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“Making the best of a bad job”: Representations of disability, gender and old age in the novels of Samuel Beckett

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To my father, Manolo,

for introducing me to Godot,

and to my mother, Maricarmen,

for everything else

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NAMES AND ABBREVIATIONS

For the sake of clarity and language economy, the following abbreviations will be used to refer to works by Samuel Beckett. Full references of them are provided in the Works Cited section:

CSP	*The Complete Short Prose*
CDW	*The Complete Dramatic Works*
DI	*Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*
DR	*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*
HII	*How It Is*
MAC	*Mercier and Camier*
M	*Murphy*
L	*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 1, 1929-1940*
P	*Proust*
PN	"Psychology Notes"
TN	*Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable*
W	*Watt*
WH	*Worstward Ho*

“TO FAIL AS NO OTHER DARE FAIL”:

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex,* which is still considered as the foundational text of second-wave feminism. Some years later, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which became a cornerstone of feminist thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. It is remarkable, while by no means casual, that Beauvoir and Friedan did also produce two of the earliest and most influential works on ageing studies, *The Coming of Age* (1970) and *The Fountain of Age* (1993), respectively. Since then, the relationship between feminist and ageing studies has continued to thrive. Indeed, numerous feminist scholars have also produced important works on ageing, from Susan Sontag (1972) to more recent ones by Lynne Segal (2013), amongst many others (Woodward 1991; Gullette 1997; Cruikshank 2003). In a way representative of Jane Sunderland's claim that "new discourses develop interdiscursively out of older ones" and we should look at tradition to see the links between the old and the new ones (2004, 122), much work has been devoted to both fields of study.

Unlike feminism, however, it has been noted that one of the main weaknesses of social gerontology is that it has traditionally been "data rich and theory poor" (Birren and Bengtson 1988; Featherstone and Wernick 1995; Dannefer et al. 2008). The efforts of sociology and the studies conducted provided experts with a series of patterns, statistics, behaviours and cases, but they lacked a strong framework or methodology for successful analysis and solutions. In addition, some have noted that "earlier critiques were limited to matters directly related to the concept of age" (Dannefer et al. 2008, 103), and so they did not include the intersectional elements necessary to making a field of theory that was strong, sensitive and conscious about more complex systems of oppression, exclusion and discrimination. That is a strong reason for critics to eventually turn to other theories alike, such as disability studies, and especially feminist theory, to perfect their own.

Nevertheless, and although it was similar in many aspects to sexism, ageism presented two main differences as a form of oppression. First, the category of old age is not hermetical as Man-Woman or Black-White were, meaning these were fixed and unchangeable due to the fact that they were discriminated on the basis of biological features set since birth. On the contrary, old age depends on time: nobody is born old, and everybody – in normal circumstances, will *become* old, which makes it a very special case. In this sense, demographical changes such as a higher life expectancy and the ageing population made old age a more probable reality, which was one of the main causes for ageing studies to develop in the first place. Thus, old age is a category we are all heading to, but the fact that we are not there yet, combined to its being inevitable, causes more anxiety. If there is something that is socially worse than being powerless, it might be being born powerful and being displaced by nature and society into powerlessness. To these general ideas, we can add Toni Calasanti's (2005) assertion that "because our culture is ageist, we learn this form of bigotry from the time we are born. Either we try to avoid the ageing process or we lose self-esteem because of the selves we feel we are becoming" (8). So, ageism is not only a consequence of our fear of old age, but an attitude established *by* society *in* society. It is an attitude that is based on stereotypes and also perpetuates them by systematically discriminating after age conditions. As a consequence, individuals are in a way despised by the same behaviours and thinking they helped establish when they were the privileged ones in the model. Furthermore, due to its progressive nature, ageing carries new kinds of self-rejection and denial.

In the same line, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has placed disability studies under a "larger undertaking [field] that can be called identity studies" (2002, 487), and she thinks that, while feminist theory cannot be transferred intact to disability studies, it can "offer profound insights, methods, and perspectives that would deepen disability studies"

(487). Indeed, all three categories are present in any aspect of culture: “its structuring institutions, social identities, cultural practices, political positions, historical communities, and the shared human experience of embodiment” (489). As a consequence, they all inevitably have an influence in the social construction of identity and our cultural notions regarding society. All this suggests that, if different power hierarchies work in similar ways, the subversion of traditional models in all of them can be also attempted by means of using similar mechanisms of struggle and visibility. In this sense, Garland-Thomson insists on the need to integrate disability in a feminist context, since it deepens our understanding:

> of gender and sexuality, individualism and equality, minority group definitions, autonomy, wholeness, independence, dependence, health, physical appearance, aesthetics, the integrity of the body, community, and ideas of progress and perfection in every aspect of cultures. [...] In other words, understanding how disability operates as an identity category and cultural concept will enhance how we understand what it is to be human, our relationships with one another, and the experience of embodiment.
>
> (490)

In any case, all three categories of disability, gender and old age affect the way we perceive ourselves and the way we relate to others and the world. As a consequence, they are in the end related to the notions of visibility and especially, following Garland-Thomson’s argumentation, of identity, a notion that became less fixed and more problematic than ever in the twentieth century. In *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (2004), Zygmunt Bauman provides an overview on the evolution of such concepts during the last two centuries until the present day. In the introduction to the text, Vecchi talks about the ambivalence of identity, indicating that, whatever the field of investigation is in which we test that ambivalence, “it is always essential to perceive the twin poles that it imposes on social existence: oppression and liberation” (Bauman 2004, 8). Moreover, for Bauman:

> “identity” is revealed to us only as something to be invented rather than discovered, [...] something one still needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers and then to struggle for and then to protect through yet more struggle.
>
> (15)

Therefore, we have an identity that is built but has to be maintained through time, which involves a prolonged effort. In relation to this, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the “precarious and forever incomplete status of identity” (16) is more difficult to hide than ever, which is a situation we need to fix if we want a successful struggle. This renewed questioning of identity is marked by the globalization of the world. Bauman says:

> Remember that in the eighteenth century the journey from, say, Paris to Marseille took as long as it did in the Roman Empire. For most people, “society” as the uppermost “totality” of human cohabitation (if they thought in such terms at all) was equal to the immediate neighbourhood. [...] [E]ach person's place was too evident to be pondered, let alone negotiated.
>
> (18)

With the proliferation of changes and the expansion of views, identity would progressively be more attractive to philosophers and sociologists if addressed as a relevant issue to understand human behaviour. Therefore, the new attention provided to it is a natural consequence of industrialization and all of the technological advances made in the twentieth century. This has partly been the breeding ground for the profoundly intersectional nature of fourth-wave feminism. In the last few decades, scholars like

Michael Kimmel or Raewyn Connell have fostered a field of investigation on the role of men in society and how patriarchy affects *them*. The underlying idea is that only by understanding the lives of men, an issue traditionally left out of feminist theory, will we be able to understand the whole situation and find better approaches and solutions. As much as society has expectations and goals reserved for women, it has different ones for men, and an investigation on this side has proven useful in addressing the overall issue of gender in modern society. Actually, a feminist perspective has become essential to studying power relations, which includes disability and old age as well. Furthermore, new insights on both old people and women are a consequence of a new interest raised after changes in society during the past century, most notably population ageing and the conquest of rights by feminism. Similarly, disability has gathered more interest thanks in part to medical developments and the welfare state, which have allowed impaired people to take part in social life more actively.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to provide an assessment of the representations of disability, gender, and old age in the eight novels written by Samuel Beckett, thus covering the period from 1932 to 1964, the date when the English version of *How It Is* was published.[1] While they differ greatly in their treatment of these topics, there is still an underlying feeling that all of them try to provide answers to the author's concerns about existence and impotence. As Irving Wardle put it, "Beckett's energy goes not into exploring alternative possibilities for creatures who have reached their destinations, but in discovering new forms in which they can more eloquently voice their despair" (Graver and Federman 1979, 340). The main goal of this thesis is precisely to analyse these forms and to explore Beckett's distancing from tradition in literary terms in his choice of protagonists who are out of the social norm, in terms of disability, gender and/or age. Indeed, when Samuel Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Swedish Academy claimed that it was "for his writing, which – in new forms for the novel and drama – in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation."[2] To use destitution in order to achieve elevation is only made possible by means of a systematic subversion of the main dual structures of thought. *Destitution*, in a Beckettian context, may thus be understood as his presentation of a raw view of the human condition, as Beckett's "elevation" includes the vindication of individuals traditionally shadowed in society and art (Beauvoir 1970, 134; Garland-Thomson 1997, 9). This paradox, in the case of Beckett, seems centrally concerned, as we shall see, with the inclusion and particular representation of alternative, non-hegemonic configurations of body and gender and of the experiences of old people,[3] giving them visibility and a new meaning. As a consequence, political readings of Beckett multiplied in the 1980s, some of which dealt with Beckett's "positioning of his interlocutors against identification with dominant ideologies and hierarchies, particularly the patriarchal" (Van Hulle 2015, 24).

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[1] A summary of the novels is provided in Annex 1 to serve as a brief guide to the main themes and characters in them.

In relation to the three critical perspectives to this study, it must be noted that studies on disability in Beckett's works have often adopted a medical approach, but there was also a renewed critical interest in the 1980s that led scholars to focus "on the abject and dwindling corporeality in the trilogy" (Van Hulle 2015, 30), reaching conclusions that provide theoretical starting points for this dissertation's observations on the body. Gender analyses, on the other hand, have been most prolific from a psychoanalytic approach, with special attention to Freudian and, to a lesser extent, Jungian models, a situation surely marked by the complex relationship between Beckett and his mother and his own interest in psychoanalysis.[4] In this aspect, Jennifer Jeffers's *Beckett's Masculinity* (2009) is a remarkable and recent work that links Beckett to the notion of masculinity in relation to Ireland as a motherland, English as a mother language, and other cultural aspects of gender. However, it has been noted that masculinity in Beckett is still an under-researched area (Maude 2009, 4). Ageing has, finally, been commented on especially in the trilogy of novels, where it is very present and closely linked to disability and death. Therefore, old age in Beckett has been mostly discussed in terms of its connections with Beckett's aesthetics of failure and its power as a source of inspiration, as analysed by Elizabeth Barry in "Samuel Beckett and the Contingency of Old Age" (2016). Disability, non-normative masculinities and old age are thus part of an Alterity that has not been studied closely until very recently. Although we can find articles and books that deal with these three elements separately and from a number of perspectives, this thesis tries to show how the three of them are combined by the author in order to give a meaning to an *oeuvre* in which form and content are inextricably linked. In the end, while Garland-Thomson wittily points out that "the cultural function of the disabled figure is to act as a synecdoche for all forms that culture deems non-normative" (2002, 490), it is essential to see its particular meaning in Beckett's works and its relationship with the other two categories to understand the specific functioning and effects of all three of them.

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[2] Nobel Media AB 2019. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969." Accessed October 21, 2019, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1969/summary/.

[3] I follow Toni Calasanti (2004) in using the term "old" instead of "older" for political reasons. As she notes, "using the term 'older' conveys that old people are more acceptable if we think of them as like the middle-aged" (S305). Thus, she uses "old" in a way similar to the use of "black," in order to "imbue [the term] with dignity, (…) to recover and instill the term with positive valuation" (S305).

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[4] Beckett's deep interest in psychology is widely illustrated by his "Psychology Notes," held at Trinity College Dublin (TCD MS10971/7 and MS10971/8) and published in Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui Volume 16, Issue 1 (2006). Such interest and influence are also assessed and discussed in James Knowlson's biography *Damned to Fame* (1996) and in Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon's *Samuel Beckett's Library* (2013).

While numerous scholars have shown how Beckett had specific literary and aesthetic ideas that vindicated areas in artistic creation that had been traditionally ignored, especially notions of impotence, silence and failure (Mercier 1977, Baldwin 1981), one of the main objectives of this thesis is to understand how the social and physical categories of disability, gender and old age both shape and are shaped by such a literary style. It is a style that revolves around Beckett's idea that "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail" (*TD*, 125), which accounts for the increasing presence of impeded protagonists who lose male power and are increasingly close to death. Indeed, this study starts from the hypothesis that all three categories work together in Beckett's novels, which provides a perfect example for the complex interactions between them. In order to do so, and so as to emphasize Beckett's preference for social minorities as protagonists, such categories are dealt with from their condition as "Other(s)." "The category of *Other*," says Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, "is as original as consciousness itself" (1949, 26, italics in the original). Such assertion, then, both acknowledges it as an intrinsic part of human existence and bounds it to perception. While organizing the world from the perspective of an "I" might be a natural mechanism, based on subjectivity as a way to shape the world around us, the One-Other duality is more problematic in society, as it involves the relationships of power and oppression according to which it organizes itself:

> The second member [of the opposition] is but the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation. Thus abnormality is the other of the norm [...], woman the other of man, stranger the other of the native [...].
>
> (Bauman 1991, 7)

This is due to society members being placed in groups according to their identities, which are defined by hierarchies and oppositions as well, a grouping that makes the One a stronger Subject, but might weaken the Other due to its systematic nature, generalization and other processes. When applied to society, there is not an "I" anymore, but rather an "us" and a "them":

> Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both self and the other, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities.
>
> (Okolie 2003, 2)

The Other is one of the main notions in Western philosophies of the nineteenth and, especially, the twentieth centuries, as it was used, with different meanings, by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Edmund Husserl in his *Cartesian Meditations* (1931) and Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), amongst others. Beauvoir draws from those previous developments to build her theory, and even uses Hegel's "master versus slave" analogy in order to adapt it to a gender-based division (1949, 99). Thus, her discourse revolves around the idea of Other as an entity created by a specific One placed on the side of power, which in such position finds legitimation to shape the world, negatively affecting the Other's experience. It is a recurrent idea, in the work of Beauvoir and other prominent theorists, that only external mediation can turn an individual into Alterity (330), in the sense that the two parts are defined in opposition to each other, as "[n]o group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself" (26). In general terms, feminist philosophy, especially that belonging to the second wave, deals with relationships of oppression in which the oppressor has also the privilege of being the part that defines the world and the norm, so that "the Other is singularly defined according to the singular form in which the One decides to affirm itself" (306). Beauvoir thus sees the function of this dualistic mechanism as a way not only to understand, but to socially order the world, a mechanism strongly based on human subjectivity.

However, there are many other divisions, apart from gender, according to which we are classified: the colour of our skin, our provenance, profession, religion, etc. These "intersect in creating systems of advantage for some and disadvantage for others" (McMullin and Cairney 2004, 79). In other words, all of them interact and mark our role in society and how we are perceived by others in it, and it is only by deconstructing all these categories that "we can begin to develop a feminist politics based on sympathy with otherness" (Pitt 1998, 400). Nevertheless, Beauvoir sees a meaningful difference between other dualities and that of Man-Woman. Women are not a social minority and they do not have a collective consciousness as black people or the Proletariat might have, and further, "men say 'women,' and women adopt this word to refer to themselves; but they do not posit themselves authentically as Subjects" (1949, 28). This way, the author is showing how reality is defined and shaped by the One – designated as One by itself, thus perpetuating its power and generating a situation of oppression and a hierarchy, as it is placed as positive and normal. Since Woman is the Other *par excellence*, her struggle matches in many ways those of a number of historical minorities that have been oppressed for centuries, hence the importance to adopt a feminist perspective to assess the situation of other groups. Therefore, the experience of women in the twentieth century may be seen to be at the roots of the search for one's own self and identity, which this thesis aims to link to that of Samuel Beckett's characters, mostly invisible and identity-less, too. Such lack of identity is more apparent, as we shall see, at the end of his production, and particularly in his late novels, where human identity seems to dissolve along other literary conventions regarding plot, location and style. Thus, both *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* contain stories of bodily and mental decay told by characters lying on a bed; the narrator of *The Unnamable* starts his own with the questions: “Where now? Who now? When now?” (*TN*, 285); the location of *How It Is* is “the mud [the narrator] live[s] on” (*HII*, 9). Their unclear contexts and experiences parallel decay and lack of coherence in the structures of the texts themselves: the first part of *Molloy* consists of a one-page paragraph in which the protagonist explains his current situation, followed by a second one in which he tries to tell how he got there and that is around eighty pages long, depending on the edition; *The Unnamable* is a monologue with the form of a single paragraph of more than two hundred pages; and *How It Is* is made of clusters of words that contain no signs of punctuation whatsoever.

