to the heights of Imperial splendour, Napoleon provided Stendhal, and other Romantics, with a model for the kind of fully-realised, self-willed and self-directed selfhood that was possible in a post-Revolutionary world.¹²⁸ The nature of that connection between Stendhal and Napoleon greatly clarifies the relevance of a reference to Napoleon and the Egyptian expedition within the context of 'Le Concentrisme'. For, while Napoleon's rise to power as a whole may have provided a model for what could be achieved through the exertion of one's own will, the Egyptian expedition in particular served as a key milestone in Napoleon's rise from his humble origins towards his apotheosis as emperor: The expedition was the last act to be carried out by Napoleon in his capacity as general, and his return to France from Egypt directly preceded his involvement in the *coup d'état* that led to his being appointed First Consul, thereby elevating himself for the first time from the soldier's role as servant of the State to a position of authority over the State.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 1007

¹²⁸ This aspect of Napoleon's character is succinctly expressed by Patrice Gueniffey, as part of his study of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire: 'Bonaparte porte en quelque sorte le rêve de chacun [...] l'homme qui, sans ancêtres et sans nom, s'est créé lui-même à force de volonté, de travail et de talent. Il est l'homme qui a fait de sa vie un destin, jusqu'à en choisir la fin en revenant de l'île d'Elbe en 1815, cette fois sans que rien ne justifie sa conduite, pour donner à son histoire un épilogue à sa mesure. Il est l'homme qui s'est élevé à des sommets inédits et qui, par son génie, a repoussé les limites connues. Non pas un modèle, mais un rêve. C'est là que réside le secret de la fascination qu'il exerce encore : *Napoléon est une figure de l'individu moderne*' (Patrice Gueniffey, *Histoires de la Révolution de l'Empire* [Paris: Perrin, 2011], [non-paginated EBook] – Emphasis mine).

¹²⁹ For this period of Napoleon's life, see David A. Bell, *Napoleon: A Concise Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 35-42

Once one has recognised both Napoleon's importance as an ideal exemplar for a particular model of individuality and the role that the Egyptian expedition played in Napoleon's rise, the full significance of Beckett's characterisation of du Chas as 'le premier individu depuis l'expédition d'Égypte' becomes clear: Far from being merely an absurd and inexplicable element of an essentially meaningless intellectual farce, the reference to the Egyptian expedition becomes a counterpoint against which Beckett can reassert what we previously identified as the key proposition of 'Le Concentrisme' – that is, the injunction to '[*aller*] s'*embêter ailleurs*' and the corresponding conviction that movement alone cannot change a person. By signalling Napoleon's rise from mere man (General) to the first sphere (First Consul) on his way to the Empyrean of Imperial majesty, the Egyptian expedition, Beckett suggests, gave rise to the mistaken conviction that by travelling to a different place one could become a different person. Guided by this mistaken conviction, the Romantics – and, more broadly, the nineteenth-century as a whole – substituted movement for growth, a change of scene for a progression of the soul. Once one has the necessary exegetical tools in hand – that is, the evidence that has been offered here – the meaning of this 'bizarre' passage becomes relatively clear:

Telle était sa vie [i.e. the life of Jean du Chas], une vie d'individu, le premier individu européen depuis l'expédition d'Égypte. Les acrobaties impériales ont flétri l'âme léonardesque, empoisonné la tranquille vertu des Indifférents européens. Sous l'égide crapuleuse d'un valet cornélien la dernière trace de la colère dantesque s'est transformé [*sic*] en crachats de Jésuite fatigué, le cortège des pestifères buboniques qui vont empuantir le 19^e siècle s'organise à la gloire éternelle du premier touriste. C'en est fait. Montaigne s'appelle Baedaker, et Dieu porte un gilet rouge.

The world prior to Napoleon, we are given to understand, was a world of visionaries – particularly, a world of artistic visionaries, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Dante –, while the world after Napoleon is full of mere travellers. Beckett underscores his admiration for the former and his disdain for the latter by contrasting them using terms that carry a particular force in the Beckettian idiolect: The reference to a 'colère dantesque' is evidently laudatory coming from one who so loved Dante throughout his life, while the abhorrence underlying his description of how this Dantean anger has been transformed into mere 'crachats de Jésuite fatigué' becomes clearer when one takes into account the use Beckett elsewhere makes of the Jesuits as symbols of all

that to which he could not warm.¹³⁰ Similarly, Beckett's reference to a 'valet cornélien' becomes a biting insult when one is aware of his marked antipathy for Corneille.¹³¹

While the precise value attached by Beckett to terms such as Jesuitical and Cornelian may have been a matter of his personal preference, understanding the rest of the passage is greatly facilitated by an awareness of the thematic exploration of movement and selfhood that is central to 'Le Concentrisme'. In short, this passage pinpoints the catalyst for this disastrous societal transformation, away from genius and towards mere travellers, in those 'acrobaties impériales' – that is, Napoleon's example of all that movement could achieve –, which led the nineteenth century to forsake the great figures of the past in favour a class of persons who represent the very archetype of those who seek to change themselves by changing their location, who insist that, if they merely travel elsewhere, they can change their lives – that is, tourists. It is precisely because du Chas does not partake of the erroneous belief that in changing one's surroundings one can change oneself – as his motto implies, wherever du Chas goes, he knows he will invariably be bored –, that 'Le Concentrisme' elsewhere invites us to think of him as an individual in the truest, the pre-Napoleonic sense – 'je vous invite à verser dans ce mot, creux depuis un siècle, toutes sa vertu prénapoléonique [*sic*]'¹³² –, the sense of da Vinci, Dante, and Montaigne.¹³³

This passage's central concern with the purported substitution of movement for selfhood in the post-Revolutionary world, and the corresponding rejection of self-examination, is not confined to an admittedly abstruse association between Napoleon and selfhood. It is also clearly and cleverly conveyed by way of the two images upon

¹³⁰ Thus, in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett explained that he couldn't appreciate Mallarmé 'because it's Jesuitical poetry, even the *Swan & Hérodiade*' (*LSB I*, 134 – SB to TMG [18th October, 1932]).

¹³¹ Beckett expressed this antipathy to James Knowlson, contrasting it with his deep love of Racine (*viz. DTF*, 49) – This coupling actually finds its way into 'Le Concentrisme': The insulting reference to a 'valet cornélien' counterpoints the approving allusion to 'clairvoyance racinienne' (LC, 5).

¹³² LC, 3 – Beckett here incorrectly fashions the adjective according to its English equivalent; the correct form would be *pré-napoléonienne*. This is by no means the only error to be found in 'Le Concentrisme', but these errors are essentially confined to minor matters of spelling (the use of 'suffisamment' [LC, 1] for *suffisamment* or 'symbôle' [*Ibid.*, 2] for *symbole*, for instance), and do not hamper comprehension of the text. Certainly, such errors do not prevent Nathalie Léger from describing this text as being written 'dans un français parfait' (Nathalie Léger, *Les Vies silencieuses de Samuel Beckett*, 15).

¹³³ In the discussion of 'Le Concentrisme' offered as part of *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*, Gesa Schubert too has remarked, albeit in a different manner to that proposed here, on the importance of the individual to this text, noting that 'Beckett plädiert in *Le concentrisme* dafür, Kunst als Ausdruck eines radikalen und komplexen Individualismus zu verstehen und lehnt in diesem Zusammenhang jegliche reduktionistischen Interpretationsätze ab' (Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*, 35).

which this passage closes. Beckett's assertion that, in the present age, 'Dieu porte un gilet rouge' serves to make metaphorically manifest the 19th-century's supposed valorisation of travel as the Alpha and Omega of existence, capable of providing the human self with all it requires since, by making God wear a 'gilet rouge', Beckett's transforms the deity into one of those employees tasked with assisting travellers at train-stations in France.¹³⁴ Beckett's transformation of Michel de Montaigne into a mere volume of the travel guide series Baedeker is more skilful still. Here Montaigne's name stands at once for the author himself and, metonymically, for the *Essais* on which his fame rests. Explicitly taking Montaigne's own person as their subject matter – '[J]e suis moy-mesmes la matiere de mon livre', Montaigne wrote in his preface 'Au lecteur'¹³⁵ –, these *Essais* constitute one of the earliest expressions of literary selfhood. More importantly still, and as Beckett would have learned from his reading of Gustave Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française*, these essays, though they range widely across time and space – touching on distant events and foreign climes –, were composed by Montaigne in the seclusion of his own home.¹³⁶ Montaigne and his *Essais* thus constitute a direct, and resounding, refutation of the idea that there is any essential connection between travel and selfhood: Rather than a guidebook, allowing the traveller to move from place to place with minimal reflection, Montaigne's *Essais* are an act of supreme self-reflection, composed without having to set foot outside a single room.¹³⁷

As is now clear, the passage detailing the contention that du Chas is the first individual since Napoleon's expedition to Egypt is far from absurd when placed in the broader thematic context of 'Le Concentrisme'. Nor, *pace* Pilling, does the mention made of Montaigne constitute an 'attack' on the author. Montaigne is in fact praised,

¹³⁴ So integral are these waistcoats to the identity of these workers, in fact, that they are commonly referred to as 'gilets rouges' – see, for example, 'SNCF Assistance, des volontaires dans vos gares' <<https://malignej.transilien.com/2013/12/02/sncf-assistance-des-volontaires-dans-vos-gares/>> [accessed: 26th October, 2017].

¹³⁵ Michel de Montaigne, 'Au lecteur', in Albert Thibaudet (ed.), *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1950), [25]

¹³⁶ Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 320-21 – Montaigne's *Essais* in fact include details of the tower, and the room, in which he composed his essays. These details are to be found in the essay 'De trois commerces' (*viz.* Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, 925-27). It is, however, unclear to what degree Beckett's direct familiarity with Montaigne's writings had progressed in 1930 – For details of Beckett's engagement with Montaigne, see Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 44-45.

¹³⁷ It may be noted that Beckett's dismissive reference to tourists, the Baedeker series of guidebooks, and the form of passive engagement with the world in which the former engage by way of the latter, constitutes one of the many echoes between 'Le Concentrisme' and *Proust*. In his critical text, Beckett explains the ravages of Habit upon the psyche by commenting that: 'Normally, we are in the position of the tourist...whose aesthetic experience consists in a series of identifications and for whom Baedeker is the end rather than the means' (*Proust*, 11).

and serves as an illustrious counterpoint to the post-Napoleonic conviction in the existence of a mystical connection between travel and the selfhood. The same cannot be said for Gide, who is indeed castigated by Beckett. Nonetheless, while Gide may be attacked, the language through which this attack is waged is by no means bizarre. On the contrary, it remains fully coherent with the vision of travel and movement as thematised by 'Le Concentrisme'. Thus, the reason for the criticism to which Gide is subjected lies in the fact that certain of his texts, unlike the *Essais* of Montaigne – and unlike the life of du Chas – are explicitly anchored in that belief in a profound connection between travel and self against which 'Le Concentrisme' rages.

Admittedly, this connection between Gide, selfhood and movement is not made explicit in 'Le Concentrisme'. As with Montaigne, however, Beckett no doubt believed that there was no need for him to be explicit: Speaking to members of the Modern Languages Society, he surely felt empowered to assume a certain degree of prior knowledge on the part of his audience – all the more so, indeed, given that many of those in attendance would have been students of French who would have been required to attain a degree of familiarity with Montaigne and Gide over the course of their degree. Thus, in citing the name of Gide, Beckett may assume that his audience hears behind this name allusions to works such as *L'Immoraliste* or *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. The first of these texts, greatly inspired by Gide's own life, details the protagonist's journey to deeper self-awareness of his 'immoral' desires, by way of sexual encounters in North Africa and thereby intimately couples self-revelation and travel.¹³⁸ The latter, meanwhile, though set primarily in Paris, once again makes of movement the fundamental principle of life, as revealed by the reflection that '[i]l est bon de suivre sa pente, pourvu que ce soit en montant'.¹³⁹ Gide's individuality is thus a matter of motion, of discovering the self in another place, of following one's natural inclinations, provided these lead upwards; du Chas holds no such illusions:

Cette vie [= that of du Chas], ~~elle qui se~~ telle qu'elle se dégage, vide et fragmentaire, de l'unique source disponible, son Journal, est *une de ces vies horizontales*, sans sommet, toute en longu en longueur, un phénomène de mouvement, sans possibilité d'accélération ni de ralentissement, déclenché, sans être inauguré, par l'accident d'une naissance, terminé, sans être conclu, par l'accident d'une mort.¹⁴⁰

Jean du Chas' life may be a matter of movement, but this movement remains stubbornly horizontal and the events that occasionally trouble it are not truly *events*, but merely 'accidents' – uniformly meaningless, and invariably devoid of revelation. As

¹³⁸ André Gide, *L'Immoraliste* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902)

¹³⁹ André Gide, *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1992 [1925]), 340 – The reflection is made by Édouard, a novelist and one of the central characters in the text.

¹⁴⁰ LC, 3 – Emphasis mine.

was the case with Montaigne, it may again be seen that Beckett's mention of Gide is more complex than it initially appears, being part of an elaborate, and deftly constructed network of allusions, all of which are made to further that engagement with the idea of selfhood and movement that constitutes one of the key thematic strands of 'Le Concentrisme' as a whole, one which echoes throughout 'Le Concentrisme' and of which the passage that has been considered in such depth here is only one manifestation. Indeed, by way of concluding this analysis – and the better to demonstrate how integral to Beckett's lecture as a whole the question of self and movement are –, we may now return to that characterisation of du Chas as one who had 'connu sa Suède' which we already noted as an allusion to Descartes' death. For, while this reference to Sweden certainly connotes the final days of the French philosopher, its significance is not confined to Descartes.

The precise phrasing of Beckett's allusion adds to it another layer of meaning, one that only becomes clear after one has adequately understood the importance of du Chas's alignment with a supposedly 'pre-Napoleonic' vision of selfhood: 'Connaître sa Suède' is, in fact, no more native to French than its literal translation is to English. When translated, however, the idea of knowing – or meeting – one's Sweden does very clearly call to the Anglophone mind the common English-language expression 'To meet one's Waterloo'. In this way, du Chas's death is made to allude, not merely to Descartes, but also – more profoundly, and more subtly – to the defeat of Napoleon. In this way, du Chas's death itself is turned into a multi-layered echo of the text's earlier refutation of the idea that travel can allow one to remake oneself: On one level, the refutation operates by way of Descartes, whose decision to travel to Sweden apparently sealed his fate by demanding that he conform to the Queen's matutinal habits – a correlation that *Whoroscope* renders through the arresting image of the Queen's 'hands...dripping red with sunrise'.¹⁴¹ On a deeper level, meanwhile, du Chas's death is also brought into association with Waterloo and, by extension, serves as a reminder that Napoleon himself provides the surest refutation of that idealised vision of a triumphant, self-fashioned selfhood which was born out of his Egyptian expedition: Napoleon may have returned from Egypt Consul, but his Empire did not survive his journey to Waterloo.

There is, perhaps, still one final layer of Napoleonic allusion to be found in this metaphorical millefeuille and which is worth considering before moving on from this text. This final, possible, allusion is to be found in Jean du Chas's name itself. Generally, this name has been interpreted by critics as a pun on the sexual sense that was accorded to the term *chas*, which refers primarily to the eye of a needle but

¹⁴¹ *CP*, 43

which was used by French Libertines to refer to ‘the female sexual organ’.¹⁴² (Thus, the ‘chas’ of Jean du Chas would echo the ‘con’ of ‘Concentrisme’, since *con* is historically cognate with English ‘cunt’ – though the modern sense of the French is far less extreme, being closer to ‘[intensely] stupid’ or ‘[highly] irritating’.¹⁴³) While there is no reason to dismiss the possibility of such a pun, it remains the case that reference to the language of the Libertines would only serve to clarify one element of Jean du Chas’s surname. If Jean du Chas is ‘du Chas’ because he is *con*, in short, why exactly is he ‘Jean’? Obviously, the precise motivations behind this name – if, indeed, there ever were any – must remain obscure. Nonetheless, it is tempting to find in this name yet another subtle connection to, and yet another subtle joke at the expense of, Napoleon. While Jean du Chas may have been Beckett’s creation, the historical Jean Chas was the author of a number of works dedicated to, and extolling the grandeur of, Napoleon.¹⁴⁴ In this way, Beckett’s use of the name serves once again to undercut Napoleon’s grandeur since, through the intrusion of a simple *du*, he has transformed Jean Chas from the author of panegyrics to the ‘Empereur des Français, Roi d’Italie et Protecteur de la Confédération du Rhin’, and transformed him into Jean du Chas – or John Pussy.¹⁴⁵

Complex though Beckett’s treatment of this particular thematic strand may be, ‘Le Concentrisme’ obviously cannot be reduced down to the connection between selfhood and movement that has been examined in such depth here. As has already been noted, this represents only one strand of the lecture. ‘Le Concentrisme’ also shares important connections with the critical monograph on Proust on which Beckett was contemporaneously engaged, and any exploration of this text that purported to be exhaustive would necessarily be obliged to take this connection into consideration.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, a truly exhaustive reading of this text would do well to pay

¹⁴² Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett’s Style of No Style’, 139

¹⁴³ Though the positing of a connection between *Concentrisme* and the word ‘con’ is popular amongst critics – being advanced, for example, by Rabaté (*Ibid.*, 138) and by Salisbury (*op. cit.*, 68) –, it is by no means the only one possible. Another reading might focus on the connection between *Concentrisme* and *Unanimisme*, for which see below.

¹⁴⁴ Jean Chas’ works include the self-explanatorily laudatory *Le Génie de Napoléon I.^{er}* (Paris: [Self-printed monograph], 1809) and *Parallèle de Bonaparte avec Charlemagne* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1805), which proposed Napoleon as nothing less than a new Charlemagne.

¹⁴⁵ Jean Chas, *Le Génie de Napoléon I.^{er}*, 1

¹⁴⁶ Though the analysis she provides cannot be deemed exhaustive, any reader interested in the connections between ‘Le Concentrisme’ and Beckett’s literary critical and theoretical output – particularly *Proust* – is encouraged to consult the discussion provided by Gesa Schubert in her *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts* (*viz. op. cit.*, 35-39).

close attention to Beckett's presentation of *concentric* selfhood as it relates to, and subverts, the model of selfhood advanced by writers belonging to *Unanimisme*, a literary movement which placed particular emphasis on connections between people, communities and societies, and in which Beckett is known to have been extremely interested towards the end of his undergraduate career, even devoting his post-graduate research essay to it.¹⁴⁷ As made clear at the outset of this chapter, however, the aim of this discussion is not to provide a thoroughly exhaustive treatment of 'Le Concentrisme', but rather to analyse this text in greater depth than has been proposed to date and, in so doing, to reveal something new about both this text itself and the relation that it shows Beckett's pre-1937 French-language writing to hold to his early English-language writing. That is precisely what has been achieved and, by shedding light on both the subtle network of allusions that 'Le Concentrisme' develops around the theme of movement and identity, and the myriad connections – at once structural and thematic – that exist between 'Le Concentrisme' and the prose that Beckett would go on to produce in English, we have seen Cohn's characterisation of this text to be mistaken: Far from being merely 'a *canular* perpetrated by Beckett after his residence at the Ecole Normale Supérieure', an intellectual farce unworthy of our attention, it has been demonstrated that this lecture merits far more careful attention than it has thus far been accorded by those few critics who have engaged with it. Rather than being viewed as the fully-realised piece of literary fiction that it is, and for which Beckett himself seems to have recognised it by allowing it to appear in print during his lifetime, it has been positioned outside the bounds of the fictional *œuvre*, understood as a text that, although it may borrow from fiction, is not yet worthy of being treated, and read, as such. By reading 'Le Concentrisme' as fiction, we have seen this text to be possessed of a complexity as rich as that to be found in *Dream*. Moreover, and every bit as important as this discovery of 'Le Concentrisme''s complexity, close analysis of this text has allowed us to recognise just how closely it is connected to Beckett's first novel. This connection, as has been observed, is a profound one and concerns everything from thematic concerns and compositional practices – such as the use of letters and framing narratives, or the incorporation of historical and biographical materials –, to the distinctive narrative voice that Beckett would deploy in *Dream* and in the literary works, at once poetic and prosaic, that followed. 'Le Concentrisme', in other words, has been demonstrated to constitute an essential way-post on the road towards Beckett's early literary writing. That this should be the case is important enough, but that this way-post should have been composed in French all but confirms the need to fundamentally reevaluate the way in

¹⁴⁷ For more on this essay, now most probably lost, and Beckett's interest in and eventual rejection of *Unanimisme*, see *DTF*, 75-77

which criticism has viewed Beckett's use of French, both in the pre- and the post-War periods.

With regard to the pre-War period, the importance of 'Le Concentrisme' demands that we correct Montini's characterisation of the early 1929-1937, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, according to which this was a time of 'monolinguisme polyglotte', a time during which French had not yet acquired any great importance for Beckett's artistic development. For the post-War period, meanwhile, 'Le Concentrisme', by proving that it was in French that Beckett first gave expression to the heavily-allusive and profoundly Baroque style of his pre-War writings, not only serves to confirm that French never served to inhibit Beckett's stylistic excesses, it also raises important questions about why the myth about a relationship between Beckett's use of this language and his literary style should have persisted for so long. Certainly, our analysis of the manuscript of 'Suite', upon which this thesis opened, had already served to disprove the idea of any fundamental connection between Beckett's use of French and his adoption of a new style. That text, however, was, admittedly, relatively inaccessible to the majority of researchers; and this inaccessibility might be seen to explain – if not to justify – why critics largely held to the myth of a correlation between the stylistic and linguistic turn. 'Le Concentrisme', however, serves to render this question decidedly more perplexing. This lecture, after all, has been readily-available to critics since the early 1980s, and yet the evidence it provides for the richness of Beckett's French has been largely ignored. Why, in the face of this evidence, should critics have been so unwilling to query the purported connection between language and style?

That is a question to which we will return subsequently. For the time being, it may be recognised that it is certainly not the only question that 'Le Concentrisme' raises: Why was *this* the text in which Beckett first gave expression to his new narrative voice? Was the emergence of this narrative voice tied, in any way, to his use of French, or was it more a function of the particular form that this text took? And, if the latter, is 'Le Concentrisme' thus exceptional or do the other texts that Beckett produced in French in the pre-1937 period demonstrate a similar voice and, more importantly, a similar level of formal and allusive complexity?

The first question, unfortunately, is almost impossible to answer at this remove. Certainly, Beckett himself has not provided us with any concrete evidence of why this text, above all, should have inspired him to turn in a new direction – one that moved away from the staid, turgid mode of 'Assumption' and towards something freer, more comic and more biting. If one were obliged to suggest an answer, however, the very form of the text may perhaps provide some clues. 'Le Concentrisme' is, after all, a 'spoof' lecture. As has already been shown, the comedic

character of this work, far from requiring us to cordon it off from Beckett's truly literary prose writings, actually constitutes one of the most powerful connections between 'Le Concentrisme' and the kind of literary fiction that Beckett would go on to produce. To say that 'Le Concentrisme''s comedy serves to tie it to the prose that Beckett would shortly begin writing, however, does not yet clarify where that comedic impulse came from. In this regard, it may be that this use of comedy did not so much come from something as emerge *in opposition to* something. More particularly, the use of comedy in this lecture may partly have been a means for Beckett of distancing himself from an exercise that, as was previously noted, he found profoundly unpleasant – namely, lecturing. Given Beckett's abhorrence of teaching and academia – an abhorrence to which he gave palpable expression in his lecture –, the choice to deliver a 'spoof' lecture was no doubt intended as a means of signalling his opposition to the world he had chosen to inhabit against his better judgement. This use of comedy was, in other words, a coping mechanism. In this respect, the use of comedy in 'Le Concentrisme' again points towards the use that would be made of comedy in *Dream*, which John Pilling has described as having emerged '[o]ut of a welter of negative feelings'¹⁴⁸, and in which Beckett's various failed relationships, unrequited loves and unwanted affections – with Peggy Sinclair, for Ethna MacCarthy, from Lucia Joyce – are made to serve his fictional ends by being presented in a comic, ironic and, by times, a vicious, light.¹⁴⁹

Awareness of the parallels between 'Le Concentrisme' and *Dream* allows us to propose an answer to the second question – namely, that of whether the use of French was of any particular importance. In short, the example of *Dream* seems to suggest that Beckett's use of French was not, in and of itself, of any importance. If French had been important, we would expect to find substantial differences between the narrative voices of 'Le Concentrisme' and the subsequent English-language fiction. What we find, however, as has been demonstrated time and again in the course of the preceding discussion, is not dissonance but consonance, not contrast but similarity. What Beckett did in French he was eminently able to repeat in English. Certainly, the fact that he did it in French first is of importance, but this importance should not be understood as the discovery of some singular quality in French that allowed Beckett to develop in ways that English alone could not possibly have allowed. Such an assumption – that is, about the incommensurate nature of Beckett's languages; the ontological divide between them, and the conviction that to write in the one is

¹⁴⁸ *DN*, ix-x

¹⁴⁹ The mix of comedy, irony and viciousness is well-evidenced in something like Beckett's treatment of the letter that Belacqua receives from the Smeraldina, which he based closely on letters received from Peggy and which, in the fullness of time, he would come to greatly regret having re-used in *MPTK* (*viz. DTF*, 183).

necessarily to write differently than in the other – is precisely the assumption underlying the notion of a correlation between Beckett’s use of French and his post-War stylistic shift, which we saw to be false in the Introduction. French, in short, did not enable Beckett to achieve anything that English could not also have allowed. Equally importantly, as we have seen in this chapter, the use of French did not prevent Beckett from achieving anything that he might have achieved in English. That is not to say that the fact ‘Le Concentrisme’ was written in French is unimportant. On the contrary, the question of why Beckett decided to write this spoof lecture in French is one that merits consideration – and, indeed, it is a question to which we will return in Part III – but the importance of his decision lies in the fact that, as we shall see, Beckett’s motivations for writing ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French were not quite the same as his motivations for writing the poetry of Jean du Chas in French, nor were these the same as those motivations that led him to write his own pre-War French language poems in French, nor are they in any way comparable to the probable reasons for his decision to compose Lucien’s letter in French when he came to write *Dream*. In other words, answering the question of why Beckett wrote ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French – and, more largely, the question of why he wrote any of his pre-War French-language texts in this language – obliges us to recognise that the use of a language other than English was never, necessarily, a matter of style.

That question of style naturally brings us to the last question, and the only one that we are in a position to properly answer at the present time and in the present chapter: Is ‘Le Concentrisme’ a radical exception, or is the complexity that we unearthed in the preceding analysis also to be found in Beckett’s other pre-1937 French language works? The short answer to this question is yes – these texts are complex, and if their complexity has gone largely unnoticed until now it is largely owing to the fact that, much like ‘Le Concentrisme’, they have essentially been ignored by critics. While lack of critical interest in ‘Tristesse Janale’ may be explained by both the relative inaccessibility of the text, and its intimate connection to ‘Le Concentrisme’, critical disregard for Lucien’s letter and ‘C’n’est au Pélican’, the poem to be found therein, is inexcusable since these are unambiguously literary texts, fully integrated by Beckett into the narrative of his first novel *Dream*. Despite their unambiguously literary stature, however, these texts have been ignored even those critics whose particular interest is in Beckett’s engagement with French. Thus, Chiara Montini – who, as previously noted, makes only passing mention of ‘Le Concentrisme’ – makes no allusion whatsoever to any of the other texts composed in French by Beckett prior to 1937.

In what remains of the present chapter, I propose to correct such critical oversight and to demonstrate the complexity of the remaining pre-1937 French-

language texts. Owing to the fact that the other three texts are far briefer than 'Le Concentrisme', the discussion accorded to them will be less extended than what was accorded to the 'spoof' lecture.

II. 'TRISTESSE JANALE'

As outlined earlier on in this chapter, 'Tristesse Janale' is intimately associated with 'Le Concentrisme'. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the text of the lecture itself provides no evidence for this association: Certainly, the poem does not feature as part of the text of 'Le Concentrisme' as published in *Disjecta*, nor does the typescript make any allusion to it. In her biography, Deirdre Bair suggests that, although absent from the text of 'Le Concentrisme', du Chas' poetry was presented as part of the lecture. Beckett, Bair tells us, 'persuaded several of his friends to support the paper by reading other "examples" of "Concentrismiste" [sic] writing'.¹⁵⁰ Bair's claim, however, is not corroborated by Beckett's other biographers. It is thus unclear whether or not those present at Beckett's lecture on November 11th 1930 were subjected to 'Tristesse Janale'. If there is no evidence for the connection between poem and lecture to be found in the lecture itself, that is not to say that there is no reliable evidence for this connection to be found anywhere. To find such evidence, we need only turn to Beckett's correspondence and to the text of 'Tristesse Janale' itself.

Evidence from Beckett's correspondence comes by way of the same letter, written to Thomas MacGreevy, in which Beckett mentions his having delivered a paper to the Modern Languages Society. In that letter, Beckett informed his friend that he 'read a paper to M.L.S. on a non[-]existent French poet – Jean du Chas – and wrote his poetry myself and that amused me for a couple of days'.¹⁵¹ This letter thus makes clear that Beckett composed some 'poetry' in du Chas' voice, and invites us to look for a probable candidate – or, perhaps, probable candidates – amongst Beckett's surviving poetic compositions. The circumspection that has here been shown in use of the plural is required by Beckett's own turn of phrase: 'Poetry' may imply more than one poem, but it does not confirm the existence of poems in the plural, as Beckett may simply have meant that he composed a single poem designed to be indicative of du Chas' imagined poetic output. Though seemingly minor, this point needs to be stressed as it is quite possible that 'C'n'est au Pélican', the second of the two poems composed by Beckett in French prior to 1937, was also composed at this time and thus also constitutes one of Jean du Chas' poems. In the case of the latter, however, the probability of its having been composed in the voice of du Chas is small given that it appears in the novel *Dream*, where it is ascribed to either Lucien, Liebert or even to

¹⁵⁰ *SBAB*, 52

¹⁵¹ *LSB I*, 55 – SB to TMG (14th November, [1930])

Belacqua himself.¹⁵² Moreover, It is also the case that ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ does not seem to include any material of that might be described as overtly Chasien – certainly, none of the figures to whom that poem refers are to be found in ‘Le Concentrisme’. Bearing the state of currently available evidence in mind, then, it seems most likely that ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ was not composed by Beckett as part of the composition of ‘Le Concentrisme’ and that, even if other poems were composed by Beckett in the voice of ‘Le Concentrisme’'s du Chas, ‘Tristesse Janale’ is the only one to have survived.¹⁵³

Admittedly, even the connection between ‘Tristesse Janale’ and ‘Le Concentrisme’ is not entirely unambiguous. We do not find any explicit mention of du Chas’ name, for example. What we do find, however, are allusive and textual echoes between the text of the lecture and the text of the poem. The allusion to Kant’s *Ding an Sich* – ‘la Chose kantienne’¹⁵⁴ –, for example, is also to be found in ‘Le Concentrisme’.¹⁵⁵ By far the clearest evidence for a connection between du Chas and ‘Tristesse Janale’, however, are the ‘subtiles concierges’ of the poem’s first line.¹⁵⁶ The presence of these concierges in the opening line of this sonnet essentially confirms that it was written in the style of du Chas, since ‘Le Concentrisme’ explicitly describes du Chas’ work as being filled with concierges:

Des concierges, beaucoup de concierges. Jean deu Chas souffrait d’une véritable obsession à cet égard et il en avait une conscience très nette. « Le concierge », a-t-il écrit dans un de ses cahier, « est le pierre angulaire de mon édifice entier. »¹⁵⁷

Jean du Chas’ assertion that the concierge is “le pierre angulaire de mon édifice entier” is a direct allusion to Beckett’s *Proust*, in which Swann is described as ‘the corner-stone of the entire structure’ of *À la recherche du temps perdu*.¹⁵⁸ Beyond facilitating allusion to Beckett’s own monograph, however, it is unclear what the figure of the concierge might have meant to du Chas. Certainly, it would be possible to connect the figure of the concierge – by virtue of their role as gatekeeper – to that

¹⁵² The question of authorship will be examined in more detail below.

¹⁵³ For this reason, ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ will be examined when we come to discuss Lucien’s letter in *Dream*.

¹⁵⁴ *CP*, 44

¹⁵⁵ *viz.* ‘La Chose de Kant’ (LC, 5) – At the period from which these writings date, it should be noted, Beckett’s knowledge of Kant, and of Kantian philosophy, appears to have been limited to whatever he had found in Schopenhauer’s writings, and whatever he might have gathered from conversations with more philosophically literate acquaintances. Certainly, the earliest evidence we have for Beckett engaging directly with Kant’s philosophy dates from 1938 (*viz.* Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library*, 137-143).

¹⁵⁶ *CP*, 44

¹⁵⁷ LC, 2

¹⁵⁸ *Proust*, 21

concern with movement which we saw to be a key thematic thread running through 'Le Concentrisme'. The most important aspect of the concierge as it appears in the lecture, however, is probably its inscrutability since Beckett goes out of his way to obscure the possible meaning that du Chas may have attached to the concierge, something which he achieves by subsuming this figure beneath a number of the interpretations that a literary critic might be tempted to offer without necessarily lending his support to any particular one of these interpretations.¹⁵⁹ That this should be the case is unsurprising, given that a major part of Beckett's point in his lecture is the desire to reject a certain explicative mode of criticism. In this regard, he goes so far as to conclude his lecture by assuring us that

[C]e qui est certain, c'est que, si vous insistez à solidifier l'Idée, Celle dont il [= Jean du Chas] parle, à concrétiser la Chose de Kant, vous ne ferez que dégrader en vaudeville de Labiche cet art qui, semblable à une résolution de Mozart...est parfaitement intelligible et parfaitement inexplicable.¹⁶⁰

Meaning is not to be explained, but to be perceived; meaning is not to be laughed at, but marvelled at.

Much as 'Le Concentrisme' serves as a means of giving voice to Beckett's frustrations with that career in teaching that he already knew himself to despise, even if he had not yet found the courage to abandon it, this lecture also serves as a means of rejecting the critical enterprise on which Beckett himself was then engaged via his work on the monograph *Proust* but with which he was already profoundly ill-at-ease.¹⁶¹ Du Chas and his poetry, in other words, have been created not so that Beckett can explain, but so that Beckett can more effectively obscure. Indeed, Beckett has created his own artist – an artist about whose work, life and person, he alone can know all there is to know – to show that art is, essentially, unknowable. Somewhat ironically, Beckett actually goes so far as to clarify to us that his purpose is obfuscation when he presents the sense of du Chas' various concierge in the following terms:

De nombreuses indications textuelles m'inclinent à voir dans ce motif [= of the concierge] presque névralgique le symbole [*sic*] d'une de ces terribles manifestations de la nature, terribles et irrégulières, qui déchirent l'harmonie cosmique et démentissent [*sic*] tous ceux pour qui l'artisan de la création est le prototype de l'artiste néo-classique et l'enchaînement précaire des mois et des saisons un manifeste rassurant et cathartique [...]¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ viz. 'Et le concierge, celui qui se laisse sortir ? Tout ce que vous voudrez, Dieu ou la fatigue, petite attaque ou clairvoyance racinienne' (LC, 5)

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ For a fuller development of 'Le Concentrisme' as a denunciation of a particular explicative mode of criticism, see Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*, 37-38.

¹⁶² LC., 2

If the concierges of du Chas signify anything, in other words, they signify – by their very opacity – that art is not a regular system. Perceptible without being explicable, these figures are supposed to give the lie to the Neo-Classical idea of the artist as one who produces beauty that is ordered, and order that is beautiful. This being so, we should not be surprised that the text of a poem composed in the voice of du Chas, such as ‘Tristesse Janale’, tends towards opacity. It is by virtue of its very inscrutability that it can be made to correspond to the mode of literary creation that ‘Le Concentrisme’ advances and, in so doing, to subvert the mode of literary criticism that that lecture denounces.

To say the text is inscrutable, however, is not yet to say it is impossible to find any meaning within it. Indeed, as our preceding examination of ‘Le Concentrisme’ demonstrated, that lecture too is not quite so inscrutable as Beckett suggested du Chas’ art to be. In this regard, I would contend that Beckett’s own passion for order and structure – the passion that informs his love of Dante and Sade, as well as many of his own writings¹⁶³ – did not allow him to easily indulge in meaninglessness of the Surrealist variety – meaningless of which a perfect example would be that injunction to ‘battre sa mère pendant qu’elle est jeune’ – as fully as he might have liked. Certainly, Beckett deploys moments of madness that seem devoid of meaning; certainly, he rails against a criticism of reductive explication in ‘Le Concentrisme’; certainly, he includes in *Dream* stern criticism of Balzac for the reason that his works – ‘chloroformed worlds’ full of ‘clockwork cabbages’ – are too ordered and do not give due regard to life’s native tendency towards confusion, uncertainty, and dehiscence.¹⁶⁴ Certainly, all of this is true. At the same time, however, Beckett’s works

¹⁶³ Beckett made clear that what he admired about both Dante’s *Commedia* and Sade’s *120 Journées de Sodome* was the precision of their narrative structure in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 1938: ‘The composition [of Sade’s text] is extraordinary’, wrote Beckett, ‘as rigorous as Dante’s’ (*LSB I*, 607 - SB to TMG [21st February, 1938]). That fascination with rigorous composition would remain with Beckett throughout his life and would, if anything, only grow stronger with age. Indeed, by the end of his career – in prose works such as *Enough / Assez*, *Imagination morte imaginez / Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Sans / Lessness* and, above all, *Worstward Ho* – Beckett’s texts come to exist primarily as compositions, becoming less like literature and more like verbal computations. (In this respect, it is interesting to note that M.S. Lourenço, who executed a translation of *Sans / Lessness* into Portuguese, stated that Beckett provided him with ‘an algorithm which helped him in the process of translating “Sans”’ [Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s Library*, 272 (n. 25)].)

¹⁶⁴ viz. ‘To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. The whole thing, from beginning to end, takes place in a spellbound backwash. We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is

themselves are, for the most part, carefully ordered and their obscurity, such as it is, derives from the complexity of that order. Once one has grasped the materials out of which the early Beckett has composed his works – that is, once one has pinpointed the sources from which he snatched his notes –, many aspects of these works become far less confounding. Beckett’s early art, in short, is a kind of pointillism; the key difference is that, where visual pointillism serves to create scenes that dissolve into dots if observed too closely, Beckettian pointillism arranges individual components with an eye to crafting a chaos that resolves itself into order if studied attentively.

Something of that underlying preference for order is present in ‘Tristesse Janale’ too. For, though one may wonder as to quite why its ‘concierges’ should be subtle, or balk at its yoking of Kant’s *Ding an Sich* and Pierre Louÿs’ Bilitis – a fictional Ancient Greek poetess to whom Louÿs ascribed poems of his own fabrication¹⁶⁵ –, ‘Tristesse Janale’ is very far from being merely a confused mass. On the contrary, the poem that Beckett composed in du Chas’ voice clearly has an underlying thematic interest in duality, and this duality is also its primary structuring principal. The centrality accorded to duality – and the complexity with which this theme is developed through the structure of the poem – becomes apparent when one considers the term ‘bigène’, which is used by the poem’s speaker to describe the unnamed object of desire to whom the poem is addressed.¹⁶⁶

‘Bigène’ appears to be Beckett’s own coinage. (Certainly, it is not to be found in any of the dictionaries to which Beckett is most likely to have had access.¹⁶⁷) As such, no single meaning can be assigned to it with certainty: If based upon the model of words such as *anxiogène* or *fébrigène*, it would mean ‘bigenic’ – that is, producing doubleness or duality –, while, if based upon the model of words such as *autogène* or *nécrogène*, its meaning would be closer to ‘twice born’ or ‘having a double origin’. This polysemy is unlikely to be merely coincidental insofar as it serves to further the poem’s chief thematic concern. For, by defining the love-object to whom the poem is addressed using a word whose meaning is irreducibly dual, the speaker effectively reinforces the poem’s fundamental concern with duality and ‘tensions ambiguës [sic]’.¹⁶⁸ These ambiguous tensions are made to echo throughout the poem by way of coupled oppositions – notably, those of ‘greffe’ and ‘greffé’, of ‘crête’ and ‘cratère’¹⁶⁹

wonderful, but why call a distillation of Euclid and Perrault *Scenes from Life? Why human comedy?*’ (*Dream*, 119-20 – Emphasis in original).

¹⁶⁵ These poems were published in a volume entitled *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (viz. Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec* [Paris: Eugène Fasquelle, 1900]).

¹⁶⁶ viz. ‘Barbouille-toi, bigène, de crispations de fange’ (*CP*, 44)

¹⁶⁷ Most notably, the word is absent from the dictionaries of Émile Littré and Pierre Larousse.

¹⁶⁸ *CP*, 44

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

–, and its insistence on the prefix of association *co-*, which is to be heard both directly – in ‘correlatif [*sic*]’ and ‘co-ordonne’¹⁷⁰ – and indirectly as the ‘con’ of words such as ‘consume-toi’, ‘conifère’ and, of course, ‘concierge’.¹⁷¹ The poem’s concern with duality is also reinforced negatively, by way of its reference to the love-object’s ‘trait antithétique’.¹⁷² While the meanings of the term *trait* are numerous, the primary importance of the term here would seem to be that it is singular: Amongst the couplings, the dualities and the associations of the poem, this *trait* does indeed constitute, by virtue of its very singularity, a form of antithesis that serves to more effectively remind us of the focus on connection that is this poem’s foundation.¹⁷³ Once again, we see both the care that Beckett has taken to ensure the various components of this poem combine to reinforce its central thematic concern with duality. The most noticeable proof of this concern, however, is not to be found within, but without the poem, since the title’s reference to the two-faced god Janus serves to cast over the entire poem the shadow of duality. This god in turn, as the god of doorways and gateways, leads us to recognise the concierge as one with mastery of entrances and exits, and thus not only helps us to interpret the importance of concierges to this poem in particular but also to du Chas’ art more broadly.¹⁷⁴

It may thus be observed that, like ‘Le Concentrisme’, ‘Tristesse Janale’ is a more complex, and a more carefully constructed, piece of work than it initially appears. One which, once again like ‘Le Concentrisme’, is structured in such a way so

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* – Clearly, in French, the ‘con’ sound is most readily associable with the female sexual organ, with stupidity, or bother, and the presence of the Sapphic figure Bilitis would support at least the first of these associations. At the same time, the presence of such potential meanings in no way removes the potential signification of ‘togetherness’, ‘union’. On the contrary, anyone familiar with French and Italian, as Beckett himself was, is scarcely able to avoid recognising various meanings of this sound, a variety of meaning which, in turn, reinforces the poem’s concern with dualities, doublings, and ambiguous tensions.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ In this respect, the line is perhaps more effective from a structural perspective than the alternative which the manuscript shows Beckett to have considered: ‘Qui sabres ma détresse en sections coniques’ (*Ibid.*, 329). Undoubtedly, the line chosen by Lawlor and Pilling – ‘Qui centres mes désirs d’un trait antithétique’ – permits both a fuller rhyme and renders the poem more interesting by reinforcing its central theme negatively. At the same time, it should be recognised that the alternative is not entirely without its charms: Most notable, its substitution of ‘détresse’ for ‘désirs’ more effectively stresses that negativity (‘tristesse’) which, as the poem’s title implies, is supposedly of equal importance to the poem’s thematic concern with duality. Moreover, even while stressing this negativity, the alternative line still manages to further the poem’s focus on duality by way of the ‘con’ sound heard in the term ‘coniques’.

¹⁷⁴ Johannes Hedberg has proposed yet another way in which the figure of the concierge may serve to underline the idea of duality that lies at the centre of this poem by suggesting that the term be read as an amalgam of the female (*con*) and male (*cierge*) sexual organs (*viz.* CP, 329).

as to advance its thematic ends. Indeed, in this respect, reading the poem in light of 'Le Concentrisme' actually serves to reveal yet another layer of complexity, and another layer of thematic importance, behind Beckett's decision to invoke Pierre Louÿs' Bilitis. Not only does this figure, by virtue of both her homosexuality and her name, accord with the poem's fundamental concern with pairings – with sameness and difference, with duality and connection –, the reference to Bilitis in a poem ascribed to Jean du Chas serves as a knowing nod to the fact that both are poets who are, in fact, fictions. Just as Bilitis had no existence beyond the imagination of Pierre Louÿs until he set her before the reading public via a volume entitled *Les Chansons de Bilitis* – a volume that lent added depth to the figure of Bilitis by way of the 'Vie de Bilitis' that prefaced 'her' poems, and the bibliography of supposedly relevant works that followed them¹⁷⁵ –, so too du Chas was born entirely of Beckett's imagination.¹⁷⁶

Beckettian though 'Tristesse Janale' may be in its complexity, it is nonetheless important to remember that it is a work by Beckett, not a work in the voice of Beckett. It is, in other words, not a personal poem but a persona poem written in the voice of du Chas. Naturally, as has already been remarked, du Chas did serve as something of an avatar for Beckett, who composed his fictional poet out of at least partly autobiographical materials. That does not mean, however, that Chasien art should be taken as an unproblematic model for Beckettian art. Certainly, Beckett made the art of du Chas obscure so that he could underline a quality that, at that time, he himself particularly valued – namely, the rejection of chloroformed worlds, clockwork fictions, and critical clarifications. There is, however, a fundamental distance between du Chas' art and Beckett's own, and this distance is made readily apparent by the fact that 'Tristesse Janale' is a sonnet.

On one level, perhaps, the decision to compose this poem in accordance with the tenants of the sonnet form would seem to be more than justified by the poem's thematic interest in 'tensions ambiguës [*sic*]'. What poetic form might be a more appropriate vehicle for the expression of such tensions than the sonnet, which takes as its fundamental principle the balance between oppositions, and the pivot of a *volta* that unifies contrary forces? Undoubtedly, the sonnet form is ideally suited to the themes of 'Tristesse Janale.' (It is, moreover, firmly anchored in the sonnet tradition

¹⁷⁵ Louÿs' *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec* provides readers with a bibliography that includes both purported critical studies and translations into various languages, including Czech and Swedish (*viz.* Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec*, 349-50).

¹⁷⁶ In this respect, the presence of Bilitis lends some credence to Bair's mention of how 'Le Concentrisme' was supplemented with readings from du Chas's poetry since, to get the full comic effect of Bilitis' presence, one would need to hear the poem in the context of 'Le Concentrisme' – which, in its way, offers its own 'Vie de Jean du Chas'.

by way of its reference to Mallarmé and Michelangelo; two especially noteworthy practitioners of the form, whose shared initials also provide the poem with yet another moment of duality.¹⁷⁷) At the same time, however, the use of such a form is profoundly at odds with Beckett's personal expressive mode. As many of his early writings attest, Beckett's natural preference is towards a counterpointing of internal patterning within broader structural unease, even decomposition. Thus, in 'Le Concentrisme' for example, a complex pattern of allusions is made to further a thematic concern with travel and selfhood, but the broader structures of the piece is one of gaps and uncertainties. Its very genre is a matter of uncertainty since it is neither a true lecture, nor a true biography, nor even an overt and obvious fiction, but hovers instead somewhere in the middle. The narrative voice is constantly shifting; it begins with a letter from an unknown correspondent and, though read in Beckett's own voice, includes snatches from du Chas' own writings and a passage from Proust that we are led to believe is in fact simply an act of Proustian ventriloquism by du Chas. Finally, as a purported exercise in critical discourse, it blatantly contradicts what should be its fundamental *raison d'être* by proposing no definite clarifications of du Chas and his art, and instead confronts us with passages so rich in allusion that they may strike one as indecipherable literary rebuses. And yet, at the same time, beneath all the confusion of this lecture, as we have seen, there is a pattern, and an intelligently engineered structure. This tension between internal patterns and structural uncertainty that is to be found in 'Le Concentrisme' – as well as in so much of Beckett's early prose – is particularly evident in Beckett's poetry. There, in the majority of cases, he eschews traditional *formes fixes* in favour of forms that are supremely ungainly, defined by their uneven line length, their irregular (or absent) rhymes, and their prosaic diction.¹⁷⁸ (It is, in fact, striking that the only sonnet to be composed by Beckett in English – 'At last I find in my confused soul' – is also a persona poem, being found in *Dream*, where it is ascribed to Belacqua and described as 'a Night of May hiccupsob'.¹⁷⁹) In this way, and quite unlike 'Le Concentrisme', it may be seen that 'Tristesse Janale' – at least insofar as it is composed in accordance with a

¹⁷⁷ viz. 'Mallarméenne et emblème de Michel-Ange' (CP, 44) – Amongst Mallarmé's sonnets, his so-called 'Sonnet en X' (viz. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx', in Bertrand Marchal [ed.], *Poésies* [Paris: Gallimard, Poésie/Gallimard, 1992], 59) is particularly notable in the present context for its use of a *hapax legomenon* of otherwise inscrutable meaning (i.e. *ptyx*) which, in the precise context of the poem, serves to confirm and advance the sonnet's thematic concern with the very nature of the sonnet form. This is, of course, directly comparable to Beckett's deployment of the term 'bigène' in 'Tristesse Janale'.

¹⁷⁸ One need only think in this respect of poems such as 'Casket of Pralinen for a Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin' or 'For Future Reference', whose very titles demonstrate their refusal to conform to our expectations of the traditionally poetic.

¹⁷⁹ *Dream*, 70

traditional form – does not tell us very much about the kind of writing that Beckett would go on to produce. Where the lecture pointed forward to the sort of prose that Beckett would soon begin writing in English, this poem looks, if anything, backwards; back, most notably, to the literary models of the 19th century, whom Beckett knew well, even if he did not often demonstrate this knowledge.¹⁸⁰ Taken in isolation then, ‘Tristesse Janale’ is not as important as ‘Le Concentrisme’, insofar as its form does not reveal anything new about the kind of art that Beckett would shortly begin to produce. At the same time, the poem is not entirely without interest for the critic. It provides, for example, still further confirmation of the fact that Beckett’s use of French must not be viewed as a form of restriction, since the complexities of ‘Tristesse Janale’ are at least equal to those of his later, English-language sonnet ‘At last I find in my confusèd soul’.¹⁸¹

To take ‘Tristesse Janale’ in isolation, however, is to sheer it of its connection to ‘Le Concentrisme’ and, when this poem is read within the context of that lecture, we do in fact find that it has something to tell us about the kind of writing that Beckett would go on to produce. For, although this sonnet may itself look backwards, the association of prose and poetry – the use of the one within the other – is something that Beckett would go on to deploy again in his later literary writing. As testified by the section of *CP* devoted to ‘Poems from Novels and Plays’, nested poetry would be a recurrent, albeit intermittent, aspect of Beckett’s writing throughout his career.¹⁸² Examples of nested poems are to be found in *Watt* – where the poems admittedly occupy the uncertain space of the ‘Addenda’ –, in *Malone meurt / Malone Dies*, in *Words and Music* and, as the manuscript of ‘Suite’ reveals, poetry was also to have had its place in Beckett’s first short-story of the post-War period.¹⁸³ In this respect too,

¹⁸⁰ In this respect too, ‘Tristesse Janale’ shares similarities with ‘At last I find in my confusèd soul’, since that poem too looked back to 19th-century versification and 19th-century sentiment. Further examples of Beckett’s familiarity with 19th-century verse are to be found in Lucien’s letter and, quite possibly, in the poem ‘Ascension’ – For these examples, see the discussions of these texts below.

¹⁸¹ For more details on the complexities of ‘At last I find in my confusèd soul’, see *CP*, 342-43.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 109-111

¹⁸³ The ‘Suite’ Notebook shows that Beckett originally intended to provide the words of the song that the narrator-protagonist of ‘La Fin’ / ‘The End’ hears to be sung ‘every evening at the same hour’ (*ECEF*, 43). The words of the song are as follows: ‘Tommy always went about / With his tiddly [~~hanging~~] ^{sticking} out / All the girls ran after him / Till he tucked his tiddly in // Upward through the troubled air / Mounts the mighty evening prayer / Till again the great forgiving / Darkness covers all the living’ (SN, 13r). Beckett did not make the decision to remove the text of this poem until quite late in the composition process. This can be inferred from the fact that the final page of the notebook shows him working on a translation of this song most likely intended for inclusion in the French-language translation of the English-language material: ‘Tommy toujours se promenait / Avec zézette qui [~~sortait~~] / Les filles lui couraient après / jusqu’à ce qu’il l’eût [~~xxx~~] ^[ramenée] // A travers l’air trouble /

then, the French-language compositions of late 1930 – that is, ‘Tristesse Janale’ and ‘Le Concentrisme’ – show Beckett to already be exploring, in French, the modes of literary creation that would characterise his subsequent literary production.

There is, however, no need to wait until *Watt* to find examples of nested poetry in Beckett’s prose fiction. Numerous pieces of poetry are nested within the prose narrative of Beckett’s first novel, *Dream*. In that novel, we find both compositions borrowed from others – such as those lines of verse recited by Jean du Chas at the Frica’s party¹⁸⁴, which derive ultimately from Jean de Meun’s continuation to Guillaume de Lorris’ *Le Roman de la Rose*¹⁸⁵ –, and compositions of Beckett’s own. Amongst those compositions by Beckett himself, moreover, we find compositions in both English and French. The French-language composition – ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ – has, moreover, the particularity of being nested within a French-language letter. These are the final two of those French-language texts that Beckett composed prior to 1937. It is to these compositions that we will now turn.

III. LUCIEN’S LETTER AND ‘C’N’EST AU PELICAN’

If the decision has been taken to amalgamate discussion of these two texts, it owes to the fact that to treat them in any other way would be to do both a disservice. As has just been outlined, ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ is not merely a poem; it is a nested poem. Moreover, unlike ‘Tristesse Janale’, which, though it may originally have been nested within ‘Le Concentrisme’ by virtue of having been read out during the lecture, is now connected to that lecture by nothing more than the circumstantial evidence of surviving correspondence and textual echoes, ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ was indisputably intended to appear in print as part of Beckett’s first novel, *Dream*. More specifically, Beckett intended for this poem to be read in the context of the ‘rather unpleasant letter’ that Belacqua receives from his friend Lucien.¹⁸⁶ Bearing these factors in mind, it seems clear that these texts should be read together and, by extension, that contextualising the letter in which this poem appears represents a necessary preliminary step to contextualising the poem itself. To contextualise the letter we

monte l’[immense] prière du soir / jusqu’à ce qu’encore [le] grand pardon / de la nuit descend sur tous les vivants’ (*Ibid.*, 48v).

¹⁸⁴ viz. ‘Toutes [= women] êtes, serez ou fûtes, / De fait ou de volonté, putes, / Et qui bien vous chercheroit / Toutes putes vous trouveroit...’ (*Dream*, 51-52).

¹⁸⁵ Although this quatrain is ultimately derived from de Meun’s Old French composition, the surviving evidence of the *Dream* Notebook shows Beckett’s own source for the quatrain was in fact William M. Cooper’s *Flagellation and the Flagellants* (viz. *DN*, [397]).

¹⁸⁶ *Dream*, 19 - Prior to its appearance as part of *CP* (viz. *CP*, 37), it was in fact impossible to read this poem in any way other than within the context of Lucien’s letter.

must first consider its author, 'a young aesthete for whom there was much to be said'.¹⁸⁷

The young aesthete in question, as already mentioned, is Lucien, one of Belacqua's three French friends – the other two being Jean du Chas and Liebert. Although these three figures may share a common nationality, the character of Lucien differs from both Liebert and (*Dream's*) Jean du Chas insofar as, where the latter are composite characters, based by Beckett upon a variety of characteristics derived from his friends Alfred Péron and Georges Pelorson, Lucien seems to have had a single real-life model. According to James Knowlson, the model upon whom Beckett based Lucien was Jean Beaufret, another of the friends he made while at the ENS.¹⁸⁸ In his biography, Knowlson carefully itemizes a number of those characteristics that Beckett derived from Jean Beaufret and conferred onto Lucien. Lucien's extravagant gestures, for example, were apparently modelled on those of Beaufret.¹⁸⁹ As well as such physical similarities, Beaufret, who was a student of philosophy at the time Beckett met him and who is now best remembered for his role in introducing Heideggerian philosophy to France, also provided the source of Lucien's evident knowledge of philosophy.¹⁹⁰ (Beaufret would in fact appear to have been one of the major sources for Beckett's own knowledge of philosophy, such as it was at the time. Notably, it was Beaufret who provided Beckett with that copy of selected texts by René Descartes that remained in his library up to the time of his death.¹⁹¹) The phrase 'Black diamond of pessimism'¹⁹² – a phrase that Belacqua describes as having been uttered by Lucien 'so nonchalantly that it must have been his and not another's'¹⁹³, and which provides the starting point for Belacqua's lengthy reflection on the nature of style and the role that French might have to play in achieving the particular sort of style he seeks¹⁹⁴ –, is merely the translation, and darkening, of 'a beautiful phrase' that Beckett found, and admired, in a letter written to him by Jean Beaufret: 'le diamant du pessimisme'.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁷ *Dream*, 22

¹⁸⁸ *DTF*, 152-53

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ For details of the relationship between Beaufret and Heidegger, alongside a speculative discussion of what the importance of this relationship may have been for Beckett, see Rodney Sharkey, 'Beaufret, Beckett, and Heidegger: The Question(s) of Influence', in Matthijs Engelberts, Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning, and Dirk Van Hulle (eds), *SBT/A 22: Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2010), 409-422

¹⁹¹ Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 131.

¹⁹² *Dream*, 47

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *viz. Ibid.*, 47-48

¹⁹⁵ *LSB I*, 73 (SB to TMG – 11th March, 1937)

Finally, and most importantly in the present context, Beaufret, like Lucien, was homosexual.¹⁹⁶

Admittedly, Beaufret's sexuality might appear to be of only ancillary importance to a discussion of the character that Beckett based on him, and of even less than ancillary importance to our understanding of the literary work in which this character appears. In actual fact, the issue of Beaufret's sexuality is of marked importance on both a biographical and a literary level. On a biographical level, the importance that Beaufret's acquaintances accorded to his sexuality was made clear by Georges Pelorson, himself a friend of Beaufret's and the person who confirmed to Knowlson that Beaufret had provided Beckett with his model for Lucien. As part of that confirmation, Pelorson was categorical in asserting both that Lucien could only be based on Beaufret and that Beaufret's sexuality was a defining feature of his character: 'Il n'y a aucun doute que cela [= Lucien] ne peut être que Beaufret. ... Beaufret, vous savez, était homosexuel. Il avait cette espèce de côté de gesticulation qui est très homosexuelle'.¹⁹⁷ Pelorson's comments confirm that Beaufret's friends were aware of his sexuality – this awareness, moreover, not merely a matter of an unspoken understanding; Pelorson is quite clear that Beaufret 'a commencé à être véritablement homosexuel avoué à Normale Supérieure'¹⁹⁸ – and Knowlson's biography goes so far as to imply that Beaufret was attracted to, and attempted to win the affections of, Beckett.¹⁹⁹

On a literary level, meanwhile – that is, to say, insofar as *Dream* is directly concerned –, Lucien's sexuality, and, by extension, Beaufret's own, is rendered singularly important by the fact that none of Lucien's other characteristics – such as his extravagant gestures, or his intimate knowledge of philosophy – contribute anything whatsoever to the letter in which 'C'n'est au Pélican' appears. Certainly, other aspects of Beaufret's character that Beckett borrowed for his fictional creation do receive more development elsewhere in the novel: We are subsequently informed, for example, that 'Lucien did not know what to do with his hands'²⁰⁰, and we learn at the same moment that Lucien is familiar with Leibniz and Descartes.²⁰¹ Finally, and as already mentioned, one of Lucien's – or, rather, Beaufret's – eloquent turns of phrase

¹⁹⁶ *DTF*, 152

¹⁹⁷ JEK A/7/13 ('Interview with Belmont, George')

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

¹⁹⁹ *viz.* '[F]inding Beckett good-looking as well as capable of sustaining a lively discussion on philosophical matters, [Beaufret] devoted himself to cultivating the Irishman's friendship, often meeting him unannounced at the station on his return to Paris from Dublin, Vienna, or Kassel, when Beckett had been to visit his ladylove, Peggy Sinclair' (*DTF*, 152) – As will be seen below, an awareness of Beaufret's affections for Beckett is itself of importance for how we interpret this letter.

²⁰⁰ *Dream*, 47

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

will be cited at a later point in the novel. In the case of the letter, however, no trace of these characteristics is to be found. The only aspect of his character that we are exposed to is his sexuality. That this should be the case is unsurprising given that the primary concern of this letter is unquestionably (male) homosexual desire. Any other matters that are to be found in this letter, such as literary style, poetry or heterosexual desire, are presented in such a way as to be inextricable from this primary concern.

To say that this letter is concerned with male homosexuality may appear redundant given the explicit nature of what it recounts. The importance of this concern, however, is not limited to the merely narrative content of the letter. One finds it, for example, in the letter's vocabulary: The term 'casse-poitrinaire', for example, which is employed by Liebert with reference to Belacqua, was derived by Beckett from his reading of Garnier's *Onanisme, seul et à deux, sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences*, where 'casse-poitrine' is offered as one of the common or garden terms for male-on-male oral sex.²⁰² More interesting than such vocabulary, however, are the efforts to which Beckett went to reinforce the letter's focus on homosexuality by way of its allusions. As previously noted during discussion of 'Le Concentrisme', the use of allusion to reinforce thematic concerns is a hallmark of Beckett's literary style and, just like that earlier lecture, Lucien's letter shows Beckett developing subtle allusive patternings with as much ease in French as he did in English.

In Lucien's letter, the patterning in question aims to reinforce the letter's focus on homosexuality and this is accomplished through allusions to male authors whose work either directly invokes, or who were themselves seen to be personally associated with, homosexuality. Some of these allusions are explicit, some decidedly less so. Perhaps the most subtle of the allusions is to be found in Lucien's description of the dawn: 'Il est inodore'.²⁰³ Although this description of 'la placenta de l'aurorore [sic]' as scentless may appear unremarkable, it in fact derives from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, more particularly from the 'Song of Myself': 'The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless'.²⁰⁴ More explicitly, reference is made to Alfred Tennyson, when Lucien speaks of Belacqua's face emerging before his eyes: 'Devant moi, croisée tennysonienne, ta belle face carrée bouge, bat comme

²⁰² Dr. P. Garnier, *Onanisme, seul et à deux, sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1883), 463 – This term, which Beckett would reuse in *Echo's Bones* (viz. *EB*, 2), is only one of those relating to sexual activities between men that Beckett derived from Gautier's volume and which he recorded in his *Dream Notebook* (viz. *DN*, [480]-[486]).

²⁰³ *Dream*, 21

²⁰⁴ Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself', in Michael Moon (ed.), *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (New York, NY; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 26

un cœur'.²⁰⁵ While the reference to Tennyson here is certainly more direct than that to Whitman, the precise sense of the reference is rendered more ambiguous by its brevity. Where the line 'Il est inodore' is clearly derived from 'Song of Myself', it is by no means easy to isolate quite what is meant by 'croisée tennysonienne.' Of the term's two meanings, that of a 'casement' or a 'window' is by far the more likely in this context given the explicit mention of 'vision'. Even so, the reference to a Tennysonian casement remains ambiguous. It is, for example, possible that the reference is to a window that appears in a particular poem by Tennyson.²⁰⁶ Based upon the context of the reference within the letter, however, it seems most likely that the reference is to Tennyson's 'The Window; Or, the Song of the Wrens', a suite of poems made into a song cycle, with music by Arthur Sullivan.²⁰⁷ In that brief lyric suite, which details the often unhappy love of an often melancholic lyric speaker for a beloved who, even in the final poem – recounting his journey to meet her on the morning of their marriage – is never directly perceived or interacted with. Communication between them, including his marriage proposal, instead takes place via letter, and the beloved herself is perceived only at a remove, often through the windowpane that comes to stand metonymically for her – as, for example, when the flowers that grow around it are said to 'trail and twine and clasp and kiss'.²⁰⁸ Understood in these terms, Lucien would be making of his mind's eye a window whereby he is permitted to perceive, however indirectly, his beloved – namely, Belacqua –, with whom he is of course communicating via letter, and thus obtain a vision that, like Tennyson's 'window-pane', is 'a jewel dear to a lover's eye!'.²⁰⁹

Probable though such an allusion to Tennyson's suite of poems may be, it remains impossible in the absence of further information to determine what precisely Lucien – and, by extension, Beckett – has in mind when he refers to a 'croisée tennysonienne'. What we can at least be sure of is that the reference is to Tennyson, and that this reference takes on a very particular importance in context of Lucien's letter given that, like Whitman, Tennyson is associated, if not precisely with homosexual desire, at least with intense homosocial affection. This common association is evidenced by the fact that both Tennyson and Whitman are among

²⁰⁵ *Dream*, 20

²⁰⁶ One might think, for example, of that reference to be found in the poem 'The Princess': 'Ah sad and strange as in dark summer dawns / The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds / To dying ears, when unto dying eyes / The casement slowly grows a glimmering square; / So sad, so strange, the days that are no more' (Tennyson, 'The Princess; A Medley', in *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate* [London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895], 186)

²⁰⁷ Tennyson, 'The Window; Or, The Song of the Wrens', in *Ibid.*, 244-46

²⁰⁸ Tennyson, 'At the Window', in *Ibid.*, 244

²⁰⁹ Tennyson, 'On the Hill', in *Ibid.*

those authors whose work Havelock Ellis mentioned as part of his study *Sexual Inversion*, which deals with ‘inversion’ – that is, homosexuality.²¹⁰ The presence of these two figures in Ellis’s study is rendered all the more interesting by the fact that Ellis himself is elsewhere to be found in Beckett’s novel.²¹¹ Although there is no surviving evidence of Beckett having consulted Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion*, his evident interest in homosexuality – testified by his careful attention to the topic as discussed by Gautier –, coupled with the mention of Ellis, means that such consultation is certainly within the realms of possibility. Such consultation is rendered all the more possible when one considers both the interest that Beckett’s mentor, Rudmose-Brown, evidently took in Ellis’s work, and the name that Beckett chose for the character of Lucien.²¹² As part of his conclusion to *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis notes a number of texts that take homosexuality as their subject, one of which is the novel *Lucien*, by Jean-Auguste-Gustave Binet, which Ellis describes as ‘a penetrating and scarcely sympathetic study of inversion’.²¹³ If Binet’s novel is clearly not the only possible source for Lucien’s name, the proximity between the occurrence of this name and a number of those writers mentioned by Ellis who are to be found in this letter is nonetheless intriguing.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion. Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1915) – Unsurprisingly, a large section of Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* is devoted to Whitman: He is discussed at length as part of the text’s first chapter (*Ibid.*, 51, *passim*) and mentioned more briefly in its conclusion (*Ibid.*, 339). Tennyson, meanwhile – though Ellis notes that ‘it is impossible to describe [Tennyson] as inverted’ (*Ibid.*, 44 [n.1]) – is mentioned in the third edition of Ellis’s study as one of those who have ‘given expression to emotions of exalted or passionate friendship toward individuals of the same sex’ as his *In Memoriam* is deemed to ‘have enshrined his affection for his early friend, Arthur Hallam, and developed a picture of the universe on the basis of that affection’ (*Ibid.*, 339).

²¹¹ *viz.* ‘Now a most terrible and unexpected thing happens. Into the quiet pages of our cadenza bursts a nightmare harpy, Miss Dublin, a hell-cat. In she lands singing Have-lock Ellis in a deep voice, itching manifestly to work that which is not seemly’ (*Dream*, 179).

²¹² This interest is attested, curiously enough, by the history of French literature that Beckett would have been obliged to read as an undergraduate at TCD: ‘Rousseau produced a revolution in the outlook of Europe, comparable only, as Mr. Havelock Ellis has said, to that produced in the Roman world by Christianity’ (Thomas B. Rudmose-Brown, *A Short History of French Literature*, 110).

²¹³ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion. Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged*, 341 – It is worth remarking in this regard that the conclusion also includes reference, not only to Whitman, as has been noted, but also to Tennyson (*Ibid.*) and to Gide’s *L’Immoraliste* (*Ibid.*, 341).

²¹⁴ Another possible source for Lucien’s name is Lucien Roubaud, a young student at the ENS who remembered spending time with Beckett during his time there (*Ibid.*, 95). John Pilling, certainly, has suggested Beckett derived his use of the name ‘Lucien’ from Roubaud (*viz.* John Pilling, ‘TWO’, in *JoBS* [Vol. 12, No. 1-2 – Spring, 2003], 57).

Taken in isolation, references to authors associated with homosexuality by no means necessarily need to be read in terms of sexuality. The reference to Gide in Beckett's monograph on Proust, for example, is not at all sexualised.²¹⁵ As he appears in 'Le Concentrisme', on the other hand – where we are told that 'Gide se crucifie à un angle de 69 degrés parce qu'il a perdu la concordance du chasseur'²¹⁶ –, the invitation to read the allusion to Gide in terms of his sexual proclivities seems clear enough.²¹⁷ In the case of Whitman and Tennyson specifically, proof that these authors need not be read in sexualised terms is to be found in *Dream* itself, since other references to them are to be found elsewhere in Beckett's novel, neither of which is primarily a matter of sexuality.²¹⁸ In much the same manner as the mention of Gide in 'Le Concentrisme' is sexualised by the angle at which he is said to crucify himself, however, the general tone and focus of Lucien's letter inexorably draws the allusions to Whitman and Tennyson that are to be found there into a sexualised frame of reference. For, in the particular context of Lucien's letter, these subtly sexualised references to Tennyson and Whitman do not occur in isolation: On the contrary, they occur together and in the very particular context of a letter composed by a homosexual character that recounts a homosexual act. They occur, moreover, alongside reference to yet another homosexual writer – Marcel Proust. In Proust's case, however, he offers far more to this letter than his name or a passing allusion alone. Proust is the allusive cornerstone of Lucien's letter and it is the use that his letter makes of Proust that most clearly invites us to read the other allusions to be found therein in sexualised terms since the manner in which Proust is presented leaves the reader in no doubt that the letter is fundamentally anchored in its concern with (homo)sexuality.

Initially, perhaps, it would appear as if Lucien's letter accords preeminent importance to style, rather than sexuality. This pre-eminence may be inferred from the letter's opening, which immediately presents us with an allusion to what Proust

²¹⁵ viz. 'At this point, and with a heavy heart and for the satisfaction or disgruntlement of Gideans...I am inspired to concede a brief parenthesis to all the analogivorous, who are capable of interpreting the "Live dangerously," that victorious hiccough in vacuo, as the national anthem of the true ego exiled in habit. The Gideans advocate a habit of living – and look for an epithet' (Beckett, *Proust*, 8-9).

²¹⁶ LC, 3

²¹⁷ Such a reading would be all the more likely given that, as previously noted, the novel that most explicitly presents us with a Gidean vision of travel as potentially self-altering – that is, *L'Immoraliste* – is also a novel that deals explicitly with Gide's particular conception of homosexual desire.

²¹⁸ The body of 'The Poet', for example, is presumed to exist '[b]eneath the Wally Whitmaneen of his Donegal Tweeds' (*Dream*, 203), and the reference here seems intended to do no more than put the reader in mind of Whitman in a suit and hat, as represented in innumerable photos. Similarly, the precise colouration of Tennyson's affection for Arthur Hallam is of no consequence to the citation from 'The Poet's Mind' that is to be found later in Beckett's novel (viz. *Ibid.*, 87).

has to say on the subject: ‘Ce qu’on dit du style, et je veux dire, à coup sûr, ce que ce cochon de Marcel en dit, me plaît, je crois, si j’ose accepter, en ce moment, les hauts-de-petit-cœur-de-neige’.²¹⁹ Undoubtedly, style is important here. (Style, indeed, is important throughout *Dream*, not least when Belacqua reflects on the possible relations between style and a particular kind of French.²²⁰) The precise way in which Proust’s comments on style are introduced, however, ensures that sex is kept to the forefront thanks to the reference to ‘ce cochon de Marcel’.

To speak of Proust as ‘ce cochon de Marcel’ is, on one level, a relatively direct allusion to Maupassant’s short-story ‘Ce cochon de Morin’, which concerns the tragic consequences of the titular Morin’s unwelcome advances on a young woman.²²¹ The importance of the appellation is not limited to this straightforward allusion, though: The use of the term ‘cochon’ equally accords an explicitly sexualised edge to the ‘Marcel’ to whom Lucien is referring – be it the author of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the narrator of the text, or both²²² – since, when used adjectivally, the term *cochon* is synonymous with terms such as *grivois*, *paillard*, and may be translated as ‘dirty’, in the sense of ‘lecherous’.²²³ By describing ‘Marcel’ as ‘ce cochon de Marcel’, therefore, the letter serves to call to mind those elements of the *Recherche* that are themselves memorably *cochon*. For Proust’s novel is not merely composed of delicate disquisitions on style – such as those that are directly alluded to in this letter and which are to be found in the novel’s final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé* –, but also of decidedly more erotic elements. Reminded of this aspect of the text by the letter’s opening reference to Marcel as ‘cochon’, we are able to recognise that it is the erotically-charged strain of Proust’s writing, rather than its more genteel focus on

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 – Proust’s comments on style to which are here alluded would appear to be those, made towards the conclusion of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the final volume of *La Recherche*, and underlined by Beckett in his own copy: ‘Ressaisir notre vie ; et aussi la vie des autres ; car le style pour l’écrivain aussi bien que pour le peintre est une question non de technique, mais de vision’ (Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu : Le Temps retrouvé* ** [Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle revue française, 1929], 48) – Beckett’s personal edition of Proust’s novel is available via the ‘Beckett Digital Library’ <<http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/>> [accessed: 16th November, 2017].

²²⁰ *Dream*, 47-48 – For discussion of this passage, see Part I, Chapter 4.

²²¹ Guy de Maupassant, ‘Ce cochon de Morin’, in *Contes de la bécasse* (Paris: Rouveyre et Blond, 1894 [1883])

²²² Though the narrator of the *Recherche* is largely nameless, there is one notable instance in *La Prisonnière* where, in a letter written to him by Albertine, he is referred to as ‘chéri et cher Marcel’ (Marcel Proust, Pierre-Edmond Robert [ed.], *La Prisonnière* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 1989 (2006)], 147).

²²³ By way of demonstrating the force of this term, it may be recalled that Maupassant’s earlier-mentioned short-story concerns the mental anguish experienced by Morin as his attempt to kiss an unwilling young woman leads to his being spoken of invariably as ‘ce cochon de Morin’: ‘On ne l’appelait plus dans toute la contrée que “ce cochon de Morin”, et cette épithète le traversait comme un coup d’épée chaque fois qu’il l’entendait’ (Maupassant, ‘Ce cochon de Morin’, in *Contes de la bécasse*, 37).

style, that most profoundly informs Lucien's letter. There are, in fact, clear parallels between this letter and one of the most sexually-explicit scenes in the *Recherche*. The scene to which I refer, and which is also to be found in *Le Temps retrouvé*, is that during which the narrator is party to a scene of explicit homosexual desire. In this scene, the narrator first overhears (through a partition) and then observes (through an *œil-de-bœuf*) as a rent-boy named Maurice flagellates the Baron de Charlus in a homosexual brothel.²²⁴ In Lucien's letter too, we observe at a remove a scene in which one man (Liebert) receives a sex-act (possibly frottage) at the hand(s) of another (Lucien).²²⁵ Even the seeming point of divergence between these scenes – that is, Liebert's authoritative tone during the act ('[G]ratte, je te l'ordonne!'²²⁶) and Charlus's more submissive demeanour ('Je vous en supplie...Ayez pitié'²²⁷) – is merely another form of parallelism, since Proust's text makes clear, shortly after the act is observed, that the Baron himself is the owner of the brothel in question and that Maurice is acting at his behest. In fact, in a manner wholly in keeping with the style Beckett develops in *Dream* – and would go on to deploy throughout his career –, this moment of sexual transgression in Proust's text morphs seamlessly into comedy when, following the scene of bloody sadomasochism, we learn that, 'acting' was indeed the operative word and that Charlus was rather disappointed with the performance: 'Je ne voulais pas parler devant ce petit [= Maurice], qui est très gentil et fait de son mieux. Mais je ne le trouve pas assez brutal'.²²⁸

The close ties between these two scenes make quite evident the key role played by homosexuality in this letter. Even for those who do not have Proust's novel in mind, however, the imbrication of questions of literary style and homosexuality, and the overriding importance that is accorded to the latter, is developed in such a way as to be unmistakable as the letter progresses. The ostensible subject of Lucien's letter – that is, Belacqua's thoughts on Proust's vision of style –, for example, has scarcely been evoked before it is abruptly interrupted by a sexually explicit exchange between Lucien and Liebert. Lucien, in fact, only manages to read out one sentence from those comments on Proust and style that Belacqua has made in an earlier letter before a bored Liebert cuts him short – 'tunnel!'²²⁹ – and brings matters back to (homo)sexual desire, asking Lucien to break off his reading and to instead describe Belacqua:

²²⁴ Marcel Proust, Pierre-Edmond Robert, *et al.* (eds), *Le Temps retrouvé* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2005 [1990]), 122

²²⁵ *Dream*, 20

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, 122

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124

²²⁹ *Dream*, 20 – The term is here being used in the sense of a protracted monologue which, by extension, describes an uninteresting passage in a play or other show.

“Il est si beau, ton ami, si franchement casse-poitrinaire, que je suis prêt à l’aimer. Est-il maigre et potelé là où il faut ? Vulgaire ? Lippu ? Ah ! vulgaire lippue chaude chair ! Gratte-moi” vociféra-t-il, en nage pour toi, “ardente cantharide, gratte, je te l’ordonne !” Je gratte, je caresse, je me dis : ce jugement est par trop indigne de cet esprit, vu que P. ne s’arrache à nul moment de l’axe glorieux de son réel. Il y reste enfoncé, il tord les bras, il se démène, il souffre d’être si platement compromis, il n’exécute nul looping, il s’est engagé trop profondément dans le marais, il atteint du bout de son orteil au nœud de son univers.²³⁰

This passage is worth quoting in full because it clearly demonstrates how the structure of the letter directly accomplishes what the allusion to the scene detailing Charlus’s visit to the brothel accomplishes indirectly: That is, it confirms and reinforces the letter’s fundamental imbrication of (Proustian) style and (homosexual) sex. For, though Lucien may continue to reflect on the question of Proustian style – and contest Belacqua’s appreciation of the issue – he does so while engaged in performing a sex-act on Liebert.²³¹ By presenting the matter of style in such a way as to be inextricable from sex, Beckett makes abundantly clear that Lucien’s letter is rooted in sexual desire. That this is the case is, however, still further reinforced when, following the aforementioned sex-act, it is style, rather than sex, that is set to one side. The conclusion of the letter, indeed, once again makes explicit this primary concern with sexuality as Lucien directly propositions Belacqua, seemingly offering to perform on him the same act he has recounted performing on Liebert,²³² before signing off by addressing him as ‘gros couillon’, in a manner that, much like the employment of the term ‘cochon’, ensures that sex is as present at this letter’s close as it was at its opening.²³³ More particularly still, it ensures that this letter’s concern with a specifically male form of sexuality, which we have seen to be present at all levels, is carried through until its very final line.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Although this sexual sense of the verb ‘gratter’ is not recorded in those dictionaries to which Beckett would have had access, it is entirely possible that he would have encountered it in his reading, or in conversation. Certainly, such a use does exist, and is attested – albeit with reference to female masturbation – in a number of texts (*viz.* ‘Gratter’, in *L’argot, avec Bob, l’autre trésor de la langue* <<http://www.languefrancaise.net/Bob/27203>> [accessed: 20th November, 2017]).

²³² *viz.* ‘Je tendrai les doigts, comme pour frôler une surface peinte, et en t’effleurant comme ce papillon de mai que chante qui tu sais je saurai, n’en doute pas, tout ce qui a dû échapper à ses [= the Smeraldina’s] plus suaves et juteuses embrasses’ (*Dream*, 22) – The person who spoke of the ‘papillon de mai’ is, of course, Arthur Rimbaud (*viz.* Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Le Bateau ivre’, in Louis Foresiter [ed.], *Poésies, Une saison en enfer, Illuminations* [Paris: Gallimard, Poésie/Gallimard, 2006], 125), whose importance to Beckett is well-known but whose importance to this particular letter may perhaps be interpreted just as profitably in (homo)sexual terms.

²³³ *Dream*, 22

In tracing the myriad ways in which this letter reinforces its concern with homosexuality we also come to recognise the properly literary complexity of this letter: Had Beckett been concerned merely with producing something apt to *épater les bourgeois* by provoking a modicum of outrage, or titillation, in his implied 1930s reader, it would have been more than sufficient for him to do no more than set before that reader a scene such as the one between Liebert and Lucien. By reinforcing the letter's focus on homosexuality through the use of sharply connoted terms, of allusions to particular authors and to particular works, Lucien's letter – much like 'Le Concentrisme' before it – confirms that Beckett's adoption of French during the early 1930s in no way diminished his ability to compose works of a complexity commensurate with the texts that he was then producing in English.

By the same token, if composing a letter in French for inclusion in *Dream* in no way prevented Beckett from deploying the same kind of style that is to be found in the main English-language body of that novel, the use of French in no way prevented him from fully integrating Lucien's letter into the broader structure of his text. For it must be recalled that Lucien's letter is not a short-story; it is, rather, one of two love letters that are to be found in Beckett's first novel – the other being that addressed to Belacqua by the Smeraldina.²³⁴ That this is the case is not co-incidental. *Dream's* narrator may express the hope that '[t]he only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary one', but the novel itself is constructed in a much more methodical manner than the adjective 'involuntary' would suggest.²³⁵ In the case of Lucien's letter, its place in the broader construction of *Dream* is best understood by comparing it with the Smeraldina's letter since they are clearly intended to function as a pair. Each, in fact, offers a perfect counterpoint to the other: Where Lucien's letter is fundamentally a matter of homosexual sex, the Smeraldina's is anchored in her heterosexual, and avowedly physical, desire for Belacqua.²³⁶ Where Lucien's wilfully abstruse French alludes – albeit in terms plain enough for those with eyes to read – to the acts he would like to perform on Belacqua were he given the opportunity, the Smeraldina gives equally clear voice to her desire for Belacqua in an English she has not yet fully mastered.²³⁷ Finally, where the Smeraldina's letter, in line with its focus on physically-realised heterosexual desire, includes a number of babies and births,²³⁸

²³⁴ For the Smeraldina's letter as it appears in *Dream*, see *Ibid.*, 55-61.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132 – This adjective is a nod to the 'involuntary memory' of Proust.

²³⁶ *viz.* 'Oh! Bel I love you terrible, I want you terrible, I want your soft white body naked!' (*Ibid.*, 55)

²³⁷ The Smeraldina's lack of fluency in English is demonstrated throughout her letter, and in a variety of ways, as attested by a sentence like the following: 'I met a new girl, very beautiful, pitch black hairs and very pale, she onely talks Egyptian [...]' (*Ibid.*, 56).

²³⁸ The Smeraldina's letter includes both a description of her dream in which Belacqua 'changed into a baby and didnt [*sic*] know what love was' (*Ibid.*, 58) and an expression

Lucien's letter, in keeping with its focus on non-reproductive sexuality, includes a metaphorical stillbirth, as the dawning of a new day is presented, not in terms of birth – as might be implied by the start of a new day –, but in terms of a bloody miscarriage.²³⁹

This complex counterpointing is made all the more interesting by the fact that it serves primarily to underscore a deeper commonality between the two letters and the two, seemingly irreconcilable, positions of homo- and heterosexual desire to which they give voice. For, whatever the gender of his admirer, Belacqua's own aversion to the romantic and sexual affection that he is offered remains unchanged. Belacqua's negative view of Lucien's advances is made clear by his appraisal of the letter in which they are proffered as 'unpleasant', 'dark', and 'disagreeable'.²⁴⁰ His negative appraisal of the Smeraldina's advances, meanwhile, has been made clear long before we read her letter – and even before we read Lucien's – by way of his assertion that 'she raped him', and thereby destroyed a relationship Belacqua had hoped to keep 'pewer and above-bawd'.²⁴¹

These two letters, in other words, although they seem to constitute opposing poles of sexual desire, actually serve to clarify that there is no fundamental difference between Lucien and the Smeraldina, nor between Belacqua's attitude towards them: Neither of these characters is truly wanted, nor either truly loved. The broader narrative function of the Smeraldina and Lucien's letters may thus be understood as a pincer movement on sexuality. By presenting opposite poles of sexual desire, these letters reveal that, regardless of the object in question, sexuality itself is something that – save for such trips to the brothel and as much masturbation as his libido might require²⁴² – Belacqua would simply prefer to avoid; renouncing corporeal carnality entirely in favour of the spiritual, disembodied, and unrequited form of desire in which the Alba's disinterest allows him to partake.²⁴³

of her gratitude for the fact of Belacqua's birth: 'I ofen [*sic*] wonder who I am to thank that you are born and that we met, I sopose [*sic*] I beter [*sic*] not start trying to find out whose fault it is that you are [*sic*] born' (*Ibid.*).

²³⁹ *viz.* 'Du matin le tiroir s'entrouvre, crache le bébé, Polichinelle, sanguinolent à en mourir' (*Ibid.*, 20) – As noted in Part I, Chapter 3, Beckett is here playing with the expression 'Avoir un polichinelle dans le tiroir', meaning 'to be pregnant.'

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19, 22

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 38-43

²⁴³ The physical unavailability of the Alba is powerfully underlined in *Dream*: We are informed, for example, that Belacqua 'shrink[s] away from contact with the frail dust of her [= the Alba's] body' (*Ibid.*, 193), and here the use of the adjective 'frail' clearly serves to extend even further the distance, not merely from the Alba's body, but from its 'dust'. Similarly, while Belacqua, as has been noted, is 'raped' by the Smeraldina and explicitly propositioned by Lucien, the distance that he preserves from the Alba, and that he intends to continue to preserve from her, is made clear by his avowal that she 'remained for him a climate that did not comfort and a dream that did not

If so much time has been spent developing the importance of (homo)sexuality to Lucien's letter, and the importance of this letter to the broader scheme of Beckett's novel, it is because, as should now be clear to the reader, this importance is fundamental to how we interpret this letter and its place in *Dream*. By extension, this same desire is fundamental to the poem that is to be found nested within this letter: 'C'n'est au Pélican' is, quite literally, surrounded on all sides by homosexual desire.

The emergence of the poem within the letter follows shortly after the sex-act between Liebert and Lucien, and the close of the poem is immediately followed by the image of Lucien as he '[se] penche, dominando l'orgasmo comme un pilote, par la fenêtre pour halener seulement un peu le placenta de l'aurore [sic]'.²⁴⁴ More strikingly still, the poem itself is allied with a sexual act. The image that has just been quoted, for example, seems to make of the poem an act of masturbation, since it concludes with Lucien's attempt to control, or refrain from, orgasm. That such a connection is intended is made all the more likely by the fact that it is not the first time within Lucien's letter that we are presented with what seems to be a wilfully physical pun on Wordsworth's pronouncement that poetry is best understood as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.²⁴⁵ Prior to this poem, and immediately following the conclusion of the sex-act between Lucien and Liebert, for instance, we are informed that 'L[iebert] se lève d'un bond, se déshabille, fait son poème, fuit de tous les côtés'.²⁴⁶ The sense of this sentence is notably obscure: While we can be sure that Liebert leaps up and proceeds to undress, the indication that he 'fait son poème [et] fuit de tous les côtés' is opaque. Certainly, to 'faire son poème' could mean to

serve...that he did not propose to Blake her, did not propose to Hieronymus Bosch her' (*Ibid.*). Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, where the unwanted affections of the Smeraldina and Lucien both intrude themselves upon Beckett in the form of those letters that have been examined here, Belacqua receives no letter from the Alba.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 – The image of Lucien as pilot, incidentally, serves to underscore, and revive, the earlier use of the term 'loopings' (*Ibid.*, 20), a term used frequently by Proust in the *Recherche*. The term is to be found, for example, in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (Marcel Proust, Thierry Laget and Brian G. Rogers [eds] *Le Côté de Guermantes* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2006], 388) and *Albertine disparue* (Marcel Proust, Anne Chevalier [ed.], *Albertine disparue* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique, 2006], 228); in each of these instances, as in Lucien's letter, 'loopings' appears alongside the verb *exécuter*.

²⁴⁵ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1850)', in W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (eds), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Vol I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 146

²⁴⁶ *Dream*, 20 – It is the indication that Liebert only now 'se déshabille' that leads one to suppose that the sex-act described in the previous chapter was indirect in nature.

‘make or compose his poem’, but no poem by Liebert is offered in the letter.²⁴⁷

Similarly, to say something ‘fuit de tous les côtés’ seems out of place here as it implies something that spills everywhere or leaks profusely, whether literally or metaphorically. Taken together then, the image might well be one of Liebert bringing himself to orgasm following his encounter with Lucien. Such an image would agree with, and thus prepare the ground for, the sexualised terms that follow ‘C’n’est au Pélican’. The essential difference between these poems is that, following the creation of the poem to which Lucien is party (‘au fond des yeux clos le poème se fait’²⁴⁸), Lucien consciously refrains from orgasm, thereby ensuring that his overflowings, as it were, are exclusively poetic.

If this sexualised interpretation of these two passages cannot, to the best of my knowledge, be confirmed with reference to argotic terminology, it has the obvious merit of clearly aligning with the focus on sexuality that, as has been demonstrated, clearly animates Lucien’s letter. It is in this designedly sexualised context that Beckett chose to place, and to set before his readers, ‘C’n’est au Pélican’, it is thus surely with reference to this context that the poem must be interpreted.

Before entering into such interpretation and examining how this poem interacts with the narrative environment in which it occurs, it should be acknowledged that two other versions of this poem exist. One of them, with minor variations, is to be found amongst A.J. Leventhal’s papers, now held at the University of Austin, Texas, and appears to reflect Beckett’s, finally abortive, attempt to cobble together enough poems to publish a collection that would have been entitled *POEMS*.²⁴⁹ The second alternate version, meanwhile, once again with minor variations, is to be found in a letter written by Beckett to George Reavey, where it seems to have been offered in response to Reavey’s request for a text from Beckett that might be published in a review that he was then considering establishing but which, finally, never came to

²⁴⁷ That is assuming that the poem recounted by Lucien – that is, ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ – is not of Liebert’s devising. That this is the case seems to be implied by the subsequent indication that ‘le poème se fait’ (*Ibid.*, 21). Were the poem in question Liebert’s, one might expect the poem to be once again described as ‘his’ or, perhaps, for the verb ‘refaire’ – or something similar – to be employed. The use of ‘se faire’, and the lack of a possessive adjective, however, seems to imply that ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ is not Liebert’s poem.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* – This representation of the poem as coming into being behind closed eyes accords with a motif that was particularly dear to Beckett at this point in his career. For more on this, see below.

²⁴⁹ For details of this collection, see CP, 299-300 – In their edition, Pilling and Lawlor elected to use the text of ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ as it appears in Leventhal’s papers as their base text. For the variations between this version and the other surviving versions, including that of *Dream*, see CP, 315.

be.²⁵⁰ While the existence of these versions is worthy of note – not least owing to the variations between them, and the degree to which, as will be seen, some of these variations can assist our interpretation of the poem – the fundamental anchoring of this poem in *Dream* is unaffected by these subsequent iterations since, in each case, the threatened appearance of this poem outside its native narrative context – ‘threatened’, because neither version was published in Beckett’s lifetime – may be explained as having been no more than a result of contingent factors.

In the case of the version that now survives among Leventhal’s papers, its existence owes to the fact that Beckett was eager to gather together enough poems to justify their appearing together as a published collection. (To do this, Beckett toyed not only with including ‘C’n’est au Pélican’, but also almost every poem he had written up to that point, including ‘Tristesse Janale’.) That Beckett’s inclusion of a poem amongst those of the projected collection *POEMS* is no indication of Beckett’s having perceived it to have had any intrinsic merit was, indeed, made clear by Beckett himself when, in abandoning the idea of this collection entirely, he finally acknowledged to Leventhal: ‘My poems are worthless’.²⁵¹ The version of ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ that Beckett offered to Reavey, meanwhile – with the opening line retooled as ‘Ce n’est pas au pélican’ –, would appear to exist solely because Beckett had been asked to provide something for free, and that it was one of the poems that he had to hand but which had not already appeared as part of *Echo’s Bones*.²⁵² Unlike the versions of this poem that Beckett sent to A.J. Leventhal and George Reavey, the presence of ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ in Lucien’s letter is not simply an effect of contingent circumstances. On the contrary, the inclusion of the poem owes itself directly to Beckett’s broader design for his first novel. The poem, in other words, was intended to be read within the context of this letter. Or, perhaps it would be truer to say that it was intended to be read *against* this letter, since what this poem most clearly gains from its situation within Lucien’s letter is a kind of thematic foil against which its own concerns become all the more apparent.

As has been noted, Lucien’s letter is fundamentally rooted in sexuality; it is saturated by homosexual desire, and strewn with references to authors whose persons or writings are commonly aligned with such desire. As has been seen, moreover, Lucien’s letter directly aligns poetry with the sexual – indeed, the

²⁵⁰ *LSB I*, 296 (SB to George Reavey [9th January, 1936])

²⁵¹ SB to A.J. Leventhal (28th July, 1934) *qtd* in *CP*, 299

²⁵² In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett made clear Reavey’s request for material came without the promise of corresponding financial reward: ‘A card from Reavey, decided to launch *European Quarterly* . . . [sic] What would I like to give him for nothing?’ (*LSB I*, 297 – SB to TMG [9th January, 1936]).

ejaculatory – act. This being so is all the more striking to find that ‘C’n’est au Pélican’ is so far removed from the sexual explicitness of the rest of Lucien’s letter. Certainly, it is an explicit work. But it is explicit in its use of religious imagery:

C’n’est au Pélican
pas si pitoyable
ni à l’Égyptienne
pas si pure
mais à ma Lucie
opticienne oui et peaussière aussi
qui n’m’a pas guéri
mais qui aurait pu
et à Jude
dont j’ai adoré [*sic*] la dépouille
qu’j’adresse la cause désespérée
qui a l’air d’être la mienne.²⁵³

All of the figures who appear in this poem – the ‘Pélican’, the ‘Égyptienne’, ‘Lucie’ and ‘Jude’ – are, as will be seen, religiously connoted. In the case of some of these figures, admittedly, their religious origin is not immediately apparent but all of them may ultimately be demonstrated to derive from the Bible, from Christian lore, or from Christian iconography.

As the poem appears in *Dream*, the most unambiguously religious of the figures is surely ‘Jude’, whose identity as Jude the Apostle, the Patron Saint of Lost Causes, is made unmistakable by the association between him and ‘la cause désespérée / qui a l’air d’être la mienne’.²⁵⁴ Lucie, for her part, is slightly more ambiguous, but the description of her as an ‘opticienne’ allows us to say with relative certainty that the figure in question is Saint Lucy of Syracuse, the Patron Saint of the Blind and of Eye Disorders, amongst other things.²⁵⁵

If scholarship is relatively certain of the essentially religious significance of these two figures – it is a strong indication of this certainty that both ‘Jude’ and ‘Lucie’ are glossed solely with reference to their saintly namesakes by Lawlor and Pilling in *CP*²⁵⁶ –, the situation is not quite so clear with regard to the ‘Égyptienne’ and the ‘Pélican.’ The latter, for example, has been identified by Lawlor and Pilling with the so-called ‘Allégorie du Pélican’²⁵⁷, that is to say the metaphorical pelican to be

²⁵³ *Dream*, 21

²⁵⁴ In French, Jude is indeed known as the *Patron des causes désespérées*, making the association between Saint Jude and the figure in the poem all the more explicit.

²⁵⁵ Saint Lucy of Syracuse also provided Beckett with the name ‘Syracusa’, which he applied to the character in *Dream* based on Joyce’s daughter Lucia – For the many connections between the Syra-Cusa and Lucia Joyce, see *DTF*, 150-51.

²⁵⁶ *CP*, 315 – The figure of ‘Jude’ was not always glossed thus by Pilling; this fact is not without importance for how we interpret the figure of the ‘Pélican’, as will be seen shortly.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

found in Alfred de Musset's poem 'La Nuit de Mai' that symbolises the melancholic poet and typifies the Romantic conviction that 'les chants les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux'.²⁵⁸ Lawlor and Pilling's notes explain the 'Égyptienne', meanwhile, as a reference to 'Baudelaire's sphinx in "La Beauté"'.²⁵⁹ *Pace* Lawlor and Pilling, I believe that, in line with the model of 'Jude' and 'Lucie', both of these figures should be interpreted religiously, with the 'Égyptienne' being read as a reference to Saint Mary of Egypt and the 'Pélican' as an allusion to the Christian iconographic representation of Christ as pelican.²⁶⁰ Happily, it is not necessary in this instance to base these proposed readings entirely upon context, since there exists considerable internal evidence in support of seeing these two remaining figures as also having a religious origin.

Initially, a bald reference to an unspecified Egyptian woman might seem to leave her identity ideally open to individual interpretations as divergent as those proposed by Lawlor and Pilling – already noted –, by Ruby Cohn – who suggested the figure in question might be Cleopatra²⁶¹ – and by Ackerley and Gontarski in their *Companion to Samuel Beckett*, who suggested Beckett's 'Égyptienne' is the mythological Phoenix, whose origin was held by the Ancients to lie in Egypt.²⁶² The case of the 'Égyptienne' is not so open as it would appear, however. The first, and most obvious, piece of evidence provided by the *Dream* version of the poem is that we are dealing with a female referent. This alone allows us to dismiss the interpretations offered by both Lawlor and Pilling, and Ackerley and Gontarski.²⁶³ Closer examination of this poem allows us to refine our identification of the figure still further. So much so, in fact, that it is possible to say with certainty that the true identity of the 'Égyptienne' in question is Saint Mary of Egypt, known in French as

²⁵⁸ Alfred de Musset, 'La Nuit de Mai', in Partick Berthier (ed.), *Premières Poésies / Poésies nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, Poésie/Gallimard, 2006), 247 – This line itself does not actually belong to the 'Allégorie', forming instead part of the immediately preceding couplet: 'Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux / Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots' (*Ibid.*).

²⁵⁹ *CP*, 314-15

²⁶⁰ Although the 'Égyptienne' may not derive from 'La Beauté', Beckett does actually allude to this poem in the main body of Lucien's letter: Lucien's description of Liebert as 'beau...comme un rêve d'eau' (*Dream*, 20) reworks the opening line of Baudelaire's poem: 'Je suis belle, ô mortels ! comme un rêve de pierre' (Charles Baudelaire, 'La Beauté', in Claude Pichois (ed.), *Les Fleurs du Mal* [Paris: Gallimard, Poésie/Gallimard, 1999], 52).

²⁶¹ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 28

²⁶² *viz.* 'Ce n'est au Pélican', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*

²⁶³ In French, the terms for phoenix (*le phénix*) and sphinx (*le sphinx*) are masculine – a feminine form *sphinge/sphynge* does exist, but is very rare; Baudelaire's poem, certainly, employs the more usual, and masculine, form *sphinx* –, and Beckett would thus not have alluded to these mythological figures using a feminine form of the adjective.

‘Marie l’Égyptienne’ – something that Beckett himself would have known from his reading of Balzac’s *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, even if from nowhere else.²⁶⁴ (The Reavey version of the poem, meanwhile, largely dispenses even with the need for familiarity with the saint’s name in French, since it refers to her by her first name, ‘Marie’.²⁶⁵) In the poem as it appears in *Dream*, the true identity of the ‘Égyptienne’ is made clear by way of her, qualified, association with purity: Saints’ lore holds that, having lived a dissolute life as a prostitute in Alexandria, Saint Mary took it upon herself to travel to Palestine, doing so primarily out a desire to increase her number of sexual conquests, only to discover faith, and invoke the intercession of a decidedly more immaculate Mary, when she found herself prevented from entering a church in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on account of her impurity. Having found God, Saint Mary of Egypt subsequently abjured sexuality and committed herself to a life of purity as a hermit.²⁶⁶ It seems likely that it is this divide between her later saintly purity and her earlier debauchery that lies behind the poem’s reference to Marie l’Égyptienne as being ‘pas si pure’. (Another possibility worth noting is that, by referring to the ‘Égyptienne’ as ‘pas si pure’, this poem may signal that, though she shares – in English, as in French – a first name with another religiously-significant Mary, a very great deal separates the Egyptian prostitute-turned-hermit from the idealised purity of Mary, Mother of God, the immaculately-conceived participant in a Virgin Birth.)

Unlike the figure of the ‘Égyptienne’/‘Marie’ – in whose case an apparent lack of supporting evidence left her identity so uncertain that Lawlor and Pilling were led to variously identify her with either Baudelaire’s poetry, or Beckett’s biography²⁶⁷ – , accurate critical interpretation of the ‘Pélican’ has been hampered by the fact that there seems to exist a quite satisfactory amount of circumstantial evidence in favour of the popular interpretation of this pelican as an allusion to Musset’s ‘La Nuit de Mai’

²⁶⁴ Balzac’s short-story, which includes reference to a painting of Marie l’Égyptienne, is one of those included in Arthur Tilley’s edition of Balzac’s short fiction, *Five Short Stories*, which Beckett would have studied during his first year as an undergraduate student of French (*viz. DU Calendar for the year 1923–1924*, 109).

²⁶⁵ CP, 315

²⁶⁶ These details of Saint Mary of Egypt’s life are derived from the entry on ‘Mary of Egypt, Saint’ in Volume 9 of *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, for which see Charles G. Herbermann, *et al.* (eds), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church – Special Edition, under the auspices of The Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee* (New York, NY: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), 763-64.

²⁶⁷ While the ‘Égyptienne’ who appears in the *Dream* version of the poem is, as has been remarked, identified by Pilling and Lawlor as a reference to Baudelaire’s ‘La Beauté’, the reference to ‘Marie’ in the version of this poem addressed to Reavey is glossed as follows: ‘The allusion to Marie is unexplained, perhaps the “Miss Cordon” to whom Beckett pays homage at the end of the 9.1.36 letter [to Reavey, in which this version of the poem appears]’ (CP, 315).

and the so-called 'Allégorie du Pélican' that this poem contains. This is the interpretation offered by Ackerley and Gontarski – 'The image [of the pelican] is from de Musset's "La Nuit de Mai"'²⁶⁸ – and the same interpretation is found in *CP*. Lawlor and Pilling's presentation of this interpretation in *CP* is particularly worth considering as it cogently presents the supporting evidence that seems to confirm this interpretation's veracity:

The contrast between pity and purity derives from Alfred du Musset's 'Allégorie de [sic] Pélican' ('Musset's prayer' in a letter to Mary Manning Howe of 22.5.37 [not in *LSB1*]), which Beckett drew on to describe 'At last I find...' as a 'Night of May hiccupsob' (*Dream*, 70).²⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, the evidence offered here is persuasive. There can certainly be no doubt that Beckett was familiar with Musset's work, and with the 'Nuit de Mai' in particular. The poem is, for example, explicitly alluded to in *Dream*, where – as noted by Lawlor and Pilling²⁷⁰ – the poem 'At last I find' is described as a 'Night of May hiccupsob'.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that, when interpreting Beckett's writings and in glossing possible allusions that are to be found therein, demonstrable familiarity with the literary work that Beckett is proposed to be alluding to is by no means the only criterion that should be considered. Beckett may, for instance, be alluding to a work he is not otherwise known to have read, or to a work with which he was only superficially familiar. Equally, the allusion may be shown to have more than one probable source. In seeking to clarify the allusive patternings of Beckett's writings, then, and just as 'C'n'est au Pélican' must be read in the context of the letter – and, more broadly, the novel – in which it appears, so too must its titular pelican be interpreted in the context of the lines in which he appears and, more broadly, in the context of the poem as a whole. Critical appraisals of the figure of 'Jude', as he appears in this poem, actually provide a very helpful model for how the 'le Pélican' might be best interpreted.

As previously recalled, *CP* glosses this poem's reference to Jude as an unambiguous allusion to Saint Jude. Such a gloss represents a departure from that previously offered by John Pilling as part of the notes and glosses that he provided for *Dream* in a special issue of the *JoBS*. Amongst those notes we read that "'Jude" and his "cause désespérée" may be a passing allusion to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, though Ackerley...reminds us that Jude (as Hardy of course knew) is the patron saint of

²⁶⁸ viz. 'Ce n'est au Pélican', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*

²⁶⁹ *CP*, 314 – Square brackets in original.

²⁷⁰ viz. *Ibid.*, 314

²⁷¹ *Dream*, 70

lost causes'.²⁷² Pilling's phrasing here makes clear that, at this point, he viewed the reference to 'Jude' as being, most probably, an allusion to Hardy's novel. On the surface, such an allusion would be entirely possible. We know Beckett to have been familiar with Hardy's writing, and the short-story 'Yellow' includes a direct allusion to Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.²⁷³ Nevertheless, the gloss found in *CP* clearly demonstrates that Pilling eventually came to dismiss the possibility that this 'Jude' constituted even a passing allusion to Hardy's character and, in moving away from his earlier literary interpretation of this reference to 'Jude', Pilling was clearly correct: The coupling of 'Jude' and a 'cause désespérée' clearly aligns the figure with the Patron Saint of Lost Causes. More broadly, the fact that 'Lucie' and the 'Égyptienne' are themselves Saints strongly implies that 'Jude' too is of saintly persuasion. The context of this reference to 'Jude', in other words, inexorably leads us to dismiss the possibility of a literary allusion in favour of a religious one – even though, at first glance, both possibilities seem equally likely. In the same way, the context of this poem's reference to the 'Pélican' leads us, inexorably, to just the same dismissal of the literary in favour of the religious.

Just as the existence of a literary Jude and Beckett's familiarity with this literary iteration have not prevented critics from recognizing the essentially religious signification of this poem's 'Jude' as Saint Jude, so too the possible literary connotations of its 'Pélican' are less important than its status as 'a symbol for the atonement and the Redeemer [i.e. the figure of Christ]'.²⁷⁴ Beckett would certainly have been aware of this symbolism himself, not only as a result of his intimate familiarity with the Christian faith, but also thanks to his intimate familiarity with Dante's *Commedia*, which draws on this symbolic association between Christ and the figure of the pelican in *Paradiso*:

Questi è colui che giacque sopra 'l petto
del *nostro pellicano* ; e questi fue
di su la croce al grande officio eletto.²⁷⁵

²⁷² John Pilling, 'Two', in *A Companion to Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, in *JoBS* (Vol. 12, Nos 1-2 – Spring, 2003), 55 – The work by Ackerley to which Pilling here refers is his 'Samuel Beckett and the Bible: a guide', in *JoBS* (Vol. 9, No. 1 – Autumn, 1999).

²⁷³ viz. 'He [= Belacqua] had underlined, as quite a callow boy, a phrase in Hardy's *Tess*, won by dint of cogging in the Synod: *When grief ceases to be speculative, sleep sees her opportunity*' (Beckett, 'Yellow', in *MPTK*, 151 – Emphasis in original).

²⁷⁴ Charles G. Herbermann, et al., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church – Special Edition, under the auspices of The Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee: Volume 2* (New York, NY: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), 576 ('Birds [in Symbolism]')

²⁷⁵ Dante, *Paradiso*, in *op. cit.*, 807 (Canto XXV) – Emphasis mine.

Beckett is equally likely to have been aware that this symbolic association derived from the mistaken belief that the pelican would ‘wound itself in order to feed its young with its blood and to bring to life those who were dead’.²⁷⁶ (It is precisely this myth of the pelican as a bird that feeds its young with its own blood upon which Musset is drawing when he utilises the pelican as a figure for the poet.²⁷⁷) In the case of ‘C’n’est au Pélican’, moreover, the text of Beckett’s poem itself offers support to a religious interpretation. As was the case with *Jude*, the evidence for this religious reading is two-fold: Firstly, the religious character of the other figures alone strongly implies that the pelican should be read religiously. Secondly, and more importantly, the presentation of the ‘Pélican’ as ‘pas si pitoyable’ is itself a discrete, but unmistakable allusion to the iconographic use of the pelican. To say it is unmistakable, however, is not yet to say it is entirely straightforward: In short, the allusion may either be a relatively direct allusion to French heraldry, or a decidedly roundabout use of a heraldic term common to French and English, passing by way of Dante’s *Inferno*.

For the direct route to work, Beckett would need to have been aware of the vocabulary used in French heraldry to describe the representation of a bleeding pelican feeding its young with its own blood – the very same image that is used to represent the figure of Christ in religious iconography, and which is to be found in Dante via the allusion to ‘nostro pellicano’. Heraldically speaking, the drops of blood shed by the pelican are referred to in French as *pitié*. While such an explanation is tempting, it is hampered by the fact that the only work that refers to these drops of blood as *pitié* appears to be L.-A. Duhoux d’Argicourt’s *Alphabet et figures de tous les termes du blason*.²⁷⁸ This very particular use of the term ‘pitié’ is not recorded in any of the dictionaries to which Beckett would have had access, nor even in the most recent edition of the *Grand Robert de la langue française*. As such, reading Beckett’s use of ‘pitié’ as an allusion to this term would appear to be contingent on his having been familiar with Duhoux d’Argicourt’s text. Bearing this in mind, and curious though

²⁷⁶ Charles G. Herbermann, et al., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church – Special Edition, under the auspices of The Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee: Volume 2*, 576 (‘Birds [in Symbolism]’)

²⁷⁷ viz. ‘Pêcheur mélancolique, il [= the pelican] regarde les cieux. / Le sang coule à longs flots de sa poitrine ouverte / En vain il a des mers fouillé la profondeur / L’Océan était vide et la plage déserte / Pour toute nourriture il apporte [= to his brood] son cœur’ (Alfred de Musset, ‘La Nuit de Mai’, in *op. cit.*, 247)

²⁷⁸ viz. ‘Cet oiseau [= the pelican] se représente de profil, sur son aire, le vol étendu et se déchirant la poitrine avec le bec pour nourrir ses petits qui paraissent au nombre de trois ; les gouttes de sang qui coulent de sa poitrine se nomment *pitié*, et si l’émail de ces gouttes est particulier, on doit l’énoncer en blasonnant.’ – This extract is taken from ‘Au Blason des Armoiries’ <<http://www.blason-armoires.org/heraldique/p/pelican.html>> [accessed: 29th November, 2017].

it may appear, the roundabout route seems to be the more likely explanation for how this pelican came to be 'pas si pitoyable'.

This route takes as its starting point the more common English-language term for the heraldic use of the figure of the bleeding pelican feeding its young. In heraldry, this figure of a bleeding pelican is referred to as a 'pelican in her piety' and the same term is also used in French, where the same heraldic figure of the bleeding pelican is referred to as being 'dans sa piété.' Obviously, the terms 'piety' and 'pity' are as distinct in modern English as they are in modern French (*piété*, *pitié*). This being so, the reference to the 'Pélican' as 'pitoyable' would not seem to evoke the figure of the bleeding figure 'dans sa piété.' In French, as in English, however, the divide between these terms was not always so clear.²⁷⁹ Even if Beckett was unaware of this common etymological origin behind the English and French terms, however, he was certainly aware that the terms are, to this very day, not distinguished in Italian, where *pietà* may be translated as piety/*piété* and pity/*pitié*.²⁸⁰ As such, it is entirely possible that Beckett was allowing himself a multilingual pun in describing his pelican as 'pitoyable' while intending an allusion to the heraldic figure 'in its piety'.²⁸¹ That such a multilingual pun is, indeed, what Beckett intended is strongly implied by the 'piteous pelican' who is to be found in 'Text 3', where it nests amongst countless allusions to Dante that, in turn, serve to remind us of the instance of *pietà* that plays a central role in Dante's *Inferno* and in 'Dante and the Lobster' alike.²⁸²

As previously acknowledged, the route by which the religious significance of the 'Pélican' may be brought to light is by no means direct. That this should be the case, however, is scarcely surprising in the context of a poem composed by the same author who composed the novel in which it appears. *Dream* is a profoundly abstruse text, one that frequently delights in placing strain on the exegetic capacity of its readers. What the 'Pélican' affords us, then, is a reading experience no different from that provided by any of the other complex allusions that are to be found in Beckett's first novel. Once again, in other words, we see that the use of French has occasioned no perceptible difference in the complexity, or the allusive potential, of Beckett's

²⁷⁹ This common origin is attested in modern French by the term *mont-de-piété*, where *piété* has the sense of *pitié*.

²⁸⁰ We can be sure that Beckett was aware of the polysemy of the Italian term since, as previously noted, this very inability to distinguish between 'pity' and 'piety' in Italian – as revealed by a scene in Dante's *Inferno* – plays an important narrative role in 'Dante and the Lobster' (*viz.* *MPTK*, 11-12).

²⁸¹ Indeed, it may be in partial acknowledgement of the divide that separates *piété* from *pitié* that Beckett describes his poetic pelican as 'pas si pitoyable', much as the reference to the 'Egyptienne' as 'pas si pure' may acknowledge her distance from the Virgin Mary.

²⁸² *CP*, 39 – For clarifications of this poem's numerous allusions to Dante, see the notes provided by Lawlor and Pilling (*Ibid.*, 316-19).

style. Complexity for the sake of itself too would not be out of keeping with the narrative, and stylistic strategies adopted by Beckett in his *Dream*. In the case of this poem, however, the religious character of these figures is not merely a matter of wilful complexity; it has a thematic function too. Having established the religious nature of these figures, we are now in a position to try and bring together what we have established about the content of this poem and the context in which it appears – that is, Lucien’s letter – the better to consider its thematic significance.

The significance of this quartet of religiously-inflected figures lies primarily in the fact that this poem is, in short, a prayer. It is a prayer addressed by the speaker neither to Christ, represented by the figure of the pelican, nor to Saint Mary of Egypt, herself an unexpected substitution for the more virginal Mary who is more regularly coupled with Christ, but rather to Saints Lucy of Syracuse and Jude. Clearly, such a prayer is every bit as out of place in the context of a homosexually-charged letter as Dante’s Beatrice would be in a brothel.²⁸³ Thus characterised, the poem would seem to be relatively simple, while its place in the letter, and the striking contradiction between it and the context in which it appears, becomes readily apparent. And yet, while placing a prayer full of references to Christian figures in such a sinful context surely appealed to Beckett, the actual meaning that we are to derive from the poem remains enigmatic.

There is, for example, no obvious indication why the speaker’s prayer should be addressed to Saint Lucy and, if the relevance of Saint Jude is made clear by the hopeless nature of the speaker’s cause, the precise character of this cause itself is left obscure.²⁸⁴ Obscure, too, is the identity of the speaker: As previously noted, there is a slight possibility that the poem is Liebert’s. There is, however, just as slight a possibility that Lucien is not composing but merely *recalling* a poem, whose author would be Belacqua and which might have been included in the letter from which Liebert previously prevented him from quoting. The connection between this poem and Belacqua only emerges much later in the novel, when ‘Lucy and Jude are kept going pretty well from dawn to dark’ as a result of Belacqua’s various illnesses and ailments.²⁸⁵ Although it may not appear until much later in the narrative, the

²⁸³ This is something that Belacqua categorically refuses to accept: ‘I admit Beatrice...and the brothel, Beatrice after the brothel or the brothel after Beatrice, but not Beatrice in the brothel, or rather, not Beatrice and me in bed in the brothel’ (*Dream*, 102).

²⁸⁴ It may be possible that the allusion to Saint Lucy, who is, as noted, Patron Saint of the Blind and of Eye Disorders, may be linked to Beckett’s own ideas about the connections between poetry and vision – For Beckett’s association of poetry and sight, see Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries 1936-1937*, 172-175.

²⁸⁵ *Dream*, 73

revelation that Saint Lucy of Syracuse and Saint Jude are Belacqua's preferred Patron Saints, to whom he turns when 'his bitch of a heart knocks hell out of his bosom' or when he seeks relief from 'his shingles and graphospasmus and weeping eczema and general condition', clearly invites us to hear this poem as having been composed by Belacqua.²⁸⁶

In truth, it seems probable that both the identity of the 'true' speaker of this poem and the precise meaning of the poem itself, is of lesser importance than the essential ambiguity of both. Isolating a particular speaker, or a particular meaning, would perhaps be comforting to the critic, but it would be out of step with the uncertainties that are an essential part of *Dream*, and its concern with gaps, interstices, and breakdown. The narrative does not seek to reassure, but to unsettle and confound. In this respect, the uncertainties that have been found in this poem, and the text of Lucien's letter more broadly may be seen as so many confirmations of the fact that has been recalled, repeated, and restated time and again throughout this first chapter. Recalled, repeated, and restated because it is of fundamental importance: Beckett's French-language writing during the pre-1937 period, belongs absolutely to the same class, answers to the same impulse, and is informed by the same style, as his English-language writing. To say otherwise, to imagine that Beckett's French-language writing of the period lies somehow beyond his English-language work, or is somehow confined and constrained by the simple fact of its being composed in French is patently untrue.

The evidence for the commonality between these two bodies of work has been clearly demonstrated in this first chapter. We have now seen that Beckett's earliest prose writing – of which *Dream* is the premature culmination, before the truly mature beginning of *Murphy* – derives most directly from the comic and allusive verve of 'Le Concentrisme'. We have also seen that the French and English writings are profoundly imbricated, never more clearly than in Lucien's letter, where French is used by Beckett, with all the richness and allusive complexity of his English, to further the thematic aims of that English-language novel. Close examination of this pre-1937 writing, in other words, has shown us that French was for Beckett, from his earliest career, a vehicle for literary creation and never – in any way, shape, or form – a

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* – In addition to the connections between this poem and Belacqua, it is also interesting to note the connection between the imbrication of religion and poetry that we find in 'C'n'est au Pélican' and Beckett's conviction in the essential commonality of poetry and prayer. This is a conviction which Beckett would only much later express in his own voice, when he wrote in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy that 'poems are prayers, of Dives and Lazarus one flesh' (*LSB I*, 274 – SB to TMG [8th September, 1935]). The example of the poetic prayer we find in *Dream* thus suggests Beckett held this opinion long before he expressed it to his friend.

barrier to excess, or a constraint to style. If this fact is not as widely recognised within Beckett Studies as it should be, this is perhaps understandable owing to the fact that these pre-1937 French-language works have been so little studied by criticism. The case of the writings composed after Beckett's 1937 move to Paris is rather different, and decidedly more perplexing. At least some of these works – more specifically, the poems of the collection *Poèmes 37-39* – have been examined by critics and such examination has generally found them to confirm that idea, which lies at the heart of LSH, according to which Beckett's use of French is inextricably tied to his embrace of a more refined, a more simplified, and a less allusive style. In the present chapter, we have seen that such a connection between the embrace of French and the rejection of stylistic complexity certainly did not exist prior to 1937. In the following chapter we will see that, contrary to what many critics have suggested, there is no evidence for the existence of such an essential connection between the use of French and stylistic attenuation after 1937 either. To see that, however, one needs to study Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s with fresh eyes, to examine it more attentively than has previously been attempted and, most importantly, to do so in a manner that refuses to be guided by the pre-suppositions of the LSH.

PART II: Beckett's Pre-Turn Writing in French

Chapter 2

1938-1939

In October 1937 Beckett made one of the defining decisions of his life when he left Dublin and moved to Paris.¹ Surprisingly, perhaps, this move did not immediately coincide with the beginning of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn, as surviving evidence suggests that he would not begin writing directly in French until Spring of 1938.² Nevertheless, this move of 1937 remains of key importance because it signalled a definitive physical break – even if not a definitive emotional break, as Beckett's subsequent visits to his mother and his subsequent literary production would amply attest³ – with the city, and the nation, of his birth. From October 1937 on, and excepting those periods of enforced absence during the Second World War, Paris would remain Beckett's primary residence until the end of his life.⁴ The move is not of merely biographic significance, however, as Beckett's decision to make Paris his home had important consequences for his writing. Not the least of these consequences was that this move appears to have coincided with Beckett's commitment to writing as a vocation and profession. That this was the case may be inferred from the fact that, although he would take numerous odd-jobs to make ends meet – primarily translation work –, Beckett would never again make even half-hearted attempts to find a steady form of permanent, academic employment, such as the lectureship in Italian at the University of Cape Town for which he had reluctantly applied in July 1937.⁵ More importantly still, it was only after Beckett's move to Paris that he began to use French as his primary means of literary self-expression.

¹ For the circumstances surrounding Beckett's move to Paris and a full description of the early years of his life there during the pre-War period, see *DTF*, 262-96

² For a fuller treatment of the surviving evidence for the pre-War linguistic turn, and an exploration of what may have motivated it, see Part III, Chapter 2.

³ In his biography, Knowlson notes how, by 1938 – only shortly after his move to Paris –, Beckett had already 'made the decision to return to Foxrock for a month every year, enabling him to see [his mother May Beckett] but still allowing him his own independence' (*DTF*, 295). As Knowlson reminds us, this was a promise that 'with the exception of the war years, [Beckett] kept...every year until [his mother] died' (*Ibid.*).

⁴ From 1953 on, Beckett would also spend time at his country-house in Ussy, a village where he and Dumesnil had been spending their summers since 1948, and he would often travel there to work. His primary residence, however, remained his apartment in Paris – For details of Beckett and Dumesnil's summer retreat in Ussy, see *Ibid.*, 367.

⁵ For details on this position, see *Ibid.*, 263

Before engaging with the texts that Beckett composed during this period, we would do well to reflect on what marks Beckett's use of French during this period out from his use of the language during the years prior to his move to Paris. It is only by doing so that we can properly appreciate the importance of Beckett's engagement with French in the post-1937 period, and of the works that he composed around this time.

As has already been seen, Beckett did not wait until his 1937 move to Paris to begin making serious creative use of French. Already, even as an Anglophone living in a majority Anglophone environment and writing texts in English for a primarily Anglophone readership, Beckett had demonstrated his willingness to compose original material in French – both poetry and prose – and even to fully integrate extended, and narratively significant, pieces of French into his English-language compositions. Nevertheless, while the works that Beckett composed in French prior to 1937 are important for our understanding of his engagement with French and of French's place in his early development as a literary writer, it remains the case that this pre-1937 engagement with French was concurrent with the use of English, which remained his primary language of literary expression. It is only after the 1937 move to Paris that we find Beckett engaging with French in a sustained and committed way *in lieu of* English. Following Beckett's move to Paris, in other words, French ceased to be merely a language that Beckett was prepared to draw upon alongside English, and became instead, for a certain period at least, his preferred vehicle for literary expression.⁶

The period in question seems to have begun in early 1938, with the composition of the first of those French-language poems that would eventually appear in *Poèmes 37-39* – the original title of this collection, 'Poèmes 38-39', more accurately reflects the composition dates of these poems; it was only changed to accommodate 'Dieppe'⁷ –, and to have come to an end in 1941, when Beckett began

⁶ The qualifying adjective 'literary' acknowledges that Beckett did publish translations and pieces of criticism in English during this period. In 1938, for example, he published a review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions*, which appeared in *transition* and was later republished as part of *Disjecta* (*viz. D*, 91-94). This same year, a paragraph on Greer Van Velde, which Beckett had written to accompany an exhibition of the artist's work at Peggy Guggenheim's London Gallery, appeared in *The London Bulletin* – that piece is also included in *Disjecta* (*viz. D*, 117) –, while Beckett's English translation of André Breton's piece on the artist Wolfgang Paalen appeared in the same publication in 1939 (*viz. John Pilling, A Beckett Chronology*, 83).

⁷ As noted in the Introduction, both 'Dieppe' and 'they come' / 'elles viennent' will be excluded from the close-readings that will be proposed in the present chapter as they were originally written in English and the French texts thus constitute translations rather than original compositions – For more details of the composition of 'Dieppe', see *CP*, 383-385; For a fuller presentation of evidence justifying the contention that 'Dieppe' was originally composed in English, see Part III, Chapter 2.

work on *Watt*, his first major literary composition in English since *Murphy*.⁸ During this period, Beckett's commitment to French revealed itself both through the translation into French of works first composed in English and the composition of original works in French. In terms of the translations that he prepared during this time, the most notable was the translation of the novel *Murphy*, which would eventually appear in print after the War. In addition to the translation of *Murphy*, we also know Beckett to have prepared a French-language translation of the story 'Love and Lethe', from *MPTK*. The fact that this latter translation has been lost raises the possibility that Beckett engaged in more extensive self-translation during this period than either subsequent publication history or the surviving archival record would suggest.⁹

While the translations that Beckett prepared from French during the 1930s have proved a fruitful area of enquiry – particularly for scholars interested in the origins of Beckett's bilingualism and his extensive engagement with self-translation in the post-War period –, the original compositions that he produced in French during this same period are perhaps of even greater importance.¹⁰ It is, for example, a striking feature of the period 1938-41 that, at the same time as French became Beckett's primary language of literary expression, his primary outlet for original creative expression appears to have been poetic since poems comprise the vast majority of the French-language material composed by Beckett during this period. Over the period 1938-41, Beckett is in fact known to have composed 12 original poems directly in French, of which 10 were published as part of *Poèmes 37-39*.¹¹ Indeed, if the 21 *Petit Sot* poems are included, this tally – already impressive when one considers that *Echo's Bones* contains only 13 poems – rises to 33, thereby surpassing the total number of Beckett's original English-language poetic compositions dating from the pre-1937 period, as his output during this time is

⁸ For details of *Watt's* tortuous composition, see C. J. Ackerley's preface to the Faber edition of *Watt* (viz. *Watt*, C. J. Ackerley [ed.] [London: Faber & Faber, 2009], vii-xi).

⁹ For details of the surviving evidence for this translation, see Part III, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ For discussions of Beckett's translations from French in the 1930s, see: Alan Warren Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro (1934)* (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 2000), [xi]-xl, *passim*; Thomas Hunkeler, 'Beckett face au surréalisme', in Michèle Touret, Gisèle Valency, Tom Cousineau, Yann Mével, and Sjef Houppermans (eds), *SBT/A 17: Présence de Samuel Beckett / Presence of Samuel Beckett: Colloque de Cerisy* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006), 35-52; Karine Germoni and Pascale Sardin, 'Scarcely Disfigured: Beckett's Surrealist Translations', *Modernism/Modernity* (Vol. 18, No. 4 – November, 2011), 739-753; Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine*, 27-73.