Due to the idiosyncrasy of Samuel Beckett’s writing, this thesis adopts a particular approach to both theory and works. As mentioned, as a result of Beckett’s ideas, his works tend to dissipation at many levels: of identity, of body, of society. Therefore, the approach of this thesis combines cultural and socioeconomic aspects of representation with more philosophical and ahistorical perspectives. Towards the end of Beckett’s novelistic production, society progressively disappears, as do relationships between characters, and representations focus on individuals in strange worlds. In this sense, these works deal more with the psyche and structures of logical thought than with social relations, if only because protagonists have little contact with other characters, if any.

It is true that both author and novels are marked by cultural notions that have a historical context, and the works negotiate their meaning with it, but Beckett does not look for a realistic sociological image, he rather offers an anti-historical representation. This way, he defies the conventional system of representation and therefore should not be studied as a classic novelist. As a consequence, the habitual parameters work to create a symbolic image that exceeds detail as a real representation. In fact, detail states its own limitations as a mechanism to represent reality, and the categories of disability, gender and old age are tools used to look for the essence of the human. In other words, Beckett’s style is the result of a cultural, political and philosophical crisis, but it does not constitute a mimetic representation of it, as it is not based on the idea of plausibility. In Anna McMullan’s words, “even though Beckett may personally have lent his support or actively intervened in particular political or historical struggles, his writing insists on an aesthetics of disintegration and non-mimeticism” (Oppenheim 2004, 96). Consequently, I intend to study Beckett from a rather ethical point of view, in an attempt to elucidate how he distances himself from hegemonic models or ideologies. Once again, there is a shift in style that affects this aspect of the thesis, and while the first novels can bear a sociological analysis, the destruction of society and earthly elements in the late novels demands an approach focused on the construction of the individual rather than on personal relations. Therefore, both the sociological and philosophical levels will be combined in order to provide the full picture of representation and its implications.

In relation to this, this thesis intends, again, to understand old age, disability and non-normative masculinity mainly as concepts subjacent to that of the Other: groups of individuals that have been traditionally invisible, both for society and for art, and who Beckett recovers and chooses as the representatives of the human and of his own art. The purpose in this thesis is then to offer an intersectional picture that tracks the similarities, as well as an analysis of how these three minorities work and what their role is in the above-mentioned elevation of the human being. In the same way, such analysis will illustrate the personal relationship of Beckett as an author with different elements of disability, gender and old age, the differences between his representations and the main norms and standards, and how such representations affect – and are affected by, his own aesthetic philosophy.

Indeed, Beckett’s aesthetic premises underwent a radical rethinking relatively early in his career. It is after he realized he could not follow the same way his mentor James Joyce had followed towards knowledge and an “apotheosis of the word” (*L*, 514) that he changed his own path and headed towards impotence (both to do and to know) and a “literature of the unword” [Literatur des Unworts] (515). The need to adapt his style has thus provided readers and scholars with novels in which the author tries to represent the same literary needs by means of different and changing mechanisms. In this sense, the present dissertation is necessarily concerned with the relationship between form and content in Beckett’s career, too. As will be shown, Beckett seeks the union of both elements of writing, which seems to, at least partly, account for the presence of bodies and behaviours that counter the norm, as these follow a literary style that, in turn, counters literary rules and conventions, undermining “traditional forms of writing” (Ben-Zvi 2011, 685). Such style is marked by particular choices at the narrative level, as mentioned above, but also by a broken syntax and a rhythm characteristic of what Ulrika Maude has called “Beckett’s performative prose” (2009, 1).

In relation to this, it is important to note Beckett’s lifelong obsession with George Berkeley’s most famous aphorism: *esse est percipi* [To be is to be perceived]. As we will see, identity and existence themselves are essential concerns for Beckett’s protagonists. Both notions are jeopardized in different, progressive degrees throughout Beckett’s artistic production and therefore addressed differently. In contrast to their invisibility in society, his protagonists need to be listened to, to be perceived, something often prevented by their physical conditions and disabilities. Words lose their meaning and discourses lose their coherence, but characters keep on trying to convey meaning. As a consequence, Beckett keeps adapting his models of characters to show, in different degrees, non-normative configurations of bodies and gender. In his own words, Beckett explains his style based on repetition and reformulation as follows: “There are many ways in which the thing I am trying to say in vain may be tried in vain to be said” (*TD*, 123). This dissertation tries to analyse all those representations, come up with patterns, and trace the links between life, artistic ideas, and production, focusing on the final implications regarding power relationships and visibility.

In so doing, one of the objectives of this thesis is to compare the author with himself at different moments in his life, seeking to explore the relationship between his life and his work. The case of Beckett has an added interest due to the fact that, at times, his writing becomes so transparent that we can glimpse ideas that seem anecdotal but that will eventually have a much greater impact and presence on his later works. As a result, the prolongation in time of his novelistic production makes it especially worth analysing. Hence that this thesis observes his novels in a more specific way. In connection with this, Rubin Rabinovitz has said that:

> His development as a writer is best observed in his fiction, the only genre he worked in consistently throughout his career. Many of the innovative devices that would reappear in his later works were introduced in his first stories and novels.
>
> (1984, 2)

This way, Beckett is a writer that picks up and perfects old ideas and motifs throughout his career, changing devices and approaches but repeating the themes he is centrally concerned with. Since we can see a progressive change in his works that begins early in his career and culminates in his later works, an analysis is very appealing in which we can look at the generation and transformation of such literary devices, especially if we take into account that his debut in theatre was only in 1949, the year when he finished the composition of *Waiting for Godot*, after some two decades of writing extended prose works.

Thus, one central aspect of this thesis is the analysis of the shift from third-person narrators to a style of first-person stream of consciousness that greatly differs from his dramatic works. Narration in the form of an inner monologue is essential to assess how protagonists lose the mastery traditionally associated to men and how their perception and expression are affected by the decay of their abilities, which allows for rich analyses from the perspective of disability and ageing studies, favoured by monologues in his later works in which we encounter time leaps, memories, and estrangement from the present time. Theatre, in this sense, somehow breaks the idea of inner monologues, with an emphasis on *inner*, as the notion of silence, essential for Beckett, differs in terms of both meaning and representation whether in theatre or prose, if only because the textual content of a play is delivered orally, which necessarily involves a character speaking, while in the late novels it is delivered by means of a first-person stream of consciousness that seems to happen inside the head of the narrator. In Beckett's theatre, this limitation is perhaps most successfully bypassed in *Rockaby*, where the voice (V) is heard through a speaker and not physically pronounced by the woman (W). Moreover, in theatre, we are spectators and do not get so clear a first-hand experience of the characters' struggle, while in the trilogy of novels the characters' slowing down and difficulties in discourse parallel "the reader's progress through the work" (Maude 2009, 83), thus fostering identification.

Moreover, theatre depends on other practical and physical elements. For example, Billie Whitelaw associates the increasing presence of women in Beckett's pieces to the death of his two preferred male actors (Ben-Zvi 1990, 10). This restriction does not appear in prose, as Beckett does not need a physical person to meet the needs of the narration. In relation to these limitations, we can look, for example, at the piece *Not I* (1972), which consists of a monologue delivered by a Mouth and includes the role of an Auditor who sits somewhere amid the audience and at some points raises his hands to show compassion

(*CDW*, 376). Beckett accepted to leave this role out of the play, arguing that "[h]e is very difficult to stage (light-position) and may well be of more harm than good. For me the play needs him but I can do without him. I have never seen him function effectively" (quoted in Gontarski 1998, 144). This is yet another restriction overcome by the novels, as elements that are contradictory or exceed physical boundaries may be, and are in fact, present there, as is the case of the Unnamable's face falling to pieces (*TN*, 307). In this sense, Beckett seems to have more freedom in prose to create works where "the boundaries between the body and the outside world are unstable, and the body is still disorganized and inarticulate" (Tajiri 2007, 47). In a way, one is limited when it comes to physically staging contradiction, while in the novels it is a matter depending on imagination, where the escape from coherence is easier.

In Beckett's drama, pieces tend to the disappearance of movement and have often been associated by both author and scholars with terms more related to plastic arts, dance and music, rather than literature, strictly speaking (Pattie 2000, 89). This is essential for our choice since, as we will see, the form of written discourse, the role of language, are closely related to his attack on power structures and relationships. Beckett's *oeuvre* is one based on dispossession and decay. His experimentalism in his later years moves away from novel as a format and approaches time very differently, with forms that resemble photographs in which the role of identity, choice-making and abilities are minimal, set in a time that seems static or eternal (see Shalghin 2014), as suggested throughout *Waiting for Godot* and meaningfully expressed in *Endgame*:

> HAMM: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!
>
> CLOV: [Violently.] That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

[Pause.]

(*CDW*, 113)

Since this dissertation draws on three theoretical fields with strong sociological and philosophical bases, applied to the representation of characters, stigmatized behaviours and relationships, it does not seem appropriate to analyse short prose works such as the three-page-long *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), where two bodies lay on the floor in a blank space, or the dramatic piece *Breath* (1969), which consists of the sound of a newborn baby's cry – or *vagitus*, followed by the exhalation of an old person in a scenario filled with "miscenalleous rubbish," and is less than thirty seconds long according to the script (*CDW*, 371). Most plays and short stories by Beckett appear after *How It Is* (1964) and start from the point where that novel finishes, namely one in which physical movement is minimal and the action, if any, is found in the recollections and reports of characters. This implies a very abstract style by which plays become "frescoes of the skull" (Knowlson and Pilling 1979, xiii), in the sense that they seem both to represent Beckett's introspections and to happen inside of the mind, an idea expressed in *Texts for Nothing*: "perhaps we're in a head, it's as dark as in a head before the worms get at it, ivory dungeon" (*CSP*, 106). This means that Beckett leaves out earthly elements as he reaches such an extreme situation: notions like gender, body, time and age seem to be rendered meaningless and interaction with the world is almost completely absent. In the late period, plays become ghostly, the line between life and death seems to disappear and the themes and level of abstraction of the plays complicate almost any physical or sociological analysis. In relation to this, it seems that such extremely short pieces work on the reader or audience in a different way to Beckett's extended prose. This thesis will try to show that novels require a prolonged effort by the reader and allow us, thanks to their extension, to see more clearly how conventions are forced and dismantled.

The last reason for focusing on the novels is the idea, central to Beckett studies, of a “revelation” referred to by the author as having taken place in his mother’s room in 1945. This epiphany, to use the Joycean term, caused him to change his writing, distance himself from Joyce, and focus on impotence:

> I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.
>
> (Quoted in Knowlson 1996, 352)

However, this is not the sudden realization suggested by the idea of “revelation,” but rather the outcome of his life experience and observations on philosophy and art. For Knowlson, a significant element of Beckett’s post-revelation art is that “he would draw henceforward on his own inner world for his subjects [...] the imagination would be allowed to create alternative worlds to those of conventional reality” (1996, 352-353). In other words, it entails an active quest for new modes of representing the reality of life perceived by Beckett that necessarily involve a rethinking of the main representational devices and motifs. Ideas such as alternative representation and inner world complicate the assessment of his later works in traditional terms of history and society, as they simply appear to be beyond them. This thesis intends to illustrate such rethinking and changes in representation up to that final situation: the locations, which in the early works are Dublin or London, become later on indeterminate, unknown places like the “Molloy country” or “the mud” of *How It Is*; while *Dream* deals with Belacqua’s love affairs with women and social relationships, *The Unnamable* constitutes a confused inner ontological reflection; if Belacqua is in the “salad days” of his youth, Molloy refers to his own “enormous history,” living – or, in his words, “dying,” at a point so remote from both youth and adulthood that he even doubts having lived. These conditions are conceived by the use of different representations of disability and old age that question traditional ideas of masculinity and power.

Since Beckett's first published theatrical piece was, as mentioned, composed in 1949, everything in his dramatic production is placed after such revelation, so one can deduce that he had already, in a way, found the mentioned genuine artistic approach to expression and he engaged in a process of refinement. On the contrary, and as we will study, novels show the author repeatedly changing his approach and manipulation of many linguistic and narrative elements as he checks out their inefficiency. In other words, we do not find, before *Mercier and Camier*, Beckett's characteristic politics of subtraction, but we can, as noted above, retrospectively see ideas that foreshadow the "revelation," notwithstanding the fact that he had not yet expressed it formally. Thanks to this, the novels show the big picture of the development of his art and its relation with his life.

With regard to the distribution of the main body of the thesis, there is a section for each separate field: disability, gender and old age. It is important to note that the last section is shorter than the previous ones because it is complemented by them, most obviously by disability, since impairment is one of the main elements in ageing studies. Thus, sections are interrelated and the two first ones outline or discuss ideas that will be only concluded in the last one. In fact, the whole thesis is distributed in that way, so that only when we understand the consequences of disability can we discuss the construction of men as impotent individuals, and only then can we understand best the importance of old age for that impotence and the differences in the process of ageing for both men and women.

In general terms, the first section deals separately with chapters on perception, expression and motility. Chapter one examines Beckett's interest in psychology and the characters' references to an incoherent world, more specifically illustrated by *Murphy* and its protagonist's job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, including passages that seem to constitute an apology of difference in mental health. It also studies the importance of memory and troubled minds for Beckett. Chapter two addresses the Beckettian idea of the "inability to express" and the way the author goes from the inclusion of parodies of language to a more radical experimentation at a linguistic level, most evidently in *Watt*, and at a discursive level by means of the shift to first-person narration and the inclusion of the stream of consciousness technique. Chapter three studies how and why Beckett chooses characters with decaying bodies to be protagonists of a novel based on the motif of a quest, as in *Molloy*. It examines such decay and the methods of adaptation used, relating them to the idea, central in Beckett, of "going on." It finally provides an analysis of how, after paralysis and dissolution of the body, movement passes to discourse and reveals physical displacement as a metaphor for the search of answers. Chapter four analyses the results of the combination of all three levels (perception, expression, movement). It relates the idea of life as trauma to the lack of integration shown by Beckett's protagonists. The final result seems to be what I called *contagious resilience*, in the sense that the form of the work complements and is complemented by the inclusion of disability motifs, which drives identification between reader and protagonists, and conveys positive emotions and attitudes on the former.

The second section, dedicated to gender, departs from the idea that, in the novels, disability takes from men the main conditions associated to hegemonic masculinity. In this sense, chapter five deals with the relationship between male characters who are not in control of their lives and discourses and Beckett as an author who is not in control of his *oeuvre*. *Malone Dies*, for its metanarrative nature, is a case in point and is thus studied more closely. Chapter six shows how this loss of mastery is complemented by the inclusion of alternative configurations and anti-hegemonic models of masculinity. It examines how Beckett subverts and parodies the ideas of man or family, and especially how he challenges normative sexuality as his writing changes over time. Chapter seven analyses how the treatment to women changes as well. The initial misogyny is especially illustrated by *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and Betty Friedan's idea of *feminine mystique*, and the chapter shows the harshness and objectification in the representation of women in the early works. The same chapter studies how Beckett humiliates male protagonists and thus seems to draw a line between the voices of protagonists, narrators and his own. Chapter eight closes the section with an account of how, due to Beckett's advance towards abstraction, indifference appears, and the final result is that gender seems to become irrelevant when the issues raised deal with universal feelings of solitude and necessity, where dependency exists regardless of the gender of the person who helps. Hence, this chapter also provides insights on the progressive change in the interactions between men and women.

The last section deals with the effect and importance of old age for Samuel Beckett's literary ideas, but also with the effect and importance of disability and gender in the representation of old age itself. In this sense, chapter nine addresses the general conception of age in Beckett. It shows how the author, appreciating the value of old age in representation, referred to youth at the beginning of his career, as he had only experience of it, while he provides images of nostalgia when talking about ageing. After that, the chapter provides an assessment of the idea of old age as the cause of physical and mental decay and the extreme importance of memory – and its loss, for Beckett. Chapter ten deals directly with the representation of old age, with a focus on impairment and death. It relates extreme age with extreme impairment, and shows how death is always present and even indistinguishable from life. However, prolongation in time allows protagonists – or forces them, to insist on their attempt to go on and "fail better." The last chapter focuses on intersectionality in order to offer a transversal assessment of the three fields chosen for the study. Thus, the chapter discusses the need for this intersectionality and the importance of the lack of power in Beckett, which works at several levels. Characters suffer a multiple jeopardy in a sociological sense, and their own identity is threatened by their extreme disability and ageing, and by other stigmas such as those imposed by classism. That last chapter studies how specific representations put them in the place of the Other in a dialectic of Alterity, and how the particular treatment delivered by Beckett puts him beside them, defending them.

An astonishing amount of new scholarly material appears each year about Samuel Beckett's *oeuvre*. The amount of personal manuscripts, letters, notebooks and drafts, together with the access granted by his legal heirs to new material and the commitment of dozens of scholars around the globe, make Beckett studies a field that is alive and thus encourages new readings of his works. Such richness has favoured the apparition of a number of thematic conferences, journals and academic courses focused on Beckett. This thesis intends to combine such favourable panorama to the most important and recent progress in the fields of disability, masculinity and old age.

In the first novel written by Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the author already presents his concerns on the uselessness of language, and the narrator, as he discusses the difficulties of literary creation when one reached a dead end, states that "all we can do, if we are not too old and tired by that time to be interested in making the best of a bad job, is to deploy a curtain of silence as rapidly as possible" (*DR*, 113). Although silence would start permeating his works years later, after different attempts to evidence confusion and problems in communication, Beckett was undoubtedly interested in "making the best of a bad job" since his youth, which was the essential cause for his recurrent modifications on his approach to impotence over time. The main objective of this thesis is to explain how, since coherence and expression were impossible beforehand for Samuel Beckett, and he was aware of both that impossibility and his need as person and artist to keep trying – the "bad job," "making the best of it" involves the recovery, as protagonists, of traditionally invisible subjects in history: disabled, old men who do not fit hegemonic standards of masculinity, just as Beckett himself did not fit the main conventions of literary tradition. Beckett's *oeuvre* could only be created, and can only be understood, with the inclusion of these characters and related motifs. Likewise, the power of his novels is to a great extent achieved by means of the combination of such characters and motifs with the form and style of his narrations. It is the aim of this thesis to offer a fresh re-reading that might illustrate a small part of the author's work. Not only are these fields receiving unprecedented attention, but this thesis will hopefully show that these three categories are essential to understanding Beckett's *oeuvre* and its deep philosophical implications.

SECTION 1.

“HEARING NOTHING SAYING NOTHING CAPABLE OF NOTHING”: REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY

> all I hear leave out more leave out all hear no more lie there in my arms the ancient without end me we’re talking of me without end that buries all mankind to the last cunt they’d be good moments in the dark the mud hearing nothing saying nothing capable of nothing nothing
>
> *How It Is*

1. THE DAMAGED BRAIN: RUPTURES IN PERCEPTION AND MEMORY

Life's like Sanskrit read to a pony

Lou Reed, *What's Good*

1.1. USING PSYCHOLOGY TO DEPICT THE WORLD

Samuel Beckett had a lifelong interest in psychology and the human mind (see *PN*; Knowlson 1996; Van Hulle and Nixon 2013), which was a result of his natural thirst for knowledge but was also fostered by experience with his own mental issues and his going under psychotherapy during the 1930s with Dr. Wilfred Bion. During his life, Beckett showed knowledge on the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler, among others, and used his notes on psychology with a creative purpose. He seems to have been profoundly attracted by their ideas and discovered the great value of a damaged mind for the transmission of his literary ideas, as he openly acknowledged (*TD*; Graver and Federman 1979; Shainberg 1987). His works are to a great extent composed by discourses that, at various levels, examine the lack of power to apprehend both the world and one's own existence. These discourses are articulated by a number of narrative and aesthetic mechanisms that work together to create the final object, of which the agency of a dysfunctional mind is only one among the most prominent aspects.

In view of this, scholars have long acknowledged the relation and similarities between both the form and content of Beckett's works and aspects linked to mental or neurological disorders such as schizophrenia (Piette 1993; Weller 2008; Barry 2016a), psychosis (Barry 2016a), Asperger's syndrome and autism (Quayson 2010), hysteria (Weller 2008), Korsakow's syndrome (Piette 1993), or Parkinson's disease (Culik 1983), among many others. Specific clinical pathologies have thus proved a useful reference to having a more complete understanding of Beckett's exposition of human existence, which has led to an increasing number of intersectional approaches with a strong clinical basis, but also encourages parallel analyses addressing the literary meaning and implications of the use of disability motifs in the world of the novels of Samuel Beckett, and impairment in his characters.

In this sense, this dissertation follows the general agreement in the field of disability studies regarding the use and definition of the terms "impairment" and "disability." From a social perspective, we might say that impairments are the injuries, illnesses or conditions that might affect an individual in a negative way, while disability is the limitation to participate in society in the same way non-impaired individuals can. This has led this field to focus on the social model of disability and the idea that, apart from the medical basis to disablement, the features of the world are essential in the creation of disadvantages for the impaired (Bickenbach et al. 1999, 1173). These disadvantages and limitations come from environmental and social sources. Therefore, disability, rather than a medical notion, is a social concept understood as the product of the relationship between an impaired individual and her relationship with world and society, so that, in a sense, impairment is natural and disability is a construct. Hence, the same impairment can imply different degrees of disability according to the context of people. In the words of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson,

> the terms impairment and disability distinguish between bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired, and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments in the world.
>
> (2011, 591)

Following this, disablement becomes "a political issue, a matter of civil rights" (Bickenbach et al. 1999, 1174), and its representation might have implications for the political positioning of a writer and the empathy of the reader. In the same way, Beckett uses it with artistic, even philosophical, purposes. As we will see, protagonists in Beckett show progressively more important impairments in their bodies and senses, and their experiences increasingly evidence their disabilities.

Beckett's protagonists face, seemingly without exception, a gap between reality as experienced by characters surrounding them and their own experience of it. As long as there is a society, protagonists are socially awkward. In relation to this, we find confusion and problems in perception ever present in the novels. In the early novels this is not necessarily the consequence of bodily impairments, which are most probably, as Ato Quayson has put it, "symptomatic of some general loss of understanding of, or investment in, the organization of the world" (2008, 188). In this sense, we find that Belacqua, the protagonist of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, knows that "the reality of the individual [...] is an incoherent reality" (*DR*, 101), but yet he is immersed in a constant attempt to reach and display all-encompassing knowledge, which eventually reveals itself as an attempt to fool himself. His discourse is that of a man convinced, or trying to convince himself, that he understands the reach, limits, and nature of such incoherence, as though he would have found a way to order reality, useful at least to manage his own vital experience. Nevertheless, that same discourse results in sentences that get eventually entangled in themselves or rejected halfway through, making his failure and confusion evident, as the narrator himself notes when saying that Belacqua is confused or questioning his reasoning: "Unfortunate Belacqua, you miss our point, *the* point" (35, italics in the original). Furthermore, the notion of an incoherent reality seems to be connected to Beckett's own words, in a letter to Mary Manning Howe in 1937, that "[t]he real consciousness is the chaos, a grey commotion of mind, with no premises or conclusions or problems or solutions or cases or judgements" (*L*, 546). Such ideas of chaos and incoherence both inside and outside the mind mark the protagonists' perception and are represented by Beckett with the use of impaired minds, thus complicating their relationships with other characters.

The appreciation by the narrator of *Dream* that "[t]he mind commands the mind, and it obeys" (*DR*, 118) becomes all the more meaningful in the reading of later novels, where an obstructed perception is what shapes the world of characters. Late novels consist of a permanent to and fro full of repetitions, corrections and reformulations as the protagonists use their inner monologues as a tool to organize the ruins they, with utmost difficulty, gather with their senses. The case of Malone is one of the most evident ones: at the beginning, and repeatedly throughout his narration, he sets the goal of telling himself stories while he waits for his end (*TN*, 174) but does not manage to accomplish it as he digresses and loses his track once and again in a way similar to the development of the monologue that conforms *The Unnamable*. In relation to this, actions by narrators in the trilogy are marked by velleity, in the sense that they display wishes and a will to accomplish goals, e.g., find one's mother, find Molloy, revise an inventory, "finish dying," that are unclear and get postponed once and again. Protagonists keep repeating their purposes and trying to reorganize their thoughts and plans, as they are often not even sure about the causes or motivations for their quest – nor about the point they are at, but they ultimately never succeed. The most shocking reaction to failure is perhaps found at the end of *How It Is,* where we see the narrator dismantle everything he has exposed throughout the novel. While his initial goal was that of explaining "how it was" before, during, and after the presence of his only partner Pim, he ends up denying it all:

> all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story from beginning to end yes completely false yes

> that wasn't how it was no not at all no how then no answer how was it then no answer HOW WAS IT screams good
>
> there was something yes but nothing of all that no
>
> (*HII*, 109)

This way, he rejects his own recollections and the existence of Pim himself: "no never any Pim no nor any Bom no never anyone no only me" (110). As the narrator cancels practically everything in the novel except his own existence, the deceptive nature of his discourse comes into the light. However, we infer, from his desperation, that he was not misleading us on purpose, but elaborating on what was true for him as well. Now, the existence of the individual is not only incoherent but also unreliable and unreal, as we see the mind denying its own authority. Something similar happens in Moran's narrative in *Molloy*. The protagonist of the second part of the novel starts his story saying: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (*TN*, 87), and finishes it saying: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (170). By using this device, Beckett questions the whole narration and makes readers doubt about the story, preventing us from discerning between what actually happened and what did not. Contradiction appears constantly in Beckett and is a device to further question reality and evidence the "mess," often reflected by damaged minds. Furthermore, Beckett's works often seem to tend to destabilization, and the loss of perceptive abilities, of "the art of thinking," in the words of Malone (187), is progressive, most notably in the trilogy. Moran, due to his being a methodical, disciplined detective, is a great example of that. He seems to be sure about his knowledge of the world, but starts doubting as his story begins. Indeed, at the beginning of his report, he does recognize that "[he] found it painful at that period not to understand" (97). But doubt keeps expanding and he ends up examining his own situation, his convictions and actions:

> 1. Why had I not borrowed a few shillings from Gaber?
> 2. Why had I obeyed the order to go home?
> 3. What had become of Molloy?
> 4. Same question for me.
>
> (161)

Finally, he disparages the society that shaped his thinking, and its members. The narration reveals that Moran becomes, in the words of Rubin Rabinovitz, "disenchanted with his old bourgeois life" (Butler and Davis 1990, 34), as we note that in his discourse the "brave little lights of men" (*TN*, 153) of a town soon become the "foul little flickering lights of terrified men" (156). This change in his opinion about society only takes place when he confirms that he has been left out of it, and seems to be at least partly caused by his own frustration regarding his loss of abilities. However, Moran eventually gets used to not understanding, and his deterioration makes him change his own prospects. In this sense, Ulrika Maude, in *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009) notes the idea by Maurice Merleau-Ponty that the senses function as an interface between self and world, and therefore mediate and bring into being the relationship between the subject and her surroundings (113). This illustrates the importance in the Beckettian canon of sight, vision and touch, which Beckett combines in order to explore and develop the existence of his characters. In relation to this, physicality marks the mind's experience as well, and Eric Levy has noted that pain in Beckett is never merely physical, but "intermingled with mind, for the mind seeks to understand suffering" (2007, 22). This combination causes the protagonists further anxiety and confusion.

As a consequence, impairment in senses configures the characters' experience, but perception itself is mediated by the mind itself as well, equally impaired. Beckett explores his own concern on the mind since the beginning, and thus represents it throughout his career, offering new configurations of mind that do not fit the hegemonic norm. As we will see, such practice makes them visible and certainly validates their particular functioning.

1.2. ALTERNATIVE CONFIGURATIONS OF THE MIND: THE CASE OF *MURPHY*

Examples of the mind failing to operate properly are a mark of Samuel Beckett's novels, and *Murphy* is the one that revolves around mind and mental issues the most, at least from the point of view of an external observer. The eponymous protagonist of the novel is concerned, as the author himself was, about the division between mind and body in the Cartesian tradition. This is one of the main motifs in the novel, and it appears since its very beginning, when Murphy is presented to us tied to a chair, blocking his own body as a means to get rid of its mechanical nature and "come alive in his mind," a common practice by him as "life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (*M*, 2). Separation between mind and body is, however, only "achieved" when he dies at the end of the novel. Thus, seconds before the explosion which ends his life, the narrator shares what could be either Murphy's last thoughts or the narrator's conclusion: "Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free" (*M*, 151).[5] In chapter six of the novel, we find a full description of Murphy’s mind as a closed system that is independent from the body, a chapter that problematizes mind and looks into non-normative mind dispositions. *Murphy* constitutes, I would argue, an apology of mental disorders and a condemnation against social stigma. This is most evident in chapter nine, where we learn about the protagonist’s new job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Both by the plain, aseptic description of the patients’ conditions and by Murphy’s behaviour and view of them, Beckett seems to denounce and condemn the loss of identity and dignity they suffer at the asylum.

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[5] The context of Murphy's death makes its ultimate cause uncertain: While Ato Quayson (2010) calls it "accidental death" (840, 852), others avoid this assumption. Chris Ackerley (2004) accepts both the possibility of accident and suicide and even discusses Rubin Rabinovitz hypothesis in "The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction" (1984) of Murphy being murdered (Ackerley 2004, 207). Due to the different implications each hypothesis has in relation to the rest of the narrative, they are all problematic. Nevertheless, the line quoted is foreshadowing of the final separation of mind and body, and shows how, whether those words are Murphy's or the narrator's, the author was conscious about it.

When Murphy sees these people with all kinds of different mental issues at the asylum, he displays a sensibility different to that of other workers, which seems to communicate Beckett’s own reflection on the mentally ill, their role as outcasts from society and their anti-normative condition. Noting that those patients “were not at all the terrifying monsters that might have been imagined from Ticklepenny’s account” (*M*, 101), he does not feel horror but “respect and unworthiness” for them. Murphy’s dealing with patients is “little short of scandalous” (110), as some of them refuse to eat, exercise or get out of bed unless it is him who assists them. Ironically, Murphy is generally depicted in the novel as a solipsist, selfish individual. Thus, there is an implicit suggestion of a bond between Murphy and the patients, made more explicit by the protagonist’s personal interpretation of their condition:

> All this was duly revolting to Murphy, whose experience as a physical and rational being obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco.
>
> (107)

The qualification of "colossal fiasco"[6] might be explanatory of the difficulty faced by Beckettian characters to deal with society and their condition of misfits. Condemnation of the stigma is further developed when Murphy inquires whether all patients are certified:

> "That is not your business," said Bim. "You are not paid to take an interest in the patients, but to fetch for them, carry for them and clean up after them. All you know about them is the work they give you to do. Make no mistake about it."
>
> (97)

This excerpt cleverly suggests two interesting things: 1) that not all the patients are certified, and 2) that Murphy – i.e., all workers, must focus on their job, and on that only. The first one shows the lack of a precise method of diagnosis, and suggests that there is no need to certify their mental issues by medical means. After all, if they are in the asylum, society has already made its particular "diagnosis," they do not need further certification of their condition.

This might be analysed in opposition to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of "normate," meaning "the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them" (1997, 9) or, in Ato Quayson's words, "the able-bodied personhood that has historically been the assumed focus of history and law" (2010, 844). Normates enjoy the privilege of being at the centre of social standards and regulations. If we extend such definition to the mind, it is clear that the patients in *Murphy* are part of the exception, as they are all out of the definition. They do not fit, they are invisible to history and law, they are outcasts, and the most direct consequence of it is that no one is going to ask why they are so. With regard to our second observation, the rather threatening advice not to think about the patients' condition fosters this alienation between equals, perpetuating the stigma and the personal gap between individuals. It is as though patients, being mentally impaired, do not have a will or life of their own and become numbers in such a way that the workers of the asylum must not learn or be interested in any aspect of their personal lives or feelings. The system takes from them their right to have a life, their right to be, and so they lose identity and human dignity.