¹¹ This figure includes, alongside the original poems published as part of *Poèmes 37-39*, two unpublished poems that have more recently come to light, namely: 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', and 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'. Both of these poems will be discussed in more detail as part of the close readings below – For transcriptions of these poems, see Appendices I (b) and (c), respectively.

represented in *CP*.¹² To get a sense of the degree to which, during this period, poetry became for Beckett his preferred mode of literary expression, one need only set the impressive body of poetry that has just been described beside the single work of original, French-language prose that he composed during the same period: ‘Les Deux Besoins’. That sole work of original prose, moreover, has the distinction of being, not a literary work, nor even, properly speaking, a work of criticism, but something closer to a work of philosophy, in which Beckett sketches out a relationship between art, artist and two forms of need, namely: the ‘besoin d’avoir besoin’ and the ‘besoin dont on a besoin’.¹³ (To the exceedingly short list of the original, French-language texts that Beckett composed during this period and which were not poems, it may perhaps be possible to add the radio sketch that Beckett prepared for Paris-Mondial but, sadly, the currently available evidence does not allow us to determine the language of this composition with certainty.)

Though only spanning a period of some three years, then, this period of majority French-language composition was clearly a highly productive one for Beckett, and for readers familiar with the traditional view of Beckett – that is, as primarily a writer of dramatic and prose works who, prior to the linguistic turn of the post-War period, worked essentially through English – it is perhaps a rather unexpected one: The period 1938-41, in short, was a time during which Beckett’s literary output was overwhelmingly poetic, and resolutely Francophone.

If this period, as sketched out above, may be something of a surprise to readers unfamiliar with this period of Beckett’s life, it is surely evident that it should

¹² The authorship of the 21 Petit Sot poems is disputed: Although most Anglophone scholars – including the editors of Beckett’s *CP*, and James Knowlson – believe the poems to be by Beckett, a number of Beckett’s close friends – including Édith Fournier and Jérôme Lindon – believed them to be the work of Dumesnil. For this reason, the poems, originally intended to appear as part of *CP* in the form of an Appendix, were excluded from the published volume. These poems, along with the accompanying explanatory notes destined for inclusion in *CP*, are now available for consultation at the University of Reading (*viz.* BC MS5479 [Folder 2/2] – Page-proofs of Collected Poems with redacted materials on Petit Sot). Owing to the disputed authorship of these particular poems and the impossibility of confirming their provenance at the present time, the decision has been taken to exclude them from the current enquiry, the better to focus greater attention on those works that are unambiguously, and universally, recognised as having been written by Beckett – For further details on the Petit Sot poems, and the circumstances surrounding their exclusion from *CP*, see John Pilling, “‘Dead before morning’: How Beckett’s “Petit Sot” Never Got Properly Born’, in *JoBS* (Vol. 24, No. 2 – 2015), 198-209.

¹³ ‘Les Deux Besoins’, in *D*, 56 – The fullest discussion of ‘Les Deux Besoins’ currently available is that provided by Gesa Schubert in her study *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts* (*viz. op. cit.*, 128-44); For a briefer discussion of the style of this text as it relates to Beckett’s review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions*, and his essay on the painting of the Van Veldes, see Part III, Chapter 3.

be of interest to Beckett Studies as a whole, and particularly for critics of Beckett's writing concerned with his use of French. This, after all, was a time during which Beckett, if not abandoned English entirely, at least turned himself resolutely towards the use of French as his primary vehicle for original literary composition. It is, moreover, Beckett who invites us to view this period in such terms as he himself appears to have been aware of a fundamental change in the language in which his writing was to be produced. Evidence for this awareness is to be found in a letter of April 1938 in which Beckett informed Thomas MacGreevy that, since his previous letter, his only literary composition had been 'a short poem in French' and that he had 'the feeling that any poems there may happen to be in the future will be in French'.¹⁴ For a writer whose poetic output had, up to that point, included only two poems in French – neither of them published at the time of that 1938 letter to MacGreevy from which has just been quoted – such certainty that his poetry would, from this point on, most likely be in French, is striking. This certainty appears all the more striking in light of the fact that the coming years would prove it to be justified: Even if Beckett's turn towards French as the primary language for his poetic compositions would only become publically apparent after the War, with the publication of 'Poèmes 38-39' in *Les Temps Modernes*, and even though Beckett would occasionally compose poems exclusively in English in the pre-War period – including 'Saint-Lô' and 'Antepepsis' –, it remains the case that from the late 1930s on the majority of his poetry would be written in French, and much of it would never be translated into English.¹⁵

To say that this period was a time of majority French-language composition is to say nothing new. Indeed, Part II opened with those remarks made by Knowlson in *DTF*, whereby Knowlson sought to correct the then-widespread belief that Beckett's engagement with French was an essentially post-War phenomenon by drawing his readers' attention to the extent of Beckett's engagement with French during the final years of the 1930s.¹⁶ While such correction was extremely welcome at the time, the major significance of this pre-War period of primarily French-language composition for our understanding of Beckett's writing remained unexplored by Knowlson in his biography. More importantly, even now, more than two decades after the appearance of *DTF*, the true significance of this period has still not been fully recognised by Beckett Studies: For this period was not simply marked by Beckett 'do[ing] rather

¹⁴ *LSB I*, 614 (SB to TMG [3rd April, 1938])

¹⁵ Certainly, amongst Beckett's poetic production of the post-War period, it is primarily in French that he would produce larger bodies of poetry such as the 'Six poèmes' or the 'mirlitonades'. All of these poems are now readily available, accompanied by extensive explanatory notes, as part of *CP* (*viz.* *CP*, 115-120, 210-220).

¹⁶ *viz.* *DTF*, 293

more than dip[ping] his toe into French waters'.¹⁷ Rather, the years 1938-1941 present scholars of Beckett's writing with nothing less than a pre-War forerunner of the linguistic turn.

I. BECKETT'S MOVE TO PARIS: AN UNACKNOWLEDGED LINGUISTIC TURN?

Certainly, in claiming that this period presents us with a pre-War linguistic turn, it must be acknowledged that there are differences between the pre- and post-War turns. If we are to properly understand the significance of the pre-War turn, we must take account of these differences before we proceed with our analysis.

The first and most obvious of these differences is that the earlier 'turn' of 1938-39 was of much briefer duration than the post-War turn, which lasted almost a decade and saw the composition of a vast array of texts across almost all the major genres in which Beckett would work during his mature period (i.e. drama, poetry and prose). Secondly, unlike the post-War turn, the pre-War turn cannot be classed as a complete rejection of English since, as noted, this period also saw the composition of a very small number of non-literary works in English. Finally, and perhaps most pointedly, Beckett's explicit admission of having turned towards French, made in the 1938 letter to Thomas MacGreevy from which has already been quoted, makes direct reference only to poetry, thereby suggesting that Beckett always intended on returning to prose-writing in English – as, indeed, he would do a number of years later when he began work on *Watt*. Nevertheless, even bearing these caveats in mind, there remain clear similarities between the post-War linguistic turn and its pre-War iteration. The most striking of these is the fact that, insofar as Beckett's strictly literary output during the years 1938-41 is concerned – and for the period in question, as has been noted, this is essentially confined to his poetic output –, the original writing that he produced was composed exclusively in French. By confining himself entirely to French – even if only for a time, even if only in one genre –, the period may clearly be described as a 'linguistic turn' in the truest sense, that is as a period during which Beckett set aside English, the language in which he had previously composed the vast majority of his literary works, in favour of French, the language that he would later come to make his own.

Once this period of majority French-language composition has been acknowledged as a proto-linguistic turn, its true significance for Beckett Studies becomes clear. By providing us with a second linguistic turn – or, rather, a *first* linguistic turn –, this period of Beckett's life allows us to engage in comparative analysis. More specifically, the existence of two linguistic turns means that we are

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

able to study them in relation to each other, to compare and contrast the pre-War linguistic turn with its unarguably better-known, but arguably still misunderstood, post-War variant. This pre-War turn, in essence, presents us with a possibility not dissimilar from that provided by the 'Suite' Notebook. Much as that manuscript, by presenting us with an English-language version of the text that marked Beckett's transition from English to French, allowed us to test the pervasive critical idea of a direct correlation between Beckett's linguistic and stylistic changes in the post-War period, so too does the existence of this earlier linguistic turn allow us to test critical assumptions about, and interpretations of, the second linguistic turn and its effect upon Beckett's literary style. Additionally, this earlier linguistic turn has the double advantage of allowing us to test not only those critical assumptions of a connection between Beckett's change of language and his change of style that were already challenged in the Introduction to this thesis, but also to test the re-interpretation of the post-War linguistic turn, and the rejection of the LSH, that was there offered by the present writer.

If Beckett's post-War turn to French did indeed bring about a change in style, in other words, his change of language in the pre-War period should be accompanied by the same change of style. On the contrary, if it is indeed the case that – as was argued in the Introduction – Beckett's change of language was not, in and of itself, the necessary prerequisite for a simplification of his literary style, it should be possible to observe that the relationship between the style of the poetry he composed during this period and the language in which it was composed is not a matter of simple one-to-one correlation in line with prevailing views of the post-War turn – baroque English to ascetic French – , but rather one of infinitely greater complexity. In short, rather than finding the use of French to invariably be linked with a disavowal of complexity and an embrace of simplicity, we should instead find a more complex narrative of stylistic evolution, one in which simplicity is to be observed in English or extreme complexity to be found in French.

In certain respects, the discussions provided in the Introduction – in which the newly simplified style of Beckett's post-War prose was demonstrated to pre-date the turn to French by way of reference to the 'Suite' Notebook –, or in the immediately preceding chapter – in which was made clear the allusive and literary complexity of Beckett's earliest French-language writings – might be said to render unnecessary such comparative consideration of the pre- and post-War linguistic turns. Demonstrable though the simplicity of Beckett's post-War English, and the complexity of Beckett's earliest French-language texts may be, however, the opportunity that this pre-War turn offers to test both longstanding critical pre-conceptions and the re-interpretations offered in this thesis must be seized for two reasons.

The first of these reasons, and perhaps the most important, is that, thus far, critics who have engaged with this earlier linguistic turn, and with the French-language literature that came about as a result of it, have proved reluctant to developing upon the possibilities that this event presents for critical reappraisal of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn.¹⁸ On the contrary, the critical discourse around Beckett's use of French during the years following his 1937 move to Paris is most striking for restating and reaffirming critical interpretations of the post-War linguistic turn. In talking about this pre-War period, in fact, critics have tended – in exactly the same manner as was elucidated in the Introduction with reference to the post-War linguistic turn – to largely isolate the pre-War linguistic turn from the historical and personal circumstances that surrounded it, preferring instead to analyse it primarily in terms of Beckett's literary production and the simplifying effect that turning to French is believed to have had upon the style of that production. This approach has resulted in the work that Beckett produced during this pre-War linguistic turn being read through the prism of assumptions about Beckett's French formulated to account for his turn to French in the post-War period.

This approach is powerfully evidenced by Sam Slote who, in the course of his contribution to the *New Cambridge Companion to Beckett* dedicated to Beckett's bilingualism and his linguistic turn, informs us that 'the attenuation of style [that is associated with Beckett's post-War writings] had already begun with the pre-war French poetry'.¹⁹ This pre-War linguistic turn too, in other words, is held up as providing evidence for that presumed link between Beckett's use of French and his embrace of a more attenuated literary style that lies at the heart of the LSH and which, in the case of the post-War linguistic turn, was demonstrated to be ill-founded

¹⁸ It should be noted that critical engagement with this period of Beckett's career, and with the French-language poetry that he composed during it, has been surprisingly limited. So limited, in fact, that, even almost fifty years after they initially appeared in print, the close readings of the *Poèmes 37-39* offered by Lawrence Harvey in his *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1970) remain the most extensive treatment of these poems readily available in print. Apart from Harvey's study – and setting aside both fleeting mentions (such as those to be found in works like John Fletcher's *Samuel Beckett's Art* [viz. *op. cit.*, 37-38]) and those discussions that appear in the context of overarching overviews (such as Ruby Cohn's *A Beckett Canon* [viz. *op. cit.*, 95-103] and John Pilling's *Beckett before Godot* [viz. *op. cit.*, 155-59]) –, the only other extended treatments of these poems of which I am aware are those provided by Patricia Coughlan (viz. "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', in Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis [eds], *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s* [Cork: Cork UP, 1995], 173-203; for discussion of the *Poèmes 37-39*, see 197-203) and David Wheatley (viz. 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett' [Unpublished PhD Thesis, Trinity College, Dublin (1999)], 237-271).

¹⁹ Sam Slote, 'Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn', in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 117

by way of engagement with the 'Suite' Notebook. The question must therefore be asked: Does the fact that this pre-War linguistic turn is also seen to provide evidence for the LSH show this hypothesis to be better-founded than was previously allowed? Or can closer examination of the pre-War evidence for the linguistic-stylistic connection upon which this hypothesis is based show the critics who have engaged with these pre-War poems to have been misled by presumptions inherited from the LSH, in much the same way as the influence of this hypothesis was shown in the Introduction to have misled those critics who have discussed the 'Suite' Notebook?

To better appraise the pre-War variant of the LSH – and reflect on what it may mean for both the post-War variant and the interpretation of Beckett's linguistic turn offered in this thesis –, we need first to examine how it has been expressed in the existing critical literature on Beckett's writing. Just as Knowlson's treatment of the post-War linguistic turn provided us with an insight into how the LSH has affected critical discussions of Beckett's post-War turn to French, so too is the conviction of a direct, causal link between Beckett's use of French in the pre-War period and the style of his French-language writing of the late 1930s particularly audible in *DTF*. There we read that

[Beckett's] shift from one language to another has commonly been regarded as taking place immediately after the war. Although this remains true for the prose fiction and the drama, Beckett did rather more than dip his toe into French waters in 1938-9. Writing poetry in French allowed him to get away, most of the time at least, from the dense allusiveness, wide erudition, and 'intimate at arms length' quality of his English poems.²⁰

As this passage makes clear, Knowlson's presentation of this period in his biography establishes a direct, causal link between Beckett's use of French in this period and what he characterises as an important stylistic development of Beckett's poetry. Beckett's use of French is explicitly described as the enabling factor that '*allowed* him to get away...from the dense allusiveness, wide erudition...of his English poems'.²¹ (The attenuation that is omitted here – 'most of the time' – is highly interesting in and of itself, and will be returned to in due course.) The use of French, in other words, did not merely accompany a stylistic development in the kind of poetry that Beckett was writing. Instead, it was the use of French itself that made this development possible. This, of course, is precisely the sort of connection that was established by Knowlson, and others, between Beckett's use of French and his style in the post-War period. Moreover, the kind of stylistic development that Beckett's use of French is deemed to have allowed in the pre-War period – namely, one away from dense allusion and

²⁰ *DTF*, 293

²¹ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

erudition, towards something simpler and less complex – is precisely the sort of stylistic development that is generally associated with Beckett’s post-War linguistic turn.

Knowlson’s presentation of the poems that Beckett composed in French during this pre-War linguistic turn, and the role that the use of French supposedly played in making these poems what they are is indicative of the general tenor of critical engagements with these poems and critical appraisals of Beckett’s use of French around the time of the pre-War linguistic turn. It is, for example, to be found in the study of these poems proposed by David Wheatley as part of his thesis, which focussed on Beckett’s poetry. There, Wheatley comments that ‘a new coolness and distance is part of what makes [Beckett’s] French poetry [i.e. those poems appearing in *Poèmes 37-39*] so obviously an advance over the more undisciplined poems in English’.²² Subsequently, Wheatley goes on to assert that these French-language poems of the late-1930s serve to demonstrate ‘Beckett’s tolerance for the wordy self-indulgence that mars his juvenilia [to have] greatly decreased’.²³ The terms that Wheatley here employs to describe the French poems – ‘coolness’, ‘distance’ –, and the distinction he establishes between them and the ‘undisciplined’ English verse that preceded them and which was marred by ‘wordy self-indulgence’ make very clear that, like Knowlson, he too understands these French-language poems as being characterised primarily by greater simplicity, as testifying to a rejection of the highly-wrought, excessive, and undisciplined mode of Beckett’s earlier English-language poems. Once again, like Knowlson, this development in Beckett’s poetic style it is rooted in possibilities provided by the French language: The ‘entirely new tonal register’ that, Wheatley finds in poems such as ‘Ascension’ or ‘La Mouche’, is one that Beckett ‘is able to call on in French’.²⁴ In English, we are given to understand, that register would have been denied him – and that no doubt for much the same reasons as it would purportedly have been denied to him in his prose and which we examined in the Introduction, namely the excessive richness of his English and his purported tendency towards excess when working in that language. More recently, Jean-Michel Rabaté has made much the same point as that presented by Knowlson and Wheatley, describing these French-language poems as works that are ‘less allusive, less Joycean than the earlier poems in English’.²⁵ For Rabaté, as for Wheatley, these poems reveal Beckett to have abandoned the stylistic and verbal excrescences of his earlier English

²² David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 240

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238 – Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett’s Style of No Style’, 140

verse, having instead 'discover[ed] a simpler lyrical voice'.²⁶ For Rabaté, as for Wheatley and for Knowlson, the discovery of this new voice is intimately associated with '[a] new awareness of the lyrical potentialities of the French language', as distinct from the English language.²⁷ Once again it may be observed that Beckett's French-language poems are not only held to show him adopting a new style but also to reveal that, if this style was adopted at all, it was ultimately a result of the new language in which they were written and the novel possibilities that this language made available to Beckett.

Naturally, in light of such widespread agreement on the subject of the simplicity of these pre-War French-language poems, the question must be asked: If critics are generally of the opinion that these poems represent a notable simplification in comparison with the kind of verse that Beckett produced in English, is that not perhaps because these poems *do* represent such a simplification?

Before answering this question, it must be recalled that the prevailing critical interpretation of these poems is grounded in two, intimately-associated and mutually reinforcing convictions. The first of these is that the poems constitute a simplification when compared with the kind of poetry that Beckett produced in English in preceding years; the second is that this simplification was fundamentally linked with the adoption of French as his primary vehicle of literary expression. These twin convictions set up a kind of circular logic: If Beckett's poems are simpler it is because they are written in French, and if Beckett's poems were written in French we should expect them to be simpler and read them accordingly. In approaching the French-language poems and expecting them to be simpler than their English-language counterparts, in other words, one is less likely to study them attentively enough to discover the deeper complexities that they may contain, but which would only be recoverable through attentive reading of the sort that Beckett's English-language writing is routinely afforded.²⁸ It is only when we have recognised the existence of *both* terms, and the connection that exists between them, that we can begin to respond to the question that has just been asked – namely, whether the reason for the critical consensus concerning the greater simplicity of the *Poèmes 37-39* may simply be that it is justified by the evidence of the poems themselves.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

²⁸ Clearly, there are strong parallels between this situation and that was previously observed in the case of 'Le Concentrisme': There, it was critical perception of the text's generic identity that was shown to inform, and implicitly justify, superficial reading strategies that would not be felt appropriate to a properly *literary* work. In this case, the superficiality of approach is a consequence of presuppositions concerning the text's linguistic identity.

The simple answer to that question is yes. The principal reason for a general critical consensus concerning the new stylistic simplification of Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s is that *some* of these poems are, broadly speaking, simpler and less allusive than the works that Beckett composed in English. Some of these poems do testify to a form of stylistic simplification when compared with those poems to be found in his first published collection, *EBOP*. To say that some of these poems are simpler, however, is not yet to answer the question of *why* they are simpler – was it a matter of language, as the prevailing critical appraisal of these poems holds, or was it a matter of something else? – nor is it to answer the question of *how* these poems should be read. It is precisely these questions which must here be considered.

In attempting to respond to these questions, it is worth beginning by considering what would appear to be the most relevant evidence in favour of the idea that these poems do represent a clear move towards a newer, and simplified, style, and that this move was a direct result of Beckett's use of French. This evidence is all the more worthy of our consideration because it comes from Beckett himself.

The evidence to which I here refer takes the form of a statement made by Beckett which seems to ally a turn to French with the embrace of a newly simplified, style and which has been proposed as proving that Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s are indeed simpler than earlier poems and that this difference is attributable to language. Originally, this statement was made in the course of a conversation that Beckett had with Lawrence Harvey and which Harvey shared with Beckett Studies at large as part of his study *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*. Harvey was, to the best of my knowledge, the first one to suggest an association between Beckett's use of French and the supposed simplicity of the poetry that he composed in that language in the late 1930s and, in so doing, he appealed directly to those conversations that he had with Beckett and upon which he drew in the course of his book.

Commenting on the relative brevity of the poems that form part of *Poèmes 37-39*, Harvey contended that it was 'no accident that these shorter poems [i.e. shorter than what had preceded them in English] are Beckett's first [*sic*] writings in French'.²⁹ To justify this contention, Harvey drew on comments made by Beckett on the subject of his post-War turn to French:

²⁹ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 196 – Although Harvey's claim that these poems represent Beckett's 'first writings' in French is mistaken, his mistake seems to be a matter of unfortunate phrasing rather than of factual inaccuracy: Beckett had composed works in French prior to these poems (e.g. 'Le Concentrisme')

When I asked [Beckett] in 1962 (as everyone seems to, sooner or later) why he switched from English to French, he replied that for him, an Irishman, French represented a form of weakness by comparison with his mother tongue. Besides, English because of its very richness holds out the temptation to rhetoric and virtuosity, which are merely words mirroring themselves complacently, Narcissus-like. The relative asceticism of French, seemed more appropriate to the expression of being, undeveloped, unsupported somewhere in the depths of the microcosm.³⁰

As the above paragraph makes clear, Harvey's discussion of Beckett's pre-War French-language poems was guided by the idea of an essential opposition between an excessively 'rich' English and a comparably 'weakened' French.³¹ This is a connection that Beckett frequently drew attention to when questioned on the subject of his use of French by critics and academics from 1959 on.³² In following Beckett's own explanation for his turn to French, and in adopting this explanation as a lens through which to read the stylistic evolution that he believed he had found in Beckett's French-language poetry of the pre-War period, Harvey can hardly be blamed: He unsurprisingly viewed his conversations with Beckett as providing him with an important insight into the works that he was studying and was thus naturally inclined to follow where he assumed Beckett to have directed.

Far from confirming the accuracy of that commonly-held critical conviction in the stylistically-determining role played by Beckett's use of French in the composition of these pre-War poems, however, Beckett's remark to Harvey actually alerts us to a problem with an unthinking reliance on Beckett's own statements. For, as has been noted, nothing confirms that Beckett's response to Harvey was explicitly intended to explain why he chose to write the poems of *Poèmes 37-39* in French. On the contrary, Beckett's remarks may well have been intended to explain why he turned to French in the *post-War* period and, as we have already seen in the Introduction, archival evidence contradicts the idea of a causal relation between Beckett's post-War turn to French and a turn towards a form of 'weakness' of the sort suggested to Harvey.

but, if we confine ourselves to Beckett's French-language *publications*, these poems were the first to have been composed.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ It should be noted that Harvey does not clarify the precise circumstances of the conversation that he had with Beckett and it is thus possible that their conversation concerned 'why [Beckett] switched from English to French' in the post-War, rather than the pre-War period. Whatever the precise circumstances of their conversation, it is quite evident that Harvey viewed Beckett's comments as applying to the decision to write the *Poèmes 37-39* in French.

³² This connection, and the manner by which it came to be proposed by Beckett to scholars interested in his post-War linguistic turn, will be the subject of close examination and contextualisation in Part III, Chapter 4.

In Part III, we will have an opportunity to examine in more depth and to tease out more carefully the problems, uncertainties, and contradictions of Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his turn to French. For the time being, it is sufficient to note that, authorial though the statement recorded by Harvey may be, it cannot be unthinkingly taken as authoritative. Certainly, it should not be adopted as an untroubled lens through which to read Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s, as Harvey evidently presumed it might be. Beckett's words to Harvey, on the contrary, should be utilised in the same manner as any other piece of evidence – that is, they should be subject to the same degree of critical examination, considered in relation to the other evidence that may be available and with due regard to the context in which the statement was made, as well as the broader context provided by any other evidence that may exist.

Beckett's statement to Harvey, in other words, which might be taken as confirming that French played a determining role in the simplification of these pre-War French-language poems, should instead lead us to lend even greater weight to the textual evidence of the poems themselves, and to consider very carefully the degree to which the evidence of these poems may help us to answer those two key questions that were earlier advanced: *Do* these poems actually constitute a simplification when compared with what came before and, if so, is this simplification demonstrably associated with Beckett's use of French?

In the Introduction, it was clarified that this thesis is focussed not on Beckett's changing style itself, but on the question of Beckett's engagement with the French language. Consequently, the aim of this thesis was clarified as being, not to propose an answer to the question of why Beckett's style may have changed in the post-War period, but instead to focus on querying certain commonly-held critical assumptions about Beckett's use of French and to subject the writing that Beckett composed in French prior to the moment of his post-War linguistic turn to greater scrutiny than it has heretofore received. In line with these aims, the present discussion will not be concerned with why exactly the style of Beckett's poetry may have altered in the pre-War period. Rather, the focus will be on examining whether or not, as contended by Harvey, Knowlson, and other critics, this pre-War change of style can be mapped onto a change of language. If this is not the case, the next step of our enquiry will be to closely engage with these poems as literary objects, setting aside those preconceptions inherited from the LSH in an attempt to better understand them

on their own terms, and, latterly, to examine what other factors, if not style, may have motivated Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn.³³

Even if this discussion will leave broader questions of the possible explanations for Beckett's pre-War *stylistic* development for future scholars – to say nothing of those scholars who have already examined this question³⁴ – that is not yet to say that the matter of style may be entirely dispensed with. On the contrary, the style of these pre-War French-language poems does have important ramifications for how we should interpret the relationship between Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn and his pre-War French-language writings. The key implication, as far as the present engagement with Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s is concerned, however, is not a matter of style *per se* but of degree. Or, to phrase things more clearly: The present discussion will be concerned with establishing the degree to which the style of Beckett's poetic compositions of the late 1930s may be shown to have been determined by their having been written in French. The question of degree is so important because to say – as has so often been said by various critics – that these poems are simpler is not yet to say that they are *all* simpler, nor is it to say that they are all *equally* simple, nor is it to say that they are all simpler *in the same way*. An attention to such fine distinctions of degree is, interestingly, already inherent in the treatment afforded to these poems – and to the pre-War linguistic turn more generally – by those critics that have here been cited as indicative of the existing critical appraisal of these poems and of the pre-War linguistic turn as signalling a move towards greater simplicity.

In the writings of Knowlson, Wheatley, and Rabaté, we are alerted to the fact that the simplicity of these poems may be more a matter of degree than of their linguistic character by the use each of these critics make of qualifiers and restrictors in their presentation of the relationship between Beckett's turn to French and his turn

³³ The motivations for Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn will be discussed in Part III, Chapter 2.

³⁴ A suggested response to the question of Beckett's stylistic evolution has, in fact, already been proposed by the editors of Beckett's collected poems, who suggest that the stylistic change that they argue can be observed in the *Poèmes 37-39* may be viewed as 'indirectly influenced by the *epoche* (or "bracketing") of Phenomenology, and more particularly by Mauthner's attack on metaphor, and language generally, in his *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*' (CP, 373). Certainly, this response has much to recommend it – not least the fact that, as will be seen, a number of these poems include clear, or probable, reference to the work of Mauthner, which Beckett was then reading. At the same time, and without entirely discounting the validity of the response suggested by Lawlor and Pilling, or the role that may have been played by either Phenomenology or Mauthner in Beckett's thinking about art at the time of writing the *Poèmes 37-39*, it should be recognised that the accompanying vision of these poems as 'relatively straightforward' (*Ibid.*, 373) is one that, as we will see, the texts of the poems themselves do not necessarily support.

away from the stylistic excesses of his earlier English verse: Knowlson, as seen, remarks that '[w]riting poetry in French allowed [Beckett] to get away, *most of the time at least*, from...dense allusiveness [and] wide erudition'; Wheatley, meanwhile, finds that, even while writing in the language that supposedly enabled an 'entirely new tonal register', 'Beckett is still capable of regrettable tonal lapses'³⁵ where he reverts to the kind of expression associated with his earlier, English-language verse; similarly, Rabaté's description of these French-language poems as texts in which '[p]uns are rare' is notable for signalling that such puns are by no means absent, merely less frequent.³⁶ Innocuous though such turns of phrase may initially appear, they merit our attention because they reveal that the style of Beckett's French-language poetry is *not* uniformly simple. These poems, Knowlson, Wheatley, and Rabaté tacitly admit, are not *all* simpler, nor is their simplicity – such as it is – necessarily of the same sort. What does this variation in style mean for these poems, then? And what does it mean for existing critical appraisals of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn? Ironically, perhaps, the most explicit expression of the fundamental flaw that lies at the heart of the prevailing critical appraisal of the *Poèmes 37-39* – and, more largely, of the linguistic turn of 1938-41 – is to be found in one of the most recent expressions of this very appraisal.

In *CP*, the explanatory notes provided by Lawlor and Pilling confidently inform us that these poems are 'relatively straightforward'.³⁷ In this way, Lawlor and Pilling echo the same position advanced by Knowlson, Wheatley, and Rabaté. In their presentation of these poems as 'relatively straightforward', however – in a manner not dissimilar from Fletcher's statement of the LSH, whereby his signalling of the flaws in Esslin's formulation served to focus attention on the flaws underlying his own version of the hypothesis –, the editors of *CP* both make clear the problem with the idea that French itself had a key role to play in this stylistic simplification and, in so doing, raise an important question concerning the vision of these poems that they themselves defend:

The recondite manner of the *EBOP* collection was well within [Beckett]'s compass on switching to French (as is evidenced by a number of letters and most extensively by the spoof lecture of 1930, 'Le Concentrisme' [*D*, 35-42])

³⁵ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 241

³⁶ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 140 – It is equally possible that the relative paucity of punning in these poems may be a consequence of the fact they are in fact more complex, and thus that the puns they contain are less readily recoverable by superficial reading strategies. Certainly, over the course of the close-readings that will be proposed in this chapter, we will have the opportunity to note a number of puns that, though every bit as complex as what one might expect from the Anglophone Beckett, are by no means immediately apparent.

³⁷ *CP*, 373

but he *chose instead to adopt a deliberate simplification and refinement of means and method*, reducing (if not wholly abandoning) allusions, exploring the self-sustaining subtleties of syntax without necessarily emphasising the verbal surface and without surrendering unexpected juxtapositions, and contenting himself for the most part with a single and singular focus.³⁸

Even allowing that adverb 'relatively' its fullest possible weight, it is surely worth asking whether these poems are as 'straightforward' as they appear. Indeed, this question becomes all the more important in light of Lawlor and Pilling's acknowledgement that '[t]he recondite manner of the *EBOP* collection was well within [Beckett]'s compass on switching to French'. That this was the case should, of course, have been equally obvious to other critics who have presented these poems as evincing a greater simplicity of approach. Both Wheatley and Rabaté, in fact, also make reference to 'Le Concentrisme' as part of the texts in which they evoke the new simplicity of the *Poèmes 37-39* and, in both cases, their appraisal of Beckett's earlier spoof-lecture lays particular emphasis on the complexity of the French in which it is composed: Wheatley, for his part, refers to it as 'a *tour de force* of *normalien* French'³⁹, while Rabaté, as previously noted, places '[i]ts intensity...on par with the witty hyperboles and crazy conceits of *Murphy*'.⁴⁰ Both of these critics, in other words, recognise that Beckett's French was not *necessarily* a vehicle for 'coolness', 'discipline', and 'a simpler lyrical voice.' On the contrary, Beckett's French could be a vehicle for the very same 'wordy self-indulgence', 'witty hyperboles' and 'crazy conceits' to which he gave expression in his English. That this should be case clearly points to a contradiction in terms that is very difficult to resolve: If Wheatley and Rabaté recognise Beckett's French as being, at least potentially, a vehicle for compositions every bit as florid as those he produced in English, why should the poems collected in *Poèmes 37-39* be, of necessity, simpler than the poems that are to be found in, for example, *EBOP*? Why, in the case of these poems in particular, should French have proved a restrictive force, if it failed to restrict Beckett in any way, shape or form during the composition of 'Le Concentrisme'? Lawlor and Pilling suggest one possible explanation for this when they describe these poems as testifying to 'a deliberate simplification and refinement of means and method'. Beckett, Lawlor and Pilling inform us, *chose* to adopt a different style in these poems. The fact that this decision was taken with regard to poems composed in French is, as such, almost immaterial; if the change of style was a matter of choice, rather than an effect of language, the new style might equally have been essayed in English.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 373-74 – Emphasis mine; Square brackets in original.

³⁹ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 237

⁴⁰ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', 138

What this means, of course, is that French itself did not necessarily impose any limitations upon Beckett's writing; Beckett was entirely capable of writing poems in French in the same academic, arcane, baroque, and ostentatious mode that he had been employing up to that point in English. If these French-language poems are indeed more straightforward, therefore, that would be an effect, not of the language in which they were composed, but a consequence of a decision taken by Beckett himself, and this decision was one which he was free to amend as the mood took him. If this were the case, of course, we would expect to find a certain degree of mobility within these poems. If the richness or complexity of Beckett's style was not yoked to his choice of language, is it not natural that he would choose to roam more freely – trying his hand at greater simplicity or greater complexity as the mood took him –, regardless of the language in which he worked? Strikingly, both Beckett's correspondence and his poetic compositions of the later 1930s provide evidence for just such a willingness to vary his method when working in French.

The first piece of evidence in this regard comes from a letter written by Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy in April 1939 and which thus dates from a period after he had already written a number of the poems that would be included in *Poèmes 37-39*. In that letter, Beckett characterises his recent works in a manner that has significant ramifications for any who are tempted to see Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39* as 'relatively straightforward' compositions:

I have no work to show beyond a few poems in French, of which I think you have already seen some. There are *two very long ones that do not belong at all to the series, being quite straightforward descriptive poems* (in French) of episodes in the life of a child. I do not know what they are worth. The few people I have shown them to liked them, but they are friends.⁴¹

As can be seen, Beckett draws here a distinction between two classes of poems: The 'poems in French' of which MacGreevy had 'already seen some' are those of *Poèmes 37-39*, a number of which Beckett had indeed already sent to MacGreevy.⁴² The 'very long' poems detailing episodes in the life of a child, meanwhile, are almost certainly those now referred to as the *Petit Sot* poems – or, at the very least, Beckett is likely to be referring to an earlier iteration of these poems, since of the surviving *Petit Sot* poems only the one that is universally recognised as being the work of Beckett himself

⁴¹ *LSB I*, 657 (SB to TMG [18th April, 1939]) – Emphasis mine.

⁴² A letter to MacGreevy of 15th June 1938, for example, included copies of three poems that would go on to appear in *Poèmes 37-39*: 'Ascension', 'La Mouche' and 'musique de l'indifférence', the last of these then bearing the title 'Prière' (*viz.* *LSB I*, 630-32 – SB to TMG [15th July, 1938]).

(i.e. 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges') could in any way be described as 'very long'.⁴³ Beckett's letter clearly implies that, in his estimation, the 'very long poems' were indeed 'quite straightforward' works. By specifying that these longer poems 'do not belong at all to the series [of *Poèmes 37-39*]', however, Beckett implies that the poems of the earlier series are themselves *not* straightforward.

In addition to suggesting that many of the poems he wrote in French in the later 1930s are more complex than has been assumed, Beckett's letter to MacGreevy also points towards one of the ways in which we might be able to better understand the nature of their complexity. In essence, if a poem such as 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' 'do[es] not belong at all to the series' that would eventually be published as *Poèmes 37-39*, it may be made to serve as a foil. By examining that 'quite straightforward descriptive' poem and attempting to ascertain its salient stylistic features, we will be better able to understand what might be distinct about the poems of *Poèmes 37-39*. And one of the first things we find when we examine 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' is that, for Beckett, a quite straightforward and descriptive mode of poetry was by no means incompatible with wide-ranging literary allusion.

II. READING BECKETT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE POETRY OF THE LATE 1930S (1/2): 'LES JOUES ROUGES LES YEUX ROUGES'

Today, 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' survives in two forms: An autograph manuscript and a single typescript, based upon this manuscript.⁴⁴ As detailed in Anne Atik's *How It Was*, the autograph manuscript, written in Beckett's hand, was found by her husband, Avigdor Arikha, in the edition of Kant's collected works that Beckett had been reading during the late 1930s and which he gave to Arikha in 1960.⁴⁵ The typescript, meanwhile, was prepared by Arikha for Beckett from the autograph

⁴³ That the two poems to which Beckett here refers are 'les joues rouges' and an earlier, longer iteration of what would later be revised as the *Petit Sot* cycle is strongly implied by a subsequent letter to George Reavey of June 1939. In that letter, Beckett asks Reavey to return 'P.S.' – undoubtedly an abbreviation for *Petit Sot* – so that he can begin reworking it into smaller poems: 'Let me have P.S. back when you can. Il me tarde de le mettre en morceaux' (*LSB I*, 666 – SB to George Reavey [16th June, 1939]). In *LSB I*, Beckett's French expression is translated as 'I can't want to tear it to pieces' (*Ibid.*, 667) – thereby suggesting that Beckett's aim is literally to destroy the poem. It should however be noted that the French may equally be taken to mean that Beckett's aim is to decompose the poem into smaller segments, rather than to destroy it entirely.

⁴⁴ Copies of these documents are now held by the University of Reading: UoR JEK A/3/68 ['Folder entitled Poems'] – For transcriptions of both the MS and the TS, see Appendix I (c). For the purposes of the present discussion, all citations have been drawn from the autograph manuscript; a transcription of the typescript has been provided for reference purposes.

⁴⁵ Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 7

manuscript.⁴⁶ Sadly, despite the overwhelming evidence that this poem was written by Beckett himself – most likely in either 1938 or early 1939⁴⁷ –, ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ remains unpublished.⁴⁸ That this should be the case no doubt owes to the fact that its central character – the figure of the Petit Sot – would recur in the poems of the so-called Petit Sot cycle, the authorship of which, as previously noted remains a matter of dispute. Unlike the poems of the Petit Sot cycle, however, whose unresolved authorship has left them largely unexamined and in a critical gloaming, ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ has been the subject of discussion by critics including Ruby Cohn and David Wheatley, and was equally commented upon by Anne Atik as part of *How It Was*. Amongst these three writers, Cohn and Atik have already signalled two of the literary allusions that are to be found in the text. In each case, however, Beckett’s use of the allusions can be demonstrated as having been more complex than either Atik or Cohn allow.

In her discussion of the poem, Atik drew particular attention to the allusion that she discerned in this poem’s reference to that

haine que les longues heures
vont ^{^^}lentement^{^^} lui enlever⁴⁹

As described by the speaker of ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’, this hate is that which Petit Sot carries with him as he ‘se promène dans le bois / tristement le long d’un fossé’.⁵⁰ In this association of ‘lentement’ and ‘heures’, Atik detected an allusion to lines from Apollinaire’s ‘A la Santé’, more specifically, to its fifth section:

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ In February of 1939, Beckett informed George Reavey that he was ‘doing a second Petit Sot’ (*LSB I*, 653 – SB to George Reavey [28th February, 1939]). Evidence of the first ‘Petit Sot’, meanwhile, is to be found in a letter to Reavey that was not included in *LSB I*. Drawing on this letter in their unpublished notes to the ‘Petit Sot’ poems, Lawlor and Pilling inform us that Beckett had already referred to a poem as ‘P.S.’ in a letter of July 7th, 1938 (SB to George Reavey [7th July, 1938] *qtd* in Seán Lawlor and John Pilling, ‘Appendix 2: The “Petit Sot” Poems’, 255 [in BC MS5479 (Folder 2/2) – Page-proofs of Collected Poems with redacted materials on Petit Sot]). Although it is entirely possible that ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ may have been the ‘second Petit Sot’ of early 1939, the connection that will be posited here between the poem and Jules Renard, coupled with its discovery in an edition of Kant, would seem to argue in favour of viewing ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ as the first of Beckett’s ‘P.S.’ poems, since Beckett referred to reading both of these authors in a letter of September 1938 (*viz.* *LSB I*, 643 – SB to George Reavey [27th September, 1938]) – The connection between Beckett’s poem and the writing of Jules Renard will be developed below.

⁴⁸ Like the poems of the Petit Sot cycle, ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ was originally scheduled for inclusion as part of *CP*. The explanatory notes on this poem prepared by Lawlor and Pilling have been drawn upon in the preparation of this discussion and will be cited as appropriate.

⁴⁹ JRYR MS – Deletions have here been omitted; for the full text, see Appendix I (c).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Que lentement passent les heures
Comme passe un enterrement

Tu pleureras l'heure où tu pleures
Qui passera trop vite
Comme passent toutes les heures⁵¹

According to Atik, Apollinaire's 'A la Santé' was a poem that Beckett 'loved and recited often'.⁵² In Apollinaire's text, which deals with the week that the poet spent in the Santé prison, the speaker recounts what he experiences as the horror of confinement. In another section of that poem, significantly, Apollinaire's speaker too describes himself as walking. In his poem, however, we read that '[d]ans une fosse comme un ours / [c]haque matin je me promène'.⁵³ That the speaker of Beckett's poem is said to experience a similar suffering as he walks through the pastoral splendour of a wood – one where he is accompanied by the sound of birdsong and, at least potentially, the spectacle of 'jolis jeunes safrans / blanches [sic] mauves jaunes striées [sic]' in a ditch⁵⁴ –, can be seen to suggest that, for him, incarceration is not a temporary state in a physical location from which he will eventually be permitted to depart, but a state of being that he carries with, and within, himself wherever he walks.⁵⁵ Indeed, Beckett's intertextual dialogue with Apollinaire's poem appears to explicitly underscore this counterpointing of physical and mental incarceration for, where Apollinaire's speaker places himself 'dans une fosse', Beckett's Petit Sot is presented in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' walking 'le long d'un fossé'.⁵⁶

For Ruby Cohn, the most explicit allusion in Beckett's poem was to be found in its second last line, which describes the flowers observed by Petit Sot as being 'sans amour et sans haine'.⁵⁷ As Cohn recognises, this line is 'borrowed from Verlaine's "Il pleure dans mon cœur"'.⁵⁸ In Cohn's estimation, Beckett's allusion is intended to

⁵¹ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'A la Santé', in *Alcools* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927), 154

⁵² Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 7 – Beckett's affection for this poem, and for the lines that have just been quoted in particular, is clearly evidenced in his correspondence: In a letter to Barbara Bray of 1981, Beckett remarked that he '[t]ried to remember Apollinaire's Comme lentement passe l'heure [sic]' and refers to it as a '[m]arvellous poem' (*LSB IV*, 560 – SB to Barbara Bray [11th October, 1981]). In a 1983 letter to Kay Boyle, meanwhile, having asked his correspondent if she is familiar with this poem, Beckett quotes the lines given above and comments: 'Wish I could translate that.' (*Ibid.*, 603 – SB to Kay Boyle [7th January, 1983]).

⁵³ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'A la Santé', in *op. cit.*, 152

⁵⁴ The uncertainty that attaches itself to the status of the 'safrans' within the poem will be clarified in due course.

⁵⁵ As examined in the preceding chapter, the idea that movement alone can never serve to liberate the self from its own suffering was central to much of Beckett's early writing – including 'Le Concentrisme'.

⁵⁶ JRYR MS – Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 99

signal a distance between his text and Verlaine's which, so Cohn contends, demonstrates a 'harmony between man and nature [where] Beckett's line designates the indifference of nature to human emotions'.⁵⁹ Certainly, there are clear oppositions between Verlaine's and Beckett's poems: Where Verlaine's speaker looks out on a rain-sodden cityscape, Beckett's basks in the 'beau soleil' that shines on the wood through which he walks. Moreover, Verlaine, as Cohn notes, sees in the rain that falls over the city a metaphor for the tears that are shed in his heart – 'Il pleure dans mon cœur / comme il pleut sur la ville'⁶⁰ –, while Beckett's *Petit Sot* derives no comfort from the sun, which in fact strengthens his hatred, and clearly identifies a gulf between himself and the flowers that, unlike him, 'étaient ce qu'ils devaient être'.⁶¹ This divide between the two poems would seem to be further reinforced by the fact that, in Beckett's poem, it is the flowers who are described as being 'sans amour et sans haine' while, in Verlaine's text, this description is applied by the speaker to himself when he informs us that

C'est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi
Sans amour et sans haine
Mon cœur a tant de peine !⁶²

Obviously, insofar as *Petit Sot* is himself described as being 'de haine plein le cœur', he necessarily stands at a remove from Verlaine's speaker. The divide between them is, however, not as total as Cohn's reading implies. Beckett notably chooses to position his borrowing from Verlaine in precisely the same location in which the line appears in Verlaine's poem – that is, the second-last line. This positioning is all the more significant because Beckett's poem, unlike Verlaine's, is unrhymed. Consequently, Beckett is not obliged to substitute an alternative rhyme for the 'peine' that Verlaine associates with 'haine.' It thus becomes almost impossible for the reader, whose ear is attuned to Verlaine's verse, to read the flowers described as being 'sans amour et sans haine' without hearing the last line of Verlaine's poem, with its admission of the 'peine' that fills the heart of the speaker. Reading Beckett's citation of Verlaine as an attempt to offer at the close of his poem a ghostly echo of the admission upon which 'Il pleure dans mon cœur' closes seems all the more apposite given that Beckett's speaker, though he may be full of 'haine', is every bit as pained as Verlaine's. Significantly, the divide between Beckett's speaker and the flowers he surveys is not

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Paul Verlaine, 'Il pleure dans mon cœur', in *Romances sans paroles*, in *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Jacques Borel and Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962), 192

⁶¹ JRYR MS

⁶² Paul Verlaine, 'Il pleure dans mon cœur', in *op. cit.*, 192

merely a matter of their being ‘sans amour et sans haine’; they, unlike Petit Sot, were also ‘ce qu’ils devaient être’ and, being in accord with what is expected of them, being equally devoid both of love and of the hate that Petit Sot carries with him, we may also assume that they are without ‘peine.’ We know that Petit Sot, on the contrary, unlike the flowers he observes – but like the speaker of Verlaine’s poem – is indeed full of pain because in the opening line he is presented to us ‘les joues rouges *les yeux rouges*’. It is thus clear from this opening line that Petit Sot has been crying, and the subsequent lines of the poem strongly imply that his own sense of failing to be ‘ce qu’[il] dev[rait] être’, of failing to be like ‘les garçons sages’⁶³ – *sage* meaning at once ‘well-behaved’ and ‘wise’, in clear opposition to the Petit Sot – has a large part to play in his suffering. Seen in these terms, Beckett’s engagement with Verlaine’s poem seems to be more complex than Cohn allows. The relationship between these poems is not simply a matter of difference, but also of tacit similarity. Certainly, as Cohn recognised, the difference between the speakers of Beckett’s and Verlaine’s poems lies in the fact that, where Verlaine’s speaker can take some comfort in pathetic fallacy, Petit Sot, foolish though he may be, is yet not foolish enough to do likewise. And yet, comforted by what they see or bereft of such comfort, the essential similarity remains: Both of these speakers suffer intensely.

As attested by the allusions pointed out by Atik and Cohn and whose sense has just been enlarged upon above, the precise value of the term ‘straightforward’ used by Beckett to describe this poem in his letter to MacGreevy needs to be nuanced. In Beckett’s mind, evidently, ‘straightforward’ did not necessarily mean devoid of literary allusion. Already, we have found traces of authors of whom Beckett was known to be fond, and of whom one – namely, Verlaine – also constitutes an important intertextual reference for another of the French-language poems dating from this period.⁶⁴ The allusive texture of ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ is not limited to these two authors, however. To those allusions that have already been mentioned, we may add three further allusions: The first to the Bible; the second, proposed far more tentatively, to the poetry of Paul Éluard; and the third, and by far the most significant, to the writing of Jules Renard.

The allusion to the Bible is to be found in the description of the flowers as being ‘ce qu’ils devaient être’. Such a characterisation of the flowers that Petit Sot observes during his walk through the wood recalls Jesus’ advice to his apostles to

⁶³ JRYR MS

⁶⁴ Beckett also engages with Verlaine in ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ – For this engagement, see the discussion of that poem below.

follow the example of the ‘lilles in the field’ and to take their example from them.⁶⁵ In the case of *Petit Sot*, he is clearly incapable of following the example of the flowers – amongst which, notably, there are no lilies to be found, only an array ‘*de jolis jeunes safrans*’⁶⁶ – since these flowers, far from being an example that might be followed by *Petit Sot*, are entirely free of the hatred that consumes him. Reading Beckett’s reference to these flowers against the Biblical verse suggests Beckett is engaged in subverting the advice this verse provides, according to which one should draw comfort from the spectacle of nature.⁶⁷

Unlike the Biblical allusion, which is tied to the thematic structure of the poem, the possible allusion to Éluard is more fleeting and, correspondingly, more uncertain. This possible allusion is to be found in that curious ‘*beau soleil bleu*’ without which *Petit Sot* would be unable to experience the hate that consumes him.⁶⁸ In the notes that they prepared on this poem, Lawlor and Pilling suggested that the ‘*soleil*’ that appears in this line may simply be an error for ‘*ciel*’, and *beau ciel bleu* would certainly make more immediate sense in context.⁶⁹ It is possible, however, that this ‘*soleil bleu*’ may have been intended as an allusion to the seventh poem of Éluard’s 1929 collection *L’amour la poésie*, which opens on the Surreal assertion that ‘[*]la terre est bleue comme une orange*’.⁷⁰ Given Beckett’s noted and well-documented affection for Éluard’s writing, an allusion to this poem – one of Éluard’s best known – is certainly possible. It is, however, difficult to determine quite what Beckett’s poem would gain if its curious ‘*soleil bleu*’ were to be read in the light of Éluard’s poem and its ‘*terre...bleue comme une orange*’. This being so, and without being able to entirely exclude the possibility of an allusion to Éluard in this line – whether a merely superficial one, or an allusion designed to further the poem thematically⁷¹ –, it would seem to be that, on balance, it is more likely Lawlor and

⁶⁵ This material is to be found in both the Gospel of Matthew (*viz.* 6: 26-29) and the Gospel of Luke (*viz.* 12:24-27) – For the text of this material, see the discussion of ‘*bois seul*’ below, a poem that contains a more developed allusion to these same Biblical verses.

⁶⁶ JRYR MS

⁶⁷ Beckett’s handling of the Biblical allusion would thus be similar to his handling of the allusion to Verlaine, which subverted the correspondence perceived between speaker and landscape.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Seán Lawlor and John Pilling, ‘Appendix 2: The “*Petit Sot*” Poems’, 264 (in BC MS5479 [Folder 2/2] – Page-proofs of Collected Poems with redacted materials on *Petit Sot*).

⁷⁰ Paul Éluard, ‘*La terre est bleue comme une orange*’, in *L’amour la poésie*, in Paul Éluard, Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (eds), *Œuvres complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1968), 232

⁷¹ It is, for example, possible to see in Beckett’s mention of a ‘*beau soleil bleu*’ an undercutting of Éluard’s verse. More particularly, the ‘*joies solaires*’ (*Ibid.*) to which Éluard’s poem refers offer a direct counterpoint to the role played by the sun in

Pilling are correct and that 'soleil bleu' is simply to be interpreted as one more error to be found within this early draft of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' – a draft which, it should be noted, does include a number of obvious errors that cluster around Beckett's evident uncertainty concerning the spelling and gender of *safran*, which he first writes with a double 'f' and initially treats as feminine.⁷²

Even if it is ultimately discounted, the possible allusion to Éluard is worth evoking as it helps to better clarify the manner in which my readings of this poem, and the rest of Beckett's French-language poetry of the 1930s, will proceed. At all times, my aim will be to try to justify allusions by way of their relation to Beckett's poetry as this can be discerned through close reading of the texts to which Beckett appears to be alluding and the text in which these allusions are held to occur. Certainly, every effort will be made to provide relevant information concerning Beckett's known or probable engagement with the author and, where relevant, the work in question. The primary criterion upon which I have relied in determining whether or not a possible allusion was worthy of consideration, however, has been, not the mere correspondence of lexical units, but the degree to which this allusion could be shown to relate to the text and its particular thematic concerns.⁷³ In determining the possibility of whether a line of text should be read intertextually I have looked to the rest of poem and considered what relation, if any, the line in question bears to the poem in which it appears. Oftentimes, this has required asking very simple questions of Beckett's texts, such as what they might mean.⁷⁴

With this in mind, and prior to examining the evidence for the probable allusion to Jules Renard that is to be found in this poem's opening reference to the 'les

Beckett's, since it is precisely the presence of the sun that permits Petit Sot's 'haine'. Such a use of Éluard would, of course, echo the manner in which Beckett was previously noted to have made use of Verlaine and Biblical verse. Even so, the possibility of such an allusion remains tenuous.

⁷² That the manuscript shows Beckett to have endeavoured to at least partially correct the errors associated with his 'safrans' – he amended the spelling and corrected the agreement of 'striées', but left the erroneous 'blanches' uncorrected – while having left his 'soleil bleu' untouched may suggest that the blue sun was intentional, but the currently available archival evidence does not allow us to say for sure.

⁷³ In this respect, my approach differs from that adopted by a critic such as David Wheatley who, in his discussion of Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39*, privileged the direct correspondence of lexical units over thematic correlation. Thus, in a poem such as 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', for example, Wheatley reads Beckett's use of the word 'naguère' as 'bring[ing] to mind Verlaine's 1884 collection, *Jadis et naguère*' (David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 264). For my part, I would contend that the use of word *naguère* alone – even if, as in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', used twice – should not necessarily be taken as being intended to evoke an entire collection of poetry.

⁷⁴ As we will see when we come to the analysis of Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39*, however, establishing what the text of Beckett's French-language poetry means is not necessarily as simple as it might initially appear.

joues rouges’, it is worth asking ourselves what exactly these words may mean as they occur within the poem.

Thus far, no reader of this poem has tarried too long on the question of why exactly Petit Sot should be described as having ‘les joues rouges’. Undoubtedly, the most obvious reading of this reference to red cheeks is to view them as indicative of Petit Sot’s feeling some sense of shame or guilt. We are almost certainly invited to assume some connection between the redness of his cheeks and the redness of his eyes, as well as to associate both characteristics with the ‘haine’ that fills his heart and the sentiment of inadequacy that he carries with him on his walk through the wood. At the same time, the precise source of this shame or guilt, much like the precise source of his sorrow, is left obscure. Although she approaches the matter indirectly, it is Anne Atik who has provided the most coherent explanation for Petit Sot’s ‘joues rouges.’

In discussing ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ in *How It Was*, Atik explained this poem as being concerned with Beckett’s ‘earliest conscious feeling of guilt’.⁷⁵ The guilt in question, according to Atik, was inspired by ‘an innocent act in his childhood, when about five or six, of putting a hedgehog into a shoe box to protect it from the cold, providing it with worms and, finding it dead one morning’.⁷⁶ As described by Atik, Beckett told this same story to herself and Avigdor Arikha ‘several times [and] it weighed upon him throughout his life’.⁷⁷ The story of the hedgehog to which Atik refers is the same one that Beckett would recount – in markedly similar terms to those used by Atik – in *Company / Compagnie*, where the voice reminds the listener of the time when he ‘[took] pity on a hedgehog out in the cold and put it in an old hatbox with some worms’.⁷⁸ For the figure whom we find ‘on his back in dark’⁷⁹ in *Company / Compagnie*, as for the Beckett described by Atik, the death of the hedgehog has a tremendous, terrible, and lasting effect:

It was on an autumn afternoon you found the hedgehog and took pity on it in the way described and you were still the better for it when your bedtime came. Kneeling at your bedside you included it the hedgehog in your detailed pray to God to bless all you loved. And tossing in your warm bed waiting for sleep to come you were still faintly glowing at the thought of what a fortunate hedgehog it was to have crossed your path as it did. A narrow clay path edged with sere box edging. As you stood there wondering how best to pass the time till bedtime it parted the edging on one side and was making straight for the edging on the other when you entered its life. Now the next

⁷⁵ Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 7

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *CIWS*, 18

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3

morning not only was the glow spent but a great uneasiness had taken its place. A suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be. That rather than do as you did you had perhaps better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way. Days if not weeks passed before you could bring yourself to return to the hutch. You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench.⁸⁰

Certain though Atik may be that Beckett's abiding guilt at the horrible death he forced upon the hedgehog 'found expression in *Petit sot*' – and though the example of *Company / Compagnie* does serve to demonstrate that Beckett was fully prepared to make literary use of this event in later life –, the very text of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' seems to argue against such a reading.⁸¹ In the description of this event that Beckett provides in *Company / Compagnie*, great stress is laid on the positive emotions that preceded and, for a time at least, followed the young Beckett's act of imagined charity. The final result of his actions may have been the suffering endured by another creature, but the original intent was a positive one: The voice in *Company / Compagnie* speaks of how, as a boy, the figure counted the hedgehog amongst his prayers for 'all [he] loved' and reflected on 'what a fortunate hedgehog it was to have crossed [his] path.' The pathos of the event derives precisely from this disconnect between intense affection, a boundless love and desire to help, and the terrifying effect of such love upon its unsuspecting object. It is precisely this sort of boundless, naïve love that is absent from 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'. There, we are presented with a Petit Sot who is defined precisely by the fact that he is

de haine plein le cœur
de haine qu'il aime ^^plus que tout^^
plus que toutes les belles choses
et que toutes les bonnes gens
^^que les garçons sages aiment^^⁸²

The defining characteristic of Petit Sot is thus that he is filled with an intense and all-consuming hatred that he loves above all else. The Petit Sot of this poem, who knows his distance from the flowers, is utterly removed from the loving child of *Company / Compagnie*. Every bit as notable as this focus on hatred and the lack of any of the positive emotions that define the child in *Company / Compagnie* is the lack of any reference to the hedgehog or its death. As recounted in *Company / Compagnie*, it is quite evident that, for Beckett, the defining element of the story is the hedgehog – the boy's initial outpouring of love towards it, and his subsequent horror at the spectacle

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19 – For this story as it appears in the French version of this text, see *Compagnie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 38-41.

⁸¹ Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 7

⁸² JRYR MS – Deletions have here been omitted; for the full transcription, see Appendix I (c).

of its death ('The mush. The stench.') – but the creature and its suffering are entirely absent from 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' where, in addition to the aforementioned crocuses, the only living presence in the poem apart from Petit Sot himself is to be found in the 'chansons des oiseaux' that Petit Sot hears as he walks in the wood.⁸³

Obviously, it possible to retort that seeking to illumine a text by way of another text composed some four decades later, as has been done here is, at best, ill-judged and, at worst, unhelpful.⁸⁴ Atik's description of Beckett's obsessive retelling of the story, however, coupled with her contention, supported by its presence in *Company / Compagnie*, that this event 'weighed on [Beckett] throughout his life', suggests to me that this story was one of those 'obsessional' images that Beckett admitted to Knowlson as being fundamental to his writing.⁸⁵ This being so, it appears unlikely that Beckett's vision of such an 'obsessional' image should have changed much over time. (Certainly, as previously noted, the version of the story as recounted by Atik agrees in all respects with the story as told in *Company / Compagnie*.) There thus seems to be no reason why a literary engagement with the memory of a little boy who '[took] pity on a hedgehog out in the cold' and who was durably scarred by the sight of that hedgehog's rotting body should result in a poem at once full of hate and entirely devoid of hedgehog. With this in mind, it seems necessary to propose an alternative to Atik's characterisation of the poem and, by extension, the 'joues rouges' upon which it opens. Rather than rooting this poem in the particular scene of the hedgehog, I would suggest that this poem may be rooted in Beckett's past more broadly. More particularly, 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' appears to develop out of an engagement with Beckett's vision of himself, of the role played by hate in his

⁸³ *Ibid.* – It should equally be noted that, since neither these birds nor the previously-mentioned plants are in any way shown to suffer through the actions of Petit Sot, it is equally impossible to see them as substitutes for the figure of the hedgehog that suffered at the hands of the young Beckett.

⁸⁴ Although its precise date of composition cannot be ascertained with certainty, it seems clear that 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' dates from 1938 or early 1939; *Company / Compagnie*, meanwhile, dates from the late 1970s – For details of the composition of *Company / Compagnie*, see Dirk Van Hulle's introduction to his edition of this text (*viz.* *CIWS*, vii-ix).

⁸⁵ *DTF*, xxi – In the 'Preface' to *DTF*, Knowlson records that, during their first interview for the biography, Beckett initially spoke of an absolute separation between his life and work, as he had done time and again throughout his post-War career. Against this presentation, Knowlson drew Beckett's attention to a number of images from his childhood that recurred throughout his fiction and which, as Knowlson put it, 'bridge[d] his life and his work' (*Ibid.*). In answer, Beckett is reported to have 'nodded in agreement: "They're obsessional," he said, and went on to add several others' (*Ibid.*). Critics eager to take Beckett's words at face value – including his statements on the subject of his turn to French – would do well to bear this particular exchange in mind when we come to examine these statements in Part III, Chapter 4.

past, and with the text that I believe to have provided Beckett with the impetus, and the example, for that suite of poems detailing of 'episodes in the life of a child' to which, as Beckett informed MacGreevy in the letter from which was earlier quoted, 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' belongs.

The text in question is Jules Renard's *Poil de Carotte*.⁸⁶ As described by Renard himself in his *Journal*, *Poil de Carotte* is not a novel – that is, something whole and entire –, but a series of individually-titled vignettes, followed by a sort of literary photo-album, that 'on pourrait indéfiniment...réduire ou...prolonger'.⁸⁷ More specifically, the vignettes that compose *Poil de Carotte* serve to recount scenes in the life of a child whom Renard modelled closely on himself and who, throughout the text – and unlike his siblings, Félix and Ernestine, and parents, M. and Mme. Lepic –, is referred to only by his nickname, 'Poil de Carotte'. Many, although not all, of the stories in *Poil de Carotte* are concerned with the various ways in which Poil de Carotte's mother makes her son suffer. In these endeavours, she is frequently aided by her other children, and never impeded by Poil de Carotte's father, who remains a beloved but largely distant and essentially silent presence and who eventually admits that he despises Mme. Lepic as much as Poil de Carotte himself.⁸⁸

In his *Journal*, Renard was extremely clear about the autobiographical nature of *Poil de Carotte* and of the unhappy, but by no means angelic, young boy whose miserable childhood the text recounts.⁸⁹ Most notably, in the very last entry of the *Journal*, written just over a month before his death, Renard explicitly acknowledged himself as having been 'Poil de Carotte':

⁸⁶ It should be noted that the text that I will here be arguing for as a source for Beckett's 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges', and for his suite of poems dealing with scenes in the life of a young child, is the *Poil de Carotte* that Renard first published in 1894, which takes the form of a series of brief vignettes, some written as prose, others as short, pseudo-dramatic exchanges between characters. Subsequently, Renard derived a one-act play of the same title from his prose narrative; this play was first performed in 1900.

⁸⁷ Jules Renard, *Journal 1887-1910*, ed. by Léon Guichard and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960), 244 [27th September, 1894] – In that same entry, Renard describes *Poil de Carotte* as 'une tournure d'esprit' (*Ibid.*)

⁸⁸ viz. 'Et moi, crois-tu donc que je l'aime ?' (Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1979], 167)

⁸⁹ It is, for example, notable that, in an entry dating from December 1906, Renard signals the divide between his fiction and reality, not by evoking what he added to his text, but what he refrained from including: 'Poil de Carotte. Tout de même, je n'ai pas osé tout écrire. Je n'ai pas dit ceci : M. Lepic envoyant Poil de Carotte demander à Mme Lepic si elle voulait divorcer, et l'accueil de Mme Lepic. Quelle scène !' (Jules Renard, *Journal 1887-1910*, 1093 [10th December, 1906]).

Je veux me lever, cette nuit. Lourdeur. Une jambe pend dehors. Puis un filet coule le long de ma jambe. Il faut qu'il arrive au talon pour que je me décide. Ça séchera dans les draps, comme quand j'étais Poil de Carotte.⁹⁰

This final entry is not merely significant on account of the explicit association that Renard establishes between himself and the fictional avatar of his boyhood self, however. It is also significant for grounding that association in an incident of bed-wetting, thereby recalling one *Poil de Carotte's* most unpleasant vignettes, 'Sauf votre respect', in which, by way of punishing her son for soiling the bed, his mother takes some of what he has done and makes it into a soup which she then brings to him in bed, feeding it to him herself. Once he has finished this soup, Mme. Lepic – 'à la fois goguenarde et dégoûtée'⁹¹ – reveals the truth and Poil de Carotte, much to the disappointment of his mother, reveals how little such behaviour surprises him on the part of a mother whose cruelty he knows too well:

"Ah ! ma petite salissure, tu en as mangé, tu en as mangé, et de la tienne encore, de celle d'hier.

- Je m'en doutais", répond simplement Poil de Carotte, sans faire la figure espérée.

Il s'y habitue, et quand on s'habitue à une chose, elle finit par n'être plus drôle du tout.⁹²

In addition to being worthy of consideration on account of the entry in Renard's *Journal*, this particular vignette has the distinction of serving to confirm Beckett's familiarity with *Poil de Carotte*. It is to this scene – more particularly, to Poil de Carotte's unmoved response on learning the true nature of what he has just eaten – that Beckett alludes in a letter to George Reavey of 1937.⁹³ We may thus be sure that Beckett had read *Poil de Carotte* prior to embarking on the composition of his French-language poetry of the late 1930s. Similarly, in another letter to Reavey – this one dating from 1938 – Beckett places Renard's work among his reading matter at the time when we know him to have been working on poems that would eventually appear as part of *Poèmes 37-39*: 'I read an average of an hour a day, after an hour the illusion of comprehension ceases, Kant, Descartes, Johnson, Renard and a kindergarten manual of science: "L'air est partout", "Le plomb est un metal lourd et tendre"⁹⁴.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1267 [6th April, 1910]

⁹¹ Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte*, 41

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *viz.* 'Je m'en doutais, comme disait Poil de Carott[e], quand on lui donna à boire [d]u déjà bu' (*LSB I*, 442 – SB to George Reavey [15th February, 1937]).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 643 (SB to GR [27th September, 1938]) – The appearance of Kant and Renard amongst those whose works Beckett was reading is all the more significant in light of the fact that, as noted, the autograph manuscript of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' would be found in Beckett's edition of Kant's collected works.

Although Beckett's letters to Reavey confirm both his familiarity with *Poil de Carotte* and his engagement with an unidentified text by Renard around the time he was working on the *Poèmes 37-39*, critical discussions of Beckett's engagement with Renard have tended to concentrate on his more evident interest in Renard's *Journal*.⁹⁵ The *Journal* is recognised to have been a very important text for Beckett, and one of which Beckett is known to have been aware from at least the early 1930s.⁹⁶ Of most direct relevance to the present discussion, however, is Beckett's interest in Renard as this is known to have manifested itself towards the end of the 1930s, around the time he would have composed 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'. In this regard, it is already significant that Beckett's allusion to 'Sauf votre respect' is to be found in a letter written in 1937 since this situates Beckett's engagement with *Poil de Carotte* in relatively close proximity to the period at which Beckett is thought to have begun work on the French-language poems of the late 1930s. More significantly still, the text of one of the *Poèmes 37-39* – namely, 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' – actually includes a direct citation from Renard's *Journal*, thereby proving Beckett to have made use of Renard in his poetry of this period.⁹⁷ While 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' thus serves to prove a connection between Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s and Jules Renard, the role played by *Poil de Carotte* in the composition of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' is potentially far more significant than that played by Renard's *Journal* in *Poèmes 37-39*.

The key indication of this significance lies in the opening words of Beckett's poem: 'Les Joues rouges' is, in fact, the title of what is, at once, the longest of the vignettes in *Poil de Carotte*, and the vignette that gives fullest expression to the negative aspects of *Poil de Carotte*'s character since he therein serves as the primary

⁹⁵ In her study of Beckett's engagement with Jules Renard – currently, the most extensive treatment of this engagement –, Angela Moorjani does in fact note Beckett's citation from *Poil de Carotte* and draws attention to some aspects of that text that may have been of interest to Beckett. Her discussion makes no mention of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges', however, nor the role that Renard's *Poil de Carotte* may have played in its composition – For this study, see Angela Moorjani, 'Beckett's Parisian Ghosts (Continued): The Case of the Missing Jules Renard', in *Limit{e} Beckett 1* (2010) <<http://www.limitebeckett.paris-sorbonne.fr/one/moorjani.html>> [accessed: 11th January, 2018].

⁹⁶ In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of February 1931, he describes himself as 'reading "Journal Intime de Jules Renard"' and finding '[o]dd things' in it (*LSB I*, 69 – SB to TMG [24th February, 1931]). Evidence of his early fascination with the *Journal*, and its many '[o]dd things', is to be found in his *Dream Notebook* – the notebook includes a large number of extracts taken from Renard's diary (*viz. DN*, [212]-[239]) – and it is a testament to the enduring nature of this fascination that, at the time of his death, Beckett's library contained a copy Renard's *Journal*, alongside volumes of his *Correspondence* and an edition of his short-story collection *Le Vigneron dans sa vigne*. (*viz. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, Samuel Beckett's Library*, 282).

⁹⁷ For this citation, and a discussion of its significance to the poem in which it appears, see the discussion of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' below.

antagonist. Before progressing with our analysis of 'Les Joues rouges' and its possible connections to Beckett's poem, however, it is worth underlining the more general connections between Renard's *Poil de Carottte* and Beckett's poetic project, as outlined in his letter to MacGreevy.

As described by Beckett, his suite of poems, like Renard's suite of prose and pseudo-dramatic fragments, was going to be concerned with 'episodes in the life of a child'. More particularly, and once again like Renard's text, Beckett's poetry would present episodes in the life of a young boy referred to only by a nickname ('Petit Sot'). These similarities already strongly argue for Renard's text as an influence on Beckett's decision to begin work on a series of texts based upon the life of a child.⁹⁸ In deriving his inspiration from a pre-existing literary model, Beckett would not have been doing anything out of character. We already know him to have considered, and to have begun work towards the composition of, a text that was to be called 'Trueborn Jackeen' and which would have been modelled on Daniel Defoe's 'The True-Born Englishman'.⁹⁹ In that case, as in the case of his suite of poems on the subject of Petit Sot, Beckett's project was finally abandoned. Unlike 'Trueborn Jackeen', however, Beckett's 'Petit Sot' reached a far more advanced stage of composition, allowing us to explore in greater detail the nature and extent of Beckett's experimentation in the spirit of Renard's model.

In the case of Beckett's text, as in the case of Renard's, the lynchpin of the construction is the figure of the child himself. As the name Petit Sot makes clear, there is a degree of negativity in Beckett's presentation of his fictional creation. This negativity is not only made clear by the name that is used to refer to him, however. The text of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' presents the small boy who wanders through the wood as being, not merely unhappy, but also hate-filled and pathetic. The sense of Petit Sot as being pathetic comes from the fact that his hatred, which he loves dearly and by which he is consumed, is deemed to be weak, surviving only during the day, in the warmth of the 'soleil' and when surrounded by the 'chansons des oiseaux'. In the typescript of the poem, we read that this is because the night is 'pleine de haines [...] / ^^beaucoup^^ plus fortes que la sienne', which leaves a measure of doubt as to why exactly Petit Sot's hatred should be a purely diurnal

⁹⁸ Interestingly, by choosing to compose this series as a suite of poems, rather than a suite of prose texts, Beckett would seem to confirm what was earlier noted about his primary creative impulse in the late 1930s having been poetic rather than prosodic.

⁹⁹ For details of Beckett's projected 'Trueborn Jackeen' and his notes towards it, see John Pilling, 'A Critique of Aesthetic Judgement: Beckett's "Dissonance of Ends and Means"', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 64-65

phenomenon.¹⁰⁰ The autograph manuscript clarifies matters somewhat by showing Beckett to have initially written that at night Petit Sot ‘a peur / de haïr comme il ose haïr’, thereby suggesting that, at night, Petit Sot’s fear prevents him from nursing the hatred he cherishes during the day.¹⁰¹ This image of Petit Sot as one who is afraid at night clearly associates him with other figures in Beckett’s canon of pre-War writings – most notably, Belacqua¹⁰² – and, most interestingly, with Beckett himself. In the course of a 1934 letter to his cousin Morris Sinclair, Beckett informed his cousin of what he saw as the success of the psychoanalysis he was then undergoing. Amongst the benefits that he felt himself to be deriving from his psychoanalysis, Beckett commented that ‘les coups de panique la nuit deviennent moins fréquents et moins aigus’.¹⁰³ Beckett, in other words, was gripped by fits of panic and distress at night; fear, in other words, not unlike that which the autograph manuscript of ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ shows to have gripped Petit Sot. It is not just a terror of the night that Beckett and Petit Sot have in common, however. Beckett’s vision of Petit Sot as profoundly unhappy and utterly full of hate is strikingly similar to that presentation of the young man Beckett understood himself to have been which he offered in one of his most revealing letters to Thomas MacGreevy:

For years I was unhappy, consciously & deliberately ever since I left school & went to T.C.D., so that I isolated myself more & more, undertook less & less & lent myself to a crescendo of disparagement of others & myself. But in all that there was nothing that struck me as morbid. The misery & solitude & apathy & the sneers were the elements of an index of superiority and guaranteed the feeling of arrogant “otherness”, which seemed as right & natural & as little morbid as the ways in which it was not so much expressed as implied & reserved & kept available for a possible utterance in the future.¹⁰⁴

The figure that Beckett here describes, consumed in equal measure by his own unhappiness and his own hatred – at once of those around him and of himself – shares clear parallels with the boy we find in ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’. Just like the younger Beckett as described in this letter to MacGreevy, Petit Sot is alone – we see him isolated, surrounded only by the sounds of animals and, perhaps, the sight of flowers – and he is consumed by hatred. This hatred, interestingly, seems to be no more natural to Petit Sot than Beckett’s letter suggests his own unhappiness to have

¹⁰⁰ JRYR MS

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* – This is crossed out in the MS (*viz.* Appendix I [c] - i).

¹⁰² It is, as previously noted, at night that Belacqua entreats the intercession of Saints Lucy and Jude.

¹⁰³ *LSB I*, 179 (SB to Morris Sinclair [27th January, 1934])

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 258-59 (SB to TMG [10th March, 1935]) – Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this letter dates from Beckett’s period of psychoanalysis, a time at which he was actively engaged in intense self-examination of the sort to which this letter clearly testifies.

been to him. There, Beckett described himself as having been ‘consciously & deliberately’ unhappy, terms that bespeak a concerted effort on his part to maintain his pitch of hateful unhappiness. Similarly, Petit Sot’s hatred is described as something that

les longues heures
vont ^{^^}lentement^{^^} lui enlever
^{^^}lentement^{^^} les blanches heures
les heures ^{^^}d’^{^^}or^{^^} ^{^^}les^{^^} heures grises
et que la nuit achèvera¹⁰⁵

Read against the description of night as a time when Petit Sot is too afraid to hate, it seems probable that this fear is his natural state. His hatred that embraces everything it would be right to love (‘toutes les belles choses’ and ‘toutes les bonnes gens’) and which serves to separate him from the ‘garçons sages’ who, unlike him, are capable of loving, is constantly being worn down by the passage of the hours, it weakens over the course of a day – as living fatigues a body – until he no longer has the strength to maintain it through, and against, the night.¹⁰⁶ If Petit Sot’s hatred is a product of conscious effort that marks out his ‘otherness’ from the other boys, it is no sign of superiority, nor any source of pleasure or comfort to him: During the day, he walks alone, hate-filled, and miserable; at night, he is equally alone but, in the dark, his little hatred of which he seems to be so proud shrivels away, and Petit Sot is left with nothing but his fear.

Recognition of the similarity between Beckett’s presentation of himself in his letter to MacGreevy and the figure of the Petit Sot not only serves to highlight the autobiographical wellspring from which this poem derives, it also alerts us to an aspect of the poem that is easily overlooked but which serves to raise the question of who is narrating this work: This aspect concerns the use of the *imparfait* when referring to the flowers that Petit Sot sees as he walked through the wood:

le long d’un fossé
où ^{^^}de jolis jeunes^{^^} safrans
blanches [*sic*] mauves jaunes stri^{^^}é^{^^}s
sans amour et sans haine
étaient ce qu’ils devaient être¹⁰⁷

The use of the *imparfait* in the final line of ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ may initially strike the reader as curious, appearing as it does at the close of a poem that

¹⁰⁵ JRYR MS – Deletions have here been omitted; for the full text, see Appendix I (c).

¹⁰⁶ The presentation of night that we find in ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ – as destructive and a time of fear – is not without echo to the vision of night that we find in ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ another unpublished, French-language poem of the 1930s – For a discussion of that poem, see below.

¹⁰⁷ JRYR MS – Deletions have here been omitted; for the full text, see Appendix I (c).

has otherwise been written entirely in the present and the future tense. These tenses place us with Petit Sot in the moment of his walk. The final use of the *imparfait*, however, unexpectedly asserts a different time – that of the narrative voice of the poem. The narrator is thus placed in the present, gazing back on Petit Sot and on the flowers whose example the hate-filled fool was unable, or unwilling, to follow.¹⁰⁸ What we seem to find, in other words, is a narrative voice that is associated with an older Beckett – the Beckett who has composed the poem –, looking back on the hate-filled youth that he felt himself to be and for whom he now appears unable to summon up any sympathy.

In presenting Petit Sot as one who is filled with hatred and seized by terror at night, then, Beckett appears to have been directly appealing to his own experience and to the young man that he understood himself to have been. In his use of the *imparfait*, meanwhile, Beckett appears to be signalling the divide that stands between that younger version of himself and the poet who crafted the text. Taken together, then, these factors would appear to confirm that – whether or not, as claimed by Anne Atik, Beckett’s guilt at having caused the death of a hedgehog has a role to play in ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ – Beckett’s Petit Sot, like Renard’s Poil de Carotte, is profoundly autobiographic. Moreover, and once again like Renard’s *Poil de Carotte*, Beckett’s poem also presents us with a profoundly negative image of its central character. It is in this respect that, as previously suggested, the fact that Beckett should have directly alluded to ‘Les Joues rouges’ in particular is so interesting.

As noted, Poil de Carotte himself is the primary antagonist in ‘Les Joues rouges’. In this regard, it should be stressed that ‘Les Joues rouges’ is not unique in *Poil de Carotte*; other vignettes also depict the young boy in a more or less negative light.¹⁰⁹ ‘Les Joues rouges’ is striking, however, because its negative portrayal of him takes place wholly removed from the environment of his family home and in the context of an extremely ambiguous narrative. To fully appreciate this ambiguity, and the true signification of the term ‘joues rouges’, we need to briefly recapitulate the narrative of this vignette.

Initially, the ‘joues rouges’ of the title are those of Marseau, one of Poil de Carotte’s classmates. Unlike Marseau, whose cheeks are described as flushing a deep

¹⁰⁸ It is, in this regard, all the more interesting that the flowers in question should be crocuses, specifically spring flowers. Such a reference to spring flowers that were once an example but which, are perhaps no longer, might thus be seen as yet another tacit admission on Beckett’s part of the temporal divide between the child-figure of the poem – a little boy, in the springtime of his life – and the poet himself, who was by this stage entering into middle age.

¹⁰⁹ In ‘La Marmite’, for example, Poil de Carotte assists his mother is forcing the retirement of their aged servant, Honorine (*viz.* Jules Renard, *Poil de Carotte*, 71-75).

crimson at the slightest provocation, Poil de Carotte's face is characterised by a persistent floury pallor out to which even concerted pinching can only coax – and even then, only on occasion – ‘quelque point d'un roux douteux’.¹¹⁰ At the start of the vignette, Poil de Carotte and other schoolboys are lying in their beds, watched by a supervisor – a ‘maître d'étude’ – by the name of Violone. On this occasion, as on many occasions previously, Poil de Carotte sees this supervisor tarrying beside Marseau's bed. Intrigued, Poil de Carotte pretends to be asleep, the better to observe Violone speaking with Marseau, telling him stories and, finally, kissing him before leaving.¹¹¹ Poil de Carotte's initial reaction to this scene is violently negative; he accuses Marseau of being Violone's ‘pistolet’, and continues to tease him on the same grounds the next day.¹¹² Although Violone, having overheard Poil de Carotte's initial response to the kiss, quickly returned and defended the propriety of his feelings for Marseau – ‘Oui...je t'ai embrassé, Marseau; tu peux l'avouer, car tu n'as fait aucun mal. [...] c'est là un baiser pur et chaste, un baiser de père à enfant, et que je t'aime comme un fils, ou si tu veux comme un frère’¹¹³ –, it is highly likely that the adult reader is intended to be every bit as disquieted by Violone's behaviour as Poil de Carotte appears to be. Violone may proclaim that his ‘affection est pure’, but there is clearly something unsavoury in his behaviour, as there is already a suspicion of something more than unsavoury in his name (*Violone*).¹¹⁴ The subsequent development of the narrative, moreover, seems to confirm that we are right to be uneasy. In the principal's office – to which he has been sent for refusing to wash his dirty hands, by what we, following the example of Poil de Carotte, can choose to see as a vengeful Violone¹¹⁵ –, Poil de Carotte, in a last-ditch attempt to avoid punishment, blurts out that Violone and Marseau ‘font des choses’.¹¹⁶ The result of Poil de Carotte's frankness, reported at the start of the final section of the text, seem to confirm that he, and we as readers, are right to have been uneasy: ‘Le même jour, à la suite d'une courte enquête, Violone reçoit son congé !’.¹¹⁷ Even the scene of Violone's departure seems only to further confirm the righteousness of Poil de Carotte's disgust, since the supervisor is reported

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93

¹¹¹ This kiss is not actually directly presented by the narrative voice. We only become aware of it when, after Violone's departure, Poil de Carotte makes Marseau aware of what he has seen: “C'est du propre !... Tu crois que je vous ai pas vus. Dis voir un peu qu'il ne t'a pas embrassé !” (*Ibid.*, 94)

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96

¹¹⁵ *viz.* ‘[...] il [= Violone] trouve que celles [= les mains] de Poil de Carotte ne sont pas nettes. Poil de Carotte, prié de les repasser sous le robinet, se révolte. On peut, à vrai dire, y remarquer une tache bleuâtre, mais il soutient que c'est un commencement d'engelure. On lui en veut, sûrement’ (*Ibid.*, 96)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99

to have chosen to leave the establishment at precisely the moment when the students are out in the yard, the better to experience, one last time, the pupils' evident affection for him.¹¹⁸ The only boy not to be in the yard at the moment of Violone's departure, in fact, is Poil de Carotte himself. From where he is confined in detention, however, Poil de Carotte can see Violone leaving and so when we are informed that he has smashed a window, we initially imagine that he does so the better to gloat at the departure of the disquieting figure of Violone. This, certainly, is what Violone himself assumes as he sees Poil de Carotte shaking his bloodied fist at him from the window. In actual fact, however, Poil de Carotte's aim is quite different from what Violone, and we as readers, might have imagined, and serves to entirely alter the sense of the story that we have just read:

"Petit imbécile! dit le maître d'étude, te voilà content !"
 — Dame ! crie Poil de Carotte, tandis qu'avec entrain, il casse d'un second coup de poing un autre carreau, pourquoi que vous l'embrassiez et que vous ne m'embrassiez pas, moi ?"
 Et il ajoute, se barbouillant la figure avec le sang qui coule de sa main coupée :
 "Moi aussi, j'ai des joues rouges, quand j'en veux !"¹¹⁹

As may be observed, this closing exchange serves to entirely reframe Poil de Carotte's response to Violone's behaviour around Marseau. Undoubtedly, the adult readers of the text are left free to judge for themselves whether or not they trust Violone's assertion of the absolute propriety of his actions, but these final lines reveal that the question of propriety was never of any concern for Poil de Carotte. Far from being disgusted or disquieted by what he observed, he was jealous. In the context of a text which elsewhere presents Poil de Carotte as enduring the abuse inflicted upon him by a sadistic mother and vindictive siblings, often before the relative impassivity of a disinterested father, Poil de Carotte's actions signal his yearning to be loved as he observes Marseau to be by Violone. Unlike Marseau, however, Poil de Carotte is unloved and, so this story suggests, unlovable, since this want of love has twisted itself into something violent. Earlier on, prior even to the moment of his observing the kiss, we are informed how Poil de Carotte 'zèbrerait volontiers, haineusement, à coups d'ongles et écorcerait comme des oranges les joues vermillonnées de Marseau'.¹²⁰ It is this sickly want of affection that, in the final lines of 'Les Joues rouges', is revealed to

¹¹⁸ viz. *Ibid.*, 100-101 – The narrator determines Violone's decision to leave while the boys are in the yard to be an instance of 'coquetterie' (*Ibid.*, 100) on his part. Given that the more general connotation of this word as used in the French of the time allies it with the efforts of a woman to seduce, or with the pleasure she takes in being found seductive, the use of the term can once again be seen as belying Violone's earlier claims that his affection for Marseau was entirely chaste.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93

be at the root of his violent hatred for Marseau. Moreover, these lines also reveal that the only person whom Poil de Carotte has truly made to suffer is himself: Marseau's face is left intact; it is his own hands that Poil de Carotte has dragged through the glass, his own pallid face that he has bloodied. Unlike Marseau's own red-cheeks – spontaneous, and capable of inspiring affection¹²¹ –, Poil de Carotte's are a willed and wilful expression of his loneliness, his desperate attempts to escape it, and the proof that these attempts serve only to isolate him ever further.

Read in light of Renard's 'Les Joues rouges' – and of Poil de Carotte's own 'jouis rouges' –, then, there is another way of viewing those of Petit Sot. Not necessarily a sign of guilt or shame about a particular action for which he would be responsible, they may instead be seen as an external marker of the hatred that he carries everywhere within himself. At the same time, if read in this way, his 'jouis rouges' would also constitute the proof that this hatred towards the world around him in fact derives from nothing other than a desperate desire to be loved. (In this way, in fact, and by a curious inversion, Beckett would have succeeded in inserting into his text the boundless, naive affection that prompted him, as a boy, to protect a hedgehog from the cold, doing so without evoking the hedgehog at all and without the tenderness that the voice of *Company / Compagnie* demonstrates towards the essentially good intentions of the young boy it describes.) Like Poil de Carotte, Petit Sot too may have 'des joues rouges, quand [il] en veut', but like Poil de Carotte, these red cheeks are not apt to inspire affection in others. Instead, they are to be seen when Petit Sot is otherwise alone – not confined in a room, like Poil de Carotte or Apollinaire's speaker, in that poem to which 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' also alludes, but within the prison of himself –, and they are a sign of enduring pain within the self, of a love warped by unrequited tenderness of which, so the narrative suggests, the child is not worthy of in any event. And so

les joues rouges les yeux rouges
et de haine pleine le coeur
[...]
en cet état Petit Sot
se promène dans le bois
tristement le long d'un fossé¹²²

None of the allusive complexity of this poem that has just been sketched out was registered by David Wheatley in his discussion of the poem. Writing on 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges', he noted only that 'the most striking feature of this poem,

¹²¹ viz. 'Marseau a d'ailleurs une manière séduisante de rougir sans savoir pourquoi et à l'improviste, qui le fait aimer comme une fille' (*Ibid.*, 92-93).

¹²² JRYR MS

apart from its much lower level of quality than the [poems of *Poèmes* 37-39], is how unlike Beckett it reads'.¹²³

Although Wheatley does not provide particular justification for his assertion that this poem is of a 'much lower level of quality' than the rest of Beckett's French-language poetry of the later 1930s, it would seem that his dislike for 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' was occasioned by what he considered to be its narrative simplicity. For Wheatley, in fact, the narrative simplicity of this poem is so far removed from what he understands as Beckettian that it led him to view the very possibility of Beckett's having written it as every bit as remote as the possibility of Beckett's having written the rest of the poems in the *Petit Sot* cycle: 'Definitive attribution remains impossible until such a time as the poems [i.e. both the briefer *Petit Sot* poems and 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'] are published', writes Wheatley, 'but blithely simplistic narrative was not a feature of the great work Beckett was now beginning to produce after the war, in fiction, drama – and poetry'.¹²⁴

Like Wheatley, I would agree that the defining feature of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' is its 'blithely simplistic narrative'. *Pace* Wheatley, however, I would suggest that such simplistic narrative is indeed a key feature of much of the 'great work' that Beckett would produce after the War. It would be difficult, in fact, to think of any text whose narrative is more 'blithely simplistic' than *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot* – a play in which, as Vivian Mercier famously put it, 'nothing happens, *twice*'.¹²⁵ *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot* is interesting, indeed, precisely because its 'blithely simplistic narrative' is counterpointed by an extreme complexity and, more pointedly still, by an almost total uncertainty: On the surface, the events that we observe could not be simpler – two men who wait by a tree; two men who arrive, and leave; a boy who does likewise; two men who remain by a tree, waiting – but as soon as one begins to ask even very basic questions of the *why*, *where*, *who*, *when* variety, the blithely placid surface of the play's narrative reveals itself to be far more treacherous than it initially appeared.

Much the same may be said of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges': The identity of the *Petit Sot*, the reason for his wandering, his location, his purpose, the relationship between the child and the poem's speaker, all of this is eminently clear until one actually tries to clarify it. If, indeed, Beckett did take *Poil de Carotte* as a model for his poetic series of episodes in the life of a child – as has been suggested here – the innovations that he introduced into his model are not limited to the

¹²³ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 266

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 267

¹²⁵ Vivian Mercier, 'The Uneventful Event', in *The Irish Times* [18th February, 1956], 6 – Emphasis in original.

transposition from prose to poetry. Beckett also introduced into his text an all-pervasive uncertainty that one does not find in Renard's writing. As the presentation of 'Les Joues rouges' that was offered above demonstrates, the vignettes of *Poil de Carotte* are, narratively speaking, exquisitely constructed. Their construction is such that it rewards careful examination by becoming ever more comprehensible, ever more transparent. Beckett's poem, by contrast, lacks any kind of development, and the only clarification at which one can truly hope to arrive via close examination of the text is clarification of the sources from which Beckett may have derived his allusions. The presence of such allusions is significant in and of itself because allusion would, of course, remain a feature of Beckett's literary writing throughout his life. (It is to be found in *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot* or in *comment dire / what is the word* as surely as it is in *Dream*.) The presence of such allusions is thus a constant that we should expect, and which is by no means incompatible with Beckett's characterisation of this poem – and, more broadly, the series to which it belonged – as 'straightforward' and 'descriptive.'

In describing his work as 'straightforward' and 'descriptive', then, Beckett was not necessarily describing it as simplistic, but his words do alert us to what, over the course of our close-readings, will emerge as the key difference between 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' and the vast majority of the rest of Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s. In the vast majority of cases, these poems are neither 'straightforward' nor 'descriptive.' On the contrary, many of them may not be said to describe anything at all. Others, meanwhile, if they are descriptive, are not nearly so straightforward as 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' since, unlike this poem, they do not even provide us with a relatively limpid surface of a superficially comprehensible narrative.¹²⁶ In this respect, 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' can be seen as pointing towards the kind of texts that Beckett would go on to produce after the War, texts that provide the reader with narratives that are at once straightforward, descriptive, and largely incomprehensible. Beckett's reasons for having chosen not to pursue this series to its fruition, must remain obscure.¹²⁷ Equally, the paucity of evidence surrounding the *Petit Sot* poems, and the brevity of the only poem amongst them that can be unambiguously attributed to Beckett himself, make it impossible to derive any broader conclusions about these poems and their place in Beckett's literary

¹²⁶ The only exceptions to this rule amongst the poems that will shortly be examined are 'La Mouche' and 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', both of which provide a relatively – albeit not entirely – unproblematic surface narrative: the one of a fly's death, the other of dispiriting pillow-talk between the poem's male and female speakers.

¹²⁷ One reason, purely biographic, may have been that the outbreak of the War led him to set the composition aside.

development. It is tempting all the same to see in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' – with its solitary figure who walks through an ill-defined locale for reasons known only, and perhaps not even, to himself – as a prefiguration of the kind of narratives, both fictional and dramatic, that Beckett would produce after the War, and the kind of characters who would people these narratives. Any temptation that one might have to root this turn towards a new kind of 'straightforward', 'descriptive' writing in his use of French, however, must be quickly dismissed owing to the fact that it was also in this language that Beckett wrote the rest of his poetry of the late 1930s. And, as we will now see, that poetry testifies not only to the vastly differing kinds of poetic style that Beckett was capable of employing in French, but also the scale of allusive and structural complexity that he was capable of producing when working in that language.

III. BECKETT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE POETRY OF THE LATE 1930S: UNEXAMINED COMPLEXITY?

Coming back to Beckett's other poetry of the later 1930s, it may be recalled that Beckett's letter to MacGreevy provided us with an authorial source that seemed to contradict the commonly-held view of the *Poèmes 37-39* as being 'relatively straightforward'. The poem 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges', meanwhile, has helped to clarify the kind of simplicity that Beckett himself deemed to be 'relatively straightforward' – namely, a simplicity defined, not by its exclusion of literary allusion, but by its presentation of a readily comprehensible narrative conveyed through uncomplicated, if not necessarily unambiguous, language. By extension, this poem has also given us an indication of the sort of complexity that we might expect to find in the *Poèmes 37-39*. If 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' is marked by narrative simplicity and linguistic clarity, in other words, we should expect the poems of Beckett's collection to be marked primarily by narrative complexity and linguistic opacity, all of this subtended by an intertextuality at least as well-developed as that which we have shown to be at work in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'.

Obviously, both Beckett's letter to MacGreevy and the text of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' are problematic sources. Whatever light the poem may throw on the style of the *Poèmes 37-39*, for example, is compromised by the fact that it cannot be confirmed as one of those to which Beckett is referring in his letter – even if all surviving evidence suggests this to be highly likely. The letter, meanwhile, cannot serve to *confirm* the nature of the *Poèmes 37-39* any more than could Beckett's words to Lawrence Harvey on the subject of his linguistic turn serve to confirm he sought in French 'a form of weakness'. If we are to prove what the evidence of Beckett's letter to MacGreevy and the text of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' imply, therefore –

namely, that at least some of the *Poèmes 37-39* are indeed highly complex texts – we will need to show that these implications are supported by other forms of evidence. More particularly, these implications must be proven by the textual evidence of the *Poèmes 37-39* themselves. And, as will be argued over what remains of this chapter, such evidence is indeed to be found in these poems for, though all of these poems may be composed in French, these poems also present us with a remarkable amount of complexity and sometimes vast differences of style and approach.

That this is the case, of course, should come as no surprise given the widespread critical acceptance of the fact that the use of French simplified Beckett's mode of expression 'most of the time' only. Equally, some critics have already recognised that a certain number of these French-language poems preserve the baroque mode of Beckett's earlier English-language verse.¹²⁸ This recognition has important implications for the manner in which we should approach the poems.

In the first instance, it serves to confirm that what we find in Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s is by no means that suite of uniformly simplified poems that would serve to confirm the role of French in limiting Beckett's creative excesses. Instead, this collection presents us with a rich and diverse array of subtle and, by times, difficult texts. The differences that exist between these poems are all the more noteworthy given that, despite these stylistic differences, the collection *Poèmes 37-39* itself is not an uneasy gathering together of disconnected poems composed in disparate styles. Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39* is, rather, a coherent collection, whose poems are unified by shared thematic concerns with the irrevocable isolation of self – particularly as this manifests itself in moments of sexuality and physical desire – and, above all, with death.¹²⁹

The second implication of the commonality that has been recognised between some of the *Poèmes 37-39* and those of *EBOP* is more significant, however, and goes some way towards explaining why even those critics who recognised certain of these poems as being overtly allusive nevertheless assumed that the collection as a whole testified to a move towards simplicity. What is notable about the poems that are recognised as carrying into French Beckett's *EBOP* style is that, in each case, the similarities between these poems and those of *EBOP* are to be found on the surface level: Both 'ainsi a-t-on beau' and 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', for instance,

¹²⁸ As part of their discussion of the poem 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', Lawlor and Pilling note that it 'comes closest (with "ainsi a-t-on beau" and "jusque dans la caverne" at a further remove) to SB's *EBOP* manner' (*CP*, 376).

¹²⁹ The deeper coherence of this collection is clearly recognised by Lawlor and Pilling: 'These twelve French poems...are not simply a collection in the sense of having been brought together in one place [...] The same subjects recur and interweave throughout' (*Ibid.*, 374).

make direct reference to a named philosopher, while ‘jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol’ explicitly alludes to Classical mythology. These surface similarities, of course, not only suggest a commonality between the style of these poems and that of the poems of *EBOP*, but do so in a manner that explicitly invites the reader to make use of reading strategies that they know to have been appropriate to the poems of *EBOP*. The reading strategies in question are those deemed appropriate to Beckett’s English-language texts of the same period and which involve not merely close examination, but a willingness to admit the potential for deeper complexity, even where a simpler reading might be more obvious.

An instructive example of the effect that the reading strategy most commonly practised on Beckett’s English-language writing, including the poems of *EBOP*, can have on one’s interpretation of Beckett’s poetry is to be found in the notes on *Whoroscope* offered by Lawlor and Pilling. Glossing the reference to Joachim that is found in the poem – viz. ‘nor Joachim my father’s’¹³⁰ – Lawlor and Pilling inform us that “‘Joachim’ presumably refers to the mystical Trinitarian philosopher Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), in whose writings the Son figures as Grace, the Father as Law and the Holy Ghost as Spiritual Understanding’.¹³¹ Such a reading undoubtedly accords with a certain idea of the highly intellectualised early Beckett and the wilfully recondite allusions that we are used to finding in his writings. As such, the reader of *Whoroscope* may be inclined to lend credence to Lawlor and Pilling’s reading. When replaced in its full context, however – ‘so I’m not my son...nor Joachim my father’s’¹³² –, the reference to ‘Joachim’ that we find in *Whoroscope* is far more likely to refer to René Descartes’ own father, Joachim Descartes. Beckett, of course, would have known Joachim to be the name of René Descartes’ father, owing to his reading of Mahaffy’s biography of the philosopher, wherein we find Joachim described as ‘a quiet and amiable man, of whom René always spoke with affection and respect’.¹³³ Obviously, it is possible that some trace of Joachim de Fiore may have been on Beckett’s mind in the writing of *Whoroscope*, but it is also the case that it is only an underlying conviction in the inherent complexity of Beckett’s English-language poetry that would lead anyone to see an allusion to a mystical Trinitarian philosopher behind the immediately satisfactory reading of a simple allusion to Descartes’ father. The expectation of extreme complexity, in essence, is enough to engender such

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 328

¹³² *Ibid.*, 42

¹³³ J. P. Mahaffy, *Descartes*, 8 – For a demonstration of Beckett’s reliance on Mahaffy’s biography of Descartes in the preparation of *Whoroscope*, see Francis Doherty, ‘Mahaffy’s *Whoroscope*’, in *JoBS* (Vol. 2, No. 1 – Autumn, 1992), 27-46.

complexity by inciting the reader to adopt reading strategies primed to detect and uncover arcane allusion.

Conversely, but by the same token, those of the *Poèmes 37-39* that appear on a surface level to distance themselves from the *EBOP* – that is, those poems that do not name particular philosophers nor testify to complexity of that overt and, to use Wheatley’s earlier-cited phrase, ‘wordy self-indulgen[t]’ sort practised by Beckett in the poems of *EBOP* – invite the reader to adopt strategies that they assume to be appropriate to such simpler poems. The reader of such poems, in other words, duly guided by the expectation that Beckett’s French will be a vehicle for work of a simpler and more straightforward nature, reads the poems in a simpler and more straightforward manner and, in so doing, prevents themselves from perceiving any of the complexity that these poems may actually possess. The adoption of simplified reading strategies in the case of those of the *Poèmes 37-39* that do not explicitly call to mind the mode and manner of *EBOP* is all the more appealing given that the collection does indeed include a number of poems that are straightforward in both method and means. The most notable of these is undoubtedly ‘elles viennent’, a poem whose five lines are remarkable for the clarity and simplicity of their expression:

elles viennent
autres et pareilles
avec chacune c’est autre et c’est pareil
avec chacune l’absence d’amour est autre
avec chacune l’absence d’amour est pareille¹³⁴

This poem, however, is very far from confirming French as a language that led Beckett away from the siren-song of style since ‘elles viennent’ was originally written in English as ‘they come’ on the night of January 25th.¹³⁵ Moreover, as can be seen below, this original, English-language version is, in every respect, as clear and as simple as the translation that Beckett would later prepare:

they come
different and the same
with each it is different and the same
with each the absence of love is different
with each the absence of love is the same¹³⁶

In these five brief lines, composed of no more than 13 distinct words, we find a poem of a simplicity that was previously alien to anything that Beckett had previously

¹³⁴ *CP*, 91

¹³⁵ Beckett described the poem as having ‘dictated itself to [him] the night before last’ in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, in which he included the English-language version (*LSB I*, 596 – SB to TMG [27th January, 1938]).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

composed. Even comparably brief poems, such as ‘The Vulture’ or ‘Echo’s Bones’ – amongst Beckett’s published verse –, ‘Gnome’ or ‘Up he went’ – amongst his unpublished writings – seem positively dense when set beside these lines that say precisely what they mean and mean precisely what they say; no more, no less.¹³⁷ There is, in these lines, no trace of wordplay beyond what monotonous repetition will allow, and there is no clear evidence of a deeper allusive substratum.¹³⁸ Instead, we find here an uncomplicated expression of the melancholia felt by Beckett as a result of those unsatisfactory romantic relationships upon which he was engaged, in some cases despite himself, at the time.¹³⁹ In every respect then, this poem appears to best embody the ideal of this collection as being comprised of poems that are ‘far simpler than the English poems’ and ‘usually eschew allusive echoes’.¹⁴⁰ The fact that the most straightforward poem of the entire collection was originally composed in English is evidently important in that it suggests that, as would be the case in the post-War period, any stylistic breakthrough there may have been occurred in English and was only subsequently brought into French for reasons other than literary style. Equally, it serves to confirm that the language in which a poem is written is no guide to the style in which it was written, nor the manner in which it should be read.

What we now find ourselves faced with, in other words, is the possibility that the simplicity that many of these French-language poems are seen to evince is an effect, not of the language in which they are written. Nor even, perhaps, an effect of any overarching ‘deliberate simplification and refinement of means and method’ on Beckett’s part. On the contrary, it becomes possible that at least some of the simplification that has been observed in many of these poems is an effect of the reading strategies that have been adopted by the critics who have engaged with them,

¹³⁷ For these poems, see *CP*: ‘The Vulture’ (*CP*, 5); ‘Echo’s Bones’ (*Ibid.*, 23); ‘Gnome’ (*Ibid.*, 55); ‘Up he went’ (*Ibid.*, 56).

¹³⁸ The connection between ‘differen[ce]’, ‘same[ness]’ and undisclosed female figures is not without echo to Paul Éluard’s ‘La Dame de carreau’, in which the speaker recounts his dreams of ‘une vierge’ (Paul Éluard, ‘La Dame de carreau’, in *Les dessous d’une vie, ou La pyramide humaine*, in Paul Éluard, Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (eds), *Œuvres complètes I*, 202), whom he dreams of endlessly and who is yet, at every dream, different from the virgin who preceded her: ‘Et c’est toujours le même aveu, la même jeunesse, les mêmes yeux purs, le même geste ingénu de ses bras autour de mon cour, la même caresse, la même révélation. / Mais ce n’est jamais la même femme’ (*Ibid.*). We know Beckett to have read this poem by way of the citation that is found in his review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions* – (“aimant l’amour”)’ (*D*, 91), a phrase which occurs towards the start and at the end of Éluard’s text –, and the existence a subtle association between ‘they come’ and Éluard’s ‘La Dame de carreau’ is thus possible. If so, of course, the presence of a subtle allusion to Éluard’s poem would simply serve to prove that this text is, indeed, a model for much of the French-language poetry that would follow it; simply not in the way that critics have previously assumed.

¹³⁹ For details of these relationships and their relation to the poem, see *CP*, 357.

¹⁴⁰ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 100

strategies that have contributed to obscuring their complexity by overlooking the very possibility of such complexity. If this is indeed the case, then the truth of Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s is quite unlike what the prevailing critical appraisal of it would lead us to believe: Far from simplifying his output, Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn may have been followed by a fully-realised collection of French-language verse that, on a stylistic level, presents us with precisely that more complex picture that we would expect if French was not, in and of itself, a vehicle for stylistic change – a collection, that is, which includes poems of overt complexity composed directly in French, poems of overt simplicity translated from English and, in the vast majority of cases, French-language poems whose complexity can only be discerned upon closer inspection and provided we are willing to pay them the same level of attention that has been allowed Beckett's pre-War English-language poetry.

Guided by this picture, I would argue that – as already argued for the post-War turn with reference to the 'Suite' Notebook – we must turn away from those prevailing assumptions inherited via the LSH, which presume a necessary association between Beckett's use of French and an attenuation and simplification of his style. In so doing, we free ourselves. We free ourselves, in the first instance, to arrive at what is perhaps a more prosaic, but also a more nuanced and more comprehensive understanding of Beckett's motivations for turning to French in the pre- and the post-War periods. Additionally, if we cease to look upon Beckett's French-language work as necessarily simpler, we free ourselves to look afresh at the poetry Beckett composed in this language and, in so doing, to arrive at a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the work he composed in French prior to the post-War linguistic turn. This sort of reassessment by way of closer examination is, of course, precisely what we have already begun to undertake in the previous chapter via the reconsideration of Beckett's original, French-language works dating from the period prior to his move to Paris.

In Part III, we will have the opportunity to examine at length the question of what may have motivated Beckett's use of French up to and including the moment of his post-War linguistic turn. Before embarking upon Part III, however, I would like, over the remainder of this chapter, to pursue the re-reading of Beckett's original, French-language literary output from the pre-War period that was begun in the preceding chapter by engaging in close reading of the remaining original poetry – both published and unpublished – that Beckett is universally recognised as having produced in French during the late 1930s. Over the course of the following discussion, these texts will be read not on the assumption that they are simplified until proven complex, but on the understanding that, as works produced by an author fond of complex allusion and who had already demonstrated himself to be capable of extreme

complexity when working through French, have at all times the *potential* to be complex and which, as a consequence, are deserving of close attention from their reader. By subjecting these poems to such close attention, I hope to demonstrate these poems to be complex works of art which serve to prove, not that French was for Beckett a means of simplifying his mode of literary expression, but that much of what Beckett Studies thinks it knows about the work that Beckett composed in this language during the pre-War period needs to be reconsidered.

IV. READING BECKETT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE POETRY OF THE LATE 1930S (2/2):
POÈMES 37-39 AND 'MATCH NUL OU L'AMOUR PAISIBLE'

As noted, the poetry of *Poèmes 37-39* testifies to widely differing levels of stylistic complexity, ranging from the overtly complex to the overtly simplified. The better to clarify the vastly differing levels of complexity observable in these poems – and to suggest something of the degree to which both classes of poems, at once the complex and the simple, could benefit from more attentive re-reading –, I will begin by examining a trio of poems that, each in their own way, serve to make clear the wide variety of approaches that is to be observed in this collection: 'Rue de Vaugirard', 'ainsi a-t-on beau', and 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents.'

Like 'they come' / 'elles viennent', 'Rue de Vaugirard' is a brief poem that clearly conforms to the newly simplified mode that most critics have seen as defining the *Poèmes 37-39* as a whole. Unlike 'they come' / 'elles viennent', however, 'Rue de Vaugirard' was originally written in French. As such, it constitutes an ideal exemplar of the kind of simpler poetry that Beckett is thought to have written in this language. The poems 'ainsi a-t-on beau' and 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', meanwhile, are held to conform, not to the tenets of Beckett's novel simplicity, but to those of the heavy-handed, allusive complexity that defines his earlier English-language poetry. In these three poems, therefore, we find the extremes of Beckett's style as it is to be observed in this collection. Having studied these extremes, I believe that we will be better able to appreciate that the defining characteristic of this collection is neither overt simplicity, nor overt complexity, but a kind of covert simplicity that, in many respects, anticipates the vaguened aesthetics of Beckett's post-War literary production.

Lying at the complex extreme of Beckett's poetic style in *Poèmes 37-39*, 'ainsi a-t-on beau' and 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', as previously noted, both include explicit allusion to named philosophers: In 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', it is the Medieval Nominalist Roscellinus Compendiensis, known as Roscelin in French, who

makes a fleeting appearance ('[...] et Roscelin et on attend [...]'¹⁴¹); 'ainsi a-t-on beau', meanwhile, provides us with an image of a disinterested Kant surveying the ruins of Lisbon in the wake of the 1755 earthquake ('[...] sur Lisbonne fumante Kant froidement penché [...]'¹⁴²). This sort of reference to philosophers is something that we would more readily expect from the Anglophone Beckett of *Whoroscope* than from the Francophone Beckett who composed the *Poèmes 37-39* and, as previously outlined, it is most likely for this reason that these poems have been described as being formed in the *EBOP* mould. If we are to properly reread Beckett's French-language poetry, however, it is not enough to say that these poems conform to the *EBOP* mode on a surface level. We must read them and think about them in greater depth: Is it possible, for example, that this *EBOP* mould was in any respect altered by its transposition into French? Is there any sense in which the references to philosophers that we find in these two poems are less fully integrated into the structure of the poem than the figure of Descartes was to Beckett's *Whoroscope*? Is the complexity of these two French-language poems merely a matter of superficial allusion? If we analyse these poems more closely, will we find a more profound simplicity beneath a thin carapace of erudition or has Beckett in these poems, as in his earlier English verse, made intelligent use of philosophical allusion in his literary compositions? To answer this question, we must first ask ourselves what relationship these named philosophers bear to the rest of the poems in which they appear.

In each case, surviving archival evidence confirms Beckett to have had some degree of (passing) familiarity with the philosophers named in these poems: Roscelin's name, as the editors of *CP* inform us, is to be found in notes taken by Beckett from Joseph Gredt's *Elementia philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae*.¹⁴³ Entries in the 'Whoroscope' Notebook, meanwhile, show Beckett to have engaged with Kant during the late 1930s, doing so both directly, via an eleven-volume edition of Kant's complete works that he procured from Munich, and indirectly, via the introduction to 'Kants Leben und Lehre' that was to be found in the final volume of that same edition and

¹⁴¹ *CP*, 93 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 98 – Emphasis mine.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 378 – The editors suggest that Beckett is likely to have been directed to this source by Brian Coffey, who was himself a Thomist scholar. In addition to this particular source, Beckett may also have encountered Roscelin via his reading of Windelband's *Geschichte der Philosophie* (viz. Wilhelm Windelband and Heinz Heimsoeth, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1935], 227, 230, 249, *passim*). For an extensive treatment of Beckett's debt to Windelband, see Matthew Feldman's study of Beckett's philosophy notes in his *Beckett's Books* (viz. Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'*, 39-77).

which was written by its editor, Ernst Cassierer.¹⁴⁴ (Further evidence of Beckett's contemporaneous engagement with Kant during the time when he was working on the French-language poems of the late 1930s is also obviously to be found in the fact that, as noted, the autograph manuscript of Beckett's poem 'les joues rouges' was found by Arikha Atik in one of the volumes of Beckett's just-mentioned edition of Kant.¹⁴⁵) While Beckett appears to have had far greater familiarity with Kant than he enjoyed with Roscelin, Beckett cannot be said to have been particularly *au fait* with the work of either. Nonetheless, neither reference can be classed as merely superficial self-indulgence since, in each case, it is possible to discern a deeper logic behind the inclusion of reference to these figures in the poems in which they appear.

The allusion to Kant, for example, presents us with the philosopher, not in a generalised and disembodied manner, but in the act of reflecting upon the Lisbon Earthquake:

sur Lisbonne fumante Kant froidement penché
rêver en générations de chênes et oublier son père
ses yeux s'il portait la moustache
s'il était bon ou mauvais
de quoi il est mort¹⁴⁶

As noted by John Pilling – and recalled by Van Hulle and Nixon¹⁴⁷ –, this reference was probably derived by Beckett from Cassierer's study in volume 11 of the aforementioned edition, where Kant is described as having felt himself 'zur gedanklichen Rechenschaftsablegung aufgefordert' by the Lisbon Earthquake.¹⁴⁸ The close association between this reference to Kant's response to the Lisbon Earthquake and the act of gradually forgetting one's father lends to the philosophical allusion a clear biographic significance, since Beckett's own father had died five years prior to the composition of this poem. By coupling the allusion to Kant with the mention of 'son père', the reference to Kant can be seen as a distancing mechanism, one that uses the philosopher to raise the question of how one should respond to human tragedy, in a general sense, thereby at once invoking and obscuring the particular human tragedy – namely, the loss and subsequent forgetting of his father – with which Beckett was still struggling as he worked on the *Poèmes 37-39*.¹⁴⁹ In this respect, the use Beckett

¹⁴⁴ Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon note that this final volume of Kant's work is 'the only volume that shows traces of a sustained effort to read [it] from cover to cover' (Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 138) – For details of Beckett's engagement with Kant, and with Cassierer, see *Ibid.*, 137-43.

¹⁴⁵ Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 7

¹⁴⁶ *CP*, 98

¹⁴⁷ *viz.* Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 139

¹⁴⁸ Ernst Cassierer *qtd in Ibid.*, 245 [n.18]

¹⁴⁹ The degree to which Beckett's father lay on his mind during the closing years of the 1930s is made clear by the fact that 'ainsi a-t-on beau' is not the only one of these

makes here of Kant can be aligned with the use Beckett made of Dante in his earlier poem 'Malacoda', where a deeply traumatic personal experience relating to the death of Beckett's father – specifically, the arrival to the house of the undertaker following his death – is partially screened off by way of the incorporation of literary material, specifically a demon drawn from Dante's *Inferno*, into the poetic description of a personally-significant, biographic event.¹⁵⁰

In the case of the reference to Roscelin that is to be found in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', the importance of the figure to the poem is less immediately apparent. It is perhaps the case that, as suggested by Lawrence Harvey, Roscelin here functions metonymically and 'stands for philosophy, or more generally the intellectual life, a mode as vain as winning, losing, loving, living'.¹⁵¹ As suggested by Lawlor and Pilling, however, Beckett's reference to Roselin might also be understood in terms of the Nominalism of which Roscelin was one of the key exponents. In their estimation, what Beckett seeks to invoke via Roscelin is the manner in which Nominalism 'transforms [Universals] into merely words...or an emission of sound'.¹⁵² For the editors of *CP*, this focus on sound is then further reinforced by the references to echoing hoof-falls ('jusqu'à l'élégie des sabots ferrés encore loin des halles'¹⁵³) and to the snip of silver scissors ('de lointains coups de ciseaux argentins'¹⁵⁴) that are to be heard later in the poem. While agreeing with Lawlor and Pilling in their privileging of the connection between Roscelin and Nominalism, the present writer would suggest that the reference to Roscelin should be read, not in relation to the poem's subsequent references to these various sounds, but in the context of the material that directly surrounds it:

et Roscelin et on attend
adverbe [...] ¹⁵⁵

Roscelin, as noted, was a Nominalist. And, as noted by Lawlor and Pilling, the Nominalists held that Universals, broad groups of individuals, were merely words – effects of language –, rather than real entities imbued with an extra-linguistic existence. It is this conviction of the Nominalists – the conviction that Universals were an effect of language –, rather than any focus on sound, that likely provides us with a clue as to how these lines should be read. For, in line with their conviction that

poems to include reference to him – the other being 'Ascension'. We will have an opportunity to study that reference in due course.

¹⁵⁰ For 'Malacoda', see *CP*, 21

¹⁵¹ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 194

¹⁵² *CP*, 377

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 93

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Universals were merely words and that the words used to describe such groups were not ontologically linked to what they described, Nominalists also held that words were ductile; the meanings assigned them were secondary and could be altered freely.¹⁵⁶ With this in mind, I would suggest that what Beckett does in this poem is eminently Nominalist in that he takes the name of Roscelin and divests it of its essential meaning – that is, a proper noun that can only refer to the philosopher Roscellinus Compendiensis –, turning it into an empty common noun that is made to stand for nothing but itself in the list upon which the poem opens. This use of ‘Roscelin’ as a catchall noun is thus directly comparable to the use that is made of the generic term ‘adverbe’ in the following line, where it is used to qualify the verb ‘attend’ in lieu of any particular adverb. The words are thus made to perform their function, and nothing but their function: ‘adverbe’ is made to serve as an adverb; Roscelin, a Nominalist who held Universals were merely words, becomes himself merely a word – more specifically, a ‘noun’. (The fact that the Nominalist Roscelin is reduced to the state of an ideal ‘noun’ produces a pun that is even more obvious in French, where the term *nominalisme* makes readily apparent that the essence of the doctrine lay in how one should interpret not merely words but nouns – that is, *noms* –, specifically.¹⁵⁷)

Much as Beckett’s use of Kant to at once evoke and attenuate the tragedy of his father’s death was shown to have a precursor in ‘Malacoda’, a poem that appeared

¹⁵⁶ It is this aspect of Nominalism that the Medieval French poet Jean de Meun draws upon in his continuation of the *Roman de la Rose* when he has the allegorical figure of Reason suggest that religious relics would be no less worthy of veneration if they were referred to as ‘couilles’ (viz. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Armand Strubel (ed.), *Le Roman de la Rose* [Paris: Le Livre de Poche, Lettres gothiques, 1992], 392 [ll. 7102-7120]).

¹⁵⁷ Interestingly, an alternate version of this poem that survives amongst the Papers of E. L. T. Mesens has ‘Anselme de Laon’ in place of ‘Roscelin’: ‘et Anselme de Laon et on attend / adverbe oh petit cadeau’ (viz. Samuel Beckett, ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, in Appendix I [b] - ii). Unlike Roscelin, Anselm of Laon was a Realist, not a Nominalist, and thus held Universals to have a real, extra-linguistic, existence. If Beckett’s reference to ‘Roscelin’ is indeed intended to pun on the tenants of Medieval Nominalism, it is possible that his earlier reference to Anselm reveals his uncertain grasp of the figures involved in the dispute surrounding Universals much as the reference to ‘Atlas, son of Jupiter!’ that we find in *Waiting for Godot* (viz. CDW, 31) – ‘Atlas, fils de Jupiter!’ in the original French (Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot*, 40) – demonstrates nothing more than Beckett’s uncertain grasp of Greek mythological genealogies. (When the true identity of Atlas’ father was finally brought to Beckett’s attention by Ruby Cohn during rehearsals for a staging of *Waiting for Godot* / *En attendant Godot* that took place in Germany, he is reported to have corrected his error without further ado, thereby confirming his association of Atlas and Zeus to have been nothing more than a consequence of inadvertence, ignorance, or both – For details of this error, and its correction, see Ruby Cohn, ‘Beckett’s Trinities’, in Anna McMullan and S. E. Wilmer [eds], *Reflections on Beckett: A Centenary Celebration* [Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009], 210).

in *EBOP*, so too does this performative use of language have a direct parallel in another poem from that collection, 'Sanies I'. There, just as in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', two words are made to perform their function in quick succession:

I see main verb at last
her whom alone in the accusative
I have dismounted to love¹⁵⁸

'See' in the lines just quoted is, indeed, the 'main verb' of the poem which finally corrals the confusion of the 42 preceding lines into some kind of sense. 'Her', meanwhile, is, of course, performative insofar as it is the accusative object of this 'main verb' – something which Beckett makes triply clear by linking this reference to the 'accusative' with the accusative pronouns 'her' and 'whom'.

The existence of such similarities between the manner of these two poems and two of the poems that appeared in *EBOP* should, of course, come as no surprise, given that, as Lawlor and Pilling acknowledge, 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' and 'ainsi a-t-on beau' are the two French-language poems that 'come closest...to [Beckett's] *EBOP* manner'.¹⁵⁹ As has been demonstrated here, the connection between these poems and Beckett's '*EBOP* manner' is more than just a matter of superficial reference to philosophers. These references are themselves fully integrated into the body of the poems in which they appear. This integration, moreover, is carried out in a manner for which clear parallels can be found in English-language poems that date from the *EBOP* period. These poems, in other words, serve to make eminently clear just how closely Beckett could continue to adhere to the model of the *EBOP* poems when working through French.

If it is important to accept that French was not merely a means of composing simple and relatively straightforward poetry, it is equally important to recognise that some of the *Poèmes 37-39* do indeed testify to a greater simplicity of manner and means, as well as a seeming rejection of the heavily allusive mode of *EBOP*. This is important, however, not because it confirms Beckett's French to have been a vehicle for greater simplicity, but because it confirms Beckett's French to have been a vehicle for complex and multifaceted literary expression. The key example in this regard, is 'Rue de Vaugirard', a poem that is a mere five lines long and which, in total contrast to the two poems that have just been examined, contains nothing to suggest the presence of a deeper allusive substratum beneath the surface description of the event its five lines recount in the present tense:

¹⁵⁸ *CP*, 13

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 376

à mi-hauteur
je débraye et béant de candeur
expose la plaque aux lumières et aux ombres
puis repars fortifié
d'un négatif irrécusable¹⁶⁰

This poem appears in many respects to be a perfect exemplar of the kind of poetry that Beckett produced in French: simple, straightforward, and devoid of extraneous displays of erudition. The simplicity of this poem, however, is not quite what it initially appears to be. The easiest way to preserve the idea of this poem as being simple, in fact, is to say as little about it as possible since, while it may contain no striking allusions or overt appeals to erudition, the seemingly unproblematic description it offers the reader leaves us with a very pressing question: What precisely is this poem describing?

In their discussion of the poem that accompanies the explanatory notes on the text provided in *CP*, Lawlor and Pilling describe 'Rue de Vaugirard' as 'a short poem, a kind of snapshot, "taken" (as if found) on the longest street in Paris, which begins close to where [Beckett] had his apartment in the rue des Favorites'.¹⁶¹ For Lawlor and Pilling, therefore, the poem approximates to a photograph that is taken by the speaker. Ruby Cohn, for her part, reads the poem in a drastically different way. For her, the poem depicts 'the persona (on a bicycle or in an automobile) stop[ping] and 'expos[ing] his license plate to light and shadow, more than ever convinced of "an irresistible negativity"'.¹⁶² Although Cohn's interpretation of the poem clearly constitutes a gross misreading – one that makes 'negativity' of 'negative' and 'irresistible' of 'irrecusable' –, her presentation of the central image as one in which a license plate is exposed to light and shadow is not necessarily impossible, merely improbable. A 'plaque' can indeed be a 'number plate' – provided the *plaque* in question is a *plaque d'immatriculation* –, and the verb 'débrayer' does indeed suggest a vehicle more readily than a simple perambulation. Lawlor and Pilling themselves note that, in preferring to read this poem as concerning a walker they are guided, not by the text of the poem, but by Beckett's own explanation of the poem as recounted to Lawrence Harvey.¹⁶³ That Lawlor and Pilling should have been forced to appeal to material beyond the text to clarify the nature of the event recounted by a poem that is, in essence, no more than the recounting of a single event, is worth reflecting upon, since the complex and uncertain nature of 'Rue de Vaugirard' has much to tell us about this collection. Many of *Poèmes 37-39* present us with images that are only

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 100

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 386

¹⁶² Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 102

¹⁶³ *viz.* 'The "je" figure is apparently not, as might be supposed, riding a bicycle, but walking (Harvey notes; Dartmouth College)' (*CP*, 386).

decipherable with extreme difficulty and, even then, the effort expended upon decoding these obscure texts often results in readings that are, at best, tentative. In the present instance, for example, the idea that this poem is concerned with a walker is, once suggested, perfectly admissible. The verb 'débrayer' has a figurative meaning – that is, the cessation of action – as well as a literal one, and the idea of the speaker stopping whatever he is engaged in and taking a metaphorical picture is certainly more probable than the curious incident of the number plate and the dappled sunlight described by Cohn.

Even if we turn to the extra information derived by Harvey from his conversations with Beckett, however, there are elements of the poem that remain mysterious. One of these is the precise location of the speaker. For, though the title of the poem places the speaker somewhere along the 'Rue de Vaugirard', the speaker opens the poem by situating himself 'à mi-hauteur', an expression that positions him vertically rather than horizontally. The verticality of the expression is not mentioned by Harvey, who aligns it with the physical space of the rue de Vaugirard itself – placing the speaker 'between the Rue des Favorites and the Boulevard de Montparnasse'¹⁶⁴ – and with the literary space of Dante's *Inferno*, by way of that poem's opening, which situates Dante '[n]el mezzo del cammin di nostra vita'.¹⁶⁵ Harvey's placement of the speaker is certainly appealing, since it positions him at once close to Beckett's own apartment and in the context of a literary work that we know to have been of great importance to Beckett. The physical location proposed by Harvey, however, cannot be correct: In the first instance, the midpoint of the rue de Vaugirard is closer to rue des Volontaires and thus located roughly 450m from Beckett's apartment at 6, rue des Favorites. Even allowing Beckett some leeway in his approximation of the midpoint of the longest street in Paris, Harvey's reading is more profoundly compromised by the fact that, as noted, it ignores the verticality of the expression 'à mi-hauteur'. Had Beckett wished simply to position his speaker horizontally, he might have used the expression 'à mi-chemin'. This would not only have placed him at the mid-point of the rue de Vaugirard, but also reinforced the literary allusion to Dante that Harvey finds in this poem by precisely conveying the Italian expression 'nel mezzo del cammin'. By using 'à mi-hauteur', however, Beckett has specifically placed his speaker vertically.¹⁶⁶ How then are we to imagine the speaker? Is he mounting a staircase or ascending upwards in a lift, such as those that he noted to be at his disposition in his new

¹⁶⁴ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 199

¹⁶⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, in *op. cit.*, 483 (Canto I)

¹⁶⁶ Admittedly, by positioning his speaker midway in an ascent – or, indeed, a descent – Beckett may still be alluding to Dante, whose progression through Hell and towards Heaven are figured in terms of descent and ascent. The use of 'mi-hauteur' nonetheless complicates the allusion in a way that must be acknowledged.

apartment on the rue des Favorites?¹⁶⁷ Or is the expression 'mi-hauteur', just like the verb 'débrayer' and the association of the poet's eye and a camera, to be taken figuratively, rather than literally? If so, Beckett's speaker finds himself at neither the midpoint of the rue de Vaugirard, nor paused midway in his ascent or descent towards an unknown location, but simply *à mi-hauteur* – in a state of supreme mediocrity, of dispassion that strays towards disappointment. Such a reading has the benefit of agreeing with the poem's overarching focus on negativity rather than positivity, as suggested by the reference to the 'négatif irrécusable' that the speaker takes with him as he moves on from wherever it is that he has paused. The sense of this line, as suggested by Harvey, is almost certainly that 'the process of development will never produce a positive portrait from [the speaker's] negative judgement'.¹⁶⁸ The photographic negative seems to suggest, metaphorically, that the view of the speaker is itself negative. Similarly, the reference to the negative as 'irrécusable' presents this negative image as irrefutable: What the speaker has seen cannot be gainsaid. At the same time, this negative is not presented in entirely negative terms. The speaker is deemed to be 'fortifié' by what he has seen. What he has seen, and the image of it that he takes with him, has made him stronger.