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[6] The term "fiasco" is used as well by Malone to refer to life and to the idea of escaping it as a system: "I say living without knowing what it is. I tried to live without knowing what I was trying (…). After the fiasco, the solace, the repose, I began again, to try and live" (*TN*, 189).

In his depiction of mental health and Murphy's reflections, Beckett is subversive and notes critical aspects and prejudices in the health system and society. Emily Christina Murphy attributes this, in part, to Beckett's involvement with surrealism, and sees a close link between his works and:

> the characteristic avant-garde and surrealist impulse to reclaim mental illness, particularly hysteria, and critique the bourgeois medical professional project to cure the mentally ill and suppress their non-rational modes of expression.
>
> (2014, 72)

As a consequence, this harsh depiction, among others, of the cruelty of the personal comes as a declaration of Beckett's stance on this issue; it tells the position of the author and serves as a critique to the lack of humanity in the treatment of patients. Murphy is naïve here and his account is simply that the definition of reality "varied according to the sensibility of the definer" (*M*, 107), which is a way of giving value to their non-normative experience and respecting mental "impairments" rather as alternative configurations of the mind. Furthermore, the fact that Beckett writes widely on the conditions of patients indicates an interest that will be developed and delved into further in his *oeuvre*, while it illustrates the author's concerns due to his own condition as a person undertaking psychotherapeutic treatment. In fact, he seemingly tried to reveal the weakness in the notion of "norm" and was conscious about exclusion, as suggested by a line in *Murphy* that hints to some kind of a vicious circle between mental issues and exclusion itself: "*Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens*" ["*It is hard for he who lives outside the world not to look for one of his own*"] (*M*, 96, italics in the original).[7] The line serves to outline and justify the mentioned condemnation of a stigma that eventually dooms people to lose control of their own lives. Such loss of control over one's own existence is experienced by every protagonist in Beckett, who generally accept their context but reach a balance in the tension between abandonment and continued struggle. Ultimately, the line enhances the feeling of exclusion and the search for a stable reference, a norm in which one can fit. This way, it works together with the representation of the mental asylum to raise awareness on the stigma on mental health.

Isolation and the sense of a damaged subjectivity are expressed in *Murphy* by another main technique, namely the contrast between the representation of the external world and the protagonist's understanding and subjective perception of it, as well as his own – and other characters', description and behaviour. There is a striking difference between the details Beckett uses to describe the outer world and the life of characters in the novel. The author does create a precise world for his characters to move in, but still despises what Belacqua, in *Dream*, calls Balzac's "chloroformed world," with characters "turned [...] into clockwork cabbages" (*DR*, 120). As Knowlson notes, "[p]recise topographical details do not ground his characters in an apposite world, let alone explain them away. They underline the attempted separation of the 'little world' of Murphy's inner self from the 'big buzzing confusion' of the outer world" (1996, 205). In other words, details here do not work for clarity, but against it, expanding confusion and creating further obstacles: for he who does not understand the world, to receive more information is just to receive more things to be baffled about. Therefore, in the early novels, detail in the description of physical elements is a paradoxical device that further complicates things. It is thus interesting to analyse how a confused mind conflicts the world and one's will to understand. The next point deals with that issue and with the more radical decay in the characters' senses and minds.

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[7] The line, Ackerley has noted, is a direct quote from André Malraux's *La Condition humaine* (1933), which appealed to Beckett for Malraux's sense of solitude and self (2004, 145-146).

1.3. PERCEPTION AND CONFUSION

Confusion is well present throughout all of Beckett's career. It is greatly exemplified by Mercier and Camier tossing their umbrella and following the direction pointed by it "according to laws of which [they] know nothing" (*MAC*, 16). As they forget the details of their trip and existence, characters abandon hopes of knowledge and just go on. In the words of Camier: "if I have any light to throw it is rather on what we are going to do, or rather again on what we are going to try and do, than on why we are going to try and do it" (43). This too is commonplace for characters in Beckett, the displaying of an ironic resignation to ignorance, especially when it comes to discerning reasons and motivations. The Unnamable – as Moran, seems to have accepted the incoherent nature of reality accounted before by Belacqua and shown by Mercier and Camier when he says: "Deplorable mania, when something happens, to enquire what" (*TN*, 290). Similarly, it seems that thinking often complicates things rather than clarifies them, as illustrated by Molloy's "the less I think of it the more certain I am" (8). Eventually, Beckett has the narrator of *How It Is* say "let him understand who has a wish to I have none" (*HII*, 38), a line that is echoed by the very last line of the last play published by the author, *What*

Where: “Make sense who may. / I switch off” (*CDW*, 476). Examples of this rejection towards knowledge, blended with a feeling of abandonment, appear throughout Beckett’s *oeuvre* until the very end. However, his literary production does not ultimately yield to such feelings, but rather moves on a tension between this rejection to knowledge and the desperate need to know *something*, more specifically information about one’s existence or identity. Hence the narrator of *How It Is* screams at the end: “HOW WAS IT screams good [...] WHAT’S MY NAME screams good” (*HII*, 109-10). This tension prevents them to come to terms with themselves and the world, and thus becomes the basic source of tormented minds and an obstacle for the culmination of their journeys or narrations.

The tension is further developed as characters inquire about the world while accepting surreal situations such as the hearing of voices inside their head:

> sometimes [the voices] cried only, and sometimes they stated only, and sometimes they murmured only [...]. And sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now.
>
> (*W*, 22)

Other protagonists, as Molloy, hear voices as well, and describe: “It’s with your head you hear it, not your ears, you can’t stop it, but it stops itself, when it chooses” (*TN*, 36). The aseptic description of these kinds of conditions works together with the lack of control over them and provides a new contrast, combining plain acceptance of strange conditions or events with questioning of quotidian things. In a sense, normalization of these conditions seems to imply they have accompanied characters for a long time.

On the other hand, protagonists may appear reluctant to accept their decline directly, as accounted, among others, in *Watt*:

> For my own hearing now began to fail, though my myopia remained stationary. My purely mental faculties on the other hand, the faculties properly so called of ?
>
> ? ?
>
> ? ?
>
> were if possible more vigorous than ever.

(*W*, 138)

This quote illustrates most explicitly how we cannot rely on the characters' account of reality as they cannot actually assess it themselves and can often take anything false as true. Beckett commits himself to making this clear, as we learn from the apparition of passages like this one, or from the characters' thoughts. The Unnamable joins Watt in misjudging his own abilities, as he curiously intersperses references to his difficulties with references to his "fitful" perceiving (*TN*, 270). However, as faulty as their minds might be, it is somewhat surprising that characters seem to reason, but always on their own terms, which provides the novels with their typical absurd spirit. Most memorable examples of this appear in *Molloy*: "having heard [...] that when a man in a forest thinks he is going forward in a straight line, in reality he is going in a circle, I did my best to go in a circle, hoping in this way to go in a straight line" (79). When characters manage to reason, they most often do it in this kind of misleading, fallacious way, or eventually incurring in an absurd conflict expressed by a discourse that seems to – and almost always does, lead nowhere, most famously exemplified by the delirious five-page long passage where Molloy tries to come up with a method to suck his sixteen stones without sucking the same one twice before finishing the whole cycle (64-69). Again, an explanation of such need is not provided, so that the reader is only presented with the obsession of Molloy, not with the causes for it.

Labyrinthine discourses as the stones problem one, filled with reformulations and repetition, are a mark of Samuel Beckett’s middle and late novels, and reach a new level of efficiency thanks to the modernist stream of consciousness technique. This way, the reach of Beckett’s artistic proposal is certainly amplified halfway through his career by the shift to first-person narration. Vivian Mercier has noted that, while Beckett did already focus on ignorance and impotence in *Watt* and *Mercier and Camier*, these still “suffered from the presence of an ‘omniscient’ narrator” (1977, 9). First-person implies a change in the focus and a whole new level in the exploration of his themes. This involves a new problem for the reader too, since approaching experience from a stream of consciousness perspective allows Beckett for the creation of deeper holes in the narrative. This is due to the fact that the protagonists’ disorientation and failure impregnate the narration much more powerfully. As Ato Quayson has wittily pointed out in his analysis of *Molloy*, its style:

> makes it impossible to differentiate between what occurs in Molloy’s own mind and what is actually in reality outside of it. And so the lacunae that proliferate seem to have as much to do with the intensities of Molloy’s own perceptions as they do with any breaks on the outside [...]. [I]n Molloy’s case his mind may not be reflecting his environment but intensifying and maybe even distorting it.
>
> (2008, 63)

This way, narrators often seem conscious about their own inability to apprehend reality, but this already happened before. The third-person narrator of *Watt*, who tells the story based on Watt’s own account, notes the low reliability of the protagonist: “But what kind of witness was Watt, weak now of eye, hard of hearing, and with even the more intimate senses greatly below par?” (*W*, 166). This might help us understand the confusion formed by contradictory accounts of reality in the late novels, impairment now associated to bodily experience, now to reality itself. To give an example from the same novel, we have passages in which strange changes in reality are presented, such as the furniture of the house being relocated overnight, or even the characters' constitution changing as well:

> [O]ne day Mr. Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middlesized, yellow and ginger [...] and the next fair, pale sturdy and tall, and the next dark, flushed, middlesized and fat [...] or so it seemed to Watt.
>
> (*W*, 172-173)

Beckett offers here more than one page of different combinations of the physical traits of Mr. Knott. This list is just one among the many in the novel that offer a contrast between extreme confusion in the world and the firm will to find a configuration of syntax that succeeds in accommodating it, as we will explore further in chapter two. In the middle of chaos, an external narrator is very valuable, as it constitutes a filter that serves to provide the narration with a minimum amount of order and vision: the sentence "or so it seemed to Watt" is a laconic end to a long list of bodily alterations that helps us remember that we are reading a biased account of reality. In later novels there is a change from description to a more direct representation of the experience of the inner self. While in the early novels we have external accounts of mind composition and disability, given by a narrator, such as the above-mentioned description of Murphy's mind, or Watt's alterations of speech (studied in chapter two of this thesis), in the trilogy we have access to the narrator-protagonists' perception – and experience, themselves. This has the fundamental consequence of making the novels more "sensorial" and is a meaningful step towards the merging between form and content sought by Beckett. This change, however, implies a number of further differences, such as a subversion of the use made by the author of his cultural background, now letting it through the surface only "as a relic of a former wide-ranging education," or using it "in a comic parody of learning or as an invocation of ignorance, confusion and bewilderment" (Knowlson 1996, 374).

In the late novels, the accounts by first-person narrators become all the more unreliable, as is the case of *The Unnamable*, which involves the difficulty of determining to which extent the narrator's inability to see comes from the outer darkness (*TN*, 286), or from his sight impairment (291), or from both (385). As Ato Quayson points out, "[t]his is a world where it does not matter whether the eyes have lids or not, or whether they are open or closed. 'Nothing' is to be seen in any case" (2008, 129). In fact, Watt suffers a similar problem in vision, although it is stated more casually, as we are told that such problem "admitted of only one solution: the eye open in the dark. The results given by the closed eye were, in Watt's opinion, most unsatisfactory" (*W*, 191). In a sense, it seems that Watt chooses "seeing nothing" before being unable to see, while the Unnamable finds no difference, due to the disintegration both of his body and of the world surrounding him.

Finally, failure in perception is represented both by the senses and by a declining memory. In the late novels, when characters are almost incapable of acting or perceiving, remembering past moments is an activity increasingly present in their life. However, their memory suffers its own deterioration as well, with its own particular characteristics.

1.4. THE DECLINE OF MEMORY

Apart from the perception of the present world, the memory motif seems to have been used by Beckett in a deliberate way as well, as his thorough study on Marcel Proust's works could have complemented his study on psychoanalysis, thus helping him find, according to Mark Nixon, "a way to represent the workings of memory realistically and in many variations" (2011, 3). The motif of memory becomes especially meaningful in the works that come after *Molloy*. By then, Beckett has placed his protagonists in situations where nothing happens, or where perception of the present moment has been annulled to a point where characters cannot know what is real or what is happening. The protagonist-narrators appear alone, almost completely motionless and in places where nothing external moves either. In that context, their existence is based on thinking and elaborating on their future, or, most commonly, on their past. It seems that reminiscing about their past life is somehow a form of creating the present as well. In the words of Malone, "[a] minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really" (*TN*, 201). This could follow the idea that "the individual is a succession of individuals" (*P*, 8) and mean that identity is the cumulative sum of the past individuals and the present one, emphasizing the need of remembering the process of construction of one's own identity to maintain it. Perhaps for that reason, the past is a recurrent place for characters to go to at an advanced stage of Beckett's production.

Memory is in Beckett a source both of life and of spiritual pain. Beckett was acquainted with the notions of trauma and the power of memories, as he would extensively explore in his dramatic production: *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Not I* (1972), *That Time* (1975), *Footfalls* (1975), *Rockaby* (1980) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1980) are only a few examples that match or prolong Beckett's exploration of memory as a concealing mechanism to find one's identity and understand the world.

In the late novels, characters remember things that they cannot confirm as true, as these are often blurred, and even confirmation itself of these memories belonging to the narrators is not provided. This technique is used repeatedly throughout the trilogy and remarks the passing of time and the fragmentation of the individual as identity. While there is a past remembered as a time of understanding and clarity, there is no confirmation of that either. The Unnamable says “[a]nd yet it seems to me I remember, and shall never forget, what I was like when I was he, before all became confused” (*TN*, 345), thus distancing himself from his prior self. As Elizabeth Barry has pointed out, “it is often left unspecified whether the past-tense episodes that surface in the present tense of Beckett’s texts are memories at all, rather than imagination or borrowed anecdote” (2006, 65). Indeed, the line between memory and invention is playfully ambiguous in the trilogy. We can see this in Molloy’s confusion between them: “but perhaps I’m remembering things” (*TN*, 80), Malone’s corrections when telling his memories: “Sapo had no friends – no, that won’t do” (183), or the Unnamable’s alleged ability to create his memory, – and his will to do it as a mark of its importance for him: “The place, I’ll make it all the same, I’ll make it in my head, I’ll draw it out of my memory, I’ll gather it all about me, I’ll make myself a head, I’ll *make myself a memory* (404, italics added). As Chris Ackerley and Stan Gontarski have noted, in Beckett, “[m]emory is not the repetition of the past but the miming of the mind seeking to locate its being in the greater mystery of consciousness” (2004, 366), thus acknowledging the creative potential it has for Beckett’s narrator-protagonists.

However, this partial amnesia does not stop characters from telling their stories. As soon as Molloy states that he has forgotten almost everything, he proceeds to tell his story. Even though he does not remember how he arrived to where he is at, what he wants from his mother, what her name is, or what his own name is, he creates his story, which advances through omissions and contradictions. In Beckett, memory is most radically attacked when its frailty affects the existence of characters itself, as in the case of Molloy: “Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be” (*TN*, 44), which contrasts with his previous utterance that “I don’t quite see how something never felt can be erased from the memory, and yet it is a common occurrence”

(14). In any case, "forgetting to be" again emphasizes the creative potential of memory to create an identity, and can be bound to the necessity of memory "if one is to live really."

In any case, as when acknowledging other gaps in their mind and perception, protagonists often reckon the inaccuracy of their memories, as is the case of the narrator in *How It Is*, who states that he is telling "[his] life last state last version ill-said ill-heard ill-recaptured ill-murmured in the mud" (*HII*, 1) and "perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times" (10). Memories, as present events, are often confused and not necessarily connected in time. In *How It Is*, as in *The Unnamable* and *Malone Dies*, a blank space seems to mean a gap in time, but the extension of the gap is never clarified, and even linearity and the sequentiality of the parts are not assured.