This brings us to the second question that this poem raises: What exactly has the speaker seen? What has been etched on his mind by the action of the 'lumières et...ombres' to which the 'plaque' of his vision has been exposed? Nothing in the poem allows us to clarify the nature of this image – nor does Harvey appear to have derived any such clarification from his conversations with Beckett, since the precise nature of the image is left obscure in his reading. What the text of the poem suggests, however, is that the experience of seeing what he has seen was one of almost childlike naivety. The description of the speaker as 'béant de candeur' suggests that he is utterly open to whatever is before him – to truths as well as untruths. Indeed, the notion of 'candeur' more readily suggests one is overly trusting and likely to be taken in by things that are not as they appear. What then does this make of the image that the speaker has seen? Has his 'candeur' left him open to being duped? Is it this same candour that prevents him from questioning what he has seen, where a more wily, a less trusting figure, might have questioned the 'négatif' that he deems 'irrécusable'?

These questions are as unanswerable as the precise nature of the sight that the speaker has seen and, bereft of the possibility of putting Beckett himself to the question, as Harvey was in a position to do, we must content ourselves with only that information to which we have access – namely, the text of the poem itself, the other

¹⁶⁷ *DTF*, 289

¹⁶⁸ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 199-200

poems of the collection, and all that we can gather from the rest of the material record that Beckett left behind and which has been gathered by decades of scholarship. In the present instance, this material is of very little assistance; the questions this poem leaves us with must remain unanswered. To be aware of these questions, and to be aware that they are fundamentally unresolvable – beyond, that is, such provisional resolutions as may be proposed by individual readers –, is already to have made an important step towards understanding the demands that these poems place on their readers. Time and again as we progress with our analysis of the French-language poems that Beckett composed in the late 1930s, we will be faced with questions that are unanswerable and obliged to offer readings that can be no more than tenuous. In approaching these texts – the overtly allusive and the seemingly simple alike – we will be obliged to suggest, rather than assert, and to contend rather than state. For these poems, simple though they may at times appear, possess depths that have too often been ignored. Close reading will help us to discern something of these depths, but our explorations will invariably be carried out with less confidence than might be liked. If it will be possible to suggest the presence of buried literary allusions in many of these poems – not, in fact, unlike that allusion to Dante’s *Inferno* posited by Harvey in his reading of ‘Rue de Vaugirard’ –, of references to Beckett’s own life in others, or of echoes that recur and resound across the collection and between the poems that comprise it, it will only rarely be possible to speak of them with absolutely certainty, since the texts that Beckett has composed are often as notable for what they leave unspoken as for what they make clear.

The role played by the unspoken and the unsaid in these poems is one respect in which these poems do indeed prefigure ‘certain traits and tendencies of the postwar French prose’.¹⁶⁹ In speaking of this prefiguration, it has invariably been suggested – as seen above – that what these poems point towards is a form of stylistic simplification. It may yet be the case that what these poems suggest is not Beckett’s move away from complexity, but towards a wilful occlusion of the complexity that his work contains. In reading a poem such as ‘Rue de Vaugirard’, for instance, it is possible to see it as a move towards a simpler style. In reading it closely, however, I would contend that what one finds is something that challenges the reader through its interplay of what is said and what is left unspoken. This use of silence is, of course, directly comparable to the use of fleeting and attenuated allusion – or, ‘vaguening’ – that has long been recognised as a cornerstone of Beckett’s post-War aesthetic and which we have already seen at work in ‘Suite’ Notebook. The comparison that is here suggested between the uncertainty that Beckett allows to exist at the heart of ‘Rue de

¹⁶⁹ Sam Slote, ‘Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn’, in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 117

Vaugirard' and the attenuated allusions of his later vaguened style is all the more worth considering since many of the other poems in this collection do indeed appear to extend uncertainty to their use of literary allusion. In many of these poems – including a number of those generally thought of as being relatively simple works –, I will argue for the presence of allusions to works by literary figures such as Musset and Shakespeare, as well as to the Bible and to Greek mythology.

In suggesting such allusions, I am mindful that some readers may feel them to be overly inventive. It must be recalled, however, that many of Beckett's post-War texts include allusions that are so subtle that they might never have come to light had it not been for the survival of drafts that pointed towards the sources to which Beckett was referring.¹⁷⁰ In the case of Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s, however, we are dealing with poems for which no earlier, autograph drafts have survived and which, in many cases, now exist in only a single version – namely, that in which they first appeared in print. Since vaguening is a phenomenon that only careful examination of manuscript evidence can reveal – evidence of a sort that does not currently, and may never, exist for these poems –, the degree to which the French-language poems of the late 1930s do, or do not, testify to the emergence of 'vaguening' as a key element of Beckett's style cannot be confirmed any more than the presence of the allusions that will be posited, or the nature of the image captured by the speaker of 'Rue de Vaugirard'. It will thus remain up to the reader to determine whether or not vaguening has any role to play in the style of these poems. It is hoped, however, that even if the reader is not convinced by all that will follow over the coming discussion, they will at least be convinced that there is more to many of these poems than has met the eyes of critics who have studied them through the lens provided by the LSH.

Having now examined three of the original, French-language poems that Beckett published as part of *Poèmes 37-39*, we have seen that Beckett's French was a vehicle for literary self-expression in every respect comparable to what he produced in English. Most often, however, what we find in these poems is a mixture of complexity and subtlety, even a form of complexity that manifests itself subtly, only becoming apparent in those moments of uncertainty that are to be discovered when the text of the poems is read attentively. I would in fact go so far as to argue that it is

¹⁷⁰ The key example in this regard is the allusion to lines from Dante's *Inferno* that hides behind a single word – 'faint' – in Beckett's late text *Stirrings still*, and which could only be brought to light via close examination of the autograph manuscript of that work – For details of this allusion, see Dirk Van Hulle, *The Makings of Stirrings Still / Soubresauts and Comment dire / What is the word* (Brussels: UPA UP Antwerp, 2011), 92-93.

this sort of subtle complexity that is the defining feature of Beckett's French-language poetry of the late 1930s. It has already been observed in 'Rue de Vaugirard' and it will be observed time and again across the poems of this collection as we progress with our reading of them. Somewhat ironically, a key indication of the degree to which this collection is characterised by subtle complexity is to be found in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents'. Initially, it might be imagined that nothing could be further from the subtle complexities of 'Rue de Vaugirard' than a poem that accords a starring role to a Medieval Nominalist. In truth, however, if our reading of 'Rue de Vaugirard' has demonstrated that the simpler of the *Poèmes 37-39* are not as 'straightforward' as some critics have claimed, it must be stressed that the more overtly complex poems of this collection are not necessarily straightforward in their complexity. To find the subtler complexities of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', we need look beyond Roscelin.

Certain critics have, in fact, already looked beyond Roscelin, and their examinations of this poem have shown the Nominalist to be merely one element of a complex literary structure. In the case of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', the aspect of its complexity that has been subject to the most analysis thus far has been its use of literary allusions, such as that striking allusion to an entry in Jules Renard's *Journal* that Beckett recorded in his *Dream Notebook* – 'Aussi navrant que le "attendez que je mouille" d'une vierge'¹⁷¹ – which is to be found in line 10 of the poem. The deeper complexity of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' goes far beyond an isolated allusion to Jules Renard, however. On the contrary – and wholly in keeping with the mode that we observed in 'Rue de Vaugirard' –, a major part of this poem's complexity derives from the uncertainty that surrounds the figure of the speaker and the precise context of the event that this speaker recounts. Much of this uncertainty, in turn – once again, just like 'Rue de Vaugirard' –, may be traced back to the language of the poem's first line. More particularly, this poem's complexity owes much to Beckett's use of 'là'.

In French, 'là' is not solely an adverb of place but may also be used as a temporal adverb or, indeed, in a figurative sense, to refer to the general situation in which one finds oneself. To describe a figure as being 'là', therefore, is by no means wholly equivalent to describing them as being 'there'.¹⁷² Beckett's poem clearly

¹⁷¹ Jules Renard, *Journal 1887-1910*, 1 [n.d., 1887] – This reference is duly noted, alongside its appearance in Beckett's *Dream Notebook*, by Lawlor and Pilling, see *CP*, 379

¹⁷² The complexities of the original are unfortunately obviated by David Wheatley's decision to render this poem's opening line as follows in his edition of Beckett's *Selected Poems*: 'to be there without jaws without teeth' (Samuel Beckett, David

exploits the polysemy of the French term since, as the poem develops, we find evidence that would support each of these three potential readings: The spatial reading, for example, is supported by subsequent localisation of the speaker in relation to Paris's *Les Halles*, to which the speaker alludes by way of that already signalled reference to the audible, albeit distant, echoes of horseshoes heard to come from there.¹⁷³ The figurative meaning, meanwhile, is clearly implied by the second line, which construes the location in which the speaker finds himself, not as a particular place or space, but as being defined by a set of circumstances and, more particularly, as the loss of 'le plaisir de perdre / avec celui à peine inférieur de gagner'.¹⁷⁴ This figurative meaning, moreover, is itself not necessarily distinct from the temporal, since the loss of the pleasure that one might feel in either loss or victory is associated with the state of being 'sans mâchoires sans dents', thereby bringing to mind ageing and its associated ravages.

Just as Beckett's exploitation of the polysemy of 'là' repays close attention, so too does the manner in which this poem brings to mind ageing. Reading this poem in French, and knowing Beckett to have been a native Anglophone, it is natural to imagine that Beckett's use of 'sans' is intended as nothing more than French for 'without'.¹⁷⁵ In coupling 'sans mâchoires sans dents' in this way, however, Beckett is not merely presenting us with the image of a jawless, toothless figure but is actually alluding to Jacques's monologue on the 'seven ages'¹⁷⁶ of human life that is to be found in Act II, scene IV of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.¹⁷⁷ At the conclusion of that

Wheatley [ed.], *Selected Poems 1930-1989* [London: Faber and Faber, 2009]), 179) – The translations that Wheatley provided for those of the *Poèmes 37-39* that he included in his edition of Beckett's *Selected Poems* are worthy of mention in the present context since they currently represent the only readily-available translations of these poems that Beckett left untranslated.

¹⁷³ viz. 'l'élégie / des sabots ferrés encore loin des Halles' (*CP*, 93) – Now the location of a shopping centre, *Les Halles* was once a major market in the first *arrondissement*. It remained a fully-functioning marketplace well into the twentieth century and the clatter of hooves would still have been heard to come from there in the 1930s.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ This, certainly, is how Wheatley chose to translate the verse as part of *Selected Poems*: 'to be there without jaws without teeth' (Samuel Beckett, David Wheatley [ed.], *Selected Poems 1930-1989*, 179). In translating the lines in this way, it may be noted, Wheatley diverged from the translation proposed as part of his thesis, where he offered a translation that preserved the term *sans*: 'to be there sans jaws sans teeth' (David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 394).

¹⁷⁶ Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in Stephen Greenblatt *et al.* (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York, NY; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 1622 (Act II, Scene 7 – l. 142)

¹⁷⁷ Curiously, given his decision to maintain 'sans' in the translation provided as part of his thesis, David Wheatley makes no mention of any possible allusion to *As You Like It* in his critical reading of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' (viz. David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 245-47).

monologue, Jacques leaves us to dwell on the ‘last scene of all’, the close of life, which he renders through the well-known image of one who has been reduced to

[...] second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.¹⁷⁸

The possibility of such an allusion is worth considering for a number of reasons: Firstly, *As You Like It* is a play that Beckett is known to have studied while a student at TCD¹⁷⁹ and which had clearly stayed with him, as evidenced by correspondence from the early 1930s¹⁸⁰; secondly, the ‘seven ages of man’ monologue in particular has been identified by C. J. Ackerley as one of the (innumerable) intertexts of *Murphy*¹⁸¹; finally, and most significantly, an allusion to this famous monologue would be entirely in keeping with the despairing sense of futility and mortality that characterises both Jacques’ monologue and Beckett’s poem. In each case, we hear the voice of a disabused speaker, one who is under no illusions as to what lies at the end of all human endeavour – namely, death.

Obviously, even bearing such factors in mind, it remains possible to interpret these lines as something other than an allusion to the ‘seven ages of man’ monologue. John Pilling, for example, has suggested that Beckett’s use of ‘sans dents’ contains a veiled allusion to a phrase derived by Beckett from Mauthner’s *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*.¹⁸² Tenuous though such an allusion may initially appear, the possibility that these words constitute a sly allusion to a phrase from Mauthner’s *Beiträge* finds support in the fact that a very similar kind of allusion to Mauthner is to be found in

¹⁷⁸ Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *op. cit.*, 1623 (Act II, Scene 7 – ll. 164-65)

¹⁷⁹ *DTF*, 54 [n.45]

¹⁸⁰ In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of August, 1930, Beckett suggests that observations on Proust, as they will be contained in his monograph, ‘may have as little variety and none of the sincerity of Orlando’s wood carvings’ (*LSB I*, 43 – SB to TMG [25th August, 1930]). The carvings to which he refers are those professions of love with which Orlando fills the forest in *As You Like It* (*viz.* Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *op. cit.*, 1624 [ll. 1-10]).

¹⁸¹ C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars : The Annotated Murphy*, 141 (‘141.2 [82]’)

¹⁸² *viz.* ‘A peculiar connection between the first line of the third of the French poems (“être là sans mâchoires sans dents”) and a repeated phrase in the four typewritten pages of Mauthner material at Trinity College Dublin (MS 10971/5) – “bissen sich die Scholastiker daran die Zähne aus...ein Theologe mit ausgebissenen Zähnen” (from Mauthner, Vol. 2, 474) – raises the intriguing possibility that in his poem Beckett is paying oblique homage to Mauthner’s critique of metaphors and false analogies. The German phrases literally mean “[he/they] wore their *teeth* out...” (italics mine [*i.e.* Pilling’s]), but they are both understood (metaphorically) to mean “[he/they] got nowhere” (John Pilling, ‘Dates and Difficulties in Beckett’s *Whoroscope* Notebook’, in *JoBS* [Vol. 13, No. 2 – 2004], 47).

‘ainsi a-t-on beau’, where ‘rêver en générations de chênes’ can be traced back to a phrase noted down by Beckett during his reading of Mauthner’s text.¹⁸³

In interpreting these lines, then, there is great potential for the presence of dense, and complex allusion – at once literary and philosophical. Moreover, it must be recalled that the possibility of a discrete allusion to Mauthner, as suggested by Pilling, would in no way exclude the possibility of a concomitant allusion to *As You Like It*. (If anything, the nesting of an allusion to a work of German-language linguistic philosophy within an allusion to an English-language play – all within the context of a French-language poem – would serve to confirm that ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ does indeed carry Beckett’s *EBOP* style into French.) It is very important to note, however, that this poem is not *merely* a vehicle for dense allusions: It is also a vehicle for the expression of broader thematic concerns that are returned to time and again across the poems of the *Poèmes 37-39*. Analysing these poems in terms of their thematic similarities is, in fact, an excellent means of studying the various modes of complexity that are to be observed across the poems since it allows one to see Beckett pursuing the same thematic aims, and giving voice to the same concerns, even as he varies the means and methods of his poetic expression. For this reason, our study of the remaining poems will progress thematically. Helpfully, ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ clearly articulates the collection’s two primary concerns.

The first of these, as the allusion to the closing lines of the ‘seven ages of man’ monologue implies, is death. Death is as central to *Poèmes 37-39* as a whole as it is to ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, which closes on the ‘coups de ciseaux argentins’ that are heard by the speaker and which are those wielded by the Classical mythological figure of Atropos, the third of the Moirai, who had responsibility for cutting the thread of life, to whom Beckett refers again in the final poem of *Poèmes 37-39*, ‘jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol’.¹⁸⁴ The centrality of death to this collection will be returned to in due course. For the time being, I would like to concentrate on another theme that is of central importance to this poem and the collection as a whole, namely: human interactions. Or, more specifically, the fundamental distance that remains between individuals, and which invariably serves to sour all human interactions, most particularly those of the romantic and sexual kind.

In the context of ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, the focus on unsatisfactory sexual interaction is most obvious in the figure of the woman who is

¹⁸³ viz. ‘[I]n the ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook SB enters the phrase “a generation of oaks” (in English, translated from volume 2, 648 of Mauthner)’ (CP, 383).

¹⁸⁴ As Lawlor and Pilling remind us, Atropos would remain a reference for Beckett beyond the *Poèmes 37-39*, being alluded to – as the ‘noire sœur / qui es aux enfers / à tort tranchant / et à travers’ (CP, 218) – in one of the *mirlitonades*.

described as preparing herself for sexual intercourse ('qu'elle mouille'¹⁸⁵). If Beckett's use of the verb 'mouiller', as noted, is likely to derive from an entry in Renard's *Journal*, it is not clear that the emotion inspired in the speaker by the woman engaged in this action is quite the same.¹⁸⁶ As used by Renard, his extremely negative response to the "attendez que je mouille" d'une vierge' appears to owe itself to the fact that this request suggests the woman in question has a more thorough familiarity with the mechanics of sexual intercourse – and the manner in which she can best derive pleasure from it – than might be expected of a virgin.¹⁸⁷ In Beckett's poem, on the other hand, the speaker does not appear in any way disappointed, upset, or otherwise incomed by the fact that his partner wishes to prepare herself before coitus.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 93

¹⁸⁶ Lawlor and Pilling too note that Beckett – or, at least, the speaker of his poem – 'apparently [does] not share [Renard's] irritation' (*CP*, 379). The nature of this irritation is, however, left unclear.

¹⁸⁷ Further reference to sex with virgins is to be found elsewhere in Renard's *Journal*, where he stresses that it constitutes, if nothing else, a way to avoid disease: 'L'amour d'une vierge est aussi assommant qu'un appartement neuf. Il semble qu'on essuie les plâtres. Il est vrai qu'on n'a pas à redouter les germes maladiés, pestilentiels, d'un autre locataire' (Jules Renard, *Journal 1887-1910*, 4 [22nd July, 1887]).

¹⁸⁸ The reading that is advanced here privileges the association between flowers and virginity (*viz.* 'fleur', in *L'argot, avec Bob, l'autre trésor de la langue* <<http://www.languefrancaise.net/Bob/>> [accessed: 21st December, 2017]) and interprets the construction 'en faisant la fleur' – a construction otherwise unattested in French – as having been formed by Beckett along the lines of expressions combining *faire* with a definite noun, such as *faire l'enfant* or *faire l'idiot*. 'En faisant la fleur' has thus been interpreted as an action performed by the woman that presents her 'acting the virgin' by requesting that her partner wait until she is ready before they engage in coitus. Such a reading has the advantage of reinforcing the connection between the aforementioned citation from Renard's *Journal* and Beckett's poem, while also agreeing with the implication of the gerund (*en faisant*) that the action is performed by the subject of the sentence who, although difficult to determine owing to Beckett's lack of punctuation, is here most likely to be the woman. If such a reading is satisfactory within the context of the French poem, it should be noted that it is incompatible with the German-language translation: 'en faisant la fleur' was translated by Elmar Tophoven, in collaboration with Beckett, as 'mit den Fingern spielend' (*qtd* in *CP*, 378). For his part, Harvey interpreted Beckett's expression as a reference to 'the familiar pastime indicated by the French "faire la fleur" that consists of putting the ring finger over the little finger, the middle finger over both, and the index over all three, then duplicating the process with the other hand' (Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 194). Harvey's use of 'familiar' notwithstanding, I have been unable to find any reference to either the pastime or the expression to which he refers outside of his study, and have thus been unable to verify his reading. Assuming that Elmar Tophoven's German-language translation serves as a perfect mirroring of the French original – and this must be an assumption, rather than a verifiable conviction – it would serve to prove that the expression 'en faisant la fleur' implies someone amusing themselves with their fingers, but the precise nature of the amusement is left unclear, thereby raising the possibility that the woman may be masturbating as a means of preparing herself for sexual congress – this possibility of digital masturbation is evoked by Pilling and Lawlor in their notes on this poem (*viz.* *CP*, 378).

On the contrary, his response is one of boredom and, perhaps, mild regret, since her action is deemed to be ‘superflu’.¹⁸⁹ The description of her action as superfluous begs the question of why this should be so. One possible explanation is that the sexual encounter for which she prepares herself has been paid for by the male speaker – this would explain the reference to the ‘petit cadeau’, which as noted by Lawrence Harvey, refers to the price fixed by a prostitute for turning a trick¹⁹⁰ – and that, in the eyes of the male speaker, her pleasure is entirely immaterial. Another reading, is that her preparation is deemed superfluous because the act will bring neither of them any pleasure, regardless of their respective states of readiness.

It is the latter of these two explanations that seems to be the more likely in light of the fact that the poem elsewhere evinces a degree of empathy with the disappointed female desire. This is achieved by way of the ‘loques de chanson’ to which the poem refers. The song in question, ‘Mon père m’a donné un mari’, although now perceived as a nursery rhyme – and, indeed, frequently included in collections of songs for children¹⁹¹ –, is, as noted by Lawlor and Pilling, explicitly sexual in its subject matter. ‘Mon père m’a donné un mari’ recounts the unhappiness of a young, and thus sexually vigorous, woman who must contend with the constant dissatisfaction of life with the impossibly small husband (‘Je l’ai perdu dans mon grand lit [...] Le chat l’a pris pour une souris’¹⁹²) to whom her father has married her off, and closes with an exhortation to other young women not to follow her example and to seek more amply proportioned husbands.¹⁹³ The use Beckett makes of a folksong that gives voice to frustrated female desire – and, particularly, his alignment of the male speaker with the unsatisfactory situation experienced by the dissatisfied wife¹⁹⁴ – is important insofar as it serves to correct existing characterisations of this poem as profoundly misogynistic. In her study of the *Poèmes 37-39*, Patricia Coughlan, for example, presents this poem as one of three poems in the collection that can be viewed as

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 93

¹⁹⁰ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 194

¹⁹¹ The song is, for example, to be found as part of *Chansons de France pour les petits français* (viz. *Chansons de France pour les petits français* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1900], 12-13), and even provides the title for a far more recent volume of songs for children (viz. *Mon père m’a donné un mari* [Paris: Didier jeunesse, Pirouette, 2008]).

¹⁹² ‘Mon père m’a donné un mari’ via *Hugo l’Escargot*

<<http://www.hugolescargot.com/comptines/36941-mon-pere-m-a-donne-un-mari/>> [accessed: 20th December, 2017].

¹⁹³ ‘Fillette qui prenez un mari...Ne le prenez pas si petit’ (*Ibid.*)

¹⁹⁴ This alignment comes about by way of the connections between the text of the folksong and the reference to the ‘petit cadeau’ which is said to be ‘vide sinon des loques de chanson’: The speaker, in essence, provides the female figure with a ‘petit cadeau’ much as the father provides his daughter with a ‘mari’; the result, in each case, will be a woman whose desire is left unsatisfied by an underwhelming partner.

being ‘misogynistic to varying degrees’.¹⁹⁵ She goes on to describe ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ in particular as being ‘about sexual disgust and panic at the loss of positive affect’ and to assert that the tone of its speaker is ‘furiously choleric’.¹⁹⁶ David Wheatley, for his part, goes so far as characterise this poem as being ‘as misogynist as anything [Beckett] ever wrote’.¹⁹⁷ While Beckett is certainly not immune from accusations of misogyny – on the contrary, he is reported to have described himself as a misogynist on occasion¹⁹⁸ –, to present ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ in these terms is at once to do the poem a disservice and to ignore an important thematic aspect of this poem in particular, and the *Poèmes 37-39* as a whole. Far from simply presenting us with the misogynistic perspective of a disgusted male speaker casting judgement on a disparaged female figure, ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, like many of the poems in this collection, expresses a more generalised sense that for all partners, in any form of relation, there is precious little satisfaction to be had.¹⁹⁹ This same thematic concern with the distance that stands between partners in a relationship, and the same sense that sexual encounters and romantic affections are ultimately unsatisfying for all concerned, is to be found in ‘à elle l’acte calme’, the poem that immediately precedes ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’.²⁰⁰

Much like ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ and ‘Rue de Vaugirard’, and in line with a number of poems in this series, ‘à elle l’acte calme’ exploits to good effect

¹⁹⁵ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry”, 198

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 241

¹⁹⁸ Gerald Stewart, who lived with Beckett for a year while they were both students at TCD, recalled to James Knowlson that, in response to a question on how things were going with Peggy Sinclair – with whom Beckett was then romantically involved –, Beckett stated that ‘he had become a misogynist’ (Gerald Stewart *qtd in DTF*, 82)

¹⁹⁹ Further evidence against accusations of misogyny as they pertain to this poem in particular are to be found in the alternate version that exists amongst the E. L. T. Mesens papers: While Wheatley – in line with his vision of this poem as essentially misogynistic – interprets the references to a ‘bouche idiote’, a ‘main formicante’ and a ‘bloc cave’ as applying to the woman, and being intended to present her in ‘a state of animal excitement heedless of anyone’s pleasure but her own’ (David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 247), the version with Mesens papers makes clear that it is the male speaker himself who is in possession of these negative attributes. In that version, the male speaker invites the woman, once ready, to come to him: ‘qu’elle mouille puisque c’est ainsi / parfasse tout le superflu / et vienne / à ces lèvres d’idiot à ces mains fornicantes / à ce bloc cave aux yeux qui écoutent’ (*viz.* ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, in Appendix I [b] - ii).

²⁰⁰ *CP*, 92

the syntactical possibilities of the French language.²⁰¹ Unlike the polyvalence of ‘là’ or the curious use of ‘à mi-hauteur’ that have been shown to contribute so much to the texture of the poems that we have already examined but which have been largely ignored by critics who have dealt with these poems to date, however, close attention has been paid to the syntax of the opening line of ‘à elle l’acte calme’. Such critical attention, however, has by no means brought clarification to this issue as those critics who have discussed this poem are far from being of one mind as to how its difficulties might be resolved.

The crux of critical debate in the case of ‘à elle l’acte calme’ is whether this ‘à elle’ should be taken to mean that the ‘acte calme’ is an attribute of the woman or merely something that she receives from the male speaker. For Lawrence Harvey, for example, the ‘acte calme’ is best understood as separate from, but reserved for, the female figure; he describes it in his study as a ‘detached gift’ offered to ‘elle’ by the speaker.²⁰² Patricia Coughlan, on the other hand, argues against Harvey for an ambiguity of ‘à elle’ – ‘Is this to her as in “they belong to her, are her attributes”, or is it to her as in “this is what I have to bring to her?”’²⁰³ – and a consequent uncertainty about which of the poem’s figures, the speaker or ‘elle’, is ‘capable of the “calm act”’.²⁰⁴ As interpreted by Coughlan, the uncertainty of the syntax here is ultimately unresolvable, and designedly so: ‘The text of the *poem* seems to me not to decide this question [i.e. of to whom the ‘acte calme’ belongs], and to be all the more effective an aesthetic object for not doing so’.²⁰⁵ While it may be true that the text of the poem as it initially appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, and as it has appeared since, allows this question to remain unresolved, that is not to say that the same may be said for all surviving versions of this poem. Since the publication of Coughlan’s article, the alternate version of this poem, discovered amongst the papers of the Belgian Surrealist E. L. T. Mesens, allows us to resolve the debate critical cornering the ‘acte calme’:

à elle l’acte calme
 les pores savants la verge bon enfant
 l’attente pas trop lente les regrets pas trop longs l’absence
 au service de la présence²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ It is thus with good reason that Lawlor and Pilling describe the *Poèmes 37-39* as ‘exploring the self-sustaining possibilities of syntax’ (*Ibid.*, 373-74).

²⁰² Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 186

²⁰³ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry’, 198

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* – Emphasis in original.

²⁰⁶ ‘à elle l’acte calme’, in Appendix I (b) - ii

As can be observed, the gender-neutral term 'sexe' that is to be found in the more familiar version of this poem is, in the version of the poem to be found as part of the Mesens collection, replaced by the explicitly male 'verge'. Since the 'verge' can only be the possession of the male figure, it logically follows that, as with the 'verge', so too must the 'acte calme' and 'pores savants' be attributes of the speaker rather than 'elle'. This version thus partially confirms the reading proposed by Harvey, whereby the poem deals with what a male speaker can present to an unidentified female figure.²⁰⁷

If I say that this version only *partially* confirms Harvey's reading, it is because the difficulties of this poem are by no means confined to matters of syntax. Certainly, the recently-discovered version of this poem that forms part of the Mesens collection has allowed us to clarify one element of the ambiguity that hangs over its published version. There is another point of uncertainty within this poem, however, one for which the version of the poem in the Papers of E. L. T. Mesens offers no clue whatsoever and for which Harvey was only able to offer what remains, at best, a decidedly tentative interpretation. What, in short, are we to make of the reference to

toute la tardive grâce d'une pluie cessant
au tomber d'une nuit
d'août²⁰⁸

Thus far, critical discussions of this poem have tended to elide the question of what might be intended by these lines. For his part, Harvey aligns them with Beckett's conviction, presumably expressed during the course of those conversations that contributed to Harvey's study, that 'a day of light rain with skies that clear just before sunset is a typically Irish phenomenon'.²⁰⁹ Notably, however, Harvey's reading of this passage – which he acknowledges to possess 'a range of meaning...as great as the rich symbolism of darkness and light or the ways in which a man can receive or be denied enlightenment'²¹⁰ – leaves unanswered the question of why, exactly, the cessation of

²⁰⁷ It is worth noting that the variant reading of 'à elle l'acte calme' that appears in the Mesens collection version of the poem seems to lend support to the earlier-advanced contention that Beckett was already deploying the vaguening strategies of his post-War work in these pre-War poems: The use of the explicitly gendered 'verge' makes unambiguous to whom the 'acte calme' belongs and, in consequence, clarifies beyond doubt the relationship that obtains between 'lui' and 'elle'. By changing this explicitly gendered term to the neutral 'sexe', however, Beckett vaguened – as it were – the ownership of the 'acte', thus introducing into this poem the ambiguity that, as mentioned above, has so excited the interest of critics since.

²⁰⁸ *CP*, 92

²⁰⁹ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 187 – This biographical foundation is subsequently expanded to include other instances of rain and fading, or absent, light, as these are to be found elsewhere in Beckett's earlier poetry – in poems such as 'Sanies I' and *Whoroscope* (*viz. Ibid.*, 187-88).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 187

rain should be tied to the precise moment of nightfall on an *August* night. The reference to August is left equally obscure by those treatments of the poem that have been provided by critics such as Coughlan and Wheatley.²¹¹ Nor, more surprisingly, is there any attempt to gloss the significance of August in the explanatory notes that accompany this poem in *CP*.²¹²

While it is certainly possible to read these lines as an opaque reference to some particular personal fascination on Beckett's part with a meteorological phenomenon that he considered to be 'typically Irish', such a biographical reading is not the only one possible. On the contrary, the reference to an August night can be quite profitably interpreted as an allusion to Alfred de Musset's 'Nuit d'Août'.²¹³ The possibility that these lines include an allusion to Musset's poem is supported by the fact that we know Beckett to have studied Musset's poetry, including his 'Nuits', during his time as a student at TCD.²¹⁴ Moreover, we know Beckett to have carried the familiarity with Musset's work that he acquired as a student over with him into his subsequent literary writings.²¹⁵ The most important evidence in favour of reading this as a reference to Musset's poem is not Beckett's familiarity with Musset's text but, rather, the manner in which 'à elle l'acte calme' is enriched when read in dialogue with the 'Nuit d'Août' and, indeed, the degree to which another poem in *Poèmes 37-39* is enriched by being read in light of another of Musset's 'Nuits'.

Taken as a whole, the 'Nuits' cycle – which comprises 'La Nuit de Mai', 'La Nuit de Décembre', 'La Nuit d'Août', and 'La Nuit d'Octobre' – recounts scenes in the life of a poet, as he experiences pain, suffering, despair and, finally, recovers a sense of hope that echoes the dawning of a new day upon which the final poem in the cycle concludes. In 'La Nuit d'Août', in particular, the poet is chastised by his muse for abandoning poetry in favour of ultimately empty carnal pleasure. In response to these accusations of infidelity, he defends himself by asserting that such wild passion is the only option that remains to one who has known pain. Or, as the final lines of the poem contend:

²¹¹ In her discussion of this poem, Coughlan makes no attempt to clarify the significance of the reference to August that is found in this poem (*viz.* Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 198-99). Wheatley too, leaves the mention of August unexamined in his discussion of the poem (*viz.* David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 244-45).

²¹² *CP*, 376

²¹³ For Musset's poem, see Alfred de Musset, 'La Nuit d'Août', in Patrick Berthier (ed.), *Premières Poésies / Poésies nouvelles*, 256-60

²¹⁴ Musset's *Poésies nouvelles*, which include the 'Nuits' cycle, were required reading for Senior Freshman students of French at TCD during Beckett's time there (*viz.* Appendix II [a]).

²¹⁵ There is, for example, as noted in the preceding chapter, an explicit reference to the 'Nuit de Mai' in *Dream* (*viz.* *Dream*, 70).

Après avoir souffert, il faut souffrir encore;
Il faut aimer sans cesse, après avoir aimé.²¹⁶

For Musset's poet – that is to say, for Musset himself, since the poet of 'Les Nuits' is as closely allied with Musset as Beckett's speakers are with him –, life is painful and, to cope with this pain 'l'homme n'a su trouver de science qui dure / Que de marcher toujours et toujours oublier'.²¹⁷ All we who live can do is forget and try to live on, all those who have suffered can do is brace themselves for further suffering, and the only option for those who have loved and lost is to try and love again. Such conviction in the potential of love to act as a palliative, if not a panacea, for the pain of life, and the pain of love in particular, takes on a particular poignancy in the context of a poem such as 'à elle l'acte calme': Here we find a speaker who, in keeping with other poems in *Poèmes 37-39*, feels himself untouched by, and incapable of love ('pur d'amour'²¹⁸), and whose incapacity to feel this emotion is experienced while in the process of making love with a woman who herself, though perhaps capable of feeling love, feels none for him ('vide d'amour'²¹⁹).²²⁰ In this regard, 'à elle l'acte calme' seems to give direct expression to the fact that the feeling of love, from which Musset's speaker claims to derive such comfort, is not available to Beckett's. Such, at least, is what may be heard behind the qualification of the rain as 'cessant', which recalls – only to dismiss – the injunction to love 'sans cesse, après avoir aimé' upon which Musset's poem closes.

In presenting us with a figure who cannot love, of course, 'à elle l'acte calme' is merely restating that same conviction in the ultimately disappointing nature of all human interactions that is to be found in many of the poems in *Poèmes 37-39*. Time and again in this collection, we are presented with figures for whom relations with other people can neither bridge the eternal divide between selves, nor provide succour for the pain that is carried within the self.²²¹ In 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', this conviction in the futility of sexual connection reveals itself, as noted, through the speaker's lack of interest in the female figure, through his allusion to the

²¹⁶ Musset, 'La Nuit d'Août', in *op. cit.*, 260

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 259

²¹⁸ *CP*, 92

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ In this respect too, 'à elle l'acte calme' engages ironically with Musset's 'La Nuit d'Août' since, as mentioned, that poem presents the dialogue between a disabused 'Poet' and his jealously loving 'Muse'.

²²¹ If many of the poems in this collection engage with the futility of romantic relationships, it is by no means romance and sex alone that is held to be ultimately unsatisfying – this is clearly demonstrated by the sorrowful acknowledgement found in 'ainsi a-t-on beau', and previously discussed, that we will inevitably forget even those who have meant the most to us.

lack of pleasure that she herself will no doubt experience and, finally, in the dismissive comments made with regard to his own person – becoming in the final lines no more than a ‘bouche idiote’, a ‘main formicante’ and a ‘bloc cave à l’œil qui écoute’.²²² A similar futility is clearly audible in ‘à elle l’acte calme’, whose speaker, as suggested both by the calm with which the act of love-making is performed and the description of him as ‘pur d’amour’, is evidently incapable of feeling that emotional connection which, according to Musset’s speaker, would salve his suffering. Moreover, if the various male speakers who populate this collection are indeed to be taken as representative of a single consciousness – namely, that of Beckett himself – later poems in the collection serve to confirm the distance between Beckett’s speaker and Musset’s, for, as previously noted, the ‘nuit / d’août’ that we find in ‘à elle l’acte calme’ is not the only allusion to Musset’s ‘Nuits’ in *Poèmes 37-39*. Another echo of Musset is to be heard in ‘Arènes de Lutèce’.

Like ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ and ‘à elle l’acte calme’, ‘Arènes de Lutèce’ – at once the longest poem in the collection and the only one to make use of punctuation – belongs to that thematic cluster of poems within *Poèmes 37-39* that deal with loneliness, isolation, and the impossibility of connection by way of a scene involving a male speaker and a female companion referred to only as ‘elle’. Unlike the previously-mentioned poems, however, ‘Arènes de Lutèce’ takes us very far from the distant intimacy of sexual activity. In this poem, the figures are presented in a public, albeit largely deserted, space, specifically the Gallo-Roman arena, located in the fifth *arrondissement* of Paris, that now represents one of the most important vestiges of the Ancient Roman city of Lutetia, forerunner of the modern city of Paris.

In her reading of this poem, Patricia Coughlan connects ‘Arènes de Lutèce’ with ‘ainsi a-t-on beau’ and suggests that Beckett’s situation of the poem in this Gallo-Roman arena is intended to ‘plac[e] the poem’s events in a long perspective’.²²³ If Coughlan’s interpretation of Beckett’s decision to situate this poem in the Arènes de Lutèce in order to provide it with a sense of history, one in which human suffering is shown to be at once personal and historical, is no doubt partially correct – all the more so given that it is coupled with the explicit mention of the elaborate sculpture that, in the 1930s, still served as a plinth for a bronze bust of archaeologist and

²²² *CP*, 93

²²³ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry”, 200-01 – In the case of ‘ainsi a-t-on beau’, the ‘long perspective’ is achieved, not by way of an historically-resonant setting, but through references to vast tracts of pre-historical time – ‘comme si c’était hier se rappeler le mammoth / le dinotherium [...] les périodes glaciaires...la grande chaleur du treizième de leur ère’ (*CP*, 98) – that Beckett derived from his reading of Mauthner’s *Beiträge* (viz. *Ibid.*, 383).

anthropologist Gabriel de Mortillet²²⁴ – the importance of this setting is not solely a matter of placing the events it recounts in a longer, historical perspective.²²⁵ The use of the arena also allows Beckett to deepen this poem’s central concern with doubled selfhood. This is made particularly clear in the opening lines, which present us with the image of the speaker and his companion as they are seen to enter the arena, from a distance, by the speaker and his companion who are seated ‘plus haut que les gradins’:

De là où nous sommes assis plus haut que les gradins
Je nous vois entrer du côté de la Rue des Arènes²²⁶

The speaker here does not merely see himself and his companion as if they were someone else, he sees them from the literal position of a spectator. By placing the speaker and his companion at once above the ‘gradins’ and in the arena itself, Beckett utilises the physical space in which the poem is set – that is, an arena – to underscore the division between observers, seated in the audience, and observed, who are seen to enter the arena and thus take on the role of the gladiators or performers who would have entered the arena when Paris was still Lutetia.²²⁷ (This sense of the observed as occupying the position of gladiators or performers is still further reinforced by Beckett’s specific mention of their entering the arena via the ‘Rue des Arènes’.) It is only in the poem’s sixth line that the uncertain unity of the observing ‘nous’ is shattered into an initially hesitant ‘elle’ and a fractured ‘je’ who exist alongside, but clearly distinct from, a young girl at play and a seemingly loving couple. Significantly, the moment that signals this shattering of the ‘nous’ is accompanied by a ‘petit chien vert’ who runs briefly into the poem of ‘Arènes de Lutèce’.²²⁸ The mention of the dog as being ‘vert’ has caused some consternation amongst critics, who have been at a loss to explain why the dog should be green. David Wheatley states that the

²²⁴ Today, only the plinth survives, the bronze bust having been melted down in 1942 during the Nazi Occupation of Paris – Images of the statue surmounted by a bust, as it would have been seen by Beckett in the 1930s, may be found at ‘Les arènes de Lutèce dans les années 1900 – Paris 5e’

<http://paris1900.lartnouveau.com/paris05/lieux/les_arenas_de_lutece_1900.htm> [accessed: 24th December, 2017].

²²⁵ The use of an historical setting to at once evoke and relativize personal tragedy was, as already noted, also a key feature of ‘ainsi a-t-on beau.’

²²⁶ *CP*, 101

²²⁷ David Wheatley too notes this performative aspect of Beckett’s use of the arena: ‘[H]e sees himself enter the Roman arena where he is already seated, as though he were watching a theatrical performance’ (David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 261). Wheatley characterisation, however, ignores that the arena was at once the scene for drama, and for spectacles of a far bloodier nature. Equally, neither Beckett’s speaker – nor the figures he observes enter – is alone. This will prove to be of some significance in due course.

²²⁸ *CP*, 101

dog is '[i]mprobably green in colour', while Lawlor and Pilling comment only that 'green is an unusual colour for a dog'.²²⁹ It is possible that this dog's 'unusual colour' may be explained by the Spanish expression: 'más raro que un perro verde' – literally 'rarer than a green dog' – that refers to something, or someone, who is very odd or out of the ordinary.²³⁰

Although Beckett did not speak fluent Spanish, he is known to have studied the language in 1933, during a time when he envisioned travelling there in the future.²³¹ In addition to Beckett's own efforts to learn Spanish, he also knew people who had studied the language and who possessed far greater fluency in it than he himself would ever achieve. The most notable of these persons was Beckett's friend and abiding love-interest Ethna MacCarthy, who studied Spanish and Italian as a student at TCD.²³² Significantly, although MacCarthy was a student of both Spanish and Italian, it is with Spain, Spanish, and Spanish culture in particular that *Dream's* Alba – for whom MacCarthy provided the real-life model²³³ – is frequently aligned, even speaking Spanish at numerous points in the novel.²³⁴ The Alba's connection with Spanish strongly argues for MacCarthy as Beckett's most likely means of access to Spanish-language culture, and Spanish-language expressions. There is, indeed, clear evidence to suggest that MacCarthy played a role in improving Beckett's acquaintance with Spanish-language culture.²³⁵ Bearing these factors in mind, it seems entirely possible that Beckett – whether through his own studies or via his acquaintance with Ethna MacCarthy – may have been aware of the expression 'más raro que un perro verde'. Making this connection allows us to see the dog, not simply as 'improbably' or 'unusual[ly]' coloured, but as a physical manifestation of that eruption of the rare, the

²²⁹ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 262; *CP*, 387.

²³⁰ Caroline James, 'Colourful language: colours in international idioms' <<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/09/colourful-language-colours-international-idioms/>> [accessed: 26th December, 2017].

²³¹ *viz. DTF*, 169-70 – Beyond 1933, letters to Thomas MacGreevy show Beckett to have considered travel to Spain as remaining a possibility, albeit a distant one, until at least 1935 (*viz. 'As to going away even to Spain, I fear that is unlikely for some time' [LSB I, 283 – SB to TMG (8 October, 1935)]*).

²³² *DTF*, 58 – MacCarthy was every bit as brilliant as Beckett during her studies, achieving the very same academic honours during her undergraduate career.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 151-152

²³⁴ Although some of the Spanish expressions used by the Alba are innocuous – 'Adios [= Adiós]', 'niño' (*Dream*, 175, 194) – the vast majority are vulgar expletives, namely: 'hijo de la puta blanca!', 'Carajo!', 'Trincapollas!' and 'Mamon [= Mamón]!' (*Ibid*, 152, 154, 171). For details of the Alba's most vulgar use of Spanish, see the discussion of Lucien's letter in Part III, Chapter 1.

²³⁵ In a letter of May 1935, for example, Beckett mentioned to Thomas MacGreevy that MacCarthy has lent him two volumes of scores by the Spanish pianist and composer Isaac Manuel Francisco Albéniz y Pascual (*viz. LSB I*, 265 – SB to TMG [5th May, 1935]).

strange, and the unexpected that emerges at precisely the point at which the already strange divide between those who observe and those who are observed, collapses into that division between speaker and 'elle' that may, perhaps, be reconciled in the poem's final lines. (Equally, albeit far more tentatively, it might be argued that the introduction of an expression derived from Spanish, serves to insert the figure whom Beckett most directly associated with this language – namely, Ethna MacCarthy – or, at least, Beckett's intense and unhappy feelings for her, into this poem's examination of the ultimately unsatisfying connections that can exist between the self and others.²³⁶)

Where the presence of the green dog can be partly explained with reference to Spanish, Lawrence Harvey proposed turning to Beckett's own lived experience to clarify the nature of that the division between observing selves and observed selves that this poem articulates. According to Harvey, this division is intended as a literal representation of that sense of hesitant, doubled, and partly unreal, subjectivity that Beckett himself experienced. As described by Harvey, Beckett often spoke during their conversations of a sense of 'existence by proxy'.²³⁷ This is clarified by Harvey as follows:

Quite often [Beckett] is overtaken by a profound sense of the unreality of the self called Samuel Beckett who goes through the motions of day to day living, mechanically and without conviction. As he walks down the street, this Beckett seems like another person, at times almost as objectified as those who are indeed other.²³⁸

This sense of an objectified selfhood, of a self become alien to itself, is clearly of importance to the poem, being present from the opening assertion that 'Je nous vois entrer', and then underscored throughout. One finds it, for example, reprised in a slightly different mode as the female companion and male speaker are made to coalesce in a manner that gives the speaker the sense of meeting himself ('Elle [...] me suit. / J'ai un frisson, c'est moi qui me rejoint'²³⁹). It is also possible to find a trace of this objectified selfhood in the poem's closing lines, in which the speaker and his female companion seem to meet each other again as distinct, but associated, subjectivities:

²³⁶ Beckett's deep affection for MacCarthy was never reciprocated: She was involved with Beckett's good friend A.J. Leventhal from the early 1930s, and would marry him in 1956 (*viz.* *DTF*, 61). Even after her marriage to Leventhal, Beckett would never cease to care for Ethna MacCarthy and, in the late 1950s – by which time MacCarthy was dying of throat cancer –, his persistent feelings for her would be a determining influence on the composition of *Krapp's Last Tape* (*Ibid.*, 442-45).

²³⁷ SB *qtd* in Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 204

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *CP*, 101

Je me retourne, je suis étonné
de retrouver là son triste visage.²⁴⁰

If, by the closing lines of the poem, an uneasy union may have been established between the speaker and his companion, this is by no means certain. In her reading of the poem, Patricia Coughlan is quite sure that the final lines detail an ‘understanding reached’ as the speaker comes to see the woman’s face.²⁴¹ Certainly, the poem does make reference to the female companion as having finally decided to reject the external world of the city of Paris – symbolised by the reference to her moment of hesitation as she ‘fait un pas vers la sortie de la Rue Monge’, which stands in opposition to the earlier mention of the ‘Rue des Arènes’²⁴² – in favour of remaining with the speaker in the uncertain space of the arena. A degree of circumspection is required, however, since, as was previously the case with ‘à elle l’acte calme’ and ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, Beckett here exploits the uncertainties of French syntax: In French, of course, the possessive adjective is governed by the object, not the possessor, and it is thus impossible to be sure if the ‘triste visage’ that the speaker finds is that of his female companion or his own. Naturally, context would generally do away with such uncertainty, but the speaker’s earlier mention of seeing himself, as well as his subsequent reference to how, when his female companion catches up with him, ‘c’est moi qui me rejoins’, means that we simply cannot be sure whose face is seen.²⁴³

Whether the face that the speaker finds is his own, that of his companion, or of either of their various doubles, this uncertainty does serve to underline one aspect of the poem that Harvey’s strictly biographic reading fails to properly account for – namely, the presence of ‘elle’. In this poem, as in the others that have already been discussed, the speaker is not alone, nor is his experience of alienated and objectified subjectivity solely his. His female companion is an integral part of the experience recounted by the poem – so integral that it is impossible to tell whether ‘son triste visage’ is his own, or hers.

The presence of the companion is thus another repetition of the doubled motif that is introduced in the opening lines when the speaker ‘voi[t] entrer’ himself and his companion. David Wheatley has argued that Beckett’s use of the double in this poem ‘can be compared to the Doppelgänger motif, popularised in the nineteenth

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry”, 201

²⁴² *CP*, 101 – In his study of this poem, Lawrence Harvey suggests that ‘[t]he Rue des Arènes suggests the ancient, while the Rue Monge...refers to the beginnings of present-day civilisation’ (Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 205).

²⁴³ The uncertainty of whose face is observed is also recognised by Lawlor and Pilling (*viz. CP*, 387).

century by novels such as Dostoevsky's *The Double*, and the subject of a celebrated *Lied* by Schubert'.²⁴⁴ I would argue, however, that the model for Beckett's poem is to be found neither in Dostoevsky's novella, nor Schubert's setting of Heinrich Heine's poem, but in Musset's 'La Nuit de Décembre', which recounts various occasions in the life of the poet speaker during which he discovers himself to be joined by a figure 'vêtu de noir / qui [lui] ressemblait comme un frère'.²⁴⁵ Unlike in the works by Dostoevsky and Schubert mentioned by Wheatley, the figure of the double in Musset's poem – who is, in fact, described, not as a 'double' but as a 'frère' and, finally, as a 'vision'²⁴⁶ – is neither pernicious nor unwanted. Certainly, the figure is observed to arrive at painful moments in the poet's life – such as the death of his father²⁴⁷ – but in the final section of the poem the double speaks to the poet and reveals its true identity. In so doing, this figure emerges as a deeply caring, but ultimately melancholic, figure, one to whom the poet may turn in moments of distress but from whom, crucially, the poet can expect no comfort:

Le ciel m'a confié ton cœur.
 Quand tu seras dans la douleur,
 Viens à moi sans inquiétude.
 Je te suivrai sur le chemin ;
 Mais je ne puis toucher ta main,
 Ami, je suis la Solitude.²⁴⁸

This poem, it should be noted, is exceptional within the 'Nuits' cycle. Unlike the other 'Nuits', which all present a conversation between the poet and his muse, 'La Nuit de Décembre' is essentially a monologue, until the final moments of the poem, when the 'Vision' speaks and explains his true nature. The structure of the poem is thus strikingly similar to Beckett's 'Arènes de Lutèce', which is structured around a series of seemingly fractured subjectivities, recounted by a single doubled speaker, and which are finally brought into uneasy union by their closing lines, which reveal that the figures – who seemed to stand apart – are actually tied together, sharing the same pain and utterly unable to comfort each other. As Musset's poem ends with the revelation that the 'frère vêtu de noir' is, in fact, 'la Solitude' – who can offer companionship, but never comfort –, so too does the close of Beckett's poem leave us

²⁴⁴ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 261

²⁴⁵ Alfred de Musset, 'La Nuit de Décembre', in *Premières Poésies / Poésies nouvelles*, 249

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 255

²⁴⁷ viz. 'J'étais à genoux près du lit / Où venait de mourir mon père. / Au chevet du lit vin s'asseoir / Un orphelin vêtu de noir / Qui me ressemblait comme un frère' (*Ibid.*, 250).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 255-56

with a face that, whether the poet's own or that of the woman who accompanies him, is marked by the same sadness.

If, as has been argued here, Beckett makes use of a motif drawn from another of Musset's *Nuits* elsewhere in the *Poèmes 37-39*, this reuse of Musset would surely lend support to his presence in 'à elle l'acte calme'. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the fact that, even if that particular poem is read in light of Musset's 'La Nuit d'Août', the mention of the 'grâce tardive d'une pluie cessant' remains quite enigmatic since Musset's poem makes no mention of rain. There is, however, no reason to assume that this reference to rain must remain enigmatic, nor that 'à elle l'acte calme' engages solely with Musset. On the contrary – and in much the same way as allusions to Musset are to be found in more than one of the *Poèmes 37-39* –, this reference to dying rain may be clarified by reference to Shakespeare, whose words were previously heard to echo, not unlike the silver scissors of Atropos, within the poetic space of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents.' More specifically, 'la tardive grâce d'une pluie cessant' may be read as an ironic echo of Portia's famous remarks on mercy in *The Merchant of Venice*:

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes²⁴⁹

As was the case with *As You Like It*, Beckett is known to have studied *The Merchant of Venice* while an undergraduate at TCD.²⁵⁰ Moreover, and once again as was the case with the 'seven ages of man' monologue, this allusion to Portia's reflections on mercy would not be the only one to be found in Beckett's writings.²⁵¹ Once again, however, the true value of proposing such an allusion derives from the manner in which its presence would serve the thematic aims of the poem in which it appears. In this case, however, and unlike the case of the allusion to *As You Like It*, the significance of this allusion to the poem would not owe to the fact that it serves to directly reinforce the poem's thematic focus, but rather to the fact that it serves to enrich the poem *a contrario*. In other words, and in much the same way as he handled the allusion to Musset's 'La Nuit d'Août', Beckett undercuts Shakespeare's verse even as he alludes to it. This undercutting is achieved by placing the allusion to the 'gentle rain' of

²⁴⁹ Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1132 (Act IV, Scene 1 – ll. 179-82)

²⁵⁰ *DTF*, 54 [n.45]

²⁵¹ John Pilling, for example, informs us that allusions to these lines are to be found in *MPTK*, in *Murphy*, and in *Mercier and Camier* (viz. John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's 'More Pricks Than Kicks': In a Strait of Two Wills*, 175).

'mercy' evoked by Portia – and, although the reference to 'mercy' in Shakespeare's play is generally translated as *clémence*, it should not be forgotten that French *grâce* fully encodes the sense of English 'mercy'²⁵² – within a reference to rain that dies away at close of day and in the context of a poem where neither the one who gives the 'acte calme', nor the one who receives it, can be said to be particularly 'blesse[d]' by their exchange.²⁵³

Understandably, some may balk at the idea of hearing Shakespearean pentameters in this dying rain in the context of a collection that is generally thought of as evincing a move towards a simpler, less densely allusive style. It must therefore once again be stressed that the belief that these poems generally tend towards simplicity is grounded, not in the text of the poems themselves, but in a particular vision of Beckett's French and of the kind of literature that he sought to produce when he worked in this language. Certainly, some of these poems do seem to demonstrate a move away from the allusive complexity that is to be found in Beckett's earlier, English-language verse. Others, however, are every bit as complex as their English-language forebears.

The widely divergent levels of allusive and structural complexity that exist within this collection become readily apparent when one considers its sixth and seventh poems: 'musique de l'indifférence' and 'bois seul'.

Appearing together and sharing clear structural and thematic similarities, the reader of *Poèmes 37-39* is almost certainly intended to read these brief poems – 'musique de l'indifférence' is six lines long, 'bois seul' seven – as a complementary pair.²⁵⁴ Thematically, like the poems that have already been examined, 'musique de

²⁵² As noted by the *OED*, the primary senses of English 'mercy' are '[c]lemency and compassion shown to a person who is in a position of powerlessness or subjection, or to a person with no right or claim to receive such kindness' (*viz.* 'mercy, *n.* and *int.*'), in *OED* <www.oed.com> [accessed: 21st December, 2017]). These same senses are attached to French *grâce*, namely a '[d]isposition bienveillante d'une personne à l'égard d'une autre personne' and a '[d]on accordé sans qu'il soit dû' (*viz.* 'GRÂCE, subst. fém.'). in *TLFi* <www.cnrtl.fr/definition> [accessed: 21st December, 2017]).

²⁵³ Interestingly, there exists evidence elsewhere in Beckett's writings, not only for the important place that Portia's characterisation of mercy held in Beckett's imagination, but also for Beckett's willingness to put this characterisation to bitterly subversive use. The direct allusion to these lines that is to be found in Beckett's late text *Company / Compagnie* offers a particularly striking example in this regard: 'You were born on an Easter Friday after long labour. Yes I remember. The sun had not long sunk behind the arches. Yes I remember. As best to erode the drop must strike unwavering. Upon the place beneath' (*CIWS*, 22). Here, the quality of mercy may not be strained and it may perhaps be gentle, but it is also profoundly destructive.

²⁵⁴ Lawrence Harvey too suggests this connection, stating that 'bois seul' 'might be called a companion piece' to 'musique de l'indifférence' (Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 202).

l'indifférence' and 'bois seul' both belong to that subset of the *Poèmes* 37-39 that deals with the theme of loneliness and the ultimate futility of human relations. Unlike the poems in this vein that have already been examined and which approach this question through the lens of a relationship between two figures, however, both 'musique de l'indifférence' and 'bois seul' are solitary affairs. We find in these poems no 'elle' whose 'triste visage' may show her to share in the speaker's own pain, nor even an 'elle' in whose embrace the speaker discovers himself to be more lonely, or whose prospective embrace he is in no rush to experience. Instead, these two poems present us with words spoken by isolated speakers divorced from any particularised external context and addressed to something other than another human figure.

'Musique de l'indifférence' takes the form of a prayer addressed to this music, whereby the speaker appeals for aid in the acquisition, not merely of silence, but of escape from his own silence:

musique de l'indifférence
cœur temps air feu sable
du silence éboulement d'amours
couvre leurs voix et que
je ne m'entende plus
me taire²⁵⁵

In his discussion of this poem, Lawrence Harvey suggested that it conveys Beckett's experience of being 'withdrawn and silent at a party'.²⁵⁶ In making this suggestion, however, Harvey can only have been appealing to either his imagination or to evidence derived from his conversations with Beckett, since nothing in the text of the poem allows us to situate it within a specific context. The poem itself tends, rather, towards the general; what we find here seems to be a general state in which the speaker perpetually finds himself, and which has obliged him to appeal to the aid of an external power. This sense of the poem as a prayer – a sense confirmed by the title that Beckett gave to this poem in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy²⁵⁷ – aligns it with a poem such as 'C'n'est au Pélican', which also took the form of an appeal for the intercession of an external force. Where 'C'n'est au Pélican' made use of Christian imagery and symbolism, however, 'musique de l'indifférence' is as entirely shorn of reference to established religious figures as it is of reference to distinct human companions. The poem, indeed, seems almost impossible to associate with a world beyond itself: We find in it no trace of the people or places Beckett knew, nor can I

²⁵⁵ *CP*, 96

²⁵⁶ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 200

²⁵⁷ As it appeared in a letter of June 15th, 1938, this poem was given the title 'Prière' (*viz. LSB I*, 632).

detect any trace of allusion to literary works with which Beckett was familiar.²⁵⁸ Certainly, it is impossible to entirely exclude the possibility of Beckett's having intended deeper associations in the terms employed after the invocation of the 'musique de l'indifférence'— that is, 'cœur temps air feu sable' – but, to the present reader, their force seems more elemental than allusive. In his study of this poem, Lawrence Harvey proposed a reading that has much to recommend it whereby these terms are to be read as evoking 'the tiny voices that become audible when the louder ones are turned down'.²⁵⁹

In assuming that the speaker yearns for a space in which these inanimate forms may be audible, however, Harvey is guided by his appreciation of the poem as concerning Beckett's desire to escape 'the ephemeral chatter of a cocktail party'.²⁶⁰ Thus read, 'leurs voix' of the fourth line would be the voices of other partygoers, engaged in just such 'ephemeral chatter.' There is, however, nothing in the text of the poem that indicates the particular identity that lies behind the fourth line's deictic 'leurs', and certainly nothing to associate them with party guests. The lack of specificity means that the reader is left largely free to determine how the lines should be interpreted. Thus, in his discussion of the poems, David Wheatley goes so far as to assume that 'musique de l'indifférence' is to be read as 'a lightly orchestrated variation on the theme of "they come"'.²⁶¹ So read, 'leurs voix' would be the voices of the women whose love, or absence of love, the speaker cannot distinguish. While Wheatley's reading, unlike Harvey's, grounds itself in another poem of the collection, as opposed to a conversation that he may have had with the author at several decades' remove from the moment of composition, it nonetheless finds no explicit support in the text of 'musique de l'indifférence' and thus remains tentative.

Focussing upon the text of the poem, other readings – admittedly, every bit as tentative as those proposed by Harvey and Wheatley – become possible. One of these readings works on the assumption that the figures to whom 'leurs' refers have already been introduced in the poem. If we assume this to be the case, it may be that

²⁵⁸ Subsequently, an allusion that is to be found in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' may allow us to read the voix of 'musique de l'indifférence' in a different light. This reading, however, only becomes possible retrospectively since 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' is the final poem in the collection. For this reason, the potential clarification that the final poem throws upon 'musique de l'indifférence' will be evoked as part of our discussion of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol.'

²⁵⁹ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 200 – In support of his reading, Harvey drew attention to the manner in which each of these terms – a beating heart, a ticking clock, the movement of the wind, the crackling of fire, and the rustling of sand – only becomes audible when other sounds are stilled (*viz. Ibid.*).

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 252

'leurs' refers to the very terms that are evoked in the second and third lines, that is 'cœur temps air feu sable /du silence [and] éboulement d'amours.' Reading the poem in this way, Beckett's appeal to the music of indifference would be intended to free him both from the sounds of others – as connoted by a reference, not to love, but, to its end²⁶² – and, in a broader sense, from the very sounds of life itself and the world as a whole. Such a request to escape from the world and other human beings would chime with the poem's final lines, which extend the prayer and make of it, finally, an entreaty to a force beyond the speaker that might permit him to escape the only sound that remains once those of the world and of the other people who inhabit it have been stilled – namely, the sounds of the self. In this poem, however, the sounds of the self are not, properly speaking, sounds at all. Rather, the speaker who yearns for silence yearns to no longer hear the sound of his own refusal to speak. These closing lines suggest that the speaker suffers from his own silence as much as he does from the voices of others and from those of the world. The implication, perhaps, is that the speaker feels trapped in his silence, and would gladly join the concourse if only he could.²⁶³ But he cannot, and so the only thing that remains to him is to pray for the end of the voices he cannot join – be that those of the world, or of his fellow beings – and of the silence he cannot, or will not, escape.²⁶⁴

The self-accusatory tone in the closing lines of 'musique de l'indifférence' may help to explain why it is followed by 'bois seul'. For, where 'musique de l'indifférence' takes the form of a prayer addressed to an external force that finally turns back upon the one who prays, 'bois seul' is comprised primarily of forceful imperatives. In this poem, as in 'musique de l'indifférence', we find no external context to which we can associate the material of the poem, and it is thus difficult to situate the speaker precisely. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the poem presents us with a voice turned directly, and commandingly, towards itself.²⁶⁵ Assuming that this

²⁶² That 'musique de l'indifférence' should evoke love only as an 'éboulement' is entirely in keeping with the attitude towards love that is to be found in the other poems of the collection.

²⁶³ Thus read, these lines would also echo those upon which Beckett's earliest short-story, 'Assumption', opened: 'He could have shouted and could not' (Beckett, 'Assumption', in S. E. Gontarski, *The Complete Short Prose: 1929–1989*, 3).

²⁶⁴ A similar admission that the speaker's pain is at once external and internal is audible in 'ainsi a-t-on beau', which closes on the vision of a self 'enfermé chez soi enfermé chez eux' (CP, 98). Whether within or without, the pain is the same, and cannot be escaped.

²⁶⁵ That these commands are issued by and intended for the same speaker is the most probable reading, but Beckett's decision to leave the relationship between speaker and listener ambiguous within the poem is striking as it serves to anticipate a kind of relationship between the one who speaks and the one who listens that will recur throughout much of his mature writing – most notably in his late work *Company* /

voice is directed towards itself, the manner in which the commands are issued makes clear that the vague hope of assistance from an external force held by the speaker of 'musique de l'indifférence' has been disappointed. The speaker of 'bois seul' has been left to fend for himself and he has found no better response to the suffering he feels than to abandon the external world entirely. Here, the speaker seems to enjoin himself to drink alone, and to engage in a series of brute, physical actions – consumption, desire, fornication, and death –, each of which is to be accomplished 'seul':

bois seul

bouffe brûle fornique crève seul comme devant²⁶⁶

Although, as noted, the precise nature of the relationship between speaker and the one to whom he speaks is left obscure, there can be no doubt about the total solitude in which each of these actions must be performed. This solitude is signalled not only through the use of the adjective 'seul' but also through the use of the second-person singular form of the imperative.²⁶⁷ Unlike the second-person plural, this form of the imperative can only be directed to a single individual. The verb thus leaves us in no doubt that this poem offers us a vision of life as a process that begins, ends, and is experienced alone. Life is not merely experienced alone, moreover, but as something violent and unforgiving. This is apparent from the verbs used, which reinforce the brutal nature of the world 'bois seul' presents. By using *bouffe*, rather than *mange*, *fornique*, rather than a more tender expression, such as *fais l'amour* or even *aime*, and *crève* in lieu of *meurs*, Beckett makes of these actions something unremittingly harsh, far removed from gentility, and suggests that no comfort is to be found in the performance of them. In this way, the language used by Beckett can be observed to contribute greatly to the creation of a very particular atmosphere: The speaker here commands, using a form of the imperative that can only be directed towards an isolated individual, and uses terms that suggest a lack of concern, even a degree of disdain or distaste, for the figure who is so addressed. A great deal has been said using very few words.

Compagnie: 'Use of the 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' (*CIWS*, 3-4) / 'L'emploi de la deuxième personne est l'effet de la voix. Celui de la troisième celui de l'autre. Si lui pouvait parler à qui et de qui parla la voix il y aurait une première. Mais il ne le peut pas. Il ne le fera pas. Tu ne le peux pas. Tu ne le feras pas' (Samuel Beckett, *Compagnie*, 8)

²⁶⁶ *CP*, 97

²⁶⁷ This form, of course, is also the one used in 'musique de l'indifférence'.

By presenting us with a suite of actions, the force of which appears to be a matter strictly of language in its purest sense – that is, of verbal person and linguistic register – rather than a matter of deeper allusive potential, the opening lines of ‘bois seul’ suggest that this poem, just like ‘musique de l’indifférence’, agrees with the commonly-held view of *Poèmes 37-39* as ‘relatively straightforward’ pieces that largely eschew Beckett’s early fondness for dense literary intertextuality. In actual fact, however, and despite the similarities that exist between the two poems, ‘bois seul’ and ‘musique de l’indifférence’ differ radically from each other in their use of allusion – ‘bois seul’ being, for its part, a highly complex poem that appeals to a number of texts with which Beckett is known to have engaged. The first of these references is to be found at the close of that suite of actions detailed by the poem’s opening lines. For, simple though it may appear, Beckett’s use of the term ‘comme devant’ – as Lawrence Harvey noted in his study of these poems²⁶⁸ – is an allusion to La Fontaine’s *Fables*, a text that Beckett had studied while a student at TCD and to which he would refer at various points in his literary career.²⁶⁹ In the case of the present poem, the phrase ‘comme devant’ alludes to the ending of ‘La Laitière et le pot au lait’, a *fable* which recounts the manner in which people are led to project fantastic futures for themselves in the privacy of their own imaginations (‘Quel esprit ne bat la campagne? / Qui ne fait châteaux en Espagne?’²⁷⁰) before reality intervenes, dragging them back to themselves and to their own mediocrity:

Quand je suis seul, je fais au plus brave un défi ;
 Je m’écarte, je vais détrôner le Sophi ;
 On m’élit roi, mon peuple m’aime ;
 Les diadèmes vont sur ma tête pleuvant :
 Quelque accident fait-il que je rentre en moi-même,
 Je suis gros Jean comme devant.²⁷¹

In La Fontaine’s *fable*, solitude is presented as a space in which the self is free to rise above its present state, to heights that will forever remain beyond its reach in the reality of life in society. In Beckett’s poem, on the contrary, the reality of life in society

²⁶⁸ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 202

²⁶⁹ Beckett studied La Fontaine’s *Fables* during his Junior Freshman year (*viz.* Appendix II [a]). Amongst other references to this work that are to be found in Beckett’s *œuvre* may be cited *Dream*’s mention of ‘[t]he Dutch Cheese of La Fontaine’s fable’ (*Dream*, 9), which alludes to ‘Le Rat qui s’est retiré du monde’, and the allusion to ‘Le Lièvre et les Grenouilles’ that occurs in ‘à bout de songes un bouquin’, one of the *mirlitonades* (*viz.* *CP*, 219).

²⁷⁰ Jean de La Fontaine, ‘La Laitière et le pot au lait’, in Georges Couton (ed.), *Fables choisies, mises en vers* (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1962), 190

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 191

is solitude, and unlike the private, imaginative realm evoked by La Fontaine this Beckettian solitude is by no means a genial place to be.²⁷²

As may be observed, even the relatively straightforward lines upon which 'bois seul' opens conceal allusive potential. Certainly, the allusion is relatively subtle since La Fontaine is not named and it initially appears as if this reference appears in isolation, as the solitary literary reference to be found in this poem. In that respect, it might be said to constitute something of a move away from Beckett's *EBOP* manner, where poems oftentimes resemble nothing so much as dense, intertextual thickets. Any reader tempted to view 'bois seul' as evidencing Beckett's move away from the *EBOP* manner and toward greater simplicity of expression, however, should be quickly disabused by the closing lines of the poem:

sors tes yeux détourne-les sur les roseaux
se taquent-ils ou les aïs
pas la peine il y a le vent
et l'état de veille²⁷³

Of all the poems in *Poèmes 37-39*, 'bois seul' has found the least favour with critics and this is essentially because of these lines, which are as complex as anything to be found in *EBOP*: David Wheatley has labelled the images these lines contain as 'puzzling and incongruous', while Patricia Coughlan has taken particular issue with the presence of the 'aïs' – or sloths – saying that they '[put] some strain on our interpretative ingenuity'.²⁷⁴ Such criticisms, however, seem to arise from a fundamental misapprehension of the kind of poetry that Beckett was capable of writing in French. It is only if it is read in a *simplifying* manner – that is, in accordance with the mode of reading that was earlier suggested to be commonly applied to Beckett's French-language works on the assumption that it is more appropriate to such 'straightforward' works –, that 'bois seul' may be viewed as lacking, in the words of John Pilling, 'a rigorous inner logic'.²⁷⁵ If we are prepared to view this poem as conforming to the more complex mode that we have elsewhere discovered in the poems of this collection that we have already examined, however, it may be observed that there is indeed a 'rigorous inner logic' at work in this poem. And this logic serves

²⁷² Harvey interprets this allusion in different terms to what has been proposed here. For his interpretation, see Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 202-03.

²⁷³ *CP*, 97

²⁷⁴ David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 253; Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 202

²⁷⁵ John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 175 – Speaking of 'bois seul' and 'ainsi a-t-on beau', Pilling criticizes both poems on the grounds that 'neither has a rigorous inner logic, and in neither is the absence of this logic compensated for by startling *aperçus*' (*Ibid.*).

to render this poem's images far less 'puzzling and incongruous' than they appeared to Wheatley, and to explain the presence of the sloths that so perplexed Coughlan.

The inner logic to which these lines of the poem answer, I would suggest, is to be found by way of Biblical allusion. The presence of one Biblical allusion within these lines is, in fact, already well-established: Critics such as Harvey, Wheatley, Lawlor and Pilling, all suggest that the command to 'sors tes yeux' be read as a reference to Matthew 5:29 – 'And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee'²⁷⁶ –, and I would agree with such an interpretation.²⁷⁷ To that widely-accepted Biblical allusion, however, I would further add an allusion to Biblical verses that are to be found in both Matthew (6: 26-29) and Luke (12:24-27) and which it was earlier suggested lay behind the description of the flowers in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'. As it appears in Luke – which Anne Atik described as Beckett's 'favourite Gospel'²⁷⁸ –, the verses in question are as follows:

²⁴ Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? [...] ²⁷ Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.²⁷⁹

In those verses as in Beckett's poem, we are invited to turn our eyes towards an animal (ravens for Luke, sloths for Beckett) and a plant (Luke's lilies; Beckett's reeds). In Beckett's poem, moreover, as in the Biblical passages, the animals and plants to which we are invited to turn are mentioned in the plural – thereby serving to explain Beckett's decision to refer to more than one sloth; a plurality to which Coughlan took particular exception, on the astonishing grounds that 'one sloth would have been enough to make the point'.²⁸⁰ The inverted order in which Beckett's poem introduces the animal-plant pairing is echoed in the inversion of the ends to which this pairing is put: In Luke, the ravens and the lilies are proposed as a positive example of God's

²⁷⁶ The full quotation reads: 'And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell' (Matthew, 5:29 – King James Version)

²⁷⁷ viz. Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 203; David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 253; *CP*, 382

²⁷⁸ viz. 'From the New Testament, Sam's favourite Gospel was Luke, although one finds Mark and others in his work' (Anne Atik, *How It Was*, 73).

²⁷⁹ Luke, 12:24-27 (King James Version) – In Matthew, one reads: '²⁶Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? [...] ²⁸Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' (Matthew, 6: 26-29 [King James Version]).

²⁸⁰ Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves': Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 202

providence and a sign that we should not privilege physical wants over spiritual matters – God, we are assured, will provide. In Beckett’s poem, meanwhile, the possible value of these figures as a model for human behaviour is immediately rejected, being fatally undermined by the presence of wind and wakefulness.

The nature of the problem posed by wakefulness can be readily explained with reference to the sloths: Unlike the sloth, Man is not free to indulge in such behaviour.²⁸¹ On the contrary, he is condemned to spend most of his life in an ‘état de veille’ – a state of wakefulness that, though La Fontaine’s *fable* ‘La Latière et le pot au lait’ may present it as a space for pleasant dreaming, the cruel vision of life articulated in ‘bois seul’ confirms to be profoundly painful.²⁸² The importance of ‘vent’ to Beckett’s poem, and its relation to the ‘roseaux’, is rather more elusive. One particular cause of confusion derives from the fact that the reed is an overdetermined plant, particularly within Beckett, and the natural inclination of readers familiar with Beckett’s other works and what is known about his own literary interests is perhaps to see in these ‘roseaux’ an allusion to either Pascal’s ‘roseau pensant’ or to Yeats’ *The Wind Among the Reeds*.²⁸³ It is thus understandable that critics have suggested the possibility of an allusion to either one, or both, of these works – Harvey noting, for instance, that the mention of the reed ‘inevitably conjures up Pascal’s “roseau pensant”’, while Lawlor and Pilling draw attention to Pascal and note that ‘Yeats’s “wind amongst the reeds” may also have been in mind’²⁸⁴ – and it is certainly possible that both of these allusions are present within the text to a greater or lesser degree. Neither Pascal nor Yeats, however, can serve to clarify the presence of the verb ‘taquiner’, whose primary meaning is to ‘tease’, ‘upset’ or ‘torment’, but which can also, albeit more rarely, mean ‘to caress lightly’.²⁸⁵ Although the easiest way of reading this verb would perhaps be to privilege the subsidiary meaning of lightly caressing and imagine the reeds caressing each other in the wind, such a solution still leaves us with the question of why the act of caressing should compromise the exemplary value of the reeds as fully as wakefulness compromises that of the sloths. In an effort to account for this verb and for its use in ‘bois seul’, I would propose that

²⁸¹ This, of course, is particularly true if one is inclined to share in the Christian understanding of Sloth as one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

²⁸² In his *fable*, La Fontaine states that ‘[c]hacun songe en veillant, il n’est rien de plus doux’ (La Fontaine, ‘La Latière et le pot au lait’, in *op. cit.*, 190).

²⁸³ In the *Pensées*, Man is described as no more than a ‘roseau pensant’ (Pascal, Léon Brunschvicg [ed.], *Pensées* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1976), 149 [347-200]). Yeats, meanwhile, published a collection of verse entitled *The Wind Among the Reeds* in 1899.

²⁸⁴ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 203; *CP*, 382

²⁸⁵ viz. ‘TAQUINER, verbe trans.’, *TLFi* <www.cntrl.fr/definition> [accessed: 26th December, 2017].

these reeds be read as an allusion, not to literature or to philosophy, nor even to the Bible, but, rather, to mythology and, more particularly, to the story of Midas.

In Greek mythology, Midas was not merely afflicted with the gift of a golden touch, he was also the king who, having sought to hide the secret of his ass's ears, was undone by a clump of reeds that revealed this secret whenever they were rustled by the wind. As recounted by Lemprière in his *Classical Dictionary* the myth runs as follows:

[...] Midas had the impudence to support that Pan was superior to Apollo in singing and playing upon the flute, for which rash opinion the offended god changed his ears into those of an ass, to shew his ignorance and stupidity. This Midas attempted to conceal from the knowledge of his subjects, but one of his servants saw the length of his ears, and being unable to keep the secret, and afraid to reveal it, apprehensive of the king's resentment, he opened a hole in the earth, and after he had whispered there that Midas had the ears of an ass he covered the place as before, as if he had buried his words in the ground. On that place, as the poets mention, grew up a number of reeds, which, when agitated by the wind, uttered the same sound that had been buried beneath, and published to the world that Midas had the ears of an ass.²⁸⁶

Interpreting the reeds of 'bois seul' in light of the tale of Midas, then, the reeds do not tease or upset each other, rather they caress each other in the wind and, in so doing, reveal themselves to be as much an enemy of Man's – or at least Midas's – peace of mind as ever was wakefulness. Moreover, the legend of Midas once again serves to reinforce the idea of society itself as a cruel and unforgiving place that was to be found in the poem's opening lines, since it is not really the fact of Midas having been cursed with ass's ears that occasions pain, but rather the idea of living with this affliction in the eyes of others. In this respect, the allusion to Midas serves to draw us back to La Fontaine, since it reaffirms the conviction of La Fontaine's poem that a large part of our suffering derives from the brutal *décalage* between the life that we would imagine ourselves to have and the life that living in society allows us to have.

Unexpected though this allusion to Midas may be, then, it may be seen as justified by its interaction with the undeniable textual allusion to La Fontaine in the same poem. Moreover, such an allusion to Classical mythology would be entirely possible in the context of a collection which has already made tacit mention of Atropos, and whose final poem will make explicit mention of both her and Persephone.²⁸⁷ Nor, indeed, do we have to assume on Beckett's part a general

²⁸⁶ John Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary* (London: T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1831), 465 ['Midas']

²⁸⁷ Both of these figures are mentioned by name in the collection's final poem, 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol'. Atropos, meanwhile, as noted, is heard as a distant, but nonetheless threatening, presence in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents.'

knowledge of the myth of Midas and the role played by reeds therein since, as the citation offered above indicates, this particular myth is to be found in Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, which, as first noted by John Pilling, was Beckett's primary source for information on Greek mythology.²⁸⁸ When these factors are borne in mind, I would contend that the allusion to the legend of Midas that has been posited reveals itself to be relatively well-founded. Similarly, when read attentively, 'bois seul', a poem castigated for its lack of inner logic, reveals itself to be far more than a confused array of incongruous images, being instead a complex work of art in which the legend of Midas stands alongside references to French literature and to Biblical verse, and in which all these various allusions are made to serve that thematic concern with the impossibility of social relations and the pain of loneliness that, as we have seen, was equally central to 'musique de l'indifférence.' In the case of the latter, of course, these themes were pursued in a very different way and seemingly without recourse to the complex use of allusion that we have found not only in 'bois seul' but in many other of the *Poèmes 37-39*. The comparison between these two poems in particular thus serves to confirm that this collection is by no means homogenous. Beckett's use of French in no way prevented him from continuing to indulge in allusions every bit as complex as those he deployed in his English poems. At the same time, the use of French *could* be a vehicle for poems of a newly simplified, if not yet a simplistic, nature – such as 'Rue de Vaugirard', 'musique de l'indifférence' and 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'. And, of course, French could also be a vehicle for poems – such as 'à elle l'acte calme' – that combine an apparent simplicity with deeper allusive and structural complexity in a manner that invites comparison with Beckett's later vagueness. Such heterogeneity of literary practice confirms the need to correct the existing critical tendency to read the texts of this poem in a uniform manner. Rather, and as already argued, it is necessary for the critic to demonstrate a corresponding willingness to adopt various modes of reading in response to the particular poem with which they are concerned.

Before moving on to the next thematic cluster in this collection – that is to say, the poems which take death as their central subject – and demonstrating other aspects of the previously-ignored richness of these poems, we will consider one last poem that, although not published as part of this collection, is undoubtedly a product

²⁸⁸ viz. John Pilling 'Losing One's Classics: Beckett's Small Latin, and Less Greek', in *JoBS* (Vol. 4, No. 2 – 1995), 6 – The importance of Beckett's engagement with Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, and its probable relevance for these poems, has more recently been confirmed by the discovery of an 1831 edition of this text that, having been purchased by Beckett in February 1936, remained in his library up to the time of his death. For more information on this volume, and Beckett's debt to Lemprière more generally, see Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 117-18

of the same creative impulse as the rest of the *Poèmes 37-39* and which shares much in common with those poems that cluster around the theme of the impossibility of social relations. The poem in question is ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’.²⁸⁹

Having seemingly survived in only a single version, as part of those texts by Beckett held with the E. L. T. Mesens papers at the Getty Research Institute, ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ was composed by Beckett towards the end of the 1930s and presents, through a sometimes uncertain use of underlining, a conversation between two lovers.²⁹⁰ The surviving typescript is curious insofar as, despite apparently having been sent to a prospective editor for consideration – from 1938-1940, Mesens was editor of the *London Bulletin*, a journal in which Beckett did indeed publish a small number of pieces²⁹¹ – it includes a multitude of errors that are not confined to irregular use of underlining and which, when taken together, bespeak a very sloppy approach to typing.²⁹² This sloppiness aside, it does seem clear that Beckett was submitting his poem in the belief that it might be published – whether by Mesens, or by someone of his acquaintance – since the surviving version of ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ is accompanied by two poems that would eventually be published as part of *Poèmes 37-39*. The fact that ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ dates from the same period as the *Poèmes 37-39* and seems to have been submitted to a prospective

²⁸⁹ For a brief description of this poem, see Mark Nixon, ‘Beckett’s Unpublished Canon’, in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 284-85.

²⁹⁰ Initially, the poem seems to use underlining to indicate direct speech, as in the following: ‘non dit-elle je n’ai pas d’aspirine’ (viz. MNLP). There are, however, instances of what is clearly direct speech in the poem that have not been underlined, as in the following example: ‘mais voyons dis-je cette fois d’une voix indignée qu’est-ce que tu me racontes’ (viz. *Ibid.*). In the absence of any discernible reason for the lack of underlining in the second example, the only explanation appears to be neglectful typing.

²⁹¹ viz. Mark Nixon, ‘Beckett’s Unpublished Canon’, in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 285 – In addition to sending this poem to a prospective editor, Beckett appears to have shown it to friends. ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ would, at least, fit more closely than any other French-language poem of the period the description given by Brian Coffey of a ‘poem of the *conversation galante* type’ that Beckett showed to him in 1938 (viz. Brian Coffey, ‘Memory’s Murphy Maker: Some notes on Samuel Beckett’, in *Threshold* [No. 17 – 1962], 35).

²⁹² These errors include, but are by no means limited to, the following: A lack of agreement on ‘général’ in the expression *d’une façon générale* in lines 1 and 3; misplaced circonflexes on *connaît* in lines 4 and 5; missing cedillas from *ça* in lines 4, 5, and 6; the use of the masculine article with *hésitation* at line 21; the incorrect accent on *lèvera* at line 22; and the addition of an unnecessary cedilla to *glaciale* in the second-last line (viz. MNLP).

publisher alongside two poems belonging to that collection strongly implies that it rightfully belongs to that collection.²⁹³

Evidence of the connection between ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ and the other poems of *Poèmes 37-39* is also to be found internally, as there are clear thematic parallels between this poem and others in the collection. In line with the poems that have already been analysed, for example, ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ presents an unremittingly negative perspective on human relations, by providing us with no sense that these relations can be a source of comfort. More particularly, ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ echoes ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ and ‘à elle l’acte calme’ insofar as, like them, it is concerned with the divide that can exist between lovers even in the act of love-making.²⁹⁴ Even more so than ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’, ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ treats this theme with a directness that may shock some readers. John Pilling, for instance, was moved to describe the poem as ‘an outrageously indelicate piece in very questionable taste’.²⁹⁵

In the present reader’s estimation, however, ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ is, in fact, decidedly less ‘indelicate’ than much of Beckett’s literary output. Certainly, it is hardly comparable to a post-War work such as *Comment c’est / How It Is*, rife as that work is with scenes of extreme violence. Nor, indeed, does this particular poem contain anything that is much more direct than the sexually-charged material appearing in Lucien’s letter in *Dream*, which we examined in the previous chapter, or even than the remark that the female figure of ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ should feel free to ‘mouille[r] / tant qu’elle voudra’. Nonetheless, it is possible that some readers may find there to be something ‘indelicate’ about the moment when the male speaker of ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ describes how, following coitus, his female companion – once again, an unnamed ‘elle’ – goes to the bathroom to, as she puts it, ‘vide’ herself:

²⁹³ Considering ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ as properly belonging to *Poèmes 37-39* would also help to explain why, as it initially appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, the collection was avowedly incomplete: Though numbered I to XIII, only 12 poems were included – number XI being missing. Additionally, despite only 12 poems appearing in *Poèmes 37-39*, Beckett spoke of the collection as having 13 poems in two letters to George Reavey (viz. *LSB II*, 48 – SB to George Reavey [15th December, 1946]; *Ibid.*, 55 – SB to George Reavey [14th May, 1947]).

²⁹⁴ A further point of connection between ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ and ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ is their shared focus on teeth: Where the speaker of the latter locates himself in a space, or a state, where he is ‘sans dents’, the male speaker of ‘Match nul ou l’Amour paisible’ specifically refuses to brush his teeth, even when explicitly requested to do so by his companion (viz. ‘va te laver / je refuse elle insiste je refuse / au moins les dents dit-elle je refuse’ [MNL]).

²⁹⁵ John Pilling, ““Dead before morning”: How Beckett’s “Petit Sot” Never Got Properly Born”, in *JoBS* (Vol. 24, No. 2 - 2015), 198-209, 207 [n.8]

je me vide je me lève
fais dis-je

elle fait bien nos anges je l'entends à peine²⁹⁶

While *se vider* can be used simply to refer to the act of releasing matter from the body – whether via the act of urination, defecation, or otherwise –, the poem makes clear that the female figure is (also) emptying herself of seminal fluid by stating that she 'fait [leurs] anges'. Beckett is here playing on *faire des anges*, a slang term for the action of performing an abortion.²⁹⁷ Obviously, the presentation of the act in which the female figure is engaged, coupled with the use of a slang term for abortion, lends to this poem a frankness that is greater than that which is to be found in the explicit use of the verb 'mouiller' in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents'. It would, however, be quite wrong to assume that 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' is *merely* explicit.

In the case of that particular instant, for example, the reference to abortion signals that this is a relationship from which nothing will come. In this respect, the reference to abortion reinforces the sense of this relationship that is to be found in the title, which presents the romance depicted in this poem as a '[m]atch nul' – a draw, denying both parties victory. Moreover, the reference to the brute physical action of expelling (some form of) waste from the body echoes the use that is made of the medical term 'intussusception', which is to be found in both the first and the final stanzas of the poem.²⁹⁸ Medically speaking, intussusception refers to 'the slipping of a length of intestine into an adjacent portion [of the intestine] usually producing obstruction', something which is also referred to as invagination.²⁹⁹ In the particular case of Beckett's poem, it seems that the term is primarily being used in the metaphorical sense of '[t]he taking in of things immaterial'³⁰⁰ – a metaphorical sense

²⁹⁶ MNLP

²⁹⁷ 'faire des anges', in *L'argot, avec Bob, l'autre trésor de la langue* <<http://www.languefrancaise.net/Bob/>> [accessed: 24th December, 2017].

²⁹⁸ *viz.* MNLP – John Pilling notes that this term is found in the *Murphy* notebooks and has suggested that Beckett derived it from William Osler (*viz.* John Pilling, "'Dead before morning": How Beckett's "Petit Sot" Never Got Properly Born', 203). In his article, however, Pilling provides no further details as to which volume of Osler's writings may have provided Beckett with the term. Despite this uncertainty as to Beckett's precise source, the fact the term is found in the *Murphy* notebooks raises the possibility that Beckett may here be using 'intussusception' primarily with the English term, and its English senses, in mind.

²⁹⁹ 'Intussusception', in *Merriam-Webster: Medical Dictionary* <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intussusception#medicalDictionary>> [accessed: 27th December, 2017] – In French too, this can be referred to as either *intussusception* or *invagination* (*viz.* 'INVAGINATION, subst. fém.', in in *TLFi* <www.cnrtl.fr/definition> [accessed: 27th December, 2017]).

³⁰⁰ 'intussusception, *n.*', in *OED* <www.oed.com> [accessed: 27th December, 2017]

that, once again, is to be found in French as well as English³⁰¹ –, as this sense would best agree with the female speaker's use of the term to describe her sense of dying as she observes death in others:

elle dit je crois d'une façon général [sic]
en voyant quelqu'un mourir je suis vraiment morte
mais d'une façon tout à fait général [sic] je crois
je croyais que j'étais malade mais non on connaît [sic] ça [sic]
à l'École de Médecine on connaît [sic] ça [sic] très bien
à l'École de Médecine on appelle ça [sic] l'Intussusception³⁰²

Although, as noted, Beckett appears here to use the term chiefly in its metaphorical sense, the reference to the 'École de Médecine' does closely ally 'intussusception' with its primary, medical sense and, in so doing, suggests that this poem, in which the female figure voids her bowels after intercourse with the male speaker, is bookended by references to bowels intruding upon themselves, to the detriment of the body as a whole. Indelicate though the scene of expelling seminal fluid may be to some, then, it should be acknowledged that it is not simply an 'outrageously indelicate' moment. It equally serves to further a thematic concern, since it demonstrates that the relationship between the two figures is the source of no positive developments and is thus, medically and emotionally speaking, a '[m]atch nul'. It is, if anything, nothing more than an unhealthy connection, the intrusion upon each other of things that should remain apart – a form of emotional, metaphorical 'intussusception.'

Of course, if the mention of bowels is not to be viewed as purely unsavoury, the poem itself must not be seen as merely intestinal. On the contrary, in a manner that echoes the kind of poetic composition that was found in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' is a poem in which explicitly physical language mingles freely with subtle literary allusion. In the case of the latter poem, the literary reference comes by way of its subtitle – 'l'Amour paisible' – but the intertextual reverberations of this reference are to be felt throughout.

As noted by Mark Nixon, 'l'Amour paisible' refers 'to a painting by Antoine Watteau, which Beckett may well have seen during his visit to Berlin in 1937'.³⁰³ This reference is not merely an isolated allusion to Watteau's painting, however. Instead, it serves to reinforce the status of this poem as an engagement with Paul Verlaine's poetry in the *conversation galante* manner, particularly that poetry which is to be

³⁰¹ viz. 'Assimilation spontanée, intuitive (propre à une personne)' ('INTUSSUSCEPTION, subst. fém.', in *TLFi* <www.cnrtl.fr/definition> [accessed: 27th December, 2017]).

³⁰² MNLP

³⁰³ Mark Nixon, 'Beckett's Unpublished Canon', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 285

found in the collection *Fêtes galantes*.³⁰⁴ As the title of that collection implies, Verlaine's poems are themselves engagements with the pictorial mode of the *fête galante*, a genre made famous by Watteau and of which his *L'Amour paisible* is a notable example. As a genre of painting, the *fête galante* seeks to capture the pastoral and romantic charm of aristocratic excursions, themselves referred to as *fêtes galantes*, by representing 'des couples d'amoureux réunis dans des jardins ou des parcs, occupés à des divertissements de société ou faisant de la musique'.³⁰⁵ In Verlaine's collection, this connection between poetry, art, and physical pleasure is reinforced not merely through the title accorded to the collection as a whole, but also through the titles of individual poems.³⁰⁶ In engaging with Watteau and with the pictorial genre of the *fête galante*, however, Verlaine's poetry is by no means purely bucolic, nor purely romantic. On the contrary, the poems of his collection, *galants* though they may be – and occasionally, as in 'En bateau', ribald³⁰⁷ –, are troubled by a potentially malevolent uncertainty.³⁰⁸ The poems of *Fêtes galantes* are also frequently melancholic. In 'Colloque sentimental', the concluding poem of the collection, for example, a pair of former lovers, now become mere 'spectres', walk through a 'vieux parc solitaire et glacé', of just the sort in which, during summer and under more pleasant circumstances, *fêtes galantes* might once have taken place or been shown taking place by Watteau.³⁰⁹ Now, however, the figures of Verlaine's poem are alone and their words are heard by none but 'la nuit'.³¹⁰

We know the melancholy of Verlaine's poems, and particularly that of his 'Colloque sentimental', to have appealed to Beckett, since it is from that poem that

³⁰⁴ In his discussion of this poem, Nixon notes the connection between 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' and Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* (*viz. Ibid.*), but was not in a position to elaborate any further on the possible intertextual significance of this connection.

³⁰⁵ 'Fête galante', in Michel Laclotte, *et al., Larousse : Dictionnaire de la peinture* (Paris: Larousse VUEF, 2003), 272

³⁰⁶ The title of the poem 'Cythère', for example, which refers to paintings of the *fête galante* type by Watteau, namely *Le Pèlerinage à l'île de Cythère* (1717) and *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* (1718) – The first published version of the collection's opening poem, 'Claire de lune', even went so far as to include Watteau's name, with the line that reads 'Au calme clair de lune triste et beau' in the final version initially reading as follows: 'Au calme clair de lune de Watteau' (*viz. Paul Verlaine, in Fêtes galantes, in op. cit., 1087*).

³⁰⁷ *viz.* 'C'est l'instant, Messieurs, ou jamais / D'être audacieux, et je mets / Mes deux mains partout désormais' (Paul Verlaine, 'En bateau', in *Ibid.*, 115).

³⁰⁸ This is expressed in a variety of ways, including the 'mots si spécieux' (*viz. Paul Verlaine, 'Les Ingénus', in Ibid., 110*) of the young women beloved of the ingenuous youths in 'Les Ingénus' that, although not revealed to the reader, are said to have a lasting effect on those that hear them, or the particular shell to be found in the grotto where the speaker and his lover '[s']aim[èrent]' of which he says only that it '[le] troubla' (*viz. Paul Verlaine, 'Les Coquillages', in Ibid., 111*).

³⁰⁹ Paul Verlaine, 'Colloque sentimental', in *op. cit.*, 121

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Beckett would go on to derive the French title of his play *Happy Days / Oh les beaux jours*.³¹¹ In this way, it seems likely that Beckett's reference to Watteau's painting is intended to allude, less to Watteau himself, than to Verlaine and to the poems of *Fêtes galantes* that Verlaine composed in conversation with, and against, Watteau. As the circuitous route by which we arrive at Verlaine suggests, the use Beckett makes of Verlaine in 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' is more complex than a single citation. On the contrary, and in much the same manner in which 'Arènes de Lutèce' and 'à elle l'acte calme' take poems from Musset's *Nuits* cycle as an intertext, so does 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' take Verlaine's 'Colloque sentimental'.

Just like Verlaine's poem, 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' allows us to eavesdrop on the profoundly unsentimental conversation between two individuals who might once have been called lovers. Beckett's poem, however, goes still further than Verlaine's in underscoring the distance between the speakers and the melancholy of their affection for each other. For where, in Verlaine's poem, the lovers have long since ceased to be intimate – the question of whether or not 'ton cœur bat...toujours à mon seul nom', posed by one of the figures in 'Colloque sentimental', receives by way of response no more than a flat 'non'³¹² –, the emotional distance between the lovers in Beckett's poem is made all the more painful by the fact that their conversation takes place in the context of an ongoing sexual relationship and, more particularly still, in the shared bed in which their sexual relations occur. (Given the explicit nature of the poem elsewhere – as well as the explicit nature of other poems in the collection – it is striking that Beckett chose not to explicitly describe the sex-act in 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible.' Certainly, we hear the woman in the toilet, emptying herself after the act, but their intercourse itself is left unseen and unheard. All the more intriguingly, while she is in the bathroom, we are presented with the image of the male speaker penetrating himself – 'je suis maintenant dans l'anus je songe à ma mère / je songe à la facilité dont [*sic*] on fait souffrir les femmes'³¹³ – in a manner that, like the quote from 'Mon père m'a donné un mari', serves to elevate this poem above mere misogyny by demonstrating a level of self-awareness on the part of the male speaker and a degree of connection between the experience of the male speaker and the unnamed 'elle' with whom he shares the poem.)

³¹¹ *DTF*, 508 – In addition to this allusion, we have of course already examined the allusion to the melancholic 'Il pleure dans mon cœur' that is to be found in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'.

³¹² Paul Verlaine, 'Colloque sentimental', in *op. cit.*, 121

³¹³ MNLP – This reference to the mother naturally invites a lengthy development which is beyond the scope of the present thesis; it is thus left to other scholars to explore the question of what this might mean or whether, as Beckett's speaker suggests, it is mere 'chichi' (*Ibid.*).

The sex-act that they perform in it notwithstanding, the bedroom in which Beckett's own *colloque* takes place remains as frigid as the 'vieux parc solitaire et glacé' in which Verlaine's spectres converse. In Beckett's poem, the coldness of the space inhabited by the lovers is to be observed on both a figurative and a literal level: Literarily, this coldness is to be felt through the reference to the female companion's 'dents [qui] claquent' and the 'main glaçiale [*sic*]' that she places on the male speaker in the poem's final stanza.³¹⁴ Figuratively, the coldness and lack of affection between the two speakers is apparent in the fact that it is only when refusing to forget his companion's confession – that is, of her having felt largely unmoved by his stated desire to sleep with other people³¹⁵ – that the male speaker is moved to feel anything approaching 'extase':

je mets une jambe hors du lit sur quoi elle dit
oublie ce que j'ai dit veux-tu fais comme si je n'avais rien dit
annulons tout ça j'ai eu tort de parler
ce qui est dit dis-je en extase tout à coup est dit
 et je rentre toutes choses considérées la jambe dans le lit³¹⁶

In terms of the poem's intertextual engagement with 'Colloque sentimental', this reference to 'extase' is all the more significant because, as noted, it is connected by Beckett with his male speaker's refusal to forget what his female companion has said. In Verlaine's poem, on the other hand, 'extase' is associated, not with a refusal to forget, but with an utter disdain for the idea of remembering.³¹⁷

The most striking point of comparison between Beckett's and Verlaine's poem, however, is perhaps to be found in the poems' closing lines. As previously noted, the conclusion of Verlaine's poem serves to reinforce the melancholy that has pervaded the entirety of the poem by swallowing up the words of the two figures in the vastness of an empty night:

Tels ils marchaient dans les avoines folles
 Et la nuit seule entendit leurs paroles.³¹⁸

In Beckett's poem too, night is central to the poem's final line and its presence in the verse serves to colour retrospectively all that we have previously read. In Beckett's

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* – This 'main glaçiale [*sic*]' itself, incidentally, may be a discrete allusion to those wandering hands of the figures in Verlaine's 'En bateau'.

³¹⁵ *viz.* 'je n'ai couché avec personne / tu as dit que tu avais envie [*sic*] dit-elle c'est la même chose / oh je suis contente que tu me le dises c'est un signe de confiance / mais on n'est pas un fluide on est sur terre ça m'écœure / tu as tout à fait raison mais je n'y peux rien tu comprends / oui dis-je ce n'est pas très compliqué' (*Ibid.*)

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *viz.* ' - Te souvient-il de notre extase ancienne ? / - Pourquoi voulez-vous donc qu'il m'en souvienne ?' (Paul Verlaine, 'Colloque sentimental', in *op. cit.*, 121)

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

poem, however, night is presented, not as a void in which the words of the lovers can be lost, but as something which, in keeping with its presentation in ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’, constitutes a profoundly negative force: Night is a time of fear, and a time of destruction, that actively, and soundlessly, works to the detriment of Man:

j’entends la nuit est une lime est-ce une chanson
puis quelquechose [*sic*] que je ne comprends pas
ça m’est égal elle aussi elle a peur
c’est l’Intussusception ha ha ha
ça m’est égal je m’assoupis mais elle
elle se retourne y mets [*sic*] une main
glaçiale [*sic*] colle sa bouche à mon oreille et dit
la nuit est une lime qui ne fait pas de bruit³¹⁹

As previously remarked, this poem, like a number of poems in *Poèmes 37-39*, the collection to which it seems to rightly belong, is more than a simple exercise in misogyny. Certainly, it is possible to see the male figure as an uncaring misogynist – demanding that the female figure service his needs even while he refuses to comply with her wishes³²⁰ –, but the text of the poem evinces a sense of shared suffering that, rather than reifying the pain of the male at the expense of the female, serves to unify the male and female figures in a kind of etymological compassion – that is, suffering together, shared suffering. In the lines that have just been quoted, and upon which the poem closes, this comingling of an apparently uncaring misogynistic speaker and a more empathetic voice is evident in the fact that a dismissal of whatever the female figure might be saying (‘ça m’est égal’) is immediately followed by an admission of shared fear (‘elle aussi elle a peur’). The male speaker here, like Petit Sot and like Beckett himself, is afraid in the night. He is, however, not yet so self-absorbed as to be unable to notice that he shares this bed with another person, and that she too is afraid. If he does not seek to reassure her, it is less because of any disregard on his part, and more a restatement of what poems such as ‘Arènes de Lutèce’ and ‘à elle l’acte calme’ have already implied: There is no comfort to be drawn from the companionship of another; we cannot reassure ourselves, nor those around us.

This expansion beyond the personal fears of the isolated self is further accomplished by way of the phrase that Beckett here uses, and which the poem’s speaker initially suspects may be a song. Rather than being a song, this is in fact a proverb that is to be found, in French, in Beckett’s ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook: ‘La nuit

³¹⁹ MNLP

³²⁰ viz. ‘je me dresse dans le lit je m’écrie apporte-moi un algocratine / j’ai changé d’avis ça me fait chier / elle me l’apporte je l’avale elle dit va te laver / je refuse elle insiste je refuse’ (*Ibid.*)

est une lime qui ne fait pas de bruit' (Italian)'.³²¹ Although I have been unable to identify the source via which Beckett may have come across this proverb, it seems clear that it plays a similar role to the citation from the folksong 'Mon père m'a donné un mari' that is to be found in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents'. As was the case in that previously-examined poem, the citation serves to expand 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible': In the first instance, as a proverb, it expands the poem beyond the commonplace nature of those day-to-day utterances that have characterised it thus far, moving us into the realm of universal truth expressed by proverbs and parables. More importantly, it also serves to confirm the expansion beyond the personal plight of the male speaker already suggested by 'aussi'. This vision of night seems to take us far beyond the particular suffering of the male speaker, and even beyond the suffering experienced by the two figures with whom the poem is directly concerned, by reminding us that night – a metonym for Time in the proverb as recorded in the 'Whoroscope' Notebook, but perhaps best understood in the context of this poem at once as Time and Night; the Night Petit Sot and Belacqua so fear – works, at once silently and inexorably, to destroy everyone, and everything. Read in this way, the conclusion of 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' serves both to set the relationship detailed in this poem under the sign of death and to draw the perspective of the poem outwards in a manner that embraces human experience beyond the self, much in the same way as the 'coups de ciseaux' in 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' are those heard by all who live, not merely the male figure 'à l'œil qui écoute'.

Having examined those of Beckett's French-language poems that deal with relationships – whether between particular individuals, between self and other, or between the self and its various selves – it must be acknowledged that the distinction between the thematic clusters of *Poèmes* 37-39 is by no means water-tight. Even those of Beckett's French-language poems, such as 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' or 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', that deal most explicitly with the failure of love to

³²¹ WN, 46 – It seems most likely that this expression is a translation and partial reworking of the Italian, and more particularly the Tuscan, proverb 'il tempo è una lima sorda'. Whether both translation and reworking are Beckett's own, or whether he derived this phrase from an as-yet unidentified French-language source remains an open question. Certainly, WN contains a number of phrases altered by Beckett, often to comic effect – amongst which are to be found titles and literary citations, as well as proverbs and other common turns of phrase. Examples of such altered phrases appearing in WN include: 'Kritik des reinen Quatsches', 'j'ai moins de souvenirs que si j'avais six mois', 'born with a spatula in his mouth', 'a lav with a view', 'fars est celare fartem', and 'Pot calling kettle white' (WN, 21, 22, 24, 30, 38, 41). It should however be noted that, where none of these phrases are attributed or clarified in the notebook, the provenance of 'La nuit est une lime qui ne fait pas de bruit' is clearly signalled as '(Italian)'. Bearing this in mind, Beckett is perhaps more likely to have derived this phrase at least from a source other than his own imagination.

provide any sense of connection across the gulf that separates individuals remain profoundly influenced by a sense of mortality and the inexorability of death. With this in mind, and as a preliminary step to engaging with those of the *Poèmes 37-39* that take death as their primary thematic concern, it will be helpful to clarify why death should have been at the forefront of Beckett's mind around the time that he was working on the poems of *Poèmes 37-39*.

On the night of the 6th of January, 1938 – mere months after his 1937 move to Paris –, Beckett was stabbed by a pimp named Prudent.³²² As recounted by Knowlson in his biography, '[t]he details of the incident remained sharply etched on [Beckett's] mind, even after fifty years'.³²³ That this should be the case is hardly surprising given that Beckett almost lost his life as a result of the stabbing – the knife having 'just missed the heart', as Beckett recalled to Knowlson³²⁴ – and would spend a number of weeks recovering from the incident. In his study of the *Poèmes 37-39*, Lawrence Harvey already suggested that there may have been a link between the stabbing incident and the work that Beckett produced at this time.³²⁵ In that study, however, Harvey mistakenly placed the stabbing incident in 1936 rather than in 1938 and, in so doing, drastically attenuated the connection between the incident and these poems. Rather than being separated by almost two years, the poems of *Poèmes 37-39* may, in fact, be understood as the direct product of Beckett's frame of mind in the months, and indeed the weeks, following the stabbing.³²⁶ We know this to be the case because the first of the poems to be written – that is, 'they come' / 'elles viennent' – was composed by Beckett on the night of January 25th, just over two weeks after the stabbing incident and only three days after he had been released from the Hôpital Broussais.³²⁷

The effect of the stabbing, and the experience of having stood in close proximity to his own mortality, cannot be underestimated: Even before his stabbing, Beckett's writing testifies to a long fascination with death – one need only think in this regard to the innumerable fictional avatars that he had done away with in his writing up to this point –, but the treatment of death in *Poèmes 37-39* is of a different sort to what we find in the earlier works. Unlike in Beckett's earlier texts, death no longer serves as a narrative climax – as it does in 'Assumption' and *Murphy* –, nor even as a

³²² For details of this event and its aftermath, see *DTF*, 281-84

³²³ *Ibid.*, 281

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 183

³²⁶ The one exception in this regard being 'Dieppe' which, as noted, was written in English in 1937.

³²⁷ *viz.* *LSB I*, 596

discrete narrative event – as it does in ‘Le Concentrisme’, *Dream*, and *MPTK*. In the *Poèmes 37-39*, death has become omnipresent. This collection does not build towards death, nor does it simply make occasional use of death; it is pervaded by death. And the death that pervades this collection is not merely the demise that threatens its various male speakers, but also that of various other figures – most notably the fly of ‘La Mouche’, the female figure of ‘Ascension’, and the father of ‘ainsi a-t-on beau’.

In the case of the final two figures – that is, the woman and the father – is it scarcely surprising that they should be specifically mentioned in these poems given that, while the stabbing incident of 1938 may have brought him face-to-face with his own mortality, Beckett had already experienced death at close quarters. In 1933, he had lost both his cousin Peggy Sinclair, with whom he had previously enjoyed an ultimately unsatisfying romantic relationship, and his father in quick succession.³²⁸ The sense of Beckett’s grief over his own father as he dealt with the natural, but deeply troubling, process of forgetting that invariably follows loss has already been noted as finding expression in the poem ‘ainsi a-t-on beau’, where the mention of ‘son père’ was shown to be every bit as important as that of ‘Kant’. At the time, moreover, it was noted that this was not the only trace of Beckett’s father’s death that is to be found in the *Poèmes 37-39*. Significantly, the second of these traces is to be found in the poem ‘Ascension’, where it appears alongside a direct allusion to the death of Peggy Sinclair. It is thus with ‘Ascension’ – the first of the poems belonging to this cluster of death-centred poems and the second poem of the collection as a whole – that our examination of these poems, and of the place of death in the collection, will begin.

Although he may have been incorrect in situating the stabbing incident to 1936, Lawrence Harvey’s reading of ‘Ascension’ is notable for the degree to which he accurately, albeit indirectly, signalled the importance to this poem of the deaths of Beckett’s father and cousin. In his reading of the poem’s reference to the ‘grands yeux verts’³²⁹ of the female figure whose death arrives at the close of the poem, for example, Harvey associated them with those of the ‘green-eyed Smeraldina’.³³⁰ In so doing, of course – whether he was aware of it or not –, Harvey had recognised that both figures had a common origin, namely in Peggy Sinclair. That Sinclair’s death should be found in ‘Ascension’ is somewhat curious given that her death in 1933 does not necessarily appear to have greatly affected Beckett in the moment. Certainly, the rather business-like description of her death that is to be found in a letter written by

³²⁸ Beckett’s father, William Beckett, died on the 26th of June, 1933; Peggy Sinclair, meanwhile, had died of tuberculosis on the 3rd of May that same year.

³²⁹ *CP*, 94

³³⁰ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 191

Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, and which is immediately followed by an almost equally lengthy paragraph on Beckett's financial difficulties, bespeaks an emotional response that betrays nothing of the closeness that had characterised Beckett's earlier, romantic relationship with Peggy:

Last Wednesday week...in the early morning, Peggy died in Wildungen near Kassel, quite peacefully after a fit of coughing in a sleeping-draught sleep. I did not hear from Cissie, but from Sally here in Dublin. Her German fiancé was with her to the last and is reported to be inconsolable. She had just been up to Kassel to see the doctor and had been told that she was better and could lie out in the sun, so they all had great hopes of her getting quite well. It appears that she and her fiancé had lately been indulging in regular paroxysms of plans of what they would do when they were married. She has been cremated.³³¹

The most direct evidence for Beckett's muted response to Peggy Sinclair's death is not to be found in Beckett's correspondence, however. Rather, it is to be found in what Beckett neglected to do with his literary writings: Having made literary use of his relationship with Peggy Sinclair while she was alive, Beckett appears never to have considered amending or obscuring this usage following her death. In fact, despite Sinclair having died only a year before the volume appeared in print, Beckett chose to include as part of *MPTK* 'The Smeraldina's Billet-Doux', a letter that he had originally written for *Dream* and which he had closely based upon one of the love-letters he had received from Peggy Sinclair during their romantic relationship.³³² As time progressed, however, Beckett does appear to have come to feel remorse about his lack of sensitivity towards Sinclair's memory and, more particularly, about his lack of sensitivity towards her surviving relatives.³³³

It is, in this respect, significant that the death of the female figure in 'Ascension' should be so clearly aligned with the death of Beckett's father, William Beckett. For, whereas Beckett appears to have been initially unmoved by Sinclair's death, the death of his father affected him profoundly and immediately. In striking contrast to the simply descriptive treatment accorded to Peggy's death – and its placement in the body of a much longer letter; showing it to be merely one item of news amongst others – the manner in which Beckett presented the death of his father, in a letter written, once again to Thomas MacGreevy, only a few days after

³³¹ *LSB I*, 158 (SB to TMG [13th May, 1933]) – At the time of her death, Peggy was accompanied by Heiner Starcke, to whom she was unofficially engaged (*Ibid.*, 163 [n.9]).

³³² For more on Beckett's fictional use of Peggy Sinclair's letter, see the discussion of Lucien's letter in Part III, Chapter 1.

³³³ *DTF*, 183 – Beckett's sense of remorse and his sense of morbidity may have been further quickened by the death of Peggy Sinclair's father, William 'Boss' Sinclair, on May 4th, 1937 (*viz.* *LSB I*, 498).

William Beckett's death makes very clear the intensity of feeling that this death inspired in him:

He [= William Beckett] was in his sixty first year, but how much younger he seemed and was. Joking and swearing at the doctors as long as he had breath. He lay in the bed with sweet pea all over his face, making great oaths that when he got better he would never do a stroke of work. He would drive to the top of Howth and lie in the bracken and fart. His last words were "Fight fight fight" and "What a morning". All the little things come back – *mémoire de l'escalier*.

I can't write about him. I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him.³³⁴

In his discussion of 'Ascension', Lawrence Harvey already suggested that the impact of William Beckett's death was to be felt in this poem. Commenting that 'the sorrow [in 'Ascension'] is less for the fact of death than its inopportune arrival and the loss of what might have been', Harvey invoked remarks made by Beckett during their conversations and which concerned his father's hope that 'if he recovered [following his heart attack] he planned just to lie on the hillside in the sun'.³³⁵ The evidence of Beckett's letter to MacGreevy that is now available to us, and from which has just been quoted, proves Harvey to have been perspicacious in his identification of this poem with Beckett's feelings towards his father: In the passage quoted above, we do indeed find that very same description of the life that William Beckett hoped to lead should he have recovered – albeit expressed in slightly less refined terms –, and it is thus highly likely that this vision of what might have been, contributed to Beckett's anguish. In commenting upon the relationship between this poem and the death of William Beckett, however, Harvey argued for an emotional, rather than a direct connection. Thanks to Beckett's letter to MacGreevy, we are now in a position to confirm that this poem is as directly concerned with the death of William Beckett as it is with the death of Peggy Sinclair. Evidence for this connection comes via the image of Beckett's father 'in the bed with sweet pea all over his face', an image that – as noted by Lawlor and Pilling in their notes for this poem³³⁶ – almost certainly lies behind the mention of 'pois de senteur' that we find in 'Ascension'.³³⁷

³³⁴ *LSB I*, 165 (SB to TMG [2nd July, 1933])

³³⁵ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 191-2

³³⁶ *CP*, 380

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 94 – Although Beckett is almost certainly thinking primarily of the sweet pea that surrounded his father's face, there is a possibility that his allusion to the plant may equally be affected by a more recent image: In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of May 26th, 1938 – one in which Beckett appears to directly mention his work on 'Ascension', which would certainly fit his description of 'a long poem in French that [MacGreevy] would not like' (*LSB I*, 626 – SB to TMG [26th May, 1938]) –, Beckett refers to his brother Frank who 'writes rapturously of lying about in the garden in the sun among the sweet pea & the roses. Happy youth' (*Ibid.*, 625 – *Ibid.*). It is thus possible that Frank's positive presentation of the sweet pea, may have served to revive

In addition to clarifying the probable source of the reference to sweet pea, Beckett's letter to MacGreevy also seems to explain the switch from the *présent* to the *passé simple* that, in 'Ascension', signals the transposition from the mundane scene of the speaker on his own in a room, buffeted by the commentary on the World Cup that comes from the room beside him, and the cheers of the fans outside that enter through the window.³³⁸ This move to the *passé simple*, which drags us from the present moment and into a space of past events, seems designed to render precisely that sort of intrusive memory that Beckett referred to in his letter to MacGreevy after his father's death – the 'mémoire de l'escalier' that always comes too late. In the case of the poem, however, the 'memory' that intrudes upon the speaker is not quite a memory, but rather a form of fabulation, since Beckett was not physically present to witness the death of Peggy Sinclair and, as revealed by his letter to Thomas MacGreevy, only heard about it indirectly, via Peggy's sister Sara.³³⁹

By presenting us with the death of a female figure who shares Peggy's green eyes, and who lies in a bed covered with sweet pea of the sort in which William Beckett died, 'Ascension' establishes an intimate association between the deaths of Peggy Sinclair and of Beckett's father. In drawing upon an image taken from the death for which he was present – namely, the sweet pea that covered his father's face when he died – to construct in the imaginary space of 'Ascension' the scene of a death which he did not himself witness, Beckett creates in verse a unifying of the two deaths that suggests the degree to which, by the time he wrote this poem, these deaths had come to be associated in his mind. That Beckett should have been moved to associate these two deaths in his poem is hardly surprising. In the first instance, the deaths occurred very close together: William Beckett died on the 26th of June 1933, just over seven weeks after Peggy Sinclair's May 3rd death. In his poem, Beckett makes use of real-world events that occurred close to the time of the anniversaries of these deaths – namely, the Feast of Ascension and the 1938 World Cup – to underscore the chronological proximity between them: In the year 1938, the Feast of Ascension fell on May 26th and, as noted by Lawlor and Pilling, this was 'just after the fifth anniversary of [Peggy Sinclair's] death'.³⁴⁰ Not only was the Feast of the Assumption close to the fifth anniversary of Peggy Sinclair's death, it was also only one month

Beckett's awareness of the negative connotations that those flowers held for him. Similarly, the fact that, at the time, Frank's wife Jean was pregnant and, as Beckett's letter notes, 'due in 5 weeks' (*Ibid.*), may equally have contributed to Beckett's awareness of those whom he had lost.

³³⁸ *viz.* *CP*, 94 – It may be noted that the close proximity between sporting terminology and scenes of a certain emotional weight is not without comparison to 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' – even if the register of the two poems is clearly different.

³³⁹ Peggy Sinclair's sister Sara Estella was known as Sally (*LSB I*, 85 [n.5]).

³⁴⁰ *CP*, 380

prior to the fifth anniversary of the death of Beckett's father, which took place on June 26th. The 1938 World Cup, meanwhile – which was played in France and lasted from June 4th to June 19th – ended only a week prior to the fifth anniversary of William Beckett's death.

The connections between these two deaths were not solely chronological, however. No doubt an even more significant factor underlying the association of these deaths in Beckett's mind was the fact that, in each case, Beckett had lost family members who had, in their own ways, played important roles in his life and who were themselves closely associated.³⁴¹ Moreover, and as Lawrence Harvey recognised, both of these important family members had, in Beckett's eyes, died too soon: Peggy was only in her early twenties when she died and, although his father may have been over sixty, Beckett clearly felt that he had been robbed of years that he should have been able to enjoy. It is surely this conviction that hangs behind the line 'toujours trop jeune'.³⁴² Set off by itself as it is between the two present-tense scenes, these words seem to represent a thought that comes unbidden to the speaker's mind – one of 'the little things [that] come back', described by Beckett in his letter to MacGreevy following the death of his father – and which are thus to be understood in the context of that 'memory' of the female figure's death that they anticipate. Following his own near brush with death, Beckett must surely have often found himself, like the speaker of the poem, drawn back to memories of those he had lost and to reflect on the fragility of life, on the ease with which some – such as he himself – are allowed the second chance that is denied to others.³⁴³

As the preceding paragraphs have made clear, 'Ascension' is very firmly anchored in Beckett's biography. Obviously, the importance of autobiographical material is in no way unique to this poem – many of the others in this collection are similarly autobiographic in their subject matter –, nor is such use in any way unique to this collection. The use that Beckett made of his life in his art was a defining characteristic of his writing from the very earliest days of his career up until the very

³⁴¹ Peggy Sinclair was the daughter of his father's sister Frances 'Cissie' Beckett Sinclair.

³⁴² *CP*, 94

³⁴³ Indeed, in the exact same manner as the speaker in the poem, Beckett's reflections were no doubt accompanied by the sounds that arrived from neighbouring apartments. The noise from other apartments was a source of irritation that, as Lawlor and Pilling remind us, Beckett alludes to in some of his letters of the period (*CP*, 380). Specifically, Beckett refers to '[a] terrible wireless' (*LSB I*, 626 – SB to TMG [26th May, 1938]), thereby almost certainly confirming Lawrence Harvey's assertion that the sound coming from the next room at the start of 'Ascension' is that of a radio (*viz.* Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 190). It should however be noted that nothing in the poem itself makes explicit that the 'voix...émue' that comments on the World Cup is being transmitted via wireless.

last. The presence of biographical material in ‘Ascension’, and in the *Poèmes 37-39* as a whole, is thus another indication of the degree to which these poems, though written in French, remain anchored in the same attitude towards literary creation that guided Beckett in the composition of his earlier English-language work – an attitude whereby the author draws freely upon his personal experience in the elaboration of imaginative, literary fictions. In those earlier works, of course, and as this attitude implies, autobiography was never an end in and of itself. On the contrary, autobiographical material was one of the materials out of which Beckett crafted his writings, shaping it with a keen eye for literary style – as demonstrated through punning and internal patterning, for example – and a marked taste for allusion. We have already seen how other poems in *Poèmes 37-39* demonstrate this very admixture of autobiography and literary allusion in the creation of complex works of art and, in this regard, ‘Ascension’ appears to be no different. Vital though biography here is, it is also possible to find Beckett making use of material derived from other sources – Biblical, literary, or otherwise –, in a manner that, as in the poems that have already been examined, serves to deepen and enrich his treatment of his personal concerns. To find the trace of this material, we must look closely at the poem and ask ourselves in what respect its various parts answer to the poem’s own inner logic. More particularly, we must look closely at the poem’s final lines:

elle rôde légère
sur ma tombe d’air³⁴⁴

As described by Lawrence Harvey, these closing lines signal that ‘the dead girl rises, comes back to life, while the live narrator is entombed’.³⁴⁵ While the opposition between the liberated female figure – that is, liberated in the sense of unburdened – and the entombed speaker is almost certainly correct, Harvey’s suggestion that she ‘rises [and] comes back to life’ is grounded, not in the text of the poem, but rather in Harvey’s own religious convictions and his belief in the comfort that is to be derived from religious faith.³⁴⁶ His entirely positive vision of the woman’s spirit, liberated by

³⁴⁴ *CP*, 94 – As it appeared in a version sent by Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy in a letter of June 15th, 1938, the final line of this poem read ‘en reçoit-il une colombe / aussi souvent que moi’, whereby Beckett at once compared himself directly to the man who was with the female figure at the time of her death and stressed the religious context of the poem implied by its title through an allusion to the Holy Spirit, the only element of the Trinity not previously referred to in the poem. Finally, however, Beckett evidently preferred to abandon both the reference to the Holy Spirit and to Peggy Sinclair’s ‘fiancé’, thereby leaving himself and Peggy Sinclair alone in the poem’s concluding stanza.

³⁴⁵ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 191

³⁴⁶ Though Beckett’s poem may make use of the religious feast of the Ascension, there is nothing in the poem to indicate that Christian doctrine is here being used as anything other than a literary device – one that, as has already been observed, owes

death and ascending to new life, actually appears to be contradicted by the text of the poem: In Harvey's study, the second-last line appears as 'elle rode légère.' This is an error that, despite Beckett's having noted it prior to the poem's first publication in *Les Temps Modernes*, persisted through every printing until that of *CP*.³⁴⁷ It is, in truth, surprising that Harvey did not notice this error as, in the context of the poem, 'rode' makes no real sense. Certainly, none of its primary meanings – 'grind', 'develop', 'run [as of a motor]' – would in any way agree with his proposed reading of the poem's conclusion. More importantly, however, his proposed reading equally strikes me as being in conflict with the corrected text of the poem as it appears in *CP* given that the verb *rôder* does not in any way indicate freedom. Having much the same sense as the English 'haunt', the idea expressed by 'rôde' is rather one of remaining in, or returning to, a place, not of escaping it.³⁴⁸ The girl is thus certainly lightened, and quite probably liberated of a burden, but even in her incorporeal state she remains, eternally, with the male speaker. As indeed she must, being now merely a memory, ever ready to return to him, even unbidden, but never again free to pursue her own life, to her own ends, and far from he who now thinks of her.

If Harvey's interpretation of the tomb image is more convincing than his interpretation of the young woman's fate, it is not least because it is difficult to read the tomb in any other way: The speaker may be alive, but his life is clearly a form of living death, one that serves to render only starker the cruelty of a world that permits the persistence of such a half-life as his while snatching away those who loved their lives enough to engage in 'paroxysms of plans' for futures they would never have, or dream of 'fart[ing]' in the bracken in the light of summer days they would never see. These lie buried in the ground or hang in the air as smoke, while the still-living speaker resides in a 'tombe'. Even if that much seems clear, the precise presentation of the tomb in which the male speaker is confined remains ambiguous: Why should the

its use primarily to the chronological proximity of the Feast of the Ascension in 1938 and the fifth anniversary of Peggy Sinclair's death. From the very outset of Harvey's discussion of the poem, however, it is evident that his interpretation of 'Ascension' lends great weight to the religious significance of this event as this may be perceived by one possessing a deeply-felt Christian sensibility: 'The context [of the poem] invites us to consider him [= Christ] in his youthfulness; as one prodigal of his love, rejected by man, and finding death the response to his gift' (*Ibid.*, 190).

³⁴⁷ viz. 'J'ai laissé passer une toute petite faute dans l'un des poèmes, le quatrième, intitulé Ascension, avant-dernier vers. Il faut rôde, avec circonflexe, à la place de rode, sans circonflexe' (*LSB II*, 46 – SB to Jacoba Van Velde [before November, 1946]).

³⁴⁸ 'Haunt' is here used as a rendering of the verb's sense that seems most germane to Beckett's poem. The reader turning to a French-English dictionary might well find *rôder* translated as 'prowl', 'roam', 'skulk', 'steal through', 'waft', or 'linger'. It may be mentioned that the last-mentioned of these subsidiary meanings of the verb *rôder* – that is, 'waft', as of a scent, or 'lingering', as of smoke – may be seen as alluding to the fact that, as noted in Beckett's letter to MacGreevy, Peggy Sinclair was cremated and had, at least partially, become smoke-like.

poem close upon an image of the speaker, nor merely in a 'tombe', but specifically in a 'tombe d'air'?

At least initially, the situation of the speaker within a 'tombe' can undoubtedly be read as a Biblical allusion, that is as a reference to the discovery of the empty tomb prior to the Ascension by Mary Magdalene and other women.³⁴⁹ In much the same way as Beckett diminishes the significance of the Ascension by presenting it as merely the return of yet another prodigal child to the family home – thereby reducing an event that the Christian believer would take as proof of Christ's divinity to but another parable among so many –, so too would this allusion to the discovery of the empty tomb provide an ironic comment on the Biblical event: Unlike the Biblical Ascension, which took place forty days after the discovery of a tomb emptied of the body of Jesus, this poem, which opened upon a reference to the Ascension, closes upon the image of a mortal, living, speaker confined to a 'tombe'. Such a religiously-inflected reading would be concomitant with that already offered, according to which Beckett's decision to close the poem upon an image of his speaker within a tomb serves to confirm and enrich that concern with death – with those whom it claims, and those who must live on it is wake – that animates the poem as a whole. Read in this way, the tomb image can be accounted for in light of the poem's religious orientation and its thematic concerns. Nevertheless, even when taken together, these readings can only be partially satisfactory in the present reader's estimation, since they can account only for the presence of the 'tombe', not for its airy composition: The speaker is, of course, not merely in a *tombe*, but in a 'tombe d'air'.

The question of what value we are intended to accord to the description of the tomb as being composed of 'air' is one that has animated a number of those critics who have engaged with this poem and who have been moved to offer a variety of possible interpretations of Beckett's use of 'air'. Patricia Coughlan, for example, has suggested that the 'air' of this poem's final line is to be interpreted as the poet's breath ('his very breathing entombs him'³⁵⁰), while Lawlor and Pilling associate it with the voice that intrudes upon the speaker in the opening stanza and which, in line with the interpretation offered by Harvey, they read as coming from a wireless ('[t]he poet is entombed in the noises carried across the airwaves'³⁵¹). Undoubtedly, both of these

³⁴⁹ *viz.* ¹Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared and certain others with them. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. ³And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus' (Luke, 24: 1-3 [King James Version]).