As Adam Piette has noted, in the Unnamable:

> [t]he amnesia is clear: "no hope of anything, no knowledge of anything, with no memory of anything, no history and no prospects," whilst the short-memory coupled with a working but random semantic memory is demonstrated in the ferocious self-corrections, shreds and patches of general knowledge, the continual self-contradictions, the accelerating anarchy of "the meaning of words, the rules of syntax."
>
> (1993, 43-44)

Thus, amnesia becomes relevant for Beckett's expression of the human condition, as the representation of characters without memories or prospects enhances the idea of being lost in an unexplainable situation. Eventually, "the confusion becomes the subject, style becomes the expression of the bewildered mind's activity, and final judgments become not only unnecessary, but impossible" (Kroll 1978, 39). So, Beckett takes psychological and cognitive issues to offer a new perspective related to his aesthetic claims. In the words of Laura Salisbury,

> Beckett's textual experimentation indeed uses the context of psychological, psychoanalytic and perhaps even neurological ideas to enable a thinking that would allow something new to be seen about the relationships between psyche and soma.
>
> (Salisbury 2013, 321-322)

This seems to produce a reciprocal relationship between literature and human psychology. Such idea of reciprocity is further supported by Elizabeth Barry's acknowledging the value of literature and philosophy to understand "the founding condition of self-consciousness, the reflexive awareness which allows us to own our actions, thoughts and feelings and organize our perceptions and sensations," as it avoids "strictly materialistic explanations" (2016a, 184).

Finally, confusion and impossibility to fit in society and understand how the world works is translated to the expression of characters and is closely related to Beckett's concerns with language and literature. Therefore, the subversion he makes of the models of perception is joined by a subversion of speech and writing as mechanisms that are abused at the beginning of his production, and more radically destroyed over time. Thus, the next chapter is dedicated to analyse how Beckett takes his concerns on perception to apply and combine them with his concerns on language as a tool.

2. THE FRAGMENTED SPEECH: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ROAD TO SILENCE

> ¿Por qué no aceptar lo que estaba ocurriendo sin pretender explicarlo, sin sentar las nociones de orden y de desorden?
>
> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*

2.1. THE OBSOLESCENCE OF LANGUAGE AND THE INABILITY TO EXPRESS

In *Damned to Fame*, James Knowlson reflects on Samuel Beckett's words that, at the point of writing *How It Is,* he was "struggling to struggle on from where the Unnamable left me off, that is with the next next to nothing" (1996, 461). Beckett was eventually able to finish the novel, which he wrote in its entirety at his house in Ussy-sur-Marne, France. This novel, the last one by the author, is a work, according to Knowlson, in which "the silence with which he deliberately surrounded himself is almost tangible" (461). *How It Is*, with its presentation of a protagonist crawling in the mud while he reflects on his memories, represents the end of Samuel Beckett's road in extended prose, his most radical work in a novel towards silence and stasis. This is a work where all punctuation signs have disappeared and where the text is presented in plain clusters of words, with a narrator-protagonist who tries to communicate with his one companion so desperately, up to the point of writing the words with his nails on the back of his partner in a powerful and distressing passage:

> with the nail then of the right index in great capitals two full lines the shorter the communication the greater the capitals one has only to know a little beforehand what one wants to say he feels the great ornate letter the snakes the imps God be praised

> it won't be long YOU PIM pause YOU PIM in the furrows here a difficulty has he grasped no knowing
>
> (*HII*, 51)

Nevertheless, this is but the last step in Beckett's attempt to solve a series of problems he detected very early in his career, most importantly the obsolescence of language as an expressive tool and its relation to the need to express. Beckett was concerned about this during his whole career, as is revealed in his personal letters, critical essays, interviews and of course in his literary works, both in implicit and in explicit ways. His works would revolve around these notions, as he focused on similar themes while changing the treatment given to form and content. As early as in 1937, Beckett expresses concern about language in what is known as the German Letter, in which he talks to his friend Axel Kaun in the following terms:

> more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they have become [...] irrelevant [...]. To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.
>
> (*L*, 513-514)

In the letter, he prefigures his action plan as he proposes a destruction of language that would end up building a "literature of the unword" (514). This is an essential concept to follow Beckett, and one of the foundations of his *oeuvre*, as he consistently strips all his works away in order to erase superfluous or merely ornamental elements. The letter also revolves around the obsolescence of language as a communicative device, which would eventually lead Beckett to start writing in French in the 1940s, a decision he would stand by for the rest of his creative life, with a few occasional exceptions. Choosing

French, his second language, would allow him to express himself more concisely, looking for the *mot juste*, to use the Flaubertian term, as part of his strategy to eliminate any unwanted content: it is not only about avoiding unnecessary words but about using exactly the sought word, one that does only mean one thing, again, stepping away from the Joycean strategy of giving every word multiple meanings and references of all kinds – religious, linguistic, colloquial, etc.[8] In the letter, Beckett considers Joyce latest works to be "an apotheosis of the word" (519) and expresses his own will to head towards the opposite direction. With regard to this, Knowlson states that "already by the middle years of the 1930s, there are clear signs that [Beckett] is reaching towards an approach to writing that is radically different from Joyce's, even though it took him until after the Second World War to discover his own 'road'"(1996, 106). The scholar also detects that even though we find, in novels like *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, passages showing imitation or parody of Joyce, Beckett felt the need of separation and distance since early in his career (106). This way, in *Dream*, Belacqua/Beckett slightly points to these ideas, but has not yet reached the determination to apply them as the only solution to write freely, or the way to formally address his literary concerns. As early as in *Dream*, we find an author that already talks, through his alter-ego Belacqua, about writing a book "where the phrase is self-consciously smart and slick, but of a smartness and slickness other than that of its neighbours on the page" and where he "shall state silences more competently than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo" (*DR*, 138-139). Such statement, as others in Beckett's youth, are strikingly premonitory about his late style. At so early a point, however, Beckett was not committed to that kind of expression, at least if he was to use his mother tongue, but yet he has Belacqua state:

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[8] Frank McNally does an ironic yet true and insightful reflection on the appropriateness of Beckett's terms in his article "A Bone to Pick with Beckett" (2017). When judging about the common misuse of the term "literally" in our days, he finds the expression "literally boneless" in *Molloy* (*TN*, 73), and states that "since someone who can put the word 'coenaesthetically' in a sentence is not to be trifled with, I have to give Beckett a pass on 'literally.' Whatever his motives for inflicting such drastic osteopathy on the protagonist, he probably knew he was doing" (2017, n.p.). Although Andrew G. Christensen calls the expression a "nonsensical hyperbole" elsewhere (2017, 92), McNally's reflection is illustrative of Beckett's precision and use of language.

> 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.
>
> (47-48)

Beckett does not attempt to shift to French that early in his career, but such comment throws light on his future decision. As a consequence of his observations on language, he will shift to French as a means to purify expression, avoid superfluous elements and be more precise. Beckett seems to feel more comfortable with French at that point, at least in terms of creating the original text in a way he could not do in English: "The French language offered greater clarity and forced him to think more fundamentally, to write with greater economy" (Mitgang 1981, 35). According to Knowlson, it was easier for Beckett to write "without style" that way:

> He did not mean by this that his French had no style, but that, by adopting another language, he 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.
>
> (1996, 357)

The decision will lead Beckett to translate his own works from the French originals into English, thus providing an "unprecedented series of self-translations which are unique in the history of literature” (Cohn 1961, 613). While English seems not suitable as an original language of expression for Beckett, he is able to write in English once he has created the original work in French. This, in combination to his practices of rewriting, gives his texts a double genealogy, coming from his deleting or adding content to them (see Cohn 1961), but maintaining the general feeling and precision. In this sense, the shift in language is one of the last choices by Beckett, in a way a device to bypass the obsolescence of language and try to elucidate to which extent its impossibility is determined by sense-making structures in the mind of a native speaker. In other words, inability to express is a concern for Beckett since the beginning, and the evolution of his works is marked by his linguistic and discursive choices to expose it and, if possible, overcome it.

In any case, the lack of effectivity of language is combined with further artistic concerns. In his *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1949), Beckett went further in the definition of his own craft and talked about the quest for a new art or literature, based on:

> the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.
>
> (*TD*, 103)

According to his interventions in the *Dialogues*, Beckett perceived a failure in artists of all times, a failure one cannot escape from, and which he attributes to their falling in “[t]he assumption underlying all painting [read *art*] is that the domain of the maker is the domain of the feasible” (120). All the great artists, for Beckett, were limited for assuming such relation, for delimiting what is possible according to their own skills, which are those of Humanity as a whole. Beckett points out – and will insist on it with his literary production, that the first step towards a more adequate, while not effective, expression is to accept beforehand the impossibility of expressing effectively – which lead him to see himself as a “non-knower” and a “non-canner” (Knowlson 1996, 353). That is the contradiction upon which Beckett bases his literature, an element that makes their characters be so trapped when it comes to understanding and interacting with the world and other characters.

The impotence shown by the famous quote of the *Three Dialogues* is a cornerstone in Beckett and is recurrently observed in his narrative, most explicitly in Molloy’s own contention that “[n]ot to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition” (*TN*, 23). Whether they express it in such terms or not, several of the protagonists in Beckett’s *oeuvre*, especially those after the shift to French, are together with the author in this: from the first moment they seem to be aware that their expressive tools do not work, and hence come their alterations on their way of talking so that, whether it is due to their determination or to chance, their words get to explain something. Beckett seems to explain this when he compares himself to a man who is “on his knees, head against the wall – more like a cliff – with someone saying ‘go on’ – Well, the wall will have to move a little, that’s all” (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 29). In the novels, this idea reveals itself both in the narration and in the characters’ utterances. Chronologically, and with a focus on speech, Beckett shifts from a precise yet ineffective style in *Dream* and *Murphy* to a self-conscious blockage in *Watt* and *Mercier and Camier* that is still perceivable in *Molloy*, and then to a new style more clearly found in the last three novels, cases in which the action itself is reduced almost exclusively to monologues and to a discourse that has been more often compared to terms such as flow, vomit or incontinence (Tajiri 2007, 38; Salisbury and Code 2016, 103).

As in the case of dysfunctional perception and reasoning dealt with in chapter one of this thesis, problems in discourse, speech and verbal communication have been addressed from a number of points of view which include both medical approaches (see Beausang and Galiussi 1996; Barry et al. 2016; Salisbury and Code 2016) and more humanist or philosophical ones (see Ben-Zvi 1980; Czarnecki 2008; Murphet 2017) that have provided valuable insights on impotence and the mechanisms used by Beckett and his characters in their attempts to overcome it.

As mentioned above, Beckett was concerned about the issue of language early in his career and although his style does not yet match them in the early works, he does express his preoccupation there. As early as in *Dream*, we find the Mandarin accusing Belacqua’s “vocabulary of abuse” of being arbitrary, and also literary but yet unable to “touch” him (*DR*, 101), implying it does not reach a successful transmission of feeling, as though Beckett would have detected the artificiality of his own syntactic and narrative practices. Still unable to do otherwise, all Beckett can do in the novel is offer a parody and ironic critique of the use of such language, as inferred from this and other accusations and questionings towards it. Belacqua acknowledges the incoherence of reality and speaks of a way of expressing such “incoherent continuum” in the way Rimbaud and Beethoven do. He notices how their statements “serve merely to delimit the reality of insane areas of silence, whose audibilities are no more than punctuation in a statement of silence. How do they get from point to point. That is what I meant by the incoherent reality and its authentic extrinsecation” (101-102). The author here is foreshadowing his future seeking for expression, he shows concern and rejects the idea of an omnipotent author. The narration seems to be deliberately confused and erudite in excess, and the accuracy of the words used contrasts with the difficulty to understand it. In this sense, Belacqua ironically recognizes: “It’s silly of me, I know [...] but I hate to be a snob and use the mot juste” (172). One of the main differences between the styles of Joyce and Beckett is that the above-mentioned total knowledge appears as virtually achievable in Joyce’s narrative, while in Beckett’s the quest is futile from the start, fostering feelings of pessimism and frustration. In this line, John King has considered that despite “superficial, stylistic affinities” between both authors, “ultimately Beckett’s aesthetic and epistemological premises are not compatible with Joyce’s” (2005, 135).

With *Dream*, Beckett offers a novel generally regarded as complex, hardly comprehensible or at least demanding of a wide knowledge on different languages and cultures for its adequate understanding. Indeed, he includes an overwhelming amount of references to mythology and classic literature, as we find in the description of the Syra-Cusa:

> The Great Devil had her, she stood in dire need of a heavyweight afternoon-man. What we mean is she was never even lassata, let alone satiata; very uterine; Lucrezia, Clytemnestra, Semiramide, a saturation of inappeasable countesses. An endless treaclemoon at the Porte de la Villette with a chesty Valmont in crimson sweater, tweed casquette and bicycle clips – her tastes lay in that direction. Her eyes were wanton, they rolled and stravagued, they were laskivious and lickerish, the brokers of her zeal, basilisk eyes, the fowlers and hooks of Amourrr, burning glasses.
>
> (*DR*, 50)[9]

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[9] In his article “*Lassata Sed*: Samuel Beckett’s Portraits of his Fair to Middling Women” (2002), Chris Ackerley tracks more than fifteen references only in the quoted description, that lead us to works by authors as varied as Robert Burton, Juvenal, Lord Byron, Geoffrey Chaucer or Pierre Garnier. A great deal of these references are found in what is known as Beckett’s *Dream Notebook* (1999), which comes as a very valuable work to advance through the novel and decipher Beckett’s inspirations and references.

Beckett does not only inherit or mimic these practices, but also offers a text rich in puns and words invented via the combination of other words, constantly inserting words and expressions in the story written in Latin, Italian, French, German or Spanish.[10] This too offers a strong contrast between the quotidian events that are being told and the erudite language used to explain it. However, only a few years after writing *Dream*, in 1937, Beckett seemed to have assumed his particular struggle with language, and referred to his own will to start "a logoclasts league" so that through rupture in writing "void may protrude" (*L*, 521). While of course the idea of a "logoclasts league" sounds comical, Beckett's aesthetic claims are serious, as he would prove using each new work to distance himself from those exhibitions of erudition and Joycean devotion to the word.

In this self-imposed mission, Beckett repeatedly adapted his approach through the years. Failure to communicate at a personal level is found in *Dream* and *Murphy*, but the author would address the issue from a linguistic perspective in *Watt*, then shift to French for *Mercier and Camier*, and ultimately develop a style in which this part of his artistic thought was managed from what we can call the discursive approach, which includes the change to first-person narration and a radical manipulation of narrative structures. In many senses, he chooses different types and degrees of disabilities related to communication – such as the combination of perception, expression and message (beforehand deteriorated ideas), to shape works that are consequent with his conception of the world. In this sense, the inability to express and communicate shown by characters appears as a literary metaphor for Beckett's own inability to express and conflict with the world. In the same way Beckett relates epistemological impairment with perceptive disability, increasing speech disability seems to be the author's literalization of his own artistic struggle through the years. Thus, narrators repeat ideas and adapt their speech time after time in an attempt to convey meaning. The next two points are focused on the analysis of the two above-mentioned main approaches, the linguistic and the discursive ones.

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[10] Even a full two-page long letter from Lucien to the Smeraldina-Rima is reproduced literally in French, no translation provided, in Part Two of the novel (*DR*, 20-22).