³⁵⁰ Patricia Coughlan, "The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 199

³⁵¹ *CP*, 380-81 – For details of the evidence in favour of reading this 'voix' as being produced by a radio, see Part II, Chapter 2 [n.343].

readings can be reconciled with the material of the poem: Coughlan's reading would serve to underscore the more general sense of the speaker's life as a deathly half-life; Lawlor and Pilling's reading, meanwhile, if the initial voice is indeed the product of a radio, would find support in the earlier reference to the sound of the 'fidèles' which arrives via 'les airs tout court', thus suggesting an opposition between those shouts that can be heard on the winds and the words of the football commentator that can be heard on the shortwaves.³⁵² From a purely linguistic perspective, however, neither of these readings is entirely persuasive. In French, the term *air* is sufficiently distinct from *haleine* and *souffle* to make Coughlan's reading unlikely. Lawlor and Pilling's, meanwhile, depends upon an assimilation of 'air' and the unspoken reference to *ondes courtes* which, in any event, is only to be found as an implied opposition to the 'airs tout court' by which the sounds of the 'houle des fidèles' intrude on the speaker. Alongside these tentative readings, therefore, it may be seen that there is room for further interpretations. The interpretation that will be offered here – and which, it must be admitted, remains every bit as tentative as those proposed by Coughlan, and Lawlor and Pilling – reads Beckett's 'tombe d'air' as an allusion to the 'airy tomb' of Robert Bridges' 'I have loved flowers that fade'.

Unlikely though the possibility of an allusion to a poem by Robert Bridges may appear, the proposition is within the realms of possibility – both textually and biographically. In seeking to justify this reading biographically, one need only recall that Beckett's literary sensibility was shaped by the tastes and preferences of his time. As such, though Bridges may no longer enjoy a wide reputation today, a schoolboy and young man enamoured of English poetry, as was Beckett – a reader of Tennyson, Meredith, and Browning³⁵³ –, is almost certain to have been aware of the work of a poet whose tenure as Poet Laureate, from 1913 to 1930, encompassed this very period of youthful and schoolboy interest. If Beckett did have any interest in Bridges it would seem most likely to have dated from this earlier period since to date no textual or archival evidence of Beckett's having engaged with Bridges during his maturity has been found.³⁵⁴ Nor do we find any volumes by Bridges amongst those owned by Beckett at the time of his death. In positing the existence of an allusion to Bridges in

³⁵² *CP*, 94 – The description of the football fans as 'fidèles' is, of course, yet another instance of Beckett evoking religious terminology in this poem only to subvert it, and thereby serves to further undermine Harvey's faith-based interpretation.

³⁵³ Evidence of Beckett's keen affection for Tennyson has already been noted as part of our discussion of Lucien's letter in *Dream*. That novel also includes reference to Meredith (*viz. Dream*, 18), as does Beckett's earliest published short-story 'Assumption' (*viz. CSP*, 6), wherein we also find mention of 'the Browning Society' (*Ibid.*, 4).

³⁵⁴ Unless, of course, Beckett's late poem 'The Downs' (*viz. CP*, 207-208) may be seen as engaging with Bridges' poem of the same name, something which is surely unlikely.

Beckett's verse, therefore, I must again stress the tentative nature of such a proposition. At the same time, I would argue that tentative proposition, rather than simple dismissal of the possibility, is the correct attitude to adopt. For, when considering the question of whether or not Beckett – whom we know to have been a wide reader, a writer fond of allusion, and a man in possession of an excellent memory³⁵⁵ – was sufficiently aware of an author to have engaged with their work, we must not sequester ourselves within the narrow confines of reductive empiricism. As Van Hulle and Nixon rightly point out in their study of Beckett's library, the portion of the library that we retain 'only represents a very small part of all the books Beckett consulted and read during his life'.³⁵⁶ The very same thing may be said for Beckett's letters and notebooks, of which have preserved many but which cannot be deemed a complete record of Beckett's engagement with literary culture. Such archival resources thus represent an important source, but also a partial one: To draw intelligently upon them is, undoubtedly, to strengthen the validity of our readings; to restrict ourselves to what they tell us, however, is to cut ourselves off from the possibility of unexpected discoveries and, in so doing, immeasurably weaken our potential to engage with the full depth of Beckett's writing. When reading Beckett, in other words, we should remain open to finding traces of his familiarity with authors and works that have left no other archival record. As has already been stressed, moreover, the fact of Beckett's having been aware of a particular text is only ever part of what must be considered when gauging the possibility of intertextual engagement. Every bit as important is the question of whether the proposed allusion can be supported textually and whether the proposed allusion can be shown to agree with the inner logic of the text in which it is held to appear.

Confining ourselves to the text of 'Ascension', indeed, as has already been argued, neither Coughlan's proposed connection between 'air' and *souffle/haleine*, nor Lawlor and Pilling's suggested connection between 'air' and *ondes* is entirely satisfactory. This means that the suggestion of another interpretation is not only

³⁵⁵ On the matter of Beckett's memory, James Knowlson has suggested that Beckett 'almost certainly possessed a photographic memory' (*DTF*, 235). In making this suggestion, Knowlson was basing himself upon the ease with which Beckett was able to recall the many paintings he had seen, and his capacity for careful comparison of even minor details between these paintings. If true, of course, the importance of the fact has implications beyond Beckett's engagement with visual art; opening up, as it does, the possibility that the various notebooks and workbooks that have survived represent only a small part of the material upon which Beckett was capable of drawing in his writing.

³⁵⁶ Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, xiv – Indeed, if we were to restrict ourselves solely to the evidence of Beckett's library as it now survives, we would be utterly unable to confirm Beckett's keen interest for the work of Gide as this existed in the 1930s, since this interest has left no extant trace in Beckett's surviving library (*viz. Ibid.*, 59).

possible, but welcome. In this regard, the suggested allusion that has been proposed here has much to recommend it since 'tombe d'air' would be a perfectly apposite rendering of Bridges' 'airy tomb'. Nor, indeed, would this allusion solely be a matter of linguistic correspondence since an allusion to Bridges' 'I have loved flowers that fade' would accord with the thematic concerns of Beckett's 'Ascension'. Both of these poems, in fact, deploy their reference to 'air' as part of their shared concern with life, death, and art's role in our response to these events.

In the case of Bridges' poem, these events are perceived in largely positive terms. This can be observed at the close of his poem, which evokes the transient beauty of flowers and music and expresses the hope that his verse will resemble them. There, Bridges's speaker enjoins his 'song' to

Die, song, die like a breath,
And wither as a bloom;
Fear not a flowery death,
Dread not an airy tomb!
Fly with delight, fly hence!
'Twas thine love's tender sense
To feast; now on thy bier
Beauty shall shed a tear.³⁵⁷

As can be observed, the 'airy tomb' in this case is itself polyvalent: In Bridges' poem, the term 'air' is intended to evoke at once air, in the sense of music, and in the sense of the open air, since it is in such a vast expanse that the poet describes himself to have heard

airs that die
Before their charm is writ
Along a liquid sky³⁵⁸

This unity of allusion is possible in French in just the same way as it is in English, since French *air* may convey – amongst other things – both the idea of a musical motif and the open air. By alluding to Bridges' verse in his French-language poem, therefore, Beckett would have been entirely capable of incorporating into his poem the same force of polyvalent allusion: His 'tombe d'air' can become, in its own way, a unity of *air/air* in the sense of song and the open air that courses through the window.

Beckett's poem not only seems to engage positively with Bridges' verse, however. In keeping with the ironic usage that the poems of this collection elsewhere make of its intertexts – such as the verse of Musset and the plays of Shakespeare –, Beckett's possible allusion to 'I have loved flowers that fade' also works against Bridges' verse

³⁵⁷ Robert Bridges, 'I have loved flowers that fade', in *Poetical Works of Robert Bridges, Excluding the Eight Dramas* (London, etc.: OUP, 1913), 263

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

by undercutting the positive perspective that lies at its heart. For Bridges, the transience of flowers and music is to be celebrated and it is precisely this impermanence that he hopes for his poem, rather than an enduring permanence along the model of the Classical dictum *ars longa, vita brevis*. In Beckett's poem, on the contrary, there is no such comfort to be drawn from brevity: The 'music' he hears is not music at all, but the droning of sports commentary or the baying of sports fans; the 'flowers' he sees are not those seen by Bridges

Within whose magic tents
Rich hues have marriage made
With sweet unmemoried scents:
A honeymoon delight,
A joy of love at sight
[...]³⁵⁹

but are rather the sweet pea that surrounded his father's face as he lay on his deathbed and which, in this poem, are associated with a love that was prevented by death from ever knowing the pleasures of 'marriage made' or 'honeymoon delight'. The material out of which Bridges' poem is made, in other words, affords a bitter undertone to the same materials as used by Beckett in the construction of his own poem. This bitterness is all the more caustic for the fact that the transience that Beckett has observed within this world, and which Bridges sought to render by way of those very flowers and airs, has become a source, not of comfort, but of intense pain. Thus, unlike Bridges, Beckett does not commend his verse to '[d]read not an airy tomb', but instead places himself within the 'tombe d'air' – the 'airy tomb' – much as he has placed himself within the poem. In so doing, he has placed himself within the only space that he and those he has lost, at once Peggy Sinclair and his father, can ever truly share. In so doing, he has also confirmed the gulf that lies between them.

It has already been argued that the change in perspective effected upon Beckett by his direct experience of mortality following his stabbing was central to this collection's concern with death. It is therefore unsurprising that 'La Mouche', the second of the poems in this collection to be primarily concerned with death, should dramatize precisely the manner in which our perspective on the world can be affected by death. Unlike 'Ascension', which it immediately follows in the collection, 'La Mouche' makes no direct mention of those two deaths that left a deep, personal impact upon Beckett. Rather, the poem focusses entirely upon the spectacle of the seemingly insignificant death of its titular fly.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

'La Mouche', it should be recalled, does not represent the first appearance of a fly in Beckett's poetry. Already, in 'Serena I', that poem's speaker had associated himself with '[his] brother the fly'.³⁶⁰ In that poem too, the fly was close to death – close to death in every sense, since he was at once 'in the autumn of his life' and a servant, however ineffective, of 'typhoid'³⁶¹ – but neither his death nor those he may have brought about were directly referred to in the poem. Rather, he emerged as just another fleeting image in a poem that, in true *EBOP* style, appeared alongside so many others – amongst which, both major architectural landmarks, such as 'the grand old British Museum' and Tower Bridge, and literary figures, from 'Thales and Aretino' to Defoe³⁶² – and that was itself a vector by which to introduce an allusion to Pascal's *Pensées*.³⁶³ The presentation of the fly in 'La Mouche' is quite different: Here, the poem concentrates all of its attention upon the figure of the fly against the window; describing, with remarkable precision, its final moments and the effect that these moments have upon the perspective of the speaker.

That is not to say that 'La Mouche' is simply a descriptive poem, entirely devoid of allusive force, however. On the contrary, the reference to the 'scène' that we find in the poem's opening lines

entre la scène et moi
la vitre
vide sauf elle³⁶⁴

seems designed, much like the opening line of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', to recall Jacques's soliloquy from *As You Like It*. Where 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' alluded to the close of Jacques's 'seven ages' soliloquy, however, and to the death that awaits us all, 'La Mouche' alludes to its famous opening lines, according to which

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,

³⁶⁰ *CP.*, 17

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 16-17

³⁶³ The description of the fly in 'Serena I' as 'fasten[ing] on his place in the sun' (*CP*, 17) is an allusion to Pascal's use of the term in one of his *Pensées*: 'Mien. Tien. – Ce chien est à moi, disaient ces pauvres enfants, c'est là ma place au soleil. Voilà le commencement et l'image de l'usurpation de toute la terre' (Pascal, *Pensées*, 137 [295-64]). Once noted, this allusion also serves to add a subversive edge to Beckett's description of the fly as 'my brother.' Where Pascal depicts children claiming ownership of a dog, or of a place in the sun, Beckett's poem closes on a speaker who claims nothing more than a certain degree of fraternal connection to a single 'common housefly', to whom he has in fact surrendered what might have been his own 'place in the sun' (*CP*, 17).

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 95

And one man in his time plays many parts
His acts being seven ages. [...] ³⁶⁵

In this poem, of course, it is neither a man nor a woman who acts their role upon the world's stage, but a solitary fly who takes its place, not even directly on the stage of the world, but on the pane of glass that stands between this poem's speaker and 'la scène'. ³⁶⁶ Regardless of precisely where he finds himself, the role that this fly is called upon to play is every bit as dramatic as those played by the men and women described by Jacques since he too must 'play many parts': Over the course of the poem, he will live and die, and his every action will be observed with extreme precision. Moreover, just as the ages of Man were held to be seven, so too does Beckett's fly play, in a very real sense, a role of 'seven ages'. This is accomplished by way of the poem's somewhat curious line division, which serves to divide it into two sections, of which the second – that is to say, the section concerned directly with the figure of the fly and its death – comprises precisely seven lines:

ventre à terre
sanglée dans ses boyaux noirs
antennes affolées ailes liées
pattes crochues bouche suçant à vide
sabrant l'azur s'écrasant contre l'invisible
sous mon pouce impuissant elle fait chavirer
la mer et le ciel serein ³⁶⁷

These lines take us from the initial appearance of the fly, seen by the speaker upon a pane of glass, and into the world as it exists by the close of the text, newly bereft of the fly that the speaker has killed. The story that the poem tells is thus quite simple; the manner in which it is told is anything but.

As first seen, the fly may be in wild movement, since it is described as being 'ventre à terre'; we can imagine it flitting rapidly across the surface of the window, or even about the space that the speaker occupies – a space which may be the cabin of a ship, given the reference to the sea in the poem's final line –, before it finally comes to rest upon the window, where the poet's eye is able to study it at length and describe in detail the body of the fly and even the frantic movement of its antennae. Why exactly the fly should be seen upon the window, and why it should remain there with its 'ailes liées', however, is left obscure. This lack of clarification is such that it invites the possibility that 'liées' represents a misreading for an orthographically proximate

³⁶⁵ Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *op. cit.*, 1622 (Act II, Scene 7 – ll. 138-42)

³⁶⁶ The vision of the world as a stage that we find in this poem may also be associated with 'Arènes de Lutèce': There too, of course, we were initially presented with a speaker who placed himself in the audience, and who gazed upon the events before him as these played out in a stage-like space.

³⁶⁷ *CP*, 95

and more comprehensible verb such as *pliées* – something similar to the appearance of ‘rode’ in place of ‘rôde’ at the close of ‘Ascension’, an error that, as noted, persisted throughout all published versions of the poem until its appearance in *CP*.³⁶⁸ There also exists another possibility, however, and this is that, by leaving the reasons for the fly’s stasis obscure, Beckett is actively seeking to cultivate a degree of vagueness and interpretive opacity. In the present instance, the second interpretation appears to be the more likely.

Evidence for this likelihood comes from two sources: Firstly, unlike ‘Ascension’, we possess an earlier version of ‘La Mouche’ in which ‘liées’ is also used.³⁶⁹ Were the use of *liées* in this poem merely an error, it is unlikely that it would be found in this pre-publication versions of the poem. At the same time, this earlier version of the poem does not entirely do away with possibility of an error since Beckett – despite having noted the erroneous lack of a circumflex on ‘rode’ in the *Temps Modernes* version of ‘Ascension’, and having attempted to correct this prior to publication – allowed this error to be repeated across all the other published versions of this poem that appeared during his lifetime. As such, it might be suggested that the fly’s wings were at one time intended to be merely *pliées*, but that Beckett subsequently either thought better of it or decided the error was unimportant. In this respect, the most important evidence that the reference to ‘ailes liées’ is not an error comes in the form of that internal evidence which is to be found in the opening line of the poem.

It has just been noted that the most intuitive reading of this poem’s opening line privileges the locution *ventre à terre*, meaning ‘very quickly’. We have already seen, however, that other poems in this collection – poems such as ‘être là sans mâchoires sans dents’ and ‘à elle l’acte calme’ – have opening lines that can be read in more than one way and that this uncertainty is capitalised upon as the poem progresses. Like the terms found in the opening lines of these poems, so too can the assertion that the fly is ‘ventre à terre’ be read in more than one way. Certainly, one can read it as a set phrase, indicative of the fly’s rapid movement, but one can also read ‘ventre à terre’ as being intended to convey the image of the fly with its underbelly pressed against the glass.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ *viz.* *CP*, 380

³⁶⁹ *viz.* *LSB I*, 631 (SB to TMG [June 15th, 1938])

³⁷⁰ Such a literal reading of the expression ‘ventre à terre’ would be unnatural in French, but Beckett is known to have been drawn to the literal meanings that lie behind *formes figées*. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, for example, Beckett informs his friend that he has ‘not yet said anything to Ruddy about fucking the field’ (*LSB I*, 84 – SB to TMG [after 15th August, 1931]). Beckett’s meaning here is simply that he has not yet informed Rudmose-Brown about his plans to resign from his lectureship in TCD, as he would at the beginning of 1932, but he has chosen to express it via a literal

This ambiguity of the opening line might pass the reader by were it not for the subsequent reference to 'ailes liées' which, by virtue of its own ambiguity – who, or what, has bound the wings of the fly? Why is the fly prevented from flying away? – invites us to reconsider our reading of the poem's opening line. Read as a reference to a fly darting frenetically about an enclosed space or across a window pane, the opening of the poem would leave the nature of the wing-binding force unclear. The subsequent development of the poem, however, suggests that the wings are of no assistance to the fly – 'liées' and unable to carry it away – because this fly, that we initially imagined to dart about, was 'ventre à terre', its underbelly pressing against the glass, not moving freely, but being carried towards death by the same external force that prevents it from moving, a force that is subsequently revealed to be none other than the speaker of the poem. This reading only becomes apparent retrospectively, however, after we have observed the fly's passage from still living, acting creature towards mere blot on the window, and this journey towards death is all the more striking because it is expressed in a manner that skilfully makes the fly the active agent of all of the actions upon which it is seen to be engaged, up to and including the moment of its death. In this way, Beckett conspires to present the fly as if it were an actor upon the world-stage the poem describes, while making of the speaker a mere spectator.

Beckett's presentation of his speaker as spectator is accomplished by way of a trio of present participles – 'suçant', 'sabrant', and 'écrasant' –, each of which identify the fly as the one performing the action. In the case of the first of these participles, the correspondence between its use and the stress it serves to lay upon the active role of the fly is merely descriptive. At this point, the fly appears to be still alive. Not only that, the fly appears to be engaged in a solitary act of eating – something that 'bois seul' will later present as central to the experience of life.³⁷¹ And yet, by describing the fly as 'suçant à vide', Beckett informs us that the fly sucks to no end, to no purpose. Subsequently, it will be seen that, if the fly is described as 'suçant à vide', this is because the fly is already engaged in the act of its own destruction. For the time being, however, that is not made entirely clear. Rather, we move very quickly to what seems like another perspective on the same action of eating. This time, the vision of the fly eating derives from the primary meaning of the verb *sabrer*, which is

– and partially inaccurate – translation of the French expression *foutre le camp*, which means nothing more than to 'clear off quickly'. (The inaccuracy of Beckett's translation lies in his rendering of *camp* as 'field', when 'camp' would be more appropriate. He may have been misled by the proximity of *camp* and *champ*, the latter of which does indeed mean 'field', or may simply have chosen to sacrifice accuracy on the altar of alliteration.)

³⁷¹ There, as the reader will recall, the speaker enjoined the one to whom he spoke to 'bouffe...seul comme devant' (CP, 97)

to strike or hit with a sabre. Read in these terms, the line presents a slightly different perspective on the same action described in the preceding line: Rather than ‘suçant à vide’, the fly now employs its mouthparts to strike (‘sabre’) that ‘azur’ that lies behind the window, the vast blue of the sky and the sea. The meaning that has just been mentioned is not the only sense of the verb *sabrer*, however. This verb can also mean to ‘streak’ or ‘stripe’, as a fabric may be streaked with colour. The remainder of the line reveals that it is this secondary sense that is intended. Far from being engaged in striking the window with its mouthparts, the fly is in the process of being reduced to a muted streak against the perfect ‘azur’ as it is crushed ‘contre l’invisible’. Rather than presenting an action, as one might be inclined to imagine, therefore, the present participle ‘sabrant’ actually describes the result of the fly’s destruction. This use of the participle is inventive, but it is in his description of the process of the fly’s destruction that Beckett’s deployment of the participle is most interesting.

Literally, the fly is ‘crushing itself’, and the speaker is merely a distant and disinterested onlooker. In practice, however, this line is no more to be read as a true reflexive than *foutre le camp* is to be read as a literal act of campground coitus. The reflexive is here operating with a passive force so that ‘s’écrasant’ tacitly admits that the observant speaker has taken an active role in what he recounts; it is his own ‘pouce impuissant’ that has reduced the artful complexity of the living fly – its ‘boyaux noirs’, ‘antennes affolées’ and ‘pattes crochues’ – to a mere streak against the brilliant blue of the otherwise invisible windowpane. In making of the fly a stain, the speaker has also made of the window not merely a thing through which to see but something against which things can be seen, and what one now sees against the window has a force far beyond itself. Like the visible vanishing point that Lily Briscoe finally provides her painting at the close of *To the Lighthouse*, the streak of colour left by the fly has been sufficient to effect a change in perception.³⁷² Where the change in perception – the ‘vision’³⁷³ – brought about by Briscoe’s streak of colour was positive, however, the effect of the streak left by the fly is decidedly more ambiguous: As Beckett’s poem describes it, the fly’s death has sufficed to ‘fait chavirer / la mer et le ciel serein’. Whether this effect will be permanent, or whether the speaker will again be able to gaze unimpeded upon the sea and the serene sky is left unclear. If the remainder of the poems in the collection may be taken as a guide, however, there is good reason to believe that what the speaker has seen of death cannot be unseen, nor can the change that death had worked upon his perspective be undone.

³⁷² Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, Penguin Classics, 2000), 255-56

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 256

In suggesting that the fly is killed by the close of this poem, it should be acknowledged that a number of critics have interpreted this poem quite differently. Critics such as Lawrence Harvey, David Wheatley, and Ruby Cohn all argue that the fly survives the poem: Harvey describes how, in the final moment, the speaker's 'thumb becomes paralyzed, incapable of visiting destruction on the helpless fly'; Wheatley presents the speaker as 'unable to bring his thumb down on the defenceless insect'; and Cohn, too, contends that 'the persona's thumb is unable to crush the insect'.³⁷⁴ (Although Cohn does not attempt to clarify the precise reason for what she reads as the speaker's inability to kill the fly, both Harvey and Wheatley believe what they view as the speaker's decision to spare the fly derives from his perception of a commonality between them.³⁷⁵) This view is not universally shared, however. Jean-Michel Rabaté too sees the poem as closing with the titular fly 'squashed by the poet's thumb'.³⁷⁶ Steven Connor, meanwhile, in an attempt to reconcile these two divergent readings, has suggested yet another reading, whereby 'the fly has already been swatted once and is here in its death throes', arguing that this is 'the only circumstanc[e] in which a fly may be crushed by a thumb'.³⁷⁷

Confining ourselves to the text of the poem, and accepting that it is indeed a poem – a text therefore free to take poetic license with reality –, rather than a how-to guide on the best manner to do away with troublesome flies, the only textually-justifiable reading of the poem is the one that has it end with the fly's death. Only such a reading can fully account for the description of the fly 's'écrasant [...] / sous mon pouce impuissant'. Nonetheless, there is great value in recognising the existence of these variant readings and in trying to understand what in the text should have motivated them. Excepting Connor's interpretation – which simply arrives at death by a more circuitous route and which, as noted, derives largely from an overly practical interpretation of the poem³⁷⁸ –, most of those critics who read the poem as detailing

³⁷⁴ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 198; David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 251; Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 97 – Although the fate of the fly is left unstated in Lawlor and Pilling's notes on this poem in *CP*, their contention that the poem 'ends by paying a kind of compliment' (*CP*, 381) to the fly suggests that they too believe it to have been spared.

³⁷⁵ For Harvey, this commonality is that of 'the unity of all living creatures in a common earthly destiny' (Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 198). For Wheatley, meanwhile, the connection is far more personal – he suggests 'the fly represents in microcosm the poet's struggles with his environment' (David Wheatley, 'Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett', 251).

³⁷⁶ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Paris, Roussillon, Ussy', in in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 58

³⁷⁷ Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 60

³⁷⁸ Connor's reading also derives, in part, from his attempt to reconcile the text of Beckett's poem with the text of a letter that he received from Beckett, wherein the fly was described as 'unswottable' (viz. *LSB IV*, 576 – SB to Steven Connor [7th February,

something other than the act of crushing a fly against a windowpane have been guided by the reference to speaker's thumb as 'impuissant'. For these readers, the speaker's thumb, as Harvey puts it, 'becomes paralyzed'. If it is 'impuissant', they seem to imagine, this is necessarily because it has been incapable of completing the action which would have confirmed its power – namely, the taking of a life. The description of the thumb as 'impuissant', however, is far more complex than a simple admission of having been too weak to succeed in 'visiting destruction on the helpless fly'. On the contrary, the text of the poem suggests that the speaker's weakness is supposed to be seen in terms of the perspective that is opened up by the death of the fly: That is to say, a perspective that looks upon death not simply as an event, but as an aftermath, indelibly colouring perception. This reading also helps to explain the conclusion of the poem that so perplexed Hugh Kenner. For, though he too saw the fly's death as central to the poem, he was at a loss as to explain the relation of this death to the poem's conclusion: 'Having delineated the beast with precise repulsion, [the speaker] squashes it, and the heavens, *for no clear reason*, are reversed in their courses'.³⁷⁹

As the reading proposed here has demonstrated, the speaker of the poem is at no point presented as an active agent by this text: He is, throughout, a spectator. The fly is the actor upon the pane, if not quite upon the stage; the speaker merely observes and considers. Even in the act of crushing the fly, French grammar allows this to be accomplished by the fly itself. The entire poem is thus geared towards sight. This being so, it is all the more significant that this poem should conclude with an act of perception, as the speaker gazes upon what has been left behind by the fly's death. Seen in these terms, it becomes apparent that the act of killing, in and of itself, is not what the poem is concerned with and it becomes easier to understand why the speaker's thumb, even in the act of crushing the fly, should be deemed 'impuissant'. To kill is not an act of power, it is to do nothing more than to cut an already fragile thread, to crush an already fragile body. Far more powerful is death itself, which – even when visited upon the smallest, and most seemingly insignificant of creatures – has the potential to change the way in which we see the world, leaving us forever changed, unsteadied in a world that, *pace* the pathetic fallacy of certain poets,

1982]). On balance, it seems likely that Connor comes closer to the truth when he interprets Beckett's description of the fly as 'unswottable' as an instance of the writer 'tipping [a] wink to the earnest young swot who had written to him' (Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*, 59), rather than as a clue intended to guide said 'swot' in his future critical readings – For more on Beckett's attitude to interpretation and his response to those who attempted to involve him in their interpretations of his work, see Part III, Chapter 4.

³⁷⁹ Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 54 – Emphasis mine.

remains, everywhere but within ourselves, as serene, as unmoved, and as unchanged as ever it was.³⁸⁰ It is, in other words, not the heavens that change their course, but the speaker's vision of the heavens that has been altered, perhaps irrevocably, by death. A single death has never, and will never, suffice to upset 'la mer et le ciel serein', but those – like the Beckett who wrote this poem in 1938 – whose lives have been changed beyond recognition for having almost come to an end and those – again like the Beckett who wrote this poem – whose sense of the world has been radically transformed by death are beyond number.

In the present writer's estimation, 'La Mouche' has a strong claim to be seen as the central poem of this collection: Brief though it may be, we find therein, as outlined above, a striking delineation of the role that death can play in shaping, reshaping, or even entirely upending, our view of the world and of ourselves. The *chavirement* that the world appears to undergo in the eyes of that poem's speaker in the wake of the fly's death perfectly figures the upheaval that must have occurred in Beckett's own worldview shortly before he began work on these poems, and the effects of which surely remained with him throughout the period of their composition and beyond. Such a sense of the upheaval that death can bring about in a life allows us to better understand why so many of these poems should either be concerned with death, whether directly or indirectly, or ponder the fragility of all human relations. Anchoring this collection in 'La Mouche' and, by extension, in death, also helps to explain why Beckett should have chosen to end *Poèmes 37-39* on the last of those poems which take death as their subject, 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol'.³⁸¹

Fittingly, for the closing poem of this collection, much of the material that 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' contains can be associated with what has come before: The opening reference to 'ciel et sol', for instance, may be seen as a subtly altered reprise of the 'la mer et le ciel' which served as a serene background to the action of 'La Mouche'; the 'vieilles voix' may be associated with the 'voix' which the speaker of 'musique de l'indifférence' prayed might be silenced; the 'lumière', meanwhile, though here directly associated with the rape of Persephone and the plains of Enna, invites the reader to recall the sky which 'éclair[ait] trop tard' the figures in the equally Classical space of 'Arènes de Luctèce', the poem which 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' immediately follows.³⁸² Finally, the mention of 'les mêmes lois / que naguère' could be seen to call to mind, however indirectly, the commanding

³⁸⁰ It may be recalled that as earlier noted, by way of Cohn, Beckett's opposition to the idea of pathetic fallacy also found expression in 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges'.

³⁸¹ For the text of this poem, see *CP*, 102

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 101

imperatives and Biblical undertones, that the reader has encountered only shortly before in the poem 'bois seul'.³⁸³

Such similarities do much to underscore the extent to which this poem is rooted in what preceded it; they also demonstrate that this collection is indeed a unified whole, and not merely a cluttering of discrete poetic compositions. At the same time, this final poem is also dramatically different from much of what comes before it. Where the rest of the poems in this collection that take death as their explicit thematic focus – that is, 'Ascension' and 'La Mouche' – both place great emphasis on the perspective of the speaker and his interactions with either the event of death itself or its consequences, 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' goes to great lengths to obviate the perspective of the human speaker entirely. Here, as noted by Patricia Coughlan, we find a poem that 'rather like the zero-focalized "Time Passes" section of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*...appears to manage without a narratorial or personal lyric speaker'.³⁸⁴ The lack of an explicit speaker serves not merely to distance this poem from those that share its thematic concerns, however. The 'zero-focalized' nature of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' also marks it out from the vast majority of the poems in this collection since almost all of the other poems are concerned with the first-person perspective and the personal experience of their speakers. Even those poems that do not contain a first-person speaker invite such a speaker to be read into the poem: The 'lui' of 'à elle l'acte calme', the 'on' of 'ainsi a-t-on beau', the individual to whom and by whom the commands of 'bois seul' are issued, each of these can clearly be associated with the same 'je' who returns, time and again, throughout the collection. The situation of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' is entirely different; here, there is neither 'je' nor 'on', neither 'lui' nor 'elle', neither first-person nor second-person subject. There is, in short, no personal voice, no human presence. What we find instead are a series of nouns – 'voix', 'lumière', 'lois' –, followed by two figures derived from Classical mythology – 'Proserpine et Atropos' – and, at last, 'la bouche d'ombre' which signals the conclusion of the poem, and the collection as a whole. In this regard, Beckett's decision to end his collection on such a poem appears all the more significant when one considers the poem immediately preceding 'jusque dans la caverne', 'Arènes de Lutèce', did so much to unsettle the security of the first-person voice and to articulate the fragility of the speaking self. Having unsettled the lines between self and other, Beckett, at the close of his collection, finally does away with both entirely and creates a space, a void – a

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 97

³⁸⁴ Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves': Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry", 203

‘caverne’, if one wishes – into which all that has come before it suddenly reveals itself to have tended.

This is not only a poem that denies us the pleasure of a human referent through whom it might be read and with whom the material of the poem might be identified, of course. It is also one that – much like ‘Rue de Vaugirard’ and ‘musique de l’indifférence’ before it – leaves the reader with questions that the text of the poem, at least in the form that it currently exists, does not permit us to answer with certainty: What, for instance, is meant by the poem’s opening line? Whose are the ‘vieilles voix’? What precisely are the ‘mêmes lois que naguère’? Finally, what is ‘la bouche d’ombre’ and what relationship does it bear to the rest of the poem, and to the collection as a whole?

The editors of *CP* obviously felt unable to offer authoritative answers to these questions since, in the commentary that they offer on ‘jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol’, Lawlor and Pilling refrain from providing notes on individual lines and restrict themselves to a general overview.³⁸⁵ Still more tellingly, their identification of the allusions that there may be in this poem is markedly tentative, the possibility of reference to figures such as Plato ([...] *perhaps* some thought of Plato’s cave’), Verlaine (*if* there is an allusion to Verlaine’s “Jadis et Naguère”) and Yeats ([...] there *may be* some further influence here of Yeats’s play *Purgatory* [...]) is invariably couched in a hypothetical mode.³⁸⁶ Lawlor and Pilling’s hesitancy reveals itself to be all the wiser when read against an example of the erroneous readings that have been proposed for this perplexing poem by a critic such as David Wheatley.

Wheatley, for his part, has confidently asserted that the ‘viols’ of this poem are to be interpreted as ‘recall[ing] one of Verlaine’s most famous poems, “Chanson d’automne”’.³⁸⁷ While it is possible that Beckett’s association of ‘longs’ and ‘viols’ may have been intended to partially evoke Verlaine’s lines – more particularly, to suggest in the mind of the reader the ‘sanglots’ that he does not mention, rather as it was earlier proposed that the final line of ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ calls to mind without citing in verse the closing line of ‘Il pleure dans mon cœur’ –, Wheatley’s English translation of these lines (‘on the Enna plains in long viols’³⁸⁸) makes clear that he has interpreted *viol* as a musical instrument, rather than an act of sexual violence.

³⁸⁵ For the notes on this poem, see *CP*, 388 – Only two other poems in the collection are accorded a similarly brief treatment, namely: ‘they come’ / ‘elles viennent’ (*Ibid.*, 375-6) and ‘musique de l’indifférence’ (*Ibid.*, 381-82).

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 388 – Emphasis mine.

³⁸⁷ David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 264 – For Wheatley, the line that Beckett is here alluding to ‘Les sanglots longs / Des violons’ (Paul Verlaine, ‘Chanson d’automne’, in *Poèmes saturniens*, in *op. cit.*, 72).

³⁸⁸ David Wheatley, ‘Occasions of wordshed: studies in the poetry of Samuel Beckett’, 400

The attention that has here been drawn to Wheatley's misreading of 'viols' is not intended merely as criticism of his individual error. Rather, Wheatley's particularly notable misinterpretation has been evoked because, by its very egregiousness, it incites us to show greater prudence in our own readings and, more particularly, to reflect carefully upon the uncertainty that hangs over some other critical interpretations of this poem that, though they may initially seem better-founded, are every bit as dubious as that proposed by Wheatley. The most important of these concerns the reference to 'la bouche d'ombre' upon which this poem closes. Clearly, the 'bouche d'ombre' was immensely important to Beckett. In the same way that placing this poem at the close of the collection places it under the sign of death, so too does the closing reference to 'la bouche d'ombre' force us to read 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', and the rest of *Poèmes 37-39*, in the light – or, rather, the shadow – of this 'bouche d'ombre'. But what exactly is it?

For Lawrence Harvey, the 'tangled syntax' of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' was justified precisely by the fact that it allowed Beckett to close his poem upon the image of the 'bouche d'ombre' and, in so doing, permitted what he saw as 'the crucial circular structure' of the poem.³⁸⁹ As Harvey's reference to a 'circular structure' implies, he associates the 'bouche d'ombre' with the 'caverne' of the poem's first line – both are, he argues, 'figures of the microscopic nirvana'³⁹⁰ –, thereby making of both dark expanses into which the various objects and persons described within the intervening lines of the poem descend. A similar reading is proposed by Patricia Coughlan who, despite acknowledging that this poem 'resists facile decoding', nevertheless proposes what I would suggest is quite a facile association between the 'bouche d'ombre' and a 'cavern mouth ready to engulf not just a Proserpina but the myths themselves that generated her, and in its turn all human consciousness which generated them, in an indeterminate void'.³⁹¹

Undoubtedly, Harvey and Coughlan are right to accord a pre-eminent position to the 'bouche d'ombre' in their readings of this poem. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the association they propose between the 'caverne' and the 'bouche d'ombre' is eminently possible. In no sense can either critic be accused of simply misreading the poem's closing line, as Wheatley misread its 'viols'. I would nevertheless contend that the confidence of their readings is every bit as misplaced as Wheatley's. For, if we confine ourselves to the text of this poem, it can be seen that

³⁸⁹ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 214

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212 – Harvey sees this entirety of *Poèmes 37-39* as being concerned with a divide between the 'macrocosm' (i.e. the world) and the 'microcosm' (i.e. the self) (*viz. Ibid.*, 183-214).

³⁹¹ Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 202-03

the 'bouche d'ombre' is not *necessarily* a cave mouth and that nothing in the poem explicitly identifies it as such: As it exists within the context of the poem, the 'bouche d'ombre' would appear to be something that itself exists 'dans la caverne'. Read in this way, the 'bouche d'ombre', far from being a figure for anything – be that the cavern, the 'microscopic nirvana' of self, or the 'indeterminate void' that swallows all – represents itself. The ambiguous position of the 'bouche d'ombre' within the poem is all the more worthy of consideration given that the significance of the term 'bouche' is more uncertain than either Harvey or Coughlan allow. For both of these critics, the 'bouche' is to be understood as a gaping maw, something that consumes all that was, is, and will be: Harvey finds in it 'the image of the eater', while Coughlan sees it as something into which things 'disappear'.³⁹² The mouth, however, does not merely serve to devour; it equally serves to speak.³⁹³

The idea of the mouth as speaking, rather than devouring, is one that is currently absent from discussions of this poem. No doubt guided by an underlying conviction outlined in the opening discussion of this chapter – namely, the idea that these French-language poems are straightforward works that are most likely to benefit from an equally straightforward mode of interpretation –, critics who have engaged with this poem have restricted themselves to the most obvious reading whereby the mouth is that of the cavern mentioned in the poem's opening line, and its 'ombre' that of an implied cave-mouth. Approaching this poem from such a perspective, the evident thematic concern with death that characterises 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' has understandably led them to view the reference to a 'bouche' as being intended to connote something all-consuming, all-devouring and all-engulfing. To read the 'bouche d'ombre' as capable of speech is, however, by no means incompatible with the poem's focus on death. On the contrary, here, as in many of the other poems of this collection, there is evidence that 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' is far more complex than previous critical discussions have allowed. In the case of the 'bouche d'ombre', for example, in line with many of the other poems that have already been examined, may be read allusively. More particularly, as I hope to show, there is a large amount of internal evidence to suggest that it should be read as an allusion to Victor Hugo's 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre'.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 214; Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 203

³⁹³ Indeed, insofar as Beckett's own writing is concerned, it would surely be truer to say that the mouth serves principally to speak. Often doing so – most notably in *Not I / Pas moi* – despite itself, and despite the self that speaks through it.

³⁹⁴ Victor Hugo, 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', in Pierre Albouy (ed.), *Les Contemplations* (Paris: Gallimard, Poésie/Gallimard, 1973), 386-409

Like many of those allusions that have been suggested previously, the possibility of an allusion to this particular poem by Hugo cannot be directly supported by citation from archival materials, nor can we rely on what survives of Beckett's library to confirm any great affection on Beckett's part for that poem, for the *Les Contemplations* in particular, nor even Victor Hugo.³⁹⁵ This absence of direct reference to 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' in the surviving archival record notwithstanding, an allusion to the poem is by no means beyond the realms of possibility. Certainly, we can be sure that Beckett studied some of Hugo's poetry during his time at TCD, his *La Légende des Siècles* and *Les Feuilles d'Automne* having been set texts during Beckett's Senior Freshman year.³⁹⁶ Moreover, the obligation placed upon Senior Sophister students to 'make themselves acquainted with the history of the various movements in French literary from the close of the Romantic period till the present day' would have ensured that Beckett returned to Hugo in his final year of study.³⁹⁷ Not only do we know that Beckett would have engaged with Hugo as a student, we know this engagement to have been at least significant enough for the writer to have remained a reference for Beckett later in life, this being attested by the references to Hugo that are to be found in letters dating from the 1930s.³⁹⁸ There is also evidence, albeit very slight, of Beckett's interest in Hugo persisting well into maturity: As part of notes taken towards the composition of *Comment c'est / How It Is*, Beckett recorded material from Victor Hugo's novel *L'Homme qui rit*.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ In their study of Beckett's library, Van Hulle and Nixon remark that Hugo's work is absent from Beckett's library and comment that '[h]e is only present in the form of a marked anecdote about him in Jules Renard's *Journal*' (Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 59).

³⁹⁶ *Viz.* Appendix II (a)

³⁹⁷ *The DU Calendar, for the year 1926—1927*. (Dublin: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1926), 136 – If, as seems likely, Beckett turned to Lanson's *Histoire de la littérature française* to help him attain this required familiarity, he would have found 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' mentioned as part of the discussion of Hugo (*viz.* Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 1054). Whether or not Lanson's brief mention might have inspired Beckett to consult the poem, however, must remain an open question.

³⁹⁸ Admittedly, these references are not always laudatory – such as when he describes *The Man of Aran* as 'very Hugo, Hugo at his most Asti [...] Pauvres Gens oxygenated', in a manner that, read against the contention that '[t]here are better waves in Epstein's Finis Terrae. Smaller and better', suggests that what Beckett found, and disliked, in Flaherty's film was something of Hugo's monumentality (*LSB I*, 207 – SB to Nuala Costello [10th May, 1934]). References to Hugo are not uniformly critical, however. The description of Balzac's *Cousine Bette* as the work of a 'Stock Exchange Hugo' (*Ibid.*, 250 – SB to TMG [14th February, 1935]), for example, valorises Hugo as much as it disparages Balzac.

³⁹⁹ Lawlor and Pilling drew attention to Beckett's citation of this material, which they specify as coming from Part Two, Book I, Chapter 9 of Hugo's novel – a chapter entitled 'Haïr est aussi fort qu'aimer' –, in those notes for 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' that were finally excluded from *CP* following opposition from the Beckett

None of this evidence for Beckett's familiarity with Hugo, of course, would be of much value if it were here being argued that this allusion to 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' is simply a matter of verbal correspondence – Beckett would not need to know anything of Hugo, or his poem, to use an expression. In this regard, the most significant evidence for a connection between Beckett and Hugo's texts comes from the poems themselves for, when Beckett poem is read alongside Hugo's, we find that Beckett's intertextual engagement with him in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' is every bit as complex as the engagements with Musset and Verlaine that were previously examined as part of the readings of 'à elle l'acte calme', 'Arènes de Lutèce', and 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible'. As was earlier seen to be the case with Beckett's use of those two poets, the complexity of his intertextual engagement was confirmed not only by instances of verbal echoing between the poems, but by their thematic proximity and, more particularly still, by the fact that Beckett was clearly exploring his own concerns by way of a dialogue with the works upon which he drew. In the case of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', the essential theme that unifies Beckett's text with Hugo's poem is death and, more broadly, the questions of what becomes of us in the hereafter and why we endure what we endure in the present moment. The dialogue that exists between these texts, meanwhile, is highly developed and serves again to demonstrate the great complexity of which Beckett was not merely capable in French, but which he actively sought to achieve in his French verse of the late 1930s.

As what has just been said implies, if we are to fully appreciate the subtlety and the depth of Beckett's engagement with 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', we need first to understand Hugo's poem. Where the essence of Musset and Verlaine's poems could be expressed with relative brevity, however, Hugo's poem is far denser than either and consequently requires careful unpacking if one is to appreciate Beckett's intertextual engagement with it. To this end, examination of this engagement will be preceded by clarification of that vision of life and death articulated by Hugo in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', a vast cosmology in verse that serves to close the sixth and final book of *Les Contemplations*.⁴⁰⁰

As it appears in the Poésie/Gallimard edition of *Les Contemplations*, Hugo's poem extends over some 23 pages of verse which present the reader with nothing less

Estate (viz. 'Appendix 2: The "Petit Sot" Poems', 264 [BC MS5479 (Folder 2/2) – Page-proofs of Collected Poems with redacted materials on Petit Sot]).

⁴⁰⁰ It should be pointed out that 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' is not, properly speaking, the final poem of *Les Contemplations*, merely the final poem of the last book. Like the first poem of the collection ('Un jour je vis debout au bord des flots mouvants'), the collection's final poem ('A celle qui est restée en France') is unnumbered and belongs to no book.

than his own vision of a universe in which all things, from the highest to the lowest, are linked and living. As recounted by ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’, however, it is not the poet who presents us with this vision. He is merely the frail onlooker who is snatched up by a vast spectre.⁴⁰¹ This spectre is the ‘bouche d’ombre’ of the title, and what this ‘bouche’ reveals is that the world in which the poet lives, and everything therein – the wind and waves, trees and flames – is alive and endowed with its own voice:

Tout dit dans l’infini quelque chose à quelqu’un
 Une pensée emplit le tumulte superbe.
 Dieu n’a pas fait un bruit sans y mêler le Verbe.
 Tout comme toi, gémit, ou chante comme moi ;
 Tout parle. Et maintenant, homme, sais-tu pourquoi
 Tout parle ? Écoute bien. C’est que vents, ondes, flammes,
 Arbres, roseaux, rochers, tout vit !⁴⁰²

Hugo’s vision is not simply of a universe in which ‘tout parle’ and ‘tout vit’ of its own volition, however. If the universe has a voice, it is only because of those immutable laws that Hugo sees as governing the entirety of creation and which condemn all creatures to carry with them the weight of their own sins. These terms – ‘carry’ and ‘weight’ – are used designedly for, as articulated by Hugo’s own *bouche d’ombre*,

Dieu ne nous juge point. Vivant tous à la fois,
 Nous pesons et chacun descend selon son poids.⁴⁰³

Hugo’s conviction, in short, is that Creation is imperfect and that its materiality is at once a consequence and a sign of this imperfection: Creation being necessarily distinct from its creator and the divine creator being perfect, God was obliged to create something imperfect.⁴⁰⁴ Though every effort was made to minimise the distance between creation and creator, imperfection naturally tended towards greater imperfection and, *dixit* Hugo, ‘la première faute / fut le premier poids’.⁴⁰⁵ The ‘première faute’ could not be the last, however, and each fault, each error, each mistake, becomes a fresh weight that serves to drag Creation ever further from God – figured by Hugo as immaterial precisely because perfect – and, the further it falls, the more material it becomes since ‘[l]e mal, c’est la matière’.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ *viz.* ‘Le spectre...Me prit par les cheveux dans sa main qui grandit / M’emporta sur le haut du rocher, et me dit [...]’ (Victor Hugo, ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’, in *op. cit.*, 386).

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 387

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 393

⁴⁰⁴ *viz.* ‘La création...Pour être...devait être imparfaite’ (*Ibid.*, 388)

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

It is this progression from immaterial perfection to increasingly material sin that lies at the heart of Hugo's vision of a universe pervaded by voices. As conceived by Hugo, it was not God who created trees, rocks, and waves and endowed them with speech. These voices, in other words, are not those of the objects themselves. Creation, at least initially, was formless; the matter that is now to be seen – including such objects as trees, rocks, and waves – are a result of its inexorable descent away from God's formless ideality. The voices that inhabit such material things, meanwhile, are those of souls who, through their own actions, have fallen ever further from the ethereal perfection of the Creator and towards ever deeper and ever more material reaches of imperfection, even while the Creator attempts to incite this Creation to return from whence it fell:

L'âme que sa noirceur chasse du firmament
Descend dans les degrés divers du châtement
Selon que plus ou moins d'obscurité la gagne.
L'homme en est la prison, la bête en est le baigne,
L'arbre en est le cachot, la pierre en est l'enfer.
Le ciel d'en haut, le seul qui soit splendide et clair,
La suit des yeux dans l'ombre, et, lui jetant l'aurore,
Tâche en la regardant, de l'attirer encore.⁴⁰⁷

As these lines make clear, Hugo's vision perceives an essential divide between a material world, comprised of successive levels of materiality – each one further from God – and an immaterial perfection which is allied with the 'ciel'. In the material world, suffering is universal – 'Tout est douleur'⁴⁰⁸ – but this is, once again, not because it has been created as such. Just as the innumerable voices that fill existence are those of variously corrupted souls, so too is the universal suffering of all creation not that which God has imposed, but rather that which such souls create within, and carry with, themselves as, in accordance with their actions, they descend towards the depths. Individual souls, in other words, are made to endure in ever more material forms the suffering that they brought about in life.

Naturally, such a vision of cruelty punished in death is liable to put one in mind of the Christian Hell as imagined, most notably, by Dante. Hugo's vision of the universe, certainly, is profoundly Christian – having been formed, as he imagines, by a single, omnipotent, benevolent, and perfect creator. At the same time however, Hugo's vision of the world and of the afterlife is very far removed from the familiar Christian vision as expressed by thinkers, theologians, and artists such as Dante. For, where the Florentine showed the damned as carefully classed and divided between the various zones of a space as separate from the living world of men and women as it

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 395

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 404

was from the divine, Hugo envisions hell as a space that the soul creates for itself – ‘Tout méchant / Fait naître en expirant le monstre de sa vie, / Qui le saisit’⁴⁰⁹ – and which, crucially, must be endured in a material form positioned within the material world. This vision is conveyed by means of some astounding images, of which one of the most striking is that in which

Dieu livre, choc affreux dont la plaine au loin gronde,
Au cheval Brunehaut le pavé Frédégonde⁴¹⁰

In these lines, the laws that Hugo holds to govern existence have brought about a remarkable conclusion to the historical rivalry between Brunhilda of Austrasia and Fredegunda of Neustria, whereby the former has become a horse and the latter a cobblestone against which Brunhilda’s hooves are heard to resound. At first glance, it is probable that the reader will find this image to be scarcely comprehensible. Once it has been placed in the appropriate context, however, it actually serves to greatly clarify Hugo’s notion of universal justice and, in due course, it will be shown to greatly clarify one of the more obscure moments of Beckett’s ‘jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol’.

As described by D.H. Montgomery in *The Leading Facts of French History*, a text from which Beckett took notes in his ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook, Brunhilda of Austrasia and Fredegunda of Neustria ‘still remain synonyms for ferocious depravity, though the first certainly was not without redeeming qualities’.⁴¹¹ Montgomery’s presentation of Brunhilda as the less depraved of these two ‘tigresses’ is evidently shared by Hugo.⁴¹² In line with his contention that ‘chacun descend selon son poids’ and his conviction that ‘la bête...est le baigne’ of the soul, while ‘la pierre en est l’enfer’, Brunhilda, the morally superior of the two, is merely a beast, while her wholly evil rival is a stone. To understand the true sense of Hugo’s presentation of these women as a horse and a cobblestone, however, we must be aware of the details of what Montgomery refers to only as the ‘horrible and shameful death’ that Brunhilda

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 394

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ D. H. Montgomery, *The Leading Facts of French History* (Boston, New York, Chicago, London: Ginn & Company, 1903), 26 – Beckett’s notes from Montgomery’s text, which cover two pages of the ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook, begin with details of the Rois Fainéants: ‘Merovingian Rois Fainéants, descendants of Dagobert, puny short-lived, sad-faced, long-haired effeminate drones did not inhabit the old Roman cities of Gaul, but moved slowly about in covered carts drawn by oxen, from one of their immense farms to another staying at each to feast & carouse til their provisions were exhausted when they languidly mounted their ox-carts again and went on to the next’ (WN, 26). It is a nice coincidence, but surely nothing more, that these details that are to be found in close proximity to the story of Brunhilda and Fredegunda (*viz.* D.H. Montgomery, *The Leading Facts of French History*, 27-28).

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 26

met 'at the hands of her rival's son'.⁴¹³ Following Fredegunda's death, in fact, Brunhilda – at the age of 80 and on the orders of Fredegunda's son Clotheric II – is recorded to have been attached to a horse and pulled asunder. Once one is aware of the nature of Brunhilda's death, it becomes apparent that Hugo's image, far from being opaque or merely curious, serves to do much more than underline the stark moral divide between what he perceives as the truly reprehensible Fredegunda and her more worthy, if not yet entirely laudable, rival. In this image, Hugo has presented us with a memorable vision of the kind of justice that he imagines awaits our souls in death: The suffering we have caused will be the suffering we endure, and this will be endured, not in Hell as understood by Dante, but in the material world in which we ourselves have lived and in material forms such as we ourselves have known in life. If there is no need for a place called Hell, it is because the world in which we live, as proved by its very materiality, is already a kind of hell in and of itself. As the 'bouche d'ombre' tells the poet :

[...] sache
 Que le monde où tu vis est un monde effrayant
 Devant qui le songeur, sous l'infini ployant,
 Lève les bras au ciel et recule terrible.
 Ton soleil est lugubre et ta terre est horrible.
 Vous habitez le seuil du monde châtement.⁴¹⁴

That Hugo's 'bouche d'ombre' here places Man at 'le *seuil* du monde châtement' is significant because it makes clear that, dreadful though the world may be, and however horrible the suffering that some souls may here endure, there is a potential to rise as well as fall. Having detailed the horrors that await the morally abject and the immanent suffering that surrounds us all, in fact, Hugo's poem concludes in a surge of hope – 'Espérez! espérez! espérez, misérables! / Pas de deuil infini, pas de maux incurables, / Pas d'enfer éternel!'⁴¹⁵ – that makes clear that the entirety of material Creation and all the souls that give voice to their suffering therein, are destined, finally, to fall silent when they reunite with God and partake once again of the formless, perfect splendour of their original Creator:

Tout sera dit. Le mal expirera; les larmes
 Tariront ; plus de fers, plus de deuils, plus d'alarmes ;
 L'affreux gouffre inclément
 Cessera d'être sourd, et bégaiera : Qu'entends-je ?
 Les douleurs finiront dans toute l'ombre ; un ange
 Cria : Commencement !⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 27

⁴¹⁴ Victor Hugo, 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', in *op. cit.*, 389

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 406

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 409

It is undoubtedly in its conclusion that we can most fully appreciate the vast gulf that separates Beckett's and Hugo's poems. Nothing in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' suggests, much less trumpets, the existence and benevolence of a higher power to whom we are all destined to return. On the contrary, it seems quite clear that Beckett's poem actively seeks to undermine the positive message upon which Hugo's text concludes by inverting the terms, and the narrative progression, of 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre'. It has just been shown, for example, that the very title of Hugo's text introduces us to the 'bouche d'ombre' and that the major part of its text is devoted to revealing the horror of the world in which Man lives and the suffering that surrounds us. Having done so, however, the poem concludes by transforming the 'bouche d'ombre' into the vehicle by which we hear a prefiguration of the stirring 'Commencement !' that an angel will proclaim when suffering comes to an end. Existence, we have learned, is full of voices, full of laws, and full of pain; a brighter future awaits, however, one in which there will be no more voices, no more pain, and only love.⁴¹⁷ In Beckett's poem, on the contrary, it is only in the very last line that we are introduced to the 'bouche d'ombre' and, when it does appear, its association with the term 'encore' suggests the direct opposite of the change signalled by Hugo. Instead of pointing towards the promise of future forgiveness, 'encore la bouche d'ombre' conveys unremitting constancy and leaves the reader with a sense that whatever negative connotations this 'bouche d'ombre' may bring with it – and it must be admitted that, shorn of a positive message to convey, it is very difficult to understand an image of a 'bouche d'ombre' in any but negative terms – remain as they have always been and, most likely, always will be.

That Beckett should have been inclined to invert the terms of Hugo's poem is unsurprising given the fact that, as noted, Hugo's text is anchored in a faith-based vision of the universe – albeit a faith and a vision of a deeply personalised nature. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett explained that he was someone 'who seem[ed] never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the supernatural'.⁴¹⁸ It may thus be safely assumed that the religious qualities of Hugo's poem would have found little favour with Beckett. That is not to say, however, that Beckett could not have engaged with the text in his own manner. To get a sense of what this manner might have been, in fact, we need only turn to that letter to MacGreevy from which has just been cited. There, Beckett's description of himself as one devoid of inclination for the 'supernatural' was offered by way of clarifying why he felt unable to derive from

⁴¹⁷ viz. 'L'heure approche. Espérez. rallumez l'âme éteinte! / Aimez-vous! aimez-vous! [...] Le sombre univers, froid, glacé, pesant, réclame / La sublimation de l'être par la flamme, / De l'homme par l'amour' (*Ibid.*, 407).

⁴¹⁸ *LSB I*, 257 (SB to TMG [10th March, 1935])

Thomas à Kempis' *De Imitatione Christi* the comfort that MacGreevy, himself a believing and practising Catholic, found therein. In his letter, Beckett further informed his friend that the only value he had been able to derive from the text – apart from those particular expressions that he had taken from it and which had remained with him⁴¹⁹ – had come by way of adopting a deeply personal approach to it. Or, as Beckett describes it, by way of

a substitution of terms very different from the one you propose. I mean that I replaced the plenitude that he [= Thomas à Kempis] 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 & the communion with which a sense of Grace.⁴²⁰

The kind of 'substitution of terms' that Beckett here describes is obviously not something that is unique to Beckett. All readers, to a greater or lesser extent, lay the texts they read upon the Procrustean Bed of their own subjectivity. Beckett's letter, indeed, makes clear that MacGreevy himself had suggested adopting just such an approach. Widespread as this practice may be, it is worth noting Beckett's mention of it since we know him have been particularly fond of this style of personalised reading, and we equally know him to have adopted such an approach in his engagements with literary, as well as with religious, texts.⁴²¹

In approaching Hugo's 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', therefore, it is probable that Beckett chose to extract from the text only what he needed and discarded that which did not appeal to him. In the present instance, what most obviously did not appeal to him in Hugo's vision was the religiously-derived idea of universal compassion, forgiveness, and divine love. No trace of any such positive sentiments is to be found in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', nor in any of the poems that make up *Poèmes 37-39*. Such emotions are alien to the image of human relations that we find in this collection where, as was previously seen by way of our readings of texts such as 'à elle l'acte calme', 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', and 'Arènes de Lutèce', there can be no comfort in companionship.⁴²² The text of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' makes clear,

⁴¹⁹ viz. 'I found [in the *De Imitatione*] quantities of phrases like qui melius scit pati majorem tenebit pacem, or, Nolle consolari ab aliqua creatura magnae puritatis signum est, or the lovely per viam pacis ad patriam perpetuae claritatis, that seemed to be made for me and which I have never forgotten' (*Ibid.*).

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ The most important example, in this regard, is, of course, Beckett's study of Proust, which is now widely recognised as telling us far more about Beckett – and his vision of the world as this vision existed at the time of composing his monograph – than it has to tell us about Proust or his *Recherche*.

⁴²² The closest that Beckett's French-language poetry comes to evincing any of these positive emotions, in fact, is that sort of etymological compassion that was identified

however, that Beckett did not merely discard that which he could not embrace. Instead, he incorporated it into the body of his poem in a manner that served at once to reinforce his own aims, and to ironise, undermine, and subvert Hugo.

In terms of what appealed to Beckett in Hugo's vision, it appears clear that Beckett could find much to agree with in Hugo's vision of a universal suffering given voice by a Creation full of souls that cry out their misery, of a universe in which punishment plays a central role, and where each soul is made to suffer in accordance with timeless laws that are as immutable as they are inescapable. This profoundly negative view of existence is one almost perfectly attuned to Beckett's worldview, as he gave voice it to time and again in his writings, both published and private. Often times, Beckett's expressed his vision of the world by appealing to Leopardi's own desperately negative vision of the world that he had found in the poem 'A se stesso'.⁴²³ In 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', however, Beckett drew on Hugo's voluble universe of tortured souls and derived from it a poem filled with 'vieilles voix / d'outre-tombe' whom death, far from silencing, has simply liberated to cry in a different way.⁴²⁴ (This is what, in Hugo's poem, is referred to as '[I]a voix de ce que l'homme appelle le silence'.⁴²⁵) The laws that govern Hugo's universe, meanwhile, and which are elucidated by his 'bouche d'ombre', are also almost surely those to which Beckett refers as 'les mêmes lois / que naguère'. In Hugo's poem, these are the laws

as part of our discussion of 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' and which might equally be found in 'Arènes de Lutèce.' As both poems suggest, however, shared suffering, and even then the sharing of suffering, brings with it no real relief for either party.⁴²³ Lines from 'A se stesso' – specifically, 'E fango è il mondo' or 'Non che la speme, il desiderio è spento' – recur time and again throughout Beckett's writing: Beckett drew from this poem the epigram to *Proust* and alludes to it in the text (*viz. Proust*, [n.p.], 7, 46); Belacqua cites this 'gloomy composition' in *Dream (Dream*, 62); Molloy cites it in the English-language translation of *Molloy (viz. Samuel Beckett, Molloy*, 33); Beckett himself, meanwhile, cites the phrase on numerous occasions in his private correspondence (*viz. LSB II*, 509 – SB to Maurice Nadeau [October 19th, 1954]; *Ibid.*, 537-38 – SB to David Hayman [July 22nd, 1955]); *LSB III*, 136 – SB to A.J. Leventhal and Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal [April 21st, 1958]); *LSB IV*, 624 – SB to Avigdor Arikha and Anne Atik [December 17th, 1983]).

⁴²⁴ On the subject of sound and voices, it is worth noting that the parallels between Hugo's poem and Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39* are not necessarily confined to 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol.' It appears likely that the 'œil qui écoute' possessed by the speaker of 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' is intended as an inversion of an assertion that we find in Hugo's poem according to which 'l'oreille pourrait avoir sa vision' (Victor Hugo, 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', in *op. cit.*, 386). Similarly, by ensuring that the entirety of the *Poèmes 37-39* lead to an image of the 'bouche d'ombre', Beckett at once opens the possibility that the 'voix' the speaker yearns to silence in 'musique de l'indifférence' of those of the universe itself and suggests another way of understanding the association that poem establishes between 'voix' and the inanimate objects – 'cœur temps air feu sable / du silence éboulement d'amours' – that it evokes.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 397

that make of every crime a weight dragging the soul ever further away from the divine ideal, ever deeper into materiality, down through what Hugo refers to as ‘[é]tages sur étages ! cavernes sur cavernes’.⁴²⁶ In Beckett’s poem too, we find the idea of descent – ‘*jusque dans la caverne*’ – and the very ‘caverne’ into which the ‘ciel et sol’ are carried, and we along with them, clearly invites to be read in relation to the ‘cavernes’ of Hugo’s poem. The negativity of Beckett’s vision, however, goes substantially further than Hugo’s insofar as ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’, though its description of the soul’s descent through successively more debased levels of materiality may be horrible, at least excepts ‘[l]e ciel d’en haut, le seul qui soit splendide et clair’.⁴²⁷ Beckett, on the contrary, casts both ‘ciel et sol’ into the cavern, thereby doing away not only with Hugo’s distinction between sky and soil, but also with the hope Hugo predicated upon this distinction – since, in his poem, it was the sky that sought to inspire the soul to stall, or even reverse, its descent by ‘lui jetant l’aurore’ and ‘[t]âch[ant] en la regardant, de l’attirer encore’.⁴²⁸ Here too, then, Beckett has made equally productive use of that with which he could agree, and that with which he could not.

Although ‘*jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol*’ is less explicit about its underlying cosmology than ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’, we can also be almost certain that the same laws are at work in both poems because Beckett’s reference to ‘les mêmes lois / que naguère’ follows immediately after a striking and obscure image that seems calculated to stress at once the proximity of Beckett’s poem to Hugo’s and the distance between them:

[...] la même lumière
qui sur les plaines d’Enna en longs viols
macérait naguère les capillaires⁴²⁹

Read in isolation, it is difficult to understand what Beckett means by these lines since nothing in the text serves to properly clarify them. Certainly, the fact that the *capillaire* fern prefers the shade does something to explain the deleterious effect that exposure to direct sunlight would have upon it.⁴³⁰ Moreover, one may be relatively certain that, by associating the plains of Enna and rape, Beckett intends an allusion to Classical mythology and, more particularly, to the fact that it was while she was wandering these plains that Hades snatched Persephone and carried her down to his underworld kingdom.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 396

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 395

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ *CP*, 102

⁴³⁰ Harvey draws attention to the *capillaire*’s preference for shade in his study of this poem (*viz.* Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 213).

An awareness of this myth alone, however – even in the version that would be most directly available to Beckett, that is the version provided by Lemprière⁴³¹ –, cannot explain why Beckett chose to render it in such curious and metaphorical terms: In a poem that mentions Persephone by name, why should she be absent from her own rapt and why should this be reimagined in such a way that it becomes, not the snatching away of Demeter's daughter at the hands of Hades, but the obtuse spectacle of 'capillaires' as these are 'en longs viols / macérait' by 'lumière'? Recognising Hugo's poem as an intertext for 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' helps to clarify the rationale behind the image used by Beckett, while recognition of Beckett's own efforts to undercut Hugo's text helps us to better understand Beckett's decision to root this poem so explicitly in Classical mythology.

To the reader alert to the significance of the 'bouche d'ombre' upon which this poem closes, it seems certain that Beckett's presentation of light raping ferns was inspired by Hugo's vision of a world in which souls descend through various forms and in which justice might most effectively be done when, as in the striking example that was earlier singled out, the 'pavé Frédégonde' is struck by the hooves of the 'cheval Brunehaut.' Though inspired by Hugo, however, Beckett undermines the vision of universal justice that subtends the Hugolian soul's descent as recounted by 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre'. This undermining is accomplished by Beckett in several ways.

In the first instance, he does so by presenting us, not with a form of justice, but with what is explicitly referred to as a rape. There is no sense that Beckett's 'capillaires' are being justly punished for suffering that they brought about or sin that they committed when their soul was shrouded in another form. All we know, all we are allowed to know, is that they are 'en long viols / macér[és]' by light and, if this image gives no hint of prior sin, it tacitly suggests innocence since – as noted by Gontarski and Ackerly in their *Companion to Beckett*⁴³² – 'capillaires' is French for a fern that, in English, is referred to as 'maidenhair'. If there are laws at work in Beckett's poem, then, they are not the laws of a loving God that give ultimately salutary order to a world in which evil is finally vanquished, good rewarded, and all set to rights in the End of Days. Beckett's 'lois', on the contrary, allow suffering without reason and end in death.

⁴³¹ Lemprière recounts the myth as follows: 'Proserpine made Sicily the place of her residence and delighted herself with the beautiful views, the flowery meadows, and limpid streams, which surrounded the plains of Enna. In this solitary retreat, as she amused herself with her female attendants in gathering flowers, Pluto carried her away into the infernal regions, of which she became the queen' (John Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary*, 642 ['Proserpina']).

⁴³² viz. 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*

In addition to undermining Hugo's text via the narrative – such as it is – of his own poem, Beckett also undermines 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' via the source from which his imagery is drawn. In Hugo's poem, as noted, his 'bouche d'ombre' speaks of a universe that, personal though it may be, clearly takes its starting point in the Christian vision of a Creation brought into being by a loving God and frequently appeals to Biblical imagery.⁴³³ Beckett, on the contrary, as we have seen, situates his 'bouche d'ombre' firmly in relation to Classical mythology rather than Christian dogma – the only figures who are explicitly mentioned in Beckett's poem being Persephone and Atropos. As already mentioned, however, Beckett's poem does not merely reject those elements of Hugo's text with which he cannot agree. Instead, we find in his text a complex engagement that serves to undercut Hugo's message even while serving Beckett's own.

This is particularly clear in the case of Beckett's handling of religion which is, of course, the central pillar upon which the positive message of Hugo's poem rests. Hugo's text can only end positively because he is convinced in the existence of a benevolent divinity. Beckett, meanwhile, subverts the religion from which Hugo draws strength and suggests that death itself is the only truly omnipotent and inexorable force at work in the sublunary world that we inhabit. Important though Beckett's engagement with religion is to his poem it is by no means obvious. There are, for example, no explicit allusions to Christianity, to Christian doctrine, or to Christian figures in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol'. Instead, Beckett subtly introduces Christianity – and Hugo's Christian vision specifically – within the verbal texture of his Classical allusions.

If the image of the rape on the plains of Enna is emphatically Classical, for example, his use of the verb 'macérer' only makes complete sense if it is understood in its explicitly religious sense of 'mortifying'. This use not only serves to introduce a religious element, but also ties it to a needless and ultimately fruitless form of suffering. The believer mortifies their own body of their own volition and in the hope of both attaining greater purity in life and of being rewarded for their piety in death; there is nothing to suggest that the 'capillaires' will be rewarded for what they endure, and the use of 'viol' entirely excludes volition. The invocation of 'Atropos / adorable', for its part, offers an even more striking imbrication of Hugo's Christianity and Classical mythology.⁴³⁴ As noted, Atropos was the third of the Moirai whose responsibility it was to cut the thread of life. She is thus not merely a figure of death, but of death in an elemental, primal, and pagan sense, wholly removed from the

⁴³³ Amongst the Biblical figures mentioned in Hugo's poem we find not only God and Jesus, but also Nimrod, Herod, Pilate, and Belial (*viz.* 394-409).

⁴³⁴ *CP*, 102

Christian vision and all that it carries with it. The reference to her as ‘adorable’ might thus be seen as intended to suggest an underlying desire for such a death, and could be understood as something akin to an early manifestation of the appeal that Beckett would address to Atropos in the *mirlitonnade* ‘noire sœur’.⁴³⁵ There is, however, no need to read this poem as a prefiguration of a *mirlitonnade* that Beckett would write decades later when it may be profitably, and powerfully, read as a wilful inversion of Hugo’s characterisation of God as ‘l’Être adorable’ towards whom all Creation cries in ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’.⁴³⁶ In that poem, God was the being whose love would finally make things right. God was proof, not against suffering, but against the possibility of *eternal* suffering – ‘Pas de deuil infini, pas de maux incurables’, as his poem has it, ‘Pas d’enfer éternel!’ – and, in this respect, was the guarantor of the final joyous silence that would accompany the ‘[c]ommencement.’ In Beckett’s poem, meanwhile, it is not God, but Atropos who is ‘adorable’ and, where Hugo’s God was the certainty, the positive truth, that lay at the heart of his cosmology, Beckett’s vision provides only ‘Atropos / adorable de vide douteux.’ That nothing about Atropos is certain is wholly fitting since, of all things in, or on the threshold of, life, nothing is at once so certain and so uncertain as death: We can know nothing of it, except that it exists, and that it awaits.

As the interplay between Classical and religious material serves to make clear, the dialogue that Beckett’s poem established with Hugo’s ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’ is at once highly subtle and highly developed. Beckett’s poem is intimately rooted in Hugo’s verse and, at the same time, his undermining of Hugo’s poetic vision is total: Where Hugo imagined a final joyous silence, Beckett’s poem allows only for endless voices; where Hugo’s poem expounded universal justice, Beckett’s poem suggests that there is no justice, only laws; where Hugo’s verse made of light a sign of divinity and hope, Beckett’s makes of it an instrument of sexual violence and implies it too will eventually fade away; where Hugo assured us all our suffering carries us towards the ultimate joy of a loving God, Beckett brings everything to a uncertain but inescapable Atropos; finally, where the message of Hugo’s ‘bouche d’ombre’ closed on the promise of beginning, Beckett’s poem closes on a ‘bouche d’ombre’ that seems to have no message at all and to promise nothing beyond the ceaseless continuation of all the horror that is.

⁴³⁵ viz. ‘noire sœur / qui es aux enfers / à tort tranchant / et à travers / qu’est-ce tu attends’ (*Ibid.*, 218) – Here too, it may be noted, we find the same inversion of Christianity and Classical paganism, as Beckett invokes Atropos in lines modelled after the Pater Noster.

⁴³⁶ Victor Hugo, ‘Ce que dit la bouche d’ombre’, in *op. cit.*, 406

As I hope to have demonstrated, 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' is, in every respect, a worthy final poem to *Poèmes 37-39*. Deftly engaging with Hugo's verse, Beckett has not only created a remarkably sustained intertextual dialogue, but also a poem that richly expresses concerns of deep importance to the collection as a whole. I am, however, conscious that not all readers will be convinced by the reading that has just been proposed. Certainly, I very much hope this reading has been sufficient to confirm to the reader the allusive depth and complexity of these French-language poems that have, for too long, been viewed as 'relatively straightforward' and testaments only to the limits that French placed on Beckett's artistic expression. It is possible, however, that some may feel the elaborate intertextual dialogue that has here proposed to be built on a foundation too slight to bear its weight.

With that in mind, and by way of concluding both this discussion of the *Poèmes 37-39* and this chapter as a whole, I would like to close my analysis of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' by drawing the reader's attention to an aspect of 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' that demonstrates not only the linguistic complexity of these French-language poems, but makes clear another element of the rich intertextual dialogue on which this poem is based, namely: Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*.

Unlike Hugo's 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', there can be no doubt about Beckett's familiarity with Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, a copy of which, as has been noted, Beckett obtained in 1936 and which provided him with his primary source of information on Classical mythology. The impact of Beckett's engagement with Lemprière on the *Poèmes 37-39* has already been suggested by way of the allusion to the legend of Midas that was earlier posited to subtend the reference to wind and reeds in 'bois seul.' It is, however, 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' that provides us with the most direct evidence of Beckett's engagement with Lemprière.

At the heart of this engagement is, unsurprisingly, the reference made to Persephone and Atropos. Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* having been Beckett's key source of information on matters Classical, it stands to reason that Lemprière would have provided him with his most direct, and most extensive, source of information on these figures. It is most likely Lemprière who led Beckett to associate these figures. Or, more properly, it is most likely Lemprière who revealed to Beckett the historical association that existed between these figures. As part of Lemprière's entry on Persephone, we read that

As queen of hell, and wife of Pluto, Proserpine presided over the death of mankind, and according to the opinion of the ancients, no one could die, if

the goddess herself, or Atropos her minister, did not cut off one of the hairs from the head.⁴³⁷

As this passage from Lemprière's text makes clear, Beckett's intimate association of Persophone and Atropos is by no means idiosyncratic. On the contrary, he was guided by the Classical association between these figures: Both, in their way, are Goddesses of Death and so both of these figures, in their way, evoke the non-Christian death that Beckett substituted for the promise of union with a loving God which Hugo placed at the ultimate end of all human existence. More importantly still, the clarification that Lemprière offers concerning the precise manner in which Persephone and Atropos could bring about the death of a mortal – that is, by cutting one of their hairs – lends another level of meaning to the *capillaire*, or 'maidenhair fern', that is made to endure the protracted violence of exposure to the Sicilian sun. In his study of this poem, Lawrence Harvey already signalled the probable association between Beckett's reference to the maidenhair fern on the plains of Enna and the fate of Persephone, herself then a maiden, when she was snatched away by Hades.⁴³⁸ In detecting a secondary reference to 'the tiny capillaries that carry the blood of life in the human body' and, by extension, a suggestion that 'light...which is life itself, destroys man', however, Harvey was misguided.⁴³⁹ If the term 'capillary' is used in English to refer to tiny blood vessels, it is because they are fine and hair-like; this is what 'capillary' means, etymologically. In English, of course, the adjective 'capillary' still has this meaning but it has been obscured behind the more widely-used medical sense. The French *capillaire*, on the contrary, fully retains its original association with hair. It is for precisely this reason that the fern which, in English, is referred to as the maidenhair is referred to in French as a *capillaire*. By evoking this fern, then, Beckett, a native Anglophone, is almost certainly punning on the English-language term and, in so doing, tacitly invoking the myth of Persephone's abduction. This is not all he is doing, however. This poem is written in French and, as such, the reference to the 'capillaires' does not merely serve to remind us of Persephone as victim. (To invoke her victimhood in French, in fact, Beckett is obliged to make direct mention of the plains of Enna.) On the contrary, the direct association with 'hair' serves to signal her role as Queen of Hell and her position as one of those figures from Greek mythology who stand as arbitress over the fate of humankind – the other being Atropos, who stands alongside her, both in Greek mythology and in Beckett's poem.

There are thus, at least two layers of meaning to the 'capillaires' that appear in Beckett's poem. *At least*, because there are still further levels of meaning to be

⁴³⁷ John Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary*, 642 ['Proserpina']

⁴³⁸ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 213

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

found behind this word as deployed by Beckett in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol'. To find these further levels of meaning, one must again turn to Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*. More particularly, one must turn to his entry on Hades, as part of which we learn that: 'Among plants, the cypress, the narcissus, and the *maiden-hair*, were sacred to him, as also every thing which was deemed inauspicious, particularly the number two'.⁴⁴⁰ Two facts are of interest in this passage. The first, most obviously, is the presence of the maidenhair amongst those plants that were sacred to Hades. As one of the plants particularly beloved of Hades, the maidenhair reveals itself to be still better suited to represent the figure of Persephone. Where its French name connotes Persephone in her power, as one of those who could end mortal lives, its English name evokes her in her maidenhood and her weakness. As previously noted, the particular association between the *capillaire* and maidenhood is entirely absent from the French. The association with Hades, however, *is* present since, whether one refers to the fern by its French, English, Latin, or Greek name, the plant remains sacred to him. To speak of the *capillaire* is thus to speak, however covertly, of the God of the Underworld and the things for which he cares.

Naturally, as the quotation from Lemprière's dictionary confirms, Beckett could have evoked Hades by other means. He might have referred to him by name. Or, if he preferred to be less explicit, he might also have evoked the cypress or the narcissus. (That he chose to evoke Hades by way of the maidenhair is no doubt largely attributable to the greater allusive potential possessed by that term, both in French and in its English translation.) Equally, he might have evoked Hades by way of the number two. This last possibility is of particular importance for, reading the poem in light of what Lemprière tells us, it does indeed appear to the case that Beckett invoked Hades by use of the number two.

Certainly, once one is aware of the significance of the number two to Hades, it is striking to note the prevalence of the number two in Beckett's poem. This poem is full of pairs: From the initial pairing of 'ciel et sol' to the final pairing of 'Proserpine et Atropos', by way of the 'la même lumière' and the 'capillaires', linked by the 'viol' endured by the one under the force of the other. Even reading 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' on a strictly superficial level, these pairings might be held to structure the poem – appearing as they do at the beginning, towards the middle and towards the end of the text. Read alongside what Lemprière reveals about the number two, however, these pairings gain a deeper, thematic sense in a poem that explicitly refers to Persephone and Atropos, and which comes at the close of a collection so profoundly concerned with death. These pairings, by virtue of their being dual, are

⁴⁴⁰ John Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary*, 617 ['Pluto'] – Emphasis mine.

themselves evocative of Hades and, by extension, the Kingdom of the Dead over which he reigns. Hades may thus be understood as a subtle, but by no means fleeting, third presence; never more than scarcely perceptible, but frequently recurring throughout 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' by way of the deeper allusive texture of the poem.

The vast majority of readers, of course, could not possibly have known anything of the multiple associations between the various components of this poem, its concern with death, and the more obscure recesses of Greek mythology. In the present writer's estimation, however, the reader's ability to readily perceive connections – such as those between Persephone and Atropos, between Persephone and the maidenhair fern, between Hades and the maidenhair fern, between Hades and the number two, or between all of these things at once – is of less importance than the fact that Beckett, thanks to his reading of Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, was indeed in a position to be aware of these associations and to appeal to them in his poetry. As I hope to have demonstrated here, there is ample evidence to show that he *did* appeal to these associations in 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol' and, in so doing, provided us with a demonstrable example of the intertextual richness, the linguistic complexity, and the thematic sophistication of the *Poèmes 37-39*. But such richness, such complexity, and such sophistication should come as little surprise to the reader now. If there is anything that should surprise the reader, in fact, it is undoubtedly that critics, guided by assumptions about Beckett's use of French derived from the LSH, could ever have thought these poems to be even '*relatively straightforward*.'

It is the setting aside of such assumptions that has allowed us to examine these poems afresh over the course of this chapter and to demonstrate something of the complexity of Beckett's French-language poetry of the 1930s. In so doing, it has also been possible to demonstrate something of what remains to be discovered in Beckett's writing, provided Beckett Studies is prepared to reconsider what it has long assumed to know about the effect that French had upon this writing and about Beckett's motivations for turning to French. It is indeed to these motivations that we will now turn our attention in Part III of this thesis.

PART III: Beckett's Turn(s) to French

Chapter 1

Beckett's Use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1930-36

Thus far, this thesis has been concerned, in Part I, with Beckett's acquisition of French up to 1946 and, in Part II, with the literary use to which he put this language in the pre-War period. This analysis has allowed us to correct many preconceptions about Beckett's French – about the place the language held in his life during these years and the role it played in his development as a literary artist, especially – and it is thus hoped that the reader will have found the discussion of Parts I and II to have been worthwhile. There are, however, important questions about Beckett's French that have not yet been examined: Why, for instance, did Beckett choose to turn to French in the post-War period if not in search of a new style? Similarly, why did Beckett choose to compose original poetry in French towards the end of the 1930s? Did the same motivations underlie Beckett's post-War and his pre-War linguistic turns? Did Beckett have the same motivations for writing the literary texts that we have thus far examined in French as he had for writing the non-literary texts that we have not examined – such as 'Les Deux Besoins' or 'La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon' –, in French? What about Beckett's decision to translate literary works that he had originally composed in English into French, does this decision have anything to tell us about his decision to compose original material in French? And what of Beckett's very earliest French texts, why were 'Le Concentrisme', Lucien's letter, and their accompanying poems written in French? Finally, but perhaps most interestingly, how are we to understand Beckett's statements aligning the turn of French with a quest for stylistic weakness if this alignment appears not to be borne out by his own literary writings? These are precisely the questions to which Part III will attempt to respond.

Obviously, at the outset of this discussion, and before examining why Beckett may have chosen to write his very earliest French-language texts in that language, it must be recognised that, at the present time, the 'truth' of Beckett's deeper motivations for using French in the pre- and the post-War periods cannot be recovered. We stand too far from the Beckett who made these decisions to lay any claim to authoritative insight. Of necessity, therefore, the present discussion will be speculative. It is hoped, however, that what has come before – the correction of misconceptions about Beckett's earliest exposure to French, the discovery of the role that the study of French Literature had to play in Beckett's lifelong passion for visual

art, the presence of previously unremarked-upon allusions to French writers (to Malraux, to Renard, to Hugo...) in Beckett's English- and French-language writings, and the discovery of unexplored depths in poems previously thought to be straightforward – will have served to convince the reader that, speculative though any exploration of Beckett's reasons for turning to French and for his own presentation of this turn may be, such an exploration and the re-examination of critical commonplaces surrounding these reasons that it facilitates are worthwhile. The questions that will be asked here – about Beckett's use of French, and his characterisations of this use – underlie too much of our thinking about his writing, about his use of French, and the emergence of his post-War style, for us to be satisfied with answers that have not been adequately interrogated. Even if we cannot answer them definitively, therefore, it is hoped that the simple fact of recognising that these questions exist, and that the answers to them that Beckett Studies has long assumed to be well-founded are, in fact, deeply uncertain, will, be salutary for future critical engagements with Beckett's writing, in French and English.

I. 'LE CONCENTRISME' / 'TRISTESSE JANALE'

As part of our discussion of 'Le Concentrisme', it was noted how critical engagements with this text have been hampered by preconceptions about its probable literary value that were grounded in its generic form and the context of its original delivery. As a 'spoof lecture', influenced by the style of *canulars normaliens* and written after Beckett's time as a *lecteur* at the ENS, 'Le Concentrisme' was held to be fundamentally a work of comedy. It was thus thought by critics to be ontologically different from Beckett's literary texts and, as a consequence, read in a more superficial manner than would otherwise have been the case. To read 'Le Concentrisme' in such a way as to appreciate its full depth as a piece of writing and its connections to the English-language prose fiction that Beckett would shortly afterward begin to compose, as we saw, it was necessary to look at it as a literary text, rather than as a 'spoof lecture'. To answer the question of why 'Le Concentrisme' – and, by extension, 'Tristesse Janale' – should have been written in French, however, it is precisely upon the generic character of this text and the context of its original delivery that we need to focus our attention since these factors appear to have been crucial in Beckett's decision to write these texts in French.

Before examining the relationship between the context in which this text was composed and the language of its composition, however, it is worth taking a moment to reflect upon what we mean when speak of Beckett's *decision* to write this text – or, indeed, any text – in French.

In and of itself, a bilingual's choice to use one of the other of their languages is, at heart, a matter of personal volition – just as the monolingual's choice to speak at all or remain silent is a matter, primarily, of personal volition. This is as true of writing as it is of speech: The choice to write in a particular language, like the choice to write at all, lies with the writer. In the particular case of Beckett, the example of those notes on the subject of Pythagoras that he took from Pierre Larousse's *Dictionnaire universel* and the use of French in the *Watt* manuscripts have already demonstrated that French and English were, in Beckett's private writings, essentially interchangeable by the late 1930s and early 1940s. Material found in a French-language source might be translated into English or left in its original language; the material would be equally comprehensible to Beckett in either language. Instructions to himself might be written in French or English, and he would understand them equally well; the use of one language or the other was indicative of nothing other than his personal choice.

For the fluent speaker of English and French, then, the decision of whether to use one language or the other in the privacy of one's own mind, or in writings destined only for one's own personal consumption, is a strictly personal matter. 'Le Concentrisme', however, was not destined for personal consumption: It was a lecture destined for public consumption and delivered on Tuesday, 11th November, 1930, as one in a series of lectures organised by the Dublin University Modern Languages Society. A text intended for public consumption, such as 'Le Concentrisme', differs markedly from private writing, and one of these differences lies in the degree of freedom Beckett had in terms of the language in which such public texts could be composed. Naturally, Beckett himself was every bit as capable of addressing his public in either of the languages to which he had access when addressing himself. Beckett's personal capacity to compose a text in English or French, however, was only one factor amongst many that must be taken into account. Equally important in determining his choice of language would have been the capacity of his audience to understand what he was saying and, by the same token, the willingness of whoever was providing him with a platform from which to address this audience to let him address them in the language of his choosing. Beckett, in short, was only free to compose 'Le Concentrisme' in French because his lecture was intended for an audience that he knew would be capable of understanding French and because his lecture was delivered under the auspices of a lecture series that allowed for lectures to be delivered in this language.¹²¹¹

¹²¹¹ The willingness of the Dublin University Modern Languages Society to allow lectures in French is demonstrated not just by Beckett's lecture, but by the fact that the opening meeting for the society's 1930 lecture series took place in that language. Evidence for this is to be found in *The Irish Times* of October 28th, 1930, where we read that: 'The Dublin University Modern Language [*sic*] Society holds its opening

Initially, saying that Beckett could only deliver his lecture in French because he had the opportunity to do so and an audience capable of understanding him may seem a fact so obvious that it scarcely needs stating. Obvious though it may be, it is important that this fact be clearly stated because it serves to make clear from the start of our examination of Beckett's French-language texts a truth that will underlie much of the following discussion: In short, whenever the text he was writing was destined for public consumption – as was the case for all of the texts that will be considered in the course of Part III –, Beckett's decision to compose the text in French was *never* a consequence of purely personal desire. In each and every case, Beckett's decision was governed at least partly by factors external to himself and entirely beyond his control. In the case of 'Le Concentrisme', as has been noted, these factors were the linguistic abilities of his intended audience and the expectations of the DU Modern Languages Society. When we come to examine other texts, however, we will see that other factors could play an equally determining role.

Having evoked the idea of a 'determining' role, we should also be careful to distinguish between positive and negative determination. In essence, this distinction may be understood as the difference between, on the one hand, the state of being able to make a choice and, on the other, the state of being unable to make a choice. In the vast majority of cases, the choice of French is an effect of a combination of both positive and negative determination. Nevertheless, an awareness of the difference between these forms of determination will enable us to better appreciate the role that each can play in the decision to compose a text in French. Helpfully, the distinction between positive and negative determination can be clarified by reference to the first two literary texts that Beckett wrote in French: 'Le Concentrisme' and 'Tristesse Janale'.

In the case of 'Le Concentrisme', we can speak of Beckett's use of French as having been positively determined – Beckett, in short, was able to freely choose to write in French. It is important to note, however, that the determination is only truly positive, and the choice only truly free, because he might equally have chosen to write his lecture in English. We know that this possibility existed because, although the opening lecture of their lecture series for the 1930-31 academic year may have been delivered in French, details of other papers scheduled as part of same series demonstrate that the DU Modern Languages Society was perfectly happy for papers to be delivered in English.¹²¹² Positive determination, therefore, as the example of 'Le

meeting today at 3 p.m. in the Regent House, Trinity College. [...] The proceedings will be in French' ('Dublin University Modern Language [*sic*] Society', in *The Irish Times* [28th October, 1930], 11).

¹²¹² A paper by Moira Scarff on the subject of 'Modern French Music' was, for example, scheduled for November 18th, 1930 (*viz.* A Correspondent, 'Trinity College

Concentrisme' suggests, means not only that there was no practical impediment to Beckett's use of French, but that there was no practical impediment to his use of English either. It may thus be seen that, whenever we speak of positive determination – as in the case of 'Le Concentrisme' –, Beckett's decision to compose a text in French will be, fundamentally, the result of a personal decision. Clearly, therefore, any instance of positive determination raises a question as to what may have motivated Beckett's personal decision to use French over English. Why Beckett should have chosen to compose 'Le Concentrisme' in French rather than English is a question to which we will return shortly. Before addressing this question, however, it remains to define negative determination.

Negative determination is by far the more important term to be aware of since, insofar as Beckett's use of French during the period up to 1946 is concerned, negative influence will prove determining. One way of explaining what we mean when we speak of negative determination is to look to Beckett's correspondence. In his preface to *LSB I*, George Craig, the translator of Beckett's French-language letters, notes that '[w]hen Beckett permanently settles in Paris from late 1937 and begins to make friends with, among others, monoglot French-speakers, some at least of the letters *have to be* written in French'.¹²¹³ This obligation to write in French is an obvious result of negative determination. More specifically, it is a result of Beckett's choice of language being determined by the correspondent to whom he is addressing himself. The fact that one is writing to a monoglot French-speaker, or one who speaks only limited English, is, as Craig rightly states an 'obvious practical reaso[n]' to write in French.¹²¹⁴ What we should note, however, is that when Craig speaks of how Beckett 'sometimes *chooses* to write in French to friends or acquaintances whose native language is English' – and tacitly contrasts it to the obvious obligation to write in French to a monoglot French-speaker – he is minimising that this choice too is negatively determined.¹²¹⁵ For Beckett to write to an English-speaker in French, after all, he must be reasonably sure that the addressee will be able to understand him. It is for this reason that the only English-speaking correspondents with whom Beckett makes substantial use of French – that is, Thomas MacGreevy, George Reavey, and

Notes', in *The Irish Times* [15th November, 1930], 6). The fact that the title of Scarff's paper was given in *The Irish Times* in English strongly suggests that the paper was delivered in this language, as the title for Beckett's paper – which we know to have been delivered in French – appeared in that language when Beckett's lecture was mentioned in the same publication.

¹²¹³ George Craig, 'French translator's preface', in *LSB I*, xxxiii – Emphasis mine.

¹²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²¹⁵ *Ibid.* – Emphasis mine.

Morris Sinclair¹²¹⁶ – are those who were either already at ease with the language (MacGreevy and Reavey), or striving to become so (Morris Sinclair).¹²¹⁷ (Indeed, in the case of Morris Sinclair, and as identified by Marion Fries-Dieckmann, Beckett's French-language letters to him were part of a language pen-pal style exchange, with Beckett writing to Morris Sinclair in French and Morris Sinclair writing to Beckett in German, thereby giving each of them the opportunity to develop their reading skill in their weaker language.¹²¹⁸) In the case of correspondence then, the importance of negative determination is clear: Beckett's freedom to write letters in French, whether to native Francophones or (advanced) learners, was conditioned by his intended-readers' ability to understand what he was saying.

In the case of these letters, we are clearly dealing with a form of negative determination. At the same time, we are also dealing with personal writings for an individual addressee, rather than literary writings destined for publication and for the reading public. To find an example of the manner in which the language of Beckett's *literary* writings could be impacted by negative determination, therefore, we need to look elsewhere. Happily, we do not need to look too far since an example of just such negative determination is provided by 'Tristesse Janale'.

As clarified in Part II, 'Tristesse Janale' is almost certainly an example of the 'poetry' composed by Beckett alongside 'Le Concentrisme', and intended to be indicative of the poetic style of Jean du Chas, the fictional poet with whom his lecture was concerned. The fictional Jean du Chas, of course, is French: Born in Toulouse to a mother 'd'origine allemande', and having summered as a boy in Kragenhof, there is a distinct possibility that he may speak German but there is no indication that his command of that language would have been sufficient for him to use it for the purposes of creative writing. Far more importantly, there is no indication whatsoever in 'Le Concentrisme' that Jean du Chas has any command of English. In light of these

¹²¹⁶ For examples of French-language letters addressed to these correspondents, see the following in *LSB I*: 152 (SB to TMG [20th March, 1933]); 211-12 (SB to George Reavey [23rd June, 1934]), 268-69 (SB to George Reavey [23rd May, 1935]), 269-70 (SB to George Reavey [23rd June, 1935]); 177-80 (SB to Morris Sinclair [27th January, 1934]), 193-96 (SB to Morris Sinclair [4th March, 1934]), 213-14 (SB to Morris Sinclair [c. 13th July-2nd August, 1934]).

¹²¹⁷ MacGreevy had translated a number of works from French, including Paul Valéry's *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* – his translation *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*, appearing with John Rodker in 1929 – and Reavey had written poetry in French – his poem 'Le Chant' appeared in *Experiment No. 4* (November 1929). Morris Sinclair, meanwhile, was a student of French and German at TCD (*viz. LSB I*, 712).

¹²¹⁸ Marion Fries-Dieckmann, 'Beckett lernt Deutsch: *The Exercise Books*', in Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann (eds), *Der unbekannt Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur*, 211 – Beckett would, however, occasionally break the terms of their exchange by using his letters to Morris Sinclair as an opportunity to practise his German (*viz. LSB I*, 200-203 – SB to Morris Sinclair [5th May, 1934]).

factors, we may therefore assume that the character of Jean du Chas is a Francophone who writes in French. If this is the case, any poetry that he is supposed to have written – including ‘Tristesse Janale’ – can only have been originally written in French. Certainly, Beckett might have chosen to write the poem in English and claim that he was presenting his audience with a translation of Jean du Chas’ French-language original.¹²¹⁹ This would only have been an option, however, if Beckett’s paper was itself delivered in English. In the context of a French-language paper, quite clearly, the decision to switch to English to present a ‘translation’ of a French-language ‘original’ would make no sense: In a paper delivered in French, it stands to reason that Beckett would quote Jean du Chas’ poetry in the original French. Jean du Chas, however, was not a real poet, merely a fictional character of Beckett’s devising. To quote from his poetry, therefore, Beckett first had to write this poetry himself and, for the reasons that have just been outlined, this poetry had to be written in French.

In this way, ‘Tristesse Janale’ presents us with an instructive example of what we mean by negative determination: In the case of this poem, unlike ‘Le Concentrisme’, Beckett was not free to choose between English and French. Once he had made the decision to write his paper about Jean du Chas in French, he could only compose Jean du Chas’ poetry in that language because it was in that language that Jean du Chas himself would have written and presenting an English-language translation of du Chas’ verse would have been out of keeping with the rest of the lecture. As this example demonstrates, then, when we speak of negative determination we mean that Beckett’s use of French was conditioned by the impossibility of his using English. Rather than being the result of a personal choice facilitated by the absence of any impediment to his using French, negative determination implies that Beckett’s use of French is a response to an external constraint. In the case of ‘Tristesse Janale’, admittedly, the force of this external constraint is somewhat obscured by the fact that it derived from a personal choice made by Beckett himself – namely, the choice to compose ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French. Freely made though the original choice may have been, however, it should be recognised that, once it had been made, it acquired the force of an external constraint: If the lecture was to be written in French, the poetry must be too.

Having clarified the distinction between positively and negatively determined use of French, we are left with the question of what underlay Beckett’s positively-determined, and thus freely-made, choice to write ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French. In the

¹²¹⁹ Had Beckett done so, he would have been following the model of Pierre Louÿs, who claimed in his *Les Chansons de Bilitis* to be presenting his readers with French-language translations of poems originally composed in Ancient Greek.

absence of an external constraint, what motivated Beckett to write his lecture in French?

To answer this question, it is helpful to consider the letter to Thomas MacGreevy in which Beckett informed his friend of his work on 'Le Concentrisme' and on Jean du Chas' poetry. Although we have already referred to this letter in Part II, it is worth quoting the relevant material from it again:

I read a paper to M.L.S. on a non[-]existent French poet – Jean du Chas – and wrote his poetry myself and that amused me for a couple of days. I've done nothing more to the Proust and am thinking of sending it back untouched. [...] I wish to God I was in Paris again, even Germany, Nuremberg, annulled in beer.¹²²⁰

As can be observed in the passage from which has just been quoted, 'Le Concentrisme' and 'Tristesse Janale' were composed during a time of intense dissatisfaction. The letter is in fact striking for the intensity of the unhappiness to which it gives voice. As described by Beckett, his life in Dublin – a city that offers him nothing more than 'negation & negation to feed a sterile will-less phallus of black fire'¹²²¹ – consists of '[f]ruitless retreat from Monday to Friday and then the degrading cotton wool interpolation of the week end, breaking the continuity of what is vacuous & uniform & pure in a kind of dark Satanic fashion'.¹²²² Beckett, in short, was not happy to be back in Dublin, nor to have taken up his position as Assistant Lecturer in French. Nor, indeed, was he happy to be working on – or, at least, to be mentally and emotionally putrifying in the vicinity of – his monograph on Proust, which would be published in March of 1931. Although the terms in which he speaks of his *Proust* in this letter are not quite as damning as those earlier employed in a letter to Samuel Putnam – where Beckett informed him that he was 'working all day & most of the night to get this fucking Proust finished'¹²²³ – it is nevertheless significant that the only glimmer of positivity that is to be found in this letter concerns Beckett's description of his work on 'Le Concentrisme' and, most probably, 'Tristesse Janale'. Certainly, the pleasure he derived from the composition of these texts was fleeting – '[...] that amused me for a couple of days' – but even such evanescent amusement is noteworthy in a life that is experienced as 'negation & negation' and which elsewhere permits no more than 'tired abstract anger – in articulate passive opposition'.¹²²⁴

What this letter seems to tell us, is that Beckett wrote 'Le Concentrisme' in French because doing so was more amusing. (This is, in fact, precisely what James

¹²²⁰ *LSB I*, 55 (SB to TMG [14th November, 1930])

¹²²¹ *Ibid.*, 54 (SB to TMG [14th November, 1930])

¹²²² *Ibid.*

¹²²³ *Ibid.*, 46 (SB to Samuel Putnam [? before 9th September, 1930])

¹²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 55 (SB to TMG [14th November, 1930])

Knowlson suggested in his biography, when he described how, in composing ‘Le Concentrisme’, ‘Beckett enjoyed using his imagination again, sharpening his wits and writing in French’.¹²²⁵) Otherwise occupied in delivering lectures to students whom he disliked and who disliked him, aware that he was supposed to be working on a monograph that he had come to loathe – if, indeed, he ever cared for it in the first place¹²²⁶ –, and violently unhappy to be back in Dublin, Beckett sought a measure of escape from all of these things, and a degree of amusement, in turning to writing a work of fiction: The choice of subject matter allowed him to establish some manner of distance between himself and what he referred to elsewhere as ‘this grotesque comedy of lecturing’, by actively deriding the act of lecturing itself and the tenets of literary criticism.¹²²⁷ In a similar way, it seems probable that the choice of language allowed him to return – however briefly and however imperfectly – to the city that, as this letter demonstrates, he missed greatly. Having taken up his position in TCD, Beckett could not return to Paris, however much he might wish it. What he could do, at least, was return to French, the better to take his mind off Dublin, TCD, and himself.

The possibility that Beckett’s decision to write ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French was motivated primarily by a desire to amuse himself is particularly interesting when one places it alongside comments reportedly made by Beckett on the subject of his post-War linguistic turn. Israel Shenker’s ‘Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett’ reports Beckett to have explained that his turn to French was occasioned by nothing more than the fact that he found writing in French to be ‘more exciting’.¹²²⁸ Read together, the evidence of ‘Le Concentrisme’ and the comments that appear in Shenker’s article would initially seem to be mutually reinforcing and serve to suggest that both Beckett’s decision to compose ‘Le Concentrisme’ in French and his post-War linguistic turn perhaps owed to a similar desire to amuse himself by turning away from English and towards French. Such mutual reinforcement is, however, compromised by

¹²²⁵ *DTF*, 122

¹²²⁶ Even before Beckett had properly begun to work on his monograph, correspondence with Thomas MacGreevy shows him to have had a decidedly negative perception of the text: ‘I can’t do the fucking thing. I don’t know whether to start at the end or the beginning – in a word should the Proustian arse-hole be considered as entrée or sortie – libre in either case. Anyhow I don’t know what to [*sic*] or where I am, but I’ll write 17000 words before I leave [Paris], even though my observations may have as little variety and none of the sincerity of Orlando’s wood carvings’ (*LSB I*, 43 – SB to TMG [25th August, 1930]).

¹²²⁷ *LSB I*, 53 (SB to Charles Prentice [27th November, 1930])

¹²²⁸ Israel Shenker, ‘Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling “Waiting for Godot”’, in *The New York Times* (6th May, 1956), 129 [1]

the fact that the interpretative value of Shenker's 'interview' with Beckett is very far from assured.¹²²⁹

Even if we disregard the comments ascribed to Beckett in Shenker's piece and their presentation of a desire for excitement as the primary motivation behind the post-War linguistic turn, it remains the case that, as has already been shown, there is strong evidence for seeing Beckett's decision to write 'Le Concentrisme' – and, by extension, 'Tristesse Janale' – in French as having been motivated by his desire to amuse himself. That at least these two texts were composed in French because Beckett found the prospect of writing a piece of comic prose in French more appealing than writing a similar piece in English naturally opens the possibility that this same motivation may have been at the root of the other texts that he wrote in French and, more importantly, the possibility that a desire for amusement may have prompted his pre- and post-War linguistic turns. If it is possible to view the decision to turn to French in these terms, there is, however, no need to assume that, simply because Beckett chose at one time or another to compose a text in French rather than English because he found it more 'amusing' to do so, the same motivations will always underlie the decision to write in French.

The major advantage of the current examination of Beckett's various *turns* to French in the years up to 1946, in fact, is that it will enable us to see quite clearly that one turn to French cannot necessarily be made to serve as a guide to another; each one must be considered in its particular context. As will be seen, Beckett chose to turn to French for a variety of reasons at different points in his life up to 1946. The degree to which Beckett's motivations for turning to French could differ from text to text becomes readily apparent when we set the probable motivations that lay behind Beckett's decision to compose 'Le Concentrisme' and 'Tristesse Janale' in French beside those motivations that appear to have underlain the decision to use French as part of the composition of his English-language novel *Dream*.

II. LUCIEN'S LETTER / 'C'N'EST AU PELICAN'

In the course of the preceding discussion, it was stated that the composition of 'Le Concentrisme' was unusual insofar as there was no obvious impediment to the text being composed in either English or French – that is, it was unusual because Beckett's decision to compose the text in French was positively, rather than negatively, determined. At first glance, however, it might seem as if Beckett's decision to compose Lucien's letter in French must also have been positively determined.

¹²²⁹ For an extensive consideration of the problems with Shenker's article and what these problems mean for the interpretative value of the explanation for the post-War linguistic turn that it contains, see Part III, Chapter 4.

Certainly, given that this piece of French-language writing appears in the context of a novel that was composed primarily in English, it is evident that there was no impediment to Beckett's writing the entirety of his novel in English. If he chose to compose Lucien's letter in French, therefore, this was obviously the result of personal choice. The fact that the majority of the novel was composed in English also means that we cannot, in the case of Lucien's letter, appeal to the sort of negative determination that conditioned the composition of 'Tristesse Janale.' That poem, it will be recalled, had to be composed in French because, as the purported work of a fictional French-language poet, its appearance in English within the context of a French-language lecture would have been bizarre in the extreme. Unlike that poem, Lucien's letter appears in the broader context of an English-language novel, which elsewhere reveals its author to be perfectly happy to depict his French characters, including Lucien himself, speaking English.¹²³⁰

Bearing these factors in mind, it might be suggested – following the model proposed by 'Le Concentrisme' – that Beckett chose to compose this letter in French simply because he felt like it, or because he found it more amusing to write it in French than in English. To make that suggestion, however, is to ignore the fact that Beckett was obviously already amusing himself by writing in English; *Dream* was, after all, a novel that he had chosen to compose, not a lecture that he undertook in an attempt to evade a monograph he despised. Moreover, if Beckett found French more amusing and thus invariably preferred it to English wherever possible, one would scarcely expect to find the opportunity to write in French squandered and French-speaking characters made to speak in English as one does in *Dream*. Amusement alone, therefore, will not help us to explain why, within the broader framework of this novel written in English, this letter and this poem are written in French. To explain this turn to French, we are obliged to look beyond the answers that were previously arrived at in the case of 'Le Concentrisme', and to propose other possible reasons for Beckett's decision to write in French.

One possible reason for Beckett's decision to compose Lucien's letter in French could be that his choice of language was guided by his source material. As noted previously, the character of Lucien was based by Beckett upon his friend Jean Beaufret, whom he had come to know while a *lecteur* at the ENS and who, according to Knowlson became so enamoured of Beckett that he 'devoted himself to cultivating

¹²³⁰ viz. "My dear friend" he [= Lucien] said in a low, earnest tone, "please, I implore you, do not, do not apologise. I spent the night up with Liebert, who by the way asks most anxiously after you. We dine together this evening – provided of course" he added in a little gush, cocking up his bright eye, "that that is agreeable to you?" (*Dream*, 33).

the Irishman's friendship, often meeting him unannounced at the station on his return to Paris from Dublin, Vienna, or Kassel, when Beckett had been to visit his ladylove, Peggy Sinclair'.¹²³¹ Knowlson's description of Beaufret meeting Beckett at the train-station on the latter's return from trips to see Peggy Sinclair is worth recalling as it seems to be behind a scene in *Dream*, which does indeed show Lucien meeting Belacqua at the train-station on his return from visiting the Smeraldina-Rima.¹²³² Beaufret's habit of meeting Beckett at the station was, however, not the only testament of the Frenchman's affection that Beckett incorporated into his fictional creation. Nor was it by any means the most interesting.

Evidence for the fictional use to which Beckett put another testament of Beaufret's affection for him is to be found in a letter of March 1931, addressed by Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, in which Beckett informs his friend that he has '[h]ad a rather terrible letter from Beaufret from Berlin'.¹²³³ Beckett's description of the letter that he has received as 'rather terrible' is strikingly similar to the terms used by Belacqua to describe the letter that he receives from Lucien, which is initially described as being 'a *rather unpleasant* letter' and subsequently characterised as being 'a dark and a *rather disagreeable* letter from [sic] one man to get from another'.¹²³⁴ The proximity of the terms used by Beckett to characterise Beaufret's letter and those used by Belacqua to characterise Lucien's suggest there is likely to be some kind of connection between them. The nature of Beaufret's affection for Beckett and the knowledge that this affection is echoed in Lucien's attitude towards Belacqua, meanwhile, allows us to reasonably assume that, if both letters are characterised in much the same terms, it may well be for much the same reason.

Evidence for Beckett's having made fictional use of a love-letter he received from Beaufret is not limited to the proximity of the terms in which these two letters are described, however. Even if Beckett did not base Lucien's letter upon the one he received from Beaufret, for example, we can be sure that he made fictional use of Beaufret's letter elsewhere in *Dream* because the phrase that Belacqua ascribes to Lucien – "'Black diamond of pessimism'"¹²³⁵ – was, as previously noted, derived by

¹²³¹ *DTF*, 152

¹²³² Although the moment of their meeting at the station is not shown, we know that Lucien met Belacqua there as they are described travelling away from the station in a taxi together. While in the taxi, moreover, Belacqua tells Lucien that he 'ought not to have given [him]self the trouble of getting up at this unearthly hour merely in order that [he] might greet [Belacqua] a little earlier than [he] would have in the ordinary course of events' (*Dream*, 32).

¹²³³ *LSB I*, 73 (SB to TMG [11th March, 1931])

¹²³⁴ *Dream*, 19, 22 – Emphasis mine.

¹²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47

Beckett from this very letter.¹²³⁶ Alongside this evidence of Beckett's incorporation of material from Beaufret's 'rather terrible letter' into his novel, we also have evidence of Beckett's having elsewhere modelled another of *Dream's* 'fictional' love-letters on correspondence he received from another of his real-life admirers. The Smeraldina's letter, namely – which appears not only in *Dream* but also, in subtly altered form, in *MPTK* –, has long been known to have been at least partly based on a letter that Beckett received from Peggy Sinclair, who provided the model for the Smeraldina. In his biography, indeed, Knowlson records Beckett as describing the Smeraldina's letter during one of their interviews as having been 'a mixture of fact and fiction'.¹²³⁷ Just as the Smeraldina's 'billet-doux' was based upon a letter Beckett received from Peggy Sinclair, Lucien's *lettre d'amour* is likely to have been based, to a greater or lesser degree, upon a letter that Beckett had received from Beaufret. This being so, and just as Beckett went so far as to imitate Peggy Sinclair's faltering English in the Smeraldina's letter to Belacqua, Lucien's letter may well include material cited verbatim from Beaufret's letter. The difference is that, where Beckett and Sinclair's correspondence was in English – she being obliged to write in her second language by Beckett's complete lack of German –, Beaufret wrote to Beckett in French.¹²³⁸ It is thus possible that, in choosing to include in his novel a letter modelled on the one that he had received from Beaufret, Beckett may also have chosen to compose his fictional letter in the same language, thereby allowing him to draw more easily upon his source material.

And yet, persuasive though the evidence for some kind of link between Beaufret and Lucien's letters may be, there is still better evidence to doubt that Beckett's probable fictional use of a letter he received from Beaufret should have had any determining effect upon the composition of *Dream*.

This evidence is, quite simply, that *Dream* is a work of fiction. The character of Lucien may well be a Frenchman based on a real-life Frenchman, the character of Belacqua may well be an Irish Francophone based on a real-life Irish Francophone – one who shares that real-life Irish Francophone's love of Racine: '[P]reterites and past subjunctives have never since Racine, it seems to me, been exploited poetically to the extent they merit to be', Belacqua tells his friend du Chas at one point, before substantiating his point with a citation from *Phèdre*¹²³⁹ – and Lucien's letter to Belacqua may well be based on a letter from Beaufret to Beckett, but Lucien and

¹²³⁶ viz. 'Had a rather terrible letter from Beaufret from Berlin. He had a beautiful phrase: "le diamant du pessimisme"' (*LSB I*, 73 – SB to TMG [11th March, 1931]).

¹²³⁷ *DTF*, 148

¹²³⁸ The language of the letter is evidenced by the phrase taken from it that Beckett cites to MacGreevy.

¹²³⁹ *Dream*, 144

Belacqua are fictional characters, and Lucien's letter to Belacqua is surely at least as much 'a mixture of fact *and* fiction' as the Smeraldina's. It is already clear, for example, that Beckett made emendations to the circumstances under which the letters were sent and received: Beckett received Beaufret's letter while the latter was in Berlin and he himself was in Paris; Lucien writes to Belacqua from Paris, while Belacqua is visiting the Smeraldina in Austria. The most important evidence of Beckett's willingness to fictionalise – that is, adjust, amend, or otherwise alter – the material that he might have found in Beaufret's letter comes in the form of Beaufret's 'beautiful phrase'. Although Beckett may have found this phrase in Beaufret's letter, it does not appear in Lucien's letter in *Dream*. Certainly, the phrase is still attributed to Beaufret, by virtue of being attributed to his fictional avatar Lucien. The context of its delivery and reception is, however, altered. Rather than being included in the text of Lucien's letter, the phrase is displaced, and attributed to Lucien in such a way that we are led to image Belacqua encountering it in the course of conversation rather than having come across it in a letter.¹²⁴⁰ More importantly still, although Beckett encountered the original phrase in French, he translated it – and partly rephrased it – for the purposes of his novel.

In light of these factors, it may be seen that, to suggest that Beckett committed himself to writing Lucien's letter in French so as to facilitate direct citation of the 'rather terrible letter' he had received from Beaufret, we would need not only to rely on an assumption for which we have no corroborating evidence, but to ignore the evidence that we do have, and which clearly demonstrates Beckett's willingness both to amend the material that he found in Beaufret's letter, and to translate what he found in it from the original French. If we are thus forced to discount the possibility of Beckett's having been obliged to write this letter in French because of the original model upon which it was based, does this mean that Beckett's use of French was entirely a matter of personal choice? Or is there any evidence – textual or otherwise – to justify seeing Beckett's decision to write Lucien's letter in French as a result of negative determination?

There does indeed appear to be evidence that supports seeing Beckett's decision to write this letter in French as a consequence of a particular kind of negative determination. More specifically, and unlike 'Tristesse Janale', where Beckett's choice of language was determined by a desire to preserve the linguistic and narrative coherence of the text in which it appears, Beckett's use of French for Lucien's letter seems to have been a consequence of his desire to see his novel in print. This

¹²⁴⁰ viz. 'It was he who one day let fall nonchalantly, à propos of what we don't happen to know, so nonchalantly that it must have been his and not another's: "Black diamond of pessimism"' (*Dream*, 47).

evidence is to be found, in the first instance, in the text of Lucien's letter itself, which as our earlier examination in Part II demonstrated, is profoundly concerned with male homosexual desire, and which includes a moment of relatively explicit sexual activity between Lucien and Liebert. The importance of homosexuality to this letter is closely aligned with Beckett's decision to compose the letter in French. To understand why this should be, we need only consider certain aspects of *MPTK*, the collection of short-stories that Beckett derived – or, in many respects, extracted – from the carcass of *Dream* after he had seen his novel rejected by enough publishers to know it would never appear in print.

As first published by Chatto and Windus in 1934, *MPTK* included a number of euphemisms. In 'Ding-Dong', for example, we read of 'weary proletarians at rest on B.T.M. and elbow'.¹²⁴¹ In 'A Wet Night', meanwhile, we are informed that the Parabimbi's husband 'had been unable to escort her [to the Frica's party] on account of his being asterisked if he would'.¹²⁴² Finally, in 'Yellow', Belacqua's inability to accept the idea that '[a]t twelve sharp he would be sliced open – zee! – with a bistoury'¹²⁴³ leads him to reject said idea in the following terms: 'Flitter the —, tear it into pieces like a priest'.¹²⁴⁴ In her introduction to the edition of *MPTK* that she prepared for Faber and Faber, from which these citations are derived, Cassandra Nelson alerts us to the fact that, in the Calder and Grove editions of *MPTK*, these euphemisms were uniformly replaced with the terms in whose stead we may assume them to stand: 'arse', 'buggered', and 'fucker', respectively.¹²⁴⁵ In explaining her decision to retain the original euphemisms as these appeared in the Chatto and Windus edition, Nelson contends that 'such a process of making explicit does an injustice to the stories of 1934, by forcing the productions of a more genteel era to conform to standards acceptable in the 1960s and 1970s'.¹²⁴⁶ While I would wholly support Nelson's decision to retain the original euphemisms, this support is certainly not based on the reasoning Nelson advances.¹²⁴⁷ On the contrary, I would question both her characterisation of the stories of *MPTK* as 'the productions of a more genteel

¹²⁴¹ *MPTK*, 36

¹²⁴² *Ibid.*, 59

¹²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151

¹²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 154

¹²⁴⁵ The Grove and Calder readings are cited by Nelson in her introduction to her edition of *MPTK* (*viz. Ibid.*, xix).

¹²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* – The Calder edition of *MPTK* first appeared in 1966 and was reprinted in 1970; Grove's edition, meanwhile, dates from 1970.

¹²⁴⁷ The present writer's support for the retention of the original euphemisms derives from the fact that the Chatto and Windus version of *MPTK* brings us closest to the form in which Beckett's short-story collection was first introduced to (a very small portion of) the book-buying public.

era' and her assertion that, in replacing the original euphemisms with the terms they conceal, Grove and Calder were 'forcing' these texts 'to conform to standards acceptable in the 1960s and 1970s'. Such a characterisation suggests that Beckett's decision to employ euphemisms owed to the fact that both he and his stories, were 'productions of a more genteel era' – an era to which crass terms of the sort that subsequently became acceptable would have been quite alien. Similarly, Nelson's assertion implies that Grove and Calder's editorial decisions constituted a form of violence perpetrated against *MPTK*, forcing it to abandon a gentility of expression that Beckett himself would fully have endorsed.

What such a position ignores, however, is that Beckett – like many a denizen of the 1930s – was perfectly capable of employing such explicit terms in his *private* writings.¹²⁴⁸ In choosing to use 'B.T.M.' in lieu of 'arse', 'asterisked' in lieu of 'buggered', and '—' in lieu of 'fucker', therefore, Beckett may actually be seen as having forced himself to conform to the standards of the era when his texts first appeared, an era during which the British publishers to whom he submitted his collection of short-stories would have been keen to avoid allowing such terms as 'arse', 'buggered', and 'fucker' to appear in print and under their imprint.¹²⁴⁹

To say that contemporary British publishers of the 1930s would have been 'keen' not to print obscene terms such as those deemed acceptable by Calder and Grove is itself a form of euphemism. At the time that Beckett's short-stories first appeared, and for a considerable time afterwards, British publishers, such as Chatto and Windus, were subject to strict laws that meant choosing to print obscene material exposed them to the risk of prosecution. It should be recalled, for example, that, a number of years prior to accepting Beckett's short-stories for publication, Chatto and Windus were one of those British publishers who had rejected D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a novel more intimately associated with the history of censorship

¹²⁴⁸ Amongst those of Beckett's letters dating from the 1930s that appear in *LSB I*, we find no fewer than eight instances of 'arse' (*viz.* *LSB I*, 43, 125, 157, 158, 167, 470, 570, 618) and one instance of 'fucker' (*Ibid.*, 112). Although the exact term 'buggered' does not appear, we do find instances of related terms – namely, 'bugger' (*Ibid.*, 396) and 'M^r Buggeroffski or Buggerin-Andoffski' (*Ibid.*, 44), with the latter example being attributed to Rudmose-Brown.

¹²⁴⁹ To get a sense of the pressures that would have constrained Beckett at the time of *MPTK*'s original publication, we need only consider the example of Allen Walker Read's 'An Obscenity Symbol', a 24-page article that appeared in the journal *American Speech* in 1934 – the same year in which *MPTK* was first published –, of which roughly 11 pages are concerned directly with the word 'fuck': Despite its focus, the word 'fuck' – described by Walker Read as 'the most disreputable of all English words' (Allen Walker Read, 'An Obscenity Symbol', in *American Speech* [Vol. 9, No. 4 – December, 1934], 267) – does not appear once in his article.

in the UK than any other.¹²⁵⁰ Commenting on Chatto and Windus' rejection of Lawrence's novel, John Sutherland has noted that, in refusing to publish *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, publishers such as Chatto and Windus were being, not hypocritical – as Lawrence himself imagined¹²⁵¹ – but 'entirely prudent'.¹²⁵² Such a response was prudent because, as Sutherland explains,

No one but a fool or a martyr would have tried to bring out the untrimmed *Chatterley* in England [at the time]. As late as 1955, an English magistrate sentenced a Hornsey retailer to two-months imprisonment for handling the novel. In 1930, a similarly reckless businessman would have been breaking stones for years.¹²⁵³

Although Beckett is almost certain to have been unaware of Chatto and Windus' rejection of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he would no doubt have been fully cognisant of the fact that Joyce's *Ulysses* had been banned in the UK on the grounds of obscenity since 1922.¹²⁵⁴ It thus seems more probable that Beckett's own decision to employ euphemisms in his text should be seen, not as a consequence of either his or his era's 'gentility', but rather as a pre-emptive attempt on the part of a would-be author to satisfy the demands of the censor whom his text would need to satisfy if it was ever to make its way into print.

The foregoing consideration of British publishing in the 1930s and its influence upon Beckett's use of euphemisms for English-language obscenities may initially strike some readers as having very little to do with the question at hand – namely, Beckett's decision to compose Lucien's letter in French. These issues are, however, very closely aligned. To see this why this should be we need only recall that euphemism is, in essence, a means of occlusion, whereby one (acceptable) term is made to stand for something that, if clearly displayed, would be wholly unacceptable. More importantly, we need to recall that euphemism can take many forms. Those euphemisms used by Beckett in *MPTK* that have already been examined, in fact, show Beckett to have been quite inventive in hiding his offensive material from view, since each of the three, previously-mentioned euphemisms occludes material in a slightly

¹²⁵⁰ Andrew Harrison, *The Life of D.H. Lawrence: A Critical Biography* (Chichester, Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell 2016), 358

¹²⁵¹ Sutherland cites Lawrence's assertion that, in rejecting his novel, publishers were "trying to cover their nakedness with 'great patches of beauty' and sighing, 'It's a great pity'" (John Sutherland, *Offensive Literature: Decensorship in Britain, 1960-1982* [Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983], 10)

¹²⁵² *Ibid.*

¹²⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁴ In 1934, *Ulysses* had only recently been found not to be obscene by a US court, and it would still be two years before its first UK publication in 1936 (*viz.* David Bradshaw, 'Ulysses and obscenity' <<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/ulysses-and-obscenity>> [accessed: 18th January, 2018]).

different way: 'B.T.M.' replaces 'arse' with the abbreviation of a synonymous term; 'asterisked' replaces 'buggered' with a verbalisation of the symbol (i.e. '***') that might equally have been used to replace the obscene term; '—', finally, replaces 'fucker' with another commonly used euphemistic symbol. These three possibilities, however, are not the only ones available to the English-language writer who wishes to move unacceptable material out of plain sight whilst keeping it in view. Another method of obscuring obscenity, and perhaps the most interesting of all, is the use of a foreign language.

This particular form of euphemism is nicely illustrated by an earlier Loeb Classical Library edition of Martial's *Epigrams*, which provided the reader of Martial's non-obscene Latin with an English-language translation by Walter C. A. Ker. The reader of Martial's obscene epigrams, however, was presented with the Italian-language translations of Giuspanio Graglia.¹²⁵⁵ A key difference between this translational method of euphemism and those that Beckett is already noted to have deployed in *MPTK* is that, unlike those methods, which replace potentially offensive terms with more acceptable but potentially unclear equivalents, the translational method of euphemism simply substitutes one form of obscenity for another, albeit a form of obscenity that is imagined to be less readily apparent, and thus less obviously offensive, to the general – and generally monoglot – public. In this regard, the translational method is infinitely preferable to any of the other three that Beckett is noted to have made use of in *MPTK* since, unlike them, it does not oblige the writer to either omit terms or bowdlerise their material. It is for precisely this reason that it was employed in the Loeb edition of Martial to which was previously referred. The translational method of euphemism, in fact, was not the only one employed by the editor of the Loeb Martial. On the contrary, as made clear in the introduction, '[a]ll epigrams possible of translation by the use of dashes or paraphrases have been rendered in English, the wholly impossible ones only in Italian'.¹²⁵⁶ Giuspanio Graglia's Italian-language translations, in other words, were only provided for those epigrams whose obscenity was a constituent part of their meaning and which would thus have been rendered entirely meaningless if the translator had been obliged either to resort to dashes every time an unsavoury term occurred or to paraphrase away the

¹²⁵⁵ This approach was by no means unprecedented: In the introduction to the Loeb edition, it is made clear that very same approach was adopted by the edition published in Bohn's "Classical Library", which provided the reader with the very same Italian-language translations of Martial's obscene verse (*viz.* Martial, *Epigrams, with an English translation by Walter C. A. Ker, M.A. (Vol. I)* [London; New York: William Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1919], xx).

¹²⁵⁶ Martial, *Epigrams, with an English translation by Walter C. A. Ker, M.A.*, xvi [n.3]

offending material. By using Italian, it was possible to leave both the meaning of Martial's verse and the moral decency of Anglophone readers untroubled.¹²⁵⁷

I would suggest that it is for much the same reasons that motivated those behind the Loeb edition of Martial's *Epigrams* to provide their readers with Giuspanio Graglia's 18th-century Italian-language translations of the Latin poet's obscene verse that Beckett provided his reader with a French-language version of Lucien's letter. Had he written this letter in English, it would have been impossible for him to deal with homosexuality in as explicit a fashion as he could in French. Obviously, there are counter-arguments that might be presented against such a suggestion, the first of these being that, rather than composing his letter in French, Beckett might simply have chosen to make its content less explicit. To argue this, however, would be to ignore that Beckett's relatively frank treatment of homosexuality in the letter was not simply intended to shock. On the contrary, as demonstrated in Part II, the homosexuality that we find in Lucien's letter plays an important role in the architecture of the novel in which it appears, where it works in tandem with the explicit focus on heterosexual desire in the Smeraldina's letter to reveal to the reader that Belacqua is opposed to sexuality of any and all varieties. To make his point clearly, Beckett had to be able to make clear to his reader that Lucien's letter was an expression of his desire for Belacqua every bit as intense as what we find in the Smeraldina's 'billet-doux'. Writing the text in French allowed him to do this because, while Beckett knew it would have been entirely impossible to find a British publisher who would have been willing to publish a text in which one character informs another that 'He's so dashing, this friend of yours, such an utterly unabashed cock-sucker, that I'm ready to fall for him', there was good reason to believe the same publishers would be more amenable to accepting its French-language equivalent.¹²⁵⁸ Crucially for the argument that is being made here, we are not reliant upon comparison with the Loeb edition of Martial. One of Beckett's own publications in fact provides us with proof of his utilisation of this

¹²⁵⁷ An example of such a text is epigram LXII of Book 2: 'Quod pectus, quod crura tibi, quod bracchia vellis, quod cincta est brevibus mentula tonsa pilis, hoc praestas, Labiene, tuae (quis nescit?) amicae. cui praestas, culum quod, Labiene, pilas?' (*Ibid.*, 144). The very meaning of this text – namely, that Labienus epilates his front-side for his mistress, and his backside for his male lover – is such that it cannot be allowed to enter English whole and intact, since to do so would be to raise the spectre of sodomy, while the obfuscation of the most offending terms ('mentula' and 'culum'), would leave the reader with a meaningless text. Hence, we are provided with a translation that leaves both the text's allusion to sodomy, and offensive terms, unobscured: 'Il perche ti dissetoli il petto, le gambe, le braccia, il perche la rasa tua mentola è cinta di curti peli, chi non sa che tutto questo, O Labieno, prepari per la tua amica? Per chi, O Labieno, prepari tu il culo che dissetoli?' (*Ibid.*, 145).

¹²⁵⁸ The phrase offered here is a translation of a remark, made by Liebert with regard to Belacqua, and included in Lucien's letter: 'Il est si beau, ton ami, si franchement casse-poitrinaire que je suis prêt à l'aimer' (*Dream*, 20).

translation form of euphemism. Not only that, but the proof in question comes in the form of a text that Beckett published with Chatto and Windus – the very publisher to which Beckett submitted the manuscript of *Dream*¹²⁵⁹ – and which thus demonstrates that Chatto and Windus was perfectly willing to publish material every bit as explicit as what we find in *Dream* in French, and to publish material in Spanish that is a great deal more explicit than what is to be found in Beckett’s first novel.

The publication in which this evidence is to be found is the very same 1934 version of *MPTK* to which has already been referred. As previously noted, Beckett’s first-published short-story collection emerged directly out of his inability to find a publisher for *Dream*.¹²⁶⁰ Amongst those parts of *Dream* that Beckett decided to salvage from his first novel, two are of particular interest because they constitute examples of precisely the same form of translational euphemism that I have here suggested determined Beckett’s decision to compose Lucien’s letter in French. Both of the examples in question are instances of rhymed verse, both are in languages other than English – namely, (Old) French and Spanish –, and both are obscene.

As they appear in *MPTK*, both of these poems are to be found in the story ‘A Wet Night’ and, in each case, the material concerned has been carried over essentially unchanged from *Dream*. The French text, for example, is to be found in exactly the same form in *Dream* and in the original, Chatto and Windus edition of *MPTK*:

Toutes êtes, serez ou fûtes, De fait ou de volonté, putes, Et qui bien vous chercheroit Toutes putes vous trouveroit. ¹²⁶¹	Toutes êtes, serez ou fûtes, De fait ou de volonté, putes, Et qui bien vous chercheroit Toutes putes vous trouveroit. ¹²⁶²
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The only differences that are to be observed between the Spanish text as it appears in *Dream* and the version appearing in the Chatto and Windus *MPTK*, meanwhile, are those necessitated by the emendation of Beckett’s incorrect Spanish:

No me jodas en el suelo como se [<i>sic</i>] fuera una perra, que con esos cojonazos me echas en el cono [<i>sic</i>] tierra... ¹²⁶³	No me jodas en el suelo Como si fuera una perra, Que con esos cojonazos Me echas en el coño tierra. ¹²⁶⁴
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¹²⁵⁹ In a letter to George Reavey, Beckett made irritable mention of having submitted *Dream* to Chatto and Windus, and their rejection of same: ‘The novel doesn’t go. Shatton & Windup thought it was wonderful but they couldn’t they simply could not’ (*LSB I*, 125 – SB to George Reavey [8th October, 1932]).

¹²⁶⁰ For details of the financial pressures that drove Beckett to extract *MPTK* from *Dream*, see Chapter 3 below.

¹²⁶¹ *Dream*, 231

¹²⁶² Samuel Beckett, ‘A Wet Night’, in *MPTK* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), 103

¹²⁶³ *Dream*, 209

¹²⁶⁴ Samuel Beckett, ‘A Wet Night’, in *MPTK* (1934), 73

Obviously, there are differences between these texts and Lucien's letter. Firstly, and as some readers may recognise, neither of these texts is Beckett's own composition: The French-language text, as has already been noted in Part II, derives from Jean de Meun's continuation of Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose* by way of William M. Cooper, *Flagellation and the Flagellants*; the Spanish-language text, meanwhile, is an obscene Spanish *jota*, the oldest-recorded version of which is found in the work of 18th-century Spanish poet Tomás de Iriarte, and which Beckett is most likely to have been introduced to by Ethna MacCarthy.¹²⁶⁵ Equally, each text is substantially shorter than Lucien's letter. Such differences, however, are of less importance than what these texts share with Lucien's letter – that is, their explicit character.

In terms of explicitness, in fact, both of these texts go somewhat beyond Lucien's letter: The instance of 'pute' that we find in the French-language verse, though it would perhaps have been less shocking to the sensibilities of Beckett's intended audience than the implied homosexual encounter in Lucien's letter, is yet more obviously obscene than even the more *risqué* moments of Lucien's letter. The Spanish *jota*, meanwhile, is not only so explicit as to make Lucien's letter seem perfectly tame by comparison, it is also explicit enough that some contemporary publications might shy away from publishing its English-language translation.¹²⁶⁶ The fact that texts such as these were included in the Chatto and Windus *MPTK* serves to prove that Beckett's use of French for Lucien's letter was a valid, and viable, euphemistic strategy. By using a language other than English, he would have been able to introduce into his narrative thematically-significant material that would otherwise have been thought too obscene to appear in print. Not only do these examples serve to demonstrate the viability of Beckett's strategy of euphemism by translation, they also serves to demonstrate why, having chosen to pursue this strategy, he could only pursue it in French.

¹²⁶⁵ As previously remarked, MacCarthy – upon whom the Alba was based – was a gifted student of Spanish. The fact that this *jota* is ascribed to the Alba in the text, and that Beckett himself was unable to distinguish between 'se' and 'si', and 'cono' and 'coño', strongly implies that he is incorporating material he had obtained from, and thus associated with, Ethna MacCarthy, rather than providing a citation of a poem he came across in his own reading. Had Beckett been citing a text that he fully understood, he would not have made the errors that we find in *Dream*; had he been citing material from a volume close at hand, meanwhile, he would have been in a position to quote accurately from said volume, as he did from Cooper's *Flagellation and the Flagellants*.

¹²⁶⁶ Preserving its explicit material, the *jota* may be translated as follows: 'Don't fuck me on the ground / as if I were a bitch, / because with those stonking great balls / you sweep [OR throw] dirt into my cunt'. (I would like to express my sincere thanks to Alexandre Guilarte, of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, for his assistance with this translation.)

Although there is a tendency in Beckett Studies to speak, at times somewhat breathlessly, of Beckett's linguistic abilities – as when Matthew Feldman evokes 'Beckett's French, Italian, Latin and German fluency (not to mention a variable amount of Gaelic [*sic*], Spanish, Latin [*sic*] and Greek)¹²⁶⁷ –, it should be recalled that, when he was working on *Dream* and the stories of *MPTK*, the list of those languages in which Beckett possessed advanced, or even tentative, fluency was substantially shorter than it would become in the fullness of time. His knowledge of German, for example, despite regular visits to the Sinclairs and his relationship with the German-speaking Peggy Sinclair, remained confined to isolated words and such expressions as could be conveyed with minimally complicated syntax.¹²⁶⁸ Similarly, though he would begin studying Spanish in 1933, the errors that are to be found in the *Dream* version of the *jota* prove that he was not yet in any way proficient in the language. In the early 1930s, in fact, the list of those languages upon which Beckett might draw in his writing was confined to English, French, Italian and Latin. Of these four languages, his knowledge of Latin would certainly not have been sufficient to allow him to compose an extended piece of original writing in it. Moreover, even if his Latin had been up to the task, the intrusion of a letter written in a dead language into the narrative space of Beckett's fiction would obviously have been every bit as problematic as writing Jean du Chas' poetry in English would have been. Similar biographical and narrative justifications can be found for Beckett's decision not to compose the entirety of Lucien's letter in Italian.

From a purely biographical standpoint, by the time he began working on *Dream*, it had been almost five years since Beckett stopped studying Italian. Having spent two of those years living in France, and having not travelled to Italy since he returned from his 1927 trip there, it is likely that Beckett would not have felt confident enough in his Italian to compose an entire letter in it for the purposes of his novel.¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁷ Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 125 – Pace Feldman, Beckett had no Irish whatsoever, nor any knowledge of the language beyond what he may have acquired from better-informed acquaintances. For evidence of Beckett's lack of Irish, see Part I, Chapter 1.

¹²⁶⁸ Like his Spanish, the limits of Beckett's German in the early 1930s are well-evidenced in the text of *Dream*. There, Belacqua attempts to calm the ardour of the Smeraldina by speaking to her in a German decidedly more risible than the English in which she will later express her love for him: 'Nicht küssen...bevor der Zug hält' (*Dream*, 30).

¹²⁶⁹ During the time between leaving TCD and beginning work on *Dream*, Beckett had admittedly worked on translations from Italian that appeared in *This Quarter*, but he is not known to have composed any original literary writing in this language – For a thorough discussion of Beckett's Italian and its role in his writings, see Doireann Lalor, "'The Italianate Irishman': The Role of Italian in Beckett's Intratextual Multilingualism" in Erik Tønning, Matthew Feldman, Matthijs Engelberts, and Dirk Van Hulle (eds), *SBT/A 22* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2010), 51-65.

Even had he felt confident enough in his Italian to compose a letter in that language, moreover, the choice of this language would have been at odds with the character of Lucien, whom we know to be French but who is at no point connected with Italy or Italian culture. Although composing his letter in Italian would thus have served Beckett's euphemistic aims equally well, ascribing to Lucien a letter written entirely in Italian would not have made narrative sense. (Although a letter composed entirely in Italian would not have been in keeping with the character of Lucien as he is established by the text, it is worthy of note that Lucien's letter does include some Italian: As he looks out of the window on the dawn that blooms over Paris, he describes himself as 'dominando l'orgasmo'.¹²⁷⁰ Although the true motivations for Beckett's decision to deploy Italian at precisely this point of his letter must remain obscure, some possible explanations may be offered: The first, in line with the euphemistic aims of his decision to write the letter in French, would be that 'orgasmo', though still recognisably a term for orgasm, is slightly further away from the English term than the French equivalent – i.e. *orgasme*. The second, and perhaps more likely, explanation is that this particular use of Italian is intended to evoke the use made of Italian in music, where Italian terms instruct the player in how a passage should be performed. Such an explanation would ally Lucien's use of Italian both with the other instances of Italian-derived musical terminology that are to be found in *Dream* – including, 'da capo'¹²⁷¹ and 'tremolo'¹²⁷², among many others – and with the broader association between music and sexuality that we find in Beckett's early fiction.¹²⁷³) Composing a letter in French, on the other hand – a language in which Beckett was more competent than he was in Italian, and in which the character of Lucien would obviously have been fluent – allowed Beckett to fully realise his narrative aims while also providing him with the necessary euphemistic force of a foreign language.

In light of the factors outlined above, it may be observed that what initially appeared to be Beckett's positively-determined – that is, entirely personal – choice to compose Lucien's letter in French was actually a more complex response to negative and positive determinations, one that was arrived at in consequence of a number of external factors. Once Beckett had made this decision to compose Lucien's letter in French his decision to compose 'C'n'est au Pélican' in the same language may be explained as a consequence of much the same forces that led him to compose

¹²⁷⁰ *Dream*, 21

¹²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 200, 235

¹²⁷² *Ibid.*, 113, 138

¹²⁷³ This connection between music and sexuality is identified by Mary Bryden (*viz.* Mary Bryden, 'Gender in Beckett's Music Machine', in Lois Oppenheim and Marius Buning [eds], *Beckett On and On...* [London: Associated UP, 1996], 37).

'Tristesse Janale' in that language. Admittedly, the circumstances are not quite the same: Unlike the Jean du Chas of 'Le Concentrisme', Lucien is shown to be perfectly capable of expressing himself in English – addressing Belacqua in this language on their way back from the station – and it is thus not beyond the realms of possibility that he should have quoted a poem in English.¹²⁷⁴ Nonetheless, it must be recalled that 'C'n'est au Pélican' is nested within a French-language text. By choosing to present the poem in English, therefore, Beckett would have troubled the narrative coherence of the Francophone space that he had gone to such pains to create. Moreover, by presenting 'C'n'est au Pélican' in the French letter, he would potentially have undone the very euphemistic purpose that writing Lucien's letter in French was supposed to serve. 'C'n'est au Pélican' is a poem in which a speaker evokes 'la cause désespérée / qui a l'air d'être la [sienne]' and specifically mentions having 'adororé la dépouille' of Saint Jude. Although the nature of the speaker's 'cause' is left unclear, and the precise quality of his *adoration* rendered obscure by virtue of being expressed through a neologism, there is a distinct possibility that, had it been expressed in English, this poem's despairing tone and the (potentially) adoring attitude that it expresses towards the bodily remains of another male, might have led Anglophone readers to precisely those conclusions that the use of French was supposed to prevent them arriving at. (Indeed, such Anglophone readers would have been especially likely to find in this poem homosexual undertones given that the letter in which it appears – even if they could not understand a word of it – was described as 'a dark and rather disagreeable letter from [*sic*] one man to get from another'.¹²⁷⁵) It therefore seems likely that, for both the coherence of his narrative and the coherence of his euphemistic strategy, Beckett was obliged to address himself, not to the Pelican, but 'au Pélican'.

That external factors should have played a role in Beckett's decision to turn to French when writing Lucien's letter – and, by extension, 'C'n'est au Pélican' – is entirely unsurprising given that the novel in which both of these texts feature was composed, not as a personal exercise, but with the intention that it would be set before public eyes. More particularly, and unlike either 'Le Concentrisme' or 'Tristesse Janale', Lucien's letter and 'C'n'est au Pélican' were written with an eye to publication. Admittedly, Mark Nixon has suggested that, in writing *Dream*, Beckett 'must have

¹²⁷⁴ Indeed, I would contend that the fact Lucien is elsewhere shown to speak English goes some way towards confirming that Beckett's decision to compose Lucien's letter in French was motivated by a desire to shield the more 'offensive' elements of that letter from view.

¹²⁷⁵ *Dream*, 22 – Emphasis mine.

known [it] would never get published'.¹²⁷⁶ The surviving evidence, however, all seems to confirm that, at the time of composition, Beckett fully believed his first novel would eventually be published. Moreover, and although it may be obvious to contemporary readers that this novel was never likely to have found favour with prospective publishers, Beckett did succeed in publishing at least part of the novel with *transition*.¹²⁷⁷ Equally, Beckett was evidently prepared to submit *Dream* to a number of publishers, and to endure a number of rejections, before he admitted to himself that *Dream* would not appear in print.¹²⁷⁸ Even then, indeed, the fact that so much of *MPTK* would be derived from *Dream* proves that, even after the rejections, Beckett continued to be driven by a strong conviction that much of what he had written was worthy of publication.

In this respect, the example of these latter texts is particularly important because it serves to remind us that the writer who hopes to see their work appear in print may be influenced by the probable constraints associated with publication. Naturally, the writer is never *obliged* to respect these constraints. In the case of *Dream*, for example, Beckett could easily have chosen to ignore the dangers associated with including in his first novel an explicit treatment of homosexuality and written Lucien's letter in English. Doing so, however, would have carried obvious risks of which Beckett could not help but be aware given that, only a few years previously, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, initially published by Jonathan Cape, had subsequently been judged obscene and banned on precisely the grounds that, in the opinion of the presiding magistrate, the novel was found to 'defend unnatural practices between women, and...glorify them'.¹²⁷⁹ While homosexuality is less integral to the architecture of Beckett's *Dream* than it was to Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, the same threat would, at the time, have hung over any text that broached the subject of homosexuality with relative frankness and moderate acceptance, as does Beckett's novel, and all the more so when the form of homosexuality in question was that between men.¹²⁸⁰

¹²⁷⁶ Mark Nixon, "'Silly Business' – Beckett and the World of Publishing", in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 2

¹²⁷⁷ A section of the novel appeared under the title 'Sedendo et Quiescendo' in *transition* 21.

¹²⁷⁸ In addition to Chatto and Windus, who had published *Proust*, Beckett also submitted *Dream* to the Hogarth Press and Jonathan Cape (*viz.* *DTF*, 162-63)

¹²⁷⁹ Sir Chartres Biron, Chief Magistrate, 'Judgement', in Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (eds), *Palatable poison: Critical perspectives on The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001), 41

¹²⁸⁰ Providing his judgement on *The Well of Loneliness*, the presiding magistrate drew attention to just this distinction between male and female homosexuality when he noted that Hall's novel 'involve[d] acts which between men would be a criminal offence' (*Ibid.*, 41-42).

This question of the treatment accorded to the theme of homosexuality is important because, in the case of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, it was the *treatment* of this theme, and not the theme itself, that rendered Hall's work 'obscene'. Thus, while the presiding magistrate at the obscenity trial for her novel noted in his judgement that the publication of her novel was 'an offence against public decency, an obscene libel', he yet stressed that he could imagine a treatment of the topic of homosexuality – at least between women – that would not be guilty of obscenity.¹²⁸¹ Such a treatment, as he described it, would deal with the subject as

a tragedy, the tragedy being that there may be people so afflicted who try their best to fight against this horrible vice, find themselves impelled in that direction or unable to resist those tendencies, with the result of the moral and physical degradation which indulgence in those vices must necessarily involve.¹²⁸²

Though Belacqua may deem Lucien's letter to be 'unpleasant', 'dark', and 'disagreeable', there is no sense that Belacqua deems Lucien, or his desires, to be a tragedy, whether for Lucien himself, his associates, or society at large. Moreover, we are never given the sense that Belacqua considers breaking off his friendship with Lucien once he has learned of his desires. On the contrary, amongst the trio comprised by Lucien, Liebert, and the Syra-Cusa, Lucien is subsequently described as being 'the least noxious'.¹²⁸³ More significantly still, and as has already been pointed out, the homosexuality we find in Lucien's letter is not denigrated. Or, at least, not denigrated on account of its being *homosexuality*. Rather, Lucien's sexual desire for Belacqua is placed on an equal footing with that of the Smeraldina, and both of them seem equally comfortable in their sexuality. It is in Belacqua's eyes only that sexuality is undesirable and, for him, both homosexual and heterosexual desire are equally undesirable.

In addition to the particular legal dangers of dealing overtly with homosexuality in *Dream*, we must also be mindful of what were then the potentially more far-reaching consequences for any writer who broached such a topic in a work of fiction. The danger of dealing directly with homosexuality – or, indeed, with any topic that was held to be utterly unacceptable at the time – would not have been confined to the risk of seeing a single novel judged obscene. Rather, the author of any such work was likely, at least in the English-speaking world, to carry with them a whiff of sulphur that might tarnish their future career prospects.¹²⁸⁴ Such reputational

¹²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 49

¹²⁸² *Ibid.*, 42

¹²⁸³ *Dream*, 46

¹²⁸⁴ It was for precisely these reasons that D.H. Lawrence's literary agent, Curtis Brown, were so incensed by his decision to privately publish an unexpurgated text of

concerns were by no means unimportant to Beckett, even in the relatively early days of his career. This is something that Beckett demonstrated through his response to Jack Kahane's proposition that he translate Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*.¹²⁸⁵

Despite Sade's text being a work that he admired greatly, Beckett was extremely reluctant to accept Kahane's proposition.¹²⁸⁶ The reason for Beckett's reluctance was precisely the fact that he '[didn]t know what effect it w[oul]d. have on [his] lit[erary]. situation in England or how it might prejudice further publications of [his] own there'.¹²⁸⁷ The fact that Beckett did eventually accept, in principal, the proposal to work on the translation project should not lead us to underestimate the sincerity of his concerns for the damage that he might be doing to his future publishing prospects by taking on such a project, however. The terms in which Beckett commented on his acceptance make clear that he remained extremely reluctant to undertake the work even after he had agreed to do so:

I have accepted the Sade translation at 150 francs per 1000 [words]. He [= Jack Kahane] wants to postpone for 3 or 4 months. I have written saying that I can't guarantee being of the same mind then, or having the time to spare. No contract therefore yet.¹²⁸⁸

In reading the terms in which Beckett expressed his acceptance of Kahane's proposal it seems most likely that Beckett had been driven to accept the translation, not because he had ceased to care about the potential dangers such work posed to his burgeoning career as an English-language writer, but because the financial situation in

Lady's Chatterley's Lover: Such a publication, they felt, 'might jeopardise his sales elsewhere' (Andrew Harrison, *The Life of D.H. Lawrence: A Critical Biography*, 358).¹²⁸⁵ In 'Becoming Beckett', Pascale Sardin too draws attention to the manner in which Beckett's response to the prospective Sade translation reveals his awareness of the larger literary systems in which he moved, and the impact these systems could have upon his career (*viz.* Pascale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30*, 77-78). The discussion of Beckett's attitude to translating Sade that is offered here equally benefited from an earlier version of Sardin's article, which took the form of a paper delivered as part of DRAFF, a conference held at TCD in August, 2016.

¹²⁸⁶ In a letter to George Reavey, Beckett spoke of Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* as nothing less than 'one of the capital works of the 18th century' (*LSB I*, 604 - SB to George Reavey [20th February 1938]).

¹²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* – Beckett subsequently made the same point, at greater length, in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy: 'I know all about the obloquy. What I don't know about is the practical effect on my own future freedom of literary action in England & USA. Would the fact of my being known as the translator, & the very literal translation, of "the most utter filth" tend to spike me as a writer myself? Could I be banned & muzzled retrospectively?' (*LSB I*, 607-8 – SB to TMG [21st February, 1938]).

¹²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 610 (SB to George Reavey [8th March, 1938]) – The translation of Sade envisioned by Kahane would eventually be published by his son, Maurice Girodias, and would be the work of Austryn Wainhouse. Wainhouse, evidently every bit as conscious of the potential reputational damage that he might be doing himself, chose to use the pseudonym Pieralessandro Casavini (*viz. Ibid.*, 611 [n.3]).

which he found himself did not permit him to forgo such a potentially lucrative job. Although Beckett claimed in his initial letter to Reavey that the money attached to the translation work were unimportant – ‘150,000 words at 150 francs per 1000 is better than a poem by AE, but doesn’t really enter as an element into the problem’¹²⁸⁹ –, Beckett’s letters to Thomas MacGreevy on the subject of this translation reveal the key role played by Beckett’s financial concerns in determining his decision to tentatively accept the Sade translation. In the first of those letters to MacGreevy, as part of explaining those forces that might lead him to take on the translation, Beckett placed his interest in Sade and his need for ready cash on the same level: ‘Though I am interested in Sade & have been for a long time, and want the money badly, I would really rather not [take on the translation]’.¹²⁹⁰ In the second, meanwhile, Beckett made clear that he had made his work on the translation subject to two conditions, of which the first (i.e. the right to write a preface to the work) was motivated by his reputational concerns, and the second (i.e. that ‘[he] should be paid 150 fr per 1000 words irrespective of the state of the £’¹²⁹¹) was motivated by his desire to ensure he derived sufficient financial benefit from his work.¹²⁹²

Not only does an awareness of Beckett’s financial need make his provisional agreement to translate Sade for Kahane more comprehensible, it also serves to clarify the precise terms in which Beckett expressed his reluctant acceptance in the letter to George Reavey of March 1938, from which has already been cited: In accepting Kahane’s offer, Beckett had not simply decided to disregard his worries on the subject of what translating Sade might mean for his own career as a writer. Rather, he had come to the conclusion that, on balance, the prospect of blackening his name in the eyes of potential publishers in the UK and the US was a less pressing concern than the financial situation in which he found himself in Paris, as he combed the city for a place to live at a price he could afford.¹²⁹³ By stipulating that he ‘[couldn]’t guarantee being of the same mind’ in ‘3 or 4 months’, however, Beckett showed that he remained deeply concerned about the possible damage he could be doing to himself by

¹²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 605 (SB to George Reavey [20th February, 1938])

¹²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 605 [n.4 – citing SB to TMG (11th February, 1938)]

¹²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 607 (SB to TMG [21st February, 1938])

¹²⁹² In the same letter to MacGreevy, Beckett laid stress on what he saw as the crucial role of the preface in limiting the danger that working on Sade’s text could pose to his own career: ‘The preface is important because it enables me to make my attitude clear’ (*Ibid.*, 608).

¹²⁹³ *viz.* ‘I have started again to look for a room and have combed most of the 14^{me}. There is hardly anything to be had. A few studios at prices I can’t afford [...] There is a new house in the Rue [de l’]Amiral Mouchez with rooms with hot & cold & heating for 2000 [francs]. A low locality but nevertheless. I shall look at a room there next Tuesday and if it is at all possible shall move there provisionally. And even if it is not I shall leave the Liberia, because it is too dear & there is no light’ (*LSB I*, 606-7 – SB to TMG [21st February, 1938]).

translating Sade and so, if his financial situation improved in the meantime, he would no longer be willing to jeopardise his career prospects for the sake of 150 francs per 1,000 words.

Beckett's appreciation of his work as a literary commodity whose value in the eyes of potential publishers could be negatively affected by his own reputation is worthy of note not only because it adds some additional weight to the argument that has just be advanced concerning Beckett's reasons for composing Lucien's letter in French, but also because it testifies, on Beckett's part, to a clear-eyed perception of the realities of the literary marketplace. Certainly, Beckett was a writer who could, by times, demonstrate a clear affinity with Romantic notions of literature and literary production – as, for instance, when he revealed to Thomas MacGreevy that he had thought a poem 'was of little worth because it did not represent a necessity'¹²⁹⁴ –, but he was also someone who appreciated the realities of life as a writer. Or, more particularly, life as a *published* writer. The private writer is always free to write, and to write however they choose: On whatever topic and in whatever style. The writer who wishes to be published, however, is not always quite so free. The writer who wishes to be published – particularly the relatively unknown writer who wishes to be published and have their work recognised as their own¹²⁹⁵ – may have to pay greater attention to their choice of topic, or their choice of style. They are never *obliged* to, but an awareness of these factors may help them to more readily secure publication, if that is indeed their aim. The bilingual, or multilingual, writer who wishes to be published, moreover, faces yet another question. For, while they may be free in private to write in whatever language they choose, the prospect of publication is necessarily conditioned by access to publishers who are ready, willing, and able to publish materials in particular languages.

In the chapters that follow, it will be argued that, where Beckett's earliest use of French was governed either by a desire to amuse himself, narrative coherence, or

¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133 (SB to TMG [18th October, 1932]) – For a fuller treatment of Beckett's affinities with Romanticism, see the articles on 'Beckett and Romanticism' collected as part of Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon (eds), *SBT/A 18: "All Sturm and no Drang": Beckett and Romanticism; Beckett at Reading 2006* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007).

¹²⁹⁵ Every bit as interesting as Beckett's reluctance to translate Sade on the grounds of the effect such work might have on his future publication prospects is his unwillingness to entertain the idea of using a pseudonym – as, has been noted, did the eventual translator. Beckett is categorical that he 'wouldn't do it without putting [his] name to it' (*LSB I*, 604 – SB to George Reavey [20th February, 1938]). Although Beckett would be willing to translate anonymously at other points in his career, it is clear that, in the case of the Sade translation – that is, a lengthy work that Beckett felt to be of great literary merit –, he was every bit as eager that his efforts as a translator be recognised as that these same efforts should not negatively impact his work as a writer.

the need to obscure potentially offensive material, Beckett's subsequent use of French – that is to say, both his pre- and post-War linguistic turns – were governed by his keen desire to see his work in print and the realities of those literary marketplaces in which he found himself.

PART III: Beckett's Turn(s) to French

Chapter 2

Beckett's Use of French in the (Pre-)War Period (1930-1944): 1937-44

Thus far, our discussion of Beckett's reasons for turning to French has primarily been concerned with the literary texts that were examined in Part II. This is because, prior to Beckett's 1937 move to Paris – and excepting letters written in French –, the only texts of his own that Beckett is known to have composed in French were those (pseudo-)literary texts that he composed directly in that language.¹ After his move to Paris, however, Beckett began turning to French for a much wider variety of purposes. Following the pre-War linguistic turn of 1938 and up to the period of the Occupation and the years that Beckett was obliged to spend in Roussillon, he not only composed original literary texts in French – these being primarily poems, as stressed in Part II – but also an aesthetic essay in French ('Les Deux Besoins'), and he worked at translating into French some of those original literary writings that he had composed in English ('Love and Lethe', *Murphy*). In addition to these texts, and as previously noted, Beckett may even have composed his first radio 'sketch', for Paris-Mondial, in French during these years.

Diverse though Beckett's French-language productions over this period may have been, it will be argued in this chapter that Beckett's decision to turn to French during this period of his career – whether for the composition of original works, or the translation of his existing writings – cannot be fully understood without paying due regard to the influence of external forces which determined Beckett's use of French in a variety of ways. Since the surviving evidence suggests that it was through his decision to begin writing poetry in French that these forces were most directly felt by Beckett and with poetry that Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn began, it is with this French-language poetry that we too will begin.

¹ Obviously, during Beckett's time in Paris at the start of the 1930s, he also worked with Alfred Péron on the French-language translation of Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle'. As a translation, however, it does not fall within the purview of the present thesis – For a discussion of this translation, see Megan M. Quigley, 'Justice for the "Illstarred Punster": Samuel Beckett and Alfred Péron's Revisions of "Anna Lyvia Pluratsel"', in *James Joyce Quarterly* (Vol. 41, No. 3 – Spring, 2004), 469-48; For the text of this translation, see James Joyce, 'Anna Lyvia Plurabelle', trans. by Samuel Beckett and Alexis Péron, in Jacques Aubert and Fritz Senn (eds), *Cahier de l'Herne : James Joyce* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1985), 417-422.

I. BECKETT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE POETRY (1938-44)

As demonstrated in Part II, critical engagement with the *Poèmes 37-39* has long been hampered by a conviction, deriving from the LSH, that Beckett's pre-War turn to French was a turn to a language that restricted him stylistically and thus necessarily led him to compose 'relatively straightforward' poems. Through close reading of Beckett's French-language verse of the late 1930s, we demonstrated these poems to be more complex than has generally been assumed. Simply demonstrating the complexity of Beckett's pre-War French language verse, however, does not bring us any closer to answering the question of *why* Beckett came to write that verse in French. If anything, recognising the complexity of the *Poèmes 37-39*, and of some of the other verse that Beckett composed in French at the close of the 1930s, leaves us in even deeper uncertainty as to what may have motivated the pre-War linguistic turn since this recognition serves to invalidate the idea that Beckett's use of French for the *Poèmes 37-39* was motivated primarily by a desire to move away from florid expression and complex literary allusion towards a wilful simplicity that might serve to challenge the expressive function of language itself. Or, as Beckett put it in his letter to Axel Kaun, the desire '[e]in Loch nach dem andern in [der Sprache] zu bohren, bis das Dahinterkauernde, sei es etwas oder nichts, durchzusickern anfängt'.² If Beckett's letter to Kaun has been cited here, it is because, as demonstrated in the Introduction by way of the example of David Tucker, this letter has been evoked by critics seeking to explain Beckett's turn to French. Indeed, many critics hold this letter to provide us with an explicit statement of Beckett's reasons for having begun to compose poetry in French the late 1930s. Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun is thus an excellent place to begin in attempting to clarify what may have motivated Beckett's use of French during these years.

The critical position according to which Beckett's letter to Kaun provides us with an insight into his reasons for turning to French has been most trenchantly advocated by Patricia Coughlan. Prefacing her engagement with Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39*, Coughlan went so far as to assert that '[t]urning to write in French is one of Beckett's few aesthetic decisions on whose motives we have very explicit comments of his own. These are in the 1937 letter to Axel Kaun'.³ For Coughlan, Beckett's turn to French is a direct consequence of the feeling, to which he gave voice in his letter to Axel Kaun, that '[e]s w[u]rd[e] [ihm]...immer schwieriger, ja sinnloser, ein offizielles Englisch zu schreiben'.⁴ Thus read, these poems in French would constitute, as

² *LSB I*, 514 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937])

³ Patricia Coughlan, "'The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves": Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry', 197

⁴ *LSB I*, 513 (SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937])

Coughlan puts it, ‘a set of consistently effective gestures in the poetic genre towards “the literature of the unword”’ that Beckett called for in his ‘German Letter’.⁵

In the Introduction, we already noted that there are a number of problems with using the Kaun letter as a crib for understanding Beckett’s decision to turn to French in the post-War period – namely, its explicit focus on the English language, its lack of any direct mention of French, and its very particular status as a request to pursue his correspondence with Kaun in German – and we further stressed the necessity of reading Beckett’s turn to French in light of the direct evidence provided by Beckett’s own French-language writings rather than attempting to read either the turn or these French-language writings through the lens of indirect ‘evidence’ such as that provided by the ‘German Letter’. These same problems also face any critic who attempts to explain Beckett’s reasons for turning to French in the pre-War period. In Part II, of course, our close reading of Beckett’s French-language poems of the late 1930s demonstrated these texts to be marked by a wide variety of styles, thereby disproving the idea of a correlation between language and style – such as that which a critic like Coughlan proposes by way of the ‘German Letter’. The problems with this letter, however, are not limited to those that have already been evoked in the Introduction, nor even to those that are posed by the stylistic variety of Beckett’s *Poèmes 37-39*. The single most pressing problem with using this letter as a means of understanding Beckett’s turn to French has, in fact, still to be mentioned. This problem is a very simple one: Chronology.

As described by Coughlan, Beckett’s vaunting of a ‘*Literatur des Unworts*’ is exactly contemporary with his first forays into French-language poetry: Beckett’s letter to Kaun was written in July 1937 and, according to Coughlan, it was ‘[i]n this same year’ that Beckett began working ‘towards “the literature of the unword” by way of ‘twelve French poems, only two of which he provided with English versions’.⁶ While Coughlan’s presentation of the *Poèmes 37-39* may be explained by her reliance on the scholarly works available to her – namely, Deirdre Bair’s biography and the bibliography prepared by Federman and Fletcher⁷ –, Coughlan is not alone in

⁵ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry”, 197 – In his letter to Kaun, Beckett speaks of ‘[einer] für [ihn] sehr wünschenswerten *Literatur des Unworts*’ (*LSB I*, 515 – SB to Axel Kaun [9th July, 1937]).

⁶ Patricia Coughlan, “‘The Poetry is Another Pair of Sleeves’: Beckett, Ireland and Modernist Lyric Poetry”, 197

⁷ At the time Coughlan wrote her essay, Deirdre Bair’s was the only biography available to scholars of Beckett’s writing and she does indeed place Beckett’s earliest forays into writing poetry in French to the closing month of 1937 (*viz. SBAB*, 306). Although Federman and Fletcher do not provide composition details of the *Poèmes 37-39*, they do note ‘Dieppe’ as having been subsequently published as ‘Dieppe 1937’ and note that ‘Mr. Beckett confirms that this poem was first written in French’

establishing a chronological correspondence between Beckett's letter to Kaun and the *Poèmes 37-39*. We also find it, for example, in Pilling's *Beckett before Godot*, where we read that '[w]ithin weeks of writing to Kaun...Beckett found...“the consolation...of sinning willy-nilly against a foreign language”, French'.⁸ In Leland de la Durantaye's *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, meanwhile – published, as the reader will recall, as recently as 2016 –, we are informed that 'it was during this summer when Beckett wrote his long 'German Letter' that he began to write with some seriousness in French'.⁹ It is, however, entirely incorrect to claim that it was 'during this summer' of 1937 that Beckett 'began to write with some seriousness in French'. Indeed, it is equally incorrect to claim that Beckett began doing so '[w]ithin weeks of writing to Kaun', or even '[i]n [that] same year'. In actual fact, all the surviving evidence that we have suggests that the very first of Beckett's *Poèmes 37-39* to have been originally composed in French was written sometime around April of 1938. This evidence is to be found in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of April 3rd, 1938, in which Beckett informs his friend:

I wrote a short poem in French but otherwise nothing. I have the feeling that any poems there may happen to be in the future will be in French.¹⁰

Prior to this letter of April 3rd there is no evidence, either in Beckett's correspondence or amongst his surviving papers, to suggest that he had yet begun writing any of the French-language poetry that would subsequently be published as *Poèmes 37-39* in 1937. The only evidence we have to the contrary, in fact, is Beckett's assertion that the poem 'Dieppe' was originally written in French and the fact that this poem is now generally dated to 1937.¹¹ The case of 'Dieppe', however, is by no means without complication.

In the first instance, we must recall that Beckett's assertion was made over three decades after the poem was originally written and it is thus entirely possible that he was mistaken in his recollection. Even with regard to the post-War work, in fact – work, that is, which he had completed more recently than 'Dieppe' –, Beckett is recorded to have been somewhat unsure of the chronology of composition, being

(Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, California; London: University of California Press, 1970], 75), thereby placing the earliest of Beckett's French-language poems in 1937.

⁸ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 155 – The reference to 'sinning willy-nilly against a foreign language' is taken from Martin Esslin's translation of Beckett's letter to Kaun (*viz. D*, 173).

⁹ Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 67

¹⁰ *LSB I*, 614 (SB to TMG [3rd April, 1938])

¹¹ *viz.* Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography*, 75

forced in many cases simply to 'guess' when asked to clarify this chronology for his early bibliographers, Fletcher and Federman.¹² (It is, moreover, worth noting that, in addition to points of chronology, some other details that Beckett provided to Fletcher and Federman have been proven incorrect by subsequent research.¹³) As such, any researcher seeking to confirm that 'Dieppe' was originally written in French would ideally need to find corroborating external evidence and, at the present time, no such corroborating evidence appears to exist. There is, for example, no autograph manuscript of a French-language 'Dieppe', nor do we find any reference to a French-language poem entitled 'Dieppe' – nor, for that matter, to any French-language poem at all – in Beckett's correspondence from 1937. The very earliest reference to any poem matching the description of 'Dieppe', in fact, is to be found in a letter dating from 1939 and that reference points towards a poem in English.¹⁴

The absence of any reference to either a French-language 'Dieppe', or even to a French-language poem, in Beckett's correspondence for the year 1937 argues

¹² *SBAB*, 721 [n.21]

¹³ On the subject of the poem *Whoroscope*, for example, we read that this poem was 'based according to Beckett on Adrien Baillet's late seventeenth-century life of Descartes' (Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography*, 6). It is now known, however, that Beckett's primary source for *Whoroscope* was not Baillet's biography, but rather Mahaffy's *Descartes* (viz. Francis Doherty, 'Mahaffy's *Whoroscope*', in *JoBS* [Vol. 2, No. 1 – Autumn, 1992], 27-46.)

¹⁴ This reference comes in the form of Beckett's comment that, in response to Blanaid Salkeld's request 'for a poem for a series of broadsheets of Dublin poets', he sent her 'one of 4 lines, the only one I had' (*LSB I*, 659 – SB to TMG [6th June, 1939]). In a letter to Mary Manning Howe, meanwhile, Beckett clarified that the poem he sent was 'one of 4 lines, being the second of the two torn from my palpitating sensorium by years of adversity, the first (of five lines) having disappeared' (*Ibid.*, 661 [n.8 – SB to Mary Manning Howe (6th June, 1939)]). Although the editors of *LSB* disregard 'Dieppe' as a possible candidate for the four-line poem to which Beckett here refers on account of Beckett's later claim that it was originally written in French (viz. *LSB I*, 661 [n.8]), the version of 'Dieppe' included in *Poèmes 37-39* is indeed a poem 'of 4 lines'. This version of 'Dieppe' would thus perfectly match Beckett's description of the poem he sent to Salkeld. The possibility of this poem's being 'Dieppe' is further supported by the conjecture, to which the editors of *LSB* give voice, that in his letter to Mary Manning Howe Beckett 'may refer to "they come" as the five-line poem that had disappeared' (*Ibid.*, 662). Aside from the probable English-language version of 'Dieppe', 'they come' is indeed the only English-language poem that Beckett is known to have composed between 'Ooftish' in 1937 and 'Saint-Lô' in 1945; given the length of the former and the composition date of the latter, neither of these can be the poems to which Beckett refers in his letter to Mary Manning Howe. Based upon the surviving record of Beckett's English-language compositions for the late 1930s, therefore, 'Dieppe' would appear to be the most probable candidate for the poem sent by Beckett to Blanaid Salkeld. Naturally, the possibility exists that one or both of the poems to which Beckett refers in the letters that have just been cited are texts that have since been lost. Were that the case, however, we would nevertheless expect to find some trace of them in other letters from the period, given Beckett's willingness to discuss the progress of his work with correspondents.

strongly against its having been written in French. Had 'Dieppe' been written in French in 1937, Beckett would almost certainly have drawn attention to this in his correspondence – just as he did in his letter to MacGreevy of April 1938 – since writing a poem in French would have been out of character for him at that point in his career.¹⁵ The earliest publication history of 'Dieppe' is similarly unhelpful: The poem originally appeared in English – being published in a five-line version in *The Irish Times*, under the title 'Dieppe 193?'¹⁶ –, and when it first appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, in French and in its better-known four-line version, the collection in which it appeared was entitled 'Poèmes 38-39'.¹⁷ These factors suggest that, while the English-language version of 'Dieppe' was composed at an unknown time, the French-version, at least, was, upon the French poem's original publication in *Les Temps Modernes*, known to date from 1938-39. As noted in Part II, the title of 'Poèmes 38-39' was only changed to the more familiar *Poèmes 37-39* at a later date, and it then seems to have been changed to accommodate the fact that 'Dieppe' was originally written in 1937.¹⁸ That date of original composition, however, in no way clarifies the *language* of original composition. Bearing these factors in mind, it may be seen that there is reason to suppose that 'Dieppe' was first written in English – whether in 1937 or at a later date¹⁹ – and subsequently translated into French sometime during the period 1938-39. Importantly, the possibility that the French-language 'Dieppe' is a translation of a prior English-language original finds support in the fact that we know another of the *Poèmes 37-39* – that is, 'elles viennent' – to be the translation of a poem that, as previously remarked, was originally written in English on the night of January 25th, 1938.²⁰

Admittedly, such chronological hair-splitting may appear to be of relatively little interest, and even less import, to the question of Beckett's pre-War turn to French. Such fine distinctions of chronology are, however, vitally important to our understanding of Beckett's pre-War turn to French, since they serve to invalidate the idea of any immediate link between the views expressed by Beckett in his letter to

¹⁵ The only two poems he had written in French thus far were 'Tristesse Janale' and 'C'n'est au Pélican' – both of which, as seen in the preceding chapter, were composed in French for specific reasons and neither of which started off as stand-alone pieces, as would have been the case for the purported French-language 'Dieppe'.

¹⁶ *viz.* 'again / the last ebb / the dead shingle / the turning then the steps / to the lighted town' (*The Irish Times* [June 9th, 1945], 2).

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, 'Poèmes 38-39', in *Les Temps Modernes II* (November, 1946), 288-93

¹⁸ *CP*, 372

¹⁹ With regard to the date of its original composition, Lawlor and Pilling have provided persuasive internal evidence in favour of dating the poem to 1937. In providing this evidence, moreover, they clearly imply that the poem was originally written in English (*viz. Ibid.*, 383-85).

²⁰ *viz. LSB I*, 596

Axel Kaun and his turn to writing poetry French. Rather than having abandoned English days, weeks, or even in the same year as he wrote to Kaun, all the surviving evidence suggests that Beckett began work on the French-language texts that would first be published as 'Poèmes 38-39' no earlier than late March or early April 1938 – that is, over eight months after he wrote the 'German Letter'. During those eight months, moreover, Beckett continued to write in English. Even excepting the probable English-language composition of 'Dieppe', we know him to have written the poem 'Ooftish' – originally titled 'Whiting' – in August 1937, his review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions* in late 1937, and the poem 'they come' in January 1938.²¹

If Beckett's decision to write his review of Devlin's collection in English can be readily explained by the practical necessity of reviewing the volume in that language, the use of English for 'Ooftish' and 'they come' presents a problem for the critic who wishes to tie Beckett's pre-War use of French to the aesthetic program sketched out in his letter to Axel Kaun. If Beckett's letter to Kaun is indeed to be understood as a farewell to literary composition in English, why would Beckett have continued to write in English for a further eight months, even after he had taken the decision to move permanently to Paris? This question naturally serves to raise further questions that are equally important: Having written in English for so long, why did Beckett finally begin to write poetry in French at some time around April 1938? Equally, when Beckett finally did write that 'short poem in French' to which he referred to his letter to MacGreevy of April 3rd, 1938, why should he have been so sure that 'any poems there [might] happen to be in the future [would] be in French'? What had changed – whether in Beckett's relationship to English, his relation to French, or both – that might serve to explain this change?

Evidently, once we have taken full cognisance of the chronology of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn, it becomes apparent that the letter to Axel Kaun cannot help us to answer any of these questions and thus cannot help us to explain why Beckett began writing poetry in French in the pre-War period any more than it can help to explain why he began writing prose in French in the post-War period. If we are to understand the pre-War linguistic turn, we must look elsewhere. More particularly, as has already been suggested, we must look to the probable influence of external forces that, as was previously observed in the case of Beckett's earliest French-language writings, may have determined his decision to turn away from English and towards French. More particularly, in the case of Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s, we must look to the probable influence of the twin forces of publication and (self-)translation.

²¹ These datings for the composition of 'Ooftish' and Beckett's review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions* are those provided by Lawlor and Pilling in *CP* (*viz.* *CP*, 354, 384).

Much as it was necessary to carefully consider the chronology of Beckett's turn to French to bring to light the problems with rooting this turn in the literary program advanced by Beckett in the Kaun letter, understanding the forces that may actually have had a role in Beckett's decision to turn to French will require us to carefully contextualise Beckett's engagement with French and with (self-)translation, as well as the pre-publication history of the *Poèmes 37-39* as this can be reconstructed through his surviving correspondence. Like *Poèmes 37-39* itself, this reconstruction begins with 'they come' / 'elles viennent'.

Evidence for the pre-publication history of 'they come' / 'elles viennent' is to be found in two letters, both of them addressed to Thomas MacGreevy, the first of which dates from January 27th, 1938, and the second from February 11th of the same year. In the first of these letters, as noted in Part II, we find the earliest, English-language version of 'they come', along with information that allows us to precisely date the poem's composition to the night of January 25th.²² We can thus say with certainty that Beckett composed 'they come' in Paris, while recovering from having been stabbed at the start of January and that, at the time he composed this poem, he had been in Paris for over 3 months. While such a precise dating of the poem's original composition and a corresponding certainty about the circumstances of its emergence is helpful, it is Beckett's comment that he '[t]hought of sending ['they come'] to Sheehy' that is of most relevance to the question of what may have motivated Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn.²³

The Sheehy to whom Beckett referred in his letter to MacGreevy was Edward Sheehy, who was at that time Books Editor of the Dublin-based literary magazine, *Ireland To-day*.²⁴ In speaking of Sheehy, therefore, Beckett was informing his friend that he had briefly considered sending 'they come' to an Irish literary review. Despite Beckett's comment that he 'withheld [his] hand', Beckett's commitment to seeking to publish his poem with *Ireland To-day* is confirmed by a passage from that letter to MacGreevy of February 11th in which we read that:

I sent "they come" (translated by [Alfred] Péron as "ils viennent"!!) to Ireland To-day, where the great purity of mind & charity of thought will no doubt see orgasms where nothing so innocent or easy is intended, and reject the poem in consequence.²⁵

²² For this reference, see Part III, Chapter 2 [n.20].

²³ viz. 'Thought of sending it to Sheehy – then withheld my hand' (*LSB I*, 596 – SB to TMG [27th January, 1938]).

²⁴ Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923–1958* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 72 – Shovlin clarifies that Sheehy had held this position since December 1936 and would remain in it until the time of *Ireland To-day's* closure in March 1938 (*Ibid.*).

²⁵ TCD MS MF 179 (SB to TMG [11th February, 1938])

In this passage, we learn a number of things about Beckett's compositional practice as it existed in February 1938, all of which are of importance for understanding his pre-War linguistic turn: Firstly, it is obvious that, at the start of 1938, Beckett was still composing poetry in English and, despite having been living in Paris for a number of months and having no plans to return to the city of his birth, he was still seeking to publish such verse with a Dublin-based periodical; secondly, as his comments about Péron's translation of 'they come' reveal, Beckett was not only continuing to write verse in English, he had not yet begun to self-translate this English-language poetry into French. Instead, he was seeing his poetry translated into French by others, and he was clearly dissatisfied with the results. This dissatisfaction is something to which we shall return in due course but, for the time being, it is worth examining more closely Beckett's enduring commitment to English-language composition and a Dublin-based periodical.

In reading these two letters to MacGreevy, it may initially strike us as curious that Beckett's decision to move to Paris had, even by February 1938, not yet served to still his interest in writing in English and in publishing with Irish periodicals. Beckett's commitment to English and to a magazine such as *Ireland To-day* seems all the more surprising given that he strongly – and, it would seem, accurately – suspected that such periodicals would be uninterested in his work.²⁶ One might imagine that Beckett's decision to distance himself from Dublin would also have led him to distance himself from Dublin-based publications, publications whose literary sensibilities he believed to be out-of-step with his literary output. At the same time, a move to Paris should surely have incited Beckett to take an interest in Paris-based periodicals, at least of some of which would surely have been more receptive to poems that, Beckett's protestations notwithstanding, open with what it is clearly *possible* to read as a sexually-explicit pun. If Beckett's decision to continue sending materials to a Dublin-based magazine raises questions, so too does his continued use of English. Much as the move to Paris should have inspired an interest in novel, Paris-based publishing avenues, one might have imagined that, in moving to Paris, a writer such as Beckett, who had already composed literary work in French and translated French-language poetry into English, would have embraced the possibility of turning to French and submitting his French-language writings to French publishers and

²⁶ The accuracy of Beckett's suspicions appears well-founded when we consider that, despite having been sent to Sheehy, 'they come' never appeared in *Ireland To-day* (*viz.* CP, 375). In considering the poem's non-appearance in *Ireland To-day*, however, it should be borne in mind that the magazine's final issue appeared in March 1938 (*viz.* Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923–1958*, 69). It is thus possible that Beckett's poem may have been denied an appearance in print not on account of misplaced editorial prudery, but simply owing to the cessation of the periodical.

periodicals. Similarly, the letters to MacGreevy equally leave us with the question of why Alfred Péron should have been translating Beckett's writing in February 1938. Even if Beckett was still writing material in English, why was he allowing someone else to translate this material into French?

Obvious though such questions may appear, they are vital to our understanding of the pre-War linguistic turn because, if we are to understand what led Beckett to write in French, we must equally consider the question of what may have led him to write in English, and what may have led to him to allow others to translate him into French. These questions are, moreover, closely intertwined since, whether we ask why Beckett turned to French, why he wrote in English, or why he allowed himself to be translated by others, it will be observed that we are asking questions that relate to the fundamental realities of writing for publication, namely: the choice of a publisher and the awareness of one's audience. More particularly, we are asking how these realities are experienced by, and impact upon, the bilingual writer.

Writing for publication as a bilingual, or indeed as a multi-lingual, writer is not simply a matter of freely choosing to compose material in whichever of one's particular set of languages seems most germane to the text at hand – although there is obviously an element of this. Firstly, it is a matter of finding a publisher who is willing and able to publish material in whichever language one happens to write in. Secondly, but more importantly, it is a matter of being willing to write in a particular language and for a particular audience. As far as Beckett's willingness to compose original work in French is concerned, the distinction between a willingness to write in a particular language and a willingness to write for a particular audience is crucial to helping us understand why, despite the fact that he had already composed texts in French on a number of occasions prior to his 1937 move to Paris, Beckett appears to have taken so long to begin writing in French and submitting his work to French-language publishers and periodicals after this move. For, when we examine the texts that he wrote in French prior to his 1937 move more closely, we see that, in each case, he had written the text in French for particular reasons, and with particular audiences in mind.

In terms of the materials that Beckett had composed in French prior to his 1937 move to Paris, we have already seen that he had composed both private letters in French and texts destined for public consumption – whether in the form of a public lecture (i.e. 'Le Concentrisme'), or in the form of what Beckett hoped would be a literary publication (i.e. *Dream*). Since the letters were never destined for eyes other than those of the persons to whom they were sent and may thus be classed among

Beckett's private writings, it is the writings that were intended for public consumption that are of relevance to understanding Beckett's attitude to writing and publishing in French upon his arrival in France. What we may say about those texts destined for public consumption that Beckett had already composed in French before his move to Paris is that none of them was intended for consumption by a specifically *French* public: 'Le Concentrisme' and, by extension, 'Tristesse Janale', were intended for an audience comprised largely of members of the DU Modern Languages Society, the vast majority of whom would have been non-native Francophones. Lucien's letter and 'C'n'est au Pélican', meanwhile, were, just like the rest of the novel in which they appeared, ultimately intended for the Anglophone book-buying public.²⁷ Although Beckett had already written original texts in French prior to moving to Paris in 1937, in other words, he had never written original texts in French for a specifically French audience. Moreover, there is no surviving evidence that Beckett had ever submitted any piece of French-language writing to a French publisher or to a French literary magazine prior to his move to Paris in October 1937.

The very earliest reference that we have to even the possibility of Beckett's French-language writing appearing in a journal directed towards a primarily Francophone audience comes in the form of Beckett's reference to 'an article on Joyce for the homage number of the Nouvelle Revue Française in Feb. or March'.²⁸ Having been asked to write this article by Joyce, Beckett had initially accepted but he appears to have done so solely out of a sense of obligation and his view of the article was profoundly negative from the start.²⁹ Subsequently, moreover, Beckett appears to have made precious little effort towards writing it and to have had even less intention of ever completing it. Beckett's attitude towards this article, however, was not one of simple irritation at the prospect of a thankless task; he appears, on the contrary, to have been intensely, and personally, opposed to the idea of writing it. We see this in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, in which Beckett goes so far as to state:

I have done nothing more with the NRF article and feel like dropping it. Certainly there will be no question of prolegomena or epilegomena when the work comes out in book form. And if that means a break, then let there be a break. At least this time it wont be about their daughter, who by the way as

²⁷ Indeed, as earlier suggested, one of Beckett's major motivations for choosing to include a lengthy passage of French in *Dream* was the assumption that the use of French would render Lucien's letter – and the homosexual material contained therein – incomprehensible to a sizable portion of that same book-buying public or, at the very least, more acceptable to the censors charged with defending that public's delicate sensibilities.

²⁸ *LSB I*, 570 (SB to Mary Manning Howe [after 10th December, 1937])

²⁹ The very first mention of the article presents it as a final act of 'slopemptying' (*Ibid.*) for Joyce.

far as I can learn gets deeper & deeper into misery & less & less likely ever to emerge.³⁰

The virulence of Beckett's feeling here is made palpable by his remarkable equation of his refusal to write the *NRF* article, or contribute in any way to the published form of *Finnegans Wake*, with the fissure that opened up between himself and the Joyces following his rejection of Lucia Joyce.³¹ Given the intensity of Beckett's resistance to writing this article, it is worth asking whether part of Beckett's resistance may have owed to the fact that, had he written this article, his first French-language publication would have been an homage to Joyce, just as his first English-publication had been almost a decade prior. For a writer who was, by the late 1930s, eager to separate himself from Joyce, the idea of reviving and reinforcing the association that had existed between them – doing so, moreover, in the eyes of a French-speaking reading public for whom he was still, or at least might still be, his own man rather than “James Joyce's white boy”³² – must have been unconscionable. If Beckett's article never appeared, it is unclear whether this was down to his own refusal to write it, or the collapse of the envisioned *NRF* ‘homage’.³³ What we can be sure of is that, even if this piece had appeared, it would have had nothing to tell us about Beckett's attitude towards the idea of publishing in French for a Francophone audience since, as what has just been said makes patently clear, Beckett would have been dragged into publication against his will. To find evidence of Beckett's true attitude towards such publication, therefore – that is, Beckett's *willingness* to appear in French –, we must look for the example of a publication freely chosen and personally desired by Beckett.

The earliest reference to such a publication comes to us via that letter of April 1938 to which has already been referred, in which Beckett informed MacGreevy of his having written ‘a short poem in French’. In addition to referring to this poem, Beckett also told his friend that he had ‘sent a copy [of *Murphy*] to Raymond Queneau, who [had] just been appointed reader to Gallimard’.³⁴ Even here, however, Beckett was not submitting a work of French-language fiction to Gallimard since the

³⁰ *LSB I*, 575 (SB to TMG [22nd December, 1937])

³¹ For this rejection, and its consequences, see *DTF*, 103-105

³² *SBAB*, 74

³³ For details of this collapse, see *LSB I*, 567 (n.3) – A subsequent letter to MacGreevy notes that Beckett had ‘[a]rranged with Shem [= Joyce] to write the homage in *NRF* without mentioning his name. The idea seemed to please him’ (*LSB I*, 580 – SB to TMG [5th January, 1938]), which might be seen to prove that Beckett remained prepared to write the article, albeit *à contre-cœur*. It is, however, unclear whether or not this mention of a Joyce-less homage to Joyce is intended as a joke. Certainly, were Beckett anxious to avoid yoking his name to Joyce's but finally unwilling to risk a break by refusing to write the article, avoiding naming Joyce at all would be one way to preserve his good name.

³⁴ *LSB I*, 613 (SB to TMG [3rd April, 1938])

text of *Murphy* that Beckett sent to Queneau for his consideration was not a French-language translation. Rather, Beckett had provided Queneau with the English-language version of *Murphy* which had just been published by Routledge.³⁵ Moreover, in providing Queneau with the English-language *Murphy*, Beckett was not proposing that he should be the one to translate it. On the contrary, Beckett's letter to MacGreevy informs us that he 'hope[d] to arrange for [Alfred Péron] to translate Murphy'.³⁶

The fact that Beckett had never willingly submitted a French-language text to a French publisher or literary magazine may appear somewhat surprising when one recalls that, by the time he moved to Paris in 1937, Beckett already had at least two French-language poems – 'Tristesse Janale' and 'C'n'est au Pélican' – that he might have considered sending to French periodicals. Certainly, each of these texts had been written in French for very specific reasons and may well be seen as belonging more properly to Beckett's juvenilia than to his mature output. Nevertheless, the idea that Beckett himself thought either, or both, of these works wholly unfit for publication is disproven by the fact that, as the reader will recall, Beckett had already considered publishing both of them and, in the case of 'C'n'est au Pélican', he seems to have considered doing so on no less than three occasions: In the first instance, obviously, 'C'n'est au Pélican' was originally destined to appear in *Dream*; additionally, as previously noted, Beckett planned on including both 'C'n'est au Pélican' and 'Tristesse Janale' as part of *POEMS*, the collection that would have been his first published volume of poetry and which he unsuccessfully submitted to publishers including Chatto and Windus, and the Hogarth Press.³⁷ Finally, and even if the vast majority of the poems destined for *POEMS* would finally be abandoned, Beckett submitted a revised version of 'C'n'est au Pélican' to George Reavey in response to Reavey's request for work that might be included in a journal that he was then considering launching.³⁸ It may thus be seen that Beckett had, at one time or another, envisioned the possibility of publishing both of these French-language poems and had even been happy to submit one of them to George Reavey for inclusion in a review. And yet, despite his willingness to see these texts appear in print, there is no evidence that Beckett ever considered sending either 'Tristesse Janale' or 'C'n'est au Pélican' to a French-language periodical, either before or after his arrival in Paris. Were we dealing with a figure such as Emily Dickinson or Gerard Manley Hopkins, an unwillingness to

³⁵ This version of *Murphy* had been published by Routledge in March of 1938, having been accepted for publication in December of 1937.

³⁶ *LSB I*, 613 (SB to TMG [3rd April, 1938])

³⁷ *DTF*, 162-63

³⁸ *viz.* 'A card from Reavey, decided to launch European Quarterly...What would I like to give him for nothing?' (*LSB I*, 297 [n.4] – SB to TMG [9th January, 1936]).

submit work to potential publishers would be readily explicable in terms of what we know about these writers' attitudes to publication. In the case of the pre-War Beckett, however, we are dealing with a writer who was perfectly willing to submit any and all of his writings – including a five-line poem dashed off in a single night, such as 'they come' – to prospective publishers. Indeed, and as the example of 'they come' proves, Beckett was even willing to send his work to reviews that he felt quite sure would have no interest in publishing it. Why then was Beckett so unwilling to submit his French-language poems to any of the innumerable French-language reviews that existed in the Paris of the late 1930s?³⁹

To explain why this should have been the case, it is helpful to consider the question of audience. More particularly, we must recall that, when Beckett pondered including his two French-language poems in *POEMS*, he was envisioning a volume that would have been primarily comprised of English-language poems and which, like *Dream* – in which 'C'n'est au Pélican' would have appeared had the novel found a publisher –, would have been published by an English-language publisher and would thus have been judged by English-speaking editors and readers, and, ultimately, made available to a primarily English-speaking audience.⁴⁰ In submitting a revised version of 'C'n'est au Pélican' to Reavey, meanwhile, he was submitting his work to an Anglophone – more properly, a bilingual speaker of English and Russian – based at that time in London, for possible inclusion in a review that, like so many London-based little magazines before it, would have been directed towards a primarily Anglophone audience. It thus seems clear that Beckett's willingness to submit his French-language poems for publication was contingent upon the publisher to whom the work was sent and upon the audience to whom the work would ultimately be made available: Prior to the 1938 linguistic turn, in short, Beckett was comfortable using French for literary purposes, but he was not yet ready to expose his French-language compositions to French eyes, nor to propose his French-language compositions to the French reading public. Certainly, it could be argued that, once Beckett's texts had been published by an English-language publisher, any native speaker of French could easily procure a copy of these writings. This possibility of being read and judged by a native speaker, however, is very far removed indeed from the experience of directly exposing one's

³⁹ As described by Benoît Lecoq, twentieth-century publishing in France was marked by the proliferation of literary and artistic reviews: 'La période qui s'ouvre ensuite [i.e. after 1914] et qui va du dadaïsme à l'existentialisme, du cubisme à l'abstraction lyrique, voit proliférer les revues littéraires et artistiques les plus diverses, dont le prestige entame bientôt celui des périodiques du XIX^e siècle' (Benoît Lecoq, 'Les revues', in Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (eds), *Histoire de l'édition française: Le livre concurrenté 1900-1950* [Paris: Fayard/Promodis, 1991], 354).

⁴⁰ As previously recalled, both volumes were sent to publishers of just this sort, namely: Chatto and Windus, and the Hogarth Press.

literary writings to the eyes of a native speaker and with the assurance that one's prospective audience will be composed primarily – even entirely – of native speakers. Directly exposing one's writings to the eyes of native speakers and explicitly proposing them to an audience of native speakers is, as has already been noted, something that Beckett is not known to have done even after his move to Paris, by which time submission of his French-language writings to local publishers and periodicals would have been no more than logical for a writer keen to make his life as a writer and, thus, from publication.

As part of the volume that he devoted to the process of translating Beckett's letters for *LSB*, George Craig considered the question of what may have motivated Beckett's post-War linguistic turn and, in so doing, provided a poignant expression of the anxieties to which have just been alluded:

Why did Beckett move to writing in French? It would be (relatively) easy to tell the story in straight, or straight-ish biographical terms: events, dates, declared reasons, external pressures, general context, decisions. But only people who know little or nothing about language(s) could imagine that a writer who was not bilingual from his infancy would simply *decide* to write in another language: as it might be, turn on this tap rather than that. He or she might indeed formulate the decision (we all need to believe that we can break with habit), but the thought would be followed immediately by profound anxieties: if the writing is to be published, how will its readers react? Can I hold my nerve as I hear the scornful laughter of the native speakers? Only the supremely confident could meet the challenge without flinching (a Nabokov, perhaps). But what of the writer who does not have an ironclad temperament?⁴¹

For Craig, as can be seen, it was precisely anxieties of the sort that have already been outlined that are likely to have lain at the root of Beckett's reticence to submit his work to Paris-based, French-language publishers and periodicals. In submitting his writing to such eyes, he would have been taking a significant step. One that, as Craig implies, takes an enormous amount of courage for 'a writer who was not bilingual from his infancy'. It is no doubt Beckett's continued reluctance to take this step that serves to explain why he did not submit any of his pre-existing French-language verse to French-language periodicals upon his arrival in Paris and, by extension, why he continued to write in English and to submit his work to English-language publications even months after his 1937 move to Paris. Similarly, this reluctance also serves to explain why Beckett, in submitting *Murphy* to Gallimard, had no intention of translating the novel himself. Rather, he had hoped to arrange for Alfred Péron, a close friend and a native-speaker of French, to translate the novel into French on his behalf. Put simply, self-translating a novel for publication with Gallimard was not on

⁴¹ George Craig, *Writing Beckett's Letters*, 35-6 – Emphasis in original.

the cards for a writer who was not yet prepared to submit his French-language poems to a Parisian literary magazine.

As helpful as it is to be aware of the probable reasons for Beckett's reticence to submit his French-language compositions to French publishers and periodicals, and to self-translate his English language literary productions into French, such an awareness cannot serve to explain why, while living in Paris, Beckett submitted a poem to *Ireland To-day*. Even if still unwilling to address French-language texts to French-language publishers and French-speaking audiences, why did this Paris-based Irishman continue to address his English-language poem to a Dublin-based publisher? To answer this question, and having considered the impact that the issue of prospective audience could have on Beckett's willingness to publish in French, we now need to consider that other reality which is faced by any writer seeking to publish their work – namely, the need to find a publisher. Or, more accurately, the need to find a *suitable* publisher.

As what has just been said implies, the possibility of Beckett's publishing 'they come' in Paris would have been dependent upon his ability to find a Paris-based publisher – or rather, given the nature of 'they come', a Paris-based, English-language publication – willing and able to publish such a text. At certain periods, finding a suitable publication in Paris would have presented no great difficulty. The 1920s and early 1930s, for example, were one such period when an Anglophone author looking to see their work appear in print would have found a profusion of publishing possibilities in the French capital. At that time, as described by Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, 'twenty significant English-language publishers were turning out memorable literature in France, in response to the influx of English-speaking expatriate writers and readers'.⁴²

It was precisely this Paris – one overflowing with English-language publishers and publications to which prospective Anglophone authors might address themselves –, that Beckett had discovered while he was a *lecteur d'anglais* at the ENS, between 1928 and 1930. In his biography, James Knowlson rightly drew attention to the dynamism of Anglophone publishing in the Paris of the late 1920s and to its importance for Beckett. The 'proliferation of private presses and little magazines, where with talent and the right social contacts a young or prospective writer could place his work' was, writes Knowlson, one of the 'exciting thing[s] about Paris in 1928-

⁴² Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris, 1944-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 125 – Amongst these publishers might be cited Shakespeare & Company, Three Mountains Press, Black Sun Press, and Obelisk Press.

29'.⁴³ Not merely was the existence of such avenues for publication 'exciting', Knowlson also stresses the importance of these avenues for Beckett at a time when he was taking his first steps along the path that would eventually lead to a literary career:

For Beckett, who was not to write creatively in French for another ten years, the existence of Nancy Cunard's small publishing house, The Hours' [sic] Press, Eugene Jolas's review, *transition*, and Edward Titus's *This Quarter* meant that there was a source of future commissions.⁴⁴

Each of the figures that Knowlson here mentions had their part to play both in Beckett's earliest career as a writer and in the English-language publishing scene that existed in Paris at the time of Beckett's arrival: Nancy Cunard's Hours Press – which, having been founded in Normandy in 1928 and moved to Paris in 1930, was just one of those English-language publishers to which Sawyer-Lauçanno referred – brought out Beckett's first solo publication, the poem *Whoroscope*⁴⁵; his very earliest publications – namely, the critical piece 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce' and the short-story 'Assumption' – both appeared in *transition*, one of the most important of the Paris-based, English-language literary journals of the inter-War period⁴⁶; finally, the first of Beckett's professional translations to appear in print – a selection of poems by the Italian poets Raffaello Franchi, Giovanni Comisso, and Eugenio Montale⁴⁷ – appeared in Edward Titus' *This Quarter*.⁴⁸ Without the Anglophone presses and publications that he found when he arrived to take up his role at the ENS, it is impossible to imagine what form Beckett's earliest years as a writer might have taken. What seems certain, however, is that Beckett's career would not have begun at all until after he left Paris since, had there been no English-language publishers and publications in operation then, there would have been no way for a fledgling English-language writer like

⁴³ *DTF*, 107

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *viz.* Samuel Beckett, *Whoroscope* (Paris: The Hours Press, 1930) – For more information on Nancy Cunard and the Hours Press, see Kris Somerville, 'Remembering the Hours: Nancy Cunard's Expatriate Press', in *The Missouri Review* (Vol. 23, No. 4 – Winter 2010), 67-78; For details of Beckett's relationship with Cunard, both during the early 1930s and later on, see Seán Lawlor, "'That's how it was and them were the days": Samuel Beckett's early publications with Samuel Putnam and Nancy Cunard', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 23-34.

⁴⁶ *viz.* Samuel Beckett, in Eugène Jolas (ed.), *transition: an international quarterly for creative experiment* (no. 16-17; June 1929), 242-53 ('Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce'), 268-71 ('Assumption') – For more information on *transition*, see Dougald McMillan, *transition: The History of a Literary Era 1927-1938* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975)

⁴⁷ For more on these translations, see Norma Bouchard, 'Recovering Samuel Beckett's Italian Translations of Raffaello Franchi, Giovanni Comisso, and Eugenio Montale', in *JoBS* (Vol. 15, Nos 1-2 – Autumn 2005/Spring 2006), 145-59

⁴⁸ *viz.* *This Quarter*, II (April-May-June 1930), 630, 672, 675-83 – For details of Beckett's relationship with Putnam, see Seán Lawlor, "'That's how it was and them were the days": Samuel Beckett's early publications with Samuel Putnam and Nancy Cunard', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 23-34.

Beckett to make his way into print – certainly not for one who would still be reticent to publish in French when he returned to Paris almost a decade later.

Paris' Anglophone publishers having been so good to him in his youth, why then, when he was looking for a place to publish 'they come', did Beckett turn to what he assumed would be an unreceptive Dublin-based literary magazine, rather than to a Paris-based magazine such as those who had accompanied his earliest steps into print? The reason for this, quite simply, was that by the time Beckett was looking for somewhere to publish 'they come' in 1938, the rich and varied array of Paris-based Anglophone presses and publications that had provided him with his earliest publications had long since ceased to exist. Indeed, in a manner almost diametrically opposed to the Paris of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Paris of the late 1930s presented almost no publishing opportunities for an English-language writer. Certainly, English-language publishing had not yet entirely disappeared from Paris – as it would during the Occupation –, but their number had been so greatly reduced by 1938 that the world of Anglophone publishing in Paris had become unrecognisable. Of the English-language publishers who had once thrived in Paris, as Sawyer-Lauçanno remarks, only one of them – namely, Obelisk Press – would actually survive long enough that it was 'forced to close because of the Occupation', the other presses 'had disappeared gradually', doing so long before the forces of Nazi Germany arrived.⁴⁹ Nancy Cunard's Hours Press, is a telling example in this respect: The publisher who had given Beckett his first solo publication had ceased to exist in 1931, only shortly after he had returned to Dublin.⁵⁰

In considering the particular case of 'they come', moreover, it must be recalled that the mere existence of an English-language publisher would not have sufficed for Beckett to place his poem; the publisher would also have had to be *suitable*, and receptive to Beckett's work. Thus, when Beckett was looking for somewhere to place 'they come', an English-language poem of a mere five lines, it is not a publisher such as Kahane's Obelisk Press that he would have sought out, but a periodical or literary magazine along the lines of *Ireland To-day*. It is thus of particular importance to the question of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn that, as dramatic as was the decline in the number of Paris-based Anglophone presses between the end of

⁴⁹ Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris, 1944-1960*, 125 – As discussed in the previous chapter, Obelisk Press did actually almost provide Beckett with a publishing opportunity while he was in Paris, when its owner, Jack Kahane, proposed that he translate Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* into English.

⁵⁰ Kris Somerville, 'Remembering the Hours: Nancy Cunard's Expatriate Press', in *The Missouri Review* (Vol. 23, No. 4 – Winter 2010), 77

the 1920s and the end of the 1930s, the decline of English-language literary reviews and little magazines was even more dramatic.

To get a sense of this decline, we need only consider Sawyer-Lauçanno's comments on the fate of '[t]he legendary English-language little magazines' of the inter-War period. As part of his discussion of the various English-language publications that emerged in Paris after the Second World War, Sawyer-Lauçanno notes that little magazines of the inter-War period such as '*transition*, *contact*, *The Little Review*, *The Transatlantic Review*, *This Quarter*, *The New Review*, and *Tambour*' had all ceased to exist by 1940, and some of them had ceased publication 'well before the beginning of World War II'.⁵¹ The reasons for this decline, as described by Sawyer-Lauçanno, were multiple – including the departure of the Anglophone expatriates who had been the lifeblood of these reviews, both as writers and readers, the worsened economic situation of the 1930s, and the 'the usual plague of little magazines, chronic lack of funds'.⁵² As with the English-language presses, then, the decline in Paris-based English-language little magazines was not an effect of the Occupation and its effects were already to be felt by the close of the 1930s. By the time Beckett arrived back in Paris in 1937, in fact, all save one of those 'legendary' English-language magazines mentioned by Sawyer-Lauçanno had ceased publication: *Contact* appeared for the last time in 1932; *The Little Review* in 1929; *The Transatlantic Review* in 1924; *This Quarter* in 1929; *The New Review* in 1932; and *Tambour* in 1930. The sole survivor of period was *transition* and, initially at least, that might seem to have been enough. After all, it might well be thought that Beckett enjoyed a relatively good relationship with the inter-War iteration of *transition*.⁵³ In addition to his first publications in *transition* 16/17, work of his had subsequently appeared in four separate issues, *transition* 19/20, *transition* 21, *transition* 24 and *transition* 27.⁵⁴ Beckett's relationship with *transition* was, however, far less positive than his relatively frequent appearances in the magazine might lead us to believe.

As described by Pilling and Lawlor in their treatment of Beckett and the magazine, in fact, 'Beckett seems...to have felt either lukewarm or positively hostile to

⁵¹ Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris, 1944-1960*, 126

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ After the Second World War, *transition* would be reborn as *Transition* – For Beckett's engagement with *Transition*, see John Pilling and Seán Lawlor, 'Beckett in Transition', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 86-94

⁵⁴ viz. 'For Future Reference' in *transition* 19/20 (Spring-Summer, 1929); 'Sedendo et Quiesciendo' in *transition* 21 (March 1932); 'Malacoda', 'Eneug II', and 'Dortmunder' in *transition* 24 (June 1936); 'Ooftish' and review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions* in *transition* 27: *Tenth Anniversary* (April-May, 1938).

the ethos of [the inter-War] *transition*'.⁵⁵ The hostility to which Lawlor and Pilling here refer is certainly evident in Beckett's correspondence. Beckett's very earliest reference to *transition*, which is to be found in one of the first of Beckett's letters to Thomas MacGreevy, already testifies to a decidedly negative view of the publication.⁵⁶ Similarly, the very last reference to the inter-War *transition* that is to be found in Beckett's letters is confined to an expression of his irritation at the errors he found in the last of his texts to appear with the magazine: 'My poem in transition was all wrong also. Also the article on Dennis [for Denis]'.⁵⁷ Seen in this light, it is evident that *transition* was, for Beckett, never more than a review of last resort. A clear example of this can be seen in the publication history of the poem 'Ooftish' which, owing to its caustic vision of the succour to be had from religion – and, more particularly, Christianity –, Beckett knew quite well it would be impossible to 'ventilate anywhere, except perhaps in Transition'.⁵⁸ The example of 'Ooftish' is all the more valuable to the present discussion of Beckett's motivations for turning to French in the pre-War period because the only other journal to which Beckett is believed to have sent this poem is *Ireland To-day*, the very publication to which he would later send 'they come': '[Edward] Sheehy is clamouring for something', wrote Beckett to MacGreevy in October of 1937, 'so I shall send him Whiting!'.⁵⁹ In affixing an exclamation point to the possibility of sending his poem to *Ireland To-day*, Beckett makes clear he thought it nigh impossible that a poem so anti-religious as his would be printed by a Dublin-based literary magazine, even one such as *Ireland To-day* that had proven itself willing to criticize the excessive power of the Catholic Church in the Irish Free State.⁶⁰ This was precisely the value of *transition*: It was, quite literally, a *pis aller*, to which might be sent texts that – because of their content, or because of Beckett's want of other options – had nowhere else to go.

Why then, when Beckett was looking for a place to send 'they come', did he not think of *transition* in January 1938 and why, in February, did he finally decide to send the poem to *Ireland To-day* when he knew they would not publish it? Setting aside Beckett's own distaste for *transition*, a major reason why he should not have

⁵⁵ John Pilling and Seán Lawlor, 'Beckett in Transition', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 83

⁵⁶ Writing to Thomas MacGreevy and with reference to an as-yet unidentified manuscript, Beckett flatly tells his friend that he 'would like to get rid of the damn thing anyhow, anywhere (with the notable exception of "transition")' (*LSB I*, 10-11 – SB to TMG [Friday (? Summer 1929)]).

⁵⁷ *LSB I*, 634 (SB to George Reavey [20th June, 1938])

⁵⁸ *LSB I*, 544 (SB to TMG [19th August, 1937])

⁵⁹ *LSB I*, 553 (SB to TMG [6th October, 1937]) – The editors of *LSB* express some doubt as to whether or not Beckett actually sent 'Ooftish' / 'Whiting' to *Ireland To-day*. In any event, the poem did not appear there.

⁶⁰ Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923–1958*, 91-93

even considered sending his poem there is likely to have been that, in early 1938, Beckett knew that, even if ‘they come’ were accepted by *transition*, there would be little chance of it appearing for the foreseeable future. In December 1937, Beckett had received the proofs for his review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions* which he knew was due to appear in the forthcoming issue – along with his poem ‘Ooftish’ –, but since then he had heard nothing with regard to *transition 27*, and had no idea when it would appear.⁶¹ Indeed, as late as March 1938, Beckett could write to MacGreevy: ‘Have seen nothing of the Jolases & don’t know if Transition is out & don’t care, except for Denis’.⁶² Knowing nothing of *transition 27*, except that ‘every second word’ in the proofs for his review of Devlin’s *Intercessions* had been ‘a mistake’, it is unsurprising that Beckett did not consider sending his verse to *transition* and finally decided to try his luck with Sheehy, even doing so against his better judgement.⁶³ The decision would have made all the more sense given that, even if the poem found no favour with *Ireland To-Day*, Beckett could always leave the poem with the rest of his ‘essuie-cul de réserve’ for the meantime and then try to place ‘they come’ in *transition 28* at a later date – in much the same way as he appears to have done with ‘Ooftish’.⁶⁴ The strategy had worked before, there was, in February 1938, no reason to suspect it would not work again.

Thus far, we have contextualised the avenues for English-language publication that were open to Beckett up until February of 1938, as well as the anxieties that were associated with writing in French for a French audience. In so doing, we have clarified both Beckett’s reasons for continuing to write in English even after months of residence in a Paris where French-language literary *revues* were plentiful, and where the lone outlet for English-language poems was a little magazine that, even when other options were available, Beckett had never looked upon as anything more than a *faute de mieux*. In the process, we have already answered at least one of those questions concerning Beckett’s decision to begin writing poetry in French that were formulated early on in this chapter: Why did Beckett continue to write in English for a further eight months after the ‘German Letter’?

If Beckett’s letter to Kaun was not immediately followed by a turn to writing in French, it is clearly because the decision to write in French was not taken as a result of his dissatisfaction with English – or, at least, with ‘ein[em] offiziell[en] Englisch’ –

⁶¹ viz. *LSB I*, 565 (SB to TMG [10th December, 1937])

⁶² TCD MS MF 178 (SB to TMG [8th March, 1938])

⁶³ *LSB I*, 565 (SB to TMG [10th December, 1937])

⁶⁴ The phrase ‘essuie-cul de réserve’ comes from a letter to George Reavey, where it refers to Beckett’s essay on ‘Censorship in the Saorstat [*sic*]’ (viz. *LSB I*, 332 – SB to George Reavey [6th May, 1936]).

that he expressed therein. If he continued to write in English after moving to Paris, meanwhile, it is because he felt himself neither able, nor obliged, to write in French for a French audience. At that point in his career, Beckett still had anxieties about his French – anxieties that, as described by Craig, are entirely comprehensible on the part of a writer ‘who was not bilingual from his infancy’ – and, every bit as importantly, he still had publishing opportunities elsewhere. They may not have been ideal – whether because of the suspicion of editorial prudery (at *Ireland To-day*) or owing to personal antipathy (toward *transition*) – but they were available, and they allowed him to continue to write in English even while living in Paris.

That, however, is only one of the questions we earlier formulated. What answer can be offered to the others: Having written in English for so long, why *did* Beckett finally begin to write poetry in French sometime around April 1938? When Beckett wrote his first ‘short poem in French’, why *was* he so sure that ‘any poems there [might] happen to be in the future [would] be in French’? What *had* changed? Had anything changed? If so, was this change a matter of external forces or internal motivations? In what remains of this chapter, I will argue that the changes, the forces and the motivations that led to Beckett’s decision to begin writing poetry in French were at once external *and* internal. I will also argue that their consequences were of crucial importance, not just for Beckett’s pre-War French-language poetry, nor simply his pre-War engagements with prose-writing and self-translation, but for the post-War linguistic turn too.

The most direct – and external – of the forces that weighed upon Beckett’s decision to begin writing in French around April 1938 is that, by that time, something had in fact changed, and changed quite dramatically: By April 1938, both *Ireland To-day* and *transition* had ceased to exist: *Ireland To-day*’s last issue appeared in March of 1938, and *transition* 27 – which included those versions of ‘Ooftish’ and the review of *Intercessions* with which Beckett was so unhappy – was the final issue of the review to appear until Georges Duthuit relaunched it 1948.⁶⁵

This fact allows us to greatly nuance the assertion, made by George Craig, that one of the mysteries of Beckett’s use of French lies in the fact that Beckett ‘c[ould] go on being an English-language writer as long as he wishe[d]’.⁶⁶ Clearly, the possibility of being a *published* English-language writer – which is, undoubtedly, what Craig is referring to – is dependent upon the possibility of publishing one’s English-

⁶⁵ For the rebirth of *Transition*, see James Campbell, *Paris Interzone: Richard Wright, Lolita, Boris Vian and others on the Left Bank, 1946-60* (London: Vintage, 1994 [2001]), 21-22

⁶⁶ George Craig, *Writing Beckett’s Letters*, 36

language writings. With the cessation of *Ireland To-day* and *transition*, Beckett had lost the last of his ready avenues for English-language publication and, with them, the last ready means of 'go[ing] on being an English-language writer'. Unsatisfactory though these avenues had been, each had clearly been open to Beckett and willing, if not to publish him, at least to receive material from him. Had Reavey's *European Quarterly* ever come to fruition, Beckett would no doubt have found a home for his verse there but, as it stood, the closure of *Ireland To-day* and *transition* left him in Paris, with no obvious outlet for his English-language publications, and nothing on the horizon.

In evaluating the importance of these closures and the lack of English-language publishing in Paris, it is obviously important to note that options did exist elsewhere: Beckett had published a novel with Routledge, for example, and any future English-language writings might well have been published with them. He could not publish individual poems with Routledge, however – whether these poems were written in English, or French. Even discounting Routledge, of course, there were undoubtedly other avenues that Beckett might have taken, other reviews – in the UK or the US – and other people to whom he might have appealed. Why was it then that, by April of 1938, he was not only willing to try his hand at writing verse in French, but writing to MacGreevy that 'any poems there may happen to be in the future [would] be in French?' To explain this change, it is helpful to turn to another passage from Craig's earlier-cited study.

There too, Craig asks the question of what may have led Beckett to turn to French and, there again, he cautions against an overly easy association of this turn with any single 'datable decision':

It is perilously easy to see Beckett's move to French as the outcome of a datable decision, when what is at issue is closer to an existential reorientation which began in the "lost" years spent hiding in Unoccupied France, during which Beckett is exposed to an undifferentiated tide of French – no longer only the currency of artists and intellectuals, but the language of farm, forge, garage, and inn. The thought that he could now "take on" that language for his own creative purposes grows in force, and, as the end of the War signals a universal reconstruction, the chance comes to act on it. It is a huge risk, but he takes it, and, in order to take it, he pushes English away.⁶⁷

In the earlier-cited passage from Craig's study, he contended that 'only people who know little or nothing about language(s) could imagine that a writer who was not bilingual from his infancy would simply *decide* to write in another language'. Such people, for Craig, ignore the degree to which writing in another language, creatively and for publication, is a veritable *Herausforderung* – a drawing, indeed a dragging, out

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 34

from within and into the world without. It is a *Herausforderung*, in more ways than one, since it entails not simply the exposure of the self to a publisher and, ultimately, an audience – something that is obviously true of any form of publication – but of a part of the self that is likely to be at once particularly susceptible and particularly important to the writer. Beckett's French, certainly, as we saw in Part I, was obviously of great importance to him and had been ever since he was a young man. He may not have chosen to begin learning the language, but he certainly chose to pursue it, through TCD and beyond, and he continued to choose it, time and again, throughout his life. At a time of intense personal anguish – when he returned from Paris in 1930, and had nothing before him but the choice between 'chucking Dublin...[his] family, and causing them pain' or 'mak[ing] up [his] mind to be a vegetable'⁶⁸ – he had turned to French to amuse himself and, when he finally decided to 'chuc[k] Dublin' for good, it was to Paris that he went. And yet, throughout it all, he had never tried to write in French for a French audience, never tried to be published for a French audience. And even when he seemed ready to seek publication with Gallimard, the words that he imagined his prospective audience reading would be his by proxy, as the French would be Péron's. Undoubtedly, then, what Craig says is absolutely correct: Beckett's move to French necessitated, in a fundamental sense, 'an existential reorientation'. What Craig says, however, is also utterly wrong.

Beckett's move to French *was* an existential reorientation, but it was *also* a 'datable decision', and that decision cannot be dated to 'the "lost" years spent hiding in Unoccupied France'. It cannot be dated to this period – or, at least, it cannot be said to have begun there – because, even before those "'lost" years' and that 'undifferentiated tide of French', Beckett had *already* made the decision to begin writing in French, for publication and for a French audience. He did so when he began to write poetry in French with the intention to publish it, sometime around April 1938. The decision to do so may appear small, even derisive – what is 'a short poem in French' when set against the post-War *nouvelles*, to say nothing of the three novels or *En attendant Godot* –, but the force of the decision must not be judged in terms of the 'short poem' that Beckett told MacGreevy he had written. It must instead be judged by the fundamental shift in perspective, the 'existential reorientation', without which Beckett could not have written that poem or looked forward to a future as a French-language poet. In writing that poem, Beckett had taken the first step towards the decision that would ultimately lead him to draw a line under the English-language 'Suite' and continue writing in French. That is not to say that the decision to write 'Suite' in French in 1946 was inevitable once he had begun to write poetry in French in

⁶⁸ *LSB I*, 32 (SB to TMG [c. 18th to 25th July, 1930])

1938. Between Beckett's 'short poem in French' and the French-language continuation of 'Suite' stand not only the "lost" years' in Roussillon and the imposing bulk of *Watt*, but also the equally important – if less imposing – pages of the English-language 'Suite'. Just as the pre-War linguistic turn of February-April 1938 cannot be understood in terms of a German-language letter of July 1937, so too must we resist the urge to interpret Beckett's post-War linguistic turn of early 1946 in terms of a decision made almost a decade earlier. Other circumstances guided the post-War linguistic turn – we will have ample chance to study them in the next chapter – but the most important change in Beckett's relationship to French, the 'existential reorientation' to which Craig refers, had indeed already taken place in 1938, and its importance for the events of early 1946 cannot be underestimated.

To say that such a reorientation took place, however, is not enough: *Why* did it take place, and why might it have taken place at that particular moment and in that particular context? I would contend that the answer to these questions is to be found in another passage of the very same letter in which Beckett informed MacGreevy of his recent forays into French verse, and his suspicion that any future verse would be in that language:

A French translation by Péron of my *Alba* appeared in *Soutes*. Not one of his best efforts. He is in good form & I lunch with him every Tuesday & play tennis afterwards. I hope to arrange from him to translate *Murphy*. He is anxious to do so. I sent a copy to Raymond Queneau, who has just been appointed reader to Gallimard & whom I met in the *Volontés* galère. But Dénoël [*sic*] & Steele or the *Mercure* are more likely.⁶⁹

Parts of this passage, as the reader will recognise, have already been referred to during the course of the present chapter: We have already noted how this is the earliest extant reference to Beckett's having sent a piece of his writing to a French publisher; we have already noted how this reference makes clear that Beckett did not envision translating the book himself, 'hop[ing]' instead for his friend Alfred Péron to do it. And yet, when one reads this paragraph in its broader context – in the broader context of the paragraph as a whole, of the letter in which it appears, of Beckett's correspondence from early 1938, and of all that has been said about the intensity of Beckett's feelings towards French –, one discovers it to convey something beyond its explicit surface meaning.

Although Beckett seems to suggest here that it was he who originally sought out Péron as a translator for *Murphy*, earlier letters to MacGreevy and to George Reavey suggest that it was Péron who first approached Beckett to translate *Murphy*, doing so almost as soon as the book had been accepted by Routledge. The first

⁶⁹ *LSB I*, 613 (SB to TMG [3rd April, 1938])

reference to Péron's eagerness to translate *Murphy*, for example, dates from January 21st when, while informing MacGreevy that he is in the process of correcting the proofs of his novel – and, in so doing, finding his text 'a very dull work, painstaking, creditable & dull'⁷⁰ –, Beckett remarks that 'Alfie Péron wants to translate it for NRF'.⁷¹ We find here no suggestion that the idea has come from Beckett, just as we find no suggestion that Beckett had yet decided to take up Péron on his offer. Things have changed somewhat by the next time that Péron's interest is noted, in a letter to MacGreevy of January 28th. There, we read that 'Péron wants to translate Murphy for NRF. I suppose again it is a question of handling Reavey with kid gloves'.⁷² By this time, clearly, Beckett had given enough thought to the possibility of allowing Péron to translate his work for publication in France for him to recognise that Reavey, who was acting as Beckett's literary agent at the time, might have been irritated by the fact that, in proposing Péron as translator, Beckett was equally proposing to side-step Reavey and allow Péron to use his own contacts to place the text.⁷³ It is, however, the manner in which Beckett finally presented this proposition to Reavey that is most revealing, particularly when read in the broader context of other letters from the period:

Alfred Péron, 69 Rue de la Tombe-Issoire, Paris 14^{me}, is anxious to translate Murphy into French. He is a close friend of mine, an expert translator and I should be very glad for him to do it. He has contacts and so have friends of his, notably with the NRF & Dénoël [*sic*] et Steele. Will you make the overtures in the matter, or would you prefer us to do so? Perhaps it would be better to leave it till you are over.⁷⁴

At first glance, the terms in which Beckett couches the prospect of publishing *Murphy* in French are precisely what we might expect from Beckett as he tried to win over his friend and literary agent to an idea that, most likely, would result in some money for Péron and Beckett, but nothing at all for Reavey. Certainly, Reavey's assistance as Beckett's literary agent is politely solicited ('Will you make overtures in the matter [...]') but it is quite obvious, as it must have been to Reavey, that this is absolutely nothing more than politeness ('[...] or would you prefer us to do so?'). Beckett's lack of interest in involving Reavey hardly needs explaining. What could Reavey, based in London and whose contacts were primarily in the world of Anglophone publishing, possibly offer as a literary agent when Beckett, seeking to publish his text in French

⁷⁰ *LSB I*, 589 (SB to TMG [21st January, 1938])

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *LSB I*, (SB to TMG [27th January, 1938])

⁷³ For details of Reavey's tenure as Beckett's literary agent, see Mark Nixon, 'George Reavey – Beckett's first literary agent', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 41-56

⁷⁴ *LSB I*, 610 (SB to George Reavey [8th March, 1938])

and with a French publisher, already had both a translator and, what's more, a translator who provided him, directly or otherwise, with contacts at two major French publishing houses of just the sort that he might hope to be interested in publishing *Murphy*?⁷⁵

Particularly noteworthy in the context of the present discussion is the manner in which Beckett presents his prospective translator to Reavey. Under the circumstances, it would be very easy to see Beckett's decision to speak of this translation as if it were a kindness that he wanted to do to Péron ('Péron...is *anxious* to translate *Murphy* into French. He is a *close friend* of mine...and I should be *very glad for him to do it*') as nothing more than another aspect of Beckett's attempt to 'hand[e] Reavey with kid gloves' in this letter: Couching this translation in terms of his friendship with Péron serves to obscure, at least partially, the degree to which the book's appearance in French would serve Beckett's own professional and literary ends. Undoubtedly, at least part of Beckett's phrasing here is exclusively for Reavey's benefit. One aspect of this letter in particular, however, has broader implications for Beckett's decision to turn to French for his poetry and thus deserves our special attention: This is the manner in which Beckett reinforces the idea that Péron alone is the right man for the job of translating *Murphy* by drawing attention not only to their friendship and Péron's contacts, but also through stressing that Péron is 'an *expert* translator'. Having worked with him on their joint translation of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle', Beckett was certainly well-placed to judge Péron's skill as a translator from English into French. In 1938, meanwhile, and even before *Murphy* had been sent to Queneau, Péron already seems to have begun acting as Beckett's translator. The translations that Péron executed, however, and Beckett's response to them, serve to greatly trouble Beckett's choice of the adjective 'expert'.

We have already noted that Péron had (mis)translated 'they come' – 'as "*ils viennent*"!!' – and the same letter in which Beckett announced that he had begun writing poetry in French includes word that '[a] French translation by Péron of [Beckett's] *Alba* appeared in *Soutes*' and that this was '[n]ot one of his best efforts'. What we cannot fail to notice about each of these references to Péron's translations of Beckett's poetry is that – despite both his assurance to Reavey that Péron was 'an

⁷⁵ A prestige publisher such as Gallimard was a natural choice, all the more so given their "Du Monde Entier" collection, established in 1931, which published translations of works by writers including D.H. Lawrence, Kafka and Hemingway (*viz.* Pascal Fouché, 'L'édition littéraire, 1914-1950', in Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, *Histoire de l'édition française : Le livre concurrenté 1900-1950*, 230). Denoël et Steele, meanwhile, would have been familiar to Beckett as the publishers of Céline, one of his favoured authors at the time.

expert translator', and the obvious depth of their friendship⁷⁶ – Beckett was, quite clearly, extremely unhappy with Péron's translations. He had, moreover, excellent reason to be unhappy: In the case of 'they come', Péron's translation either entirely traduces the poem's meaning, changes its speaker's gender, reconfigures its speaker's sexuality, or some combination of all three; in the case of his 'Alba', meanwhile, Péron's curious decision to translate 'sheet' ('whose beauty shall be a sheet before me [...] only I and then the sheet / and bulk dead'⁷⁷) as 'rideau' ('dont la beauté sera comme un rideau devant moi [...] plus que moi et le rideau / et la masse morte'⁷⁸) entirely does away with the connection between the poem and the act of writing – a connection which was achieved via the association between 'sheet' and a sheet of paper – that is central to the architecture of 'Alba'. Beckett's dissatisfaction with Péron's translations was therefore not simply the discomfort of a possessive author unwilling to see other hands interfering with their creation; Péron's translations are bad. If Beckett was unwilling to come out and say so explicitly – although, at least as far as 'they come' is concerned, the effect of his two irate exclamation points amounts to much the same thing – it was surely because, as previously noted, his friendship for Péron was very real.

Taken together, Péron's inadequacies as a translator and Beckett's very real friendship for him would obviously have created problems. Beckett's intense dislike for what he saw as imperfect translations of his own work is well known and – later on in his career at least, and when the translator was not his friend – Beckett was perfectly willing to express his frustrations in no uncertain terms, even when the translator in question was translating into a language that Beckett did not know as well as he did French.⁷⁹ As it is impossible to imagine Péron taking it upon himself to translate one of Beckett's poems and submit it for publication without first broaching the matter with Beckett – and, almost certainly, consulting with Beckett during the

⁷⁶ By the time he translated 'Alba' for *Soutes*, Beckett had known Péron for over a decade, and he was very clearly Beckett's closest friend in Paris at the time. After the War, and Péron's death, the depth of Beckett and Péron's reciprocal affection is to be heard in the words that Péron's son, Alexis, remembered Beckett addressing to him: 'Je deviens, selon la promesse que je lui [= à Péron] ai faite, votre père et Mania [= Péron's wife] est ma sœur' (UoR JEK A/7/66 ['Transcript of interview with Peron, Alexis']).

⁷⁷ *CP*, 10

⁷⁸ Samuel Beckett, 'Alba', A.R. Péron (trans.), in *Soutes: Revue de Culture Révolutionnaire Internationale* (No. 9 – 1938), 41

⁷⁹ The key example in this case is to be found in Beckett's vocal opposition to certain choices made by Erich Franzen, who was responsible for the original German-language translation of *Molloy* – For Beckett's disagreements with Franzen's translation, and Franzen's defence of at least some of those points with which Beckett disagreed, see Erich Franzen and Samuel Beckett, 'Correspondence on Translating MOLLOY', in *Babel* 3 (Spring 1984), 21-35.

translation process –, it seems highly probable that Beckett was fully aware of this translation, and of its failings, long before it appeared in print. This being so, it may appear surprising that the poem should have been published at all while Beckett was still unhappy with it. I would in fact go so far as to contend that this publication only becomes comprehensible when one takes account of Beckett's friendship for Péron. It is most likely only this friendship that led him to hold back his criticisms – or, in other words, to handle Péron with kid gloves, as he had already done with Reavey, another friend, and a less intimate one at that – and to give his blessing to the publication of what he quite evidently, and with good reason, found to be an unsatisfactory translation. To say that Beckett was willing to mollify his criticism and to allow what he saw as a sub-standard French version of his 'Alba' to appear in print, however, is certainly not to say that the situation would have been easy for Beckett. On the contrary, it would no doubt have been extremely difficult for him. All the more so, indeed, because, when it appeared in *Soutes*, Péron's translation of 'Alba' was the very first work by Beckett to appear in a French-language publication and thus the very first to be set before a predominately French-speaking readership.

It has already been argued, via reference to Craig, that a major factor preventing Beckett from writing in French and submitting his work to French-language periodicals and publishers was the anxiety he likely felt at the prospect of setting his French work before the judgement of native speakers. It has equally been argued, again via Craig, that for Beckett to take the step of turning to French for the composition of materials that would be read by native speakers of French – whether prose, poetry, or otherwise – required a fundamental revision of his perspective, an 'existential reorientation'. Obviously, it is impossible to be entirely sure of what motivated this reorientation but it has been noted, against Craig, that this revision cannot have occurred any later than Beckett's decision to begin writing poetry in French around March or early April 1938. Bearing these factors in mind, Beckett's experience of being translated by Péron and his discovery of where his reticence to writing in French had led him seems to provide us with a probable explanation for Beckett's sudden change of attitude towards writing and publishing in French: He had been afraid of subjecting his French to the judgement of native speakers, and the result of this fear was that his first French-language publication took the form of a mediocre, French-language translation of 'Alba', penned by a friend who was clearly eager to translate his work and whom Beckett could hardly refuse while he himself was unwilling to write directly in French, or even to translate his own work for publication. As noted, the mature Beckett's response to what he saw as poor-quality translations of his own work is well known and the effect that such translations had upon him in his later career equally so. As Ludovic Janvier wrote, in an article on the

subject of his experience working with Beckett, alongside his own wife, Agnès Vaquin-Ludovic, on the translation of *Watt*: 'On ne traduit pas Beckett, on le provoque à se traduire'.⁸⁰

In this particular instance, I would contend that Péron's translation of Beckett's writing did something far more significant than simply provoking Beckett into translating himself. (Although it evidently did this too, since the translation of 'they come' that finally appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* did not begin 'ils viennent'...) Rather, it was Péron's translations that finally led Beckett to the realisation that he *could* write original, publishable work in French, and that he could submit this work to French-language publications destined for French-speaking audiences. In looking at Péron's translations of his poems – particularly the translation that appeared in *Soutes* – and realising that he himself could have done a better job, Beckett must also have realised that there was nothing preventing him from *doing* a better job, except himself and his refusal to write in French or translate himself for a French-speaking audience. If Beckett could find fault with a translation *into* French – a translation that had been executed by a native speaker of the language, one supremely well educated and possessed of a literary sensibility –, it stands to reason that he thought he could have translated his poem more effectively and, once Beckett believed that he could translate his own English-language poetry into French more effectively than an educated, literate native speaker of the language, it would have become possible for him to believe that he was capable, not merely of translating poetry into French better than a native speaker, but also of writing poetry directly in French as well as a native speaker. What we find here, in other words, is the probable source of that 'existential reorientation' of which Craig spoke.

It seems most probable that the reorientation occurred at this point because the transformation in Beckett's attitude to writing in, and self-translating into, French was almost immediate. Not only did he signal this commitment in his letter to MacGreevy, alongside his initial mention of having writing 'a short poem in French', he subsequently confirmed it when he asked George Reavey, in late April of 1938, if the European Literary Bureau, whose Europa Press had published his first collection, *EBOP*, would be willing to 'publish Poems in French & English'.⁸¹ If there was to be another collection of verse in future, Beckett revealed to his friend, it would be primarily comprised of poems in French. Beyond his correspondence, meanwhile, Beckett demonstrated his commitment to verse composition in French by writing, with an intensity that he had not demonstrated in years. Between 1938 and 1939, as

⁸⁰ Ludovic Janvier, 'Au Travail Avec Beckett' in Bishop, Tom and Raymond Federman, *Cahier de l'Herne : Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1976), 103

⁸¹ *LSB I*, 618 (SB to George Reavey [22nd April, 1938])

noted in Part II, Beckett composed not only the 10 original poems and the two translations that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, but also a number of other poems, that would remain unpublished during his lifetime. The fact that all of this was composed in French, and by a poet whose previous French-language output had been restricted to two, brief poems – and which, in each case, had been composed in French as a consequence of external necessity, narrative or otherwise – is undeniably striking from a linguistic point of view. Even if Beckett had composed these poems of 1938-39 in English, however, the sheer scale of his composition during this period would be remarkable: Between 1936 and 1937, Beckett had composed just two or three poems ('Cascando', 'Ooftish' and, most probably, 'Dieppe'); between 1938 and 1939, he composed more than four times that many. Certainly, a number of these French-language poems are brief but, as Part II demonstrated, they are by no means simple. On the contrary, the poems that Beckett produced in French are, in many cases, complex works of art. Such an outpouring of verse is exactly what we might expect to follow on from Beckett's decision to begin writing verse in French, since it is exactly paralleled by the outpouring of prose – the 'frenzy of writing' – that following the post-War linguistic turn of 1946. The consequences of Beckett's decision to begin writing verse in French around late March-early April 1938 were not limited to a sudden flurry of creative activity, however. Another, and perhaps even more important consequence of Beckett's decision to embrace French-language composition is to be observed in his new confidence in approaching French-language publications.

Having previously shied away from such publication opportunities, Beckett's correspondence for the period after April 1938 shows him seizing those opportunities that were most readily available to him, and confidently considering seeking out more distant ones. Unsurprisingly, he seems to have begun with those to which he had a direct connection: In the first instance, there was *Soutes* – the journal in which Péron's 'Alba' had appeared and on the editorial committee of which Péron himself sat⁸² –, but there was also *Volontés*, a new review that Beckett's friend Georges Pelorson 'edited and more or less codirected with Raymond Queneau'.⁸³ (Admittedly, by this stage, Beckett was already beginning to distance himself from Pelorson, whose evident affinity for Fascist ideas Beckett found distasteful.⁸⁴ Equally, the few

⁸² Péron's position on the *comité directeur* of *Soutes* is made clear on the front page of the journal (*Soutes: Revue de Culture Révolutionnaire Internationale* [No. 9 – 1938], [n.p.]), and serves to clarify Beckett's reference to 'Péron's *Soutes*' (*LSB I*, 620 – SB to TMG [22nd April, 1938]).

⁸³ *DTF*, 290

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* – Pelorson's affinity for Fascist ideals would eventually lead him to a political role of some importance in Vichy France, when he became "'Chef de la propagande des jeunes" for the occupied zone within the Secrétariat général à la jeunesse'

references to *Volontés* that one finds in Beckett's correspondence are – unsurprisingly, given its politics and his own – uniformly negative.⁸⁵ As has been seen in the case of *transition*, however, Beckett's personal antipathy towards a review was not enough in and of itself enough to make him dismiss an opportunity for publication. If he could be published in *Volontés*, he would hold his nose and do so – as he had done with *transition* –, and he would no doubt do so hoping that the 'Volontés galère' at least engaged better typesetters than those used by *transition*.) Beckett's interest in taking advantage of these particular opportunities for publication is attested by another letter to MacGreevy of April 22nd, in which Beckett explains: 'A couple of poems in French in the last fortnight are the extent of my work since coming to Paris. Péron's Soutes is publishing one, & perhaps Volontés the other'.⁸⁶

If no poetry by Beckett would appear in either of these publications, it is almost certainly due to factors beyond his control, rather than to any resurgent reticence on his part for his French-language verse to appear in French-language publications: If Beckett's letter to MacGreevy is to be believed, for example, *Soutes*, had already accepted one of his poems, the fact that it never appeared in a future issue of the publication may be explained by the fact that the final issue of the bimonthly – but irregularly published – magazine to appear in the pre-War period came out in June 1938.⁸⁷ Beckett's failure to appear in *Volontés*, meanwhile, was most likely a consequence of his deteriorating relationship with Pelorson and, perhaps more probably still, a consequence of indiscreet remarks made by Beckett to Georges Pelorson's wife, Marcelle, during a birthday party for James Joyce:

I told Marcelle Pelorson bluntly at the Joyce party that I found Georges' editorials negative & far too angry & that a better title for the review, to judge by its appearances to date, would be Nolontés. It will be some time before there is another sign from that quarter (or eighth).⁸⁸

In line with the non-appearance of his 'sketch' for Paris-Mondial – which was cancelled following the German invasion of France⁸⁹ –, it may be seen that the fact that Beckett's work did not appear in either of these publications is explicable in terms of external circumstances and factors beyond Beckett's control. This being so, the fact

(Vincent Giroud, 'Transition to Vichy: The Case of Georges Pelorson', in *Modernism/modernity* [Vol. 7, No. 2 – April, 2000], 234) – For a full treatment of Pelorson's role in Vichy, see Giroud's article (*viz. op cit.*, 221-248).

⁸⁵ Evidence for Beckett's negative attitude to *Volontés* will be provided shortly.

⁸⁶ *LSB I*, 620 (SB to TMG [22nd April, 1938])

⁸⁷ '*Soutes* (1935-1938 [1ère série])', *Les revues littéraires* <<http://www.revues-litteraires.com>> [accessed: 31st December, 2017].

⁸⁸ TCD MS MF 179 (SB to TMG [11th February, 1938]).

⁸⁹ For further details of this radio sketch and the reasons for its cancellation, see Appendix II (b).

that Beckett did not succeed in publishing any of his French-language compositions in the pre-War period cannot serve to invalidate the idea that the major breakthrough in Beckett's attitude to French-language publishing occurred by April 1938.

On the contrary, the surviving evidence of Beckett's correspondence all confirms 1938 as a watershed in Beckett's attitude towards the idea of publishing his French-language materials for Francophone audiences. After all, by June, Beckett could not only send three French-language poems to MacGreevy, he could also tell his friend: 'When I have enough [poems in French] I thought of taking them to Eluard'.⁹⁰ The development represented by this casual reference to thinking of 'taking [his poems] to Eluard' should not be underestimated: Scarcely two months prior, Beckett had begun to write poems in French and for a French audience, now he was actively considering bringing these poems to the attention of a figure who was already an important French-language poet, and whose work Beckett had known and admired since at least 1930, if not earlier. To consider submitting his poems to the judgement of Éluard – or indeed, as may be imagined, to consider soliciting Éluard's assistance in publishing these poems – testifies to a prodigious development in Beckett's attitude to writing and publishing in French; it is one whose significance we should not ignore.⁹¹ A fundamental shift had occurred in Beckett's attitude to French-language composition and publication. A linguistic turn in the truest, and fullest, sense of the term.

Already in Part II, it was demonstrated that Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn – that is, his pre-War decision to begin writing poetry in French – was not a matter of seeking out a language that might better allow him to flee excess and literary allusion, to say less by speaking in a language that constrained and confined his expression. In this chapter, meanwhile, we have further shown that this linguistic turn was not a matter of Beckett's being exposed to 'an undifferentiated tide of French' during his time in Roussillon, nor was it simply a consequence of a decision taken in the absence of external constraints. On the contrary, this pre-War linguistic turn has been shown

⁹⁰ *LSB I*, 630 (SB to TMG [15th June, 1938]) – These thoughts were not merely idle fantasies. Subsequently, Beckett would also write to Reavey that he 'thought of sending them to Eluard' (*Ibid.*, 633 – SB to George Reavey [20th June, 1938]) and later still, sometime after October, Beckett mentioned again to Reavey that when he had enough French poems he would 'send them to Eluard. Or get Duchamp to do so' (*Ibid.*, 645 – SB to George Reavey [after 24th October, 1938]).

⁹¹ In 'Becoming Beckett', Sardin too draws attention to the manner in which this letter reveals Beckett appealing to Éluard for 'his sponsorship within the French literary field' (Parscale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30*, 76).

to have taken place within, and in response to, a complex set of factors, all of which impacted in their own way upon Beckett's ultimate decision.

At the heart of this turn was Beckett's discovery that he was already confident in his own French, that he was willing to write original work in that language and see such work published in French periodicals. This discovery did not happen in isolation, however. Beckett's pre-War turn to French occurred at a time when English-language publishing opportunities for his poetry were closing off to him – through the closure of *Ireland To-day* and *transition* – and at which, owing to his residence in a Paris without the vibrant world of English-language little magazines that he had found in 1928-30, new opportunities for publishing his English-language verse had become much harder to come by. Obviously, this lack of English-language opportunities and the corresponding profusion of opportunities for publication in French might have pushed him to embrace the possibility of being translated by another as a possible solution and, had Péron been a better translator, Beckett might well have been pursued this path. As it happened, however, Beckett found Péron to be an unsatisfactory translator and yet, as his closest and oldest friend in Paris at the time, he could scarcely have told him that he was unhappy and that he would prefer for someone else to translate his work. Not only that, even if Beckett had been willing to seek out someone else after seeing Péron's failings, the simple fact of recognising those failings had proven to him – or, at the very least, convinced him – that he was capable of handling French with as much skill as a native speaker, at least in poetry. Having arrived at this realisation, and having seen that there were French-language publications that might be receptive to his verse, the natural step was not to hunt out another translator – offending Péron in the process, and possibly setting himself up for further disappointment – but to begin writing in French himself. This is precisely what he began to do, with great confidence and great commitment, writing more verse, and with greater ease, than he had written in years.

Naturally, this genealogy for Beckett's turn to writing poetry in French can only remain tentative. We cannot know for sure the *how*, *when*, and *why* of the pre-War linguistic turn, any more than we can know for sure the *how*, *when*, and *why* of its post-War equivalent. Nevertheless, the genealogy that has been offered here does have the merit of answering each of the questions that we formulated at the beginning of this chapter and, more importantly still, it does so more effectively, and more comprehensively, than any of the answers that have previously been offered by scholars who have addressed this question.

As previously remarked, the key moment of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn was his decision to begin writing poetry in French and with the intention of submitting

it to French-language reviews. In that respect, we have proposed an answer to the essential enigma at the heart of this pre-War linguistic turn and taken a large step towards deepening our understanding of the post-War linguistic turn. It would nevertheless be wrong to imagine that the pre-War turn was confined entirely to poetry. It was noted at the outset of this chapter that, during the period that would be covered, Beckett began to use French for a wide variety of purposes – not just poetry, but also self-translation and the composition of original prose. In what remains of this chapter, I will briefly consider these remaining aspects of the pre-War linguistic turn. In the case of these texts, unlike the poetry, it is unfortunately even more difficult to arrive at certainty since reference to these texts in Beckett's surviving correspondence is a great deal scarser. Consequently, the discussion of Beckett's self-translations (*Murphy*, 'Love and Lethe') and prose essay ('Les Deux Besoins'), will be more speculative than the discussion of his poetry. Even so, consideration of these texts is of value as it will serve to demonstrate that, when Beckett began to compose original literary prose in French in the post-War period, he was not making an unprecedented decision and turning towards unknown horizons. On the contrary, he was returning to, and continuing down, a path he had already begun to walk – however falteringly – in the pre-War period.

II. BECKETT'S FRENCH-LANGUAGE PROSE (1938-44)

As was seen in the preceding section, Beckett's earliest reference to the prospect of a French-language *Murphy* makes quite clear that, as of March 1938, he had no intention of self-translating the novel. Rather, Beckett hoped for this translation to be prepared by his 'close friend', the 'expert translator', Alfred Péron. Ultimately, *Murphy* would not be translated by Péron – or, at least, not by Péron alone. Instead, as described by Beckett's biographers, Beckett and Péron worked on the translation together, doing so within the context of their regular social meetings – whether these took the form of post-work drinks (*dixit* Bair), or lunches and tennis (*dixerunt* Cronin and Knowlson).⁹² Beckett's decision to dedicate the French-language translation 'à Alfred Péron' when it finally appeared in 1947, could thus be seen as testament to the role his friend had played in its composition.⁹³

Although all of Beckett's biographers are in agreement that Péron had a role in the translation of *Murphy*, the nature of that role, and the scale of Péron's contribution to the translation as finally published, is impossible to quantify, or even to confirm, owing to the fact that no archival record of the translation process has

⁹² viz. SBAB, 306-7; Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, 306; DTF, 303.

⁹³ viz. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (Paris: Bordas, 1947), [6]

survived, whether in the form of manuscripts or typescripts. Nor, indeed, is any assistance offered by the post-publication history of the French-language *Murphy*. As it first appeared, the French *Murphy* was certainly dedicated to Alfred Péron – who had died in 1945, shortly after his release from Mauthausen Concentration Camp⁹⁴ – but it in no way signals his contribution to the translation of the text. There is no note stating that it was *traduit par Alfred Péron, en collaboration avec l’auteur*, for example.⁹⁵ Instead, we are simply informed that this novel had previously ‘[p]aru en anglais, sous le même titre, aux éditions Routledge, en 1938’.⁹⁶ More strikingly still, in the Federman and Fletcher bibliography, we are informed that ‘Mr. Beckett...completed the translation [of *Murphy*] before the outbreak of World War II, with the *occasional informal assistance* of Alfred Péron’.⁹⁷ To speak of ‘occasional informal assistance’ is very different from the close collaboration that we find described by Beckett’s biographers, and Beckett’s correspondence from the period suggests that this assistance may in fact have been so slight as to be almost immaterial. This possibility arises from the fact that there appear to be no references to Beckett’s working with Péron on the translation of *Murphy* in any of Beckett’s letters from the relevant period – that is, 1938 to 1940.⁹⁸ An interesting example in this regard is a letter to MacGreevy of April 18th, 1939. In that letter, Beckett does indeed remark that he ‘lunch[es] every Tuesday with Péron, and [is] very glad to have him’ but there is no mention of their working together on the translation of *Murphy* and the comment that Beckett ‘[is] very glad to have him’ seems intended as no more than an expression of the sincere pleasure he took in having such a good friend close at hand.⁹⁹ More notably still, the only references to the translation of *Murphy* that we

⁹⁴ *DTF*, 342

⁹⁵ Although the absence of such a reference from the original Bordas edition might be explained as a result of Bordas’ own publishing policy, it does seem significant that no such indication of Péron’s role in the translation is noted on the subsequent Minuit edition of the text either. In the case of the Minuit edition, such notes were provided where Beckett translated in collaboration with others. The Minuit edition of *Watt*, for instance, informs us that the text was ‘traduit de l’anglais par Ludovic et Agnès Janvier, en collaboration avec l’auteur’ (Samuel Beckett, *Watt* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968], [4]).

⁹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, (Paris: Bordas, 1947), [4]

⁹⁷ Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography*, 39

⁹⁸ While it is possible that references to Beckett’s working with Péron may exist amidst the masses of letters that Beckett composed, one would expect that, if they were to be found, they would have been included in *LSB*, given that edition’s stated intention to include letters ‘having bearing on [Beckett’s] work’ (*LSB I*, xiv) – For the principles of selection employed by the editors of *LSB*, see *Ibid.*, xx-xxii.

⁹⁹ *LSB I*, 657 (SB to TMG [18th April, 1939]) – Interestingly, *LSB I*’s ‘Chronology’ for the year 1939 informs us that by 18th April, of that year, Beckett was ‘[m]eet[ing] Alfred Péron every week to work on French translation of *Murphy*’ (*LSB I*, 651 – ‘Chronology 1939’). In making this suggestion, however, the editors can only have been basing

find in Beckett's correspondence all present the work as his alone. Thus, the very first reference to Beckett's work on a translation of *Murphy*, which occurs towards the end of the 1939, comes when he informs the Reaveys that he 'ha[s] been working hard at Murphy & only 4 chapters remain to translate'.¹⁰⁰ Significantly, perhaps, this first reference to Beckett's translation of *Murphy* comes, as can be seen, towards the end of the process, and after Péron had been mobilised for military service. It therefore remains possible that, having begun working on his translation with Péron, Beckett was only obliged to continue and complete the job alone owing to Péron's departure from Paris.¹⁰¹ It is nevertheless noteworthy that, in another letter to George and Gwynedd Reavey written after completing the translation, Beckett once again referred to the French-language *Murphy* as his alone.¹⁰² After the War, meanwhile, Beckett would announce the publication of the French-language *Murphy* to Thomas MacGreevy by informing him that *Murphy* 'is out in French, badly translated *by me*, and is not worth reading'.¹⁰³ Taken individually, there is little that these few fleeting references to the translation of *Murphy* can tell us. Taken together, however, they imply the translation was primarily Beckett's own work, even if it cannot be proven that it was entirely so.

That this should have been the case is not necessarily surprising if we consider the role played by Péron in the translation of Beckett's poetry. There, as we have seen, Péron's value was primarily of the *a contrario* variety: It was by disappointing Beckett that he helped him; by badly translating Beckett's English, that he led Beckett to write original French. In the case of *Murphy*, naturally, Beckett would have been dealing with an infinitely more expansive and more complex text, and so it might be assumed that he would have been eager for the assistance of a native Francophone. In the case of the post-War period, for instance, Alfred Péron's son Alexis recalled the role played by his mother, Mania (or Maya) Péron (*née* Lézine), in the typing, reviewing and, in some cases, revision of Beckett's French-language

themselves on the information provided by Beckett's biographers, since nothing in the letters from this period confirms that Beckett and Péron were working on translating *Murphy* during their weekly lunches.

¹⁰⁰ *LSB I*, 669 (SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [6th December, 1939])

¹⁰¹ This same possibility is evoked by the editors of *LSB* (*viz.* *LSB I*, 670 [n.3]).

¹⁰² This reference is to be found as part of Beckett's evocation of the assistance that literary critic Anatole Rivoallan, acting at the behest of Joyce, had offered Beckett with the revision and publication of *Murphy* but which, following the German invasion of France, was already a distant memory: 'I have been working a lot. Rivoallan was doing an article on At Swim Two Birds & Murphy for the *Mercure*, in the place of the one projected by the late Maurice Denhof. He was also going to revise *my* translation for submission to Paulhan with recommendation from Adrienne Monnier. All this is down the drain for the moment.' (*LSB I*, 679-80 – SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [21st May, 1940] – Emphasis mine).

¹⁰³ *LSB II*, 65 (SB to TMG [24th November, 1947]) – Emphasis mine.

writings.¹⁰⁴ Although Beckett certainly benefitted from Mania Péron's input it would seem that, by the post-War period, he was already confident enough to take her advice only rarely and to reject it frequently.¹⁰⁵ By that time too, however, Beckett had been through the years in Roussillon and had already published a number of French-language short stories with journals, including *Les Temps Modernes* and *Fontaine*.¹⁰⁶ It would thus be tempting to assume that, in the pre-War period, Beckett would have relied more heavily on the advice and assistance that Alfred Péron might have offered him. And yet, tempting though it might be, there is no evidence to support such an assumption. On the contrary, as has been noted, evidence suggests that already, in 1938, Beckett was willing to challenge and disagree with Péron's translations of his work. It is therefore entirely possible that, in translating *Murphy*, Beckett may have worked largely alone – consulting with Péron, since his friend was eager to be involved in the process, but not necessarily relying on him, nor even collaborating with him in any concerted way. Obviously, such a mode of working cannot be confirmed, but it would fully justify Beckett's subsequent references to the French-language *Murphy* as 'my translation' and as having been 'translated by me' in his correspondence.¹⁰⁷

The possibility that Beckett may already have begun to work largely unassisted on a translation that he hoped to submit for consideration to a French publishing house is important to bear in mind, but it is all more important to recognise that, whatever the nature of their collaboration, Péron's absence from Paris meant that Beckett did indeed complete the translation alone. This fact is of vital importance to our understanding of Beckett's engagement with French during this period because it serves to demonstrate that Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn was not confined to poetry. Beckett was, on the contrary, perfectly willing to write prose in French. Or, at the very least, to do so by way of self-translating his own, pre-existing English-language prose.

Evidence for this willingness is to be found elsewhere in Beckett's prose writings of the period. Towards the close of 1938, for example, we find reference, in a letter to Reavey, to a 'modified version in French of Love & Lethe' that Beckett was by

¹⁰⁴ viz. *DTF*, 361-62

¹⁰⁵ Referring to a typescript of *Molloy* that includes emendations in both Beckett's and Mania Péron's hands, Knowlson notes that 'Beckett sometimes accepted but quite often overruled Mania Péron's suggestions' (*Ibid.*, 773 [n.20]).

¹⁰⁶ In addition to the appearance of 'Suite' in *Les Temps Modernes*, Beckett's short-story 'L'Expulsé' appeared in Max-Pol Fouchet's *Fontaine* (viz. Dirk Van Hulle, 'Publishing "The End": Beckett and *Les Temps Modernes*', in Mark Nixon [ed.], *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 75).

¹⁰⁷ viz. *LSB I*, 679-80 (SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [21st May, 1940]); *LSB II*, 65 (SB to TMG [24th November, 1947])

that time ‘halfway through’.¹⁰⁸ In interpreting this remark, it is particularly important to note that Beckett described this text, not as a translation, but as ‘a *modified version* in French’. To speak of his ‘Love and Lethe’ in this way implies that we are not dealing with a simple self-translation. Instead, we are dealing with a much freer mode of literary self-recreation in French. More importantly still, there is, once again, no reference to Péron in this letter, which implies that Beckett’s ‘modified version’ was prepared by himself alone.¹⁰⁹ Admittedly, the manner in which Beckett presents this French ‘Love and Lethe’ suggests that he is not entirely sure of the quality of his new version. It should be recognised, however, that this uncertainty is presented as owing, not to any dissatisfaction with the new version’s language or Beckett’s sense that his French is not up to the task, but to a dissatisfaction with the English-language original.¹¹⁰ Whatever Beckett’s feelings about his French version of ‘Love and Lethe’, a subsequent reference to a ‘nouvelle’ that ‘Sartre gave...to Paulhan’ implies that Beckett was happy enough with his ‘modified version in French’ to ask Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom he was acquainted, to submit it to Jean Paulhan, then editor of the *NRF*, on his behalf.¹¹¹ Although it is now impossible to judge either the success of Beckett’s French-language version of his story or the scale of the revision that the story underwent – the text was not published by the *NRF* and Beckett’s typescript appears not to have survived –, I believe that it is possible to get some sense of just how far Beckett’s efforts at preparing French-language ‘versions[s]’ of existing English-language work could take him. This sense – very imperfect, admittedly, but valuable all the same – is offered by ‘Les Deux Besoins’, the aesthetic essay that Beckett composed in French sometime between 1938 and 1939.

The first thing that must be said about ‘Les Deux Besoins’ is that it is now, unfortunately, impossible to date the composition of this text with certainty: Beckett

¹⁰⁸ *LSB I*, 645 (SB to George Reavey [after 24th October, 1938])

¹⁰⁹ In his biography, James Knowlson suggests that Beckett was ‘probably helped...by Péron’ (*DTF*, 761 [n.160]) during the translation and modification of ‘Love and Lethe’, but the only evidence offered in support of this probability is Péron’s supposed assistance with the translation of *Murphy*.

¹¹⁰ *viz.* ‘I don’t know if it’s better than the English version or merely as bad’ (*LSB I*, 645 – SB to George Reavey [after 24th October, 1938])

¹¹¹ *LSB I*, 653 (SB to George Reavey [28th February, 1939]) – In their notes to this letter, the editors of *LSB* remark that ‘no evidence has been found that SB had given this story [i.e. ‘Love and Lethe’] to Sartre’ (*Ibid.*, 654 [n.6]). While no corroborating evidence may have been found for Beckett’s having given this short-story to Sartre – and while the possibility naturally exists that Beckett may have been acting as an intermediary for another, unknown, writer –, no other text that Beckett is known to have been working on at the time could be referred to as a ‘nouvelle’, nor is Beckett known at this time to have acted as a literary intermediary for any French-language writer. In light of these facts, it is most probable – and thus most reasonable to assume – that the text referred to is indeed the modified ‘Love and Lethe’.

informed John Fletcher that '[i]t must have been written 1938 or early 1939 at latest'¹¹², and critics – such as Ruby Cohn and John Pilling¹¹³ – have commonly followed Bair in placing its composition in 1938.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, James Knowlson, whose datings are generally more reliable than Bair's owing to his greater access to relevant documentation and having benefited from the decades of intervening research between their two biographies, chose to exclude 'Les Deux Besoins' entirely from *DTF*; this exclusion may suggest that Knowlson was at once unable to corroborate Bair's dating by way of external evidence and unable to find sufficient reliable information about the text and its composition to warrant discussing it in his biography.

Uncertainties about the composition date of 'Les Deux Besoins' notwithstanding, what we can say with certainty is that this text shares obvious similarities with Beckett's review of Denis Devlin's *Intercessions*, written sometime in late 1937. So notable are these similarities, in fact, that a number of those critics that have engaged with these texts have chosen to examine them together.¹¹⁵ Some of these similarities are stylistic; each text conforms to the allusion-rich mode of Beckett's pre-War writing. Alongside citations from Devlin, therefore, the review of *Intercessions* also includes unattributed citations from Goethe's *Faust* ('Unbefriedigt jeden Augenblick'¹¹⁶) and Éluard's 'La dame de carreau' ('aimant l'amour'¹¹⁷), alongside pointed references to the Biblical parable of the Dives and Lazarus – evoked via the 'Dives-Lazarus symbiosis'¹¹⁸ –, as well as 'ex-comrade Radek' and his definition of 'social realism'.¹¹⁹ 'Les Deux Besoins', meanwhile, begins with an allusion to

¹¹² SB to John Fletcher [3rd June, 1966] *qtd* in *LSB I*, 646 [n.7]

¹¹³ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 97; John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 159

¹¹⁴ *SBAB*, 312

¹¹⁵ For discussions of 'Les Deux Besoins', see: Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 97-99; Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 428-31; John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 159-63; Gesa Schubert, *Die Kunst des Scheiterns: Die Entwicklung der kunsttheoretischen Ideen Samuel Becketts*, 128-44 – Both Pilling and Schubert examine 'Les Deux Besoins' and the *Intercessions* review as a pair.

¹¹⁶ *D*, 91 – For the original, see Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil*, in Gotthard Erler (ed.), *Goethe Berliner Ausgabe, Band 8: Dramatische Dichtungen IV* [Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978], 524).