2.2. THE LINGUISTIC APPROACH: THE CASE OF *WATT*

Beckett's conflict with language as a tool for expression is most vividly and directly represented in *Watt*, the last novel he wrote originally in English. Since it was written in 1945 (published 1953), there is a new, essential element affecting Beckett's own search for an apt means of expression to represent reality in his work, namely his experiences during the Second World War and in its immediate aftermath. He was already working along with the flow of new avant-garde currents that sought for new ways of depicting the world that would adapt to their own reality after the Great War, trying to keep up to economic changes and technical developments. While Beckett had already expressed his concerns regarding a confused world, an all-encompassing mess and the uselessness of available means of creating art, some experts find a link between the historical context and his production in the years following WWII. This has led authors such as Amanda Dennis to say that *Watt* "might be said to limn the horrors of the Second World War via determinate negation, saying by not saying that historical circumstances require a renegotiation of what it means to mean" (2015, 104). Still, it seems to mean more in the context of Beckett's career. In this novel, the author's focus shifts from a more philosophical level to one that seems fundamentally linguistic. By choosing to dismantle coherence "through language itself rather than through concepts" (Nixon 2011, 187), he creates what John J. Mood has called a "devastating depiction of the cul-de-sac of modern

Western rationalistic philosophy" (quoted in Dennis 2015, 104). In the same line, the novel has been considered:

> Beckett's last attempt to express the creative vision within a highly rationalized allusive system. Several scientific disciplines provide exact images, but their extreme accuracy, rationality, and orderliness militate against the material they seek to express.
>
> (Culik 1983, 58)

After Watt collapses, seemingly due to his inability to apprehend the world around him, the narrator of the novel provides an analysis of his manner of speaking, informing us that he speaks both rapidly and unusually low, "with scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation, and very likely, if the truth were known, for spelling too" (*W*, 154). Watt's depreciation of basically any aspect of language is more literally shown at the point where he suddenly starts to invert the order of words: "*Day of most, night of part, Knott with now* [...] *Ears, eyes, failing now also*" (134, italics in the original). This way, the narrator detects that perhaps not only discourse was reverted, but *thought* as well (134). Progressively, Watt starts to change the order not only of words but also of letters in it: "*Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub*"; then sentences in the period: "*To the teacher. To the temple. To him I brought. This emptied heart*;" then both words and letters: "*Deen did taw? Tonk. Tog da taw? Tonk. Luf puk saw? Hap!*;" and he finally starts combining all of them in the same dialogue or monologue: "I recall no example of this manner," says the narrator (134-138). The perseverance and seriousness in the narrator's detailed account of Watt's surreal alterations of speech – an effect achieved to a great extent thanks to the use of repetition, contributes to the prominence of Beckett's ideas on language, to make it stand out as a serious problem. On the other hand, the fact that the narrator of *Watt* tells he eventually gets used to each new configuration of speech suggests a depreciation of the authority of syntactic and grammatical rules. The last effect, and probably the most important one, is that Watt's aphasia appears as an effort – whether it is conscious on his part or not, to manage the confusing information perceived from the world. In 1961, Beckett told Tom Driver: "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 219). Watt's language is probably best understood as a reaction to a confused world, a means to adapt to what his broken perception lets him learn about the world. What we read in the novel are Watt's attempts to find a linguistic form that properly accommodates the mess perceived by his impaired senses, which in turn seem to be a dramatization of the chaotic real world experienced by Beckett. Furthermore, the idea that language was inverted and thought as well shapes this relationship. "To explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt" (*W*, 78), but unsuccessful attempts to conciliate the mind, experience and the world lead him to collapse. In John P. Harrington's words,

> *Watt* is a particularly strong demonstration of that characteristic common to all of his better work, first noted by Beckett in *Proust*: "perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the condition of its worlds" and of an "endless series of renovations."
>
> (1991, 136)

The novel contains a great deal of lists, series and permutations that attack the idea of using logical language to order a chaotic world (Dennis 2015, 106). These lists have been compared by Andrew Gibson to the "Ithaca" chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), as entailing a similar critique, one that parodies what Fritz Senn has referred to as:

> the organizing mind towards categorization, the administrative Western mentality with its classical, scholastic as well as encyclopaedic traditions. [...] "Ithaca" is a

> pedantic triumph and a “protracted failure” (*U* 17.1669) of the occidental preoccupation with taxonomy and intellectual mastery or, in more fashionable terms, with authority (male).[11]
>
> (Gibson 1996, 16)

In this sense, *Watt* subverts the functions of language in the use of grammar and syntax in many passages but it also clearly mocks the power of language by means of these parodic long structures that lead nowhere and can often be a few pages long:

> As for his feet, sometimes he wore on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking, or a boot, or a shoe, or a slipper, or a sock and a boot, or a sock and a shoe, or a sock and slipper, or a stocking and boot, or a stocking and shoe, or a stocking and slipper, or nothing at all. And sometimes he wore […]. And sometimes he went barefoot.
>
> (*W*, 164-5)

Moreover, Watt’s memory seems to be as damaged as his senses, to the extent that he becomes “incapable of reconstituting a unified self” (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 362). Such incapacity is later represented by other means: the trilogy will show Beckett’s acceptance of artistic conventions and that expression within them “involves distortions of the poetic vision,” which allows Beckett to use less rationalized forms of allusion (Culik 1983, 70). This on its part relates again to the adoption of a first-person narrator and a deeper interest in subjectivity.

The lack of a fully capable body with regard to perception takes Beckett to assume a new means to represent Watt’s bafflement and seek for an effective way of expressing himself. This leads to a rather modernist, experimental idea in the fashion of Joyce’s

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[11] I will discuss the ideas of mastery and authority in relation to masculinity and Beckett in chapter five of this thesis.

Finnegans Wake or the first part of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, in which we find a narration by an intellectually impaired man (Benjy) that results in an account of facts incomprehensible for the reader. Faulkner takes the title for his novel from the soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*'s act 5, scene 5:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.
(Faulkner 1929, 1)

Faulkner, who uses the stanza for the opening epigraph of his novel, operates on language by manipulating basic syntax and the creation of sentences, but also at a narrative level. Such manipulation is clearest in the chapter narrated by Benjy and in the one narrated by his brother Quentin, whose troubled mind is depicted by an experimental disregard of syntax, punctuation and grammar that creates an extremely confused text:

> *did Mother set Jason to spy on you* I wouldn't have.
>
> *Women only use other people's codes of honor it's because she loves Caddy* staying downstairs even when she was sick so Father couldn't kid Uncle Maury before Jason Father said Uncle Maury was too poor a classicist to risk the blind immortal boy in person […].
>
> (111, italics in the original)

Joyce on his part alters words themselves as well, so that, as Beckett himself comments, when the meaning is "to sleep," words go to sleep, and when one is drunk, "language is drunk:"

> To stirr up love's young fizz I tilt with this bridle's cup champagne, dimming douce from her peepair of hideseeks tight squeezed on my snowybreasted and while my pearlies in their sparkling Wisdom are nippling her bubblets I swear (and let you swear) by the bumper round of my poor old snaggletooth's solidbowel I ne'er will prove I'm untrue to (theare!) you liking so long as my hole looks. Down.
>
> (Quoted in *DI*, 32)

Similarly, Beckett makes Watt alter his speech at several levels as the protagonist collapses while trying to grasp meaning from the world. Faulkner tries to show a specific condition, that of Benjy's and Quentin's disabilities acting as a barrier for their perception of the world, but also relates it to their linguistic failure to communicate. Beckett uses similar mechanisms to represent a chaotic world or damaged perception with a fragmented, incoherent speech.

Nevertheless, references to failed communication had appeared before in Beckett, represented differently and with differing attempts to solve it. In *Murphy,* the gap between the protagonist's subjectivity and reality is evidenced by his language, which, instead of making him communicate successfully, becomes "enigmatic and aporetic," thus rendering Murphy's "both emotional and cognitive understanding […] nearly impossible" (Quayson 2010, 847). This baffles Celia most of the time, as she tries to understand him, be it at an emotional or a logical level, invariably failing, so that she feels:

> spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time.
>
> (*M*, 25)

In fact, language works here as a barrier rather than as a bridge between minds, as it is the narrator himself who tells us that "[t]hus in spite of herself [Celia] began to understand as soon as [Murphy] gave up trying to explain" (41). Murphy, who acknowledges that "[his] fourth highest attribute is silence" (25), often fails to communicate properly with other characters. While he does not show so specific a condition as Watt, he is also unsuccessful in society for his failure in communication. So, lack of effectivity in language happens in *Murphy* both at a narrative and at a conversational level. In this sense, Beckett himself explains, in a letter to his first publisher George Reavey, that while the book is "obscure," its crazy and unreal dialogues are essential and their erasure would obscure it further. In this sense, the author recognizes that "of course the narrative is hard to follow, and of course deliberately so" (*DI*, 135). Regarding Beckett's life, he elsewhere recognized: "I was in Germany, in London, I was back in Dublin. I was battering around the place. That's a very confused period in my own mind" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 147), a situation that could have permeated the writing process. Unsuccessful communication between characters is equally true for the rest of the novels, as illustrated by Molloy developing a code to communicate with his mother by knocking on her skull: "One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye" (*TN*, 14), a method which is useless as well, as her impaired mind prevents her from remembering more than two knocks. In *Dream*, the Smeraldina-Rima fails to understand Belacqua's language and accuses him of using "such long [words]" (*DR*, 25). Language seems to be as useless in communication for Beckett as it is for his protagonists.

However, a linguistic tackle on the inability to express and communicate was seemingly not enough for Beckett and his ideas, and he eventually shifted to French for his next novel after *Watt*, *Mercier and Camier*. It was after that, with *Molloy*, that he would begin to use the first-person perspective and resolutely turn to a manipulation of language based on discourse itself.

2.3. THE DISCURSIVE APPROACH

After presenting a series of characters that failed to communicate properly due to linguistic reasons in his early novels, Samuel Beckett did eventually reach the conclusion suggested by Belacqua more than one decade before. As mentioned above, when reflecting on how writing with a style cannot give us the hidden object of art, Belacqua acknowledges the writing of French authors such as Racine or Malherbe who can give the important essence to us, as they “have no style, they write without style,” venturing that “[p]erhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want” (*DR*, 48).

Furthermore, in relation to the failure of speech from a literary point of view, the Unnamable says “I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don’t remember, but it was clumsily down, you could see the ventriloquist” (*TN*, 342), expressing Beckett’s feeling that he did not succeed in his purpose with previous novels, or that due to some aspect of their form they were not credible. However, as mentioned in chapter one, even *Mercier and Camier*, the first novel written originally in French by Beckett, “suffered from an omniscient narrator” (Mercier 1977, 9), so he had to take one step further. Consequently, the author seems to have found a solution for this and a better form for his ideas in the trilogy conformed by *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, when the shift to first-person contributes to a new notion of discourse, one that gets rid of other limitations and becomes an unstoppable flow. In the trilogy, this technique reaches its peak in the last novel, *The Unnamable*, where the narration achieves a momentum, as

Derek Attridge has noted, partly because of Beckett's overriding of the rules of grammar and punctuation (2017, 8), which led the scholar to assess it as "well beyond any norm of 'good style'" (16). Thus, after *Watt*, Beckett goes further towards finding a form that "admits chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 219).

In relation to this, and to discourse as incontinence, Molloy admits that he was never able to express himself in a reasonable measure:

> I always say either too much or too little, which is a terrible thing for a man with a passion for truth like mine. [...] it often happened to me, before I gave up speaking for good, to think I had said too little when in fact I had said too much and vice versa [...]. In other words, or perhaps another thing, whatever I said it was never enough and always too much. Yes, I was never silent, whatever I said I was never silent.
>
> (*TN*, 30)

Thus, Molloy expresses his lack of control on speech, a condition that will be all the more evident in *The Unnamable*, with a narrator who tries to go silent by exhausting language, marked by an incontinence that forms a confused text. Molloy shows his frustration with language in "violent and defeatist terms, as when [he] laments the death of a world "'foully named' ('the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings')" (Dennis 2015, 107).

On the other hand, scholars have long acknowledged the ironic contrast between the overwhelming amount of detail in the narrations of the novels and the no less overwhelming lack of clarity. In relation to this, Quayson has observed in Molloy what he has called "an elusive plenitude of immediacy" (2008, 59), meaning he is pushed to describe in detail his experience of his mind and the outer world, while we cannot be sure about anything described. Isolation and lack of communication between individual and world and/or between individuals is a feature common to every work by Beckett, while the way it is pictured changes over time. So, this is equally true for the rest of first-person narrators, and they seem to be, in a way, equally aware of the uselessness of language if we consider observations such as that of Malone that "my notes have a curious tendency, as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record" (*TN*, 252). His case is especially interesting as his purpose is to tell stories and he judges and obstructs his own narration, correcting himself,:

> Sapo had no friends – no, that won't do
>
> Sapo was on good terms with his little friends, though they did not exactly love him.
>
> (183)

or stopping it unexpectedly to note that "[t]his is awful" (185), then proceed to resume his story. In such metanarrative interruptions by which Malone interacts with his own narration, he repeatedly exposes his own failure to have a story with "as little as possible of darkness," aware as he is that darkness "accumulates, thickens, then suddenly bursts and drowns everything" (184), which is what eventually happens in his story. All this contributes to conforming a work that is, as Carnero-González has put it, "a reflection on the possibilities of language as a tool for telling stories" (1993, 208).

The Unnamable revolves about this sense of unstoppable speech, and while the narrator does not think he can stop at will, he very interestingly says that "[t]he search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue" (*TN*, 293). So, this novel revolves essentially around the idea of going silent, of finishing telling everything and, as noted above, exhausting speech. The Unnamable joins Beckett and other narrators in acknowledging that speaking is "a step towards silence and the end of madness, the madness of having to speak and not being able to except of things that don't concern me, that don't count, that I don't believe" (*TN*, 318). In a monologue similar to that explored by Beckett in drama with *Happy Days* and most clearly with *Not I, The Unnamable* reaches a verbal flow in which Attridge has detected a resonance "with the quality of verbal (and hence mental) movement Joyce achieves in the 'Penelope' episode of Ulysses, but the momentum is different" (2017, 17), perhaps due to their generating no certainties but what Ato Quayson has aptly termed epistemological impasse (2010, 847), as the notion towards which Beckett's works seem to tend. In a sense, monologues in the trilogy do not culminate in knowledge or in a climax but remain suspended. Eventually, the novel achieves a performative style and its content combines with its form, so that, for dozens of pages,

> the voice's sense of a compulsion to speak, and its yearning for a final silence that only speaking will produce, is made real by the continuation, page after page, of its self-interrogation, its telling of tales and spinning of imagined possibilities.
>
> (Attridge 2017, 19)

Thus, there is an inextricable link between discourse and existence, as the monologue becomes the evidence of the narrator's existence. In relation to all these issues, Nadia Louar has foregrounded "a decomposing body that becomes liable for the narrators' linguistic failure" (2018, 70) and noted that "the linguistic disincarnating 'programme' carried out in the Trilogy and reaching its peak in *The Unnamable* is intricately bound up with the physical decline of bodies" (Louar 2018, 79).[12] It is only by combining all three motifs – senses, speech, motility, that Beckett is able to create a consistent image of impotence and confusion. The next chapter will address the central issues with regard to the body and its decay in Beckett’s novels, with the aim of assessing how it complements the presence of similar mechanisms in mind and speech.

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[12] Louar (2018) is one of the most recent and appealing works to discuss the importance of body and its bounds to language in Samuel Beckett's novels.

3. THE BROKEN BODY: MOTILITY, PARALYSIS AND ISOLATION

> What we cannot reach flying, we must reach limping.
>
> The Book tells us it is no sin to limp.
>
> Al-Hariri of Basra, *The Assemblies*

3.1. MOVEMENT, LIFE AS WANDERING AND THE CASE OF *MOLLOY*

When Ulrika Maude says in *Beckett, Technology and the Body* that we should see Samuel Beckett's *oeuvre* as "one of the most serious efforts in literature to bring the body to the forefront" instead of a "portrait gallery of cripples" (2011, 11), she is appreciating how Beckett does not only show impaired people, but makes their bodies a central issue for the literary value of his works. The body in Beckett becomes as meaningful as content itself, and its decay is by no means secondary or ornamental, but rather a constitutive part and a transmission medium for the author, who extensively reflects on the possibilities and restrictions of bodies. Representation of impaired bodies is more present, and its analysis more fruitful, from the medium period of the author's production onwards, a period which contains "Beckett's most intricate and intense investigation into embodiment" (Maude 2009, 6). In these novels, treatment to the body seems to be a prolongation of treatment to the mind, speech and discourse, which results in what has been called aptly called a "syntax of weakness" or "syntax of disgust" (Ben-Zvi 2011, 691). In the trilogy and *How It Is*, decay, scatology and obscenity work together in discourse and representation to form an appalling portrait of human experience. Powerful images of impotent bodies enhance Beckett's message and become the subject of the narration itself.

In fiction, disabled characters have traditionally tended to stay on the margins, as complements to the story or in order to take it forward. Main characters almost never have physical disabilities, and the disabled have not existed as subjects of art (Garland-Thomson 1997, 9). So, the overwhelming amount of details on body impairments in Beckett, especially in his first-person narrator-protagonists, questions tradition and shifts his stories' focus. In this case, Beckett's "problematic corporeality" (Garner 1993, 453) seems to materialize his concerns with existence and expression. The progressive deprivation of bodily power to characters questions literary tradition and evidences at the physical level their lack of suitability in the world.