¹¹⁷ *D*, 91 – For the original, see Éluard, 'La Dame de carreau', in *Les dessous d'une vie, ou La pyramide humaine*, in Paul Éluard, Marcelle Dumas and Lucien Scheler (eds), *Œuvres complètes I*, 202.

¹¹⁸ *D*, 92

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* – Austro-Hungarian writer and Bolshevik Karl Radek defined 'social realism' as part of the 'First Soviet Writers' Congress' in 1934. He was subsequently expelled from the party, tried during the 1937 Moscow Show Trials, and died in prison (*viz.* David Weisberg, *Chronicles of Disorder: Samuel Beckett and the Cultural Politics of the Modern Novel* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000], 30-32).

Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*¹²⁰, and includes reference to Galileo ('Il se mouvait pourtant, le berceau de Galilée'¹²¹), Pascal ('choux pensant et même bien pensant'¹²²) and Stendhal ('Il y a des jours...où la route réflète mieux que le miroir'¹²³), as well as overt reference to Pythagoras, Maxwell, Poincaré, who appears coupled with God, and Communism, coupled with Fascism.¹²⁴ The similarities between these texts go far beyond correspondences of style, however. We also find an example of the same phrasing being used in both texts: In the Devlin review, we read that '[a]rt has always been...pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric'.¹²⁵ In 'Les Deux Besoins', meanwhile, we find defined 'les limites entre lesquelles l'artiste se met à la question, se met en question, se résout en questions, en questions rhétoriques sans fonction oratoire'.¹²⁶ There is also the most obvious, and the most important, of the similarities between these two texts – namely, their shared focus on the relation between artistic creation and need.

In 'Les Deux Besoins', the subject of need is obvious from the very title of the essay and it is subsequently expanded and clarified – after a fashion – by way of a six-pointed, many-lettered star, whose significance Beckett explains thusly:

¹²⁰ viz. 'Et le pharmacien...entonna: "J'ai deux grand bœufs dans mon étable. Deux grand [sic] bœufs blancs..." Sénécal lui mit la main sur la bouche, il n'aimait pas le désordre' (*D*, 55) – It should be noted that the value of this allusion appears to owe itself, not to any connection that it serves to establish between Beckett's essay and the scene that occurs in Flaubert's novel (viz. Flaubert, Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé (ed.), *L'Éducation sentimentale* [Paris: GF Flammarion, 2001], 364), but in establishing a connection between the essay and the song that is being cited by Flaubert, namely Pierre Dupont's 'Les Bœufs' (viz. Pierre Dupont, *Chants et chansons (poésies et musique) de Pierre Dupont, ornés de gravures sur acier d'après T Johannot, Andrieux, C. Danteuil, etc. Tome premier* [Paris: Alexandre Houssiaux, Éditeur, 1855], 25-27). The relevance of this poem to Beckett's essay undoubtedly owes to the fact that it recounts the speaker's excessive attachment to his two oxen: 'S'il me fallait les vendre / J'aimerais mieux me pendre ; J'aime Jeanne ma femme, eh bien ! j'aimerais mieux / La voir mourir, que voir mourir mes bœufs' (Pierre Dupont, 'Les bœufs', in *op. cit.*, 27). In his all-consuming attachment to his 'deux bœufs', the speaker is a model of the artist as conceptualised by Beckett in this essay, for whom the titular 'deux besoins' are every bit as vital as the 'deux bœufs' of Dupont's text. Evidently, Beckett's manner of citing Dupont by way of citing Flaubert's citation is itself a marker of the allusive complexity of this text.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* – Beckett is here playing on the proximity of 'Galilée' and Galileo, applying to Christ's crib that statement which Galileo is said to have uttered after having been forced to abjure his expressed belief in a heliocentric universe: 'E pur si muove.'

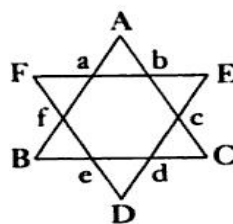
¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56



Besoin d'avoir besoin (DEF) et besoin dont on a besoin (ABC), conscience du besoin d'avoir besoin (ab) et conscience du besoin dont on a besoin – dont on *avait* besoin (de), issue du chaos de vouloir voir (Aab) et entrée dans le néant d'avoir vu (Dde), déclenchement et fin de l'autologie créatrice (abcdef).¹²⁷

Art is here presented as a product and a consequence of those needs which confront and inhabit the artist, these being chiefly: the need to need, and the need so needed – or once needed. It is within the limits of these two needs that the 'autologie créatrice' – creative self-knowing, creation perceived as self-knowing – has its beginning and its end.¹²⁸

The centrality of need to artistic production is equally evident in Beckett's review of Devlin's *Intercessions*. In that review, Beckett declares that he will speak of poetry in '[i]ts own terms, that is terms of need'.¹²⁹ More particularly, art is defined as lying within the confluence of two forms of need, of which one is clearly defined as 'the need to need', thereby exactly prefiguring the 'besoin d'avoir besoin' that would later be evoked in 'Les Deux Besoins'.¹³⁰

Noteworthy as such obvious points of commonality are, it is worth recognising what separates these texts, because there is indeed a divide between them. For his part, John Pilling has characterised that divide in terms of style: 'The principal difference between "Les deux besoins" and the Denis Devlin review', writes Pilling, 'can be expressed in terms of the difference between a straight line and a spiral, or between plane geometry and figures in space.'¹³¹ In Pilling's estimation, 'Les

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* – Emphasis in original.

¹²⁸ Although perhaps not central to his essay, the fact that Beckett's visual representation of these two needs places art, and the artist, under the sign of a Star of David is scarcely coincidental given that, as noted by Knowlson, Beckett had by this stage 'witnessed at firsthand the impact of anti-Semitism on individual painters whom he had met in Hamburg, persecuted simply because they were non-Aryan' (*DTF*, 303) – This use of the Star of David, and the connection which it appears to establish between artists and Jews, is also noted by Ann Beer in her discussion of this text: Beer finds in it an 'awareness of Jewish culture' that she elsewhere identifies in Beckett's decision to use a Yiddish term for the title of his poem 'Ooftish' (*viz.* Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 153).

¹²⁹ *D*, 91

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 162

Deux Besoins' merely 'speaks' of the artist's needs; in the Devlin review, on the other hand, '[t]he spasms and convulsions' are 'actually active agents in what is being said'.¹³² So interpreted, the 'principal difference' that Pilling finds between the two texts is revealed most clearly in the fact that, in the Devlin review 'Beckett...resists any residual desire to supply his readers with a diagram'.¹³³ In 'Les Deux Besoins', in other words, Beckett would cleave too closely to something that 'looks a little too much like the geometrical equivalent of "book-keeping"', while in the Devlin review, Pilling views Beckett as having liberated himself to produce something potentially incomprehensible and, in so doing, a text whose form exemplifies the conviction, to which he gives voice in the essay, that 'art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear'.¹³⁴

While I would agree with Pilling's contention that these texts are different in key respects, I cannot agree with his characterisation of that difference as a form of progress, a development away from clarity – typified by a 'residual desire to supply...readers with a diagram' – in 'Les Deux Besoins' and towards an embrace of undiagrammed obscurity, in the Devlin review. The fundamental problem with Pilling's vision is that he has inverted the chronology of composition: Although first published in 1938, we know that the Devlin review was composed in 1937, since Beckett, as previously noted, was able to receive the proofs by December of that year. 'Les Deux Besoins', meanwhile, while its precise date of composition may be unclear, seems almost certainly to have been composed in 1938, and after April 1938 at the earliest. As such, we cannot speak of any '*residual* desire' that would subsequently have been entirely discarded, since the clarifying diagram is offered by Beckett months *after* he had already completed the purely verbal presentation of the 'inverted spiral of need' that we find in the Devlin review.¹³⁵ Bearing this chronology in mind, it is no longer possible to situate the difference between these two texts where Pilling imagined it to be; we must look elsewhere. If we must look elsewhere, perhaps the wisest place to start is by looking to the different genres to which these texts belong – the one a review, the other an aesthetic essay – and the effects that their respective generic character may have had on their composition.

The potential impact of generic constraints upon at least one of these texts is, in fact, suggested by Beckett himself. In the Devlin review, and having situated art in 'terms of need', Beckett goes on to clarify the degree to which the task of the reviewer should be informed by an awareness of this need:

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *D*, 94

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 91

The only suggestions therefore that the reviewer may venture without impertinence are such as have reference to this fundamental [i.e. need]. Thus he may suggest the type of need (Braque's is not Munch's, neither's is Klee's, etc.), its energy, scope, adequacy of expression, etc. there seems no other way in which this miserable functionary can hope to achieve innocuity. Unless of course he is a critic.¹³⁶

Despite its sarcastic tone, Beckett's presentation of the reviewer's role is not merely facetious since it serves to underline the essential distinction between his review of *Intercessions* and 'Les Deux Besoins'. As the passage that has just been quoted implies, Beckett's review is precisely that, a 'review'. It is, as such, anchored within the text that Beckett has been tasked with discussing. Certainly, the vision of art that he presents – the vision of an art rooted primarily in need, of art as an expression of need(s) – is personal, but this personal vision is refracted through the prism of another's writing, such is the unavoidable consequence of the task at hand. What Beckett says of art and of need in his review is said *around* rather than *through* Devlin. That this is the case is made manifest in Beckett's review through the graceless use of quotation from Devlin's poetry that we find therein. Rather than citation from Devlin's poetry and Beckett's text being interwoven in such a way as to work together to advance an evaluation of the former's poetry, we are instead offered, in the first instance, a dense passage of Beckett – one that speaks about art in general terms, and which might be entirely divorced from Devlin – and then, in the second half of the review, these Beckettian passages are occasionally interrupted by lengthy passages from Devlin. Even when Devlin finally appears, however, there is almost no interactions between his verse and Beckett's commentary, and even less sense that the latter has anything of great relevance to tell us about the former, or *vice versa*. Beckett's lack of real engagement with the text of Devlin's poems is at least partly explicable as a consequence of the fact that Beckett was not particularly taken with *Intercessions*; he admitted to MacGreevy that, despite finding 'lovely fragments' in it, he was 'on the whole rather disappointed' by *Intercessions*.¹³⁷ Similarly, the failure of Beckett's review *qua* review is unsurprising given that Beckett was never eager to write the review.¹³⁸ Neither of these factors, however, can suffice to explain Beckett's decision to use the review as a chance to speak around Devlin and on the subject of art and need. The vision of art that Beckett gave voice to in this review was obviously one that was of importance to him at the time and one that he was eager to express, even if he had to do so via a review that he would have preferred not to write.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 92

¹³⁷ *LSB I*, 549 (SB to TMG [21st September, 1937])

¹³⁸ Having been initially asked by Devlin to review his collection for *Ireland To-day*, Beckett asked MacGreevy to pen this review on his behalf (*viz.* *LSB I*, 530 – SB to TMG [4th August, 1937]).

Once this aspect of the review has been properly appreciated, the significance of Beckett's decision to return to the topic of art and need when he came to write 'Les Deux Besoins' becomes clearer. In writing this brief essay, Beckett has been freed from the review format: There was no longer anyone else whom he was obliged to incorporate into his text; no one around whose presence he was obliged to fit whatever personal opinions he wished to express; there was, crucially, no friend whose 'disappoint[ing]' work he was obliged to comment on in print as politely as he could manage. Instead, Beckett was now free to make his point directly – or, at least, as directly as was his wont. It seems probable that this is the real reason why 'Les Deux Besoins' is more explicit in its treatment of the relations between art and need than was the Devlin review. Rather than this essay representing a step backwards, or being limited by any 'residual desire' for clarity, it is a space in which Beckett was free to articulate his aesthetic perspective '[w]ith himself on behalf of himself, with his selves on behalf of his selves'.¹³⁹ Such freedom is all the more notable because, as the texts collected in *Disjecta* make quite clear, 'Les Deux Besoins' is the *only* text of the pre-War period in which Beckett may truly be said to have spoken '[w]ith...[and] on behalf of himself.' Throughout the rest of the period his only forays into critical writing took the form of reviews or other engagements with the work of others, as was the case for 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce' and 'Recent Irish Poetry', or with subjects of a political nature, as in 'Censorship in the Saorstát [*sic*]'. Obviously, there are some pre-War texts that afford us an insight into Beckett's personal aesthetic vision which is not mediated via his response to the work of others or the workings of the Saorstát, but these texts are, invariably, private. To find Beckett articulating his own poetics, we need to look either to his correspondence – to the so-called 'German Letter', or to his letters to MacGreevy – or to Beckett's other personal writings of the period – namely, the 'German Diaries'.¹⁴⁰ 'Les Deux Besoins' is thus all the more important because it is one of the few examples that we have from this period of Beckett directly expressing his views on art, it is also the sole example of such a text that appears to have been written with the intent to publish it and, more importantly still, it was written in French.¹⁴¹ What we find in 'Les Deux Besoins', therefore, is not simply a statement of

¹³⁹ *D*, 91 – This is, of course, the opening line of Beckett's Devlin review which, as Pilling rightly reminds us has 'no antecedent' (John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 161). Although he does not suggest the possibility, I would propose that Beckett's opening may be intended to underline his discomfort at being obliged to engage in a dialogue with, and to speak on behalf of, someone else's work.

¹⁴⁰ The importance of the 'German Diaries' to Beckett's evolving poetics has been most thoroughly explored by Mark Nixon (*viz.* Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, passim*).

¹⁴¹ Although Beckett would not publish 'Les Deux Besoins' in the pre-War period, he did show it to the German artist Otto Freundlich, and was certainly happy for it to appear in print in the post-War period. With regard to Beckett's showing this text to

what Beckett then perceived to be an essential connection between artistic creation and forms of need. We also find in this text evidence for two things of direct relevance to the question of Beckett's pre-War turn to French.

Firstly, this text provides us with proof of the fundamental change that had taken place by 1938 in Beckett's approach to writing in French. It is quite clear that, by this time, he was willing not only to write poems in French but also to use French for the articulation of a keenly-felt, and deeply personal, aesthetic position. Admittedly, this articulation comes in the form of a relatively brief text, but a brief text is precisely what we should expect for a work that Beckett would most likely have hoped to place with a literary review – notably, 'Les Deux Besoins' is roughly the same length as most of his critical writings from the 1930s, being a little longer than some, such as his review of an English translation of Eduard Mörike's *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, and only noticeably shorter than the two key pieces of non-literary writing from the period (i.e. 'Recent Irish Poetry' and 'Censorship in the Saorstat [*sic*]').¹⁴² Moreover, and more important than its relative brevity, the statement we find in 'Les Deux Besoins' is complete: What this text offers us is an expansion and a clarification of the point that Beckett could only partially make in his review of Devlin's *Intercessions*, it offers not just a restatement but a refinement of what came before. In that respect, 'Les Deux Besoins' offers us a fully-realised example of what Beckett described his French 'Love and Lethe' to be, that is a 'revised version in French' of a pre-existing English-language original.

Unlike the revised version of 'Love and Lethe' that has not survived, however, we are in the happy position of having preserved 'Les Deux Besoins' and it thus offers us a chance to get some sense of what Beckett's short-story may have been. In preparing his 'modified version' of the story in French, Beckett is likely to have taken the opportunity to expand and clarify the essence of 'Love and Lethe' just as he expanded and clarified the essence of the Devlin review in composing 'Les Deux Besoins'. It seems equally likely that the revised version of 'Love and Lethe' would have been composed in a style that carried into French the densely allusive, self-conscious, and mannered mode of his pre-War English-language writings that, as we saw in Part II, was still the mode of much of his French-language writing of the late

Freundlich, this may have been done either as a simple gesture of reciprocation for the 'large aesthetic essay' (*LSB I*, 645 – SB to George Reavey [after 24th October, 1938]) of his own that Freundlich had given Beckett to read, or as a preliminary step to soliciting Freundlich's help in placing the essay with a suitable magazine. It must be admitted, however, that neither suggestion finds support in Beckett's correspondence and so the precise reasons for his giving the text to Freundlich must remain obscure.

¹⁴² All of these works are reprinted in *D*.

1930s. Here again we have 'Les Deux Besoins' to guide us, as this text does indeed accord with that allusive style that characterises the rest of Beckett's pre-War prose.

On the subject of the style of 'Les Deux Besoins' and the relationship between Beckett's style and his use of French, it is worth recalling what was said about this essay's style by Brian Coffey in 'Memory's Murphy Maker: Some notes on Samuel Beckett'. Referring in that piece to a 'bespoken article...in French' that can only be 'Les Deux Besoins' since it is described as containing 'a geometrical diagram', Coffey commented that, when he saw the text, '[he] noticed that [Beckett] was keeping close to known French sentences selected from, for example, *La Méthode*, or from traditional proverbs and wisecracks (*Paris vaut bien une messe*), which he altered slightly to suit his purposes'.¹⁴³ In the context of Coffey's article, this characterisation is supposed to suggest that, by 1937 – the date at which Coffey claims the article in question was composed¹⁴⁴ – Beckett had not yet made the breakthrough into that 'much greater liberty in using the second language' which, for Coffey, began with 'a poem of the *conversation galante* type' that is almost certainly 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible'.¹⁴⁵ The opposition that Coffey establishes between these works, however, and the vision of Beckett's French that he derives from this characterisation, misses something important about Beckett's pre-War style.

What Coffey describes as indicating Beckett's lack of ease in French, in fact – namely, the deployment of materials found elsewhere and altered to suit his purpose –, is *exactly* what Beckett had been doing in English, and in French, since his earliest engagements with fiction at the start of the 1930s.¹⁴⁶ *Pace* Coffey, therefore, Beckett's deployment of materials derived from other sources in 'Les Deux Besoins' is not a sign of his unease with French at the time he wrote this essay, for precisely the same reliance on third-party sources is to be found in his English-language writing of the pre-War period. Once again, in other words, we find a text that stands as a testament to the consistency of Beckett's style, whether he is working through English or through French.

In summation then, the importance of 'Les Deux Besoins' and the lost version of 'Love and Lethe' owes to the fact that they show Beckett was already prepared to

¹⁴³ Brian Coffey, 'Memory's Murphy Maker: Some notes on Samuel Beckett', in *Threshold* (No. 17 - 1962), 35

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* – Coffey's dating, it should be recalled, is not supported by any other evidence and therefore cannot be taken as authoritative.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ At the same time, Coffey's characterisation of 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' as evincing a 'much greater liberty' ignores the degree to which that poem too rests upon an intertextual foundation – being, as demonstrated in Part II, grounded in Beckett's dialogue with Verlaine's 'Colloque sentimental'.

compose French-language prose by the close of the 1930s. More particularly, they show that Beckett was prepared to do so in a way that went beyond mere translation, of the sort demonstrated by his preparation, with or without Péron's assistance, of the French-language *Murphy*, and moved into a process of recreation or even, as in the case of 'Les Deux Besoins' – a text that preserves only the primary concern of, and a single sentence from, its English-language predecessor –, a process of true creation. This creation, however, remained in the mould of what had preceded it: The interests, themes, and style remained the same; only the language had changed. In this way, two other aspects of the importance of the pre-War linguistic turn become clear: Firstly, and at the risk of offending the reader's patience by returning to a point that has already been made and demonstrated at length, it is once again obvious that the turn to French, in and of itself, had no effect on Beckett's style. Secondly, and no doubt more interestingly, it can be seen that, even by the time of his pre-War linguistic turn, Beckett was *already* willing to write French-language prose. Even if this prose was only a kind of translation, or revision, of English models that had come before, it is still significant that he was willing to take this step. That he should have been willing to do so invites us to consider what progress his work might have taken had the events of the Second World War not intervened, and particularly the events of Beckett's life following the German invasion of France and the resulting Occupation.

During much of this period, as is well known, Beckett was engaged in the composition of *Watt*, his first English-language novel since *Murphy* and his first substantial composition in English in years. That Beckett should have chosen to work on a novel in English at this time might well be taken as evidence of the fact that he was, as yet, unwilling to write original literary prose in French. While such an explanation is tempting, it must be recalled that the composition of *Watt* is unlike anything else produced by Beckett during his career. The particularity of its composition is well captured by C. J. Ackerley in his preface to the recent Faber edition of the novel. There, we read that:

Watt began, and ended, in Paris: the first entries in what would prove to be six notebooks dated '11 February 1941', and the last signed off with 'December 28th 1944 / End'. Much of the writing was done while Beckett was on the run from the Gestapo between 1943 and 1945, in the small town of Roussillon, in the Vaucluse, where he and his partner, Suzanne [Dumesnil], had taken refuge. [...] He later described it to Lawrence Harvey as 'only a game, a means of staying sane'; and he dismissed it to Ruby Cohn as 'an exercise', written to counter the long hours of *ennui* as he waited for nothing to happen.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ C. J. Ackerley, 'Preface', in *Watt*, viii

Obviously, the composition process that Ackerley here describes is very far removed from that of any of Beckett's earliest works. As he worked on *Dream* and *Murphy*, Beckett's biggest concern was almost certainly that his novels would be rejected – and this is, of course, exactly what happened, numerous times. While working on *Watt*, however, Beckett's concerns were of a far more pressing, a far more urgent, and a far more threatening sort: Even if Beckett had not yet begun working with the Resistance cell "Gloria SMH" when he started work on *Watt*, he was already living in a nation defeated and occupied by Nazi Germany. The horror of that realisation, particularly for one such as Beckett who already experienced life in Nazi Germany, cannot be underestimated. Later on, Beckett would work on this novel at the same time as he took an active role in resisting the Nazis and he would continue working on this novel after he and Dumesnil had been obliged to flee to the *Zone libre*, subsequently become the *Zone sud* as Nazi occupation expanded from November 1942, in fear of their lives. Clearly, when we talk about the composition of *Watt*, we are *very far* removed from the ordinary run of literary creation. We are not dealing with a text composed by a writer who, during its composition, most likely hopes to see it published. We are dealing with a text begun by a man who most likely hoped to see the Nazis soon defeated; a text composed by a man who, having seen an opportunity to contribute towards this defeat, offered his assistance and who then, having seen those resistance efforts come to naught, the Resistance cell of which he was a member broken, and his close friends captured by the Nazis – including Alfred Péron, his dearest friend in Paris at the time –, can only have hoped as he continued to work on *Watt* that no one else dear to him would endure a similar fate, and perhaps even that he himself might remain alive long enough to complete the book. To write a novel in such conditions is not simply a literary act, it is a personal act; it is expressive of a conviction that life as it was, some semblance of life as it was, continues. To write this novel in English, moreover – especially an English-language novel such as *Watt* which, as described by Ackerley, is 'a very Irish novel [and] its world of trams, trains and verdurous ditches recognisably that of Beckett's childhood'¹⁴⁸ –, is expressive of a conviction that the life that once was will be again: If one writes a novel in English under such circumstances, it is because one is certain that the day will come when things will be as they were, when one will no longer be where one is, as one is, and because, when that day comes, it will be possible to publish such a text. Such a characterisation of what may have motivated Beckett to write his novel in English is, of course, profoundly speculative; other reasons might surely be proposed. Whatever reasons one proposes, however, one must recognise that the circumstances under

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

which Beckett wrote *Watt*, we have no reason to doubt that when Beckett said he wrote it as ‘a means of staying sane’ he was telling the truth.

The circumstances under which *Watt* was written make of it a radical anomaly, one upon which it is impossible to base any critical understanding of Beckett’s relationship to language, to publishing, or to the language in which he hoped to publish. This period of the War, of tumult and confusion, though lived in the moment and, undoubtedly, never forgotten thereafter, constitutes a kind of parenthesis that bears no real connection to the more practical aspects of that ‘writer’s life’ that Beckett lived in the years that preceded and followed it – with its concerns about publication avenues, the reputational damage that might be attached to translating unsavoury materials, and the like. In the same way, the work produced during this period – namely, *Watt* – is itself a kind of parenthesis. *Watt* stands apart from the rest of Beckett’s literary production. Certainly, it is a part of this production, and it plays an important role in Beckett’s development as a writer – ‘it has’, as Beckett put it in a letter to George Reavey of 1947, ‘its place in the series’¹⁴⁹ –, but it is also a curio that cannot be judged in precisely the same terms, that will not submit to exactly the same logic, as any of the work that preceded or followed it. The decision to write *Watt* in English may perhaps be proof of Beckett’s lingering uncertainties about his ability to succeed as a French-language author or, at least, as an author of French-language prose, but it may also simply be proof of an understandable desire for something removed from the chaos that surrounded him, for a space that seemed somewhat more amenable and brought him somewhat more amusement than the situation in which he found himself.

If the decision to compose *Watt* in English cannot – owing to the circumstances under which this decision was taken – be relied upon to teach us anything about Beckett’s perspective on the possibility of his having a future as an author of French-language prose, however, the decision to compose French-language texts in the immediate pre-War period is of great importance. For Craig, as we saw, Beckett’s period of residence in Roussillon was fundamental for his emergence as a French-language writer in the post-War period. This, however, cannot be the case: Beckett’s French-language poetry of 1938-39 – not simply its composition, but his desire to publish it, and his willingness to consider sending it to a figure such as Éluard – proves his willingness to write original poetry in French for a Francophone audience. Similarly, what the example of ‘Les Deux Besoins’ demonstrates – and what the more fugitive spectre of his modified ‘Love and Lethe’ suggests – is that, even before Beckett spent his years in Roussillon, he had already begun to produce French-

¹⁴⁹ *LSB II*, 55 (SB to George Reavey [14th May, 1947])

language prose too, and seems even to have been willing to submit at least some of it to the judgement of an editor as discerning as Jean Paulhan with the intention of publishing it with a journal as well-reputed as the *NRF*.¹⁵⁰ Beckett might not yet have begun work on any truly original short-stories in French, much less a truly original novel in that language, but by composing original poetry, by modifying his pre-existing prose – and, as the example of ‘Les Deux Besoins’ proves, modifying it profoundly – he had shown himself quite capable of moving towards the creation of something entirely new in French. It thus seems highly probable that, by 1940, Beckett was already embarked on the path that would have led him to compose original prose in French and that, had he had enough time to continue along this path, this prose would have appeared even without the years in Roussillon.

Evidently, to speak of ‘what might have been’ but for the events of the Second World War and the years in Roussillon is to present a counterfactual that can be of no real assistance in deepening our understanding of the precise motivations and circumstances that may have governed Beckett’s post-War linguistic turn. Be that as it may, an exercise in *uchronie* such as that which has just been proposed is worthwhile in that it serves to remind us, yet again, that Beckett’s post-War linguistic turn is quite different from what Beckett Studies has long presumed. As the title of Part III already implies, Beckett’s use of French in the post-War period and his decision to begin using that language for the composition of original prose, was not an isolated, radical and *sui generis* event, the deeper reason of which can only be faintly glimpsed through the explanations that Beckett proffered when he was entreated to explain, for the benefit of his perplexed and astonished critics, ‘why he *began* to write in French’ after the War.¹⁵¹ Beckett did not *begin* to write in French after the War. He had already begun to write in French long before the War, and he had already made clear his willingness to write in French for a French-speaking audience just before the War in 1938. Beckett, in short, did not *turn* to French; he had been *turning* to French in a variety of ways, for a wide variety of reasons, and in response to a wide variety of forces – both internal and external – for years. That this was the case has been known since at least the publication of *DTF*, and yet its implications and the precise nature of, and motivations for, Beckett’s use of French prior to the post-War linguistic turn remain, in many respects, opaque and ill-understood. If Beckett Studies has largely

¹⁵⁰ For an extensive discussion of Paulhan’s early years as editor of the *NRF* and his role in developing the reputation that it enjoyed by the late 1930s, see Sophie Levie, ‘Jean Paulhan, rédacteur en chef de *La nouvelle revue française* de 1925 à 1930’, in *Études littéraires* (Vol. 40, No. 1 – 2009), 55-75.

¹⁵¹ ‘French’, in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* – Emphasis mine.

ignored Beckett's reasons for turning to French in the pre-War period, it is hardly surprising given that none of the pre-War turns to French led to anything like the work that followed after the post-War linguistic turn of early 1946. If Beckett Studies is to properly understand that post-War turn, however – and as I hope the reader will agree –, scholarship must take cognisance of that turn's pre-history, and of the depth and richness of Beckett's engagement with French prior to the post-War linguistic turn. Such was, of course, the aim of all that has thus far been discussed in this thesis and, having now clarified and contextualised what came before, we are ready to turn our attention to the post-War linguistic turn.

PART III: Beckett's Turn(s) to French

Chapter 3

Beckett's Use of French in the Post-War Period: 1945-46

The post-War period is the key moment in Beckett's development as a writer. Of all the material that he produced during the pre-War period – whether in English or in French –, it is almost certain that no trace of it would now be found anywhere, save the index of literary histories or the research interests of a particular class of literary critic, were it not for the writings of the late 1940s. Beckett's place in the Anglophone and Francophone literary canons rests, essentially, on three novels (*Molloy*, *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies*, *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable*) and a play (*En attendant Godot* / *Waiting for Godot*) that he produced in a span of three years, between 1947 and 1950.¹ These works laid the foundation for his subsequent reputation and, ultimately, for a future rediscovery and reevaluation of all the work he had composed over the preceding decades. As the reader will have noted, however, it is not with this period, nor with these works, that the present chapter will be concerned. Instead, this chapter will take as its focus a brief period that stretches from 1945 to early 1946 and two of the works that Beckett composed during it. The period in question is that which runs from immediately prior Beckett's linguistic turn of 1946 up to the moment of this turn itself, and the two works in question are 'La Peinture des Van Velde ou Le Monde et le pantalon' ('Le Monde et le pantalon'), and the text of 'Suite' as it is to be found within the 'Suite' Notebook up to the point of Beckett's turn to French.

In choosing to focus upon this narrow span of time, and these two texts in particular, it must be stressed that the present discussion will not attempt to provide in-depth engagement with the content of these texts. Instead, it will be principally concerned with contextualising these works. Undoubtedly, there is much that might be said about the content of both works.

Beckett's essay on '[l]a peinture...d'Abraham et Gerardus van Velde'², for example, although not itself a work of literature, is nonetheless important for the insight that it offers into Beckett's own thinking on art in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and only a short time prior to the beginning of those intensely creative years – that 'frenzy of writing', as we find it described in *DTF*, that 'siege in

¹ For details of the composition of these texts, see Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 161-94.

² *D*, 123

the room', for Bair³ – during which Beckett composed the key literary works mentioned above. It is, however, not for what it may reveal about Beckett's attitude to literary art – nor for what it reveals about the pictorial art of the van Veldes –, that this essay is of interest to us at the present time. Instead, Beckett's 1945 essay will be examined for what it reveals about his use of French in the immediate post-War period – at once the kind of French in which he wrote, and his reasons for writing in French in the first place. For, in addition to being an aesthetic essay, 'Le Monde et le Pantalon' was also Beckett's very first French-language composition of the post-War period, having been composed in 1945.⁴ As such, it provides us with an excellent opportunity to consider how and why Beckett used French in the period immediately prior to his post-War linguistic turn.

The importance of 'Suite', meanwhile, is self-evident. Or, at least, the importance of the French-language 'Suite' would be self-evident. This was, after all, Beckett's first French-language literary composition of the post-War period; at once the first of the texts of that aforementioned 'frenzy of writing' to be completed, and the first to be (partially) published. As such, it undoubtedly merits close attention within the context of any discussion of Beckett's French *following* the linguistic turn. As noted in the Introduction, however, this thesis takes as its *terminus ad quem* the precise moment of Beckett's linguistic turn. As such, the material that he composed after this turn – including the French-language 'Suite' – is properly the subject of another discussion. In the present instance, therefore, our interest lies, not with the content of the French-language 'Suite', nor the content of the various forms in which this short-story has appeared in print – whether as 'Suite' in *Les Temps Modernes*, as 'La Fin' in *NTPR*, or as 'The End' –, but with precise moment of the post-War linguistic turn as this is revealed by the 'Suite' Notebook in that line traced across its thirtieth page. 'Suite' is important to this chapter, in other words, but it is important precisely because it will allow us to contextualise that linguistic turn more thoroughly than has heretofore been essayed. Similarly, while certain details of Beckett's biography in the years after the linguistic turn will be evoked, this will only be insofar as such details can help us to better understand the particular context of the turn itself.

Before embarking upon our discussion of these texts, and of Beckett's use of French during the period 1945-46, however, it is worth taking a moment to clarify why exactly it has been decided to focus on this period in particular and why the years and the writing that followed after Beckett's 1946 linguistic turn – including the French-language 'Suite' – will not be examined here. The reasons why it has been decided to focus this chapter on such a brief period, and on these two texts only, are very simple,

³ *DTF*, 355; *SBAB*, 367

⁴ For details of the essay's composition and original publication, see below.

namely: Chronology, and the unique evidentiary value of the 'Suite' Notebook for understanding Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. Simple though these reasons may be, clarifying the value of these factors will prove helpful as it will allow us to bring together certain points that have been made over the course of this thesis and which are of particular relevance to the present chapter's discussion.

Chronology has been one of the key concerns throughout this thesis. The value of this concern with chronology was made particularly evident in the immediately preceding chapter. There, great care was devoted to reconstructing the precise sequence of events that led up to and surrounded Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn. The value of such careful attention to the chronology of this turn – to the contemporaneous evidence contained in Beckett's correspondence and to the publishing environment in which Beckett found himself at the close of the 1930s – was demonstrated by the manner in which we were able to show the inaccuracies of those critical accounts of the pre-War linguistic turn that had presented it as a direct consequence of Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun and the vision of language expressed therein. In addition, our focus on accurately reconstructing the chronology of Beckett's pre-War linguistic turn also allowed us to greatly nuance the relationship between Beckett's years in Roussillon and the post-War linguistic turn. By carefully plotting Beckett's engagement with French over the period between his move to Paris in 1937 and his composition of original French-language work in 1938-39, it was possible to show that Beckett had already made the necessary 'existential reorientation' in his attitude towards writing and publishing in French long *before* he was obliged to flee Paris and seek refuge in the Vaucluse. In this way, due regard for chronology was essential in revealing that the years in Roussillon, while they certainly exposed Beckett to new kinds of French – and thus undoubtedly had their role to play in contributing towards the kind of French in which Beckett would write his post-War works⁵ –, were not necessary to effect the change in his attitude towards writing and publishing in French that permitted him to write these post-War works in French in the first place.

In speaking of the benefits that have been derived from a due regard for chronology, it must at the same time be acknowledged that the elaboration of a chronology is by no means an easy thing and the chronologies that have been advanced in this thesis are by no means immune from critique or correction. With regard to the chronology of the pre-War turn offered in Chapter 2, in particular, it would be foolhardy to ignore the uncertainty that hangs over it – or, at least, over

⁵ The nature of this contribution will be clarified when we come to discuss 'La Peinture des Van Velde, ou Le Monde et le pantalon'.

parts thereof – and which in turn serves to cast some doubt over this thesis’ presentation of the pre-War linguistic turn. The most obvious of these uncertainties concern the nature of ‘Love and Lethe’ and the language in which ‘Dieppe’ was originally composed. If the former held much closer to the English-language original than implied by Beckett’s description of it as a ‘modified version’, for example, then this closeness might serve to disprove the possibility that Beckett was willing to compose radically novel – if not quite entirely new – *literary* prose in French, a possibility which we could only suggest by way of the radically novel, but resolutely non-literary, prose of the essay ‘Les Deux Besoins’. Similarly, if Beckett did indeed originally compose ‘Dieppe’ in French, then it may be possible to salvage something of the argument that holds the pre-War linguistic turn to be a direct consequence of the Kaun letter.⁶

It is only right that the existence of such uncertainties and the potential difficulties that they present for the particular chronology of the pre-War linguistic turn that has been offered here be acknowledged. Such uncertainties should not, however, be allowed to throw into question the fundamental value of chronology. Quite simply put, the writings of 1937 cannot be read as if they were a development of those composed in 1938.⁷ By the same token, any enquiry into the origins of Beckett’s pre- and post-War linguistic turns must respect the chronology of these turns as this is recoverable via the documentation and evidence that we possess. This is not to say that surviving documentation and evidence cannot be supplemented by suggestion, conjecture, or educated assumption. (On the contrary, documentation and evidence alone will not a chronology make; for that, such material as is available *must* be accompanied and elucidated by suggestion, conjecture, and educated assumption.) Rather, it means that our discussions of these linguistic turns must take as their starting point what we can know of the chronology of these turns. This

⁶ With regard to these potential uncertainties – and without wishing to entirely dismiss either of them –, I would submit the following defences: In the first instance, even if ‘Love and Lethe’ was more a translation than a modification, ‘Les Deux Besoins’ does prove Beckett to have been willing and able to produce original prose in French before the years in Roussillon, a fact that should be recognised. Secondly, even if ‘Dieppe’ was originally written in French, Beckett’s decision not to make mention of this poem – which would have been his first French-language poem since the early 1930s, and his first ever French-language poem to be written for itself rather than with the intent of nesting it in a broader narrative – in his letters, and his similar unwillingness to try publishing it, or any of the French poetry he is known to have written by that point in his life, with a French-language publication prior to his experience with Péron, do provide support for that genealogy of the ‘existential reorientation’ set out in the previous chapter. Evidence which is further supported by the fact that, during this time, Beckett continued to compose and seek to publish material in English (i.e. ‘Ooftish’, ‘they come’).

⁷ This was, as the reader may recall, the problem that was identified with John Pilling’s reading of ‘Les Deux Besoins’ and Beckett’s review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions*.

recognition of chronology is all the more necessary because, as observed in Part II, a great deal of scholarship into Beckett's use of French following his pre-War linguistic turn read the French-language material produced following this pre-War turn in terms of what Beckett Studies has long assumed about the *post*-War linguistic turn – namely, that Beckett's turn away from English was occasioned by a desire for greater simplicity and weakness, characteristics that could only be achieved through the use of French. As we have already seen, the pre-War turn must be read on its own terms, not as if it were a consequence of a subsequent switch to French that would not take place for another eight years.

The importance of chronology in the case of the post-War turn is even more striking, since it was preceded by the pre-War turn. As such, when we come to asking the question of why Beckett began to write prose in French in the post-War period we cannot pretend that he had not already done so in the pre-War period. Equally, we cannot pretend that Beckett waited until the post-War period to seek to publish his work. His efforts to publish his French-language compositions in the pre-War period may have been unsuccessful, but we have already seen that his correspondence proves his willingness to see his French-language poetry and prose appear in print, whether in the journals of his friends or in more prestigious publications, to which he hoped to gain access via intermediaries such as Sartre (in the case of his 'nouvelle') or Éluard (in the case of his poems). In analysing the post-War turn, then, we must recognise that the sea change in Beckett's attitude to publication has its origins in the pre-War period. Equally, we must recognise that, in direct opposition to the pre-War turn – over the precise circumstances of which some lingering uncertainty will no doubt forever hang –, the post-War linguistic turn is, *pace* George Craig, an eminently 'datable decision'.

As outlined in the Introduction, evidence for the dating of this decision is to be found in the 'Suite' Notebook itself, which shows that Beckett decided to begin writing a short-story in English on February 17th, 1946, and then, subsequently, decided to draw a line under what he had written and continue his story in French sometime around March 13th, quite possibly doing so on this very date. The importance of this particular notebook, as has already been stressed, owes to the fact that this story – which Beckett concluded in French – was the first literary text to be written by Beckett in French in the post-War period. (Indeed, when its first half appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in June 1946 it was also his first ever literary publication in French.⁸) These factors confirm 'Suite' as the story that marked the

⁸ For the publication history of 'Suite', see Dirk Van Hulle, 'Publishing "The End": Beckett and *Les Temps Modernes*', in Mark Nixon [ed.], *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 75-79

linguistic turn, and allow us to place this turn around March 13th, 1946. All the French-language writings that followed after 'Suite' – the novel *Mercier et Camier*, the rest of the *nouvelles*, the novels of the Trilogy, and the various plays (*Eleutheria*, *En attendant Godot*...) – were enabled by the decision to write in French and the willingness to publish in French that this story signalled. Chronology thus proves the unique importance of this period, and of the 'Suite' Notebook, for any understanding of the linguistic turn.

As what has just been said attests, the focus on the 'Suite' Notebook in this chapter is a direct consequence of chronology. It is not *simply* a matter of chronology, however. It is also a consequence of the fact that this notebook provides a uniquely valuable insight into the precise circumstances of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn.

Though less often discussed than the turn to French, the fact that 'Suite' was begun in English is every bit as important as the fact that the story was completed in French: Those pages of English-language fiction serve to confirm a number of things about Beckett's relation to the English and French languages in the immediate post-War period and allow us to formulate a number of questions about this relationship. In terms of what these pages confirm – and just as chronology confirms that the years in Roussillon were not necessary to bring about his 'existential reorientation' in relation to the idea of writing and publishing and French –, the fact that Beckett began 'Suite' in English proves that the years in Roussillon alone were not sufficient to convince Beckett of the necessity of abandoning English as the primary language of his literary expression. Despite these years of living almost exclusively through French, the 'Suite' Notebook proves that, when Beckett began to work on his first piece of literary prose of the post-War period in February 1946, he began it in English. Any explanation of the linguistic turn needs to account for this initial use of English every bit as much as it does for Beckett's eventual decision to switch to French sometime around March 13th.

In conclusion, it may be seen that chronology has led us to this period and that this period has led us to the 'Suite' Notebook. This notebook proves that the post-War linguistic turn was the result of a choice and, as we have already seen over the course of the previous chapters of Part III, Beckett's linguistic choices were invariably a response to a complex set of forces, at once external and internal, of determinations at once positive and negative. Thanks to the 'Suite' Notebook, it becomes easier to study what these forces may have been. It has already been possible in the Introduction to show by way of the 'Suite' Notebook that Beckett's style did not greatly change through the passage from English to French, and that the key traits of his post-War style were already present in the original, English-language 'Suite'. This discovery has already proven immensely beneficial as it provided us with a

first step towards the re-evaluation of Beckett's pre-War French-language writing that was proposed in Part II. Even if we have proven Beckett's turn to French was not necessarily commensurate with a turn to a novel literary style, however, it remains to be shown what forces may have contributed to Beckett's choice to conclude in French a story begun in English. If we are to answer this question, as I hope these introductory remarks have made clear, chronology and the 'Suite' Notebook will be of prime importance. With this in mind, and before turning our attention to the 'Suite' Notebook of 1946, let us begin by briefly examining Beckett's decision to write an aesthetic essay in French in 1945.

I. 'LA PEINTURE DES VAN VELDE OU LE MONDE ET LE PANTALON' ('LE MONDE ET LE PANTALON')

As previously noted, this text is not a work of literary fiction but, rather, an essay. It is, moreover, an essay that Beckett is known to have been written sometime in 1945, most likely in January of that year.⁹ In *DTF*, Knowlson informs us that 'le Monde et le pantalon' was the result of a commission, Beckett having been 'invited by the editors of the art journal, *Cahiers d'Art*, to contribute an essay on the painting of his Dutch friends, Geer and Bram van Velde [...] Exactly where and when the essay was written is not entirely clear. But it was probably early in 1945'.¹⁰ Unlike the doubt that Knowlson admits concerning the precise date of composition for 'Le Monde et le pantalon', there can be no room for doubt as to the rationale for Beckett's decision to compose this text in French. In this case, Beckett's choice to write his essay in French was a direct result of the fact that the essay was solicited by the editors of *Cahiers d'Art* and, as attested by the issue in which Beckett's article appears, this was a purely French-language publication, Beckett was thus obliged to compose the article in French.¹¹

That Beckett was obliged to write in French as a consequence of the editorial policy of *Cahiers d'Art* means that Beckett's decision to compose his article on the van Veldes in French may be seen as simply one more instance of Beckett's choice of language being negatively determined by an external force, in a manner not dissimilar to the use of French for 'Tristesse Janale' or for Lucien's letter, as examined in Chapter 1. In this regard, what this text reveals about the motivations for Beckett's choice of

⁹ This is the composition date provided by John Pilling in his *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (viz. *op. cit.*, 93) and by the editors of *LSB* (viz. 'Chronology 1940-1945', in *LSB II*, 6).

¹⁰ *DTF*, 357 – In a footnote, Knowlson clarifies that this essay 'must have been written either before [Beckett] left Paris in 1945 [to return to Ireland] or while he was in Ireland from May until August – slightly less likely but not impossible' (*Ibid.*, 772 [n.4]).

¹¹ viz. Samuel Beckett, 'La peinture des Van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon', in *Cahiers d'Art 1945-1946, 20^e-21^e années* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'Art, 1946), 349-356

French is eminently straightforward. The value of 'Le Monde et le pantalon' is not restricted to demonstrating once again how Beckett's choice of language could be determined by external circumstances, however. This essay also allows us to clarify matters of importance for the linguistic turn concerning Beckett's willingness to write in French, and the kind of French in which he wrote.

The decision to write in French may not necessarily have been Beckett's to make, but it must not be forgotten that the decision to write the essay at all most certainly was. Had Beckett preferred not to write this article in French, he might have refused to write it or, even if he felt obliged to write the article out of a sense of loyalty towards the van Veldes, he might well have chosen to engage the services of a translator, or even to let his work appear under a pseudonym. By choosing to write the essay himself, and to see it published under his own name, Beckett was demonstrating his willingness to allow his French-language writing appear in a French-language publication directed towards a French-speaking readership. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is not an opportunity that Beckett would have been eager to seize prior to the pre-War linguistic turn of 1938.

In expressing his willingness to publish his writing in French, however, he was not necessarily doing anything radically novel either. The key change had already occurred in 1938, by which time Beckett's earlier reticence had transmogrified into a keen desire to write and publish in French. 'Le Monde et le pantalon' thus proves not that Beckett had arrived at a new willingness to write and publish in French, but that the willingness he had come to feel by 1938 remained undimmed after the intervening years, and in spite of the decision to work on a novel in English during that period. Certainly, the prose that Beckett wrote for the *Cahiers d'Art* was not, strictly speaking, *literary*, but it was prose that would be read by educated, French-speaking readers of the sort before whom, as late as early 1938, Beckett appears to have been unwilling to set his original writing in French. It was, moreover, prose destined for a publication in which it would appear alongside explicitly literary writings. (Beckett may well have been aware that previous issues of the *Cahiers d'Art* had included work by poets including René Char, Éluard, and Francis Ponge.¹² If he was aware of this fact, he would certainly not have been surprised to find that, when 'Le Monde et le pantalon' appeared, it did so alongside poems by René Char, Francis Ponge, and Jacques Prévert,

¹² viz. René Char, 'Le Visage nuptial' and 'Poèmes à l'étroit dans la vie menacée', in *Cahiers d'Art 1940-1944, 15^e-19^e année* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'Art, 1944), 27-31; Paul Éluard, 'Chant du feu vainqueur du feu', in *Ibid.*, 6; Francis Ponge, 'Une demi-journée à la campagne', in *Ibid.*, 204.

as well as French-language translations of verse by Hölderlin.¹³ To allow one's work to be presented in such company is no mean feat and the essay thus stands as a statement of Beckett's continued confidence in his French in 1945.)

'Le Monde et le pantalon' is not simply important for demonstrating Beckett's willingness to write and publish in French, however. As Beckett's first piece of French-language writing to date from the post-War period, the language of this text also provides us with an insight into both the kind of French in which Beckett was willing to write and publish, and the way in which his French had altered over the years since his French-language compositions of the pre-War period.

As acknowledged by Knowlson in his discussion of this essay in *DTF*, 'Le Monde et le pantalon' is 'not always easy to follow'.¹⁴ That this is the case owes largely to the kind of language in which this essay is written. Although 'Le Monde et le pantalon' may be a piece of criticism rather than a literary text, Beckett's pre-War criticism proved his willingness to disregard traditional forms of critical expression in favour of modes more familiar from the realms of literature. This tendency to prefer complexity over clarity that we find in the pre-War work continues to influence 'Le Monde et le pantalon', as may be seen in a passage such as the following, in which Beckett offers a description of what he perceives as one to the key features of Geer van Velde's style of painting:

Aucun rapport avec la peinture à montre à arrêt, celle qui, pour avoir accordé aux nénuphars deux minutes par jour pendant l'éternité du psalmiste, croit avoir bloqué la rotation terrestre, sans parler des ennuyeux gigotements des astres inférieurs. Chez G. van Velde le temps galope, il l'éperonne avec une sorte de frénésie de Faust à rebours.¹⁵

In Part I, it was noted that Rudy Cohn has described Beckett's French in 'Le Monde et le pantalon' as 'assured and colloquial, with vulgarities uncustomary in art criticism'.¹⁶ Certainly, the essay contains a number of terms that might be described as vulgar, such as 'emmerder', 'foutre la paix', and 'déconner'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that, as the passage cited above demonstrates, 'Le Monde et le pantalon' is

¹³ viz. René Char, 'Secrets d'hirondelles. Poème' (*Cahiers d'Art 1945-1946*, 20^e-21^e années, 27), 'Le bulletin des Baux. Poème.' (*Ibid.*, 75), 'Le requin et la mouette. Poème.' (*Ibid.*, 77); Francis Ponge, 'Le chien. Poème.' (*Ibid.*, 377); Jacques Prévert, 'Parfois le balayeur... Poème.' (*Ibid.*, 39); Hölderlin, 'Fragments poétiques' (*Ibid.*, 208-210).

¹⁴ *DTF*, 358

¹⁵ *D*, 129 – The text as it appears in *D* introduces two errors that are not present in the original *Cahiers d'Art* publication: 'avoid' for 'avoir', and 'sortie' for 'sorte'. These errors have been corrected.

¹⁶ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 126

¹⁷ viz. *D*, 126, 131, 132

not simply a matter of ‘colloquial[isms]’ and ‘vulgarityies’. On the contrary, the syntax of Beckett’s essay is often complex, and its language more heterogeneous than Cohn’s account implies. If we find colloquial and familiar terms (‘loufoque’¹⁸), we also find instances of a wilfully literary syntax (‘Mais il était peut-être temps que l’objet se retirât [...]’¹⁹). Alongside vulgar expressions such as those that have already been cited, we also find far rarer terms (‘[...] une suite de propositions *apodictiques*’²⁰), instances of untranslated Latin (‘Parce que pompier admirable est une *contradictio in adjecto*?’²¹), terms derived from Greek scarcely more comprehensible for being in the Latin alphabet (‘les *dyskoloi* et les *eukoloi*’²²), as well as from the language of science (‘[...] douée de ce que les astronomes appellent...une grande *vitesse d’échappement*’²³) and, in a nod to Beckett’s pre-War experiences of French – as well as to the lasting influence of the period 1928-1930 –, we equally find traces of the *argot* of the ENS (‘[...] l’animal grotesque et méprisable dont le spectre hante les ateliers, comme celui du *tapir* les *turnes normaliennes* [...]’²⁴). In addition to this purely lexical richness, Beckett’s essay is also notable for the number of allusions that it includes. We find more or less direct allusions to a variety of literary writers and literary works (Balzac’s *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, Molière’s *La Princesse d’Élide*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*²⁵), as well as to philosophers (Pascal, Heraclitus, Pythagoras²⁶), and to the mythology of Ancient Greece.²⁷ The profusion of allusion that is to be found in this text is well captured by the brief passage cited above, which itself includes allusions to both Goethe’s *Faust* and to that same Biblical injunction to ‘consider the lilies’ that was earlier noted as a significant intertext for two of Beckett’s French-language poems of the late 1930s, ‘les joues rouges les yeux rouges’ and ‘bois seul’.²⁸

The linguistic richness and allusive complexity of Beckett’s essay serves to remind us that Beckett’s style in ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ represents an evolution when compared with his writing of the pre-War period, rather than a revolution. In terms of its complexity and frequent allusion, the French of ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ remains close to that of the most directly comparable of the pre-War texts, namely ‘Les Deux Besoins’. Certainly, the passage of ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ cited above is

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 120

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126 – Emphasis mine.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124 – Emphasis mine.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 123 – Emphasis in original.

²² *Ibid.*, 129 – Emphasis in original.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124 – Emphasis mine.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120 – Emphasis mine.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119, 122, 131

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127, 128, 132

²⁷ *viz.* ‘Les oiseaux sont tombés, Manto se tait, Tirésias ignore.’ (*Ibid.*, 125)

²⁸ For discussions of these poems, see Part II, Chapter 2.

not quite so extreme as, for example, the closing paragraph of ‘Les Deux Besoins’²⁹, but the two texts are not so far removed as might be imagined based upon Cohn’s characterisation of the former as ‘assured and colloquial’ and the latter as ‘complex and concentrated’.³⁰ In both of these texts we find instances of complexity, in both texts we find allusions to literature, philosophy, and science; in both texts we find literary syntax and untranslated Latin; in both texts we find lexical items of the highest register, and of a (sometimes decidedly) lower register. ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ is, certainly, less ‘concentrated’ than ‘Les Deux Besoins’, but that is primarily an effect of their vastly differing scales – as they appear in *Disjecta*, the earlier essay is scarcely two-and-a-half pages long, the later commissioned essay stretches to an ample 15 –, and the longer text is, in parts, every bit as ‘complex and concentrated’ as Beckett’s earlier essay on art in terms of need.

In comparing these two pieces of writing, in short, one finds that very little, in essence, has changed about the kind of French in which Beckett writes: This French remains richly allusive, verbally complex, and continues to occasionally indulge in literary syntax. Admittedly, there has been a partial reduction in complexity, and we may therefore be tempted to identify this essay as part of the trend towards that less obviously arcane form of expression that would characterise Beckett’s French-language writings of the immediate post-War period. This trend, however, is by no means particular to Beckett’s French since the same trend is also to be found if we compare the pre-War English-language review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions* with the post-War review of Thomas MacGreevy’s *Jack B. Yeats: An Appreciation and an Interpretation*.³¹ If there is any true novelty that is particular to Beckett’s French it seems that this novelty is to be found in the freer use of terms that would then have been described as vulgar and colloquial. In ‘Les Deux Besoins’, for instance, we may well find the word ‘pet’, but there is nothing to match the ‘déconner’ of the post-War essay, and in that earlier essay the Latinate ‘testicule’ is preferred to the familiar alternative *couille*.³²

In determining the reasons for this disparity, a certain regard must be given to the possible effect of self-censorship that might have arisen depending upon what

²⁹ The closing paragraph of ‘Les Deux Besoins’ is as follows: ‘Autrement dit, le saint sorite, *lubricum et periculorum locus*. Rien ne ressemble moins au procès créateur que ces convulsions de vermisseau enragé, propulsé en spasme de jugement vers une pourriture d’élection. Car aux enthymèmes de l’art ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non pas les prémisses. Jusqu’à nouvel avis’ (*D*, 57).

³⁰ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 99

³¹ This essay, which first appeared under the title ‘MacGreevy on Yeats’ in *The Irish Times* (*viz. op. cit.* [4th August, 1945], 2), is republished in *D* (*viz. D*, 95-97).

³² *viz. Ibid.*, 56

publication Beckett imagined 'Les Deux Besoins' as being destined for.³³ It may be the case, for example, that Beckett chose to limit vulgar expressions out of a respect for editorial policy. In broaching this possibility, however, it should be recalled that, as noted in Part I, Beckett's use of colloquial and non-standard forms of French – kinds of language to which vulgar usage undoubtedly belongs – was, during the pre-War period, largely confined to instances of direct speech. Evidence for the relatively limited use of colloquial and vulgar material in his pre-War French-language writing is also to be found in the French-language poems of the late 1930s since, even in those poems that are most obviously explicit in their content – such as 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents' and 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible' – the 'explicit' character of these texts is more properly seen as being a feature of *what* they describe, not *how* they describe it. Even when these poems treat the sexual act with relative frankness, for example, terms such as *bite*, *con/chatte*, or *foutre* are entirely absent.³⁴ The register of French in which even these rather vulgar poems were written thus remains quite far removed from the realm of vulgarity.

Bearing these factors in mind, it may be posited that the relative lack of familiar and vulgar expressions in 'Les Deux Besoins' is less a consequence of any self-censorship in Beckett's part and more a consequence of the kind of French in which he wrote during the pre-War period – and, by the extension, the kind of *language* in which he wrote, since it was earlier noted that such a controlled use of language was a feature of his English- as much as his French-language writing. The comparison between the language of 'Les Deux Besoins' and 'Le Monde et le pantalon' thus suggests that the more widespread use of colloquial and vulgar terms should be viewed as a novel development of Beckett's post-War writing.

In comparing this essay to what came before, however, we must recall that the colloquialisms and vulgarities that are to be found in 'Le Monde et le pantalon' are

³³ It is for precisely this reason, in fact, that the emergence of vulgarity in Beckett's post-War French must be understood as a development upon its pre-War equivalent, and not as a point of divergence between Beckett's post-War English and his post-War French, since the publishing environment for English-language material was far stricter than that for French. Consequently, the lack of vulgarities in, for example, an essay published by *The Irish Times*, is no more worthy of comment than the lack of English-language essays from *Cahiers d'Art*. To get a sense of that gulf which then existed between what was acceptable in French and what was permitted in English, one need only consider the well-known example of the changes Beckett was obliged to make to his English-language text of *Godot*, which entailed removing materials that were entirely acceptable on a French stage but which would have been deemed obscene on an English one – For the effect of the Lord Chamberlain upon the English *Godot*, and Beckett's disgust at same, see *DTF*, 411-412.

³⁴ 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible', indeed, only admits reference to the last of these by way of implication, and even the orifice that might have been rendered using the familiar *cul* appears in the more acceptable guise of 'anus' (*viz.* MNLP), thereby following the model we find in 'Les Deux Besoins' and its reference to 'testicules'.

notable not because they are the defining, or even predominant, feature of the language in which this essay is written, but because they are to be found *alongside* the same literary allusions, the same arcane verbiage, and the same literary syntax that were key elements of Beckett's French-language writings – and, indeed, his English-language writing – since the 1930s. In understanding Beckett's progression towards more frequent use of 'familiar' language in the post-War period, it is probable, as suggested in Part I, that this development may be traced back to the years Beckett spent in Roussillon, and to Beckett's lengthy and direct exposure to precisely these kinds of language during that period.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Beckett's willingness to write in French does not date from his years in Roussillon. As such, it would appear that the only development in Beckett's post-War use of French that can be traced back to his years in Roussillon is this new willingness to make more extensive use of vulgar and colloquial forms of French, as well as to draw such forms into the narrative voice of his (French-language) writing. To say this is the case, it must be stressed, is by no means to diminish the importance of these years in Roussillon since, as noted in Part I, the influence of oral French would be of central importance to Beckett's major, French-language texts of the post-War period. It has already been argued that the orally-influenced French in which Beckett's post-War works are written cannot be seen as a consequence of his pre-War encounter with the writings of Céline. If that were the case, as already argued in Part I, we would expect to already see the evidence of this encounter from the pre-War period. If Beckett only begins to extensively deploy forms derived from a specifically oral French in the post-War period, it seems clear that it was not a pre-War engagement with a particular kind of literature that provided Beckett with this kind of French, but rather the years in Roussillon, years spent living with and through this kind of French.

Away from the France and the French that he had known, these years in Roussillon were, as recognised by George Craig, and as noted in Part I, years of immersion in a kind of language unlike anything that he had known before, in either French or English. These were years defined by 'the language of farm, forge, garage, and inn'.³⁵ These years thus revealed to Beckett a kind of natural, non-literary French that he is almost certain to have found every bit as exciting as what he had once found in the writings of figures such as Racine and Perrault. That he would have found this intimate experience of colloquial French exciting may be inferred from a story – recounted to James Knowlson by Alfred Péron's son, Alexis, and told to him by his

³⁵ George Craig, *Writing Beckett's Letters*, 34

mother Mania – that makes readily apparent the degree to which Beckett could be delighted by just this sort of everyday French:

[M]a mère me disait : ‘C’est étonnant, Sam est arrivé l’autre jour absolument ravi en disant “Je viens de découvrir une expression française, c’est une que je n’avais jamais entendue et c’est prêt à sortir réanimée car c’est d’une poésie merveilleuse” c’était “le fond de l’air est frais”.’ Elle me disait: ‘Mais c’est vrai, c’est une découverte.’³⁶

It is only after we have recognised the degree to which even a relatively common French expression such as ‘le fond de l’air est frais’ could be a source of such delight for Beckett that we can properly appreciate the revelation that he must have experienced during his time in Roussillon. For someone who could be so enchanted by the ‘poésie merveilleuse’ of ‘le fond de l’air est frais’, it is scarcely conceivable that the years in Roussillon would not have offered, at least occasionally, similar instances of joyous linguistic discovery. (This discovery would have been all the more intense, moreover, because, as noted in Part I, many of the forms of language that Beckett discovered during these years would have been entirely novel to him, given that he had never experienced a life such as the one he lived in Roussillon through English.) Over time, meanwhile – as the language of ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ suggests – these years in Roussillon seem to have amounted to much more than a suite of delightful expressions. It seems rather that these years served to provide Beckett with something every bit as valuable, from a stylistic perspective, as the literary allusions, the recondite vocabulary, and the careful syntax that he had developed through decades of study of, and careful engagement with, the French language and French Literature, namely: a new register of French. And, perhaps more importantly, a corresponding confidence in the deployment of this register that allowed him – in a manner that he had previously been unable to achieve in his pre-War writing, whether in French or English – to make this colloquial, non-standard register, an integral part of his writing.

This was not, it must once again be stressed, a register that entirely replaced the ones he had already been exposed to and in which he had worked since at least the composition of ‘Le Concentrisme’ in 1930, but a register that might be *added* to the ones that had come before. We can be almost certain that Beckett understood his new familiarity with oral French – its colloquialism and vulgarities – as an addition rather than a replacement because, had Beckett desired to replace the literary qualities of his pre-War French – its allusions, arcane adjectives, and literary tenses – with the language in which he had acquired a new fluency through his lengthy exposure to an ‘undifferentiated tide’ of French in Roussillon, we would find a truly

³⁶ UoR JEK A/7/66 [‘Interview with Alexis Péron’]

radical alteration between a pre-Roussillon text, such as 'Les Deux Besoins', and the post-Roussillon essay on the van Veldes. We would move from a primarily literary to a primarily oral register. But, as has already been stressed, radical alteration is not what we find when we compare these texts. The sensation of reading them is not of hearing Beckett play upon an entirely new instrument, but of hearing him play much the same tune in much the same way. In the later text, however, the familiar harmonies and cadences have been enriched by his novel access to a wider array of notes.

Beckett's French in 'Le Monde et le pantalon' is thus important for what it tells us about the impact of the years in Roussillon: Although they may not have been responsible for leading Beckett to the realisation that he could write original material in French, they do seem to have played a central role in contributing towards the kind of French in which he would come to write his French-language works of the post-War period. Had Beckett not been obliged to spend those years in the Vaucluse, it is probable that he would eventually have come to write original prose in French, but it seems equally improbable that these works would have been written in the same *kind* of French that he would eventually come to use. At the same time, it must also be recognised that the French in which Beckett wrote 'Le Monde et le pantalon' is not quite the French in which he wrote 'Suite', and still less the French in which he wrote 'La Fin'. There are points of comparison between the texts, certainly. Like 'Le Monde et le pantalon', 'Suite' too takes evident pleasure in the intermingling of highly-literary syntax and more oral forms.³⁷ When we compare the styles of these two texts, however, it is the differences that are most apparent.

When we read the version of this short-story that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, for instance, we cannot help but note that the story contains none of the Greek-derived terms, none of the untranslated Latin, nor any of the self-consciously direct allusions – to Heraclitus or Pythagoras, to Pascal or Molière –, with which we are confronted when reading Beckett's essay for the *Cahiers d'Art*. As explained in the Introduction, this newly restrained style of 'Suite' has frequently been examined through the lens of the LSH and thought of as a direct consequence of Beckett's decision to compose his short-story in French, just as the decision to compose the story in French has itself been seen as a consequence of Beckett's supposed desire for

³⁷ This intermingling is particularly evident in this sentence, found on page 108 of *Temps Modernes* 'Suite': 'Ça commençait à me fâcher, qu'elles ne m'eussent pas laissé attendre dans le lit familial' ('Suite', in *Les Temps Modernes* [Vol. 1, No. 10 – 1er juillet, 1946], 108). Here we find that same integration of clearly oral features – such as the use of 'ça' and the binary-turned construction, whereby this 'ça' refers to the following sub-clause – and overtly literary use – namely, the *plus-que-parfait du subjonctif* in the third-person plural – that we have just observed as one of the key traits of 'La peinture des van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon'.

a new style. And yet, as has been demonstrated throughout this thesis – by way of reference to chronology, to biography, and to the textual evidence of Beckett’s own writings in English and French – the LSH cannot be correct. Beckett’s ‘Suite’ *does* evince a new style; this new style, however, was neither a motivation for, nor a consequence of, the post-War linguistic turn. Were this the case, we would already see this novel style at work in Beckett’s very first French-language text of the post-War period and, while ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ may make more extensive use of colloquialisms and vulgarities than a text such as ‘Les Deux Besoins’, its style is not yet that of ‘Suite’. The change in language alone did not give rise to the change in style.

As previously noted, it is not the purpose of this thesis to closely engage with the stylistic change to which ‘Suite’ attests. Nor it is the purpose of this thesis to study the possible reasons for Beckett’s development towards the new style that he made use of in his literary writings of the immediate post-War period, first in the English version of ‘Suite’ and subsequently in the short-story’s French-language continuation. It is nonetheless essential to remind ourselves that, whatever the reasons for this change of style may have been, they cannot have been a matter of language, nor can they have been a consequence of the linguistic turn.

By March 1946, when the post-War linguistic turn took place, Beckett’s French was a language every bit as rich, as subtle, and as developed as his English. By that time, French was a language he had been studying for all but four years of his life; a language in which, and through which, he had been living for decades, and which had acquired for him a personal significance entirely of its own. Long before the linguistic turn, as the evidence of the ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook and the *Watt* manuscripts show, French and English were already equally available to Beckett, as he had ceased to distinguish between them when writing to himself. French in particular was a language whose literature he had loved dearly and read closely for decades, into which he had translated – both his own work, and the work of others – and in which he had written original material. These French-language translations and original writings show that, by March of 1946, Beckett’s French could be every bit as literary and refined, every bit as arcane and allusive, but also every bit as familiar, vulgar, and free as his English. By the moment of the linguistic turn, crucially, Beckett had already come to recognise that he *could* use French as a vehicle for literary expression and he was equally happy to see it published; the ‘existential reorientation’ necessary for original literary creation had already taken place, and the French he needed to compose such texts was now his. And yet, despite all these facts, when Beckett began ‘Suite’ on February 11th, 1946, he chose to begin it in English.

II. 'SUITE'

As has been underlined at various points throughout this thesis, the question of why Beckett began to write 'Suite' in English and why he subsequently decided to continue this story in French are questions that the LSH cannot help us to answer. It is for this very reason that these questions have been thought worth asking, and the enquiry proposed by this thesis worth pursuing. If the post-War linguistic turn cannot be explained in terms of Beckett's desire for a refined, colourless, and less allusive style, or with reference to evidently inaccurate perceptions of the effect French had upon his writing, how might it be explained, and where are we to look for the evidence upon which to base this explanation?

The direction in which to look for such evidence has already been suggested by the preceding examinations of Beckett's other turns to French: To arrive at more accurate – or, at the very least, more nuanced – answers to these questions, we must look to context. The post-War linguistic turn, in short, must be subjected to the same kind of examination as any of those turns that preceded it for, as their example proves, the decision to continue a short-story in French in 1946 was not, in and of itself, a radical and unprecedented decision when viewed in the broader context of Beckett's career and his engagement with French up to that point. On the contrary, this decision was just the latest in a series of turns to French that began when Beckett decided to compose 'Le Concentrisme' in that language.

Clearly, not all of these 'turns' were alike in terms of their underlying motivation, nor in terms of their long-term effect upon Beckett's writing. The earliest of these 'turns', as we saw in Chapter 1, were all of such brief duration that even to describe them as 'linguistic turns' would be incorrect. Far from turns, they are no doubt better thought of merely as instances of Beckett using French. Beckett may have chosen by times to write in French prior to 1938, but he never considered doing so at the expense of English. In direct contrast to these early linguistic choices, the pre-War linguistic turn of 1938 was a 'linguistic turn' in the truest sense of the word, since it constituted a turn towards a consistent and exclusive use of French – primarily in poetry, but also in Beckett's prose and critical writing –, and a clear commitment to publishing this French-language material with French-language publications. Insofar as it demonstrated Beckett's willingness to see his work set before the judgement of a French-speaking audience, this pre-War linguistic turn was, as established in Chapter 2, the most important progression in Beckett's attitude towards using French that occurred during his career. Once he had made the mental leap that permitted him to write in French for a French audience – a mental leap that, as we saw, was intimately associated with his dissatisfaction with the earliest French-language translations of his work –, Beckett was free to turn to French, a turn that was itself guided by the

complete lack of English-language publishing opportunities available in the Paris of the late 1930s and the rich array of French-language publishing opportunities that were available in the city at that time. More largely, once Beckett had undergone the change in perspective that permitted the pre-War linguistic turn, the post-War linguistic turn and the French-language writing of the post-War period had also become possible.

Once all this has been recognised, it may be seen that the post-War linguistic turn is actually far less interesting, and far less important, than it appears. Undoubtedly, the question of why Beckett switched to writing 'Suite' in French is intriguing, and clearly this decision had important ramifications for Beckett's post-War literary production, but we can now see that it is not only the case that the post-War turn had no direct effect on Beckett's literary style or use of the first person, it is also the case that the questions George Craig imagined Beckett must have been faced with around the time of the post-War linguistic turn – namely, '[I]f the writing is to be published, how will its readers react? Can I hold my nerve as I hear the scornful laughter of the native speakers?' – are in fact applicable only to the pre-War linguistic turn. Once Beckett had chosen to publish his French-language work with French-language publishers and literary magazines – or, at least, once he had decided to try and do so – in 1938, he had demonstrated that he was willing to face the judgement of native speakers, willing to expose his works to their scrutiny. Having shown himself willing to do this in the pre-War period, there was no reason why he should have been unwilling to do so again in the post-War period. An 'existential reorientation' was necessary for the post-War linguistic turn, yes, but this reorientation had already occurred in 1938.

The key question of how Beckett came to be willing to write and publish in French having thus already been answered in Chapter 2, the only ones that remain to be examined now are those pertaining directly to the case of the post-War linguistic turn which have been sketched out above, namely: Why was 'Suite', specifically, begun in English and why, at a particular moment in time, did Beckett decide to continue 'Suite' in French? In answering these questions, we should be mindful that the same forces often lead to the same results. In other words, just as Beckett – once the essential 'existential reorientation' had taken place – was, in 1938, incited to switch languages by the lack of publishing opportunities in one of his languages and the availability of such opportunities in another, it is probable that a similar lack, a similar availability, or some combination of the two, had a similar role to play in his decision to switch to writing in French in 1946.

Before considering the question of why Beckett turned to French, however, we must first examine Beckett's decision to begin writing 'Suite' in English. The first 30

pages of 'Suite' make plain that, between February 11th and March 13th 1946, Beckett was under the impression that his story was destined for an English-language publisher, it was only sometime after this point that the story was redirected towards a French-language publisher and a French-speaking public. If Beckett decided to continue in French a story begun in English – and if he decided to do so, moreover, for reasons that the 'Suite' Notebook proves were neither purely stylistic, nor strictly linguistic –, the change of language was most likely linked either to a change in the publication avenues available to Beckett, to some change in his material circumstances between the time of beginning 'Suite' and the time of the linguistic turn, or to some change in Beckett's perception of these avenues and these circumstances. With this in mind, we will begin by examining Beckett's probable reasons for starting to write 'Suite' in English, and will then move on to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn in due course.

As noted, 'Suite' was begun on February 11th, 1946. When Beckett began this story, his most recently-completed literary text (i.e. *Watt*) had been written in English. In that respect, and although the decision to begin writing *Watt* in English may be somewhat obscure – and, as previously noted, is likely to have been intimately associated with the very particular circumstances under which it was written –, the choice to continue writing in English is a natural progression given that Beckett was evidently eager to return to publishing his work as soon as possible. This eagerness may be observed in the fact that, though he came to describe *Watt* as 'an unsatisfactory book' in 1947, Beckett immediately set about trying to publish his novel as soon as the opportunity arose in 1945.³⁸

To say that Beckett returned to publishing in English 'as soon as possible' in 1945 and that he endeavoured to publish what was at that point his most extensive, readily-available English-language text – that is, *Watt* – 'as soon as the opportunity arose' is by no means an understatement: Beckett brought the manuscript with him on his very first post-War trip out of France in April 1945.³⁹ By May 10th of that year he reported to Gwynedd Reavey that he 'ha[d] been busy cleaning up [his] book [i.e. *Watt*]' and that he 'hope[d] to see [it] off to Routledge th[at] week or next'.⁴⁰ Beckett would, in fact, send *Watt* to Routledge on May 25th – this date being confirmed by a letter Beckett sent to T. M. Ragg, editor at Routledge and Keegan Paul⁴¹ – and, by the end of 1946, Beckett would have sent his novel to a number of other publishers,

³⁸ *LSB II*, 55 (SB to George Reavey [14th May, 1947])

³⁹ *DTF*, 341-342

⁴⁰ *LSB II*, 10 (SB to Gwynedd Reavey [10th May, 1945])

⁴¹ *viz.* *LSB II*, 12 (SB to T. M. Ragg [25th May, 1945])

including Chatto and Windus, and Metheun, either directly or via intermediaries such as his new literary agent, A. P. Watt and Son.⁴²

In signalling his return as a writer to potential English-language publishers in this way, it is only natural that Beckett should have been keen to continue writing in English, with an eye to addressing future works to much the same English-language publishers, or to any other avenues of publication as might be opened up to him by the publication of his novel. It in fact seems probable that it was for much the same reason – that is, a desire to take advantage of available and receptive English-language publishers – that Beckett, having announced to MacGreevy in 1938 that ‘any poems there may happen to be in the future will be in French’, and having continued to write poetry exclusively in French for a number of years, returned to writing poetry in English for a time in the immediate post-War period: It was in English and in a suitably receptive publication – namely, *The Irish Times* – that Beckett’s very earliest publications of the post-War period appeared. Thus, as had already been noted, Beckett published a review of Thomas MacGreevy’s study of Jack B. Yeats with *The Irish Times* in August of 1945 and, before that, Beckett had already reached into his pre-War compositions and drawn out ‘Dieppe’, which became his very first post-War publication when it appeared in *The Irish Times* in June 1945.⁴³ Later still, even after he was comfortably ensconced in French, it was to *The Irish Times* that he continued to address the vestiges of his immediate, post-War, English-language production, as evidenced by the fact that the poem ‘Saint-Lô’, written during Beckett’s time working with the Irish Red Cross in Saint-Lô in 1945, was published by *The Irish Times* in June 1946.⁴⁴ (If the poem ‘Antepepsis’, written in 1946, did not also find its way into *The Irish Times*, it is certain that the poem’s tone – to say nothing of lines such as ‘To eat, drink, piss, shit, fart and fuck, / Assuming that the fucking season / Did not expire with that of reason’⁴⁵ – had something to do with it.⁴⁶)

⁴² *DTF*, 342

⁴³ The fact that, of the pre-War poems, only ‘Dieppe’ was published in English is, I would suggest, another piece of evidence in favour of Beckett’s having originally written this poem in English. Had Beckett been willing to take it upon himself in 1945 to translate into English a poem that only existed in French, it seems surprising that he would not have translated any of the other *Poèmes 37-39* at a time when his financial situation was one of extreme precarity and when even the meagre money that he might have received from such publications would have been welcome – For more on Beckett’s financial position in the immediate post-War period, see below.

⁴⁴ viz. Samuel Beckett, ‘Saint-Lo [*sic*] 1945’, in *The Irish Times* (24th June, 1946), 5 – For notes on this poem, see *CP*, 389-91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 106

⁴⁶ For notes on ‘Antepepsis’, see *Ibid.*, 391-93.

Having raised the matter of *Watt* and the role it may have played in guiding Beckett towards writing in English in the immediate post-War period, it is worth taking a moment to consider its tortured path to publication – the novel would only appear in 1953, when it was published by the Paris-based Olympia Press⁴⁷ – and the possible role that Beckett’s difficulty in finding a publisher for his novel may have played in his post-War linguistic turn. Certainly, as noted in the Introduction, those critics who have proposed explanations for this turn other than those implied by the LSH have generally pointed to Beckett’s inability to find a publisher for his English-language writings in the immediate post-War period – and more particularly still, to his inability to find a publisher for *Watt* – as a key motivating factor in his switch to writing in French.⁴⁸

Undoubtedly, Beckett’s disappointment must have been extreme when, at the start of June 1945 – not even a month after he had sent his manuscript to T. M. Ragg –, he received word that *Watt* had been rejected by Routledge.⁴⁹ It was, after all, Routledge that had accepted *Murphy* in 1937, doing so after the novel had been ‘turned down by more than two dozen publishing houses’.⁵⁰ In deciding to submit *Watt* to Routledge first, it is likely that Beckett was not simply taking advantage of his sole remaining direct connection to the world of English-language publishing.⁵¹ Rather, it seems probable that he was motivated by the memory of the more than two dozen rejections that he had faced when seeking to publish his first novel and, by the same token, the single letter of acceptance that he had received from Routledge. When Beckett learned that Routledge had rejected *Watt*, therefore, there is every possibility that he saw this rejection, not simply as the rejection of a single publishing house, but as the rejection of the *only* publishing house that had seen fit to accept

⁴⁷ For the publication history of *Watt* and the differences between the various editions of the text, see C. J. Ackerley, ‘Preface’, in *Watt*, x-xix.

⁴⁸ For discussion of these critics, see the Introduction.

⁴⁹ According to the rejection letter that Beckett received from T. M. Ragg, Beckett’s novel had been found ‘too wild and unintelligible...to stand any change of successful publication...at the present time’ (T. M. Ragg to SB [6th June, 1945] *qtd* in *LSB II*, 14 [n.1]).

⁵⁰ Mark Nixon, ‘George Reavey – Beckett’s first literary agent’, in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 46 – As Nixon, notes, Beckett initially kept a careful record of these rejections in his ‘Whoroscope’ Notebook, but ‘gave up listing the publishers at number 12, Faber & Faber’ (*Ibid.*, 47).

⁵¹ By 1945, the list of Beckett’s publishing contacts – never overly long – had diminished starkly: Charles Prentice, who had played an instrumental role in Beckett’s earliest publications with Chatto and Windus, had retired from Chatto and Windus in 1935; George Reavey, meanwhile, who had acted as Beckett’s literary agent during the pre-War period, had ceased to act in this capacity by 1939, when he had sold his European Literary Bureau (*viz.* Sandra Andrea O’Connell, ‘George Reavey (1907-1976): *The Endless Chain – A Literary Biography*’ [Trinity College, Dublin: Unpublished Thesis, 2005], 240).

Murphy. Faced with such a rejection, it would have been only natural for Beckett to have decided to turn his back on the world of English-language publishing and turn his face towards the possibility of brighter prospects as a French-language writer.

The rejection of *Watt* by Routledge would thus be a tempting – and in many respects a satisfactory – genealogy for the post-War linguistic turn, and it cannot be excluded that the psychological impact of Routledge’s rejection may have had some role to play in Beckett’s decision to turn to writing in French. There is, however, a problem with this particular genealogy, at least insofar as the moment of the linguistic turn is concerned. This is a problem of chronology.

Beckett received word from Ragg that Routledge were not interested in *Watt* in June of 1945. If this rejection were the unique, or even the primary, impetus for the post-War linguistic turn, we might reasonably expect Beckett to have turned away from English-language publishing and towards writing in French very soon after learning of Routledge’s rejection. Beckett’s response to this rejection, however, was emphatically not to turn his back on the world of English-language publishing, at least not at that particular moment. On the contrary, having used his most direct contact to the world of English-language publishing and having met with no success there, Beckett’s first impulse was to provide his friend Denis Devlin with the second of his two typescripts of *Watt* and to charge him with the task of proposing the text to publishers in the US; having done that, Beckett made it known to George Reavey that he was seeking to engage the services of a literary agent, preferably a ‘young’ and ‘tenaci[ous]’ one, who could better represent his novel and, hopefully, find a place for it with an English-language publishing house in the UK.⁵²

As these actions attest, even after meeting with Routledge’s refusal, Beckett was still not willing to give up on the possibility of publishing *Watt*. Nor, indeed, was he yet willing to give up on the possibility of writing in English. We know this to be the case because, if Beckett had been led to abandon English by Routledge’s rejection of *Watt*, there is no reason why he would have chosen to begin writing ‘Suite’ in English in February 1946 – that is, fully eight months since Ragg’s letter of refusal. By choosing to begin ‘Suite’ in English, and to continue to work on his story in English up until at least March 13th, Beckett proved his continued commitment to writing and publishing in English.

⁵² Beckett made his continued eagerness to find a publisher quite clear in a letter to George Reavey, written mere weeks after he received Routledge’s rejection: ‘My book Watt was turned down by Routledge. [...] I have forgotten the name of the agents who took over from you and don’t know if they exist still. If you know of any agent, preferably young, with even half the tenacity you displayed in handling Murphy, I should be glad to know his name. One copy of the book went with Denis to America.’ (LSB II, 16 – SB to Gwynedd and George Reavey [21st June, 1945]).

At this point, admittedly, it might be suggested that the reason Beckett had not yet made the decision to switch to French by February 1946 was that, by that point, *Watt* had only been rejected by one publisher. Certainly, for the reasons that were outlined above, we can imagine that the experience of being rejected by Routledge must have been particularly painful, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that it was only in the face of multiple rejections that Beckett finally made the decision to turn his back on a clearly unreceptive English-language market and commit himself to writing in French.

Once again, this is a tempting genealogy. And, once again, it is entirely possible that there may be some truth to it. In particular, it is possible that the difficulty Beckett experienced in placing *Watt* may have led him to remain committed to life as a French-language writer up until the composition of 'From an Abandoned Work' in 1954. In other words, this difficulty may have played an important role in transforming the linguistic turn – that is, a particular choice that was taken at a particular time – into a lengthier linguistic practice, whereby French became Beckett's exclusive language of original literary creation for a number of years.

This distinction between the linguistic turn and Beckett's linguistic practice in the years that followed after it is an important one if we hope to properly understand the post-War linguistic turn. While the linguistic turn of March 1946 was an important decision in Beckett's life and career, it must be understood as a momentary event. Beckett had turned to French on a number of occasions without entirely abandoning English in the pre-War period, and even the more durable pre-War linguistic turn of 1938 had eventually been followed by *Watt* and, after the War, by fresh poems in English. There was, as such, nothing to suggest that, when Beckett made the decision to continue 'Suite' in French in March of 1946, that he saw himself as rejecting English in favour of what would henceforth be an exclusively Francophone career. If he *continued* to write exclusively in French after the post-War linguistic turn therefore, it may well be the case that that decision was at least partly attributable to the evident disinterest that English-language publishers, in both the UK and the US, had shown in *Watt* while, at the same time, French-language publishers appeared, at least initially, to prove more amenable to his writings. Certainly, by the time Beckett gave his first explicit sign of an intention to abandon writing in English – this coming in a letter to George Reavey, in which Beckett wrote: 'I do not think I shall write very much in English in the future'⁵³ –, it was December of 1946 and Beckett, or agents working on his behalf, had been trying unsuccessfully for over a year to find a publisher willing to

⁵³ *LSB II*, 48 (SB to George Reavey [15th December, 1946])

take *Watt*.⁵⁴ In terms of French-language publications, on the other hand, Beckett had, by December of 1946, published two of his short stories – ‘Suite’ with *Les Temps Modernes*, and ‘L’Expulsé’ with *Fontaine* –, as well as publishing his pre-War, French-language poetry, again with *Les Temps Modernes*, and had seen his commissioned essay on the van Veldes appear in *Cahiers d’Art*. More importantly still, by 1946, Beckett had signed a contract with the French publisher Pierre Bordas and, in so doing, was under the perfectly reasonable impression that he had found a home for his future writings.⁵⁵ When these factors are taken together, it is highly probable that Beckett’s long-term turn to French was the natural consequence of the negative push exerted by numerous rejections from English-language publishers and the positive pull of a clearly receptive French-language publisher, and equally receptive French-language publications.

This genealogy, however, serves only to suggest why Beckett may have been ready to abandon English by the close of 1946, it does little to help us clarify Beckett’s particular reasons for turning to French in March of that year. Once again, the problem is a matter of chronology. As remarked, Beckett decided to draw a line under what he had written since February and continue ‘Suite’ in English sometime around March 1946. By that time, however, Routledge remained the only publishing house to have rejected *Watt*. Certainly, other rejections would soon come, but they would begin to come only *after* Beckett had chosen to turn from English to French. News of the second rejection, for instance – that of Chatto and Windus –, would not arrive until April 1946, while Beckett would only learn of Methuen’s rejection in September of that year, by which time he had already published the first half of ‘Suite’ with *Les Temps Modernes*.⁵⁶ We must not forget, moreover, that this publication with *Les Temps Modernes* was Beckett’s first properly literary publication with a French review. Certainly, by this time Beckett had been commissioned to write a piece for *Cahiers d’Art* but, prior to publishing ‘Suite’ with *Les Temps Modernes*, his only experiences with French-language publishing had been the failure to find a publisher for either his

⁵⁴ Intriguingly, Beckett states in a letter to Reavey of May 1947 that he had in fact found a publisher who would have been willing to publish *Watt* had Beckett himself ‘consented to make certain changes’ (*Ibid.*, 55 – SB to George Reavey [14th May, 1947]). Although there is no record of any of those publishers to whom the novel was submitted having requested changes prior to refusal, the significance of Beckett’s recollection lies in what it reveals about his commitment to seeing the novel in print exactly as he would have it or not at all. Beckett, indeed, appears only to have shared the story so that Reavey, whom Beckett by then hoped would take it upon himself to find a publisher for *Watt*, would know that he would be unwilling to make changes, ‘in case the suggestion is made to you that I should’ (*Ibid.*).

⁵⁵ For Beckett’s ultimately unhappy experience with Pierre Bordas, see Shane Weller, ‘Beckett’s Last Chance: Les Éditions de Minuit’, in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 114-117

⁵⁶ ‘Chronology 1946’, in *LSB II*, 27

French-language translation of *Murphy* or his modified version of 'Love and Lethe', and the cessation of *Soutés* that prevented his French-language poetry from appearing there in 1938. Beckett, in other words, had already decided to reorient himself towards French-language publishers before the blanket disinterest of English-language publishers was made clear to him, and he had done so without any clear evidence that French-language literary publications would be more receptive to his writings than English-language publications had proven.

Undoubtedly, the previously-outlined rejections that Beckett received from English-language publishers and the successes that Beckett enjoyed with French-language publishers and publications should be taken into consideration as a possible contributing factor that served to transform the particular instance of the linguistic turn into a multi-year abandonment of English. If we are to understand the linguistic turn itself, however, we cannot rely on *Watt*, nor can we explain it exclusively with reference to that novel's arduous journey into print since, as has been seen, the chronology of events does not support a direct correlation between these factors and the linguistic turn of March 1946. This being so, it may be helpful to look at another aspect of 'Suite'. For, if we have already established that there were sound reasons for Beckett's decision to begin writing 'Suite' in English – namely, his obvious desire to publish the novel he had written during the War and, in so doing, to re-establish himself as an (English-language) writer –, the question of why Beckett began writing a short-story in February 1946 is rather more perplexing.

When critics do discuss the composition of 'Suite', it is unsurprising that they are generally drawn to comment on its bilingual character. This is the most obviously interesting aspect of the text and, thus far, it is certainly the aspect of the text to which attention has most clearly been drawn in this thesis. When discussing 'Suite', however, it must be recalled that the strictly linguistic nature of this text is not the only interesting thing about it. Within the context of Beckett's writing, in fact, it is its generic character that is most remarkable.⁵⁷ When Beckett began working on 'Suite', it

⁵⁷ The generic character of 'Suite' is all the more remarkable for the perplexing reference that is to be found in it in a letter George Reavey of 1946. In that letter, Beckett informs his friend: 'I have finished my French Story, about 45:000 words I think. The first half is appearing in the July Temps modernes (Sartre's canard), I hope to have the complete story published as a separate work. In France they dont bother counting words. Camus's Etranger is not any longer' (*LSB II*, 32 – SB to George Reavey [27th May, 1946]). In this instance, it would appear to be Beckett who has not 'bother[ed] counting words', since the story to which he refers – that is, 'Suite' – is substantially shorter than Camus' *L'Étranger* and very far shy of the 45,000 words that he suggests. Given that the 'Suite' MS contains the entirety of what would eventually appear as 'La Fin', we know that this story was never any more than roughly 11,500 words. The only possible explanation for the 45,000 word figure, therefore, would

was the first wholly original short-story that he had written since the composition of 'Lightning Calculation' in 1935, and that was a mere two-page squib that Beckett himself described as 'very short & very tenuous'.⁵⁸ For Beckett's last fully realised short-story, we need to look back even further – namely, to 'A Case in a Thousand', composed in 1934.⁵⁹ The closest Beckett had come to working in the medium of short fiction in the intervening 12 years had been the 'modified version' of 'Love and Lethe' that he had worked on, in French, in late 1938. Since setting that 'modified version' aside, Beckett had kept his distance from the short-story form, working largely on the poetry that he had begun earlier in 1938, then on the English-language play *Human Wishes*, the now-lost Paris-Mondial 'sketch', and finally on the novel *Watt*, a text that appears to have entirely occupied him up until it was completed in 1944. As for the work that came immediately after *Watt*, namely 'Saint-Lô', we have already established that it was written in English (thereby following, linguistically, the recent example of *Watt*) and that it was a poem (thereby following, generically, the relatively recent example of the *Poèmes 37-39*). In beginning 'Suite', then, Beckett was doing something that, at least in the context of his own recent literary production, was remarkable from a generic point of view.

When these factors are borne in mind, we see that Beckett's decision to begin working on a short-story is even more anomalous than his decision to begin working on a text in English, or even to subsequently continue that text in French. To understand why Beckett may have begun work on a short-story in February 1946, rather than on another novel, it is helpful to recall that the progression from novel (i.e. *Watt*) to short-story (i.e. 'Suite') is not without parallel in Beckett's pre-War literary career. We find exactly the same progression in the case of *Dream*, after which Beckett began work on the short-story collection that would eventually be published as *MPTK*. In that case, as described by Mark Nixon, Beckett's decision to begin working

appear to be that Beckett originally envisioned 'Suite' as the first part of a novella, one that might have been composed of the material that would eventually appear as the separate but interrelated stories 'La Fin', 'L'Expulsé', 'Le Calmant', and *Premier amour*. Although this explanation might serve to justify Beckett's 45,000 figure, it cannot explain why he spoke of 'Suite' as 'the first half', nor why he spoke of his 'French Story' as being 'finished' when, if we are indeed to imagine 'Suite' as only the first part of a novella, the major part of it still remained to be completed in May 1946. If the precise meaning of Beckett's letter to Reavey remains unclear, it is certain that Beckett was willing to publish 'Suite' as a short-story, and it will thus be referred to as such throughout the present discussion – I would like to express my thanks to James Little for bringing the inconsistency of Beckett's word count for 'Suite' to my attention.

⁵⁸ *LSB I*, 243 (SB to TMG [29th January, 1935]) – For details of this story, see Mark Nixon, 'Beckett's Unpublished Canon', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 283-84.

⁵⁹ Samuel Beckett, 'A Case in a Thousand', in *The Bookman 86* (August 1934), 241-42 – 'A Case in a Thousand' is reprinted in *CSP*.

on a collection of short-stories was a direct response to the material situation in which he found himself at the time: 'With his financial situation becoming ever more precarious, and the rejection notices piling up around him', writes Nixon, 'Beckett decided to salvage parts of *Dream* and reshape the novel in a more accessible format'.⁶⁰

Obviously, there are a number of differences between the post-War progression from *Watt* to 'Suite' and the pre-War progression from *Dream* to *MPTK*. In the first instance, we have already made clear that, at least when he began work on 'Suite', Beckett did not yet find himself in a position where 'rejection notices [were] piling up around him'. Secondly, 'Suite' did not emerge out of *Watt* as *MPTK* had emerged out of *Dream*.⁶¹ In these respects, at least, the model of Beckett's earlier progression from novel to short-story obviously fails to provide an exact parallel for Beckett's move from *Watt* to 'Suite.' Despite these differences, however, Nixon's presentation of Beckett's decision to turn from *Dream* to the composition of *MPTK* yet serves to make clear why the example of this pre-War text is of relevance to the present discussion. For, although the rejection letters that Beckett would receive in response to *Watt* had not yet begun to pile up, and while the relation between *Watt* and 'Suite' may not be that which pertains between *Dream* and *MPTK*, it remains true that, in early 1946, Beckett found himself in essentially the same position he had been in when he began reworking *Dream* and working towards the stories of *MPTK*. Then, moreover, as before, his financial situation was becoming 'ever more precarious'.

In *DTF*, James Knowlson provides a frank assessment of Beckett's financial situation in the years immediately following the War: We are informed that Beckett and Dumesnil 'needed money very badly' at the time and that this need to earn money was 'clear[ly]...part of the stimulus that compelled him to write as feverishly as he did'.⁶² Just as it had been during the development from *Dream* to *MPTK*, then, financial need was an important spur for Beckett during the period of intense writing to which he referred as a 'frenzy' of writing, a 'frenzy' which began with the short-story that started life as 'Suite' and which would eventually become 'La Fin'. This being so, it stands to reason that, in 1932-1933 as in 1946, the same causes may have brought about the same effects, and Beckett's decision to start work on a short-story in February 1946 may have been tied to financial need.

⁶⁰ Mark Nixon, "'Silly Business' – Beckett and the World of Publishing', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 3

⁶¹ We need, in fact, to wait for Beckett's first French-language novel, *Mercier et Camier*, to find Beckett introducing the character of Watt into another literary environment (*viz. Mercier et Camier*, 193 / *Mercier and Camier*, 91).

⁶² *DTF*, 358

Insofar as *MPTK* is concerned, a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 1933 makes the connection between writing and money every bit as obvious as Beckett's pecuniary difficulties at the time:

I owe you something out of the 50 fs., but I'm so broke that I'm going to hold on to it till I see you! I'm so terrified of getting sick away and everything seems so dead against being abroad that even if I succeeded in placing something and getting some money I don't think I would bother my arse to move. Here at home they encourage my endeavours to build myself up on stout, and I feel that for stout my world is better lost than for Lib., Egal., and Frat., and quarts de Vittel. They don't say anything about my getting a job and I begin to be impervious to their inquietude.⁶³

As this letter demonstrates, Beckett was very conscious of his financial need around the time he was working towards the stories of *MPTK* – this need was indeed so great that he was obliged to withhold money owed to a good friend – and he was also very much aware that any immediate improvement in his position would be dependent upon his 'placing something' – that is, placing a text with someone willing to pay him for it.⁶⁴

As the passage cited above makes clear, however, the difficulties of Beckett's financial situation in the early 1930s were significantly ameliorated by the fact that, even though he may have been without either profession, steady employment, or a ready source of independent income, he was resident in Dublin and could count upon the generous support of his financially-comfortable family while he worked on his literary writings. No matter how bad things might get for him financially in the early 1930s, in short, Beckett continued to have a roof over his head, food in his belly, and a sanctuary from unhappy creditors.⁶⁵ In 1946, on the contrary, Beckett found himself not only without either profession or steady employment, he was also now living in Paris, far from his family and the direct assistance that they would no doubt have been willing to offer had he been in Ireland. In 1946, in other words, Beckett no longer needed money to supplement the conveniences of life at home in Dublin, he needed money to maintain his home, and the life he had made for himself, in Paris. There

⁶³ *LSB I*, 158-59 (SB to TMG [13th May, 1933])

⁶⁴ The surviving evidence suggests that the majority of the stories in *MPTK* were composed in 1933, the same year this letter was written – For a more thorough chronology of composition for these stories, see John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's 'More Pricks Than Kicks': In a Strait of Two Wills* (London; New York, NY: Continuum, 2011), 6.

⁶⁵ Earlier in the same letter to MacGreevy, Beckett paints an even starker picture of his financial woes when he comments that 'Mr Sean Cagney threatens me with distraintment if I don't fork up 5 guineas in a week' (*Ibid.*, 158). Faced with such a situation, however, Beckett yet derives comfort from the knowledge that Cagney 'can't make my father responsible and the bumtraps can't enter my father's house' (*Ibid.*).

were, moreover, still further differences between Beckett's situation in the early 1930s and in 1946, differences which help us to better understand why Beckett should have begun work on a short-story in 1946. To appreciate these differences, let us first consider the similarities between these two periods.

Much as had been the case in 1933, the precarity of Beckett's financial position in February 1946 was largely a consequence of his own actions. More specifically, his difficulties were in large part attributable to his decision to resign from what had, up to that point, been a relatively secure and sufficiently remunerative job.⁶⁶ Effective as of January 1946, meanwhile, Beckett had resigned from the position as Quartermaster/Interpreter with the Irish Red Cross Hospital at Saint-Lô that he had held since August of 1945.⁶⁷ As made clear by a letter to Gwynedd Reavey, written shortly before he took up his position in Saint-Lô, Beckett's motivations in choosing to work with the Irish Red Cross were purely practical – namely, his desire to return to France and to keep his apartment in Paris –, and his decision to remain in this position no longer than was absolutely necessary is therefore wholly comprehensible.⁶⁸ In resigning at the start of 1946, however, Beckett was also abandoning a secure source of income at a time when the broader economic context in France was becoming increasingly difficult, marked by strict rationing and rapid inflation.⁶⁹

Admittedly, Beckett's decision to cease working with the Irish Red Cross did not leave him entirely penniless. He continued to have access to an independent source of income thanks to an allowance, provided for in William Beckett's will, that Beckett had been receiving since 1933. The benefit that Beckett derived from this allowance was, however, severely restricted by the situation of the French economy, particularly by the effects of that rampant inflation which has just been mentioned. The situation in which Beckett found himself at the start of 1946 is made plain by James Knowlson who, in *DTF*, informs us that prices 'quadrupled' and salaries 'increased by between 40 and 50 per cent' in France between the Liberation and

⁶⁶ In January 1932, Beckett had resigned from his position as lecturer in French at TCD (viz. *LSB I*, 101 [n.2]).

⁶⁷ 'Chronology 1946', in *LSB II*, 27

⁶⁸ viz. 'I am returning to France as (tenez-vous bien) interpreter-store-keeper to the Irish Red Cross Hospital Unit in Normandy. [...] This is the only way in which I can return to France with the certainty of being able to keep my flat. It is impossible to get sterling out of here to France for any other than strictly commercial purposes.' (*LSB II*, 15 – SB to Gwynedd Reavey [21st June, 1945]).

⁶⁹ As noted by Knowlson in *DTF*, bread rationing was reintroduced in January 1946 (viz. *op cit.*, 353). The scale of inflation in post-War France, meanwhile, is made clear by Michel-Pierre Chélini: 'Le sommet de la crise [i.e. of inflation] n'est...pas la guerre, mais l'après-guerre entre 1946 et 1948 où se dessine un "pic inflationniste" d'un rythme annuel proche de 60 %' (Michel-Pierre Chélini, *Inflation, État et opinion en France de 1944 à 1952* <<http://books.openedition.org/igpde/2555>> [accessed: 7th January, 2018]).

January of 1947.⁷⁰ Amidst these dizzying increases, Beckett's allowance 'stayed the same, except for an initial increase caused by the devaluation of the franc in December 1945'.⁷¹ When these realities are taken into account one recognises that, although Beckett's financial situation in 1946 may have had a similar origin to his position in 1933, his predicament as he worked on 'Suite' was decidedly worse than it had been around the time he worked on the stories of *MPTK*. There was, moreover, another key difference between these periods which served at once to further worsen Beckett's financial position in 1946 and which had a direct effect upon his writing: Whereas in the early 1930s Beckett was still willing to entertain the possibility of pursuing various lines of work – these possibilities had perhaps been entertained only half-heartedly, but they had been entertained nonetheless –, by 1946 he had long since committed himself to making his living as a *creative* writer.

As noted in Chapter 2, this commitment appears to have solidified around the time of his 1937 move to Paris and there is nothing to suggest that Beckett's position had changed by March 1946. Working with the Irish Red Cross, as made clear, was intended purely as a means of returning to France and maintaining his apartment. Beckett's earliest expression of any willingness to take on steady employment – namely, his comment to Reavey in a letter of April 1946 that, having 'see[n] advertised...an editorial vacancy on the staff of the RGDATA (Retail Grocery Dairy and Allied Trades Association) Review at £300 per an. I think seriously of applying'⁷² –, meanwhile, is, as the editors of *LSB* remark, 'seen in terms of a possible – if implausible – literary apprenticeship, as he makes clear when he continues: "Any experience of trade journalism would be so useful"'.⁷³ More notably still, as will be seen shortly, this first allusion to the possibility of pursuing work beyond creative writing dates from *after* the linguistic turn. The fact that Beckett was, up to at least March 1946, entirely committed to living, and surviving, as a *creative* writer specifically is important, because at other points in his life Beckett had shown himself quite willing to work as a translator of others' work when this proved financially necessary. From 1948 on, Beckett would return to translation as a means of earning a living, and is known to have 'had a hand in the translation of some thirty of the articles and poems published in successive issues of [Georges Duthuit's revived, post-War] *Transition*'.⁷⁴ Prior to 1948, however, Beckett was entirely unwilling to consider the

⁷⁰ *DTF*, 354

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *LSB II*, 29 (SB to George Reavey [25th April, 1946])

⁷³ Dan Gunn, 'Introduction to Volume II', *LSB II*, lxviii

⁷⁴ John Pilling and Seán Lawlor, 'Beckett in *Transition*', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 88 – For a sense of what Beckett may have earned from these translations, see *Ibid.*, 87-88.

possibility of working as a translator and, the evanescent possibility of applying to work on the RGDATA Review to which has just been alluded notwithstanding, entirely focussed upon his creative writing. Both Beckett's commitment to his own writing and his refusal to translate are evident in the response he offered to Maria Jolas when, in 1947, she proposed that he work as a translator for the revived *Transition*:

I'm afraid I can't undertake the translation you propose. I'm not doing any translations now.
I should be glad eventually to contribute to the Workshop if you are interested in my work in French?⁷⁵

As can be seen, Beckett not only refused to accept the translation work that he had been offered by Jolas, but also attempted to use this as an opportunity to capitalise on the emergence of a new publication in which he might place his own French-language writing, thereby allowing him to earn money as a creative writer without being obliged to undertake translations. In responding to Jolas in this way, Beckett, it must be stressed, was not influenced by any misplaced sense of financial security. (As he wrote to MacGreevy in November of 1947: 'I had a letter from Maria Jolas asking me to do translations for her "new" *Transition*. I declined, in spite of poverty'.⁷⁶) Quite simply, Beckett's response to Jolas was motivated by his continued, fervent commitment to making his life as a professional creative writer.⁷⁷

Faced with the financial hardship of his position in 1946 and committed to life as a creative writer, therefore, it is obvious that the only means of improving his position that Beckett would have been willing to consider was to write and to seek money from the publication of this writing. It would only be in 1948, after two years of such extreme financial hardship and in rueful recognition of his inability to live from his own creative writings, that Beckett would finally apply for work with UNESCO and, subsequently, turn to regular work as a translator for *Transition* as a means of earning money.⁷⁸ Even at the start of 1948, though, as a letter to MacGreevy in which Beckett

⁷⁵ *LSB II*, 58 (SB to Maria Jolas [2nd August, 1947])

⁷⁶ *LSB II*, 66 (SB to TMG [24th November, 1947])

⁷⁷ In 'Becoming Beckett', Pascale Sardin too draws attention to Beckett's reticence to translate texts at this period and expands more fully on this reticence as indicative of the manner in which 'translation and bilingual writing...represented aesthetic and economic assets to Beckett' while also posing 'a symbolic threat' (Pascale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30*, 81, 79-81).

⁷⁸ Significantly, Beckett would not sign his translations for the post-War *Transition*. Instead, he would only sign the original works that appeared in the publication: 'Trois poèmes' / 'Three poems'; 'Three Dialogues'; 'Two Fragments' (*viz.* John Pilling and Seán Lawlor, 'Beckett in *Transition*', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 87). This refusal to acknowledge his work as a translator clearly indicates that, even after poverty had obliged him to return to translation, Beckett continued to view his own writing as his true work.

describes his intention to seek employment with UNESCO makes clear, he continued to view the prospect of seeking gainful employment with no great pleasure, was obviously regretful that he had failed to secure his livelihood as a writer, and clearly continued to attach supreme importance to his creative writing:

It is quite impossible for me to live now with my pittance [i.e. his allowance]. I had hoped that my books would make up the difference. But there is little chance of their pleasing here more than elsewhere [...] I have been reduced to applying for employment to UNESCO. Suzanne earns a little money with her dressmaking. That is what we are living on at present. [...] So it's a quiet and meagre life. With no friends, with only work to give it meaning.⁷⁹

Bearing in mind both these economic factors and Beckett's firm commitment to making his life as a creative writer – a commitment that remained profoundly strong in 1946 and which would only begin to diminish in 1948 –, it is unsurprising that Beckett's initial impulse upon returning to Paris from his time working in Saint-Lô was to begin work on a short-story. Unlike a novel, a short-story can be completed relatively quickly and, once completed, can be sent out to prospective publishers. For the starving writer intent on living from their art – or, in Beckett's case, the hungry and very cold writer intent on living from his art⁸⁰ –, the financial attraction of a short-story over a novel is obvious. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that whatever financial attraction the poverty-stricken writer may perceive in the short-story form is predicated on the existence of some way of publishing, and thus being paid for, any short-stories they may succeed in writing. For, if the story cannot be published, then the economic situation of the writer remains unchanged. The possibility of publication, moreover, is not simply a matter of finding a publisher but, as stressed in Chapter 2, of finding a *suitable* publisher. It was thus necessary that Beckett be able to appeal to a suitable publisher for his short-story. Crucially, in 1946, the suitability of any prospective publisher was a question at once of genre and of language.

In terms of genre, we have already established that the financial position in which Beckett found himself and his resultant need for a relatively speedy turnaround from composition to publication obliged him to choose a form other than the

⁷⁹ *LSB II*, 72 (SB to TMG [4th January, 1948]) – By this time, it should be noted, Beckett had in fact been able to secure that contract for his writings with Bordas that has already been mentioned, and had even brought out his French-language translation of *Murphy*. These successes, however, had failed to improve his finances, as sales of his texts proved abysmal and the contract with Bordas was finally terminated.

⁸⁰ Knowlson notes that, during the post-War period, Beckett and Dumesnil lived on 'meagre rations...supplemented by the supplies of butter that Yvonne Lefèvre sent fairly often from Isigny-sur-Mer in Calvados' (*DTF*, 355). Writing about the hardships that Beckett experienced while writing during the winter of 1945-46, meanwhile, Knowlson writes that 'there were times when Beckett's fingers were blue with cold as he gripped his pen' (*Ibid.*, 354)

novel as the form most appropriate for his purposes. In the case of a short-story and of a writer who hopes to publish this short-story as soon as possible, the publishing channels that are of most direct relevance are not those of major publishers, such as those that Beckett was at that time hoping might be coaxed into publishing *Watt*. Routledge, Chatto and Windus, Methuen, or the like, might well be interested in publishing a collection of short-stories, but they would not publish a single story, nor even a smaller section of a novella. In this regard, publishers of this sort were useless to Beckett's immediate needs. Equally useless to Beckett's needs was the one English-language publication that, in 1946, Beckett knew to be open to his literary writings in the immediate post-War period – namely, *The Irish Times*. For, though the paper was willing to publish some of his poems and a review in the period 1945-46, it did not publish short-stories. When Beckett began work on 'Suite' at the beginning of 1946, then, the publication avenues that were of most relevance to him were literary journals, reviews, or little magazines of the sort in which, during the pre-War period, he had occasionally published short-stories and sections from his longer works.

To this force of generic constraint must further be added the force of linguistic constraint. What this meant in practice was that, Beckett having begun 'Suite' in English, the only publication avenues that were available to his story were those literary journals, reviews, or little magazines that would be willing and able to publish a short-story written *in English*. In the Paris of 1946, however, no such publication existed. In fact, insofar as English-language journals, reviews, literary magazines and little magazines were concerned – that is, publications of the sort that were of relevance to Beckett –, James Campbell has noted that there was 'nothing' in Paris at the time, and there would continue to be nothing until late 1948-early 1949.⁸¹ Once things had begun to change, Anglophone publishing in Paris did expand quite

⁸¹ James Campbell, *Paris Interzone: Richard Wright, Lolita, Boris Vian and others on the Left Bank, 1946-60*, 21-22 – Excepting the revival of *Transition* in 1948 since this, although an English-language publication, was primarily a vehicle for material that had been translated from French, the first of the English-language reviews to emerge in post-War Paris was the bilingual review *Points*, which was founded by Sinbad Vail and Marcel Bisiaux. The date at which *Points* was founded is a matter of some dispute: James Campbell states the review was 'born' in 'February 1949' (*Ibid.*, 22). For his part, Sawyer-Lauçanno offers the slightly earlier dating of 'late 1948' (Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *The Continual Pilgrimage: American Writers in Paris, 1944-1960*, 126) – It is of some interest to note that *Points* has the distinction of being the first of Paris's post-War 'little magazines' to bring Beckett to its audience's attention; in its joint 11th/12th number (Winter 1951), *Points* published a review of *Molloy* by Jared Shlaes, entitled 'Beckett is...'. This review is an early example of that 'Beckett as Saint' trope which would mark much of the early discourse around Beckett's life and work. In Shlaes' case, he contended that 'Beckett has everything it takes to make a "saint" except publicity' (*qtd* in James Campbell, *Paris Interzone: Richard Wright, Lolita, Boris Vian and others on the Left Bank, 1946-60*, 51). That situation was to change somewhat in coming years.

rapidly and the following years would see the emergence of publications such as *Zero* (1949), *New-Story* (1951-53), and *Merlin* (1952), with the last of these playing a noteworthy role in Beckett's career during the 1950s.⁸² At that precise moment in March 1946 when Beckett chose to continue 'Suite' as a French short-story, however, the re-emergence of Anglophone publishing in Paris was still almost two years away and could, as such, provide no hope whatsoever of improving Beckett's financial situation.

The precarity of Beckett's financial position in 1946 has already been evoked but it is important to fully reflect upon what it would have meant, practically speaking, for Beckett and for the kind of writing that he could produce in a Paris devoid of opportunities for English-language publication. By writing in English, in short, Beckett was not just addressing himself to a certain type of publication, he was confining himself to a type of publication that did not exist in the city in which he lived, and he was doing so at a time when he had urgent need of additional income. Whatever publication he might eventually address his English-language writings to, it would have been clear to him in March 1946 that this publication could only be found overseas – most likely in Ireland or the UK, since the only other English-speaking country in which Beckett had ever sought out publication opportunities was the US and he had never met with any luck there.⁸³

The disadvantages of this situation are obvious. In the first instance, as has been noted, Beckett no longer had contacts with reviews in any of the English-speaking countries that have just been mentioned. The last of the reviews that he had had any direct connection to in Ireland – namely, *Ireland To-day* – had ceased publication in 1938, and none of Beckett's immediate circle of acquaintances in Britain or Ireland provided him with direct access to a suitable publication. Having enjoyed a relatively large number of connections to the world of Anglophone publishing in the early 1930s – largely thanks to his association with Joyce –, Beckett's list of literary contacts had, by the close of the pre-War period, been reduced to MacGreevy, Reavey, and the Jolases. In 1946, however, none of them could offer any assistance: MacGreevy, certainly, had joined the editorial staff of *The Capuchin Annual* in 1943, but such a publication was, as may be imagined, unlikely to have been receptive to

⁸² For the importance of *Merlin* to Beckett, see Justin Beplate, 'Samuel Beckett, Olympia Press and the Merlin Juveniles', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 97-109.

⁸³ Aside from Beckett's unsuccessful pre-War efforts to place *Murphy* or *MPTK* with US publishers, the only known instance of Beckett's submitting a piece of writing to a US-based journal are the poems that he sent to *Poetry* in 1934 (viz. *LSB I*, 230-35 – SB to The Editor, *Poetry Magazine* [1st November, 1934]).

Beckett's literary output.⁸⁴ Reavey for his part, having abandoned his literary agency in 1939 and having worked with the British Institute in Madrid and for the British Foreign Office in the intervening years, would not return to the business of publication for some time.⁸⁵ The Jolases, meanwhile, had equally withdrawn from the world of publishing when *transition* ceased publication in 1938, although, as has been noted, Beckett would hear from Maria Jolas prior to the magazine's resurrection in 1948. Although Beckett would reject Maria Jolas' initial offer, the existence of this offer serves to demonstrate the value of literary contacts where such contacts existed. In 1946, as has been stressed, Beckett found himself without such contacts. Bereft of friends who might have assisted him in placing his work with English-language publications, Beckett would have been obliged to approach any prospective British, Irish – or, indeed, American – publications as an unknown. Admittedly, after the literary agents A. P. Watt and Son had acknowledged receipt of *Watt* in February of 1946, there was the possibility that Beckett might make use of their services to place any future writings with potential publishers. Even that possibility was by no means ideal, however. Beckett's letters of the period suggest he was unhappy with A. P. Watt.⁸⁶ Part of this unhappiness may have derived from a preference that Beckett appears to have had for working with agents whom he knew personally. (In 1936, in fact, it was precisely this preference that led him to engage Reavey as his literary agent, despite the fact that, at the time Beckett 'neither trust[ed] him nor like[d] him'.⁸⁷ Quite simply, Beckett knew no other agent and, as a subsequent letter to MacGreevy made clear, 'they [= literary agents] are all the same, & with Reavey I will be spared the labour & embarrassment of introducing myself'.⁸⁸) Not only did A. P. Watt lack the personal, familiar quality that Beckett had appreciated in Reavey, it appears that the agency may also have obliged Beckett to contribute to the cost of submitting his works to prospective publishers for consideration. Such, at least, may be inferred from Beckett's remark in a letter to George Reavey of May, 1946: 'I heard

⁸⁴ viz. Susan Schreibman, 'Timeline', in 'About Thomas MacGreevy' <<http://www.macgreevy.org>> [accessed: 10th February, 2018]

⁸⁵ In her biography of Reavey, Sandra Andrea O'Connell informs us that he 'had undoubtedly intended to restart his publishing business after the war but, in the wake of his return to London in 1945, he experienced a profound sense of alienation from his familiar surroundings' (Sandra Andrea O'Connell, 'George Reavey (1907-1976): *The Endless Chain – A Literary Biography*', 369).

⁸⁶ viz. 'I wish I'd never given [*Watt*] to Watts' (*LSB II*, 35 – SB to George Reavey [19th June, 1946]).

⁸⁷ *LSB I*, 365 (SB to TMG [7th August, 1936])

⁸⁸ TCD MS MF 179 (SB to TMG [19th August, 1936]) – In the material cited, Beckett is agreeing with an opinion advanced by MacGreevy, but there is nothing to suggest that he did not fully share this opinion.

from the Watts. Watt is now with Methuen, who wrote asking to see it. Another stamp gone bang'.⁸⁹

For a writer in Beckett's position, then, the non-existence of English-language publishing in Paris in 1946 had very direct financial repercussions. By writing in English, he was at once confining himself to foreign-based publishers and publications, and, at the same time, he was also obliging himself to pay for the costs associated with sending this writing abroad, whether that be to his literary agents in London, to prospective reviews in Ireland, Britain, or the US, or – as Beckett's remark on the subject of the stamp appears to imply – a combination of the two. These costs are worth bearing in mind as, for a writer in Beckett's precarious financial position, they would have been by no means insubstantial at the time. The *Bulletin officiel du ministère des postes, télégraphes et téléphones* specifies that, as of the 1st of February, 1946, the cost of sending a letter of up to 20g abroad was fixed at 10 francs.⁹⁰ (By way of comparison, the cost of sending a letter or parcel of up to 20g internally was merely 3 francs in 1946; 10 francs was the cost of sending a letter or parcel of up to 100g internally.⁹¹) Basing our calculations upon the standard weight of a sheet of 55gsm A4 paper (i.e. 3.43g), any short-story that Beckett hoped to send abroad is likely to have weighed more than 20g, thus obliging him to pay for postage at a higher rate, which was fixed at 6 francs for letters and parcels in excess of 20g.⁹² To better appreciate what these costs would have meant for Beckett, we need only recall that the second half of 'Suite', which Beckett sent to *Les Temps Modernes*, came to six typed A4 pages, which would already total 20.58g, excluding any accompanying cover letter.⁹³ Beckett would thus have been obliged to pay 16 francs to send even one half of 'Suite' abroad. While the prospect of spending a total of 32 francs to post the two halves of the English-language story that 'Suite' might have been to either his London-based agents or to London-based publications may appear minimal to some readers, we must bear in mind the value of the franc, the cost of living in France in early 1946, and what we know about Beckett's difficult financial situation at this time. To get a sense of the

⁸⁹ *LSB II*, 33 (SB to George Reavey [27th May, 1946]).

⁹⁰ *Bulletin officiel du ministère des postes, télégraphes et téléphones*, no. 4 [10th February, 1946] (Paris: PTT, 1946), 149

⁹¹ *Bulletin officiel du ministère des postes, télégraphes et téléphones*, no. 1 [10th January, 1946] (Paris: PTT, 1946), 27 *et seq.* – Costs associated with internal postage for the year 1946 are readily available via *Les timbres de France* <<http://www.phil-ouest.com/TarifsPostaux.php>> [accessed: 23rd February, 2018].

⁹² *Bulletin officiel du ministère des postes, télégraphes et téléphones*, no. 4 [10th February, 1946], 149 – The *Bulletin* specifies that an additional 6 francs is added to the cost of sending letters and parcels 'par 20 grammes ou fraction de 20 gr. en excédent' (*Ibid.*).

⁹³ A typescript of the second half of the French-language 'Suite' is held at the University of Reading (*viz.* UoR JEK A/2/296).

value of the franc, and the relative cost of sending an English-language short-story abroad for consideration, it is helpful to place these costs in comparison with information that is to be found in a letter that Beckett wrote to Morris Sinclair in late 1945, wherein he advised his cousin, who was then considering pursuing a PhD in France, that it would be 'difficult to live on 4,500 frs. per month' and suggested that Sinclair supplement his income by providing 'grinds...at from 80 to 100 francs an hour'.⁹⁴ In an environment where one could hope to earn between 80 to 100 francs for an hour's teaching, the 32 franc cost of sending a short-story such as 'Suite' abroad is by no means negligible.

Set beside Beckett's advice to his cousin, the figures for postage throw into stark relief the relative cost that would have been represented by commitment to life as an English-language writer in Paris. Rather than providing him with a ready source of income, Beckett's English-language 'Suite' would have provided him only with the assurance that, prior to any potential return, he would be obliged to bear the cost of sending this short-story abroad – a cost equivalent to almost a third of the most that he could hope to derive from an hour of private teaching. For a man living on an allowance whose value was rapidly diminishing owing to rampant inflation and who at no point appears to have considered supplementing this allowance with other forms of work, we must bear the reality of the charges associated with sending materials abroad in mind. At the same time, we must also bear in mind that such charges were by no means an inevitability for Beckett. Obviously, a monolingual writer in Beckett's position would have been obliged to remain dependant on English-language publishers, and thus obliged to pay high postage costs if they hoped to continue publishing their works. Beckett, however, was bilingual; if he chose to, he *could* write in French, thereby avoiding the costs of sending materials abroad. More important still, Beckett was a bilingual writer who had already proven that he was willing to write in French in the pre-War period. If he chose to do so again in 1946, he would be drastically changing his prospects for publication and, by extension – at least potentially –, both his financial situation and his chances of making his living as a creative writer.

An awareness of these facts allows us to nuance Leland de la Durantaye's contention, noted in the Introduction, that when Beckett turned to French in 1946 it was a consequence of 'aesthetic pressure', by which he was specifically referring to a desire to achieve a particular kind of impoverished literary style.⁹⁵ In this regard, de la Durantaye saw Beckett's post-War linguistic turn as profoundly different from that of fellow bilingual writer Vladimir Nabokov who 'changed literary language under intense

⁹⁴ *LSB II*, 22 (SB to Morris Sinclair [21st October, 1945])

⁹⁵ Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking*, 67

financial, as opposed to aesthetic, pressure'.⁹⁶ Although de la Durantaye's conviction in the validity of the LSH may lead him to privilege internal, aesthetic motivations in Beckett's case and to ignore the possible influence of external factors, such as Beckett's financial situation, we have seen that Beckett's life around the time of his post-War linguistic turn was defined by 'intense financial...pressure' of much the sort experienced by Nabokov. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that Beckett was also labouring under a particular kind of 'aesthetic pressure'. As we have seen, however, this was not the stylistic pressure that de la Durantaye, guided by the LSH, imagines. Instead the 'aesthetic pressure' that weighed on Beckett was that exerted by his pressing desire to survive as a creative writer. Bearing these twin pressures in mind, it is impossible to either overestimate, or to overstate, the degree to which writing in French transformed Beckett's prospects in 1946.

We have already noted that, as an English-language writer in Paris at a time when the city was entirely devoid of English-language publications, Beckett was not only obliged to send his work aboard, but also obliged to do without the lifeline of personal contacts since, at that particular moment, none of his friends were directly involved in publications that might have been open to his writing. By writing in French, this situation was transformed: In contrast to the utter lack of English-language publications in the Paris of 1946, the city was, at that time, experiencing a remarkable boom in French-language publications that has led Anne Simonin to describe the cultural life of post-Liberation France as being 'marquée par l'efflorescence de revues'.⁹⁷ Indeed this flourishing of reviews in the post-War period was so sudden and so extensive, that, as early as August 1944, Maurice Blanchot was able to refer to the 'au moins cent cinquante revues en instance de paraître'.⁹⁸ Not only was Paris thus rife with potential avenues for publication, it was also a city in which Beckett possessed precisely those connections that he lacked in Dublin or London. The evidence of these connections is made clear by that same letter to Morris Sinclair from which was quoted earlier. There, having suggested that Sinclair consider the writing of Jean-Paul Sartre as a research topic, Beckett stated that he 'could introduce [Sinclair] to Sartre & his world'.⁹⁹ Although Sinclair would apparently never meet Sartre, Beckett's connection with 'Sartre & his world' was very real, and dated from

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* – For Nabokov's financial situation around the time he began work on his first English-language novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), 494-496.

⁹⁷ Anne Simonin, *Les Éditions de Minuit 1943-1955 : Le devoir de l'insoumission. Nouvelle édition augmentée avec des annexes sur le Nouveau Roman et la Guerre d'Algérie.* (Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe: Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine "L'édition contemporaine", 2008), 272

⁹⁸ Maurice Blanchot *qtd* in *Ibid.*, 273

⁹⁹ *LSB II*, 22 (SB to Morris Sinclair [21st October, 1945])

the pre-War period. (It was, of course, via Sartre that Beckett had passed ‘the nouvelle’ to Paulhan at the *NRF* in 1939.¹⁰⁰) This connection provided Beckett with an obvious entryway to *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal that Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir would found in late 1945 and where Beckett would publish his earliest French-language literary writings of the post-War period. Admittedly, Beckett does not appear to have approached Sartre or de Beauvoir himself. Instead, ‘Suite’ was placed with *Les Temps Modernes* by Jacoba van Velde, who began acting as Beckett’s literary agent in 1946. This situation too, however, constitutes another important difference between Beckett’s experience when writing in French and when writing in English.

Unlike A. P. Watt, Jacoba van Velde was someone whom Beckett had come to know via his friendship with her brothers, Geer and Bram van Velde. This personal connection is precisely the sort of connection that Beckett sought with his literary agents, and precisely the sort of connection that had led him to prefer Reavey to any other possibility in the 1930s. In this respect too, then, writing in French had advantages over writing in English. All the more so given that, although Beckett may have been loath to negotiate directly with editors – a distaste that had been with him since the pre-War period¹⁰¹ –, he was, at least in the months immediately following his turn to French, by no means averse to supplementing the assistance he received from Jacoba van Velde with that which could be offered by well-placed friends and acquaintances. Thus, in the very letter in which Beckett thanks van Velde for placing ‘Suite’ with *Les Temps Modernes*, he alerts her to the possibility that the text may also have been taken by *Fontaine*:

J’apprends de Suzanne que vous avez placé “*Suite*” aux *Temps Modernes*. Félicitations. Il n’y a qu’une chose qui me chiffonne...c’est que j’ai l’impression, d’après ce que Tzara m’a dit, que *Fontaine* (rédacteur Fouché) l’a déjà pris. Il est naturellement possible que Tzara ait dit ça pour se débarrasser de moi. En tout cas il faudra s’assurer que cela ne passe pas dans les 2 revues à la fois, ou d’avance dans l’une alors que l’autre comptait dessus pour un numéro futur.¹⁰²

Dirk Van Hulle has rightly drawn attention to the manner in which Beckett’s letter to van Velde shows that he ‘did not labour under any delusion about his modest position in the Parisian literary field at the time’.¹⁰³ More particularly, this awareness of his

¹⁰⁰ *LSB I*, 653 (SB to George Reavey [28th February, 1939])

¹⁰¹ In a letter to MacGreevy of 1936, Beckett described the possession of a literary agent as an unfortunate necessity on account of the fact that ‘[t]ruck direct with publishers is one of the few avoidable degradations’ (*LSB I*, 365 – SB to TMG [August 7th, 1946]).

¹⁰² *LSB II*, 30 (SB to Jacoba van Velde [15th May, 1946])

¹⁰³ Dirk Van Hulle, ‘Publishing “The End”’: Samuel Beckett and *Les Temps Modernes*, in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 76

unimportance is to be found in his admission that Tristan Tzara may only have told him that *Fontaine* was interested in his writings so as to avoid having to deal with him. The reference to Tzara is also important for another reason though: If Tzara may have told Beckett that *Fontaine* would take 'Suite' only 'pour se débarrasser de [Beckett]', this proves that Beckett was endeavouring to make use of Tzara in a way that might have incited him to want to put off Beckett in the first place. What Beckett's letter to Jacoba van Velde reveals, in other words, is that, however modest his position in the Parisian literary field may have been, he did have a position in this field and contacts upon whom he could call. Tzara was one such contact. In the pre-War period, Beckett had translated his poetry.¹⁰⁴ Now, in 1946, Beckett was clearly appealing to him for assistance, both in terms of placing short-stories with reviews where Tzara had already appeared – Tzara had published material with *Fontaine* in February of 1946¹⁰⁵ – and in securing a publisher for the as-yet unpublished French-language translation of *Murphy* since, elsewhere in the same letter, Beckett reminds van Velde that Tzara 'devait soumettre Murphy à Calmann-Lévy'.¹⁰⁶

Beckett's letter to van Velde serves to prove that he took full advantage of the contacts and opportunities that were available to him in Paris. Or, rather, it proves that he endeavoured to take full advantage of the contacts and opportunities that existed in Paris once he had, as it were, made these available to himself by virtue of his decision to draw a line under the English-language 'Suite' and continue that story in French. In so doing, he was also drawing a line under an English-language short-story that could only have been directed away from Paris and towards an unknown reception in Dublin, London, or further afield, a story that, as such, had little chance of improving his financial situation, or furthering his aim of surviving as a creative writer. When he made the decision to write in French, on the other hand, Beckett was opening to himself possibilities, opportunities, and contacts that, in March 1946, existed for him only in Paris, and only if he wrote in French. It is, I believe, in these

¹⁰⁴ Seán Lawlor, "'That's how it was and them were the days': Samuel Beckett's early publications with Samuel Putnam and Nancy Cunard', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 29

¹⁰⁵ Dirk Van Hulle, 'Publishing "The End": Samuel Beckett and *Les Temps Modernes*', in Mark Nixon (ed.), *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, 75

¹⁰⁶ *LSB II*, 30 (SB to Jacoba van Velde [15th May, 1946]) – Finally, it would be van Velde who eventually secured a publisher for *Murphy*, when she negotiated a contract with Pierre Bordas on Beckett's behalf in October 1946. We know this to be the case from Bordas' description of his first meeting with Beckett, when he states that Beckett was 'accompagné par une jeune femme qui parlait à sa place' (Pierre Bordas, *L'Édition est une aventure* [Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1997], 186). The 'jeune femme' in question was almost certainly Jacoba van Velde, although she would have been in her early forties at the time.

realities that we can find the origins of Beckett's decision to switch to French and, by extension, of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn.

As we have seen over the course of our examination, Beckett's post-War linguistic turn did not merely signal the switch from one language to another. More importantly, it constituted fundamental reorientation in the kind of publications to which his work might be addressed. By writing in English, Beckett was confining himself to publications in cities other than Paris, cities where, in March 1946, he was almost entirely without connections, and to the unpleasant truth that any prospective income that he might succeed in deriving from his writings would be immediately diminished not only by the percentage take of his literary agents, A. P. Watt, but by the simple fact of having to send these writings out of France. By writing in French, on the other hand, Beckett's situation was drastically improved: Suddenly, he opened to himself all the possibilities of a literary field that, owing to a flowering of French-language reviews, was alive with opportunity to publish precisely the sort of texts most likely to improve his financial situation – that is, short-stories. These texts, moreover, could be sent out more quickly, more cheaply, and more easily than could English-language materials to their English-language equivalents. This ease was an effect not only of reduced costs, but also of the network of contacts upon whom Beckett could draw in Paris, and of the assistance that he would receive from Jacoba van Velde, a literary agent with whom he was personally familiar and with whom he was evidently far happier than with A. P. Watt. To cap it all, where the existence of the English-language novel that he had completed during the War – that is, *Watt* – had been a clear invitation to write in English, the better to capitalise on whatever publishing avenues might be opened by this novel, the decision to write in French could equally be capitalised upon as the chance to secure a publisher for the French-language translation of *Murphy* that he had prepared in the pre-War period, and the poems that he had written in French around the same time. Both of these texts would indeed appear in print mere months after Beckett had taken his decision to begin writing in French: 'Poèmes 38-39' appearing in *Les Temps Modernes* in November of 1946, and *Murphy* being published by Bordas in April 1947.

Taking all of these factors together, the greatest effect of turning from English to French in 1946 becomes clear: By writing in English, Beckett had been severely diminishing his chances of ever succeeding in his dream of making his living as a writer. By writing in French, on the other hand, it became infinitely more likely that he would be able to publish his work, infinitely more likely that he would be able to secure a livelihood from his creative writing, and thus infinitely more likely that he would succeed in living from this writing, something that he had been trying to do

since at least 1938. It was, I would contend, these factors – or rather, Beckett’s realisation of these factors: Of all that he was denying himself by writing in English, and all that he stood to gain by writing in French – that led him to the post-War linguistic turn. While the explanation that has been proposed here may lack some of the literary appeal of the LSH, it has the inestimable advantage of according with almost all the available evidence – and with all the surviving contemporary evidence – that we have for this turn.

It has, for instance, already been demonstrated that the use of French, in and of itself, changed nothing about the manner in which Beckett wrote: French alone never made Beckett’s writing simpler or less allusive. The explanation for the linguistic turn that has been proposed here presumes no such change. Similarly, it has been demonstrated that the post-War linguistic turn changed nothing about ‘Suite’ on a purely stylistic level: The use of the first-person, the reduction in allusion, the threat of unseen third-parties, the hesitancy and uncertainty of the narrative voice – all of this was present in the initial, English-language version. Again, the explanation for the linguistic turn that has been proposed here neither presupposes, nor requires, that such stylistic changes should have taken place. Rather, the explanation proposed here is based upon the role played by a change in language in radically changing Beckett’s publishing opportunities, the prospects for his financial position, and the likelihood that he could survive as a creative writer in the Paris of 1946.¹⁰⁷ In each of these

¹⁰⁷ It may be noted that this genealogy for Beckett’s linguistic turn – that is, the idea that it was predicated largely on the want of English-language publishing opportunities – directly parallels that of his fellow bilingual writer Julien Green who, having travelled to the US during the War, found himself in an environment essentially devoid of French-language publishing opportunities. It was in consequence of this fact that, as Green explains in ‘My First Book in English’, he turned his back on French and set about writing in English, the better to take advantage of the opportunities that were available to him: ‘I began my book [i.e. *Memories of Happy Days*] in French, of course, and I say “of course” because up to that time I had practically never written in any other language than French [...] I wrote about twenty pages. At this point I put down my pen and wondered who was going to print my book and who was going to read it. You must remember that in July 1940 French publishers in the States were very few in number. Personally, I didn’t know one. As for the readers of French books, there were some, to be sure, but terribly scattered. Would it not be more natural, in an English-speaking country, to write this book in English? All the more since my book, the object of which was to serve France, was principally meant for American readers. For all those reasons, I decided to put aside the pages I had already written in French and to make a completely new start, in English’ (Julien Green, ‘My First Book in English’, in *Le langage et son double* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987], 216). If this material has been offered in a footnote and only after having presented the totality of the evidence upon which this study’s explanation for Beckett’s post-War linguistic turn is based, it is because our interest was precisely in contextualising Beckett’s own experience in its particularity. Our explanation for Beckett’s turn to French needed, therefore, to stand on its own merits, and to be justified on the basis of the evidence we have for Beckett’s own experience. Green’s experience cannot be a perfect model for Beckett’s, nor can it provide any new insight into Beckett’s individual case. The

respects, as has been demonstrated, the linguistic turn was transformative. The precise kind of transformation that the post-War linguistic turn effected is, admittedly, not that upon which Beckett Studies has generally focussed attention, but the relative novelty of the explanation that has been offered here should not be allowed to detract from the solid evidentiary basis upon which it is founded, nor from the obvious advantages that it has over the LSH that continues to govern so much thinking within Beckett Studies.

As has already been stressed, the LSH *cannot* explain the post-War linguistic turn. Not only can it not explain the post-War linguistic turn, it cannot explain the pre-War linguistic turn either, and it has had the perverse effect of leading critics to misread and misjudge the writing that Beckett composed in French during the pre-War period, most notably the poetry of the late 1930s. Finally, and crucially, the fundamental conviction in an intimate connection between Beckett's use of French and the style of his writing upon which the LSH is based is contradicted by the 'Suite' Notebook, our single most important piece of contemporaneous, evidence for the post-War linguistic turn. To address these problems we require a new hypothesis, it is just such an hypothesis that has been proposed here: This may be termed the Contextual Hypothesis (CH), and it has informed not just this chapter's discussion of the post-War linguistic turn, but Part III's engagement with Beckett's turns to French and this thesis's study of Beckett's engagement with French over the period 1906-1946 as a whole.

The CH displaces that focus on language and style that has governed so much thinking on both Beckett's turn to, and his use of, French. Rather than looking to the style or the language of the writing that Beckett produced and looking there for clues that might corroborate statements made by Beckett himself in the years after the linguistic turn, one must look to the context in which this writing was produced. As recognised by John Fletcher, Beckett's linguistic choices are a product of the circumstances in which he found himself; they are a function of context. What Beckett Studies has generally failed to recognise, but what has been demonstrated here, is that context did not begin to play a determining role in these linguistic choices during Beckett's mature period. On the contrary, Beckett's choice of French or English, his use of one or the other, was *always* tied to the circumstances in which he found himself; it was always a function of context.

It is for this reason that the CH is of such value. As I hope to have demonstrated, the CH *can* account for each of these various contexts while also

parallel between them – striking though it may be – can only be suggestive; its proper place is thus on the boundaries and at the close, rather than within the body, of the present study.

addressing the problems that undermine the LSH: It can serve to explain Beckett's various turns to French; it can serve to explain the pre-War turn; it can, moreover, do so in a way that frees us to recognise the full complexity of Beckett's French-language compositions of the pre-War period, and the full depth of the role that this pre-War French-language writing played in Beckett's development as a literary artist. Finally, the CH can explain the post-War linguistic turn: It can explain why Beckett began to write a short-story in English in February of 1946, why he decided in March 1946 to turn from English and continue writing this story in French, and it can explain why this change of language left no obvious stylistic traces on 'Suite'. Explained in terms of this CH, it becomes clear that no dramatic stylistic traces of the linguistic turn are to be found in the text of 'Suite' because the traces of the linguistic turn are not to be found in style, nor are its origins to be found in language. Instead, its traces are to be found in the publications that followed on from the post-War linguistic turn, and its origins in the pressing financial impetus of the need to survive or, more accurately, the keenly felt need to survive as a creative writer.

Clearly, there are questions that the CH cannot answer and it would be disingenuous to pretend otherwise: Why, for example, did Beckett's continue writing in French for so long after the post-War linguistic turn? Why, even after he returned to writing in English, did he remain a bilingual writer? Why were certain texts begun in French and others in English? Some of these questions, obviously, are not properly the subject of the present thesis since they concern, not Beckett's engagement with French up to the moment of the linguistic turn, but Beckett's development as a French-language and, subsequently, as bilingual writer in the months and years that followed this turn. Many of these questions, moreover, have already been the subject of extensive study by scholars interested particularly in Beckett's bilingualism and his extensive work as a self-translator, to whose work persons interested in these particular questions are warmly directed.¹⁰⁸ There is, however, at least one question

¹⁰⁸ For studies of Beckett's bilingualism that embrace works produced during his mature career, see: Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art'; Sinéad Mooney, *A Tongue Not Mine – Admittedly*, none of these studies have taken the contextualising approach adopted by the present thesis with regard to Beckett's linguistic turn. It was indeed noted in the Introduction that Pascale Sardin has recently called for a mode of engaging with Beckett's bilingualism and self-translation that would take account of just such external contexts and thereby 'question the romantic vision of the bilingual writer who allegedly created himself independently from the "rules of art" and outside the polysystems in which he was, in reality, and active agent' (*viz.* Pascale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez [eds], *SBT/A 30*, 77-78). As Sardin's remarks attest, such a study remains to be written.

raised by the CH that we must try to answer, and which I will attempt to answer in the final chapter of Part III. This question is quite simple: If the association between language and style, between Beckett's use of French and his embrace of stylistic attenuation, upon which the LSH depends, is incorrect, why did Beckett himself so often explain his turn to French in precisely these terms?

PART III: Beckett's Turn(s) to French

Chapter 4

Beckett's Post-War Idea(s) of the Linguistic Turn

During the post-War period, Beckett offered a number of reasons for his post-War linguistic turn. As noted in the Introduction, some of the statements he made on this subject have come to hold an important place in Beckett Studies and are frequently cited in support of what, for the purposes of this thesis, has been referred to as the LSH. Naturally, the existence of these statements, and the authorial support that some of them lend to this hypothesis, constitutes something of a problem for the contextual interpretation of Beckett's linguistic turn(s) that has been developed in this thesis.

This problem is a complex one since Beckett's statements are not in and of themselves sufficient to refute the CH as expressed in this thesis. As made clear towards the close of the immediately preceding chapter, there is much evidence that serves to corroborate the idea that each of Beckett's turns was an effect of a broader array of factors tied to the particular contexts in which he found himself and which, at the same time, serves to trouble the critical commonplace according to which Beckett's linguistic turn was motivated primarily by stylistic concerns and by the effect that French had upon his writing practice. We have, most notably, the evidence of Beckett's own pre-War writing in French, which proves that this language was never necessarily a vehicle for greater restraint, and the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, which demonstrates that Beckett's change of style in the post-War period preceded his change of language. While such textual and manuscript evidence evidently does much to corroborate the CH that has been advanced here, it remains the case that, none of the evidence to which we can appeal takes the form of direct statements made by Beckett himself on the subject of his post-War turn to French. These statements, by and large, paint a very different picture, one that seems to be profoundly in accord with the LSH.

In light of this seeming opposition between the various forms of evidence available to us, and whatever one's own perspective may be about the probable validity of the hypotheses that exist to explain Beckett's turn(s) to French, it is surely legitimate to ask why Beckett, at various points in his post-War career, should have explicitly presented language and style as key motivators for his post-War linguistic turn. Such is the question to which this final chapter will attempt to respond, doing so by engaging with the statements Beckett is known to have made on the subject of this post-War linguistic turn. In this way, it is hoped that we will be able to arrive at a

better understanding, not only of what these statements mean for the post-War linguistic turn and the CH advanced by this thesis, but also for the manner in which Beckett Studies engages with author-derived evidence.

In terms of how these statements will be engaged with, the present chapter will follow broadly the same approach as that adopted by the closing chapter of Part I, in which were contextualised Beckett's pre-War comments on the subject of French. As in that chapter, every effort will be made to contextualise Beckett's statements in terms of the original moment of their expression and what we know of Beckett's biography. There will, however, be some differences between the scope and structure of these two chapters.

Unlike the earlier chapter's focus on Beckett's comments on the subject of the French language in the broadest sense, this chapter will be focussed exclusively on comments made by Beckett explicitly with regard to the post-War linguistic turn. In addition, owing to the larger number of comments to be examined here, it has been decided to slightly adapt the structure employed in Chapter 4 of Part I. Rather than examining Beckett's statements from first to last in an exclusively chronological order, as was the case in the final chapter of Part I, the statements that will be examined here have been subdivided into three categories, which will be discussed in the following order: Private Statements; Public Statements; and, Statements to 'Scholars'.¹

Before embarking on a more careful contextualisation of Beckett's statements on the subject of his turn to French, however, some remarks should be made about the differences between Beckett's pre-War comments on French and his post-War statements on the subject of his linguistic turn since these differences have important consequences for how we should consider these two sets of comments and, by extension, for the interpretive value that each group may be said to hold for Beckett Studies and for understandings of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn in particular.

¹ The quotation marks that are here placed around the term 'scholars' are not intended to suggest that the academics concerned are not sufficiently scholarly, but simply in recognition of the fact that at least some of these comments were addressed to people who might not initially be thought of as 'scholars' – that is, professional academics –, such as the translator Hans Naumann. Insofar as Beckett's statements were always intended to respond to 'scholarly' queries about his turn to French – including those he addressed to Naumann – the term 'scholar' has been thought appropriate to the spirit, if not the letter, of all the figures concerned. It is this distinction between and the spirit and the letter that the quotation marks are intended to signal.

The major difference between Beckett's pre- and post-War remarks is, of course, that the pre-War comments were all made prior to the post-War linguistic turn. Obvious though this difference may be, it must be underlined as it has important consequences for these remarks and their evidentiary value in terms of understanding the post-War linguistic turn.

In the case of the pre-War comments, the fact that they were made years prior to the linguistic turn means that it is only by way of *a posteriori* intervention by scholars that they can be made to refer to Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. Having been made before the linguistic turn, in other words, they bear a more tenuous relationship to Beckett's post-War decision and the light they may be said to throw upon Beckett's motivations in 1946 is, like that from a distant star, subject to a certain degree of redshift. This redshift is further exacerbated by the fact that the distance between the pre-War remarks and the post-War linguistic turn is not a matter of chronology alone, but also of intention. None of the pre-War comments deal specifically with Beckett's own reasons for turning to French in the post-War period, since this was a decision he had not yet made. Naturally, it is possible to extrapolate a position from these pre-War comments and then apply that position to the post-War turn, but any such extrapolation will necessarily be a *post facto* critical construction. It will, moreover, be one developed in cognizance of and, as demonstrated by the examples of Pilling, Beer, and de la Durantaye, one invariably developed with explicit reference to what the critic already knows of Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his post-War linguistic turn.² In examining the meaning of these pre-War comments, in other words, one is likely to find only that to which the majority of the post-War statements have explicitly pointed: namely, a link between French and stylistic impoverishment. Taken together, these factors serve to greatly undermine the interpretative value of Beckett's pre-War comments, at least insofar as our understanding of the post-War linguistic turn is concerned.

The case of those post-War statements that will be examined in the present chapter is entirely different: These statements were all made after the post-War linguistic turn had already taken place and, more importantly still as far their evidentiary value is concerned, they were all specifically intended to respond to the question of why Beckett began writing in French in the post-War period. Where the light shed by the pre-War comments thus needs to be corrected before it can be made to properly illumine the post-War turn, the light Beckett's post-War statements may be assumed to throw on the linguistic turn could scarcely be clearer, more direct, or provided by a better source. Bearing this in mind, indeed, it might be contended that

² For the use made of Beckett's pre-War comments on French by these three critics, see Part I, Chapter 4.

contextualising Beckett's post-War statements is unlikely to have anything of importance to tell us that Beckett has not already made plain himself. If one is seeking to understand Beckett's reasons for turning to French, what better insight could we hope to find than Beckett's own comments on the matter? While this question may strike the reader as rhetorical, it should be taken seriously as there is good reason to doubt that Beckett's comments on the subject of his linguistic turn actually provide us with clear and unambiguous insight into this turn. We would, as a result, do well to examine the question of how we should engage with author-derived evidence in a little more depth.

A response to this very question was, as the reader may recall, already suggested prior to our engagement with Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s. In that chapter, it was noted that the earliest expression of the view of these poems as straightforward and relatively simple works that currently prevails in Beckett Studies derives – namely, the one that is to be found in Lawrence Harvey's *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* – invoked Beckett's own presentation of his reasons for turning to French as supporting evidence. In that chapter, however, we noted that even author-derived evidence, though it may come from Beckett himself, cannot be accepted uncritically. Instead, it must be interrogated, placed in its proper context, and brought into dialogue with other forms of evidence – including, most notably, the texts written by Beckett.

The same approach that we advocated then must also be adopted now when dealing with Beckett's statements on his linguistic turn: These statements must be contextualised, and considered in light of what other evidence reveals about this turn. Moreover, in the particular case of these statements, they must be brought into dialogue with each other. For, it is a feature of these statements that they reveal Beckett to have actually offered a number of *different* explanations for his post-War linguistic turn. Even in the absence of other attenuating evidence – such as that provided by the 'Suite' Notebook or Beckett's pre-War French-language compositions –, in fact, the very variety of explanations offered by Beckett would invite us to be wary of assuming there to be a single motivation for his post-War linguistic turn to which his statements on the matter would provide untroubled access. This variety, however, is not the only reason to approach these statements with a measure of circumspection. It is also the case that Beckett's statements on this post-War turn were made at various points over the course of decades – the earliest being made in 1948, very soon after the turn, and the last in 1982, scarcely seven years before Beckett's death at the age of 83. To treat these statements as an undifferentiated group, therefore – a collection of 'statements by Beckett' –, is to ignore the decades across which they were made and the associated possibility that Beckett's own

perception of his reasons for turning to French may have changed over that period, or that his perception of the question itself may have changed.³

Given what has just been said about the uncertainties that hang over the statements Beckett is known to have made on his post-War linguistic turn – at once the variety of explanations that he offered and the long number of years that separate his earliest statement on the matter from his last –, it seems sensible that, before we attempt to contextualise these statements individually, we should endeavour to get some overview of Beckett's statements and of their diversity, at once in terms of the explanations for the turn that they afford and the extensive chronological range that they cover. To these ends, the statements that will be examined in this chapter are presented below, where they appear in chronological order. In all cases, the date given is that at which Beckett is known, or may be reasonably assumed, to have first made the statement. Where the date of original expression is likely to have differed from the date of the statement's first appearance in print, this is signalled by the use of 'pre-'. Although it cannot be claimed that the statements presented in this chapter comprise the true totality of Beckett's post-War comments on the subject of his turn to French, it does represent all those that were found in the course of research for the present thesis.⁴

³ Although the example does not concern French, two mutually-contradictory comments made by Beckett on the subject of the English language offer a helpful insight into the manner in which his views on language could change with time: Thus, in the pre-War period, Beckett wrote of the excessively 'sophisticated' nature of the English language in his essay 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce', where he commented that 'it is abstracted to death' (*D*, 28). In the post-War period, however, Beckett is reported to have commented to a Swedish friend that 'English is a good theatre language because of its concreteness, its close relationship between thing and vocable' (Holmqvist *qtd* in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* [Åbo/Turku: Åbo Akademi, 1976], 30). Clearly, these views are antithetical; they were also both expressed by Beckett.

⁴ Although every effort has been made to find all of those statements made by Beckett on the subject of his post-War linguistic turn, the present chapter cannot claim to be exhaustive. This owes to the fact that, as will be seen, Beckett's statements on the subject of his linguistic turn were primarily offered in response to individual scholars. While a number of these responses have gone on to be frequently cited and thus enjoy widespread recognition, some of Beckett's statements remain confined to the writings of those individuals to whom they were initially addressed. As such, where a particular scholar's work has neither enjoyed a wide readership nor been cited in a volume that has, the explanation offered by Beckett for his linguistic turn has been lost to criticism at large. (It is equally possible that certain of those statements made by Beckett on the subject of his linguistic turn may have been kept private. As will be seen, there is at least one occasion on which Beckett explicitly requested that the comments he made on this matter, and other issues pertaining to his work, not be publicly cited by the critic to whom they were made.) This being so, and owing to the vast body of literature that has grown up around Beckett, it remains possible that further statements by Beckett on the subject of his post-War linguistic turn may have been inadvertently omitted from this chapter, whether owing to the fact that they now only exist in the deepest recesses of Beckett Studies or in the memories of those

1. Pour faire remarquer moi.⁵ [1948]
2. Depuis 1945 je n'écris plus qu'en français. Pourquoi ce changement ? Il ne fut pas raisonné. Cela a été pour changer, pour voir, pas plus compliqué que cela, apparemment au moins. [...] Ce qui n'empêche pas qu'il puisse y avoir, à ce changement, des raisons urgentes. Moi-même j'en entrevois plusieurs, maintenant qu'il est trop tard pour revenir en arrière. Mais j'aime mieux les laisser dans l'ombre. Je vous donnerai quand même une piste : le besoin d'être mal armé.⁶ [1954]
3. In spite of having to clear out [of Paris] in 1942 I was able to keep my flat. I returned to it and began writing again – in French. Just felt like it. It was a different experience from writing in English. It was more exciting for me – writing in French.⁷ [pre-1956]
4. Beckett selbst antwortete auf die Frage, warum er als Irländer das Französische vorziehe: 'Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style'.⁸ [pre-1957]
5. I said that by writing in French he [= Beckett] was evading some part of himself. (*Pause.*) He said yes, there were a few things about himself he didn't like, that French had the right 'weakening' effect.⁹ [1959]
6. When I asked him in 1962...why he switched from English to French, he replied that for him, an Irishman, French represented a form of weakness by comparison with his mother tongue. Besides, English because of its very richness holds out the temptation to rhetoric and virtuosity, which are merely words mirroring themselves complacently, Narcissus-like. The relative asceticism of French seemed more appropriate to the expression of being, undeveloped, unsupported somewhere in the depths of the microcosm.¹⁰ [1962]
7. [H]e [= Beckett] was afraid of English 'because you couldn't help writing poetry in it'.¹¹ [pre-1964]

who first heard them. Bearing these factors in mind, the contextualisation offered in the present chapter can only be viewed as indicative; it will be up to the reader to determine whether this indicative survey may be said to have any more general value.

⁵ 'Notes on Contributors', in Georges Duthuit (ed.), *Transition Forty-Eight* no. 2 (Paris: [s.n.], 1948), 146-147 – This note is reproduced in *LSB II* (*viz. op. cit.*, 93).

⁶ *LSB II*, 461-62 (SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954])

⁷ SB *qtd* in Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling "Waiting for Godot"', in *The New York Times* (6th May, 1956), 129 [1]

⁸ SB *qtd* in Niklaus Gessner, *Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache: eine Untersuchung über Formzerfall und Beziehungslosigkeit bei Samuel Beckett* (Zurich: Juris-Verlag, 1957), 32 (unnumbered footnote)

⁹ Herbert Blau, 'Meanwhile Follow the Bright Angels', in *The Tulane Drama Review* (Vol. 5, No. 1 – September 1960), 91

¹⁰ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 196

¹¹ Richard Coe, *Beckett*, 14

8. À la libération, je pus conserver mon appartement, j'y revins et me remis à écrire – en français – avec le désir de m'appauvrir encore davantage. C'était ça le vrai mobile.¹² [1968]
9. Escape from mother Anglo-Irish exuberance & automatism.
From ex[c]less to lack of colour.
Distance from the writing from which clearer to assess it.
Slow-down of whole process of formulation.
Impoverished form in keeping with revelation & espousal of mental poverty.
English grown foreign resumable 10 years later.¹³ [1982]

When Beckett's post-War explanations of his reasons for turning to French are laid out as they have just been, it becomes apparent that these reasons are far from uniform. Certainly, the majority of Beckett's statements evidence the commonly-cited vision of French as a language that enabled him to abandon excess in favour of a more refined, a more ascetic, and a less allusive style. Statements 5-9 are, indeed, quite explicit that this was Beckett's primary motivation for turning to French. If these were Beckett's only statements on his turn to French, therefore, it would be quite possible to say that Beckett provided general and unceasing support for the LSH. These explicit statements are not alone, however. What are we to make of Statements 1-4?

In terms of Statements 2 and 4, admittedly, it might well be said that they too express, albeit in a more ambiguous way, the same connection between French and 'weakness', 'lack of colour' and the escape from 'poetry'. Neither of these statements, however, can be said to provide unambiguous support for the LSH. In the case of Statement 2, for example, although it concludes with a 'piste' that can obviously be held to mean much the same thing as Statements 5-9, it equally suggests the 'besoin d'être mal armé' was only one reason amongst the many that Beckett claims to now be able to 'entrevo[i][r]' for his turn to French. This 'besoin' is, then, only an initial clue and we are invited to consider it as the first step towards discovering the various 'raisons urgentes' which motivated this change and which, since no further clarifications are offered, might as easily be understood as external (i.e. contextual) as internal (i.e. linguistic, stylistic). Similarly, while Statement 4 is generally taken as expressing the same need for impoverishment that we find later statements – writing 'sans style' being assimilated into writing with 'greater simplicity and objectivity'¹⁴, and thus imagined as merely a variant of Statements 5-9 –, it must be recognised that 'écrire sans style' is resolutely opaque. Oxymoron though it may be, the opacity of this idea becomes very clear if we reflect on our discussion of Beckett's pre-War

¹² SB *qtd* in Ludovic Janvier, *Samuel Beckett par lui-même* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 18

¹³ *LSB IV*, 592-93 (SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982])

¹⁴ *DTF*, 357

comments on French and, more specifically, on the idea of 'writ[ing] without style' as it appears in *Dream*. In that novel, as the reader will recall, the French writers whom Belacqua holds to write 'without style' are not those who write with 'greater simplicity and objectivity', nor those who abjure 'excess' or 'poetry'. Rather, writers 'without style' are, as indicated by the case of Racine, those who write in a manner that admits the common language of ordinary speech alongside the 'colour' and 'poetry' of literary expression. Their use of such language, moreover, is not valorised for its 'simplicity and objectivity', nor for a generalised 'weakness' or 'impoverishment', but precisely because it allows them to better provide us with 'the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margaret' of beautiful phrases, instances of true poetry, that only became visible when they stand out more starkly against the 'pebbles and flints' of 'humble tags and commonplaces'. Their lack of style, in other words, has an explicitly stylistic function; one that, far from excluding literary and poetic expression, is what makes such expression all the more impressive. If that was how Belacqua intended 'writ[ing] without style' to be understood, is this what Beckett had in mind when he spoke of French as a means to 'écrire sans style'? If so, the meaning would be quite far removed from what we find in Statements 5-9. If not, how might it be possible to prove what Beckett *did* have in mind?

While Statements 2 and 4 may thus be said to raise a number of questions, even while retaining some connection to the standard narrative of the LSH, the same cannot be said of Statements 1 and 3.

Despite the fact that these statements were also made by Beckett – or attributed to him –, they seem to undercut or, indeed, to directly contradict the reasons for his turn to French that he offers in Statements 5-9. By extension, then, these statements also serve to undermine, or even to directly contradict, the LSH. These particular statements are not simply problematic on account of disagreeing with Statements 5-9, however, they are also problematic on account of the uncertainty that hangs over their provenance and the spirit in which they were intended to be taken: Is Statement 1 merely facetious, as the ungrammatical French in which it is expressed seems to imply, or does it have a deeper meaning? What about Statement 3? How are we to interpret the fact that it associates French, not with the asceticism implied by Beckett's other statements – with their implications of a necessary retreat from 'poetry', 'exuberance', and 'colour', in favour of an embrace of 'weakness' –, but with pleasure and excitement? Is this statement simply to be dismissed owing to the doubtful nature of the article by Israel Shenker in which it first appeared, or should we, in line with S. E. Gontarski, accord some weight to this statement on account of the fact that the other statements attributed to Beckett by

Shenker in the same article sound 'so accurate, so Beckettian'¹⁵? If some of these statements made by Beckett on the subject of the linguistic turn provide evidence in support of the LSH, then, others provide evidence that seems to attenuate, or even contradict, this hypothesis.

It should be noted that others have also remarked upon the dissonance that is to be heard when one brings together Beckett's various explanations for his post-War turn to French. Sinéad Mooney, for example, has drawn attention to a dissonance between, on the one hand, Statements 4, 5, and 7, which 'have been read as cumulatively testifying to Beckett's postwar adoption of French...as part of a conscious aesthetics of self-improvement', and, on the other, Statements 1 and 3, which offer quite a different view of Beckett's motivations for turning to French.¹⁶ In Mooney's essay, the response to this conflict between these various statements is simply to avoid engaging with it by moving the focus of her attention away from the 'single moment' of the linguistic turn – that is, the decision for which these varying explanations were offered – and towards Beckett's bilingual literary practice.¹⁷ Mooney's approach here is, in fact, entirely in keeping with a recent privileging of the *bilingual* aspect of Beckett's work and a corresponding disengagement from the precise moment of the linguistic turn.¹⁸ While Mooney's approach is quite defensible in the context of an enquiry such as her own, which takes as its subject not Beckett's turn to French *per se* but his bilingualism and his practice as a self-translator – 'Beckett in French and English', as the title of her contribution to the *Companion* puts it –, the same approach cannot be adopted here.

Unlike Mooney and other critics of the bilingual Beckett, our attention lies entirely with the precise moment of Beckett's linguistic turn and the particular focus of this attention at the present time is precisely those statements made by Beckett on the subject of his post-War turn to French. We, in other words, cannot turn a deaf ear to the dissonance between Beckett's statements on the matter of this turn; we must listen to it carefully. Clearly, there is no guarantee that we can resolve the dissonance between Beckett's varying explanations for this turn into some kind of harmony – nor,

¹⁵ S. E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster"' in Bernard Benstock (ed.), *The Seventh of Joyce The Seventh of Joyce* (Bloomington: Indiana UP; Sussex: Harvester, 1982), 31

¹⁶ Sinéad Mooney, 'Beckett in French and English', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 196

¹⁷ *viz.* 'In fact, Beckett's bilingual oeuvre...operates less upon a single moment of renunciation or ascesis than upon a career-long embrace of an activity traditionally considered ancillary and derivative...that of self-translation' (*Ibid.*).

¹⁸ This movement is well-evidenced by the title of Sam Slote's contribution to the recent *New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*: 'Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn' (*viz.* Dirk Van Hulle [ed.], *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, viii).

indeed, should this necessarily be our intention, since it may be the case that the variation itself has something to tell us about Beckett's turn to French or, at least, his own attitude to this turn. Nonetheless, before we can properly engage with what this variation may mean for the post-War linguistic turn – for Beckett's attitude towards it, our understanding of it, or both –, we must first be prepared to scrutinise these various statements, to examine them in the particular context of their original expression, and to try to determine what value they may have, separately and together. That is what we will now attempt to do and, in line with the format sketched out above, we will begin by considering Beckett's private statements on the matter.

I. PRIVATE STATEMENTS

The first category of statements to be considered in this chapter is something of an exception. Unlike the others, it comprises none of Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his turn to French; it is an empty set. At first glance, it may appear odd to have included in this discussion a category to which none of these statements belong. This category is, however, necessary if we are to properly contextualise the rest of the statements that will be examined.

What this particular 'empty set' allows us to underscore, is that, while we do possess a number of statements made by Beckett on the subject of the post-War linguistic turn, we have no truly *private* statement from him on the topic. There is, for example, no post-War diary in which Beckett spoke about the linguistic turn in the security of a document that he might safely have assumed would remain private. All of Beckett's statements on the subject of his linguistic turn that we have preserved and on which critical discussions of this turn have been based are public statements of one kind or another. All of them, in other words, were directed towards one sort of audience or another. Some were public statements in the truest sense, being directed to an ill-defined, general public. The vast majority, meanwhile, were public in the narrower sense of being addressed to individuals other than Beckett himself. Even in the case of these more narrowly public statements, however, it would be naive to treat them as if they were comparable to private statements. The act of addressing another person already constitutes an act of stepping outside the private realm and into the public sphere. This is all the truer in the case of the narrowly public statements that will be examined here, since they were proffered by Beckett in response to questions he received from scholars. As such, Beckett was quite aware that whatever statement he made might appear in print at some point in the future, thereby filtering into the critical discourse around his work. In certain cases, moreover, Beckett's statements were made to scholars whom he neither knew, nor would ever come to know. Some

of these statements, in short – most notably, Statements 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9¹⁹ – were addressed to people who were, at the time Beckett made them, mere strangers.

It is all too easy to ignore the difference between a truly private statement and a public one, but this difference does exist, and it should be recognised that it has consequences for the manner in which we should interpret such public statements. To get a sense of the effect that the audience to whom Beckett spoke could have upon his mode of expression, we need only consider his letters.

The major determining factor in Beckett's letter-writing practice is the identity of the intended recipient. One aspect of the role played by the intended recipient in the composition of Beckett's letters was already mentioned in the course of elaborating that distinction between positively and negatively determined linguistic practice.²⁰ It is not only the case that Beckett's choice of language could be determined by his correspondent, however. The identity of the person to whom Beckett wrote could also have a determining effect on what he was willing to express and how he was willing to express it. This is made readily apparent by a number of letters concerned with the world of publishing, two dating from the early 1930s and a third from 1947.

In early November 1930, Beckett confided in MacGreevy that he had 'done nothing more to the Proust and [was] thinking of sending it back [to the publisher, Chatto and Windus] untouched'.²¹ The 'Proust' to which Beckett here refers is his monograph on the subject of Proust's *Recherche*, which Beckett was then supposedly engaged in emending so as to extend and improve a conclusion that he himself recognised as having been written 'in a hurry'.²² If Beckett was so reluctant to emend his monograph, we should scarcely be surprised given that he never appears to have particularly cared for his *Proust*. Equally unsurprising, but of greater relevance to the present discussion, is the fact that the letters Beckett wrote to Charles Prentice, his editor at Chatto and Windus, speak of 'the Proust' in a manner quite far removed from what we find in Beckett's letters to MacGreevy.

When writing about *Proust* to MacGreevy, Beckett could speak honestly; he thus admits to his friend that he had simply neglected to work on revising his monograph even though, at the same time, he found time to 'amus[e] [himself] for a couple of days' with the writing of 'Le Concentrisme' and some of Jean du Chas'

¹⁹ For these statements, see Part III, Chapter 4 (520-521).

²⁰ viz. Part III, Chapter 1 – There, we noted that the language(s) in which Beckett was free to write were invariably a function of the language(s) that his correspondent was capable of understanding.

²¹ *LSB I*, 55 (SB to TMG [14th November, 1930])

²² *LSB I*, 52 (SB to Charles Prentice [14th October, 1930])

poetry. A few weeks after Beckett had written to MacGreevy expressing the pleasure he had taken in working on 'Le Concentrisme' and composing du Chas' poetry, however, Beckett finally returned the unchanged *Proust* to Prentice, regretfully informing his editor that he 'c[ouldn]t do anything here – neither read nor think nor write'.²³ If nothing has been added to *Proust*, Beckett claimed, it was certainly not to do with the fact that he had no desire to work on his loathed monograph, but rather because his despondency was such that he was incapable of doing anything at all – news of the lecture and poems he had only recently written naturally has no place in such a narrative. In choosing to misrepresent the truth to Prentice in this way, Beckett would appear to have been primarily motivated by the very understandable desire to maintain a good relationship with Prentice and, by extension, with a potential publisher.

The contention that Beckett's letter to Prentice was guided by his desire to express himself in the manner most likely to appeal to his editor is corroborated by the fact that, almost two decades later, we find much the same causes bringing about much the same effects. In this case, the letter in question was written to George Reavey in 1947, and the editor in question was Alan Hodge. Still seeking a publisher for *Watt* but having already made the decision to write only in French henceforth, Beckett's letter to Reavey reveals him pondering the merits of adopting a similar strategy of tactful omission – or, if one prefers, outright lying – the better to secure a publisher for his novel: 'Perhaps, to encourage him [= Alan Hodge, editor at Hamish Hamilton] with Watt, I should say I expect soon to resume writing in English, than which, entre nous, few things are less likely'.²⁴ The truth of the matter might be that English had been abandoned, but there was no need for Hamish Hamilton to know that, and still less for Beckett to be the one to tell them before they accepted his book.

As these letters demonstrate, Beckett's perspective on his own work – on the writing process, or on the language in which he was likely to write – was not necessarily static across his correspondence. Depending upon whom Beckett was writing to, he might choose to present the progress of his work in a certain light, or to characterise the likelihood of his writing in a particular language in a particular way. Obviously, in each of the cases that has been outlined above, we are dealing with letters written to a very specific audience: In the first case, Beckett is writing to an editor with whom he had developed a good relationship and whom he does not wish to alienate by avowing the true reasons why he has been unable to improve a

²³ *LSB I*, 57 (SB to Charles Prentice [3rd December, 1930])

²⁴ *LSB II*, 60 (SB to George Reavey [15th August, 1947])

conclusion that he himself had first suggested should be emended.²⁵ In the latter, Beckett is considering the best strategy to adopt with a prospective editor whom he does not wish to actively dissuade from accepting a novel he is keen to see published. The specificity of the audiences to whom Beckett is speaking – or, as in the Reavey letter, to whom he is proposing to speak – should not, however, blind us to the more general insight that these letters afford into the manner in which statements made by Beckett can be coloured by his awareness of an intended audience. Nor, indeed, should we allow ourselves be blinded to what this colouration means for our own access to Beckett’s deeper motivations.

The question of our access to Beckett’s ‘motivations’ is, naturally, an uncomfortable one for a particular kind of literary critic. It is, however, at the very heart of the present chapter – we are, after all, dealing with Beckett’s avowed motivations for turning to French in the post-War period – and so it must be addressed directly. In the case of the letters that have just been mentioned, they powerfully reveal the extent to which we are dependent on Beckett’s own statements for access to these motivations, and the degree to which these statements may be inaccurate.

To put matters another way, were we entirely dependent upon Beckett’s letter to Prentice or Beckett’s subsequent communications with Hodge, we would have a very erroneous view of, in the first case, Beckett’s ability to engage in creative writing in the final months of 1930 and, in the second, the long-term consequences of the linguistic turn as these were perceived by Beckett in 1947. In each case, we are in the happy situation of having access to evidence other than these letters and, as a result, the interpretative consequences of Beckett’s targeted address to Prentice and Hodge is mitigated by our ability to corroborate or query Beckett’s statements to these particular individuals by way of reference to other sources.²⁶ What, however, are we to do in situations where we lack such corroborating evidence?

The question is all the more worthy of our attention given that its importance is not restricted to instances of Beckett wilfully misrepresenting matters to a particular correspondent, as he did in the case of his letters to Prentice and Hodge. A similar problem is posed by any of Beckett’s statements since, unless we assume every

²⁵ viz. *LSB I*, 52 (SB to Charles Prentice [14th October, 1930])

²⁶ In the case of the remarks on his inability to ‘write’ in the closing months of 1930, for example, we may compare Beckett’s statements to Prentice with those made in letters to MacGreevy, as well as with the evidence of the lecture ‘Le Concentrisme’ and the poetry Beckett composed in the manner of du Chas. The version of events Beckett proposed presenting to Hodge, meanwhile, is proven to be inaccurate both by the comments he made to Reavey and by the evidence of his own writing practice, which shows him to have only returned to writing in English in the mid-1950s.

statement Beckett ever made to be entirely truthful and unaffected by factors such as bias, faulty memory, or even the very human inability to properly judge one's own motivations – that is, unless we assume Beckett to be an automaton rather than a human being – we necessarily find ourselves in a position where Beckett's statements cannot be taken at face value. They must always be examined in a broader context and in relation to other evidence. What then, are we to do in cases where we lack such evidence or, perhaps even more importantly, in cases where we have a great deal of mutually contradictory evidence, such as in the case of Beckett's various statements on his post-War turn to French? In this case, as previously noted, the contradictions are not restricted to those between the LSH and the archival or textual evidence of Beckett's own writings. There are also apparent contradictions between Beckett's statements on the matter of his turn to French. This being so, the only sensible approach to these statements is, in the first instance, to weigh up their value against whatever other forms of evidence we may have at our disposal – precisely as we did throughout the preceding chapters of this thesis – and, secondly, to attempt to better understand the possible source of the contradictions that exist between them.

In terms of the possible sources of these contradictions between Beckett's various statements on his turn to French, it is certainly possible that they might be attributed to a change in Beckett's perspective on the post-War linguistic turn over time. This, at least, would be one way of explaining the variation between Statements 1-4, as well as the variation between these statements and Statements 5-9. There are, however, other ways in which these variations might be explained: It is, for instance, possible that some of Beckett's explanations were intended only half-seriously, and at least partially as jokes; it is equally possible that, as was shown to be case for the remark he made to his students on the difference between French and English, some of his statements on the post-War turn may have been misunderstood; it must also be recalled that Beckett himself was profoundly aware of the critical discourse that developed around his work – he is known, for example, to have read articles and theses that dealt with his writings²⁷ – and it is thus possible that, when critics turned

²⁷ In fact, Beckett's letters show him to have read a good deal of criticism on his own writings, including a number of those works in which his own statements on his turn to French appeared, namely: Niklaus Gessner's thesis, which includes Statement 4 (*viz.* *LSB II*, 647-648 – SB to Barney Rosset [30th August, 1946]), and Herbert Blau's article, 'Meanwhile, Follow the Bright Angels', which contains Statement 5 (*viz.* *LSB III*, 384 – SB to Alan Schneider [9th December, 1960]). Although we find no direct mention of Beckett's having read Lawrence Harvey's *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, which includes Statement 6, or Ludovic Janvier's *Samuel Beckett*, which includes Statement 8, it is entirely possible that Beckett was familiar with these texts too, since other letters show him to have read other critical works by both these writers (*viz.* *LSB III*, 503 – SB to Lawrence Harvey [3rd October, 1962]; *LSB IV*, 251 – SB to Herbert Myron [10th March, 1971]).

to him seeking author-derived clarification of his innermost motivations, Beckett may have responded by providing them with explanations that he himself had first encountered in critical discourse around his work. Finally, and perhaps most troubling, it may be the case that, as in his dealings with Prentice and Hodge, Beckett may occasionally have chosen to simply misrepresent matters when commenting on the subject of his turn to French.

Initially, the idea that any of Beckett's statements on his turn to French might have been influenced by the factors outlined above will no doubt strike the reader as highly unlikely, and even vaguely ridiculous: Why should we believe that any of Beckett's statements on the post-War turn were intended as jokes? Can it really be said that any of these statements have been misunderstood? What evidence do we have that Beckett was influenced by the critical discourse around his work? Finally, whatever Beckett's letters to Prentice, MacGreevy, and Reavey may suggest, what proof is there that Beckett was ever anything less, or more, than thoroughly honest with scholars who approached him seeking clarification on the subject of this work?

It has, in fact, already been noted that some critics have indeed recognised that at least one of Beckett's statements may have been intended as a joke (i.e. Statement 1). Similarly, it has already been noted that the opacity of Statement 4 means that those who have found in it merely another version of Statements 5-9 may well have misinterpreted its meaning. More importantly still, however, it will become apparent as we progress with our analysis of these statements that there is also evidence to suggest that Beckett was influenced by critical discourse around his work and even more evidence to suggest that at least some of his statements on the matter of his turn to French were, if not quite misrepresentations of the truth, at least wilfully ambiguous. There is, in other words, very good reason to doubt that these statements provide us with limpid insight into Beckett's motivations for turning to French, and very good reason to pay them closer attention than Beckett Studies has previously been wont to do.

II. PUBLIC STATEMENTS: 1, 3

Among Beckett's statements on the subject of his post-War linguistic turn, only two of them are public in the truest sense of the term, having appeared in publications addressed to a general reading public. Perhaps significantly, and as already noted, these are also two of the statements that are the most explicitly contrary to the LSH and those whose interpretative value is most obviously open to question. To say that their value is 'open to question' is not yet to say that they are entirely without value,

however, merely that this value requires a degree of parsing and a measure of contextualisation of the sort that will here be offered.

In direct contrast to Statement 3, it is very easy to replace Statement 1 in its original context: This statement first appeared in *Transition Forty-Eight*, where it was ascribed to Beckett as part of the note dedicated to him in the 'Notes on Contributors' section of that issue. The context in which this statement initially appeared complicates its value as an aid to interpreting Beckett's linguistic turn in a number of ways.

As remarked by the editors of *LSB II*, the 'Note' in which Statement 1 appears is likely to have been 'written by Duthuit and possibly translated by [Beckett] himself'.²⁸ If the editors are correct in their assumption that this note was written by Duthuit, it becomes legitimate to ask whether or not this statement is an accurate reflection of Beckett's own views on the subject of his linguistic turn. Certainly, as attested by their copious correspondence over the late 1940s and early 1950s, Beckett and Duthuit enjoyed a very warm relationship at the time when this note would have been written.²⁹ This being so, it is probable that any note written about Beckett by Duthuit would have been composed collaboratively – as they would compose 'Three Dialogues', a text which originally appeared in *Transition Forty-Nine*³⁰ –, or, at the very least, with some degree of input from Beckett.³¹ Taking account of these facts then, it may be seen that, while there are clearly questions about Beckett's role in the composition of this text and the degree to which it may be said to represent his personal views on the matter of the linguistic turn, it nevertheless seems certain that, when this 'Note' appeared in *Transition Forty-Eight*, it did so with Beckett's prior knowledge and with his imprimatur. This being so, it may be assumed that, whatever

²⁸ *LSB II*, 93 [n.3]

²⁹ Having been immensely close for a time, the relationship between Beckett and Duthuit would cool dramatically from 1953 and never recover (*viz.* 'Georges, Duthuit [1891-1973]', in *LSB II*, 702-703). The scale of the distance that existed between them by the time of Duthuit's death in 1973 is attested by Beckett's last-known letter to Duthuit, written in 1972, in which Beckett pointedly leaves unanswered an appeal to renew their friendship that Duthuit had included in the letter to which Beckett's missive responds (*viz.* *LSB IV*, 293 – For Duthuit's letter, see *Ibid.*, 294 [n.1]).

³⁰ Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, 'Three Dialogues: Tal Coat Masson – Bram van Velde', in Georges Duthuit (ed.), *Transition Forty-Nine* no. 5 (Paris: [s.n.], 1949), 97-103 – *Three Dialogues* is reprinted, with Duthuit's name omitted, in *D* (*viz.* *D*, 138-145).

³¹ Naturally, if Beckett translated this note, he would have had a very direct opportunity to amend or revise the text, since Duthuit could hardly have refused Beckett the right to have a role in the elaboration of his own 'Note' if he were its translator.

Beckett's precise role in the composition and/or translation of this 'Note', he was not actively opposed to it or its presentation of his reasons for turning to French.

The problems that arise as a result of the context in which Statement 1 first appeared are not limited to matters of authorship, however. Before we can properly determine the value of this statement as an insight into Beckett's reasons for switching to writing in French in 1946, we must also take account of the spirit of levity in which 'Notes on Contributors' are often written. (Certainly, as proved by other 'Notes on Contributors' to be found in other issues of *Transition*, this spirit was by no means alien to Duthuit's review.³²) If the 'Note' in which Statement 1 appears was intended as a joke, does this mean that Beckett's description of himself as having turned to French '[p]our faire remarquer moi' is itself intended merely to amuse, as its ungrammatical construction implies?³³ For some critics, this statement is indeed best understood as a joke: Ann Beer, for instance, has described the remark as 'facetious', and Sinéad Mooney has described Beckett as making the remark 'perhaps flippantly'.³⁴ For others, however, there is a deeper significance to be found in Beckett's statement, and this significance is to be found precisely in the unnatural syntax in which this statement is expressed.

Michael Edwards, for example, suggests that '[Beckett] speaks pidgin French here as if to indicate...that French written by a foreigner, were it even impeccably correct, is not the same thing as French written by a Frenchman'.³⁵ Read in this way, Beckett's statement would be an avowal of that divide between a native language and a foreign one that, as noted in Part I, Edwards himself views as central to Beckett's experience of writing in French.³⁶ For Juliette Taylor-Batty, meanwhile, the assertion that Beckett's turned to French '[p]our faire remarquer moi' is an instance of Beckett

³² To see the degree to which these notes could be comedic we need only consider some of 'Notes about Contributors' provided in *Transition Fifty*: The note on Julien Gracq informs us that he is '[s]till young, is absent-minded and, we understand, an *agrégé* and professor of History' (*Transition Fifty* [Paris: Transition Press, 1950], 150); the note on Emmanuel Bove, meanwhile, states that he 'lived miserably and died young, a few years ago. Wrote more than he would have wished, it may well be; but *Armand* and *Mes Amis* should be read and read again' (*Ibid.*); elsewhere, a note on Lautréamont tells us that he 'had a tremendous vogue in the between-war period : [*sic*] the Surrealists positively idolized him. Since then, psychoanalytical and university circles have taken him up. All that remained was to bring in occultism; and now, two commentators, writing about the famous *Chants of Maldoror*, mention that they contain "irrational entities which behave in a truly occult way". When they add that "here the function of the exact sciences appears almost nullified", we have no difficulty in believing them' (*Ibid.*, 150-151).

³³ That is 'pour faire remarquer moi' in place of 'pour me faire remarquer'.

³⁴ Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in John Pilling (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 215; Sinéad Mooney, 'Beckett in French and English', in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 196.

³⁵ Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French', 69

³⁶ For a critique of this development, see Part I, Chapter 1.

‘effectively misus[ing] language...in order to make it function performatively’ since his grammatically-incorrect phrasing does indeed foreground the self (*le moi*) in a sentence that suggests he turned to French to do just that.³⁷ This particular instance of performativity is all the more significant in Taylor-Batty’s estimation because it evinces ‘a tendency that is increasingly characteristic of the trilogy overall’ and because ‘Beckett’s misuse of the personal pronoun performs the foreigner’s struggle with language and his inability to signify himself correctly or adequately’.³⁸ As read by Taylor-Batty, therefore, this simple statement is expressive of the literary style Beckett deployed in the novels of the *Trilogy* and, more generally, it points towards what she sees as the foundational role played by ‘pidgin bullskrit’ in Beckett’s post-War literary writings.³⁹ Like Taylor-Batty, Leland de la Durantaye too sees this statement as looking towards ‘the phenomenal burst of creative energy Beckett first experienced in French’ since this burst was allied by Beckett himself with a decision to ‘begin to write the things I feel’.⁴⁰ In de la Durantaye’s view, then, this statement’s foregrounding of the self provides us with an insight into Beckett’s reasons for turning to French: The language allowed him ‘to speak, at last, clearly of how the *moi* slips from his writing grasp’.⁴¹

As the examples of Edwards, Taylor-Batty, and de la Durantaye demonstrate, the comedic tenor of Statement 1 in no way prevents it being incorporated into a broader critical narrative around Beckett’s post-War turn to French, to say nothing of his post-War literary production as a whole. What is notable about the manner in which these three scholars discuss this statement, however, is that none of them make any attempt to draw it into that broader narrative of French as a vehicle for stylistic impoverishment that is provided by the LSH. That this should be the case is notable given that de la Durantaye at least elsewhere attempts to explain Beckett’s turn to French in these terms.⁴² At the same time, however, the lack of reference to the LSH when discussing this particular statement is hardly surprising given that, for Statement 1 to have a deeper meaning at all, we must view it in terms quite opposed to those suggested by this hypothesis. Far from French being a vehicle by which Beckett pursued ‘an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence’, to use

³⁷ Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 151

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *viz. Ibid.*, 146-48 – As clarified by Taylor-Batty, the phrase ‘pidgin bullskrit’ is used by the narrator of *The Unnamable* to describe his speech, whereby it serves to translate the ‘petit nègre’ of *L’Innommable* (*viz. Ibid.*, 146).

⁴⁰ Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett’s Art of Mismaking*, 70

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² For de la Durantaye, as noted in the Introduction, Beckett’s choice of French should be aligned with his quest for stylistic weakness and aesthetic impoverishment (*viz. Ibid.*, 68).

Knowlson's phrase, this statement would demonstrate that, for Beckett, French was, in the post-War period, a vehicle for comic wordplay and punning in much the same way as English had been in the pre-War period.⁴³ In essence then, if the critics who accord to Statement 1 a deeper significance are correct, this deeper meaning would serve to undermine the LSH almost as surely as if the statement were to be taken at face value – that is, as an admission that Beckett wrote in French purely to be noticed.

It should be recognised, however, that before we can perceive such a *deeper* meaning in this statement we are required to read it in a very specific way: Firstly, we must ignore the uncertain provenance of this remark, and the unequally uncertain authorship of the piece in which it appears. (Was this particular statement ever actually spoken, written, or translated by Beckett? Or is it the case that what we find here is merely a comic vignette written by Duthuit alone in an effort to amuse the readers of *Transition* and, perhaps, Beckett himself?⁴⁴) Secondly, we are required to limit the comic potential of this statement – to see it as being *superficially* amusing, perhaps, but also, and more properly, possessed of a *deeper* and revelatory significance. Finally, and most significantly, we are obliged to read this statement in splendid isolation, apart from the rest of the note in which it occurs.

Not all of these problems are of equal importance. It has already been established, for example, that, whoever was actually responsible for writing or translating this piece, it was undoubtedly published with Beckett's approval and most likely with Beckett's involvement; the question of authorship is thus of little moment. As to the matter of how Edwards', Taylor-Batty's, and de la Durantaye's readings require us to assume the cohabitation of surface comedy and deeper significance, it is evidently possible for a text to be at once comedic and significant and, as a result, these critics' decision to read this remark as at once comic and meaningful is not particularly problematic either. The same cannot be said for the third of these problems – namely, the fact that these three critics focus exclusively upon the statement itself, isolating it from the broader context of the 'Note' in which it originally appeared. We must not forget that, although Statement 1 is generally

⁴³ We in fact find a strikingly similar example of just such a creative use of pronouns to underline the relationship between art and the self in Beckett's first novel, *Dream*: 'No no I *won't* say everything, I *won't* tell everything. No but surely you see now what he am? See!' (*Dream*, 72 – Emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ While Beckett's response to this note has not been recorded, certain members of the reading public appear to have been highly amused. Such, at least may be inferred from the fact that it was included as part of the 'Not in the Reviews' section of an issue of *Books Abroad*, where it appeared under the title 'Why Samuel Beckett Writes in French' (*viz.* 'Not in the Reviews', in *Books Abroad* [Vol. 23, No. 3 – Summer, 1949], 247-48) and alongside a piece entitled 'Tit for Tat', that recounts a comic anecdote concerning Pierre Frondaie and '[a] very corpulent actress' that first appeared in *France-Amérique* (*viz.* 'Tit for Tat', in *Ibid.*, 246).

quoted in isolation, it originally appeared as part of a longer narrative, in the light of which it was supposed to be read.⁴⁵ This broader narrative environment is all the more important because, when one reads the 'Note' in its entirety, one notices that, while this 'Note' is most certainly a joke, and the contention that Beckett turned to French '[p]our faire remarquer moi' equally so, the joke is not necessarily on Beckett or his *mauvais français*. Rather, this 'Note' – given in full below – takes the form of a vignette that satirises those who are desperately concerned with the secret and mysterious motivations that a non-native speaker of French such as Beckett is imagined to have had for turning to French as their preferred language of literary expression:

Samuel Beckett is a Dublin poet and novelist who, after long years of residence in France has adopted the French language as his working medium. Invited to give some account of his reasons for now writing in French, rather than in this [*sic*] native language, he replied that he would be happy to do so and seemed then to have some views on the subject. But some months later he wrote saying that he did not know why he wrote in French, nor indeed why he wrote at all. Some considerable time later however, as we chanced to encounter him emerging in unusual good humour apparently from the *Multicolor* in the *Avenue de Wagram*, we begged him to make a further effort, in his own interest and in that of literature as a whole. Drawing us then aside into the little frequented semi-circular *Rue de Tilsitt*, and having first looked round in every conceivable direction to make sure no doubt that we were not observed, he confessed at last in a strong or rather weak Dublin accent: "*Pour faire remarquer moi.*" Despite this undoubtedly original syntactical usage of his adopted tongue, Beckett has nevertheless contributed to such French reviews as *Les Temps Modernes*, *Fontaine*, etc. Any mention here of his English-language writings would, we feel, be out of place, despite their indisputably excellent quality.⁴⁶

As can be observed, the narrative that this vignette recounts is not really one of Beckett and his reasons for turning to French. The true focus of the narrative is, rather, those who have an inordinate interest in uncovering these reasons. The narrative's true focus becomes apparent when we recognise that, alongside Beckett, the 'Note' also includes a character who functions as the note's narrative voice. This narrator's desire to understand Beckett's reasons for writing in French is initially presented as mere curiosity – Beckett being simply '[i]nvited to give some account of his reasons for...writing in French' – but the narrator's interest in Beckett's 'reasons' for his linguistic turn is subsequently revealed to be of an entirely different order. Rather than being merely 'invited' a second time to offer an account of his turn to French, an unsuspecting Beckett – who, 'some months' after being asked to voice his

⁴⁵ Admittedly, de la Durantaye does quote the remark in the fuller context of the vignette (*viz.* Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismatching*, 69-70), but he does not engage with this vignette or the narrative that it recounts in any way.

⁴⁶ *LSB II*, 93 [n.3] - Emphasis in original.

reasons for turning to French, finally came to the conclusion that ‘he did not know why he wrote in French, nor indeed why he wrote at all’⁴⁷ – is pounced upon by the now desperate narrator when he chances upon Beckett leaving the Multicolor, a gambling house and favoured haunt of Beckett’s in real-life.⁴⁸ Having found Beckett again, the narrator is now free to give vent to his fascination with Beckett’s decision to write in French, a fascination that has built to a pitch of wild intensity in the intervening months: Where once he ‘invited’ Beckett to explain his deeper motivations for writing in French, we are informed that the narrator ‘begged him’ to explain them ‘in his own interest and in that of literature as a whole’.

To properly appreciate the comedy of the hyperbole here employed, we need to remember that, when this ‘Note’ first appeared in print, it was published to accompany Beckett’s ‘Trois Poèmes’ / ‘Three Poems’.⁴⁹ At that time, Beckett’s French-language publications were limited to two essays – namely, ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ and ‘Peintres de l’empêchement’, the second of these having been published in *Derrière le Miroir* only a few months before this number of *Transition Forty-Eight* appeared⁵⁰ –, one story in *Fontaine*, one story and a suite of poems in *Les Temps Modernes*, and a translation of *Murphy* that had sold so poorly it essentially ended the publishing contract Beckett had signed with Pierre Bordas in 1946. At this point in his career, in other words, Beckett was not yet an object of fascination in the literary world, and he was of even less consequence to ‘literature as a whole’. Even so, the fascination that drives the narrator of this ‘Note’ to ‘beg’ Beckett for some insight into his reasons for abandoning ‘this [*sic*] native language’ in favour of French is entirely true to life, since there are many examples of writers who have inspired fascination by choosing to write in a foreign language even though they themselves are relatively unknown.⁵¹ In Beckett’s case, his linguistic choice would obviously come to inspire

⁴⁷ The joke here, according to which Beckett requires months to determine that he knows neither why he writes in French nor why he writes at all, shares an obvious connection to the joke that we find in the last of the ‘Three Dialogues’: ‘D. – One moment. Are you suggesting that the painting of van Velde is inexpressive? / B. – (A fortnight later) Yes.’ (*D*, 143 – Italics in original). Such a close parallel between the comedic style of ‘Three Dialogues’ and the ‘Note’ on Beckett in *Transition Forty-Eight* is precisely what we would expect if we were dealing in both cases with the same authors, and thus lends further support to the idea of this ‘Note’ as also having been composed by Beckett and Duthuit.

⁴⁸ *viz.* *DTF*, 389

⁴⁹ These, in keeping with *Transition*’s practice for brief poems, were published bilingually – For details of these poems, see *CP*, 401-406.

⁵⁰ This text is reprinted in *D* (*viz.* *D*, 133-37)

⁵¹ This fascination is, in fact, particularly evident in France, where French-language writers whose first language is not French – including those whose reputation has not made it beyond France, such as the Dane Pia Petersen, or the Slovenian Brina Svit – are often evoked in the course of articles devoted to the question of why non-French writers choose to write in French, which are a relatively regular feature of the French

widespread critical fascination as his writings became better known. What we find in this particular 'Note', however, is an indication that fascination with Beckett's decision to write in French did not begin when he rose to fame in the mid-1950s. On the contrary, this 'Note' suggests that Beckett had been 'invited', and even 'begged', to explain his reasons for turning to French since the days of his very earliest publications in French.

In addition to suggesting that Beckett's decision to write in French was a source of fascination for at least some of that small circle of readers familiar with his work in the late 1940s, the vignette also makes quite clear that this fascination derived, as the narrator of this 'Note' implies, from the conviction that the choice to write in a language other than one's First Language must necessarily be mysterious. This conviction in the fundamentally mysterious nature of the reasons that must have driven Beckett to turn to French is central to the comedy of the 'Note', since it is the narrator's desire to pierce the mystery of Beckett's choice to write in French that drives him to 'be[g]' him for clarification, and it is Beckett's own desire to preserve this mystery – or, at least, the desire of the character based on Beckett who appears in this vignette – that leads him to 'confes[s]' his deeper motivations only after '[d]rawing [the narrator]...aside into the little frequented semi-circular *Rue de Tilsitt*, and having first looked round in every conceivable direction to make sure no doubt that we were not observed.' The joke is then completed by the fact that, when it finally arrives, Beckett's 'confess[ion]' reveals his motivations for turning to French to be at once utterly base, and utterly opposed to anything the narrator had previously imagined. Where the narrator had supposed Beckett's mysterious motivations as either intimately personal ('we begged him to make a further effort, in *his own interest...*') or profoundly literary ('...and in *that of literature as a whole*'), Beckett reveals that his true motivation has nothing to do with literature and even less to do with his innermost self. Far from a personal or literary mystery, his true motivation, it seems, was the knowledge that this decision would lead others to pay attention to him. The reason Beckett made the fascinating decision to turn to French, in other words, is precisely because he knew that the decision to turn to French would make

press. The following is an indicative list of such articles, although many more could be cited: Delphine Peras, 'Ces étrangers qui écrivent en français', in *L'Express* (11th November, 2005) <<https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre>> [accessed: 16th February, 2018]); Françoise Dargent, 'Le français, langue d'accueil de tous les écrivains du monde', in *Le Figaro* (8th January, 2009) <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/livres>> [accessed: 16th February, 2018]); Florence Noiville, 'Pourquoi ils écrivent en français', in *Le Monde* (20th March, 2009) <www.lemonde.fr/livres> [accessed: 16th February, 2018].

him fascinating. The tale recounted by the narrator proves that Beckett has succeeded.⁵²

That Statement 1 constitutes the punchline of this brief vignette is made clear by the fact that, once it has been delivered, the 'Note' very quickly dispatches with the only task that remains for it to carry out – namely, pointing out the author's previous publications. (Although, even there, the writer cannot resist evoking Beckett's earlier English-language publications in a joking manner.) Like all good jokes, however, the comedy of this 'Note' is not restricted to the punchline; the set-up is important too.

In this instance, the set-up is the opening sentence of the 'Note', which informs us that 'Samuel Beckett is a Dublin poet and novelist who, after long years of residence in France has adopted the French language as his working medium'. As has just been outlined, if Beckett's reasons for turning to French are held to be a source of fascination, it can only be because they are also held to be utterly mysterious. It is for this reason that the opening sentence of the 'Note' is so important to the comedy of the 'Note', because it serves to preface the vignette, which recounts the narrator's quest to uncover Beckett's deeper motivations for turning to French, with an eminently straightforward rationale for this turn. Even before we first hear of the narrator's desire to find out why Beckett began writing in French, in short, we learn that Beckett's decision to begin writing in French was made only 'after long years of residence in France'. The decision to write in French, in other words, was neither sudden nor mysterious. A writer who, after long years in France, eventually decides to write in French is, indeed, decidedly less mysterious than a writer who, even after long years in France, persists in writing in English. One reason the committed Anglophone might have to avoid writing in French would be an insufficiently perfect grasp of the French language. The 'Note' suggests that this was indeed Beckett's case – long years in France have not yet taught him how to properly use his pronouns –, but this too is part of the joke given that Beckett's facility in French is proven by the poetry he has published in *Transition*, the very poetry this note is intended to accompany. The reader of the 'Note' thus knows Beckett to be bilingual and, once this has been recognised, it may be observed that there is very little mystery about what might lead a bilingual writer in Beckett's position to opt for the language of their adopted homeland after years of residence there – and even less reason when, as previously

⁵² Indeed, re-reading the narrative this 'Note' recounts in light of the final 'revelation', it becomes possible to see even the initial offer to reveal his motivations and the subsequent refusal as part of the performance; a teasing hint, designed to stoke the fascination of the literary public – a role played in the 'Note' by the narrator.

outlined, the publishing avenues that are available in their adopted homeland oblige them to turn to French if they wish to be published at all.⁵³

The joke of this 'Note' thus works on a number of levels: In the first instance, it begins with an obvious practical reason for Beckett's decision to write in French and follows this with a mysterious quest to find out the *true* motivation for this decision, one that the narrator assumes can only be a matter of psychology or literature; secondly, it makes fun of Beckett, by presenting him as having decided to write in French primarily for attention, but without having bothered to master the language; finally, and most significantly as far as the present analysis is concerned, it mocks those who turn a blind eye to facts, and the more obvious motivations that Beckett may be seen to have had for turning to French, and choose instead to plead for privileged access to his deeper motivations and then, in the hopes of obtaining such access, follow him down little frequented streets and listen attentively to confessions, offered 'in a strong or rather weak Dublin accent', that reveal these reasons to be laughable. If it turns out that Beckett's deeper motivations are laughable, however, the joke, finally, is on those who went looking for them in the first place.

Thus far, critics who have engaged with Statement 1 have isolated it from the rest of the 'Note' in which it appeared. If the reading of the note as it appeared in *Transition Forty-Eight* that has been proposed here is correct, the fact that Beckett most likely had a hand in a text that adopts such a dismissive attitude towards the figure of a person obsessed with discovering his true reasons for turning to French has important ramifications for how we should interpret those statements that Beckett later proffered in response to scholars when questioned on this very subject. The most important of these ramifications, undoubtedly, is the possibility that Beckett himself was dismissive of such questions and so, at least potentially, may not have taken those who asked him to comment on his reasons for turning to French entirely seriously. This possibility, naturally, is not a certainty. It is equally possible that, having looked dismissively on those who begged him to be enlightened as to his reasons for abandoning English in the late 1940s, Beckett may have come to treat such persons with more respect and to provide honest answers to the earnest questions of serious

⁵³ Indeed, for the original audience of *Transition Forty-Eight*, it is likely that the common-sense justification for Beckett's turn to French would have been even more apparent since, as readers of *Transition*, they would have known that they were reading what, as outlined in the preceding chapter, was then the *only* English-language little magazine available in Paris. Moreover, they would have known that even *Transition* was occupied in publishing translations of work first written in French, rather than original English-language material. For this audience, therefore, the fascination shown by the narrator of this 'Note' with Beckett's decision to begin writing in English is likely to have appeared even more ridiculous.

scholars. Whatever the case may be, it is evident that the question of whether Beckett was being entirely honest when he spoke to scholars in later years, whether he was merely humouring them, or whether he allowed (more than) a little humour to colour his honesty, will need to be borne in mind as we progress with our examination of the statements he proposed to scholars. Before considering those particular statements, however, it remains to examine the last of Beckett's truly public statements on the subject of his linguistic turn.

Unlike Statement 1, establishing the original context in which Statement 3 (i.e. 'It was more exciting for me – writing in French') was first expressed is now impossible given that, in the decades since Shenker's article first appeared, severe doubts have been expressed as to both its accuracy and its reliability as a source. The interview's value was most thoroughly queried by S. E. Gontarski, who went so far as to call it a 'sham interview', to state that 'no direct interview ever took place', and to describe Beckett as having characterised the material presented by Shenker as 'misleading'.⁵⁴ Crucially, Gontarski's doubts are confirmed by Shenker himself: Shenker's confirmation comes by way of Deirdre Bair who, in her biography of Beckett, refers to a letter she received from Shenker in which he drew attention to the fact that 'he said nowhere in the article that Beckett gave him an interview'.⁵⁵ Not only is it true that, as Shenker informed Bair, he nowhere suggests in his article that Beckett gave him an interview, the very title of his article – 'Moody Man of Letters: A *Portrait* of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling "Waiting for Godot"'⁵⁶ – carefully avoids using the term interview; we are promised nothing more than a 'portrait'.⁵⁷

Obviously, to say that Beckett never gave Shenker an interview is not necessarily to say that they never spoke at all. Nor is it to say that Shenker never spoke with people who knew (people who knew) Beckett. It cannot be entirely ruled out, therefore, that Shenker's article was based on an informal conversation with

⁵⁴ S. E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster"' in Bernard Benstock (ed.), *The Seventh of Joyce*, 31

⁵⁵ *SBAB*, 726 [n.30]

⁵⁶ Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling "Waiting for Godot"', in *The New York Times* (May 6th, 1956), 129 [1] – Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ The idea that this text is based upon an interview with Beckett seems only to have taken root within Beckett Studies later, and was no doubt cemented by its appearing under the title "'An Interview with Beckett' (1956)' in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman's *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* – where it was described, indeed, as nothing less than 'the first important interview with Beckett' (viz. Israel Shekner, "'An Interview with Beckett' (1956)', in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman [eds], *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* [Routledge: London 1979], 146).

Beckett, or upon comments made by Beckett to other persons and subsequently shared with Shenker. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out either that the article is no more than a 'sham' in the truest sense, a fiction born entirely of Shenker's own mind. This being so, it seems prudent to assume that 'Moody Man of Letters', far from being an interview, is, at best, a dubiously-sourced 'portrait' given the appearance of an interview by way of verbal sleight of hand and eloquent punctuation. Consequently, it seems equally prudent to assume that this 'portrait' provides us with an insight, not into Beckett's own characterisation of his reasons for turning to French, but into these reasons as perceived by Shenker himself, by those to whom he may possibly have spoken in the preparation of his 'portrait', or both.

To consider 'Moody Man of Letters' as a hotchpotch of statements taken from other sources – including, quite possibly, Shenker's own imagination – and to which Shenker gave the appearance of an interview in this manner, however, is to raise further questions about its origins and the particular value of the statements that we find attributed to Beckett therein, including that statement on the turn to French: Whom and where, in short, do the statements presented by Shenker come from?

It has already been suggested that the statements attributed to Beckett in this article might have been dreamt up by Shenker himself. Such a possibility, however, sits uneasily with the fact that, as Gontarski rightly states, 'the [article's] observations seem so accurate, so Beckettian, that it is difficult to believe that Shenker's interview [*sic*] has no merit'.⁵⁸ This being so, it seems likely that Shenker's article, rather than being a mere fabrication, does have some basis in fact. This likelihood is further reinforced by Gontarski's assertion that Beckett himself characterised the material that Shenker presented as being 'misleading'.⁵⁹ Had the information been simply incorrect, Beckett would surely have been willing to describe it as such – as he would later be happy to speak of the 'manifold deviations from truth' in Deirdre Bair's biography.⁶⁰ By using the term 'misleading', Beckett implied that, while the material in Shenker's article was itself accurate, it had been presented in a 'misleading' manner. Both the Beckettian character of the statements we find in

⁵⁸ S. E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster"', in *op. cit.*, 31 – In making this assertion, Gontarski was thinking of statements such as the oft-quoted distinction that Beckett is reported to have drawn between himself and Joyce: 'The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance' (Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling "Waiting for Godot"', in *The New York Times* (May 6th, 1956), 131 [3]), which is cited by Gontarski in his article (*viz.* S. E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster"', 32).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31

⁶⁰ *LSB IV*, 701 (SB to Hans Hiebel [6th January, 1988])

Shenker's article and Beckett's own characterisation of these statements argue in favour of 'Moody Man of Letters' having at least some truth value. It is, however, Shenker himself who provides us with the clearest indication of where he might have found his facts originally.

In his article, Shenker introduces the statements attributed to Beckett by commenting that: 'If [Beckett] would relax his rule on interviews, this is what he would say (he has said it all, in precisely this phrasing)'.⁶¹ What Shenker's prefatory remarks imply is that, having failed to secure an interview with Beckett, he turned to other sources that might provide him with relevant and reliable information – be it documents by Beckett, documents which quoted Beckett, or persons who knew (persons who knew) Beckett – and recycled the material that he was able to obtain by such indirect means. Were this indeed the case, and if Shenker was as faithful to Beckett's phrasing as he and his quotation marks suggest in his article, we would expect to be able to find some evidence of his sources elsewhere. Helpfully, evidence for one such source does indeed appear to exist. More helpfully still, this evidence is concerned directly with Statement 3.

This evidence is to be found in a lecture on Beckett, delivered by Kay Boyle in the Summer of 1957.⁶² In the course of that lecture, Boyle evoked Beckett's reasons for turning to French and, in so doing, offered what she presented as a direct quote from Beckett himself: "In 1942, I began writing in French. I just felt like it. It was a very different experience from writing in English. It was more exciting for me."⁶³ What is striking about this comment – aside from the clearly incorrect dating, which is most likely a failure of memory or inadvertent error on Boyle's part, since Beckett himself dated his post-War turn to French to 1945⁶⁴ – is that it is almost a word-for-word repetition of Statement 3 as we find it in Shenker's article. This being so, it might be imagined that Boyle was simply appropriating what she found in Shenker. While this is certainly possible, it would be surprising if this were the case given that, in her lecture, Boyle is reported to have presented this particular comment as being

⁶¹ Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling "Waiting for Godot"', in *The New York Times* (May 6th, 1956), 129 [1]

⁶² *viz.* *LSB III*, 52 [n.3] – Entitled 'The Tradition of Loneliness', the text of this lecture appears to now survive only as a typescript (*viz.* Kay Boyle, 'Lecture: The Tradition of Loneliness' (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Kay Boyle Collection [Series 9: Box 84; Folder 14]).

⁶³ Kay Boyle, 'The Tradition of Loneliness' *qtd* in *LSB III*, 57 [n.2]

⁶⁴ As previously noted, this was the year in which Beckett placed the turn to French when asked to comment on the matter by scholars (*viz.* *LSB II*, 461 – SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]; *ibid.*, 468 – SB to Gian Renzo Morteo [after 20th February, 1954]); *LSB III*, 636 –SB to John Fletcher [21st November, 1964]; *LSB IV*, 592 – SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982]).

something that Beckett 'said to her in conversation'.⁶⁵ It seems highly unlikely that Boyle would have felt the need to present a remark derived from a newspaper as having been 'said to her in conversation'. (Indeed, she would be all the more unlikely to do so since the text of her lecture elsewhere shows her to be perfectly willing to acknowledge material she has derived from others.⁶⁶) Boyle, moreover, unlike Shenker, was personally familiar with Beckett: They first met when both were in Paris in the late 1920s.⁶⁷ When these factors are borne in mind, it seems probable that Boyle, rather than Shenker, is most likely to have had direct access to such a remark and that it is thus Shenker who is most likely to have derived Statement 3 from another source – whether Boyle herself, or another friend of Beckett's who was familiar with the same statement.

When Statement 3 is understood in these terms, its value is obviously altered: On the one hand, it may perhaps become more reliable since it becomes possible to see it, not as a pure invention on Shenker's part, nor as a remark addressed to an unknown journalist in the knowledge it would become part of the public record, but as a statement addressed to a personal acquaintance in the context of a personal conversation. And yet, if viewing the statement in this way means that it becomes more reliable, what does such reliability mean for the LSH?⁶⁸ If Beckett was happy to admit to turning to French because '[i]t was more exciting' in 1956 – or sometime before –, why did he subsequently set aside excitement in favour of stressing a quest for impoverishment, a desire for weakness?

In truth, the possibilities that are raised by the contextualisation of Statement 3 that has been proposed here cannot be pursued in good conscience since the contextualisation itself is too tentative for us to lend any real credence to it: The similarity between this statement as presented by Shenker and the statement presented by Boyle is intriguing, but it cannot aid us in resolving the issue of

⁶⁵ *LSB III*, 57 [n.2]

⁶⁶ At another point in the lecture, Boyle cites material from Niall Montgomery's article 'No Symbols Where None Intended' and introduces the quoted material as follows: '[I]t remained for others to say of him [= Beckett] that after his work with the Resistance in France, "he looked haggard and ill on his return to Dublin in 1945, went back immediately to France and worked in an ambulance unit in a Red Cross hospital, and was decorated for his service"' (*Ibid.*, 56 [n.1]). Although, as can be seen, Boyle does not cite Montgomery by name, her phrasing clearly signals that the material has been derived from a third-party source.

⁶⁷ *DTF*, 107

⁶⁸ Notably, the idea that at least some of Beckett's turn(s) to French were motivated simply by the greater pleasure he derived from writing in this language poses less of a problem for the CH, the possibility of this motivation having already been admitted at an earlier point in this thesis when pleasure was suggested as a major motivating factor for Beckett's decision to write 'Le Concentrisme' in French.

authenticity either way.⁶⁹ That Beckett enjoyed writing in French is obviously true, and this enjoyment almost certainly had some role in the rush of creativity that *followed* the post-War turn to French, as it no doubt had a role to play in the creative rush that followed the pre-War linguistic turn of 1938. A single statement of uncertain provenance is not, however, sufficient to decide the question of what role this sense of excitement may have had in motivating Beckett's initial decision to turn to French in March of 1946. Certainly, it is not sufficient to prove that Beckett's sole, or even primary, motivation in March 1946 was a desire for greater excitement. This being so, the most prudent course of action would be to set this particular statement aside – and, indeed, to set it apart entirely from the others attributed to Beckett during the post-War period – on account of the fact that, for the time being at least, its relation to Beckett is simply too problematic. Naturally, should further evidence arise in the future, it may be possible for others to better clarify its relation to Beckett and its value as an insight into his turn to French. For the time being, however, we would be better advised to focus our attention on the remainder of the statements made by Beckett, since, although they are by no means more pellucid of meaning, they are at least of less dubious provenance.

Before doing so, there is one respect in which Statement 3 – despite its uncertain provenance and problematic status – is of interest to the present discussion. For, having directed us to Boyle's lecture on Beckett, this statement also directs us to Beckett's response to that lecture and, more particularly, serves to greatly clarify his own attitude to scholarly engagement with the post-War linguistic turn. Or, at least, this attitude as it existed up to 1957.

Sometime after delivering her lecture, Boyle sent a copy of 'The Tradition of Loneliness' to Beckett, who responded to Boyle with his thoughts on the lecture in a letter that opens with extremely warm praise.⁷⁰ Of more interest than the warmth of this letter's opening, however, is the manner in which it closes, since its closing lines make specific mention of Boyle's treatment of Beckett's post-War turn to French. In that letter, Beckett remarks that: 'The passage on switch to French very good too and probably true in the main, now that I've forgotten half my English I feel like going back to it'.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Boyle may be unlikely to have commandeered material derived from another source and presented it as a remark made to her in conversation, but the only proof of such a conversation ever having occurred is confined to the material she cites in her lecture.

⁷⁰ viz. 'This exhausted bristol to thank you for and congratulate you on The Tradition of Loneliness which is very fine and gave me great pleasure' (*LSB III*, 56 – SB to Kay Boyle [26th July, 1957]).

⁷¹ *LSB III*, 56 (SB to Kay Boyle [26th July, 1957])

Beckett's appraisal of Boyle's treatment of the post-War linguistic turn is striking because there is no suggestion that he feels himself to be in any position to decide upon the validity, or otherwise, of the hypothesis that has been proposed. On the contrary, Beckett in fact appears to view '[t]he passage on [the] switch to French' primarily as a formal invention, rather than as an hypothesis that might be proven or disproven. In this regard, Beckett's response to the portion of Boyle's lecture that dealt with the linguistic turn echoes his response to her treatment of *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot*, which he described in the same letter as being 'a little tiré par le 2-Millimeterschnitt, but formidably ingenious'.⁷² To speak of Boyle's treatment of his own play as 'formidably ingenious' implies that Beckett has enjoyed Boyle's interpretation of his writing chiefly for its inventiveness, and despite its questionable truth value. There is, once again, no sense that Beckett has privileged access to any information that might allow him to act as arbiter over the truth, or otherwise, of Boyle's interpretation of his work. Beckett, in fact, has responded to Boyle's study of his own play in precisely the same manner in which he previously responded to her allegorical reading of Joyce's 'The Boarding House':

Se non è vero è ben trovato, and no doubt it is possible Joyce had some such allegory in mind. I simply feel it is not only unnecessary, but perhaps an injustice to him, to suppose so, and that the text could be shown to contain elements quite incompatible with your interpretation.⁷³

Rather than appraising Boyle's readings of either Joyce's text or his own play in terms of truth or falsehood, Beckett instead remains resolutely non-interventionist: Certainly, he comments on the plausibility of her readings – noting, in each case, that her reading is merely one of many that might be proposed – and, above all, he comments on the style in which her reading has been presented. The highest praise he will offer is that the interpretation she offers is 'formally ingenious' or 'ben trovato', which amounts to much the same thing. If Beckett privileges plausibility over truth, it would appear to be because he holds truth to be beside the point in matters of interpretation: Evidence can always be found that will contradict any individual interpretation, what matters therefore is that the interpretation offered should at

⁷² Beckett's response refers particularly to Boyle's treatment of the role played by the Occupation in *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot*: 'The Occupation interp. is perhaps a little tiré par le 2-Millimeterschnitt, but formidably ingenious (Pozzo-Bozzo gem) and after all for the likes of some of us it's that way always and no Nono zone inside or out' (*Ibid.*). The 'gem' to which Beckett here refers is Boyle's contention that Vladimir's uncertainty as to whether Pozzo has pronounced his own name 'Bozzo' or 'Pozzo' is a nod to the 'well known [fact] that Prussians invariably pronounce "B" as "P" and "P" as "B"' (*Ibid.*, 57 [n.1]).

⁷³ *LSB III*, 48-49 (SB to Kay Boyle [28th May, 1947]) – For Boyle's allegorical reading, see *Ibid.*, 50 [n.2].

least have the virtue of being ‘formally ingenious’, ‘ben trovato’, and that it should, if at all possible, avoid doing excessive violence to the text whose deeper recesses it will never succeed in illuminating.

While the manner in which Beckett responded to Boyle’s treatment of Joyce’s fiction or his own drama may initially appear far removed from the question of the linguistic turn and Beckett’s statements on the topic, these issues are, in fact, intimately intertwined. The connection between these two issues owes to the fact that, as has already been outlined, Beckett approached Boyle’s engagement with his linguistic turn in much the same spirit as he approached her engagements with his literary work and with Joyce’s. In responding to her presentation of his switch to French, he made no effort to confirm or refute her interpretation of his reasons for turning to French. Certainly, he responded in a manner that was broadly positive (‘The passage on switch to French *very good* too...’) but to say that the passage is ‘very good’ sounds extremely close to those other characterisations of her interpretations as ‘formally ingenious’ or ‘ben trovato’. ‘[V]ery good’, in short, seems to be a comment on the style of her passage, not its accuracy. That this is the case is all but confirmed by the fact that, having characterised this passage as ‘very good’, he proceeds to evoke its truth-value in a manner that preserves a certain amount of doubt (‘...*probably true in the main*’).

To understand Beckett’s eagerness to preserve this level of doubt we need only recall that the question of why he turned to French is a matter of interpretation and, as previously remarked, Beckett’s vision of interpretation is such that the only appropriate response is reasonable doubt: Whatever interpretation one may propose – be it of Joyce’s ‘The Boarding House’ or of Beckett’s turn to French –, it is always possible to adduce evidence for an alternative interpretation. Although Beckett may think Boyle’s interpretation of his turn to French well-expressed and plausible, in other words, he is by no means entirely convinced by it – no more so, indeed, than he was convinced by her reading of the Occupation into *Godot*, or the political situation in early 20th-Century Ireland into ‘The Boarding House’.

Beckett’s response to the passage in Boyle’s lecture that deals with the linguistic turn is thus interesting in the first instance for what it reveals about his attitude to interpretation more generally. In the context of the present discussion, meanwhile, it is most relevant for what it tells us about his attitude to one interpretation of his own linguistic turn in particular: The precise statement that Beckett appears to be referring to as ‘probably true in the main’ is not, in fact, the assertion that he turned to French because he found it interesting, but rather a statement taken from a letter that an unidentified mutual friend of Boyle’s and

Beckett's had written to her on the subject of Beckett's linguistic turn, and which Boyle quoted during her lecture. This passage is reproduced in *LSB III* as follows:

For Sam, ours is a spiritually and aesthetically destitute age, one in which anything other than the meagrest and poorest means of expression are wholly out of place. His own language, because of the marvellous wealth of the English language, became for him too easy, too much of a temptation – and forcing himself to write in a foreign language that is at the same time a more formal and far less rich one, he felt he could better convey the sordidness and poverty of the epoch as he sees it.⁷⁴

One of the most remarkable aspects of this particular interpretation of Beckett's linguistic turn is that it sounds almost exactly like the explanations that Beckett himself would later offer, in Statements 5-9. The question of that similarity will be returned to in due course. For the time being, however, the aspect of this passage which is worthy of note is Beckett's reaction to it. Or, more specifically, the fact that Beckett refused to either entirely confirm or entirely deny this explanation. For, although Beckett stated that this interpretation has some merit to it on account of the fact that 'now that I've forgotten half my English I feel like going back to it', Beckett equally avoided providing any evidence that might confirm this interpretation. By the time he was writing to Boyle in 1957, after all, he had *already* gone back to English.⁷⁵ Had Beckett wished, therefore, he might well have stated in his letter that it was only after English became foreign to him that he *had* gone back to writing in it. Rather than presenting her with evidence that might have been taken to confirm that interpretation, however, Beckett preferred to phrase the prospect of his return to English as something tentative ('I *feel like* going back to it'), and thus maintain a certain degree of doubt around the interpretation, saying no more than that he thought it to be 'probably true in the main'.

When Statement 3 is read in the context of its appearance in Kay Boyle's lecture and Beckett's response to this lecture, we see that, far from providing us with merely another example of ambiguous author-derived evidence – whether for the reason why Beckett turned to French, or why he returned to English –, it serves to reveal something significant about Beckett's engagement with questions of interpretation, including the interpretation of why he chose to write in French or English: Beckett, up to 1957 at least, seems to have been of the opinion that such matters of interpretation could carry on largely without his intervention, and certainly without his pronouncing definitively on the subject. Rather than telling people why he

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 57 [n.2]

⁷⁵ He had begun work on the text that would become *From an Abandoned Work* in 1954. The radio play *All That Fall* – first broadcast in January of 1957 –, meanwhile, had been written in the Summer of 1956 (*viz. DTF*, 427).

chose to do what he did, or providing them with evidence that would unambiguously prove or disprove their particular hypotheses, he was content to let other interpreters examine the available evidence and decide the matter as they saw fit.

III. STATEMENTS TO 'SCHOLARS': 2, 4-9⁷⁶

Clearly, the temporal qualification that has just been offered is quite important since, when one compares Beckett's response to Boyle's treatment of his linguistic turn with those of his pronouncements on the subject of his turn to French that date from after 1957 – that is, Statements 5-9 –, it is clear that, from 1959 on, Beckett moved ever further away from the attitude that we find in his letter to Boyle, where a preference for ambiguity is allied with an unwillingness to intervene in this particular question, and ever further towards explicitly-worded and unambiguous interventions that served to confirm and reinforce a very particular narrative for the reasons underlying his turn to French. More particularly, from 1959 on, Beckett's comments on the subject of his turn to French became increasingly more direct, and mirrored ever more precisely the vision of his turn to French as this is understood by the LSH.

If Statement 5 has been singled out as the beginning of this move towards increasingly definite interventions on Beckett's part concerning his reasons for turning to French – and ever closer mirroring of the terms of the LSH –, it is because, as previously noted, Statement 4 is actually more ambiguous than is generally assumed. Depending upon how it is read, Statement 4 can be interpreted in a number of ways and not all of these possible interpretations are compatible with the tenets of the LSH. If Statement 4 has generally been taken as offering support for the LSH, in fact, it is only because it is generally read in the light of those other comments that Beckett is known to have made to scholars and which seem to unambiguously confirm the validity of the LSH – the earliest of which is Statement 5. Where we earlier noted the importance of accounting for a certain degree of redshift when applying Beckett's pre-War statements on French to the linguistic turn, a distinct but related problem affects Statement 4. Rather than its meaning being affected by the distance that lies between it and the moment of the linguistic turn, the meaning of Statement 4 is affected by the fact that criticism tends to appraise it only after bringing it into close proximity with unambiguous statements – namely, Statements 5-9. This proximity serves to colour Statement 4, obscuring its own inherent ambiguity and suggesting that what one finds in it is a truth comparable to that which is provided by Beckett's later statements on his reasons for turning to French. A particularly revelatory example of this approach to

⁷⁶ For these statements, see Part III, Chapter 4 (520-521).

Statement 4 is, in fact, provided by Statement 7. Or, rather, the context in which Statement 7 originally appeared.

Statement 7 first entered critical discourse around Beckett's writing by way of Richard Coe's study *Beckett*. As part of this study, Coe provided a brief discussion of Beckett's linguistic turn, in the course of which he cited Statements 4 and 5, as well as providing what was then the entirely new evidence of Statement 7, which he had obtained directly from Beckett. For Coe, 'Beckett's reasons for turning to French [were]...fairly clear' by the time his own study appeared in 1964.⁷⁷ These reasons were, moreover, essentially those proposed by the LSH – that is, the excessive richness of English, and the need for a control that was only possible in French⁷⁸ – and if they were 'fairly clear' by then, it was because they had already been clarified by a number of factors, not least the explanations that Beckett himself had, by that time, already offered to scholars:

To Herbert Blau, Beckett confided that French 'had the right weakening effect'; to Niklaus Gessner, that 'in French it is easier to write without style'; to myself, that he was afraid of English 'because you couldn't help writing poetry in it.' This last explanation perhaps offers a clue also to one of the more puzzling riddles in Beckett's writing – namely, that whereas much of his prose is superb poetry, most of his 'poetry' is second-rate verse.⁷⁹

In Coe's estimation, as may be observed, Statement 4 and Statement 5 are expressive of precisely the same interpretation of Beckett's reasons for turning to French, an interpretation that is held to be further confirmed by Beckett's remarks to Coe himself and which, when taken together, fully justify his opening contention that 'Beckett's reasons for turning to French are by now fairly clear'. What is striking about Coe's interpretation, however, is that the clarity of Beckett's reasons for turning to French that he discerns is more obviously attributable to what has been omitted than what has been included.

⁷⁷ Richard Coe, *Beckett*, 13

⁷⁸ *viz.* 'In English, the words do half the poet's work for him, and the temptation is to let them do more and more, to let them take over directly from a subconscious which gives the impulse but which does not direct, and for the writer merely to follow whithersoever the whim of language wanders. [...] Beckett, in the final analysis, is trying to say what cannot be said; he must be constantly on his guard, therefore, never to yield to the temptation of saying what the words would make him say. Only when language is, as it were, defeated, bound hand and foot; only when it is so rigorously disciplined that each word describes exactly and quasi-scientifically the precise concept to which it is related and no other, only then, by the progressive elimination of that which precisely is, is there a remote chance for the human mind to divine the ultimate reality which is not. And this relentless, almost masochistic discipline, which reaches its culmination in *Comment c'est*, Beckett achieves by writing in a language which is not his own – in French.' (*Ibid.*, 13-14)

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14

Notably, Coe does not cite any of Beckett's statements on the subject of his turn to French that would trouble the clarity of his LSH-aligned interpretation. Naturally, there is no reason to assume any wilful desire to obscure evidence on Coe's part; it is quite possible that the only reason he did not cite Statements 1 or 3 is because they were unfamiliar to him. His omissions, however, are not restricted to the absence of particular statements made by Beckett on the subject of his turn to French. Equally striking is the manner in which his interpretation omits to engage with the ambiguities inherent in Statement 4. For, while Coe may cite the remark Beckett made to Gessner, he makes no mention of the uncertainty that hangs over its precise meaning. Rather than inviting us to reflect on what Beckett may have meant when he spoke of 'writing without style', Coe simply encourages us to assume that Beckett's remark to Gessner means exactly the same thing as his remark to Blau about French's 'weakening effect', or the remark he made to Coe himself concerning the impossibility of writing anything but 'poetry' in English.

It may thus be observed that the meaning of Statement 4 to which Coe appeals as evidence for his interpretation of Beckett's turn to French – and, by extension, the LSH – is itself dependent upon the more obvious meaning of Statements 5 and 6. French, in short, is a language that restricted Beckett: This is what Beckett's remarks to Blau and Coe clearly mean, therefore it stands to reason that Beckett must have meant much the same thing when he spoke to Gessner. Beckett's reasons for turning to French were, by then, fairly clear, after all. What, however, if Statement 4 does not mean what Coe invites us to assume it meant? What if Statement 4's association with the LSH, rather than becoming clear when read in close proximity to other statements made by Beckett that do explicitly associate his turn to French with a quest for weakness and poverty, was actually merely an *effect* of its being read in such close proximity to these statements? What if, when read in the context of its original expression – rather than the context of Beckett's later statements – Statement 4 actually had quite a different meaning? Before we could have any idea of what Statement 4 means, in short, we would need to set it apart from statements that Beckett had not yet made and try to clarify the context in which it was initially expressed. Sadly, however, this is no longer possible.

The fundamental role played by context in determining the meaning of Beckett's statements on his turn to French is not limited to Statement 4. Our earlier discussion of Statement 1 has already served to demonstrate the vital importance of context to our understanding of this particular statement's meaning: Read outside of the environment of the 'Note' as a whole, the meaning of Statement 1 is entirely altered, and it becomes impossible to see that the true object of the text's satire is not

really Beckett, but rather the narrator. It is a feature of the statements that Beckett made to scholars, however, that very few of them can be adequately contextualised since, in almost all cases, we have preserved only the statement itself, not the broader context in which it was originally expressed.

The two exceptions to this rule are Statements 2 and 9: The first derives from a letter written by Beckett to Hans Naumann, and the second from a letter to Carlton Lake. Happily, as both of these letters have been preserved and were included as part of *LSB* – the first in *LSB II* and the second in *LSB IV*⁸⁰ –, it is possible to replace both of them in their original context.⁸¹ In marked contrast to Statements 2 and 9, none of the other statements that Beckett is reported to have made to scholars interested in the question of his linguistic turn can now be replaced in their original context. As a result, any attempt to interpret their meaning risks falling into much the same trap as that which awaits critics who attempt to interpret Statement 1 without paying due heed to the broader vignette in which it initially appeared.

Clearly, the fact that we no longer have access to the original context of many of the statements made by Beckett to scholars interested in his linguistic turn is not uniformly detrimental to our understanding of these statements. In many cases, the meaning of these statements is sufficiently explicit that we can be almost certain of what they mean even without reference to a broader context. Statements 5 and 6, for example, which are both notable for characterising Beckett's turn to French as a turn towards 'weakness', state quite plainly that French provided Beckett with a means of limiting himself, reducing the strength he felt when working through the medium of English.⁸² This 'weakness', moreover, is almost certainly directly comparable to Statement 7's characterisation of English as a language that lured Beckett into writing 'poetry'. If French provided him with 'weakness', it only makes sense that English should have provided him with lyrical strength, 'poetry' being understood as the literary space in which the potentiality of language is most powerfully realised. Taken together, then, it would be difficult to interpret these three Statements in any terms other than those proposed by the LSH. The case of Statement 8 is even more explicit, and once again serves to reinforce the understanding of the linguistic turn that can be derived from Statements 5-7 since Statement 8 makes perfectly clear that, if Beckett turned to French, his 'vrai mobile' for doing so was the

⁸⁰ viz. *LSB II*, 460-463 (SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]); *LSB IV*, 592-593 (SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982])

⁸¹ The importance of this context will become apparent shortly.

⁸² Although, as previously noted in Part II, Chapter 2, a measure of doubt does hang over Statement 6, insofar as it is impossible to be entirely certain whether Beckett was clarifying his reasons for turning to French in the pre-War period, the post-War period, or, indeed, the reasons that motivated both the pre- and post-War linguistic turns.

aim of impoverishing himself and his writing, an aim that obviously chimes with the earlier mentions of 'weakness' embraced and 'poetry' rejected. Though we may lack a broader context for these statements, therefore, it seems impossible to imagine any broader context that might lead to their meaning something other than what they so clearly, directly, and unambiguously express.

When we come to Statement 4, however, we find ourselves in a very different situation. Unlike the statements that have just been mentioned, Statement 4 is sufficiently ambiguous to be unclear without a broader context. Obviously, we can try to supplement this lost context in a variety of ways: We might, for instance, do so by appealing to Belacqua's remarks in *Dream*. Doing so, however, creates problems insofar as it assumes that Beckett's use of the phrase 'write without style' in a novel written at the start of the 1930s is comparable to his use of the phrase 'écrire sans style' sometime in the mid-1950s. Another possibility would be to draw upon Statement 8 and assume that, a desire for impoverishment having been later described as his 'vrai mobile', this must necessarily have been what Beckett meant at the time. To do this, however, is to ignore what might be called the Krapp-problem that was earlier evoked as part of our discussion of Beckett's pre-War comments on French: The Beckett who spoke to Ludovic Janvier in 1968 was not the Beckett who spoke to Niklaus Gessner sometime before 1957, why therefore should we assume the latter to have unproblematic insight into the intentions of the former? In an effort to avoid these particular problems, then, perhaps the ideal solution would be to recover a contemporaneous context for Statement 4 by way of appealing to Gessner's own thesis for clarification. There is, however, a problem with this approach too, since, as cited by Gessner, Statement 4 is not actually used to shed light on Beckett's reasons for turning to French, at all. Instead, Gessner cites this remark in an effort to shed light on Beckett's probable motivations for instructing his German-language translators to prefer neutral terms over those that might have some deeper emotional resonance – such as when he advised that *rencontrer* be translated with the neutral *sehen*, rather than the more charged *begegnen*.⁸³ Gessner's original use of this statement thus draws us away from the role that French in particular might have had to play in terms of style, conceived as formal structure or complexity, and instead

⁸³ viz. 'Samuel Beckett, der selber fließend Deutsch spricht, hat die Übersetzung Elmar Tophovens Wort für Wort nachkontrolliert. Von einem Versehen kann also nicht die Rede sein. Autor und Übersetzer empfanden offenbar das deutsche Wort „begegnen“ als um eine Nuance betonter als das französische „rencontrer“ und entschlossen sich für das neutralere, ausdruckschwächere „gesehen“. Erich Franzen, der Übersetzer von „Molloy“ machte ebenfalls die Erfahrung, dass Beckett im Bestreben, den emotionalen Wert der Wörter herabzumindern, den Übersetzer im Zweifelsfall zur Verwendung der unpathetischeren, weniger betonten Wortfügung anhält' (Niklaus Gessner, *Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache*, 32).

brings us towards a consideration of the relationship between language and emotion, with specific reference to how this relationship impacted on German-language translations of Beckett's work.

Bearing in mind the problems that are associated with each of the contextualisation strategies that have just been proposed, it may be observed that Coe's approach to Statement 4 – although he himself may not have recognised it as such – was to adopt the second method, whereby Statement 4 was contextualised by reading it in terms of Beckett's more unambiguous remarks on the subject of his turn to French. This particularly method of contextualisation is, I would suggest, the most problematic of all. Not only is it the case that, as has just been noted, it confronts us with the Krapp-problem of bringing multiple Beckett's into conversation, it also serves to blind us to a key difference between Statement 4 and the statements that followed it. This difference lies precisely in the contrast between the ambiguity of Beckett's reasons for turning to French as expressed by Statement 4, and the certainty of intention expressed by Statements 5-9.

Up until Statement 5, ambiguity was a fundamental part of the statements that Beckett is known to have offered to scholars interested in his linguistic turn (i.e. Statements 2 and 4). It was only from Statement 5 – or, to put matters another way, it was only from 1959 on – that Beckett abandoned this ambiguity in favour of increasingly definite and explicit comments on the subject of his turn to French. Rather than ignoring this aspect of Beckett's statements to scholars on the subject of his linguistic turn, or obscuring it by reading those that are ambiguous through the prism of those that are not, Beckett Studies must recognise and engage with this divide between constituent ambiguity and increasing certainty. If we are to properly judge the value of any of Beckett's statements to scholars on the topic of his linguistic turn, this will only become possible after we have first attempted to better understand the reason for this progression from uncertainty to certainty, from ambiguity to explicitness. Thankfully, as previously noted, we are in the fortunate position of having preserved the letters that contain what is almost certainly one of the first and what appears to have been one of the last of those statements that Beckett is known to have made to scholars specifically on the topic of his reasons for turning to French. In what remains of this chapter, therefore – and as a step towards better understanding of this progression from ambiguity towards certainty –, I will closely engage with both of these letters so as to clarify what the context of these letters reveals about the statements that they contain. In so doing, I will suggest that what these letters help us to understand is not necessarily Beckett's linguistic turn, but rather Beckett's changing attitude towards those who took an interest in it. By the same token, it will be suggested that these statements that seem to provide the

author-derived evidence upon which the LSH is built in fact derive, not from Beckett alone, but from Beckett's engagement with Beckett Studies.

Statement 2, the first of Beckett's statements to 'scholars' that can be contextualised is, as noted, to be found in a letter of February 1954 written by Beckett to German translator and editor, Hans Naumann. Beckett's letter to Naumann constitutes an excellent starting point for tracing the progression from ambiguity towards certainty because perhaps the most interesting thing about it – even more interesting than the fact of its containing one of Beckett's earliest explanations for his linguistic turn – is the profoundly, indeed archly, ambiguous way in which Beckett chose to respond to the question of what motivated him to abandon English in favour of French:

Depuis 1945 je n'écris plus qu'en français. Pourquoi ce changement ? Il ne fut pas raisonné. Cela a été pour changer, pour voir, pas plus compliqué que cela, apparemment au moins. Rien à voir en tous cas avec les raisons que vous suggérez. Je ne considère pas l'anglais comme une langue étrangère, c'est bien ma langue. S'il en est une qui m'est parfaitement étrangère, c'est le gaélique. Vous pouvez me ranger dans la triste catégorie de ceux qui, s'ils devaient agir à bon escient, n'agiraient jamais. Ce qui n'empêche pas qu'il puisse y avoir, à ce changement, des raisons urgentes. Moi-même j'en entrevois plusieurs, maintenant qu'il est trop tard pour revenir en arrière. Mais j'aime mieux les laisser dans l'ombre. Je vous donnerai quand même une piste : le besoin d'être mal armé.⁸⁴

Clearly, if one were to isolate the 'piste' offered by Beckett to Naumann from the rest of the letter, it would be easy to extrapolate a commonality between its stressing of 'le besoin d'être mal armé' and those various statements that Beckett would later make and in which he allied the turn to French with a quest for greater poverty of expression, with the 'weakness' of French, and with the excessive 'poetry' of English. To do so, however, would be to ignore the fact that this particular 'piste' is not offered in isolation. On the contrary, Statement 2 comes at the close of a longer paragraph. In this respect, Statement 2 shares a certain similarity with Statement 1. In this particular case, admittedly, the broader text in which Statement 2 appears is not a fictional vignette but a paragraph-long meditation on Beckett's reasons for turning to French. When this meditation is read carefully, however, it becomes apparent that the similarities between Statements 1 and 2 are not restricted to their appearing in the context of a longer text; the tone of the longer texts in which they appear too is strikingly comparable. Like Statement 1, in fact, Statement 2 is also to be found in a context that is fundamentally comedic. In each text, moreover, the comedy depends

⁸⁴ *LSB II*, 461-462 – SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]

upon a joke at the expense of someone who is overly fascinated with the question of Beckett's motivations for turning to French.

In the case of Statement 1, we saw that a full appreciation of the joke was dependent upon an awareness of the broader context of the vignette in which it appears. Similarly, if we are to fully appreciate the comedy of Statement 2, we need to pay attention to the rest of the paragraph – and, indeed, the rest of the letter – in which it appears. We need, in the first instance, to recognise that the 'piste' Beckett offered to Naumann, just like the letter as a whole, was not a private and unmotivated expression of Beckett's most intimate reasons for turning to French. On the contrary, Statement 2 and the letter in which it appears were intended as an answer to a particular set of questions posed by a particular individual. It has already been suggested that the content of Beckett's letters could be influenced by his relationship with his correspondent. In the case of the Naumann letter, therefore, and before engaging with its content, we should clarify who Hans Naumann was and what relationship, if any, Beckett enjoyed with him.

Insofar as Beckett's relationship with Naumann was concerned, there was, in fact, no relationship to speak of whatsoever: All surviving evidence suggests that Naumann was, quite simply, a person whom Beckett had never met and with whom he had never communicated prior to receiving a letter in February of 1954, in which Naumann asked him a number of personal questions and in the course of which Naumann asserted that Beckett was a native-speaker of Irish – a language which had, for Beckett, supremely negative associations⁸⁵ – and intimated that his literature was, fundamentally, rooted in Ireland, that country on which Beckett had chosen to turn his back in 1937.⁸⁶ These facts raise a number of questions for how we should interpret this letter: Given the absence of any prior relationship with Naumann, for example, why should we assume that Beckett had any reason to speak honestly, or

⁸⁵ It was this assumption that moved Beckett to respond flatly: 'Je ne considère pas l'anglais comme une langue étrangère, c'est bien ma langue. S'il en est une qui m'est parfaitement étrangère, c'est le gaélique' (*Ibid.*, 461). The strength of Beckett's dismissal of any connection between himself and the Irish language should be read in the context of his own understanding of this language, and the association he perceived between it and the more negative aspects of the Irish society he had rejected – For evidence of this association, see Part I, Chapter 1.

⁸⁶ In his letter, Naumann asked Beckett to clarify whether it would be 'juste, d'après [lui], de chercher dans [son] œuvre une tradition irlandaise' (*Ibid.*, 465 [n.1]). The phrasing of this question strongly implies that Naumann was himself of the opinion that Beckett's writing could be traced back to a specifically Irish tradition, and that he was seeking authorial support for this perspective from Beckett. If such was indeed the case, Naumann can only have been disappointed by the response that he received, whereby Beckett rejected any association with Ireland and assured his correspondent: 'De l'Irlande...il m'est tout à fait impossible de parler avec retenue. J'ai horreur de ce romantisme-là. Et je n'ai pas eu besoin de boire de la fontaine magique pour supporter de ne pas y vivre' (*Ibid.*, 462).

any reason to care about accurately enlightening his correspondent as to his motivations for writing in French? Certainly, one might well respond by asking what reason, if any, Beckett would have had to lie to his correspondent but that answer is unsatisfactory. In the first instance, it does not confirm Beckett was telling the truth and thus leaves us with precisely the same doubts concerning the accuracy of Beckett's comments to Naumann. Secondly, such an answer equally ignores the fact that Beckett may indeed have had some reason to be less than forthcoming with Naumann, at least on the subject of his motivations for turning to French. This being, not necessarily any wilful desire to conceal, but simply that rather dismissive attitude towards those who reject the obvious motivations that Beckett might have had for turning to French in favour of seeking out other motivations of a more intimate, a more personal, and a more literary nature. This, of course, is the precisely the attitude that we discerned in the 'Note' in *Transition*. If Beckett, who as previously noted most likely had a hand in the composition of the *Transition* 'Note', was happy to make fun of people desperate to discover his *true* reasons for turning to French in 1948 – or, at the very least, to see such people made fun of in a 'Note' devoted to him –, is there any proof that he was likely to respond entirely seriously when he was asked to explain his post-War linguistic turn by Naumann in 1954?

This last question is of particular importance because the precise formulation of the question that Naumann asked Beckett on the subject of his turn to French reveals just how closely his interest in Beckett's post-War linguistic turn echoes the interest expressed by the narrator in the satiric vignette:

Les motifs du changement de langue, quels sont-ils ? Je vois un motif tout à fait extérieur. Dans l'impossibilité de lancer une œuvre littéraire écrite en langue irlandaise au-delà les [sic] frontières du petit pays, vous vous trouvez, certes, dans la nécessité de choisir une langue étrangère, ou le français ou l'anglais ; vous choisissez le français. Mais il doit y avoir quand même une raison plus profonde. Est-ce que vous croyez que la culture française est un fonds plus adéquat pour l'œuvre ?⁸⁷

As can be seen, Naumann's perspective on Beckett's turn to French is all but identical to that of the narrator in the 'Note' that appeared in *Transition Forty-Eight*. For Naumann, as for the narrator of that vignette, Beckett's decision to abandon his native language and turn to French can only have been the consequence of something other than the obvious. (In the 'Note', the obvious reason rejected by the narrator was the fact of Beckett's 'long years of residence in France'; in Naumann's letter, the obvious reason he rejects is the need for Beckett to abandon his mother-tongue, which Naumann assumes to be Irish, so that his writings can travel beyond the narrow

⁸⁷ Hans Naumann to SB [15th February, 1954] *qtd* in *LSB II*, 466 [n.3]

confines of Ireland.) Not only do Nauman and the narrator of the 'Note' both reject the obvious reason for Beckett's linguistic turn, they also both assume that Beckett's *true* motivation can only be of an intimately personal or a profoundly literary sort. Naumann, for his part, seems to privilege a literary explanation above all – this is implied by the fact that, having asserted that a deeper rationale for this linguistic turn must exist, he then proposes that this reason may owe itself to the connections between Beckett's writing and the resources of French culture.

Having already observed that the 'Note' in *Transition* mocks its fictional narrator's excessive fascination with Beckett's reasons for turning to French and his refusal to accept the plain, common-sense view of why Beckett might have decided to begin writing in French after years of living in France, we might well expect Beckett's response to a real-life scholar possessed of a similar degree of fascination, and a similar refusal to accept an obvious explanation for want of a more fantastic one, would be at least partly mocking. And, when Beckett's response to Naumann is read carefully, one does indeed find that the manner in which he responds to Naumann's question about the turn to French is profoundly mocking.

The evidence for this mocking tone is, in fact, self-evident in Beckett's presentation of 'le besoin d'être mal armé' as a mere 'piste'. By characterising this 'besoin' as a 'piste', Beckett makes plain that he is not admitting to Naumann that he definitely turned to French because of the need to be 'mal armé', and even less that he necessarily did so in search of an artistic impoverishment that only the weakness of French could offer him. Such a meaning may appear obvious when this 'piste' is read in the light of Beckett's later statements but, as has already been outlined with regard to Statement 4, that is an effect of proximity. When Beckett's 'piste' is read on its own terms, and with reference to the precise context in which it originally appeared, its meaning is far less certain. Indeed, what Beckett's use of the term 'piste' makes clear is that the meaning of what he has proposed to Naumann *cannot* be clear. By describing the 'besoin d'être mal armé' as a 'piste', Beckett is telling Naumann that what he is offering him is merely a clue that his correspondent may choose to follow if he wishes to pursue the matter further. This clue, moreover, is proffered by Beckett with one hand while, at the same time, he uses the other to wilfully obscure the other 'raisons urgentes' that lay behind his linguistic turn and which, unlike the 'besoin d'être mal armé', are not described as a 'piste'. These reasons, we are led to believe, constitute the truth of why Beckett decided to turn to French, and Beckett has chosen to wilfully obscure that truth from Naumann.

To say that Beckett wilfully obscures the truth from Naumann is not an interpretation on the part of the present writer. Beckett himself openly states that this is what he is doing when, having suggested that he can 'entrevoi[r] plusieurs'

reasons for turning to French, he goes on to flatly inform Naumann that he will not share anything of what he has glimpsed with his correspondent: 'Mais j'aime mieux les laisser dans l'ombre.' Where the narrator of the *Transition* 'Note' was pulled into a 'little frequented semi-circular' street and initiated into the truth of Beckett's linguistic turn, in other words, Naumann has been denied the truth of this turn, and pointed instead in the direction of a shadowy 'piste' at the end of which this truth may perhaps be lurking.

In responding to Naumann in this way, it must be stressed that Beckett was not doing anything out of character. We have already observed that Beckett's response to Kay Boyle's lecture on him preserved a veil of mystery around his own perspective on *Godot*, and his own perspective on his switch to French. We have also previously noted that Beckett's primary motivation in responding to Boyle in this way was his conviction that interpretation – whether of literary works, or his own personal motivation for turning to French – was not a matter of certitudes, but of possibilities that might always be disproven, depending upon how one chose to examine the available evidence. For Beckett, in short, matters of interpretation were fundamentally opposed to matters of fact.⁸⁸

The letter to Naumann demonstrates precisely the same distinction between matters of fact and matters of interpretation: In the case of the former, Beckett is remarkably direct, providing Naumann with clear, unambiguous and immensely helpful responses. On the subject of Joyce, for instance, Beckett specifies the dates of their first meeting ('en 1928, année de mon arrivée à Paris comme lecteur d'anglais à l'Ecole Normale Supérieure') and their last ('à Vichy en 1940').⁸⁹ Similarly, Beckett corrects Naumann's erroneous belief that he worked at the Sorbonne during his time in Paris ('je n'ai jamais été chargé de cours à la Sorbonne sauf, très brièvement, d'un cours de langue anglaise').⁹⁰ In terms of his reading matter, he tells Naumann that he is unfamiliar with the work of Max Picard and Brice-Aristide Parain, but that he was very impressed by Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* when he read it for Joyce.⁹¹ In terms of language, meanwhile, as Statement 2 indicates, Beckett is perfectly explicit with Naumann about the fact that he is a native-speaker of English

⁸⁸ Beckett made this distinction quite clear in an earlier letter to Boyle, where, having learned she was engaged in researching his writing, he informed her that he would be 'happy to help with any biographical and bibliographical information that you might need' (*LSB III*, 26 – SB to Kay Boyle [4th March, 1957]). The specification already makes quite clear – even before his subsequent comments on her engagement with *Godot* – that assistance with matters of interpretation will not be forthcoming.

⁸⁹ *LSB II*, 461 (SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954])

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 462 – Nothing that has been discovered by subsequent scholarship contradicts Beckett's stated lack of familiarity with Picard and Parain, while subsequent scholarship has done much to confirm Beckett's stated interest in Mauthner.

and that his turn to French occurred in 1945.⁹² In matters of interpretation, however – namely, the interpretation of *why* he turned to French – Beckett’s approach is entirely different.

Far from providing Naumann with clear and direct answers, Beckett in fact goes to remarkable lengths to preserve and, indeed, to carefully cultivate an atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty around the question of his linguistic turn. Almost every sentence of the explanation for his turn to French that Beckett provides in his letter to Naumann is, in fact, calculated to confuse and perplex his correspondent: It is, perhaps, significant in this regard that Beckett begins by placing his decision to turn to French entirely beyond the realm of reason, by stating that ‘[i]l ne fut pas raisonné’. Obviously, to say that the decision was not ‘raisonné’ can mean no more than that the change was not the result of a predetermined project. There is, as such, not necessarily any reason to assign to Beckett’s use of the term ‘raisonné’ any meaning other than that conveyed by George Craig’s translation: ‘It [= the turn to French] was not deliberate’.⁹³ Given the manner in which this particular paragraph develops, however, it seems significant that Beckett chose to use the term ‘raisonné’, rather than a synonymous term – such as *calculé*, *posé*, or *réfléchi* –, which might have expressed the same idea without yet setting the decision entirely beyond, or beneath, the realm of conscious reason. Certainly, having suggested that his decision to begin writing in French was not ‘raisonné’, Beckett proceeds to lead Naumann ever further away from reason and ever further into the depths of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The development of uncertainty and ambiguity begins immediately: Beckett’s initial explanation that he turned to French ‘pour changer, pour voir, pas plus compliqué que cela, apparemment au moins’, develops opacity on a lexical and syntactic level. The intransitive use of the verbs *changer* and *voir*, for instance, while entirely possible in French, is perplexing in the context, since one would expect a change of language, even one that was not ‘raisonné’, to have been undertaken with the aim of changing *something* (perhaps his style?), or seeing *something* (perhaps in a new way?).⁹⁴ This initial ambiguity is then compounded by the manner in which Beckett concludes his sentence. In the first instance, the very phrasing of his statement that the reasons he has just evoked are inherently simple paradoxically

⁹² As noted, this date was the one that Beckett uniformly provided for his post-War turn to French and, while not applicable to his literary writings, it is certainly true that his first post-War text to be composed in French – namely, ‘Le Monde et le pantalon’ – was written in 1945.

⁹³ *LSB II*, 464

⁹⁴ In each case, the ambiguity of these terms is deepened still further for us since our access to Beckett’s manuscripts proves that Beckett’s turn to French changed nothing, and produced no change in his artistic vision. This evidence, however, would not have been available to Naumann.

serves to compound the complexity of his explanation, since his reader cannot help but recognise that there can be nothing simple about Beckett's intransitive use of these particular verbs. Beckett then compounds this complexity still further by concluding with the airy admission that the simplicity of his reasons for turning to French is, perhaps, merely apparent. Obviously, if Beckett's reasons for turning to French were only uncomplicated 'apparemment au moins', the implication is that they may, in reality, have been quite complicated indeed. In the very first sentence of this explanation, therefore, Beckett has offered Naumann two equally possible, and equally opaque, reasons for having turned to French, he has proceeded to tell him that there is nothing overly complicated about these opaque reasons, and finally stated that there may well be something complicated about them after all.

Even after Beckett has developed ambiguity to such an extent, however, he then takes things still further by suggesting that he actually knows nothing at all of his deeper motivations. Naturally, to say that he knows nothing of his motivations after having just suggested that these motivations were a matter of changing and seeing looks very much like a contradiction. And this contradiction becomes even more blatant when the admission that he knows nothing of his motivations is immediately followed by the admission that such motivations are not only likely to exist, but that they do exist and he himself can already think of a few: 'Ce qui n'empêche pas qu'il puisse y avoir, à ce changement, des raisons urgentes. Moi-même j'en entrevois plusieurs, maintenant qu'il est trop tard pour revenir en arrière.'

At this point, in other words, Beckett has introduced into his explanation of the supposedly uncomplicated turn to French still further reasons for his linguistic turn – reasons that one may assume to be entirely different from those of changing and seeing that were previously announced, subsequently queried, and finally, perhaps, rejected. He has, moreover, done so in such a way as serves only to thicken the fog of confusion that hangs over the paragraph. This is achieved via his use of the verb 'entrevo[i]r', in lieu of *voir*. By stating 'j'en entrevois plusieurs [i.e. reasons for turning to French], maintenant qu'il est trop tard pour revenir en arrière', Beckett is not necessarily suggesting that these reasons were not there when he initially made the decision to begin writing in French, merely that they have only become apparent to him after the fact. If these reasons became somewhat clearer to him after he turned to French, however, they apparently remain very far from distinct: He himself claims to have only half-seen the true reasons for his turn to French. If he can 'entrevo[i]r' them, it is because they remain to him as mysterious as the faces of people glimpsed while passing through a street, or all that can only be seen through a glass, darkly.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ The same verb is, interestingly, also used when Beckett describes the role that Joyce played in his conception of what it means to be an artist: 'Il m'a fait entrevoir, sans le

While the ambiguity of Beckett's response to Naumann's question concerning his reasons for turning to French is striking, what is even more striking is the manner in which Beckett's wilfully ambiguous response turns the very formulation of Naumann's own question against him. Remarkably, when Beckett's 'answer' is closely read against Naumann's question, we see that Beckett incorporates and reworks aspects of Naumann's own question about his turn to French into his response to this question. The manner in which Beckett has reworked Naumann's phrasing, moreover, has been done in such a way that it serves not solely to deepen the mystery around Beckett's reasons for turning to French, but also to ensure that whatever clarification Naumann receives regarding Beckett's turn to French will ultimately find its source, not in Beckett's personal life, but in Naumann's own letter.

In Naumann's letter, as will be recalled, he at once stated that there was an obvious reason for Beckett's linguistic turn – namely, the impossibility of achieving an international career as an Irish-language writer – and then proceeded to claim that 'il doit y avoir quand même une raison plus profonde' for Beckett's turn to French. In response, and having only just placed himself 'dans la triste catégorie de ceux qui, s'ils devaient agir à bon escient, n'agiraient jamais' – that is, those who do not know their own intentions – Beckett states that this inability to discern his true motivations 'n'empêche pas qu'il puisse y avoir, à ce changement, des raisons urgentes'. Beckett's reference to 'raisons urgentes' closely echoes Naumann's own mention of a 'raison plus profonde', but the transposition from the single to the plural, and from depth to urgency, implies something more multifarious, more pressing and thus altogether more fascinating and worthy of discovery. (And this sense of pressing urgency is, moreover, precisely the implication that will be subsequently reinforced by Beckett's use of the term 'besoin' in the 'piste' he offers to Naumann.) At the same time, Beckett also goes out of his way to attenuate the existence of these reasons by way of substituting the verb 'pouvoir' for Naumann's 'devoir'. The deeper reason that Naumann imagined *must* exist, has been transformed into a host of diversely urgent reasons that *may* exist, or may not... The most interesting aspect of Beckett's reworking of the terms of Naumann's question is not to be found in this particular sentence, however. Instead, it is to be found in the very 'piste' upon which Beckett's 'explanation' of his turn to French concludes and which, when read against the letter that Naumann wrote to Beckett and the question to which Beckett was responding, seems to derive, ultimately, from that very 'raison plus profonde' that Naumann

vouloir d'ailleurs le moins du monde, ce que peut signifier: être artiste' (*LSB II*, 461 – SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]). Obviously, unlike the dates of their meeting and Beckett's role in the elaboration of *Finnegans Wake*, the role Joyce played in Beckett's development as an artist is a matter of interpretation. The appropriateness of 'entrevoir' to this particular context is thus readily apparent.

himself suggested when he asked if Beckett's turn to French might have been impelled by the fact that 'la culture française est un fonds plus adéquat pour l'œuvre'.

Many critics have noted that the precise phrasing of the 'piste' Beckett offers Naumann ('le besoin d'être mal armé') seems to deliberately pun on the name of French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, since when read aloud the phrase might be interpreted as *le besoin d'être Mallarmé*. If this echo has been noted by a number of critics, each critic has proposed their own explanation of what Beckett's pun should be taken to mean. For Jean-Michel Rabaté, for example, this pun is designed to be read as an allusion to Mallarmé's habit of 'play[ing] on the echoes of his name, so as to highlight the weakness of his body and the comparative strength of his art'.⁹⁶ For Juliette Taylor-Batty, this pun is 'playful rather than serious' and yet, at the same time, it is also designed to put us in mind of the fact that, in 'the strangeness of Mallarmé's French, its manipulations of interlingual effects' we find 'a perspective on language that is directly relevant to the ways in which Beckett deliberately seeks to deform, distort, even "violate" the foreign language'.⁹⁷ For Sam Slote, meanwhile, the pun on Mallarmé's name is best read in light of the fact that Mallarmé is 'a poet not unconcerned with tending towards a writing that would "authentifier le silence"'.⁹⁸

While it is possible to read Beckett's pun on Mallarmé's name in a variety of ways – including those suggested by Rabaté, Taylor-Batty, and Slote –, it is notable that none of the readings that have been proposed thus far examine Beckett's remark in the immediate context of his letter to Naumann. Instead, in each case, critical readings of this punning *piste* place it in a more general context and seek to discover what connections might exist between Beckett's writing and Mallarmé's, whether these connections are thematic, linguistic, or otherwise. In each case, in other words, Beckett's pun has been taken as a (relatively) honest admission of a deeper debt to Mallarmé, one that might facilitate scholarly enquiry into Beckett's writing by allowing us to better understand both his reasons for turning to French, and the relationship between his writing and that of Mallarmé. What must be recalled, however, is that Beckett's *piste* was not necessarily intended to shed light on his reasons for turning to French. On the contrary, we have already seen the degree to which Beckett's letter to Naumann is designed with precisely the opposite intention – namely, to preserve a degree of doubt and uncertainty around these reasons. Nor, indeed, was the *piste* Beckett offers directed towards Beckett Studies as a whole. (Beckett, in fact, explicitly asked Naumann to keep their correspondence private, and not to cite it in any future

⁹⁶ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Excuse My French: Samuel Beckett's Style of No Style', in *CR: The New Centennial Review* (Vol. 16, No. 3 – Winter, 2016), 141

⁹⁷ Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction*, 150

⁹⁸ Sam Slote, 'Bilingual Beckett: Beyond the Linguistic Turn', in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *The New Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 120

publications.⁹⁹) Beckett's pun, in short, just like his *piste*, was intended for one scholar in particular, namely: Hans Naumann.