Noticing the intersection of "textual, phenomenological and cultural concerns" (Maude 2009, 1), critics have detected the profoundly physical nature of the characters' existence. The body seems to be a witness of the passing of time, actually a better tool to experience and apprehend the world than the *cogito* (10). Corporeal continuity is thus an important part of the essence of knowledge, and the body and its functions are conditioned to such extent. In Elizabeth Barry's words, the experiences of the body "make the ontological uncertainty at work more tangible" (2016a, 186).

As much as *Murphy*, as analysed in chapter one, might be seen as containing a critique to the mental health system and the stigma towards mental illnesses, the relationship between Molloy and society reveals a critique to ableism and problematizes physical differences. This is most evident when the police officer finds the protagonist resting in his particular way. Unable to sit anymore, he only has two possible postures left: "the vertical, drooping between my crutches, sleeping on my feet, and the horizontal, down on the ground" (*TN*, 18). As the officer finds him in the first posture, he wants to punish him for his behaviour. Nevertheless, even though Molloy is conditioned by an infirmity that “obliged me to rest as I could, rather than as I should” (16), the officer tells him that he must obey the law as everyone else:

> But there are not two laws, that was the next thing I thought I understood, not two laws, one for the healthy, another for the sick, but one only to which all must bow, rich and poor, young and old, happy and sad. He was eloquent.
>
> (16)

We can link this to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s definition of disability as “the attribution of corporeal deviance – not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (1997, 6). There is a general law that is logically regulated by the normative expression, and that is the basis to further define deviation.

Due to the unclear nature of Molloy’s recollections, we cannot know whether he was in fact behaving offensively for the majority of people, but the passage in any case reminds us of the “ugly laws” existing in many countries that limited the presence of physically disabled people in public so as to avoid their image to cause disgust or discomfort in other people. Some of them were repealed “[in the United States] as recently as 1974” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 7), and they clearly reflected and protected the vision of an ableist society, whose effects remain present to this day. In fact, the pressure of an ableist environment is present in Molloy’s accepting the officer’s reprimand and concluding that he will not rest in that way again, reaching a conclusion:

> It is indeed a deplorable sight, a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of

> strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at the end of the day, and roll on the ground.
>
> (*TN*, 20)

Molloy internalizes the stigma and blames himself, he wants to correct his behaviour. Ironically, he wants to do it in order to avoid other people collapsing and rolling on the ground, which is similar to his own situation later on the novel. He further adds that "I have only to be told what good behavior is and I am well-behaved, within the limits of my physical possibilities" (20), which indicates how his physical conditions affect his social position, and how something which should be universal as good behaviour is conditioned, limited by his body. It is in fact a loop in which his impairment forces him to rest in the only position he can do it, and he gets punished for the obscenity of his posture. With the naivety in his reaction, he finally generates compassion in the reader. Nevertheless, society is not always the main problem for characters. The inability to advance with one's own body, and eventually the inability to move, shape to a great extent the narrators' existence, and seem to be closely related to the idea, essential in Beckett, of "going on."

In this sense, later characters in Beckett seem to represent in action Murphy's idea that life is "but a wandering to find home" (*M*, 3), as they show an extraordinary will to advance towards a place that actually reveals itself as some kind of fulfilment and peace of mind. There is a general feeling of contradiction in such will, as the ultimate goal of the journey is to end the journey itself. In other words, the motivation for their action is to stop acting, and it seems that inability to advance "properly" – i.e., as an able-bodied person, would provoke a stronger commitment in the characters. This is most evident in *Molloy,* while movement in *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* seems to shift to a linguistic level in which the goal is not physical immobility, but silence itself. Regarding this, Molloy notes:

> For in me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on.
>
> (*TN*, 44)

Movement, therefore, is an essential idea in Samuel Beckett's works. In fact, to *go on* is an idea underlying his whole artistic system, as something that troubles characters. The idea shown by Molloy of resisting just a little more appears elsewhere too:

> He [Mr.Hackett] knew also that he would not long remain motionless, for the state of his health rendered this unfortunately impossible. The dilemma was thus of extreme simplicity: to go on, or to turn, and return, round the corner, the way he had come. Was he, in other words, to go home at once, or was he to remain out a little longer?
>
> (*W*, 3)

Not only to go on, but the inability to do it as well, compress the whole feeling of Beckett's *oeuvre*, as a metaphor of the inability and simultaneous obligation to express. While it has been noted that "[m]ovement in space is commonly used in fiction to represent the movement towards fuller understanding" (quoted in Maude 2009, 84), movement and displacement become, at least in *Molloy*, the subject of the narration itself, by means of eliminating other details and emphasizing physicality. Hence, it is not only a representation of movement towards knowledge, but also towards expression. In a way, there seems to be a relation between understanding and expressing, as if reaching expression would provide characters with something valuable and new. Finally, when expression reveals itself as unattainable, *The Unnamable* tries to exhaust language, he becomes closer to silence, thinking it might work. However, before that point in Beckett's career, the emphasis in going on is showed by the importance of movement and physical displacement. Movement, "the only thing that justifies their existence," becomes increasingly irregular and difficult for characters (Buning and Oppenheim 1993, 207).

In relation to this, *Mercier and Camier* tells the repeated attempts of the protagonists to leave a city and shows them walking side by side for the largest part of the novel, and the structure of *Molloy* is composed by two parallel, specular journeys. Molloy's quest for his mother and Moran's quest for Molloy turn spatial displacement in one of the main motifs, as their journey is the cause and goal of the narration and other details remain more confused. Furthermore, there is an emphasis in impairment related to legs and feet. Loss of feet motility is prefigured as early as in *Dream*, where Belacqua suffers the "demolition of his feet" (*DR*, 128), and acknowledges there is always "one foot larger than the other" (131). Interestingly, as early as in this first novel, the narrator refers to Belacqua's "pedincurabilities, if such a word may be said to exist," and although he reckons he intended to present the protagonist's "more notorious physical particularities," he renounces that intention (133). Murphy "suffered much with his feet" as well (*M*, 46) and in fact, immobility is in that novel self-inflicted, when the first apparition of the protagonist shows him tied to his chair in order to free his mind and obtain pleasure. In the description of the character, we find "Features: Mobile" (*M*, 7), highlighting the importance of such feature for Murphy's existence – and for the rest of Beckettian protagonists as well.

However difficult advance might become, Molloy adapts and develops new systems to move. The importance of movement and the decay of the body in that aspect is clearest here. He invents a way to ride a bicycle fastening his crutches to the cross-bar and pedalling with one foot, before both of them become stiff. In this sense, “motility in Beckett is simultaneously marked by a near impossibility and, at least after the early works, a compelling persistence to proceed at all costs” (Maude 2009, 83). Molloy’s legs become stiff, he loses his toes, his feet are always present until he becomes unable to walk and has to crawl. In a similar way, Moran feels a sudden pain in the knee, his leg becomes stiff as well and later he lays on the forest floor and he sends his son to buy a bicycle. However, just as Watt adapted his speech to the incoherence of the world, both Molloy and Moran come up with new forms of motility. As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, Molloy decides to crawl in circles, an action most representative of Beckett style. The author’s idea of movement joins here his interest in repetition and circularity and will be recovered and explored in drama, as is the case of *Footfalls* (1976), in which the protagonist, May, walks in circles as she speaks, or *Rockaby* (1981), where the rocking movement of the rocking chair is marked as well, two cases of movement associated to the unrest of traumatized minds (Hale 1988, 69; Knowlson 1996, 615).

Furthermore, descriptions similar to those regarding Molloy’s means of advancing appear before in Beckett’s novels:

> Watt’s way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north [...].
>
> (*W*, 23)

Comical and detailed descriptions of movement like this one are not uncommon in Beckett. The case of *Watt*, however, is interesting because it can be linked to other detailed passages that explain his way of talking, as we saw in chapter two, so that a relationship is drawn between motility and expression as obsolete or difficult, and it illustrates the invention of new means to give utility to both speech and body. Problems in advancing and overcoming appear and are described in *Mercier and Camier* as well, as falls begin "to enter into play:"

> now Camier accompanying Mercier (in his fall), now the reverse, and now the two collapsing simultaneously, as one man, without preconcertation and in perfect interindependency. They did not immediately rise, having practiced in their youth the noble art, but rise in the end they did.
>
> (*MAC*, 81)

Similarly, the Unnamable remembers his own advance: "After each thrust of my crutches I stopped, to devour a narcotic and measure the distance gone, the distance yet to go" (*TN*, 310). These kinds of methodical systems of advancement and rest are typical in the novels, and the Unnamable, in a passage reminiscent of Molloy's final days, also recalls:

> I had already advanced a good ten paces, if one may call them paces, not in a straight line I need hardly say, but in a sharp curve which, if I continued to follow it, seemed likely to restore me to my point of departure, or to one adjacent.
>
> (310)

For the Unnamable, who lacks an arm and a leg (315), ten paces seem a long way, and he continually checks his route, rests, and tells us about any modifications. References like these signal the decay of the body so that it never stops being present, and foreground the idea that characters have to adapt. It is shown that they were not always impeded, which causes a new kind of anxiety when they reflect on their past body, as in the case of Malone: "My body is what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do. Sometimes I miss not being able to crawl around anymore" (180). The trilogy, this way, explores how the deterioration of bodies is as progressive and becomes as radical as that of discourse and perception. Finally, we are left with paralysed characters, and a union is drawn between cognitive abilities, movement, expression and existence itself.

3.2. PARALYSIS

As we advance through the trilogy, there eventually comes a time when characters become paralysed. After *Molloy*, the next novel presents Malone to us, who, as mentioned above, is an almost fully impaired character, as he finds, in his own words, "virtually nothing" his body can do (*TN*, 180). This situation reaches a peak when the Unnamable becomes an inconcrete figure in a jar. Again, contradiction is present at a physical level throughout the narrative of the Unnamable: "It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee" (295), his neck having stiffened prematurely (325), in a way reminiscing death. The Unnamable reckons:

> here I can count on my body alone, my body incapable of the smallest movement and whose very eyes can no longer close as they once could, according to Basil and his crew, to rest me from seeing, to rest me from waking, to darken me to sleep, [...] but must remain forever fixed and staring on the narrow space before them where there is nothing to be seen, 99% of the time. They must be as red as live coals.
>
> (294)

Paralysis, this way, is extreme and not only limited to the limbs, but extended to practically every part of the body. Curiously enough, the Unnamable does not want the control of his eyes to use them properly, i.e., to see, but to close them and stop staring at nothingness.

In these novels, paralysis is, similarly to the rest of bodily abilities, sometimes seen in a paradoxically positive way. Contrarily to what one might expect, narrators are sanguine about the loss of memory and physical function (Barry 2015, 141), and they seem to perceive their own body as an impediment, an idea that is supported by characters in other works by Beckett, as shown by *Happy Days*'s Winnie's "What a curse, mobility!" (*CDW*, 158). In this sense, Moran, in *Molloy*, reflects on that idea:

> To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps as deaf as a post! And who knows blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain intact to allow you to exult!
>
> (*TN*, 140-141)

Other characters in this period show similar relief when confronting their loss of physicality, as is the case of Malone, who notes that he does not feel his feet any more, "and a mercy it is" (227). Embracing paralysis appears combined with passages in which protagonists reject their own body. This seems a consequence of first, the division of the self, and second, the emotional and physical cost of charging with the body itself. Thus, Molloy says "I had so to speak only one leg at my disposal, I was virtually onelegged, and I would have been happier, livelier, amputated at the groin. And if they had removed a few testicles into the bargain I wouldn't have objected" (31). Malone goes further when he says "If I had the use of my body I would throw it out of the window" (219). In a similar line, the narrator of *How It Is* says "had I only the little finger to raise to be wafted straight to Abraham's bosom I'd tell him to stick it up" (*HII*, 26). In a sense, it seems that the fact of having a body would involve the obligation to use it and characters show their rejection towards that. Furthermore, it would involve pain and suffering and it might be perhaps a way of expressing their will to get rid of it, thus becoming free. As Hugh Kenner has noted, “Malone making up stories is free within his own mind, and enjoying the only freedom toward which Beckett’s clowns aspire” (1962, 18), a condition related to what has been detected as “a freedom from the body for which consciousness yearns but which it never attains” (Garner 1993, 459). In a sense, alienation and rejection towards one’s own body in the late works is a continuation of Murphy’s habit to tie his body in order to free his mind.

However, movement becomes eventually relativized by narrators: “Let us then assume nothing. Neither that I move, nor that I don’t, it’s safer, since the thing is unimportant” (*TN*, 301). Indifference permeates the narration as if narrators where foreshadowing the next step to paralysis, that of the obsolescence and progressive dissolution of the human body. In relation to this, it has been noted that *The Unnamable* is “the final phase of a trilogy which carries the Cartesian process backwards, beginning with a bodily *je suis* and ending with a bare *cogito*” (Kenner 1962, 129), as a consequence of the characters’ efforts to keep their physical abilities being repeatedly rendered useless.

3.3. OBSOLESCENCE AND DISSOLUTION OF THE BODY

Towards the end of his novelistic production, Beckett reaches a new stage beyond paralysis, a more extreme situation that entails the dissolution of the body as the ultimate consequence of its obsolescence. One of the main consequences of progressive impairment in Beckett is the characters’ failure to be a unified and coherent self, to identify with themselves or with what they were in the past. The sense of continuity of the body – meaning it is simultaneously always and never the same body, results in experiencing an inability to do what one could do in the past, which is a source of anxiety for protagonists. For Maude, these differences between past and present body accentuate their bodily disabilities (Maude 2009, 13). Characters fail to recognize parts of their bodies as theirs: “the face my hands felt was not my face any more, and the hands my face felt were my hands no longer” (*TN*, 164), so that eventually “the habitual body, the body in its stative aspect, functions as a signifier that is out of sync with its signified” (Maude 2009, 22). This is managed by Beckett with the inclusion of the obsolescence and disappearance of the body, two themes that are most strikingly present in *The Unnamable*. At that point of Beckett’s production, doubt reaches its peak and uncertainty about one’s own identity and context – physical, temporal, historical, permeates the novel, as announced by its very first words: “Where now? Who now? When now?” (*TN*, 285). Through his dismemberment, the Unnamable explains the mentioned sense of continuity:

> I may therefore perhaps legitimately suppose that the one-armed one-legged wayfarer of a moment ago and the wedge-headed trunk in which I am now marooned are simply two phases of the same carnal envelope, the soul being notoriously immune from deterioration and dismemberment.
>
> (324)

And thus he shows his commitment to “go on” as an individual. In this sense, protagonists in the trilogy are as openly focused on that idea as the author himself, and they make the most direct references to it in any of his novels:

> To go on, I still call that on, to go on and get on has been my only care, if not always in a straight line, at least in obedience to the figure assigned to me, there was never any room in my life for anything else.
>
> (314)

If "Beckett's suppression of emotional, sexual, psychological or metaphorical detail allows movement itself to become the subject" in the trilogy (quoted in Maude 2009, 83), the abolition of a verifiable body makes us understand movement not as physical movement, but as movement in discourse. While movement in space was understood as movement towards knowledge, the essence remains here, as expressed by the Unnamable, who is "afraid, as always, of going on":

> For to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been, of which I shall know nothing, being incapable of seeing, moving, thinking, speaking, but of which little by little, in spite of these handicaps, I shall begin to know something.
>
> (*TN*, 296)

The fact that *The Unnamable* is marked by the culmination of the decomposition of the body – most literally represented by the passage in which his face falls to pieces and becomes ball-like (Tajiri 2007, 45) confirms the above-mentioned inversion of the Cartesian process initiated in *Molloy* and that the novels explore the search of the self "through the gradual elimination of the world of men, of bodily functions, and of the writer writing, until there remains the voice alone" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 579).