Once this has been recognised, it becomes possible to identify quite a different reason why Beckett may have wished to pun on Mallarmé's name. Far from seeking to clarify his own writing, or its relation to the work of the French poetry, for the benefit of future scholars, the precise phrasing of Beckett's *piste* – just like the rest of the letter in which it occurs – appears to have been deliberately tailored to the particular scholar for whom it was intended. By punning on Mallarmé's name, in short, Beckett was implying that, while Naumann may have been mistaken about his being an Irish-speaker, he was quite correct about Beckett's more profound reason for the turn to French – namely, the fact that 'la culture française est un fonds plus adéquat pour l'œuvre'. By speaking of 'le besoin d'être mal armé', Beckett suggested that there was indeed a fundamental link between his reasons for turning to French and at least one important representative of that 'fonds' that Naumann supposed to be provided by French culture: Stéphane Mallarmé, one of the most important and stylistically inventive of modern French poets. By providing Naumann with a personalised *piste* that punned on Mallarmé's name, Beckett placed his reasons for turning to French precisely where Naumann expected to find them: In the 'fonds' of French literary culture. Beckett did so, moreover, in a way that was at once sufficiently obscure to excite Naumann's scholarly interest, and sufficiently close to Naumann's own theory to provide a sense of satisfaction at having been correct. Beckett's paragraph on his linguistic turn was thus made to end in much the same manner as the letter as a whole – in a decidedly good-humoured fashion, that encouraged Naumann to continue with his scholarly interest in Beckett's writing but made clear that Beckett could assist him only when it came to matters of fact, not interpretation:

Si vous avez d'autres questions à me poser comportant des réponses précises, je suis à votre d[i]sposition. Mais quant à dire qui je suis, d'où je viens et ce que je fais, tout cela dépasse vraiment ma compétence.¹⁰⁰

When closely read in the context in which it originally appeared, we see that what Statement 2 provides us with is not really a *piste* for Beckett Studies to follow, and certainly not an unambiguous indication of where we should look if we are to discover Beckett's true reasons for turning to French. Instead, Statement 2 – like the rest of the letter in which it was originally expressed – is personally addressed to Hans Naumann,

⁹⁹ viz. 'Je crains que cette lettre ne puisse vous servir à grand'chose. Je vous demanderai en tout cas de bien vouloir la considérer comme confidentielle, autrement dit de ne pas la citer' (*LSB II*, 462-463 – SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954]).

¹⁰⁰ *LSB II*, 463 (SB to Hans Naumann [17th February, 1954])

and is in fact intended as a partially satiric, but ultimately kind-hearted, response to Naumann's attempts to engage Beckett's assistance in a matter of interpretation. Faithful to his refusal to pronounce on matters of interpretation – a refusal that has already been demonstrated via his letters to Kay Bole and which is also attested by numerous letters to other scholars who contacted him in the hopes of proving their interpretations¹⁰¹ –, Beckett provided Naumann, not with a definite answer to the question of *why* he turned to French, but instead with a *piste* that was carefully chosen to punningly echo the reason Naumann himself had advanced for Beckett's linguistic turn, and which was only provided at the close of a paragraph-long meditation on the topic of his turn to French which, by carefully cultivating ambiguity and uncertainty, made quite clear to Naumann that, while there might well be deeper motivations for Beckett's turn to French, he would have to find them on his own time, and with no further assistance from Beckett beyond such precise factual responses as the writer would be willing to offer to precise factual questions. Statement 2 then, as may be seen when it is read in the broader context of Beckett's letter to Naumann, was intended neither to entirely clarify nor to entirely confirm, neither to wholly reveal nor to wholly refute, merely to propose an appropriate *piste* and invite the scholar to pursue the matter further on their own time. In this respect, Beckett's response to Naumann's inquiries into his reasons for turning to French serves to reaffirm what was earlier suggested, by way of his letter to Kay Boyle, about the essential commonality between how he viewed questions about his work and how he viewed question about his linguistic turn: Both were matters of interpretation with which he could not help, and which he left any scholars interested in either to research in their own ways, and on their own time.

Bearing in mind what has just been said about the importance of ambiguity in Beckett's response to questions of interpretation, and what has been demonstrated about both the central place accorded to ambiguity in Beckett's response to Naumann and the efforts taken by Beckett to provide Naumann, not with a definite answer, but with a purposefully obscure and appropriately-tailored *piste*, the clarity and directness of Statements 5-9 becomes all the more perplexing: Indeed, where a number of the statements in Shenker's article sound 'too Beckettian' to be easily dismissed despite their uncertain provenance, there is something so non-Beckettian about the directness of these statements on the subject of the post-War linguistic turn, and especially about Statement 9, that, their seemingly indisputable provenance notwithstanding, we must approach them with caution. How, after all, can we

¹⁰¹ We will shortly have an opportunity to consider some of the other letters attesting to this aspect of Beckett's approach to scholarly interpretation.

reconcile the Beckett who spoke so definitively about his reasons for turning to French with the Beckett who flatly stated that he preferred to keep those same reasons 'dans l'ombre' when writing to Hans Naumann? How, more specifically, can we reconcile, on the one hand, the Beckett who, having been asked to explain his turn to French, wrote to Carlton Lake in 1982:

Definite switch [to French] on return to Dublin summer 1945 when Molloy begun. Already in French poems & nouvelles.
Escape from mother Anglo-Irish exuberance & automatisms.
From ex[c]ess to lack of colour.
Distance from the writing from which clearer to assess it.
Slow-down of whole process of formulation.
Impoverished form in keeping with revelation & espousal of mental poverty.
English grown foreign resumable 10 years later.
So on.¹⁰²

with, on the other, the Beckett who, having been asked to write an elucidation of *Endgame*, wrote to Alan Schneider in 1957:

[W]hen it comes to these bastards of journalists I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind. That's for those bastards of critics. And to insist on the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue. If that's not enough for them, and it obviously isn't, or they don't see it, it's plenty for us, and we have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin.¹⁰³

It would be all too easy to claim that the strikingly different attitudes towards interpretation that we find between these two letters can be explained by the fact that, in the first case, Beckett was writing about his linguistic turn, while in the second he was writing about his work. To claim such a thing, however, would be to ignore both the fact that the question of why Beckett turned to French falls under the heading of 'exegesis of any kind' and, more importantly still, the fact that the position advanced by Beckett in his letter to Schneider is clearly the same one that he adopted when discussing his linguistic turn in the letters he wrote to Naumann and Boyle – neither of whom were provided with an 'elucidation', merely a 'piste' and a 'probably'. Statement 9, on the contrary, is very clearly a bottle of interpretive aspirin offered by Beckett to a scholar who was suffering from a headache brought on by the question of why Beckett turned to French. The letter to Lake is, as such, entirely non-Beckettian. At the same time, however, we are every bit as sure that Beckett wrote the letter to Lake as we are that he wrote the letters to Naumann, Boyle, and

¹⁰² *LSB IV*, 592-93 (SB to Carlton Lake [3rd October, 1982]).

¹⁰³ *LSB III*, 82 (SB to Alan Schneider [29th December, 1957])

Schneider. There is, as such, an obvious contradiction between what we know about Beckett's attitude to interpretation and the clarity of the statements he made to Lake. This contradiction deserves some consideration because, in much the same way as the archly Beckettian character of the statements ascribed to Beckett by Shenker invited us to approach 'Moody Man of Letters' cautiously and ask questions about the provenance of these curiously Beckettian statements that were to be found in such a non-Beckettian space, the decidedly non-Beckettian character of Statement 9 invites us to approach Beckett's letter to Lake with equal caution. In this case, the question that we must ask is not 'Where/Whom does this statement come from?' but rather 'Where does the explicitness of Beckett's statements come from?'

In seeking to understand this move from ambiguity – such as we find it in Beckett's letters to Naumann, Boyle, and Schneider – towards the extreme explicitness of Beckett's letter to Lake, it might be suggested that the reason for this move is to be found in what was earlier said about the role Beckett's addressee can play in determining the kind of information that he provided in his letters, and the way such information was expressed. In this case, however, the contrast between, on the one hand, Beckett's refusal to provide an unambiguous explanation for his linguistic turn to either Naumann or Boyle and, on the other, his readiness to provide just such an explanation to Lake cannot be attributed solely to the identities of his addressees. For, though Boyle may have been an acquaintance of long-standing, Beckett's tone of ambiguity in his letter to her is much the same as in his 1954 letter to Naumann, who was entirely unknown to Beckett at the time of their correspondence. The key comparison, however, is between Beckett's letter to Naumann and his letter to Lake since, in each case, Beckett was writing to the same type of correspondent and answering the same type of question: Neither of these men knew Beckett personally when they wrote to him, and both Naumann and Lake had written to Beckett asking why he had turned from writing in English to writing in French.¹⁰⁴ Given the obvious similarities between these two correspondents and the questions they were asking, it is clearly impossible to ascribe the differences between these letters either to the relationship Beckett enjoyed with his correspondents or, for that matter, to the nature of their enquiries.

Another explanation that might be pointed to for the radically different manners in which Beckett's letters to Naumann and Lake respond to the question of why he turned to French is the fact that the letter to Lake was written in 1982. By that

¹⁰⁴ In Naumann's case, this was only one of the questions he had asked as part of his letter. Lake's letter, meanwhile, had been restricted exclusively to the topic of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn (*viz.* *LSB IV*, 593 [n.1]).

time, Beckett was much older than he had been when he wrote to Naumann and it might therefore be suggested that Beckett's willingness to provide a clear and unambiguous response to a question of the 'qui je suis, d'où je viens et ce que je fais' variety – that is, a question of interpretation – in 1982 can be attributed to a change in perspective that had taken place in his attitude to interpretation over the intervening years. Where, in his letter to Naumann of 1954, he had refused to pronounce on matters of interpretation and instead allowed his correspondent to pursue his own enquiries without obvious assistance or imposition, perhaps it is the case that, by 1982, Beckett had simply decided to adopt a more direct, and less ambiguous approach to interpretation.

Initially, this second explanation seems quite appealing since it might also serve to explain why, even before Statement 9, Statements 5-8 also attest to a similar lack of ambiguity. What appears to be the particular charm of this second explanation, however, quickly turns against it when we recognise that, were it to be accurate, this would imply that Beckett's attitude to interpretation began changing in 1959 – that is, when Beckett made the relatively explicit Statement 5 –, and yet we possess a great deal of evidence that shows Beckett's attitude to interpretation to have remained unchanged up to the 1980s. Indeed, even if we restrict ourselves to 1982 – that is, the year in which Beckett wrote to Lake – we can find letters that prove Beckett's attitude to interpretation to have remained entirely consistent with what it had been when he wrote to Naumann, to Boyle or to Schneider in the 1950s. One of the key examples in this regard is a letter that Beckett wrote to the academic Steven Connor, in which Beckett responded to the copy of Connor's article 'Beckett's Animals' that he had been sent by the academic. In his letter to Connor, Beckett adopted the same, resolutely non-interventionist stance on interpretation that characterises his letters to Naumann and Boyle, and which he explicitly advised Schneider to adopt in his dealings with journalists. As when he wrote to Naumann and Boyle, Beckett's letter to Connor carefully avoids simple declarative sentences and shows Beckett instead preferring to cultivate ambiguity:

Thank you for your letter of Jan. 22 & for "my" animals read with interest. The unswottable [*sic*] fly of the early poem (La Mouche) might also have been made to mean something. And the flies of the waiting-room at the end of Watt.¹⁰⁵

As may be seen, all Beckett does in his letter to Connor is to provide him with a *piste* for future research and then leave Connor free to pursue that *piste* as he himself sees

¹⁰⁵ *LSB IV*, 576 (SB to Steven Connor [7th February, 1982])

fit.¹⁰⁶ An even more revelatory example of the degree to which Beckett's attitude towards interpretation remained unchanged in 1982 is to be found in the response that Beckett provided to a query concerning Clov that he had received from one Alexander Haydon, then an 18-year-old student. In his initial letter, Haydon had alerted Beckett to what he believed to be an inconsistency in the text of *Endgame*: If Clov could squat, enquired Haydon, why could he not sit?¹⁰⁷ Beckett's response to Haydon clearly demonstrates that he remained entirely unwilling to offer pronouncements on what he viewed as matters of interpretation – that is, questions of *why* as opposed to *what* –, even when the text being interpreted was one of his own devising:

It is not stated why Clov cannot sit.
It cannot be because he cannot bend his knees. He could sit with
outstretched legs. In squatting there is no seat.
Contact with a seat would therefore seem to be the problem.
The sea-captain in Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* arrives standing in a taxi. His
trouble severe chronic piles might also do the trick.
To mention but them.
Pick your fancy...¹⁰⁸

Not only does Beckett's response to Haydon provide us with another example of the disinterested attitude towards interpretation that we observed in his letter to Connor, it also serves to confirm Beckett's continued adherence to a rigid distinction between matters of fact ('It is not stated why Clov cannot sit'), upon which he had long been happy to comment, and matters of interpretation, on which he still refused to pronounce definitively in 1982 – preferring instead to note only that many interpretations were possible and then leaving Haydon free to decide for himself. Beckett's letter to Haydon also has the advantage of making perfectly clear that the reasons for his utter indifference to providing direct and unambiguous interpretations of his work: Matters of interpretation are, quite simply, inherently opposed to matters of fact. Provided one does not traduce the text entirely, there is no right or wrong answer, merely a multiplicity of interpretations that can be constructed upon (textual) evidence that, in accordance with one's own personal perspective, can be adjudged and appraised in a variety of ways. In the end, Beckett's letter to Haydon contends, all

¹⁰⁶ Significantly, Beckett's letter to Connor echoes his earlier letter to Boyle in the sense that his contention that various of 'his' flies might also have 'been made to mean something' implies that whatever meanings Connor purports to have discovered were, in fact, manufactured by Connor himself.

¹⁰⁷ *LSB IV*, 575 [n.1]

¹⁰⁸ *LSB IV*, 575 (SB to Alexander Haydon [3rd February, 1982]) – As noted by the editors of *LSB*, Beckett is mistaken in his reference to Hamsun's *Hunger* (*Sult*); the sea-captain in question appears in *The Ring Is Closed* (*Ringen sluttet*), another of Hamsun's novels (*viz. Ibid.*, 576 [n.2]).

matters of interpretation remain the privilege of the interpreter and, provided they do not do too much harm to the text, every interpreter is entitled to '[p]ick [their] fancy...'.¹⁰⁹

The perspective that we find in Beckett's letter to Haydon is one that we know and recognise as Beckettian. That letter's perspective on interpretation is the very same one that we find in his letters to Naumann, Boyle, and Schneider, and it is also the one that we find in Beckett's own critical writings. As Beckett puts it in 'Les Deux Besoins': 'Rien ne ressemble moins au procès créateur que ces convulsions de vermisseau enragé, propulsé en spasmes de jugement vers une pourriture d'élection'.¹⁰⁹ If the critical worm prefers one particular 'pourriture' over another, who is the creator to disagree? Or, more specifically, who is Beckett to tell the critical worms attached to his body of work that a particular way of feasting on his literary carcass would be preferable to the one they themselves have chosen?

Bearing these factors in mind then, it becomes impossible to explain the newly explicit tone of Beckett's letter to Lake in terms of his age or in terms of any change in his attitude to interpretation. The Beckett who wrote to Lake explicitly telling him, not only exactly how and why he turned to French, but also how and why he then returned to English, was the very same Beckett who invited Connor to try making a few of his fictional flies 'mean something' and who proposed a clutch of possible explanations for Clov's inability to sit to Haydon and then invited him to '[p]ick [his] fancy'. The author of all of these letters was obviously the same person. And yet, at the same time, Beckett's letter to Lake could not be any further from his letters to Connor and Haydon. Nor, indeed, could it be any further from his letters to Naumann or Boyle in which he spoke of the post-War linguistic turn in the 1950s.

Beckett's letter to Lake demonstrates a fundamentally different attitude to interpretation. Rather than presenting Lake with a variety of possibilities and inviting him to '[p]ick [his] fancy', presenting him with a well-chosen *piste* and sending him on his way, or even contenting himself with stating that one particular narrative seemed to him 'probably true in the main', Beckett's letter to Lake simply provides a blow-by-blow account of his changing motivations for turning towards writing in French and his subsequent journey towards bilingualism. Beckett's letter to Lake, in fact – save for its incorrect dating of *Molloy's* composition to 1945, and its apparent suggestion that both the French-language poems of 1938 and the *nouvelles* were composed in the pre-War period¹¹⁰ –, reads less like a letter written by Beckett and more like notes

¹⁰⁹ *D*, 57

¹¹⁰ The erroneous dating of *Molloy's* composition and the curious correlation of the French-language poems and the *nouvelles* is likely to be no more than an effect of Beckett's uncertain memory. (In this regard, it can be seen as a corollary to the

taken from any one of those critical treatments of Beckett's turn to French that were already readily-available by 1982. More particularly, what Beckett provided Lake with was a bullet-pointed version of his turn to French as understood in terms of the LSH.

Once one has recognised the connection between Beckett's letter and the linguistic-stylistic interpretation of his turn to French, it becomes apparent that every element of the linguistic turn as outlined by this hypothesis is included in Beckett's letter to Lake: The desire to escape the 'automatisms' of his native English; the turn from the 'ex[c]ess' of an overly rich English, to the comparative impoverishment of a French defined by its 'lack of colour'; the supposedly greater clarity and objectivity that Beckett found in French or, as Knowlson puts it, the ability to 'concentrate more on the music of the language, its sounds and its rhythms'; the apparently greater connection between what Beckett wished to express – 'the search for "being" and...an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence', in Knowlson's terms¹¹¹ – and the French language; and then, finally, the discovery that it was finally possible to return to English once it had 'grown foreign' enough. The degree to which the narrative of his turn to French that Beckett provided Lake sounds like the narrative of this turn provided by the LSH is uncanny. More specifically still, it sounds almost exactly like that formulation of the narrative which Beckett himself had encountered during his reading of Kay Boyle's 1957 lecture.¹¹²

At the time, as the reader will recall, Beckett thought that that particular narrative was no more than 'probably true in the main'. At that point, in other words, he still preserved that note of doubt, that refusal to pronounce definitively on a matter of interpretation, that we can recognise as Beckettian. By the time he wrote to Lake, however, his perspective on this interpretation has changed entirely. No longer is this version of events 'probably true in the main', it is now true and irrefutable. Beckett's discussion of his linguistic turn in his letter to Lake sounds, in short, almost nothing like Beckett and everything like a critical treatment of Beckett written by someone familiar with critical discourse around Beckett's writing. It lacks Beckett's ambiguity, it lacks his uncertainty and, most of all, it contravenes that unwillingness to pronounce on matters of interpretation – whether for or against – that, as demonstrated by his letters to Connor and Haydon, was fundamental to Beckett's vision of interpretation even up to 1982. At the same time, it agrees in every respect with how his linguistic turn was, and is, popularly viewed by Beckett Studies.

previously-mentioned lapse of memory in his letter to Haydon, where Hamsun's sea-captain was displaced from one novel to another.)

¹¹¹ *DTF*, 357

¹¹² For this formulation, see Part III, Chapter 4 (546).

I would contend, indeed, that there is only one part of Beckett's letter to Carlton Lake that actually sounds like Beckett – namely, the weariness that we hear in the 'So on' upon which this explanation closes. These two words – imbued with all the boredom of a man telling a story he has heard repeated so many times that he no longer feels the need to tell it in its entirety – are not merely Beckettian, they are also sufficient to reveal something important about the explanation that we find in the Lake letter, something that may serve to explain not only the similarities between the narrative Beckett provided Lake and the narrative he found in Boyle's lecture, but also about his progress from ambiguity to explicitness, about the fundamental divide between Statements 1-4 and Statements 5-9, and about the fact that certain of Beckett's own statements on the subject of the linguistic turn agree so closely with the LSH even as they disagree so entirely with the evidence of his own texts.

Central to an understanding of these two words – and all that they imply – is a recognition of the fact that nothing of what we find in Beckett's letter to Lake is actually new. Certainly, the declamatory tone is strikingly different from what we observed in Beckett's letters to other 'scholars' – Naumann, notably, but also Boyle, Connor, and Haydon –, but it is also precisely the same tone that we find in Statement 8, in which Beckett categorically describes his desire for impoverishment as 'le vrai mobile' of his turn to French. The use of 'vrai' brooks no opposition as to the fundamental role played by impoverishment in the turn to French and is already, in its own way, every bit as blunt as Statement 9. At the same time, this contention that a desire for greater impoverishment was his 'vrai mobile' for turning to French is itself no more than a natural progression from Statement 5 which shows Beckett responding with a simple 'yes' to Herbert Blau's question concerning whether or not he was endeavouring to 'evad[e] some part of himself' by writing in French. This unadorned 'yes' is just as important as the subsequent clarification that the linguistic turn was a matter of French's "weakening" effect'. For, while the clarification offered in Statement 5 is the first that provides us with an unambiguous reference to one of those motivations that the LSH associates with Beckett's turn to French – namely, 'weakness' –, Beckett's explicit 'yes' is the first evidence we have of Beckett willingly, and unambiguously, confirming an interpretation of his reasons for turning to French.

From that point on, such confirmation will become standard, and it will invariably be to motivations of the sort proposed in Statement 5 that Beckett will point whenever he is asked to clarify his reasons for turning to French. Whether speaking to Blau, to Harvey, to Coe, to Janvier, or to Lake, Beckett's response to the question of why he turned to French appears, from 1959 on, to have become entirely standardised. Time and again he provides an increasingly unambiguous repetition of

the factors that Beckett Studies now commonly associates with Beckett's turn to French, and with the post-War linguistic turn especially – that is, a desire for weakness, for poverty, for an escape from poetry. Once we have noted this fact, what becomes clear is that, while Beckett may have preferred to leave his 'raisons urgentes' for turning to French 'dans l'ombre' when he wrote to Naumann in 1954, and while he may have been willing to propose a multitude of interpretations for Clov's inability to sit up when he responded to Haydon's question about *Endgame / Fin de Partie* in 1982, he had, as early as 1959, ceased to maintain ambiguity around the issue of his turn to French and had instead begun to respond to questions on this topic by providing crisp, clean, increasingly well-defined, and increasingly definitive interpretations of his motivations. The question that we must now answer is why this particular question should have become an exception for Beckett. When Beckett was so resistant to providing simplistic interpretations at other times and to other questions, why is it the case that, sometime between 1954 and 1959, the question of why he turned to French become a matter of clearly-defined cause and bullet-pointed effect?

One response to this question would be to suggest that Beckett simply decided to stop being ambiguous and start being direct. That response, however, does not tell us why Beckett's newfound desire to be direct appears to have applied only to questions concerning his reasons for turning to French. Nor, indeed, does it answer the question of why, when he finally decided to begin responding directly to this question, he offered explanations that are contradicted by his own French-language writings. This being so, it seems clear we must look elsewhere for an answer to this question. In terms of where we might begin looking for an answer, the natural starting point is the very first of the explanations that were offered for Beckett's turn to French – namely, Statement 1.

As previously outlined, Statement 1 is not really an explanation for why Beckett turned to French at all. Rather, it is the punchline of a joke whose true butt is a narrator who begs Beckett to disclose his reasons for turning to French. In this regard, it is important to recall that this satiric text dates from 1948. As early as 1948, in other words, Beckett appears to have been making fun of people interested in discovering the 'true' reasons for his turn to French. And yet, as Statement 5 demonstrates, Beckett was still being asked to clarify the 'true' reasons for his linguistic turn in 1959, over a decade later. In the early stages of his career, no doubt, the question maintained a certain degree of novelty – being posed, for example, as in the case of Naumann's letter, by an unknown German correspondent who was fascinated by Beckett's work – and, perhaps more importantly still, these early stages of his career were a time when Beckett still assumed that it might be possible to

preserve his privacy by requesting, as he did with Naumann, that scholars who appealed to him for an explanation of his linguistic turn keep the 'raisons', or at least the 'piste[s]', that he provided to themselves. This is not to say that Beckett hoped his deepest motivation might stay private, merely that he still assumed it might be possible not to see his own words turned into the foundation of an unassailable, author-derived interpretation – something that was anathema to him throughout his career. By 1959, however, it must have been long clear to Beckett that, while people were still intent on asking him to explain his reasons for writing in French, there was no use asking them to refrain from dragging his words into their own interpretations. Whatever Beckett said was liable to be cited, and each citation that could be ascribed to him was another brick in the construction of an author-derived, and therefore utterly unimpeachable, interpretation.

The relative impossibility of keeping what he said to scholars private is proven by Statement 5 which, although it first appeared in *The Tulane Drama Review* in 1960 – where it was made clear that the published text originally took the form of a letter addressed by Herbert Blau to all members of his theatre company –, apparently began life as a possibly off-hand remark made by Beckett in the context of a private conversation between himself and Blau, a man whom he did not know particularly well at the time. Blau, indeed, records that the remark was made in the course of a meeting in Beckett's apartment during which they 'talked long and rather intimately'.¹¹³ This supposed intimacy notwithstanding – and which, given that Beckett does not appear to have known Blau prior to their meeting, nor to have maintained a close relationship with him subsequently, may have been simply an effect of Blau's imagination, or of the 'jigger of Jamieson's [*sic*] best' that he reports they both drank¹¹⁴ –, Blau yet felt entitled to share what he and Beckett discussed, first with his theatre company, then with a general readership. Not only that, but he presented Statement 5 as if it were a particularly personal remark, one that revealed something important about Beckett and demonstrated that the Irishman had been touched to the quick by Blau's own perspicacity:

What *enlivened and disturbed* him most was my remark about the language of his dramas. I said that by writing in French he was evading some part of himself. (*Pause*) He said yes, there were a few things about himself he didn't like, that French had the right "weakening effect."¹¹⁵

By the time Beckett read Blau's letter as printed in *The Tulane Drama Review*, he can no longer have been surprised to see his own words, or some variant thereof,

¹¹³ Herbert Blau, 'Meanwhile Follow the Bright Angels', in *op. cit.*, 90

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 91 – Emphasis mine.

appearing in a publication written by someone else. Already, in 1954, the fact that Beckett explicitly asked Naumann not to cite from their correspondence demonstrates his awareness of the fact that his status as a published, and increasingly famous, writer had drawn him into a pseudo-public space, one where even remarks made in the context of personal correspondence might be deemed fit to print by scholars and critics interested in him, his work, or both. By the same token, the fact that he explicitly requested Naumann not to cite from the letter suggests that he was uncomfortable with this pseudo-public existence and with the manner in which statements of his could be drawn into the scholarly discourse around his works, a discourse of which he wished to have no part. Subsequently, however, Beckett would be provided with ample proof that nothing connected with him would ever be treated as entirely private, and that even those things he had offered to people whom he assumed to be friends could be offered up as an 'insight' into his work.¹¹⁶

While we cannot be entirely sure of Beckett's personal attitude towards the people who chose to publish remarks and comments he made on his reasons for writing in French, or his precise reasons for requesting that Naumann not cite the letter from which Statement 2 derives, we can be sure that, by 1959, Beckett was fully aware these remarks and comments were being cited and that they were invariably being invoked to justify particular interpretations of the deeper reasons for his linguistic turn. By the time he read Blau's article, in fact, Beckett had already seen earlier comments that he had made on his reasons for turning to French quoted in texts such as Gessner's thesis – which he determined to be 'brilliant if one-sided'¹¹⁷ – and Boyle's lecture. Although Beckett may have responded positively to Gessner's thesis and Boyle's lecture, the positivity of his response never obscures the fact that he was, as a rule, uncomfortable with interpretation. (Gessner's thesis is thus 'one-sided' and Boyle's lecture 'a little tiré par le 2-Millimeterschnitt' in parts.) And yet interpretation was precisely what innumerable scholars sought to co-opt him into providing, time and again, with particularly large numbers of them seeking to co-opt him into providing interpretations for his reasons for writing in French. The frequency with which Beckett was confronted by questions of this sort is, it must be assumed, not adequately reflected by the number of statements that have made their way into popular critical discourse around his work. In addition to those that are mentioned in this chapter, therefore, we must also bear in mind all those critics who asked Beckett

¹¹⁶ A key example in this regard is a recording that Beckett allowed Lawrence Harvey, by then a good friend, to make of him reading poems from the novel *Watt*. When Beckett discovered that Harvey had played this recording for others, he was deeply upset and requested that Harvey destroy the recording (*viz.* *LSB IV*, 290 – SB to Lawrence Harvey [4th April, 1972]).

¹¹⁷ *LSB II*, 647 (SB to Barney Rosset [30th August, 1956])

to comment on his linguistic turn but whose publications have been forgotten, as well as all those who, having written letters to Beckett on the topic, received responses that have since been lost.

If we wish to get a sense of the frequency with which Beckett was obliged to comment on his reasons for turning to French, in fact, we need to consider Statement 6 which, as provided by Lawrence Harvey in his *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, is preceded by a parenthetical acknowledgement of just how often people appealed to Beckett to elucidate his linguistic turn:

When I asked him in 1962 (*as everyone seems to, sooner or later*) why he switched from English to French, he replied that for him, an Irishman, French represented a form of weakness by comparison with his mother tongue. Besides, English because of its very richness holds out the temptation to rhetoric and virtuosity, which are merely words mirroring themselves complacently, Narcissus-like. The relative asceticism of French seemed more appropriate to the expression of being, undeveloped, unsupported somewhere in the depths of the microcosm.¹¹⁸

In Harvey's formulation of the elucidation that he himself received from Beckett, the reader will clearly recognise the tenets of the LSH – augmented, admittedly, by traces of Harvey's own critical interpretation of Beckett as being torn between the 'macrocosm' and the 'microcosm'¹¹⁹ – but one will also recognise that the terms of Statement 6 are essentially the same as those of the response that Beckett had already offered to Blau in 1959 and which had been published in 1960. The explanation that Harvey received from Beckett serves, as such, not to throw any fresh light on Beckett's linguistic turn, but to prove that, by 1962, the interpretation of his reasons for turning to French had already settled into a standardised narrative. In this regard, Statement 6 is far less interesting for what it 'reveals' about Beckett's turn to French than for what the parenthesis that precedes it reveals about what Beckett was obliged to endure as a result of critical fascination with a decision made in 1946.

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that, like the various other turns to French that had occurred prior to 1946, Beckett's post-War linguistic turn was at once negatively and positively determined, having been impelled by a wide variety of external forces (including financial need and available publishing opportunities) and internal (namely a keen desire to make his living as a writer, a willingness to write in French, and a corresponding willingness to offer these French-language writings to French-language publications). This explanation clearly differs radically from that most

¹¹⁸ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 196 – Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁹ For details of this divide as perceived by Harvey, see Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 183-214.

commonly proposed by Beckett himself to scholars, an explanation that accords with the terms of the LSH. Whichever explanation one views as more likely, it is obvious that the post-War linguistic turn, like every turn to French, was at once a matter of facts (i.e. dates and places), and a far more complex matter of multifarious *reasons* – some of which were surely circumstantial, others almost certainly exceedingly personal.¹²⁰ In his dealings with scholars interested in his work and in his (post-War) linguistic turn, Beckett showed himself to be quite happy to offer the facts of his turn (*when* he began writing in French, *what* his earliest French-language text had been). As Harvey makes clear, however, the question to which Beckett was asked to respond was not of the *when* or *what* variety. Scholars invariably wanted to know ‘*why* he switched from English to French’.

Up to a certain point, Beckett maintained a degree of good-humour about the whole affair, and a willingness to provide interested scholars – such as Naumann and Gessner – with a variety of variously ambiguous explanations for his switch to French.¹²¹ After a certain point, however – and there is no clear evidence that might allow us to confirm exactly when that point was reached –, Beckett appears to have lost his good-humour, and his preference for ambiguity. Or, to put matters another way, he appears to have lost his willingness to indulge critics who incessantly called upon him to answer the same question he had already answered countless times before. That Beckett should have lost his good humour in this matter is all the more understandable given that, if scholars continued to ask him ‘why he switched from English to French’ even after his comments on the matter had been published in various articles and monographs, it can only have been because – much in the manner of the narrator of the ‘Note’ in *Transition* to whom Beckett, or a character based on him, offered his first ever reason for turning to French – many of these scholars were convinced that, thus far, Beckett had hidden his *true* reasons for turning to French but that they, if only they asked, would be entrusted with the ‘vrai mobile’ he had hidden from others.¹²²

¹²⁰ The ‘existential reorientation’ that was required prior to his pre-War linguistic turn, for instance, required nothing less than a fundamental re-evaluation of what he felt himself to be capable of in French.

¹²¹ The only thing we can be sure of is that Beckett maintained a degree of good humour about this issue up to 1954 – this thanks to the evidence of his letter to Naumann.

¹²² It may, indeed, have been in the hopes of putting an end to such questions once and for all that Beckett informed Janvier that ‘le vrai mobile’ of his linguistic turn had been to ‘[s]’appauvrir davantage’. In Janvier’s *Samuel Beckett*, this remark is dated to 1968 (*viz.* Ludovic Janvier, *Samuel Beckett par lui-même*, 18). As Beckett had known since 1967 that Janvier was working on this particular volume – ‘[Janvier] is to do me again for the *Ecrivains par Eux[-]mêmes* Series. Avec lui je suis tranquille’ (*LSB IV*, 70 – SB to Herbert Myron [21st April, 1967]) –, this comment is likely to have been made during the course of an interview as part of Janvier’s research for this volume, and on

Initially, while he was still willing to humour questions on the subject of his linguistic turn, Beckett provided scholars interested in this question, not with an unambiguous explanation, but with a *piste* and advised them to undertake more research into the truth they already suspected they had found. That, at least, is what we can see in his response to Naumann. In doing so, Beckett was doing no more than he would do time and again when called upon by scholars to provide interpretations for why he had written what he had written the way he had written it.¹²³ While Beckett's letters prove that he continued to deal in this way with scholars interested in various aspects of his literary texts up to at least 1982, his attitude towards scholars interested in his turn to French gradually became quite different. By 1959, we can see that Beckett was no longer offering interested scholars *pistes*, nor was he trying to maintain a level of ambiguity around the question of his linguistic turn. The questions were, as revealed by Lawrence Harvey's parentheses, too frequent; the appeals for fresh clarification too insistent and, as demonstrated by Herbert Blau, any such clarification was likely to make its way into print, no matter what the context of its initial expression, where it would be used to justify and demonstrate that the scholars in question had uncovered the *right* interpretation of Beckett's linguistic turn. When faced with this situation, Beckett might well have chosen to stop responding to the question entirely, but that was not his preferred manner of engaging with scholars – his letters make abundantly clear that he always responded to queries, even those he received from 18-year-old students such as Haydon. In the case of questions concerning his linguistic turn, however, he found a method of responding to such queries that greatly simplified matters for himself and proved eminently satisfactory to scholarship: He simply chose one of the interpretations that had already been proposed by someone else, and presented it whenever called upon to explain the *why* of his linguistic turn. If the narrative we find in Statements 5-8 sounds familiar, in short, I would suggest that it is because Statements 5-8 *are* familiar. And, if Statement 9 provides us with what looks like a blow-by-blow account of the LSH – one that closes with the 'So on' of a man repeating a well-worn narrative –, this is because Statement 9 is indeed nothing more than a blow-by-blow account of the same narrative that Lake might have found if, rather than appealing to Beckett for special insight, he had simply

the understanding that it would appear in print, where, prefaced by such a clear assertion of its accuracy, Beckett might have hoped that unveiling his 'vrai mobile' would suffice as the final word on the matter of his linguistic turn.

¹²³ The proof of this is to be found in those letters to Connor and Haydon that have already been referred to.

opened up any number of the critical studies that had by then been written on Beckett – namely, the well-worn narrative of the LSH.¹²⁴

The idea that Beckett, at some point in his career, began providing those interested in his linguistic turn with an interpretation he himself had derived from someone else may initially appear a curious proposition. There is, however, a good deal of evidence to support it – evidence that is to be found both in Beckett’s post-War statements on the linguistic turn and in the textual record of his French-language writings.

In the first instance, we must recall that we already have an example of Beckett reaching outside himself when called upon to explain his innermost reasons for turning to French. The ‘piste’ that Beckett offered to Naumann in 1954 had its source outside of Beckett, having been intended to echo the terms of Naumann’s own letter. Subsequently, however, Beckett’s approach to those who questioned him on the subject of his linguistic turn changed. Rather than providing scholars with various explanations, tailored to particular situations, Beckett instead began to provide them with an interpretation for his linguistic turn that he himself is known to have encountered at least once, by way of Kay Boyle’s 1957 lecture: This interpretation was, quite simply, a LSH, initially described by Beckett as no more than ‘probably true in the main’, which held the post-War linguistic turn have been provoked by Beckett’s desire to escape the ‘marvellous wealth of the English language’ which had become ‘too easy, too much of a temptation’ and to instead ‘forc[e] himself to write in a foreign language that [wa]s at the same time a more formal and far less rich one’ and which would allow him to ‘better convey the sordidness and poverty of the epoch as he [saw] it’. For a man who felt that the best that could be said of any interpretation was that ‘se non è vero è ben trovato’, the appeal of this particular hypothesis was obvious: It may not have been perfectly accurate, but it was ‘probably true in the main’ and, while we cannot be sure if Beckett quite felt it to be ‘ben trovato’, it was at least pre-prepared and readily-available – which, for a bilingual writer who by 1959 (that is, the point at which Beckett begins to offer unambiguous explanations for the linguistic turn) had already spent a decade being asked to explain his reasons for deciding to write in French in a Paris without English-language publications, was no mean advantage.

Evidence in support of the idea that Beckett took ‘his’ vision of the linguistic turn – as this is formulated in Statements 5-9 – from Beckett Studies is not confined to evidence that can be derived from his correspondence, however. Evidence for its

¹²⁴ Lake might, indeed, have turned to any one of the critical studies in which Statements 6, 7, and 8 had already appeared.

veracity is also to be found in the fact that this particular idea has the notable advantage of serving to explain a number of those curiosities about Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his linguistic turn that were mentioned at the start of this chapter.

The first of these is the fact that, as previously noted, Beckett's own explanations for his turn to French are neither uniform, nor entirely coherent. The standard narrative of weakness and impoverishment is only unambiguously attested from Statement 5. Prior to that, as has been remarked, there is at once variation between and ambiguity within his statements on the subject. The degree of variation between Beckett's statements can be minimised – however problematically – by dismissing Statements 1 and 3. The ambiguity of Statements 2 and 4, however, is far less easily done away with: Such ambiguity is a constituent part of these statements, and to read them as if they were explicit is to do an unnecessary violence to them. To read Statements 2 and 4 as if they were explicit is also to blind oneself to the importance of the fact that Statements 5-9 *are* explicit, and explicit in a way that Beckett elsewhere refused to be. From 1959 on, all the variety and ambiguity of Statements 1-4 vanishes, being replaced by an increasingly rigorous presentation of a narrative that perfectly respects the tenets of the LSH. What we must also recognise is that such rigorous presentation is confined to Beckett's comments on the linguistic turn – in discussions of topics as varied as his treatment of animals, or Clov's inability to sit down in a chair, he remained steadfastly ambiguous and resolutely opposed to elucidation. The very explicitness of Statements 5-9 thus becomes every bit as curious as the ambiguity of Statements 1-4. If we abandon the LSH, however, and view these statements through the prism of the CH – that is, if we read these statements within the broader context of their expression and what we can know of Beckett's own biography – this variation and ambiguity, as well as this rigorous explicitness, begin to make sense. All three may be explained in terms of the context of Beckett's own changing attitude to the question of why he turned to French: From one of good-humoured amusement, to one of increasing boredom.

In addition to making sense of the incoherence that exists between Beckett's statements on the subject of his turn to French, the proposition that Statements 5-9 were derived by Beckett from the critical discourse around his work – and, more specifically, from the LSH – also serves to explain why, while these particular statements perfectly agree with the terms of the LSH, they do not agree with the other evidence that we have for Beckett's turn to French. Most notably, and as previously clarified, that vision of the linguistic turn advanced by Statements 5-9 is contradicted by the evidence of Beckett's own writing. The idea that the 'weakness' of French led to, or facilitated, a stylistic impoverishment in Beckett's writing has been

disproven in a variety of ways over the course of this thesis: In the Introduction, we observed that the style of Beckett's first short-story of the post-War period, 'Suite', was not altered by his turn to French; in Part II, we saw that Beckett's French-language writing of the pre-War period was no weaker nor any less allusive than his English-language writing of the time, and that the same richness of expression was not only possible in both languages, but that Beckett happily indulged himself in this same richness whether he was writing in French or English.

The only unambiguous evidence we have for the 'weakness' or 'poverty' of Beckett's French, in fact, is confined to what Beckett himself is reported to have said in Statements 5-9. The contradictions between Statements 5-9 and the available archival and manuscript record of Beckett's writings is, moreover, not confined to matters of style. The very 'frenzy of writing' that followed the post-War turn to French is, in its way, a refutation of Statements 5-9, and of the LSH.¹²⁵ For, were it true that Beckett's turn to French had led to a '[s]low-down of [the] whole process of formulation', as contended by Beckett's letter to Lake, the creative outpouring of the years 1946-1950 would have taken a very different form. The dates of composition for Beckett's literary works speak for themselves:

TITLE	DATES OF COMPOSITION
'La Fin'	Feb. – May, 1946
<i>Mercier et Camier</i>	Jul. – Oct., 1946
'L'Expulsé'	Oct., 1946
<i>Premier Amour</i>	Oct. – Nov., 1946
'Le Calmant'	Dec., 1946
<i>Eleutheria</i>	Jan. – Feb., 1947
<i>Molloy</i>	May – Nov., 1947
<i>Malone meurt</i>	Nov., 1947 – May, 1948
<i>En attendant Godot</i>	Oct., 1948 – Jan., 1949
<i>L'Innommable</i>	Mar., 1949 – Jan., 1950

Far from '[s]low[ing]-down the whole process of formulation', Beckett's turn to French actually appears to have facilitated the composition of a vast number of works – four short-stories, four novels, and two plays – in rapid succession, and this is to say nothing of his French-language correspondence with Georges Duthuit – 'the single most intense...surge of letters Beckett ever offers'¹²⁶ –, which Beckett wrote at the same time as many of his major, French-language texts and which, by virtue of its scale, has been likened to the frenetic pace of his creative writing.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ SB to Lawrence Harvey *qtd* in *DTF*, 358

¹²⁶ Dan Gunn, 'Introduction to Volume II', in *LSB II*, lxxxix

¹²⁷ *viz.* Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction*, 151

Read in the context of Beckett's own literary production up to that point, the rapidity with which these works were composed is remarkable; Beckett composed more literary works in the four years after his linguistic turn than he composed, in English, in the preceding fifteen. Not only was Beckett able to compose these French-language texts quickly, he also appears to have been able to compose them with relatively little difficulty. Indeed, in the majority of cases, they appear to have been composed more easily than that earlier English-language work. The manuscript of *Molloy*, for example – the first of Beckett's three, French-language novels of the post-War period – was written 'rapidly and with fewer hesitations and *repentirs* than *Watt*'.¹²⁸ If the turn to French had facilitated or enforced a '[s]low[ing]-down of the whole process of formulation', this 'slow-down' is simply not reflected in the composition history of Beckett's French-language works. On the contrary, we find evidence of the exact opposite movement: Not a slowing down, but a speeding-up of the process of formulation and a newly-discovered ease in writing.¹²⁹ When Statements 5-9 are compared with the available evidence, therefore, we find that these statements – the only ones of Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of the linguistic turn to agree unambiguously with the terms of the LSH – are contradicted in almost every respect, and by almost every form of available evidence. The only thing they agree with, in fact, are the terms of the LSH. That this should be the case obviously raises a number of questions. It is hoped that this chapter has made a contribution towards answering at least some of them.

At the outset of this chapter, it was noted that many of Beckett's post-War statements on the subject of his linguistic turn presented a problem for the CH that was advanced in the first three chapters of Part III on account of the fact that they were in profound accord with the LSH, a hypothesis that this thesis deemed to be ill-founded. What we have seen over the course of this chapter is that, while many of these statements are indeed in profound accord with the LSH, that fact alone does not present a problem for the validity of the CH. On the contrary, it may now be seen that the proximity between these statements and the LSH can be traced back to the

¹²⁸ Magessa O'Reilly, Dirk Van Hulle, Pim Verhulst, and Vincent Neyt (eds), 'Genetic Edition of *Molloy*: Catalogue', via *BDMP* <<http://www.beckettarchive.org/molloy/about/catalogue>> [accessed: 22nd February, 2018]

¹²⁹ Or perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a *re*-discovered ease in writing since, as previously noted, the creative flurry that followed the post-War linguistic turn was merely a repetition of that lesser-known 'frenzy of writing' that followed the pre-War linguistic turn, and which saw Beckett compose, over the period 1938-1939 – and quite probably in 1938 alone –, more poetry in French than he had composed in English over the preceding four years.

fundamental problems with that hypothesis: Grounded solely in a partial record of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn – a record that excluded the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook –, and supported by the evidence of certain statements made by Beckett, this hypothesis is entirely unable to account for the contradictions suggested by Statements 1 and 3, nor is it capable of reconciling itself with the inherent ambiguity of Statements 2 and 4 except by way of ignoring this ambiguity in favour of presenting them as modified versions of the unambiguous explanations offered by Statements 5-9. Not only does the LSH fail to explain the totality of Beckett's post-War statements on the post-War linguistic turn, it is also no longer able to explain, to illumine, or even to accommodate the currently-available textual evidence for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn. Additionally, as demonstrated in Part II, the LSH has also led Beckett Studies to misinterpret, or even to entirely ignore, the evident complexity of the writing that Beckett composed in French prior to the 1946 linguistic turn.

By presenting Beckett's turn to French as motivated by a desire to weaken his style and impoverish his literary expression, in short, this hypothesis has blinded decades of scholars to inconsistencies in Beckett's statements on his motivations for turning to French, and to aspects of the writing that Beckett composed in French – be that the uniform style of the English- and French-language versions of 'Suite', or the stylistic richness of Beckett's pre-War French-language texts. At the same time, the fact that the LSH is fundamentally grounded in statements provided by Beckett to explain his post-War turn to French specifically has led scholarship to ignore the complex history of Beckett's various *turns* to French – turns that are never a simple matter of literary style, and invariably a matter of complex circumstances and particular contexts.¹³⁰ The CH, on the contrary, allows us to avoid the traps and pitfalls of the LSH: It serves to clarify Beckett's various turns to French while respecting the particularity of each turn; it brings to light, and serves to explain, how Beckett's pre-War French-language writing could be so complex, as well as why the English- and French-language versions of 'Suite' should be so similar; it also serves, finally, to explain the various inconsistencies of Beckett's post-War statements on his turn to French for these inconsistencies have been demonstrated to be, fundamentally, a matter of context.

The reader may perhaps disagree with certain aspects of this chapter's treatment of Beckett's statements on his post-War linguistic turn, or with certain aspects of this study of Beckett and French more broadly – be it its treatment of

¹³⁰ The one exception to this rule, as noted, may be Statement 6. Yet, whether Beckett was speaking particularly of his use of French for the composition of the *Poèmes 37-39*, his post-War linguistic turn, or his motivations for writing in French generally, it remains the case that Statement 6 too has been overwhelmingly used by critics to support prevailing critical understandings of the post-War linguistic turn.

Beckett's engagement with French up to the moment of his 1946 linguistic turn, his pre-War French-language texts, or his various turns to French. Such disagreement is to be expected, and welcomed. If the deleterious effects of the LSH prove anything, it is the dangers of overly widespread agreement in matters of scholarly enquiry. At the same time, I would contend that there has been much worth to this final chapter's treatment of Beckett's post-War statements on his switch to French, as there is much value to the CH that has been advanced by this thesis, and to the study of Beckett's engagement with French over the period 1906-1946 that this hypothesis has facilitated. Whatever else it has achieved or failed to achieve, this engagement has brought much new information to light, and shed fresh light on many issues that Beckett Studies has for too long left unexamined. No doubt, other readers might choose to read this new information differently, while still others may find that the fresh light shed upon certain issues has served to place other issues in a new kind of obscurity. The reader may indeed feel that, in the final estimation, their interpretation of Beckett and French during the period 1906-1946 does not agree with what has been offered here. If the reader should feel this way, that is entirely understandable: This thesis, like any engagement with matters literary, has been no more than an interpretation. It cannot pretend to be anything more than possible, and cannot hope to be anything other than well-expressed. *Se non è vero*, therefore, it is hoped that the reader will find it has at least been, relatively, *ben trovato*.

Conclusion

This thesis has provided a study of Samuel Beckett and French over the period from his earliest exposure to the language as a child up to the moment of his post-War linguistic turn in 1946. Having taken as its starting point the failure of the most widespread explanation for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn – an explanation that has here been referred to as the Linguistic-Stylistic Hypothesis (LSH) – to account for the evidence of the 'Suite' Notebook, this thesis has proposed an alternative explanation. That alternative, the Contextual Hypothesis (CH), examines Beckett's French, not in the abstract nor in terms of the purported association between his use of French and a search for 'weakness' and 'impoverishment' that has long defined critical engagements with his writing, but with reference to the particular contexts in which Beckett found himself.

Adopting this contextualising approach throughout, and embracing three key aspects of Beckett's engagement with French – as a student of the language, a reader of French Literature, and a French-language writer –, this thesis has not only proposed a novel response to the well-worn question of *why* Beckett began writing in French in 1946, but has also made an original contribution to knowledge by expanding and enriching critical understanding of the role that the French language played in Beckett's life and in his art up to the moment of the post-War linguistic turn. In what follows, the nature of this thesis' contribution to knowledge will be recapitulated and some avenues for future research, which might serve to build upon its insights, will be proposed.

Although Beckett's 1946 turn to French was central to this thesis, it would have been impossible to appreciate the full value of this turn without the broader contextualisation permitted by Part I. By applying to the examination of Beckett's engagement with French up to the post-War linguistic turn the same focus on context that would subsequently be applied to the moment of the turn itself, Part I allowed us to 'situate' Beckett's French and thus to better understand what it meant for him to turn to this language in 1946.

Tracing Beckett's engagement with French from the very beginning enabled us to correct certain misconceptions that have made their way into critical discourse around his earliest exposure to French. More particularly, we were able to challenge the contention that Beckett's experience of French as a student at Earlsfort House School necessarily kept him at a remove from the living language, and led him to

associate language study with pedagogical violence. On the contrary, it was argued that the environment in which Beckett found himself at Earlsfort House meant that his early study of French was most likely defined by engagement with the living language in a manner quite different from what would have been found in most other Irish schools of the time. Not only did this discussion demonstrate the necessity of taking account of the particularity of Beckett's schooling, it also served to remind us of the particularity of Beckett's French. Viewing Beckett's French in terms of abstract notions about what it means to speak or write in a foreign language – such as Michael Edwards's contention that '[a] foreign language is...a kind of art work'¹ – was shown to be unhelpful. Far from being a 'foreign' language, comparable to any of the other foreign languages that Beckett is known to have been familiar with, it was argued that Beckett's French must be understood as a language possessed of its own specificity, one born of the environments in which he studied it, and of the place it held in his life. In this regard, it was contended that Beckett's relationship with French was marked by an evident passion for the language – a passion that, though often ignored in favour of focussing on Beckett's youthful engagement with English Literature, was firmly established even prior to his entry into TCD.

Having examined the role that the French language played in Beckett's early life, our focus then shifted to French Literature, and it was demonstrated that Beckett's years of study at TCD served to do much more than provide him with an 'English literary sensibility'.² On the contrary, these years were shown to have provided Beckett with a specifically *French* literary sensibility, one that stayed with him to the very end of his life – when, alongside Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale', a poem often presented as emblematic of the special place English Literature held in his heart, Beckett also recited Vigny's 'La Mort du Loup', a poem he first encountered as a student at TCD. This sensibility was one upon which Beckett was shown to have expanded considerably in the years after he left TCD. By focussing on one particular author whom Beckett discovered only after leaving TCD – namely, André Malraux – a new source for the opening scene of *Murphy* was proposed. The importance of these years was not limited to the strictly literary sensibility that Beckett developed nor the literary references that he accumulated, however. Careful examination of the notes taken by students who attended lectures on 'Racine and the Modern Novel' given by Beckett in the early 1930s revealed that Beckett's interest in the pictorial and sculptural qualities of Racine's drama was inherited from his mentor, Thomas Brown Rudmose-Brown. Tracing Beckett's fascination with these aspects of Racine back to

¹ Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French', 75

² Mark Byron, 'English Literature', in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context*, 218

Rudmose-Brown helped at once to clarify the origins of Beckett's passion for visual art – a passion as evident in his earliest writing as it is in his mature staging of his own plays –, while also drawing attention to the unexpected ways in which Beckett's study of French Literature contributed to the formation of his poetics.

At this point, our attention returned to Beckett's engagement with the French language, and specifically with the living language. Tracing his movement through three distinct linguistic environments – namely, the ENS, the city of Paris, and the village of Roussillon –, we considered how each of these environments contributed to the development of Beckett's French and how this contribution was reflected in his French-language writing. Arguing against critics who had privileged Beckett's dialogue with Céline as the primary vector for the emergence of colloquialisms in his post-War texts, it was proposed that Beckett's exposure to the living language played a key role in how his French evolved over the course of the 1930s up until his linguistic turn of 1946. Significantly, this section of our study was concerned not merely with the particularity of Beckett's French, but also with the relationship between Beckett's French and his English, as it was argued that the divide between these languages became, for Beckett, increasingly porous from the 1930s on. With regard to Beckett's literary production, the effects of this porosity were to be observed in his comparable handling of colloquial forms of both languages. In the private space of Beckett's notebooks and manuscripts, meanwhile, we found evidence that French and English were, by the late 1930s, essentially interchangeable for him. Recognition of this interchangeability led us to contend that the years in Roussillon, generally held to have been of significance because they introduced Beckett to new forms of French, should be seen as having introduced Beckett to new forms of *language*. French, by this stage, was no longer merely a means of discovering new ways of saying what Beckett already knew how to say in English; French had become the vehicle for wholly new experiences, and entirely new modes of expression.

Finally, we turned our attention to statements made by Beckett on the subject of French during the pre-War period. Rather than being indicative of a consistent view of French, these statements were interpreted as responses to particular contexts: Beckett was observed cautioning his students away from stylistic excess; repeating an understanding of Racinian style derived from his own years as a student; and repeating an understanding of the French language that can be traced back centuries, to Rivarol and beyond. By contextualising these statements, we also drew attention to the uncertainties that underlie each of these remarks and which remind us that these statements, often taken as corroborating the connection between French and stylelessness that is central to the LSH, are a more problematic form of evidence than they initially appear.

Over the course of Part I, as this recapitulation suggests, we traced the development of Beckett's French as what began as a 'foreign' language learned in the classroom became a deeply personal language, one to which Beckett appealed as easily and as readily as he appealed to his English, and which was by times scarcely distinguished from English in his eyes. By 'situating' Beckett's French, it was seen that, in turning to French in 1946, Beckett was not really crossing a divide since, by that stage, the languages had become porous; in turning to French, there was no 'psychological wrenching of linguistic foundations', as described by Ann Beer, since French too had, by that point, become essential to Beckett's selfhood.³ In his private writings, the only factor that led Beckett to prefer French to English, or *vice versa*, was personal choice; in his public writings, the only factors that might lead him to choose one language over another would necessarily need to come from without. Indeed, in the final chapter of Part I, we saw that Beckett's opinions on the French language too could be shaped by factors that came from without. Both of these insights would go on to be reaffirmed by our analysis of Beckett's turns to French, and his post-War statements on the 1946 linguistic turn, in Part III.

Where Part I focussed primarily on the role that French played in Beckett's life up to 1946, Part II centred on the role played by French in Beckett's literary art during the pre-War period. Engaging with the totality of those original, French-language literary texts that are universally recognised as having been composed by Beckett during the pre-War period, and moving away from models of interpretation proposed by critics who previously engaged with these texts, Part II's analysis argued for the need to reconsider both the place that French held in Beckett's early development as a literary artist and the complexity of his French-language poetry of the later 1930s.

In the first chapter, our examination of the French-language texts that Beckett produced prior to his 1937 move to Paris asserted the importance of French as a constituent element of his developing poetics in the early 1930s. 'Le Concentrisme', for example, generally presented as a mere *canular*, was shown to prefigure much of Beckett's early English-language literary production – particularly, the comic, erudite voice of works such as *Dream* and the stories of *MPTK*, as well as that use of allusion to further thematic aims which would be a central feature of his literary output throughout his career, particularly in the pre-War period. Lucien's letter in *Dream*, meanwhile, was shown to have an important thematic function within Beckett's first novel, working in tandem with the Smeraldina-Rima's love-letter

³ Ann Beer, 'The Use of Two Languages in Samuel Beckett's Art', 177

to demonstrate Belacqua's opposition to sexuality of any sort. Far from being a time of what Chiara Montini has termed 'monolinguisme polyglotte'⁴ – a time, in other words, during which French remained peripheral to Beckett's literary production – it was argued that French-language composition played an integral role in Beckett's earliest development as a literary artist.

Unlike the prose that Beckett composed in French prior to 1937, his French-language poems of the early 1930s were admittedly less complex than the prose texts in which they were nested. Certainly, these works were not entirely without merit, and close-reading showed 'C'n'est au Pélican' to offer an early example of a text grounded in religious imagery and allusion. For truly successful French-language poetry – work that shows Beckett ably deploying the French language in the creation of allusively-complex poems, of a piece with his English-language production –, however, we need to wait until the French-language poetry of the late 1930s.

This poetry constituted the focus of Part II's second chapter, where we argued against the vision of these poems as 'relatively straightforward' that currently prevails within Beckett Studies.⁵ In its stead, we advocated the need to view these poems as diversely complex creations: Poem such as 'they come' / 'elles viennent', originally written in English, and 'Rue de Vaugirard', originally written in French, were seen to attest to an undeniable degree of stylistic attenuation; poems such as 'être là sans mâchoires sans dents', 'bois seul', and 'jusque dans la caverne ciel et sol', however, all originally written in French, contained allusions and intertextuality every bit as complex as what one finds in Beckett's English-language poetry of the mid-1930s; 'La Mouche', another French-language poem, though perhaps less complicated than others in the collection, demonstrated Beckett's skill as a poet, exploiting the possibilities of both the French language and Shakespearean allusion; the unpublished poem 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges', meanwhile, once again written in French, was posited as evincing a newly subtle form of complexity, one that combined attenuated literary allusion with a less overt form of autobiography, and which might be said to look towards the vaguened aesthetic of the post-War period.

While the example of 'Le Concentrisme' had already led some critics to recognise that Beckett's use of French did not necessarily prevent him from indulging in precisely the same stylistic modes that he deployed in English during the pre-War period, critical examination of the *Poèmes 37-39* had thus far failed to acknowledge the complexity of these poems. In particular, critical discussions of these texts had failed to shed light on the rich panoply of intertexts that were discovered in the course

⁴ Chiara Montini, « *La bataille du soliloque* » : *genèse de la poétique bilingue de Samuel Beckett (1929-1946)*, 24

⁵ *CP*, 373

of the analysis proposed by this thesis, and which showed Beckett engaging with literary forebears (Hugo, Musset, Renard, Shakespeare, Verlaine...), Biblical allusion, and Greek mythology, as he pursued issues and concerns of direct personal relevance to him at that point in his life and grappled with unhappiness, loneliness, and loss in the aftermath of a near-fatal stabbing.

As was the case in Part I, the interrogation of existing critical discourse constituted a key thread that ran through Part II. The engagement with Beckett's writing that these chapters afforded served not only to uncover new depths in Beckett's French-language compositions, but to shed necessary light on the degree to which critical engagement with these texts – and with Beckett's pre-War use of French more generally – has been hampered by the conviction that this language was for Beckett, primarily, a vehicle for stylistic simplification. By setting aside this conviction, we were able to look afresh at many texts that had previously been thought either insignificant, or straightforward. In so doing, we were able to do more than demonstrate the complexity of these texts. We were also able to enrich our understanding of Beckett's engagement with French Literature in a number of respects – most notably, we have pushed back Beckett's engagement with Éluard to the very beginning of the 1930s, uncovered evidence that argues strongly in favour of Renard having played a key role in Beckett's stylistic development towards the close of the decade, and found evidence of a complex intertextual engagement with a poem by Hugo, a writer Beckett was not previously known to have engaged with so intensely.

Taken together, the chapters of Part II confirmed both the necessity and the value of setting aside existing pre-conceptions: In the case of 'Le Concentrisme', we saw how this text, which has frequently been underestimated owing to its very particular generic status as a 'spoof' lecture, deserves to be seen as an important waypoint in Beckett's development as a writer, prefiguring as it does many of the characteristics that define his properly literary production. In the case of Beckett's French-language poems of the late 1930s, meanwhile, the pre-conceptions that needed to be set aside were those inherited from the LSH, according to which Beckett's use of French is best understood as a quest for stylistic impoverishment unless the presence of overt references to philosophers or explicit allusions obliges the critic to read the text otherwise. Our readings approached Beckett's French-language writing solely on the understanding that they were written by Beckett, with all the potential for complexity that that implies. By reading Beckett's French-language poetry in a manner that privileged the text of these poems over assumptions about the relationship between Beckett's use of French and the style of his writing, we were able to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of Beckett's poetry of the late-1930s

and his use of French, while also pointing the way towards a reconsideration of the evolution of his style.

Taking as its focus Beckett's turns to French, Part III returned to a more overtly biographical-historical approach as Beckett's reasons for turning to French between 1930 and 1946 were re-examined in accordance with the contextualising approach that guided this study throughout. Building upon the insights of Parts I and II, Part III argued in favour of seeing Beckett's use of French, not as an exclusively personal choice born of his desire to 'weaken' or 'impoverish' his literary expression, but as a decision taken at various times and for various reasons. Certainly, it was recognised that Beckett was always free to choose to write in French or English, but this freedom was not absolute; it was conditioned by the contexts in which he found himself. It was these contexts that we were interested in elucidating and, by clarifying each of them in turn, we saw that Beckett's turns to French were never a matter of literary style.

Earlier on in his career, it was argued that the choice of French was sometimes necessitated by the demands of the text upon which he was working, or the nature of the material that he hoped to publish. Subsequently, analysis of the various publishing avenues available to Beckett revealed that, while the choice to write in one language or the other might always have been his, the ability to *publish* his writings was always dependent upon factors beyond his control – namely, the existence, or otherwise, of publishers and publications willing to accept his work, and his access, or otherwise, to persons capable of assisting him in publishing his work.

If the (non-)availability of suitable publishing outlets would have a significant role to play in both Beckett's pre- and post-War linguistic turns, we also observed that other factors were equally of crucial importance. The pre-War turn, for example, was shown to have been intimately connected with Beckett's exacting standards for translations of his own work, as Alfred Péron's unsatisfactory translations of Beckett's poetry led him towards the 'existential reorientation', to use George Craig's phrase, that finally allowed him, in 1938, to begin writing French-language texts with the intention of publishing them in French-language publications for Francophone readers.⁶ This willingness to publish for Francophone readers was so critical, in fact, that it was argued that, whatever the precise motivation for the post-War linguistic turn may have been, it was Beckett's pre-War turn that made it possible, and not the years Beckett spent in Roussillon.

⁶ George Craig, *Writing Beckett's Letters*, 34

When we finally came to examine Beckett's motivations for the post-War turn, these were shown to be varied, but never purely literary. Instead of looking to Beckett's art, we looked to the context in which he found himself at that particular moment – to his need to support himself financially, and to his keenly-felt desire to make his living as a creative writer. It was this need and this desire that, firstly, led him back towards the short-story form after over a decade of working in other genres and, subsequently, to writing in French, as he had already done between 1938-1939. If it was acknowledged that the possible existence of other factors cannot be entirely dismissed, the explanation proposed in this thesis, grounded in the CH, was shown to be capable of accounting for all the available evidence for Beckett's post-War linguistic turn in a manner that previously-advanced explanations cannot.

The only evidence for which the CH was unable to account were certain of Beckett's statements on the subject of his own post-War linguistic turn. It was these statements – and, indeed, all of Beckett's post-War statements on his turn to French – that were the subject of the final chapter of Part III. Over the course of that discussion, contextualisation once again served to reveal the internal inconsistencies between these statements, as well as the inconsistencies between the bluntly factual approach adopted by Beckett in responding to questions on the subject of his linguistic turn from 1959 on, and his invariably ambiguous response to other questions of interpretation. By its very nature – primarily concerned, as it was, with the evanescent context of Beckett's emotional response to the question of why he turned to French – the final chapter's discussion could only be speculative. Nonetheless, its interrogation of Beckett's post-War statements on his linguistic turn was valuable in that it served to reveal the inconsistencies and uncertainties that characterise these statements. Many scholars of Beckett's writing have preferred to view Beckett as an oracle, and to treat statements made by Beckett on the subject of his linguistic turn as irrefragable, if by times opaque, verities. Our discussion argued for understanding these statements in rather different terms – namely, as occasionally abstruse answers offered by a man to questions he had already been asked countless times before, answers capable of being coloured by this man's own perspective on the question asked. Undoubtedly, Beckett's own statements can be an important resource for those seeking to interpret his turn to French, and his work more broadly; they are also an occasionally problematic resource, however. Beckett being now dead, critics interested in his writing can no longer hope to address these problems by putting him to the question again. The better to make use of the statements it does have, therefore, it is all the more necessary that Beckett Studies questions itself, and carefully interrogates what it thinks it knows about Beckett, including about even topics as central to his life and

work as his engagement with French. This study has been an important contribution towards just such an interrogation.

Naturally, interrogation is not necessary for Beckett Studies alone. Academic enquiry is, by its very definition, a state of perpetual questioning and reconsideration. The present study of Beckett and French has perhaps served primarily to raise questions for other scholars to pursue. In what remains of this Conclusion, some of the questions raised by this thesis will be highlighted. (The questions and avenues for further research that will here be noted are, of course, only those that appear most pertinent to the present author. Others might be cited; the reader will be best-placed to judge which aspects of this study they believe to invite, or demand, further exploration.)

It has already been recalled that a conviction in the need to recognise the particularity of Beckett's French was central to Part I. While no other 'foreign' language in Beckett's life could claim to hold a place comparable to his French, recognition of the degree to which the term 'foreign language' is unhelpful, and recognition of the degree to which critical understanding even of Beckett's French – by far the best-studied of his languages – is incomplete suggests that consideration of the particularity of Beckett's other foreign languages (German, Italian, Spanish, Latin...) might prove fruitful. Admittedly, some of these languages have already benefited from such study.⁷ To date, however, even a language as important to Beckett as Italian awaits the treatment it deserves – that is, one which moves beyond Beckett's interaction with Italian Literature.⁸ In addition to individual studies,

⁷ German, at least, has been the object of much study, and any reader interested in Beckett's German should consult the following texts: Thomas Hunkeler, 'Un cas d'hyperthermie littéraire: Samuel Beckett face à ses 'juvéniles expériences de fièvre allemande'', in Matthijs Engelberts, *et al.* (eds), *SBT/A 10*, 213-22; Therese Fischer-Seidel and Marion Fries-Dieckmann, *Der unbekannt Beckett: Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005); Marion Fries-Dieckmann, *Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Sprache. Eine Untersuchung der deutschen Übersetzung des dramatischen Werks* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007); Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011); Jan Wilm and Mark Nixon (eds), *Samuel Beckett und die deutsche Literatur* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013). Spanish too, though lesser studied, has benefited from the analyses proposed by José Francisco Fernández: José Francisco Fernández, 'Spanish Beckett', in *Dreaming the Future: New Horizons/Old Barriers in 21st-Century Ireland*, ed. by María Losada Friend, Josme María Tejedor Cabrera, José Manuel Estévez-Saá and Werner Huber (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2011), 63-74; Francisco Fernández, José, 'Surrounding the Void: Samuel Beckett and Spain', in *Estudios Irlandeses* (No. 9 – 2014), 44-53.

⁸ An important step towards examination of Beckett's engagement with Italian beyond Italian Literature was taken by Doireann Lalor (*viz.* Doireann Lalor, "'The Italianate Irishman": The Role of Italian in Beckett's Intratextual Multilingualism', in Erik

comparative study of Beckett's languages could potentially uncover deeper significance in Beckett's deployment of the various languages – including differing literatures and registers –, with which he was familiar. The present discussion was only able to briefly allude to the vastly differing emotional connotations that two languages in particular – namely, German and Irish – had for Beckett, but even this briefest of mentions proved suggestive.⁹ More extensive engagement with the affective dimension of Beckett's languages would surely be worthwhile for a writer whose love of words is writ large in his work: '[W]ords', as Beckett wrote in *From an Abandoned Work*, 'have been my only loves, not many'.¹⁰

The *grand absent* of Part II was certainly the *Petit Sot* cycle. Although the present author believes the exclusion of these poems to have been fully justified based on the currently-available evidence and by virtue of the more extensive analysis of the works Beckett is universally recognised to have written that this exclusion facilitated, close-readings of this curious suite of poems would constitute a welcome supplement to the discussion of 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' that was proposed here. In a similar vein, and while Part II's consideration of Beckett's French-language writings suggested some respects in which these writings might be integrated into our understanding of Beckett's development as a writer, a study that built upon what has here been suggested about the polyvalent complexity of Beckett's French-language compositions and which took as its primary focus the style of Beckett's writing – in both English and French – would prove complementary to the present thesis' overarching concern with Beckett's French.

The final avenue for future research that might be considered is less a complement or a development than a continuation: Having pursued the present analysis up to the moment of the linguistic turn in 1946, the years from that moment on remain to be examined. In the Introduction, of course, it was noted that John Fletcher already argued in 1976 for the importance of recognising circumstance as a

Tonning, Matthew Feldman, Matthijs Engelberts, and Dirk Van Hulle (eds), *SBT/A 22*, 51-65). Undoubtedly, however, there remains much more to be said on this topic.

⁹ The positive emotional connotations of German are especially worthy of further consideration, as thus far critics who have mentioned the possible emotional resonances of this language – such as Thomas Hunkeler (*viz.* Thomas Hunkeler, 'Un cas d'hyperthermie littéraire: Samuel Beckett face à ses 'juvéniles expériences de fièvre allemande'', 218) or Mark Nixon (*viz.* Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937*, 9-10) – have tended to present it as having been marked primarily by negative emotions. This negativity is something that Beckett's references to German in his letters – as, for instance, when he speaks of 'wallowing in Mozart and German' (TCD MS 10402 – SB to TMG [11th November, 1932]) as one wallows in a pleasurable activity – do not necessarily bear out.

¹⁰ *TFN*, 61

key motivating factor behind Beckett's mature linguistic choices.¹¹ It was also noted in the Introduction, however, that Pascale Sardin has recently called for an approach to Beckett's bilingualism and (self-)translational practice that 'question[s] the romantic vision of the bilingual writer who allegedly created himself independently from the "rules of art" ...and outside the polysystems...in which he was, in reality, an active agent'.¹² Applying the CH to Beckett and French over the period 1946-1989 would constitute an important step towards providing that contextualising study of Beckett's mature linguistic practice which, as Sardin's remarks attest, remains a *desideratum* within Beckett Studies. Certainly, it might initially appear as if application of the CH to this later period would have less to offer given that, as Fletcher recognised, many of the forces that drove Beckett's linguistic choices from the 1950s on were more obvious than those that played a role in his use of French over the period that has been studied here. If the present study has demonstrated anything, however, it is that careful contextualisation has the potential to uncover facts previously ignored or underappreciated by Beckett Studies, even on topics as apparently well-combed as Beckett's reasons for turning to French in 1946. This being so, the possibility remains that a contextualising study of Beckett and French during the period from the post-War linguistic turn up to the time of Beckett's death might serve to reveal much that is novel. Most notably, such a study would be able to provide that close, textual analysis of the French-language section of the 'Suite' Notebook of which the present thesis was able to offer only the briefest suggestion in its introduction. Having taken the precise moment of Beckett's post-War linguistic turn to French as its *terminus ad quem*, a close textual study of the French-language text in Beckett's 'Suite' Notebook was not the proper task of this thesis. It is to be hoped, however, that someone – building upon what this study has revealed about the deficiencies of the LSH, and guided by the possibilities of the CH – may choose to take this notebook and its French-language text as their *terminus a quo*.

¹¹ viz. John Fletcher, 'Écrivain bilingue', in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (eds), *Cahier de l'Herne : Samuel Beckett*, 209

¹² Pascale Sardin, 'Becoming Beckett', in Nadia Louar and José Francisco Fernandez (eds), *SBT/A 30*, 83

APPENDICES

Note:

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**APPENDIX I (a):
TRANSCRIPTION OF 'LE CONCENTRISME' TYPESCRIPT
(UoR MS 1396/4/15 MSS PROSE/CON 01 PHOTOCOPIES)**

1

'Monsieur

Vous êtes le premier à vous intéresser à cet imbécile. Voici tout ce que j'en sais : j'ai fait sa connaissance ou, plus exactement, il m'a imposé cette incommodité, la veille de sa mort, à Marseille. Il s'est cramponné à moi dans un sombre bistrot où, à cette époque, j'avais l'excellente habitude d'aller me soûler deux fois par semaine. « Vous avez l'air » me dit-il « suffisamment [*sic*] idiot pour m'inspirer une confiance extrême. Enfin » poursuivit-il – (je ne change rien à ses logoglyphes) – « enfin et pour la première fois je tombe sur un animal qui, si j'ose en croire à mes yeux, est totalement et idéalement dépourvu d'intelligence, plongé dans une divine et parfaite nullité. » Il s'interrompit, se découvrit, et puis, d'une voix vibrante : « Je vous embrasse, mon frère ! » s'écria-t-il. Je le repoussai vivement. Il faillit tomber, pâlit, et se mit à tousser d'une façon si douloureuse [*sic*] que je ne pus m'empêcher de regretter la violence de mon geste. Mais il se reprit bientôt et m'adressa de nouveau, maintenant d'une voix à peine perceptible. « Monsieur » dit-il, « permettez-vous que je vous pose une question ? »

« Faites, Monsieur », lui dis-je, froidement.

« Seriez-vous de Toulouse, par hasard ? »

« Oui, Monsieur. » Il tressaillit, puis se mit à bégayer : « Un service, Monsieur, rien qu'un petit service. Excusez-moi. » Il sortit de sa poche une carte de visite, écrivit rapidement une adresse sur le revers, et me la donna. « Au nom de tout ce qui vous est précieux » me dit-il, « venez à cette adresse demain vers midi, présentez cette carte, dites que vous êtes le Toulousain, dites que... » Je lui coupai la parole. « Monsieur » lui dis-je, « je n'en ferai rien et je ne viendrai pas. Je ne vous connais pas, vous m'avez insulté, vous.... » « Mais si » insista-t-il, presque avec impatience, « mais si, vous viendrez. » Puis, insolemment : « Seriez-vous si bête.. » Il se tut. Enfin, et doucement cette fois : « Mais pas avant midi », et là-dessus il sortit.

J'ai fait tout ce qu'il m'avait demandé. Il avait laissé chez la concierge un gros paquet adressé à « mon cher ami de Toulouse qui a promis de venir. » « Qui est ce Monsieur ? » demandai-je à la concierge. Elle ne répondit pas. « Qui est cet idiot ? Où est-il ? » J'étais furieux. « Paraît qu'il est mort » me dit-elle.

Et voilà, Monsieur, tout ce que j'en sais, et je vous garantis que cela me suffit largement. Dans le paquet il n'y avait que les cahiers qui vous ont intrigué si fort intrigué. Je les ai transmis au conservateur de notre Musée ^{^^}Bibliothèque^{^^}, d'abord

pour m'en débarrasser [*sic*] au plus vite et ensuite dans l'espoir que, perdus entre toutes les pourritures de cette maison des morts et des moribonds, ils ne sauront plus troubler personne. Il ne me reste que d'exprimer tous mes regrets que cette noble aspiration ne se soit pas réalisée, et de vous prier, Monsieur, d'agréer ma sympathie et mon plus profond mépris.

Signé : | |

2

Il n'y a pas que les coups d'encensoir échangés avec une si triste patience entre le voleur et le frôleur de gloire qui soient inédits. Je déplore l'absence de son Altesse Sérénissime de Monaco. Car je suis vraiment le premier à violer ce sujet, et je sais avec quelle violence les cœurs nobles sont activés par une matière intacte, même si elle ne dispose pas des pièces de convictions d'une amitié miraculeuse. Intacte et parfaitement obscure. Pas de scandale, pas de sensation. Des concierges, beaucoup de concierges. Jean du Chas souffrait d'une véritable obsession à cet égard et il en avait une conscience très nette. « Le concierge », a-t-il écrit dans un de ses cahiers, « est la pierre angulaire de mon édifice entier. » Mais il nous présente un concierge pour ainsi dire idéal, idéal et abstrait, un concierge absolu, qui ne sait potiner. De nombreuses indications textuelles m'inclinent à voir dans ce motif presque névralgique le symbole [*sic*] d'une de ces terribles manifestations de la nature¹, terribles et irrégulières, qui déchirent l'harmonie cosmique et démentissent [*sic*] tous ceux pour qui l'artisan de la création est le prototype de l'artiste néo-classique et l'enchaînement précaire des mois et des saisons un manifeste rassurant et cathartique : par exemple, une de ces averses ex nihilo qui ponctuent, heureusement à des intervalles assez espacés, le climat de cette île. Mais ce n'est là qu'une spéculation et si j'en ai parlé dès le début de mon discours c'est afin que vous preniez connaissance au plus tôt de la qualité sobre, unie, je dirai presque monochrome, de l'art chasien.

Jean du «Chas, fils unique, illégitime et posthume d'un agent de change belge, mort en 1906 par suite d'une maladie de peau, et de Marie Pichon, vendeuse dans une maison de couture à Toulouse, est né à l'ombre rouge de la Basilique St. Sernin, un peu avant midi le 13 avril 1906, aux divagations feutrées d'un carillon en deuil. A part les circonstances peu édifiantes de sa mort, nous ne savons rien de son père. Sa mère était d'origine allemande et entretenait des rapports suivis avec sa grand'mère, Annalisa Brandau, qui dirigeait toutes seule, et, paraît-il, avec une habileté surhumaine, sa petite propriété aux bords de la Fulda, tout près de

¹ Illegible overtyped letter.

Kragenhof, ancienne station de villégiature et qui n'est plus maintenant qu'un vague éboulis de toits asphyxiés sous la houle des sapins. Dès l'âge de quatre ^{ans}² il y allait tous les étés avec sa mère, et il évoque, dans un de ses premiers poèmes, la lente usure de toute sa sève de jeune Toulousain dans cette Tolomée de colophane. C'est à ces juvéniles expériences de fièvre allemande qu'il attribue l'impossibilité où il s'est trouvé pendant toute sa vie de dissocier l'idée de lumière de celles de chaleur et de dégoût. Pour lui il n'y a pas de spectacle plus exaspérant qu'un coucher de soleil – « infecte déflagration » écrit-il, « qui implique dans ses vomissements de paysagiste intoxiqué l'éternelle lassitude de Vesper » et, et il rejette cette vulgarité de ~~poste~~ carte postale en faveur du crépuscule plombé qui sert de fond blafard à la plus radieuse pâleur de Vénus. Et il salue le subtil désaccord si souvent et si vainement poursuivi d'un caillou à peine visible contre un front exsangue.

Négligé par sa mère, sans amis, maladif et sujet dès son plus jeune âge à ce qu'il a appelé des ~~crise~~ « crises de négation », il traverse tant bien que mal une jeunesse qu'il n'aura ni le temps ni l'occasion de regretter. Le 13 avril 1927, il écrit dans son journal : « Me voici majeur, et malgré moi et malgré tout », et plus loin : « Ces miracles immotivés ne sont point à mon goût. » Les notes de ce jour-là s'achèvent sur une phrase biffée avec une telle violence que le papier en a été déchiré. J'ai réussi à ~~recon~~ reconstituer la seconde moitié. La voici : « et il faut battre sa mère pendant qu'elle est jeune. » Son journal abonde en ces étranges interpolations. Il s'interrompt au milieu de détails triviaux et intimes pour écrire, entre parenthèses et en lettres majuscules : « les éléphants sont contagieux ». Une autre fois c'est : « je suis venu, je me suis assis, je suis parti » ou « les curés ont toujours peur » ou « user sa corde en se pendant » ou « ne jeter aux démons que les anges ». Jean du Chas est mort à Marseille le 15 janvier 1928, dans un petit hôtel. L'avant-veille il avait écrit dans son Journal : « mourir quand il n'est plus temps ». La page suivante, celle du 14, ne fournit que des objurgation [sic] à l'intention de Marseille et des Marseillais, et des projets de voyage. « Cette cité est vraiment trop comique et la faune trop abondante et trop déclamatoire, sans intérêt. Folchetto est mort garçon. Moi aussi. Tant pis. J'irai m'embêter ailleurs. J'irai me confesser à Ancone ». ||

3

C'est bien la formule de son inquiétude, la constellation de tous ses déplacements : va t'embêter ailleurs, le stimulus qui finit par s'user à force de

² Added in black ink in left margin.

surmenage. Cette vie, ~~celle qui se~~ telle qu'elle se dégage, vide et fragmentaire, de l'unique source disponible, son Journal, est une de ces vies horizontales, sans sommet, toute ~~enlongu~~ en longueur, un phénomène de mouvement, sans possibilité d'accélération ni de ralentissement, déclenché, sans être inauguré, par l'accident d'une naissance, terminé, sans être conclu, par l'accident d'une mort. Et vide, creuse, sans contenu, abstraction faites [*sic*] des vulgarités machinales de l'épiderme, ~~elles~~ celles qui s'accomplissent sans que l'âme en prenne connaissance. De vie sociale, pas une trace. En lisant son Journal on a l'impression que pour cet homme et fatalement et en dehors de toute action d'orgueil ou de mépris, la vie sociale, la convention sociale, toute l'ennuyeuse et prudente stylisation des afflictions humaines, amour, amitié, gloire et le reste, que tout cela n'était qu'une dimension, ou l'attribut d'une dimension, inévitable, comme la friction, une condition de son adhésion à la surface de la terre. De sorte que du Chas avait une vie sociale comme vous avez une vie centripète, à savoir, inconsciemment et indifféremment, ce qui équivaut à dire qu'il en était exempt, car l'indifférence et l'inconscience ne cadrent guère avec la tradition sacrosainte de la cave et la peur et l'ignorance et la solidarité crispée sous la³ tonnerre. Excluant et exclu, il traverse l'élément social, sans le juger. On aurait beau lui demander un jugement général, une critique compréhensive de tendances locales et actuelles. « La faune est trop abondante » : voilà tout ce qu'il peut en savoir. Toujours la faune, le mystère, accepté comme tel, sans intérêt, à Marseille comme partout, sauf qu'elle y ~~est trop nombreuse, trop prolongée dans l'espace, il en est accablé~~ pèse trop, y est trop prolongée dans l'espace, il en est accablé, faut aller s'embêter ailleurs. Et c'est toujours ainsi qu'il en parle, en constatations effectives, sans enthousiasme [*sic*] et sans colère, avec regret, mais sans en vouloir à qui ou à quoi que ce soit, comme un homme qui dirait, avant de demander son vestiaire [*sic*] : « j'ai mangé trop d'huîtres ».

Telle était sa vie, une vie d'individu, le premier individu européen depuis l'expédition d'Égypte. Les acrobaties impériales ont flétri l'âme léonardesque, empoisonné la tranquille vertu des Indifférents européens. Sous l'égide crapuleuse d'un valet cornélien la dernière trace de la colère dantesque s'est transformé en crachats de Jésuite fatigué, le cortège des pestifères buboniques qui vont empuantir le 19^e siècle s'organise à la gloire éternelle du premier touriste. C'en est fait. Montaigne s'appelle Baedaker, et Dieu porte un gilet rouge. Des minorités se mobilisent et l'inventent un vampire abstrait qu'elles appellent la majorité. C'est l'apothéose de la force mineure. Une hordes de crapauds sadiques parcourent l'Europe à la recherche de l'ânesse éternellement exténuée. Raskolnikoff, Rastignac et Sorel se dévouent et

³ 'a' crossed out with pen; 'e' added with pen after it.

mettent la Trinité au goût du jour, triangle scalène ou symbole [sic] phallique, comme vous voulez, camarades. Chacun à sa gouttière. Ibsen prouve qu'il a raison. Renan démontre qu'il a tort. Coïncidence. Anatole France s'en fout à tue-tête. Marcel Proust se métamorphose en aubépine à force de fumigations. Coïncidence. Et Gide se crucifie à un angle de 69 degrés parce qu'il a perdu la concordance du chasseur et Fargue s'horizontalise parce qu'il a épuisé son répertoire de saloperies et Valéry décompose en propositions absolues ce qu'il n'a pas lu et Mallarmé bémolise en ~~tie~~ tierces clair-de-lunaires ce qu'il n'a pas fait et tous les autres que vous savez accordent leur cornemuses et puis se mettent en quatre afin de jouer faux, car, saperlipopette !, les individus ne vont pas au concert. Enfin, et pour en finir de cette crise de splénite, si j'ose vous affirmer qu'un individu – (et je vous invite à verser dans ce mot, creux depuis un siècle, toutes sa vertu prénapoléonique [sic]) – qu'un tel individu a vécu et est mort au milieu de nos vulgarités, c'est parce que je le ~~tr~~ trouve pur de cette exaspération sociale qui s'est nécessairement exprimée en braiements anti-sociaux, infiniment moins émouvants et moins nobles que les plus ordinaires explosions de tristesse asine. Et cela fait déjà ² fois⁴ au cours de cette comédie, et dans l'espoir d'éclairer mon texte, que j'ai insulté l'âne. Je lui demande pardon. Je me prosterne devant ce plus charmant et plus ténébreux de tous les animaux qui nous font patiemment l'honneur d'agréer nos accès de tendresse. Mais le dernier affront, celui d'Esope, celui pour lequel il n'y a pas de rémission, et qui consiste à le faire parler, lui, l'âne, Dieu m'est témoin que je n'en suis pas encore coupable.

Vous allez trouver que la rubrique sociale a été soumise à une torsion de coup un peu trop prolongée. Et c'est bien le cas de dire : faute de X⁵ mieux. Car il n'y a que cela. Tout est là-dedans. Si vous avez compris | |

4

pourquoi du Chas est individu tandis que Gide ne l'est pas et ne le sera jamais, vos malheurs sont pre⁵ que terminés. La chose s'explique. Et la membrane chasienne cède devant vos paroxysmes de pression cérébrale. Dispersion du concentrisme.

Je n'ai trouvé qu'un seul passage dans les Cahiers qui puisse, en dépit de sa façade rebarbative [sic], nous éclairer à ce sujet. La voici intégralement :

« Mes enfants, mes tendres thyrsofères, lâchez la mamelle, faites attention à ce que je vais vous dire. Je sais que dans 10 ans vous me demanderez pas mieux que

⁴ Added in black ink in the left-hand margin.

⁵ Illegible letter overtyped.

⁶ Added in pen by hand in superscript.

de faire plaisir à mes mânes. Or, mes mânes seront difficiles. Du moins, j'ai lieu de le croire. Une de ces dévotions bruyantes et sanguines, semblables à celle que feu Monsieur mon père a vouée au sel de Mercure, ne vous avancera en rien. Je ne veux, mes enfants, ni de vos approbations de scala santa ni de vos immortalités de basse-cour. Et c'est afin de m'en mettre à l'abri que je vous expose, ici et ~~mainten-~~ maintenant, votre programme. Vous allez vous appeler les Concentristes. C'est moi qui vous le dis, moi, inventeur du Concentrisme, moi, le Christ ^{^^}Bouddha^{^^} biconvexe.⁸ Vous direz à vos contemporains : - Jean du Chas, illustre fondateur du Concentrisme, ^{^^}le^{^^} Christ ^{^^}Bouddha^{^^}⁹ biconvexe, fils unique, illégitime et posthume d'un agent de change belge et d'une salaudine germano-toulousaine, vous invite, tutti quanti, à un festin religio-géologique, où vous pourrez vous farcir, perte de boutons, de sainte nourriture sous la double forme de lentilles cartésiennes et concierges synthétiques. – Vous leur accorderez une courte pause et puis vous leur direz : - La poésie chasienne, c'est l'étirement d'une phrase dont les pétales s'ouvrent, ~~ce~~ordon s'il vous plaît¹⁰ qui se désagrège sous les sourcillades ^{^^}halsiennes^{^^}¹¹ de notre indomptable capitaine, qui, hélas !, lui aussi, a connu sa Suède. C'est en lui que nous saluons – et nous vous faisons l'honneur de vous inviter à en faire autant – l'auteur du Discours de la Sortie, conçu et composé parmi les chaudes vapeurs de la conciergerie, de toutes les conciergies [*sic*], poètes de ^{^^}Neuburg^{^^}¹² novecenteschi. – Et vous finirez par leur flanquer la définition suivante : -- Le Concentrisme est un prisme sur l'escalier. – Et voilà mes enfants, les côtes de votre manifeste. Engraissez-le. Adieu, mes enfants, et bon appétit. Je vous rends à ~~mes~~^{^^}v^{^^}¹³os mères. »

Il ne faut pas se laisser bafouer par l'amère superficie de ce passage. Il ne faut pas non plus lui en vouloir d'une obscurité qui a l'air féroce en sa préméditation. Du Chas est ainsi. C'est un de ces esprits qui ne peuvent s'expliquer. Rien que l'idée d'une apologie, de la réduction de sa substance en hoquets universitaires – ce qu'il appelle :

⁷ Crossed out in pen; added in pen in small space left in right-hand margin.

⁸ The phrase 'le Christ biconvexe' has been underlined in pen, with a question mark written in pen in the left margin. It seems probable that Beckett was doubtful about whether or not to include a comic reference to Christ in a paper for public consumption, and it may well have been these doubts that finally led him to replace the potentially offending term with 'Bouddha'.

⁹ As previously, this material has been crossed out and added in black pen.

¹⁰ Only the first three letters are struck through and nothing has been added or taken away; it seems likely that Beckett simply meant to underline and that, owing to the way this was done on the typewriter, he struck out three letters accidentally.

¹¹ Added in pencil in superscript.

¹² A blank space was left in the TS and this was subsequently added in pencil, indicating that SB was unsure of the spelling of the location – or, perhaps, of the precise location – to which he wanted to refer and so left himself some space before going to check it at a later stage, perhaps in Mahaffy's biography of Descartes.

¹³ Overwritten in black ink.

reductio ad obscenum – lui crisper et enchevêtrer les nerfs. Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'il veut être compris. Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'il comprend la compréhension. Ses Cahiers contiennent plusieurs notes qui ne laissent pas de doute à cet égard. J'en choisis le plus clair et le plus susceptible de vous intéresser en vertu de son actualité :

« Je viens de lire une lettre de Proust » écrit-il, « à l'intention de je ne sais plus qui, une (ou devrais-je dire : un) de ses Albertines-Jupiens sans doute, et où il explique pour quelles raisons il ne peut pas, mais absolument pas, se moucher le dimanche matin avant six heures. Le microcosme de sa thèse, ayant dégringolé par toute la hauteur d'une pagode inver^{tt}ie¹⁴ de tergiversations téléologiques, débouche en bolide victorieuse et vous broie la sensibilité. Voici la dernière phrase de cette lettre : - « de sorte que je me vois condamné, par suite de ce funeste enchaînement de circonstances qui remonte, n'en doutez pas, à quelque coryza mérovingien refoulé, pareil à Françoise qui, en ce moment même, blottie et invisible contre la caisse sonore de ma porte, se penche sur l'abîme fatal et délicieux d'un éternûment [*sic*] titanique, à aspirer les torrents de lave muceuse [*sic*] qui se soulèvent des profondeurs de ma morve matinale, sabbataire et volcanique et assiègent les soupapes frissonnantes [*sic*] de mes narines. →»

Je n'ai jamais pu trouver cette lettre. Du Chas l'a peut-être fabriquée de toutes pièces. Elle est assez « à la manière de... » pour être apocryphale [*sic*]. Mais cela n'a aucune espèce d'importance. Ce sont les réactions chasiennes qui nous concernent. Il précise la nature de son dégoût :

« Qu'il ne puisse se moucher le dimanche matin avant six heures, c'est une chose qui me semble assez naturelle. Mais après ce supplice de clarifications je n'y comprends plus rien. Au diable avec ses explications ! Il n'y a que les tics justifiés qui soient indécents. La folie, Dieu merci, est indivisible. »

On pourrait tirer une variété de conclusions du manifeste des Concentristes tel que du Chas l'a ébauché dans son Journal. C'est une de ces énonciations qui se laissent volontiers réduire en assez d'obscénités pour satisfaire l'aspiration de chacun de nous vers les régions d'ordre et ^{de} clarté. | |

5

Vous pourriez, par exemple, interpréter ce Discours de la Sortie comme l'expression artistique des évasions qui précède le suicide, et « cordon s'il vous plaît » comme l'unique acte définitif de l'individu qui se fait enfin plus que justice. Ce serait un « cogito ergo sum » un peu sensationnel. Et le concierge, celui qui se laisse sortir ?

¹⁴ The 't' has been added in black pen between the typed letters.

¹⁵ Added in black pen in superscript.

Tout ce que vous voudrez, Dieu ou la fatigue, petite attaque ou clairvoyance racinienne. Et le Concentrisme ? Spirale éliminatoire. Et le « prisme sur l'escalier » ? Décomposition des joyeux qui descendent en colimaçon. Et vous voilà. Clair et conséquent comme les syllogismes de Monsieur Chauvin.¹⁶ Où pourriez considérer tout cela sous la lumière de la physiologie. Ce serait plus égayant. Mais ce qui est certain, c'est que, si vous insistez à solidifier l'Idée, Celle dont il parle, à concrétiser la Chose de Kant, vous ne ferez que dégrader en vaudeville de Labiche cet art qui, semblable à une résolution de Mozart ^^On a un [tas] de [Humiens]^¹⁷, est parfaitement intelligible et parfaitement inexplicable. ||

¹⁶ This mention of 'Monsieur Chauvin' provides another subtle reference to Napoleon: The figure in question is Nicolas Chauvin, a fictional soldier who was held to have first served in the Revolutionary and later the Napoleonic armies of French, and whose character was defined by a simple-minded and exaggerated patriotism.

¹⁷ This material has been added in black pen in superscript and is very difficult to decipher. The reading proposed here – i.e. 'Humien' – can be justified in the present context by the parallelism that it allows between the preceding coupling of Kant and Labiche: As there we find an artist linked with a philosopher, so here we find an artist (Mozart) coupled with a philosopher (David Hume). Such justification aside, the reading remains tentative.

**APPENDIX I (b):
TRANSCRIPTION OF POEMS FOUND IN E.L.T. MESENS ARCHIVE
(Getty Research Institute: E.L.T. Mesens papers, 1917-1976 [Box 15, folder 2])**

i. 'Match nul ou l'Amour paisible'

elle dit je crois d'une façon général [sic]
en voyant quelqu'un mourir je suis vraiment morte
mais d'une façon tout à fait général [sic] je crois
je croyais que j'étais malade mais non on connaît [sic] ça [sic]
à l'École de Médecine on connaît [sic] ça [sic] très bien
à l'École de Médecine on appelle ça [sic] l'Intussusception
ainsi en voyant un chien écrasé tu comprends
mais moi j'ai très mal à l'œil gauche et je fais
comme si je n'y comprenais rien tu as compris dit-elle
oui ou non
écoute dis-je d'une voix faible as tu [sic] de l'aspirine par hasard
j'ai très mal à l'oreille à l'œil je veux dire
à l'œil gauche
non dit-elle je n'ai pas d'aspirine

mais j'ai dit-elle après l'épouvantable pause ci-dessus
de l'algocratine c'est très anodin tu trouveras dans le tiroir
avec la pommade mais il fait froid j'ai la flegme
de me lever je me retourne sur le dos je porte
les mains à la tête

en veux-tu dit-elle oui ou non
non dis-je sans le [sic] moindre hésitation
quand elle se lévera [sic] pour se laver
je changerai d'avis

ainsi dit-elle quand tu dis que tu as couché avec quelqu'un
ça m'étonne un peu qu'elle dise quelqu'un mais je ne dis rien
c'est comme si moi je couchais avec quelqu'un
mais voyons dis-je cette fois d'une voix indignée qu'est-ce que tu me racontes

je n'ai couché avec personne

tu as dit que tu avais envie [sic] dit-elle c'est la même chose
oh je suis contente que tu me le dises c'est un signe de confiance
mais on n'est pas un fluide on est sur terre ça m'écoeure
tu as tout à fait raison mais je n'y peux rien tu comprends
oui dis-je ce n'est pas très compliqué

mais non dit-elle tu ne comprends pas puisque tu me dis
que tu n'as pas couché que tu avais seulement envie [sic]
bon dis-je je ne comprends pas

j'ai mal à l'œil.

je mets une jambe hors du lit sur quoi elle dit
oublie ce que j'ai dit veux-tu fais comme si je n'avais rien dit
annulons tout ça j'ai eu tort de parler
ce qui est dit dis-je en extase tout à coup est dit
et je rentre toutes choses considérées la jambe dans le lit

mais ce n'est pas ça du tout dit-elle il vaut beaucoup mieux se taire
oh tu sais dis-je sans la moindre hésitation
pas de beaucoup

enfin dit-elle
j'ai dans le nez les petits doights [sic]
les indicateurs dans les yeux
les pouces dans les oreilles
je sens qu'elle me dévisage
en effet voici un murmure au loin
tu as la suffrance [sic] des orifices
c'est pour rigoler mais je ne marche pas
puis
je me vide je me lève
fais dis-je

elle fait bien nos anges je l'entends à peine
je suis maintenant dans l'anus je songe à ma mère
je songe à la facilité dont [sic] on fait souffrir les femmes
se venge d'être né

je me demande si tout ça n'est pas du chichi
je suis tout de même content de ne pas être seul cette nuit
je veux dire d'avoir un autre paquet de vie
un autre jeu de maux le cas échéant
à portée de la main
car j'ai encore le calcul au cœur les phalanges pleines de fourmis
et mal à l'œil gauche n'oublions pas ça
je me dresse dans le lit je m'écrie apporte-moi un algocratine
j'ai changé d'avis ça me fait chier
elle me l'apporte je l'avale elle dit va te laver
je refuse elle insiste je refuse
au moins les dents dit-elle je refuse
elle se recouche ses dents claquent
éteins dis-je s'il te plaît
elle éteint on se tourne le dos

j'entends la nuit est une lime est-ce une chanson
puis quelquechose [*sic*] que je ne comprends pas
ça m'est égal elle aussi elle a peur
c'est l'Intussusception ha ha ha
ça m'est égal je m'assoupis mais elle
elle se retourne y mets [*sic*] une main
glaçiale [*sic*] colle sa bouche à mon oreille et dit
la nuit est une lime qui ne fait pas de bruit

ii. Alternative versions of poems appearing in *Poèmes 37-39*

'à elle l'acte calme'

à elle l'acte calme
les pores savants la verge bon enfant
l'attente pas trop lente les regrets pas trop longs l'absence
au service de la présence
les quelques haillons d'azur dans la tête les points enfin morts du cœur
toute la tardive grâce d'une pluie cessant
au tomber d'une nuit
d'août [*sic*]

à elle vide

lui pur
d'amour

'être là sans mâchoires sans dents'

être là sans machoires [sic] sans dents
où s'en va le plaisir de perdre
avec celui à peine inférieur
de gagner
et Anselme de Laon et on attend
adverbe oh petit cadeau
vide vide sinon des loques de chanson
mon père m'a donné un mari
ou en faisant la fleur
qu'elle mouille
tant qu'elle voudra jusqu'a [sic] l'élégie
des carevanes [sic] encore loin des Halles
ou l'eau de la canaille pestant dans les tuyaux
ou plus rien
qu'elle mouille puisque c'est ainsi
parfasse tout le superflu
et vienne
à ces lèvres d'idiot à ces mains forⁿicantes¹
à ce bloc cave aux yeux qui écoutent
de lointains coups de ciseaux argentins

mon dieu quel Homme quel petit Homme

mon père m'a donné un mari

mon dieu quelle[sic] Homme qu'il est petit

¹ This is inserted in pen to the right of the end of the line.

APPENDIX I (c):
TRANSCRIPTION 'LES JOUES ROUGES' MS AND TS
(University of Reading: UoR JEK A/3/68 ['Folder entitled Poems'])

i. 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' [MS]

[disant 1 2 3
 4 5]¹

les joues rouges les yeux rouges
et de haine plein le cœur
de haine qu'il aime ~~et qu'il sait~~ ^^plus que tout^^
~~qu'il ne pourra garder longtemps~~
plus que toutes les belles choses
et que toutes les bonnes gens
~~qui [méritent] d'être aimées~~ [sic]² ^^que les garçons sages aiment^^
de haine que les longues heures
vont ~~peu à peu~~ ^^lentement^^ lui enlever
~~peu à peu~~ ^^lentement^^ les blanches heures
les heures [grises] ^^d'or^^ et ^^les^^ heures grises
et que la nuit achèvera
la nuit noire ~~où il a peur~~ pleine de haines
~~de haïr comme il ose haïr~~
~~plus que~~ ^^beaucoup^^ ~~mais qui~~ plus fortes que la sienne
qui a besoin du soleil
et du beau soleil bleu
et des chansons des oiseaux
pour ~~pouvoir~~ ^^oser^^ se faire sentir –
en cet état Petit Sot
se promène dans le bois
tristement le long d'un fossé
où ~~les saffrans~~ [sic] ^^de jolis jeunes^^ safrans
blanches [sic] mauves jaunes striée^^é^^s
sans amour et sans haine

¹ Above the first line of the poem four words are faintly discernable. These words are arranged according to the numbers on provided in this transcription, tentative readings are as follows: 1 – la; 2 – lune; 3 – on; 4 – voit; 5 – la.

² The erroneous feminine agreement of the participle after the masculine *gens* appears to be occasioned by the grammatically correct feminine agreement of preceding noun.

étaient ce qu'ils devaient être

pour l'inventeur / Avigdor Arikha / 9 août 1960 / Closerie des Lilas / de son ami / Sam Beckett

ii. 'les joues rouges les yeux rouges' [TS]

les joues rouges les yeux rouges
et de haine plein le cœur
de haine qu'il aime plus que tout
plus que toutes les belles choses
et que toutes les bonnes gens
que les garçons sages aiment
de haine que les longues heures
vont lentement lui enlever
lentement les blanches heures
les heures d'or les heures grises
et que la nuit achèvera
la nuit noire pleine de haines
beaucoup plus fortes que la sienne
qui a besoin du soleil
et du beau soleil bleu
et des chansons des oiseaux
pour oser se faire sentir –
en cet état Petit Sot
se promène dans le bois
tristement le long d'un fossé
où de jolis jeunes safrans
blanches [sic] mauves jaunes striées [sic]
sans amour et sans haine
étaient ce qu'ils devaient être

**APPENDIX II (a):
SET TEXTS FOR FRENCH DURING BECKETT'S UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE
(1923-27)¹**

JUNIOR FRESHMAN (1923-1924)

Hilary Examination

Corneille: *La Galerie du Palais* (Manchester), *Le Cid*, *Le Menteur*, *Nicomède*.

Racine: *Andromaque* (Oxford).

Balzac: *Five Short Stories* (Cambridge).

Rudmose-Brown: *A Short History of French Literature*, pp. 26-59.

Trinity Examination

Molière: *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (Lanson - Hachette), *Les Femmes Savantes*

(Lanson - Hachette); *L'Avare* (Manchester University Press); *Le Misanthrope*.

Maupassant : *Six Contes* (Cambridge Univ. Press).

La Fontaine: *Fables*.

Rudmose-Brown: *A Short History of French Literature*, pp. 59-95.

Michaelmas Examination

Marivaux: *Théâtre* (in *Tous les Chefs d'œuvre*).

Sainte-Beuve: *Selections* (Tilley – Cambridge University Press).

Faguet: *Le Dix-huitième siècle*.

Balzac: *Père Goriot*.

Rudmose-Brown: *A Short History of French Literature*, pp. 96-128.

SENIOR FRESHMAN (1924-1925)

Hilary Examination

Balzac: *Le Cabinet des Antiques*.

V. Hugo: *La Légende des Siècles* (Oxford), *Les Feuilles d'Automne*.

Musset: *Les Caprices de Marianne*, *Fantasio*, *Lorenzaccio*, *Il ne faut jurer de rien*.

Rudmose-Brown: *A Short History of French Literature*, pp. 129-152.

Trinity Examination

Balzac: *Louis Lambert*, *Les Proscrits*.

¹ This appendix provides a collation of the lists of set texts for undergraduate students of French as these are to be found in those editions of the *TCD Calendar* that cover the period of Beckett's course of undergraduate study (i.e. 1923-1927).

Trinity Examination (cont.)

Vielé-Griffin: Plus Loin.

Leconte de Lisle: Poèmes barbares.

Rudmose-Brown: A Short History of French Literature, pp. 152-186.

Michaelmas Examination

Vigny: Selected Poems (Peers—Manchester University Press).

Musset: Poésies Nouvelles (excluding Rolla). [In Dent's *Tous les Chefs d'Œuvre*.]

Gautier: Voyage en Italie (Pitt Press).

Renan: Souvenirs de Jeunesse.

JUNIOR SOPHISTER (1925-1926)

Hilary Examination

Scève: Délie (Selections).

Ronsard: Selected Poems (Oxford).

Montaigne: Extraits (Petit de Hulleville—Delagrave).

Lanson: Histoire de la Littérature française, Part iii.

Rudmose-Brown: A Short History of French Literature, pp. 1-25.

Trinity Examination

Corneille: L'illusion comique (Bibliotheca Romanica. Nos. 270, 271).

Racine: Bérénice, Phèdre, Athalie.

D'Urfe: L'Astrée, l^{ère} partie, i.-iv. (ibl. Roman. Nos. 257, 258, 259).

Lanson: [Histoire de la Littérature française], Part iv.

Michaelmas Examination

Molière: La Princesse d'Elide, Les Amants magnifiques, La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas.

Marivaux: Le Prince travesti.

Florian: Arlequinades (Bibl. Roman. Nos. 286, 287).

La Chanson de Roland (Bibl. Roman. Nos. 53,54).

Lanson: [Histoire de la Littérature française], Part v.

SENIOR SOPHISTER (MODERATORSHIP) (1926-1927)

Group I

Gormunt et Isembart (Champion's Classiques français du moyen-âge).

Aucassin et Nicolette (Manchester).

Group II

Candidates must show a first-hand acquaintance with the principal works of –
Ronsard, Corneille, Molière, Racine, and Marivaux.

Group III

Balzac: --Eugenie Grandet, Un Ménage de Garçon, Ursule Mirouët.

André Gide: Isabella, La Porte étroite.

Leconte de Lisle: Poèmes antiques, Poèmes barbares, Poèmes tragiques.

Verlaine: Choix de poésies (Fasquelle).

Stendhal: Le Rouge et le Noir, La Chartreuse de Parme.

F. Jammes: Choix de poésies (Mercure).

Marcel Schwob: Cœur double, Le roi au masque d'or

H. de Rénier: Histories incertaines, Le Plateau de Laque, La Sandale ailée.

R. de la Vaissière: Anthologie poétique du XX^e siècle (Crès)

H. Pourrat: Les Montagnards.

Marcel Proust: Du côté de chez Swann (vol. i, pp. 1-173, Combray).

L. le Cardonnal: De l'une à l'autre aurore.

NOTE—Candidates are expected to make themselves acquainted with the history of the various movements in French literature from the close of the Romantic period till the present day.

**APPENDIX II (b):
'I did a sketch for Paris Mondial': Beckett's First Sketch For Radio (1940)**

Today, direct evidence for Beckett's experience of writing for radio in the pre-War period is confined to a single letter in which Beckett informs George and Gwynedd Reavey that he 'did a sketch for Paris Mondial that was cancelled because of recent events'.¹ Although this particular letter has long been known to scholarship, Beckett's reference to 'Paris Mondial' has previously been either ignored or misunderstood. In *Beckett before Godot*, for example, John Pilling cites this very passage from Beckett's letter to George and Gwynedd Reavey but does not discuss the Paris-Mondial 'sketch'.² The editors of *LSB I*, meanwhile, state that they were unable to find any trace of a 'publication bearing the name *Paris Mondial*'.³ That the editors of Beckett's letters should have been unable to find such a publication is wholly unsurprising given that Beckett is not referring to a publication but, rather, to the radio station Paris-Mondial.

A French-language equivalent of the BBC's World Service and forerunner of today's Radio France Internationale, Paris-Mondial broadcast in over twenty languages – including French, English, German, Japanese, and Serbo-Croat – between 1938 and 1940, when German Occupation forces shut the station down and annexed its operation to Radio-Paris.⁴ Obviously, recognition that Beckett's 'sketch' was written for a radio station is important insofar as it allows us to push back the date of his earliest experience of writing for radio by a number of years. (Generally, Beckett's first piece of writing for radio has been believed to be 'The Capital of the Ruins', a short piece of reportage on Saint-Lô – a town so heavily bombed during the War that it came to be referred to as the 'Capitale des Ruines', hence the title of Beckett's piece –, where Beckett was then working with the Irish Red Cross. Although a copy of the text was discovered in the RTÉ archives, 'The Capital of the Ruins' appears never to

¹ *LSB I*, 680 (SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [21st May, 1940])

² John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot*, 164 – Pilling's decision not to elaborate on the reference to 'Paris Mondial' is entirely understandable given that his particular focus is on the reference to *Human Wishes*, which is also found in the same letter (*viz.* 'I wrote half of a first act of Johnson' [*LSB I*, 680 – SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey (21st May, 1940)]).

³ In their notes on Beckett's letter to the Reaveys in which the reference to Paris-Mondial appears, the editors comment only that: 'No publication bearing the name *Paris Mondial* at this time has been discovered' (*Ibid.*, 682).

⁴ Christian Brochard, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France: Tome I (1921-1944)* (Paris : La Documentation Française, 1994), 341 – For a fuller history of Paris-Mondial, which was itself the successor to earlier stations such as the *Le Poste colonial* and *Paris Ondes*, see Frédéric Brunquell, *Fréquence monde : Du Poste colonial à RFI* (Paris : Hachette, Pluriel, 1992), 11-61.

have been broadcast.⁵) Nonetheless, the pseudo-existence of this cancelled radio ‘sketch’ for Paris-Mondial clearly raises other questions: How might Beckett have come to have written for the station? What sort of text might the ‘sketch’ have been? Was it Beckett’s own work, or a translation? In what language might the ‘sketch’ have been written? Why was the ‘sketch’ never broadcast? And, most importantly of all, what significance might this text have for our understanding of Beckett’s writing? Sadly, currently-available evidence means that very few of these questions can be answered at the present time. Nonetheless, basing ourselves upon what we can know of Paris-Mondial, of French broadcasting history, and of Beckett’s social circle during 1939-1940, it is possible to answer at least some of these questions and, in the case of the others, to make some educated guesses.

The first of the (relatively) educated guesses that may be made concerns the question of how Beckett came to write for Paris-Mondial. In this regard, it is important to recall that Paris-Mondial was not merely a radio station: It was a state broadcaster and, more importantly still, a broadcaster that played a key, if finally unsuccessful, role in France’s propaganda efforts as part of the ‘Guerre des ondes’.⁶ Given Paris-Mondial’s role in the ‘Guerre des ondes’, it seems most probable that Beckett’s association with the station came about in one of two ways: The first possibility is that Beckett was put in touch with Paris-Mondial as a result of his own application to join the French war effort.⁷ The second possibility is that Beckett’s association with Paris-Mondial may have originated via his friendship with Alfred Péron.⁸ Although Péron is not known to have worked for Paris-Mondial himself, it is conceivable that Péron – a fluent English-speaker who had previously served as a liaison agent with the British Expeditionary Force⁹ – may have had some connection to the broadcaster.¹⁰ At the

⁵ For the text of this piece, and explanatory notes on its history, see *CSP*, 275-78 (‘The Capital of the Ruins’), 285-86 (explanatory notes).

⁶ For more information on the ‘Guerre des ondes’ – and the unsuccessful part played therein by Paris-Mondial –, see Harold N. Graves, Jr., *War on the Short Wave* (New York, NY: Foreign Policy Association, 1941), 17-21.

⁷ Earlier letters to George and Gwynedd Reavey show Beckett to have applied to serve France as early as September 1939 (*viz.* *LSB I*, 668 – SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [26th September, 1939]). Although he had not heard anything by December (*viz.* *LSB I*, 669 – SB to George and Gwynedd Reavey [6th December, 1939]), it is entirely possible that his services may subsequently have been engaged.

⁸ That Beckett’s association with the station owed something to Péron would follow what we know about Beckett’s subsequent experience with the French Resistance, Péron having been the one to recruit Beckett into the Resistance cell Gloria SMH (*viz.* *DTF*, 303).

⁹ *LSB I*, 671 (n. 9)

¹⁰ Péron’s association with a broadcaster dedicated to advancing the French war effort would be of a piece with his subsequent work with various Resistance cells, including ‘Etoile’, ‘Gloria SMH’, and the Resistance groups of the Musée de l’Homme, the Lycée

very least, Péron would almost certainly have been familiar with individuals connected with the station, and thus in a position to put Beckett in contact with them, should they have been looking for an English-speaking writer.¹¹

The subject of writing naturally brings us to the questions of what sort of text the 'sketch' may have been, whether it was Beckett's own work, and the language in which it is likely to have been written. Sadly, the precise nature and language of Beckett's text are difficult to ascertain with precision. Paris-Mondial is known to have broadcast an eclectic range of programs – including reportage, current-affairs programmes, cultural talks, and, significantly, radio dramas –, some of which were in French, some translated. A sense of this eclecticism is offered by the following account of a day's programming by the station as heard by audiences in the US:

The following programs broadcast in the week of March 7, 1940 are fairly representative [...] For Saturday: *Kant and Peace*, talk by Leon Bruschig. For Sunday: *From Douanier Rousseau to Diego Rivera*, talk in Spanish. *How the French Academy Works*, talk by Monsieur Savarin. For Monday: *An Interview about French Folklore and How It Is Made Available to the Public in the French National Museum of Popular Art and Tradition*, and a talk by Professor Sargeant on *Laënnec and the Invention of the Stethoscope*. For Tuesday: a talk by André Gide on *The Latest French Books*. For Wednesday: *A Moroccan Legend*, by Titaina, *Remarks from a Parisian*, and *Books and the Empire*. For Thursday: finally [*sic*], a play by Claudel and a talk on Whistler, and for Friday a talk by Madame Titaina on *The Woman's Point of View* and a pastoral talk by the Reverend Worden, head of the Reformed Churches of France.¹²

In this instance, Beckett's letter to the Reaveys may offer a clue. More specifically, his use of the term 'sketch' – with its connotations of '[a] short play or performance'¹³ – suggests that the piece in question was a brief radio drama rather than a news

Buffon and the Combat network (*viz.* Emilie Morin, *Beckett's Political Imagination* [Cambridge: CUP, 2017], 150).

¹¹ Evidence for Péron having had connections in the French national broadcaster derives from the talk that he is known to have given for another national radio station, Paris PTT, sometime in 1939. Beckett himself clarified the subject of this talk in a letter to MacGreevy, where he commented that Péron would be 'doing a quarter of an hour's broadcast...on *Finnegans Wake*' (*LSB I*, 659 – SB to TMG [6th June, 1939]). Although no listing of this particular broadcast survives, the editors of *LSB I* note that James Joyce mentioned it to Harriet Shaw Weaver, clarifying that it would be broadcast on Paris PTT (*Ibid.*, 661 [n.6]).

¹² Arthur Mathieu, 'Paris-Mondial', in Harwood L. Childs and John B. Whitton (eds), *Propaganda By Short Wave* (Princeton: Princeton UP), 1942, 189-90 – Emphasis in original.

¹³ *viz.* 'Sketch [4]', in *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/>> [accessed: 11th September, 2017] – Beckett's use of the term 'sketch' may be further clarified through comparison with an example of almost exactly contemporary French usage. In the May 19th, 1940, edition of daily-paper *Le Figaro*, for example, the paper's radio listings promise 'un sketch' by Tristan Bernard, entitled 'Une Magnifique Occasion' (*viz.* 'La Radio: Lundi 20 mai', *Le Figaro* [19th May, 1940], 2a).

broadcast, or piece of reportage.¹⁴ Beckett's use of the term 'sketch' equally suggests that the work was an original composition, rather than a translation since, in his letters of the period, Beckett invariably speaks of his translation work as 'translations'.¹⁵ Admittedly, the alluring possibility of Beckett's phrasing must be set against evidence that Paris-Mondial's broadcast output had changed by May 1940. More specifically, it would appear that the station's output underwent a radical change after April that year – shifting focus away from cultural and literary programming while also ensuring that 'more time was dedicated daily to talks and news'.¹⁶ In weighing up this evidence, however, it should be noted that the commentary on Paris-Mondial's changed focus is based upon material gathered by the Princeton Listening Station, and thus reflects Paris-Mondial's output as it was directed *specifically* towards American audiences.¹⁷ In April 1940, France – like all the Allied nations – was endeavouring to draw the US into the war against Germany, and it would thus be wrong to imagine that the same kind of programming was necessarily being broadcast to the US and, for example, the UK.¹⁸

While much of what has been posited thus far clearly cannot be considered any more than speculative, we are on far firmer ground when it comes to explaining

¹⁴ This suggestion is supported up by materials held at the BNF, which reveal that Paris-Mondial frequently broadcast material of a literary nature. Such literary broadcasts included plays by Classical dramatists Racine and Molière – e.g. Racine's *Britannicus* (viz. '*Britannicus*, realisation radiophonique' <<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40889348h>> [accessed: 11th September, 2017]), in French; Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (viz. '*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, realisation radiophonique' <<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40889357g>> [accessed: 11th September, 2017]), in English –, as well as adaptations for radio of works such as Lesage's *Gil Blas* (viz. '*Gil Blas*, comédie radiophonique' <<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb408888161>> [accessed: 11th September, 2017]) and the Medieval *Roman de Renart* (viz. '*Roman de Renart*, realisation radiophonique' <<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40889354f>> [accessed: 11th September, 2017]).

¹⁵ See, for example, his references to the translation of Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' that he prepared with Alfred Péron in letters to TMG (viz. *LSB I*, 40 – SB to TMG [7th August, 1930]; *LSB I*, 65 – SB to TMG [3rd February, 1931]), his expression of his reluctance to '[do] more translations' in a letter to Reavey (*LSB I*, 295 – SB to George Reavey [9th January, 1936]), the mention of how he 'winced' at [his] translations' (*LSB I*, 362 – SB to TMG [26th July, 1936]) of the Surrealists when reading the anthology in which they appeared.

¹⁶ Arthur Mathieu, 'Paris-Mondial', in Harwood L. Childs and John B. Whitton (eds), *Propaganda By Short Wave*, 201

¹⁷ viz. 'After the reorganization of the broadcasts in April the inadequacy of the highly intellectual appeal was apparently realized along with the necessity of *producing programs adapted for American listeners and transmitted by Americans*' (*Ibid.*).

¹⁸ The specificity of Paris-Mondial's broadcasts to the US is made clear by that list of programmes that were scheduled for 3rd June, 1940. Amongst these broadcasts we find programmes such as "To students of America", a talk to be delivered by a former professor at Harvard University and, most notably, "How the U.S. would suffer in any case from a Hitler success" (*Ibid.*).

why Beckett's 'sketch' was never broadcast. It is, in fact, possible to say with certainty that the cancellation of Beckett's sketch was a direct consequence of the German invasion of France on May 12th, 1940. More specifically, Beckett's 'sketch' was cancelled following a decision taken by the French government on May 20th – that is, the day before Beckett informed the Reaveys that his 'sketch' had been cancelled because of 'recent events' – to cancel 'toutes les émissions artistiques et publicitaires'.¹⁹

By way of summation, and taking into consideration all that has just been said, we may now posit the following (speculative) account of Beckett's Paris-Mondial 'sketch': Having become associated with France's international broadcaster, Paris-Mondial, sometime between the closing weeks of 1939 and the early months of 1940, Beckett wrote a 'sketch' for the broadcaster in either English or French.²⁰ Having been scheduled for broadcast sometime after May 20th, Beckett's 'sketch' was cancelled as a result of a French government ordonnance. The fact that the ordonnance in question specifically affected creative broadcasts – such as radio plays –, while leaving foreign-language programming and reportage unaffected, strongly argues that Beckett's 'sketch' was not a piece of reportage, but rather a radio-play similar to what Paris-Mondial had been broadcasting up to that point, and that it was written in French.²¹ Sadly, the precise subject-matter of the 'sketch' cannot be recovered, nor can we make even speculative judgements about what it might have been. The only thing of which the surviving evidence allows us to now be certain is that, had it not been for a French government ordonnance of May 20th 1940, Beckett's first ever 'sketch' for radio would have been broadcast on Paris-Mondial in May 1940.

Having clarified what can currently be known about Beckett's Paris-Mondial 'sketch' we come to what is at once the most important and the most unanswerable

¹⁹ Christian Brochard, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France: Tome I (1921-1944)*, 190 – Significantly, the only broadcasts that were unaffected by this government decision were 'le Radio-Journal, les radioreportages et les émissions en langues étrangères' (*Ibid.*). This evidence provides some corroboration for the possibility that Beckett's 'sketch' may have been a French-language composition.

²⁰ In light of Beckett's status as a native English-speaker with experience as a writer and translator, and Paris-Mondial's remit to broadcast abroad, it would perhaps seem more likely that his 'sketch' was written in English. Nonetheless, the possibility that the piece was written in French cannot be excluded, since Paris-Mondial also broadcast programmes in French and Beckett had already shown his willingness to produce original material in French and had sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to present this work to French-speaking audiences.

²¹ The 'sketch' would thus have been of a piece with programming such as Titaÿna's 'In a little cafe, radiophonical play', which was broadcast on Paris-Mondial sometime between 1939 and 1940 (*viz.* 'In a little cafe, radiophonical play' <<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40889351d>> [accessed: 13th September, 2017]).

of the questions posed by this now-lost text: What significance might this 'sketch' have for our understanding of Beckett's writing? In answering this question, it is essential to remember that, although the 'sketch' may never have been broadcast, it was not purely theoretical. Beckett's text had been written and was ready for broadcast; only the German invasion of France prevented that broadcast from occurring. As a result, though the only surviving trace of it may now be in a letter to George and Gwynedd Reavey, it remains the case that this 'sketch' *does* have a place in Beckett's body of works and, consequently, a place in his development as a writer. More specifically – barring the discovery of any further evidence in future –, the Paris-Mondial 'sketch' was almost certainly Beckett's earliest fully-realised dramatic text, and his first experience of writing for radio.²² Once these facts have been recognised, the importance of this 'sketch' becomes clear and it becomes legitimate to ask certain questions: Firstly, might the Paris-Mondial 'sketch', like his earlier, abortive effort at playwriting in English – namely, *Human Wishes*²³ –, have had an influence on Beckett's post-War drama?²⁴ Secondly, might Beckett's earliest exposure to radio – what was, at the time, an entirely new medium for him – have had some role to play in his development towards that post-War style and its persistent interest in (increasingly disembodied) voice?²⁵

²² The earliest dramatic text that Beckett is known to have written dates from August 1936 and is to be found in the 'Clare Street' Notebook (*viz.* 'Clare Street' Notebook, UoR MS 5003, 9-23). Written in German and entitled 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck', this text is a pastiche of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and appears to have been intended primarily as a private translation/composition exercise as part of Beckett's study of German, rather than a purposeful literary endeavour destined for public eyes. Notably, 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' shows Beckett making use of expressions that he had previously noted down as part of his German vocabulary lists. The expression 'Was jetzt kommt, ist kein Witz' ('Clare Street' Notebook, UoR MS 5003, 13), for example, is to be found in UoR MS 5002: 'Was jetzt kommt, ist kein Witz joking apart' (German Vocabulary Notebook, UoR MS 5002, 58). As such, although 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' is undoubtedly interesting, not least for its use of tropes that are to be found elsewhere in Beckett's fictional output of the time (*viz.* 'Es dämmert, weil es nicht anders kann' ['Clare Street' Notebook, UoR MS 5003, 9]), it cannot properly be compared to a completed text intended for public consumption such as the Paris-Mondial 'sketch' – For a full transcription of 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck', see Lutz Dittrich, Carola Veit, and Ernest Wichner (eds), *Obergeschoss still closed.* *Samuel Beckett in Berlin 1936-37. Ausstellung Literaturhaus Berlin.* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2006) 123-124; for a discussion of this text, see Ernest Wichner, 'Das erste Theaterstück von Samuel Beckett' in *Ibid.*, 97-101.

²³ The surviving draft of *Human Wishes* was published as part of *Disjecta* (*viz. D*, 155-66).

²⁴ Certainly, when one reads Beckett's letter to the Reaveys, one cannot help but be struck by the proximity between his reference to the work on his sketch for Paris-Mondial and his work on *Human Wishes*. It may, indeed, have been his work on the Paris-Mondial 'sketch' that inspired Beckett to return to the Johnson play that he first began working on in 1937 (*viz. DTF*, 270-72).

²⁵ Here one must acknowledge both the strictly artistic experience of writing for radio, and the more diffuse experience of exposure to the world of radio broadcasting.

Sadly, these are questions that the currently-available evidence does not allow us to answer.²⁶ As such, rather than fall into the trap of tantalising, but unsubstantiated, claims, let us instead simply leave matters where they now stand: The fact of Beckett's pre-War work for radio stated, the current evidence presented, and the door left open for future researchers who may wish to pursue the matter in more depth.

There is, for instance, an uncanny similarity between the kinds of questions that would become the focus for much of Beckett's post-War work and the following remarks, made by Florisse Londre, a radio-announcer who worked for Paris-Mondial's precursor, Le Poste Colonial: 'Je rêvais en devenant speaker de connaître des artistes, des intellectuels, de leur parler, d'être presque leur collaborateur. Eh bien ! Regardez : première boîte l'artiste ; deuxième boîte, l'opérateur ; moi, je ronronne dans la troisième. Nous travaillons ensemble, nous ne nous voyons jamais. Nous lisons des nouvelles déposées sur nos tables par des mains inconnues. Là-bas...très loin, à Saïgon, Pernambouc, ceux qui les écoutent sont-ils des hommes qui pensent à nous ou des tympanes qui enregistrent ? Je croyais sans être beau, devenir un parleur. Je ne suis qu'un haut-parleur !... Un larynx, un simple larynx qui n'a même pas le droit d'avoir un accent !... Voilà' (Florisse Londre *qtd* in Frédéric Brunquell, *Fréquence monde : Du Poste colonial à RFI*, 39 – Ellipses in original).

²⁶ Certainly, the partial example of *Human Wishes* does suggest that the Paris-Mondial 'sketch' must have left some trace on Beckett's subsequent writing. James Knowlson has already drawn attention to the manner in which Beckett's play about Johnson, abortive as it may have been, 'points forward', to plays such as *Come and Go*, *Endgame* and 'above all, to *Waiting for Godot*' (*DTF*, 272). Had we preserved Beckett's Paris-Mondial 'sketch', it is quite possible that early hints of Beckett's later writings would have been discerned there also.

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