Curiously, after reaching extreme disintegration in the previous novel, the author retakes in *How It Is* the idea of body and the crawling motif present in *Molloy* to represent his necessity to go on:

> then on my elbow I quote I see me prop me up thrust in my arm in the sack we're talking of the sack thrust it in count the tins impossible with one hand keep trying one day it will be possible
>
> (*HII*, 2)

Here, the narrator's assurance that "one day it will be possible" appreciates the value of repetition and recalls Beckett's own comparison with his situation as a writer, as mentioned in chapter two, of a man with his head against the wall being told to go on: "Well, the wall will have to move a little, that's all" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 29). Such situation is evoked as well at the end of *The Unnamable*: "I can't go on, I'll go on" (*TN*, 407). The body in *How It Is* could mean that Beckett went back to the use of physicality to represent a situation referred to on other occasions or be merely figurative, a device to express an abstract situation when the peak of abstraction had been reached in *The Unnamable*. In a way, Beckett seems to recover the value of a body crawling, and of a narrator lying "like Belacqua fallen over on his side tired of waiting forgotten of the hearts where grace abides asleep" (*HII*, 15), as though emphasizing the difference between the implications of a body no longer able and those of the absence of a body.

Beckett's "obsession" (Tajiri 2007, 47) and use of images of the body and its value as signifier have been acknowledged (Quayson 2008; Maude 2009) and seem to point to his will to move beyond discourse (Maude 2009, 2). An explanation of such obsession can be that Beckett's concerns on the uselessness of language forced him to attempt an attack at multiple levels. The inclusion of decaying bodies is very visual and joins the decay of language itself, so that difficulties in advancement are transferred to the reader as well. In Ulrika Maude's words, motility in Beckett is:

> simultaneously marked by a near impossibility and, at least after the early works, a compelling persistence to proceed at all costs. Coinciding with this impossibility is a gradual slowing down both of the physical motion of the characters and of the reader’s progress through the work, with linguistic deviation accompanying and paralleling the characters physical deterioration in the text.
>
> (2009, 83)

The combination of textual elements such as broken syntax and rhythm, and the intensifying effect on the rest of literary elements have been long acknowledged (Maude 2009, 1) as one of the most prominent characteristics of Beckett’s prose. This way, the vindication of impaired bodies and disabled individuals for representation is only one step among many devices that work as a whole and create the essence of the author’s world. The following sections of the thesis will discuss the use of such devices and their implications from a perspective based on the One-Other duality, but we should first look into disability from a more literary perspective and into its meaning for Beckett’s conception of life. Therefore, the next chapter addresses these issues and offers an explanation of the artistic values of such practices and inclusions and their effects on the reader.

4. DISABILITY IN SAMUEL BECKETT: LIFE AS TRAUMA AND THE CONTAGIOUS NATURE OF RESILIENCE

> Man grows used to everything, the scoundrel!
>
> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

4.1. LIFE AS TRAUMA

References to birth as a sin or crime are ubiquitous throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*. In drama, some of the most direct and explicit instances are those of Hamm blaming his father: "Accursed progenitor! [...] Accursed fornicator!" (*CDW*, 96). In the novels, Neary curses "first the day in which he was born, then – in a bold flash-back – the night in which he was conceived" (*M*, 29), while Watt refers to his own birth as his "ejection" (*W*, 178), and Mercier says that his mother "died perpetrating me, the slut. Rather than meet my eye" (*MAC*, 34). Similarly, Molloy refers to his mother bringing him into the world "through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit" (*TN*, 12). However, he exonerates her for having done all she could not to have him, "except of course the one thing. [...] No it is not enough for me, but I give her credit, though she is my mother, for what she tried to do for me" (14). This feeling towards birth and life is not new in literature, and notwithstanding the humour found in the formulas he uses, Beckett seems to have had in mind Calderón de la Barca's version in *La vida es sueño*, as he quotes it directly in his essay on Proust: "Pues el delito mayor / Del hombre es haber nacido" (Ackerley 2004, 70). This idea becomes a cornerstone for works by Beckett, as he presents it in several different ways, thus letting it affect characters and narration.

The aim of the present chapter is to offer a vision of birth and life as traumatic events that condition the existence of Beckettian characters as the overwhelming instances of ailments, pathologies and health issues in Beckett's work can be seen as provoked by them. Consequently, this chapter develops the idea that there is a context strong and meaningful enough to read life in Beckett in the terms of a disorder with a traumatic basis. Secondly, the chapter observes the effects it has when it comes to giving shape to the artistic object, and therefore on the reader as receiver of the work, which results in what I think to be the main humanistic value in Beckett's works, what I have called *contagious resilience*.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Samuel Beckett's interest in medicine and psychology are widely acknowledged in criticism on his life and works, as is his custom of taking notes on them to use in his literary production. One of the central issues in the Beckettian worldview is that of the *wombtomb*, described, as early as in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, as a place for Belacqua to go to,

> where there was no conflict of flight and flow and Eros was as null as Anteros and Night had no daughters. He was bogged in indolence, without identity, impervious alike to its pull and goading. The cities and forests and beings were also without identity, they were shadows, they exerted neither pull nor goad.
>
> (*DR*, 121)

The wombtomb implies rest and freedom and is linked to a state of suspension before birth, it is an idea that echoes in other novels as it seems to impregnate the characters' drives. These characters appear in situations reminiscent of the uterus, as in the case of Malone, or who long for a womblike end, like Murphy. Angela Moorjani has discussed the main meeting points of Beckett's wombtomb and Otto Rank's trauma of birth, tracing their debt to Arthur Schopenhauer's *Nichtseins* or "nonbeing" as a source of nostalgia, and to Sigmund Freud's death drive (Oppenheim 2004, 174). While we know Beckett did not read Rank's *Trauma of Birth* until after the writing of *Dream* (Knowlson

1996; Oppenheim 2004; Stewart 2011; Murphy 2014; Barry et al. 2016), there are similarities between the ideas of both authors.

Trauma, Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud said, works as a foreign body whose effects persist for a long time ([1895] 1955, 6). When these effects are endured for a long time, they might cause a rupture in the mind of the individual, leading to non-integration with the self or dissociation, appearing in bodily conditions as well by a process of somatization. A more clinical definition of trauma is that of “a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self’s emotional organization and perception of the external world” (Balaev 2018, 360). Such experience can become inexpressible by natural means. For Hartman, there is a “traumatic knowledge” that cannot be completely apprehended or brought to the surface of the mind to be effectively understood or communicated (1995, 537), making trauma an unspeakable reality due to the individual’s inability to assimilate it, a situation known as “speechless terror” (van der Kolk 1998), which is only one of the responses to trauma. The notion of speechless terror is easily linked to Beckett’s famous “inability to express” and other situations in the novels, and is thus an element that supports this point further, as the tendency towards silence and adaptations in speech found in his characters fits the idea.

Trauma victims might experience dissociation as described by Laurence Kirmayer, meaning “a gap in the normal integration of memory, identity and experience” (Kirmayer 1996, 10) that appears as an adaptive response to traumatic events. In this sense, trauma breaks the individual’s mechanisms of control, psychological trauma becoming “the affliction of those who have no power” (Herman 1997, 63). As we have seen in the previous points, the loss of power is a defining feature of Beckettian protagonists, who fail to manage perception, expression and a body felt as alien, in works that become a representation of trauma by using narrative, aesthetic and linguistic devices. What provides the individual with recovery is, for Judith Herman, integrity. In her words, integrity is:

> the ability to state the value of life in comparison to death, to come to terms with the limits of one's life and with the tragic limitations of human condition, and accepting such realities without despair.
>
> (1997, 241)

Placing Beckett's *oeuvre* in relation to this description, we see that his characters have not accepted such conditions. We do not find a protagonist in the novels that has come to terms with himself and the trauma of birth. While memory has been appreciated as a tool to overcome trauma (Kirmayer 1996; Herman 1997), in Beckett it seems to be a source of further suffering as individuals are not yet integrated with it. Malone notes that "[a] minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really" (*TN*, 201), but his narration keeps conveying a feeling of entrapment in the past. This might be due to the actuality of trauma, this being not birth but life itself. In Beckett's works, being born is not a trauma *per se* in the terms of a traumatic event, but rather for its most catastrophic consequence: life. Therefore, characters cannot use memory – i.e., benefit from time and distance, to overcome a trauma because it is still, and always, an on-going trauma, an inextricable feature of life. Thus, protagonists in the novels have not yet come to terms with their issues, and appear in a situation that creates the feeling of confinement and constant struggle[13] both with the world and the self, while it renders memory useless when it comes to healing.

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[13] While novels, by means of a first-person narration and a broken stream of consciousness, provide an invaluable perspective, Beckett took on memory, trauma and non-integration of the self in his plays as well, most shockingly with the inclusion of liminal individuals in ghostly environments, as in *Not I, Ohio Impromptu* or *Footfalls*, among others.

Life as trauma is universal trauma. This category expands its reach to the fullest and presents Beckett's artistic proposal as universal too. While trauma studies, when applied to collective trauma experiences, have been most extensively used in relation to situations in which authors detect a victim and a perpetrator, – e.g., the Holocaust, slavery or colonialism, the great difference in the case of Beckett is that his approach encompasses Humanity as a whole as victims, at least every person born and alive. There is no perpetrator of life but parents or God, and both are treated accordingly by characters, as shown at the beginning of the present chapter. The literary and philosophical implications of universality have an effect on the importance of identification, due to the fact that readers, pushed by a feeling of shared suffering, tend more to stand by the protagonists. In their situation of powerlessness, protagonists become the Other in a hierarchy where there is no One. When the aggrieved collective is every person alive, new perspectives and solutions become all the more difficult and simultaneously all the more urgent. Since the limits of life are defined by the absolutes of birth and death, leaving nothing beyond either of these concepts, any measure is but palliative, and the scale of the drama becomes overwhelming.

4.2. DISABILITY AND ARTISTIC MESSAGE

However, most characters that are not protagonists in Beckett's novels do not seem to be troubled by as many ailments and health issues. Two explanations might be given for this situation. First, protagonists might be a more direct representation of Beckett's concerns on existence, therefore receiving most of the traumatic load, physically and emotionally speaking, as other characters are not usually as concerned about the same issues. Belacqua and Murphy, for instance, seem to have a stronger feeling of the incoherence of the world and the importance of the mind, respectively, feelings that are usually dismissed or misunderstood by secondary characters. If trauma has a psychological basis, it might also be subjective, in a way that not perceiving life as a trauma might prevent its traumatic consequences. In other words, pain comes partly from the certainty that life is painful. Second, Beckett's omniscient narrators are mainly focused on the eponymous protagonists and their own inner worldview, a situation already hinted at by the titles of the novels, as is the case of *Murphy*, *Watt* or *Mercier and Camier*. With the shift to first-person narration, this becomes even more evident. Then, the relative absence of these issues in the text might just be a narrative consequence of such one-point perspective, meaning other characters can be suffering from a number of issues but we are just not told about it, as it would affect the novel. Subjectivity, in this sense, is essential to understand Beckett's novels, and therefore the experience of his narrators and their point of view are enhanced. In a way, subjectivity is also used to convey the final effect of the novels, which seem to explore the healing or therapeutic power of literature by means of the combination of trauma, struggle and resistance.

The notions of trauma, pain, difficulty in everyday functions and particular ailments, which are spread throughout the whole of Beckett's production, might be understood as somatizations of life as a trauma. Beckett himself suffered from a number of health issues in his life, and was interested in changes to his body when undergoing a period of illness, observing carefully what was happening (Knowlson 1996, 167-169). This way, he could later use medical conditions and motifs to create a work in which most characters suffer from some kind of illness or disability. Furthermore, he would even modify certain ailments or create non-existent ones, which would serve to underline the confusion inherent to the world in his works. It is the case of haemophilia, "an exclusive male disorder, but not in this work" (*W*, 82), the imaginary Duck's disease (*M*, 58) or the impossible paralysis from the knees down and the waist up (*W*, 101).[14] In relation to this, representations of disability are perhaps not always consistent or logical because Beckett rejects the idea of a logical world and uses these representations to emphasize the absurd condition of life itself.

When individuals undergo a trauma, their bodies "turn against them" in ways that include a number of different problems (Herman 1997, 145). The presence of trauma-related motifs is combined in Beckett to the three mentioned in the previous sections, namely important troubles in perception, expression and movement, in order to create a work in which impotence becomes the main subject. In this sense, Beckett's prose reaches performativity when the presence of health issues and decay are "paired and further intensified by textual [elements], such as the broken syntax and rhythm" (Maude 2009, 1). With regard to motor impairment, Maude links the increasing inability to advance physically, most prominent in the medium and late works, to the difficulty found by the reader to follow and understand the novel, as linguistic deviation joins and parallels the characters' bodies' deterioration (83).

As noted before, the difficulties for the body to move are one of the main instances of impairment in Beckett. With that in mind, perhaps the most striking aspect is the persistence of the protagonists, most explicitly in the trilogy, to go on. When the few hopes of Molloy disappear – as he decides, very illustratively, that he can "stay, where he happen[s] to be" (*TN*, 85), Malone starts again, shifting the focus to discourse, eventually giving way to the Unnamable. Even if we were not to take the novels as an actual trilogy – as it contravenes the author's own wishes,[15] it is clear that these revolve around the same identity-related issues, and a de-progression[16] is easily observed. There is something that makes protagonists advance, or at least try to. I would not call it "hope," as none of them seem to harbour any firm hope towards the idea of a happy ending, not even towards an ending as such. To this respect, Eric Levy has argued that their purpose is "to prolong conviction in its impossibility" and that "[w]hat appears as perseverance is instead the prolongation of surrender" (2007, 5). It is convenient to recover a quote used in chapter three, since Molloy makes reference to this in his report:

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[14] Culik notes that "paralyses are from a point on the spinal cord downward; paralyses are without gaps" (1983, 59).

[15] As Brian Richardson notes, Beckett refused the words "trilogy" and "trinity" to refer to the novels. As he quotes, Beckett wrote to his publisher Barney Rosset: "[I] can't think [...] of a general title and can't bear the thought of [the] word trilogy appearing anywhere... If it's possible

> For me in there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on.
>
> (*TN*, 48)

This is the great conflict for Beckettian characters: to stay where they are, as good or bad as it might be, or to go on a little more, looking for the unknown (Levy 2007, 6), which is the only thing that suggests an idea of change. Molloy's use of the term *fools* is important here, as it seems to suggest that believing in a chance of improvement is just as fatuous as thinking that one can stay where he is.

To illustrate the impossibility that impregnates his artistic thought and transfer it into fiction, Samuel Beckett uses, as we have seen, the idea of a failed journey, which reveals itself as three different journeys. First one is a pervasively physical one that seeks to advance in space; the second one is one of the mind that seeks to understand the incoherent world; and the third one is focused on language as a tool analogue to life,

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to present the thing without either I'd be grateful" (quoted in Richardson (2009, 123). However, they are usually edited together and the use of "trilogy" to refer to them is widely spread.

[16] "Desprogresión" was the term used for such process of progressive reduction applied on Beckett's *oeuvre* by José Francisco Fernández in his lecture "La recepción de Samuel Beckett en España: Consideraciones generales" at the Samuel Beckett International Conference on Literature and Translation, University of Extremadura, on April 12th, 2018.

which paradoxically tries to explain as a mechanism to understand. In an enormous exercise of perseverance, when the body fails the mind keeps asking questions, and when this fails, it rewords questions and answers once and again. In *The Unnamable*, the inner monologue is performative, as we find "[a] voice exploring a huge number of hypotheses as to its mode of existence" (Attridge 2017, 14). However, every new journey started by Beckettian characters ends up suspended or exhausted, with no prospect of success, a situation at the core of his production.

Trapped in such a situation of extreme impotence and detachment from life, in which nothing works when it comes to stop suffering, one is prompted to ask why not recur to suicide or euthanasia, when facing the void. In the trilogy, as well as in other works such as *Waiting for Godot*, suicide is mentioned as an actual solution which is eventually rejected. One of the mysteries of Beckett is precisely in this matter, since the idea of suicide does not appear as a clear solution or logical outcome (Davies 2000, 6). Instead, opposition to their innate will to advance causes frustration in the characters, but eventually makes them stronger, supporting their determination to be reaffirmed in the world. Moran provides one of the keys to overcoming or adapting to an adverse situation, if only because his mind is relatively healthier, at some points, than that of the rest. When suicide or rendition are rejected, one still wonders why keep on living. Moran, or Beckett, seems to detect the value of decision in choosing how, in altering the way in which the individual fails even though he cannot change the final result. Interestingly enough, Moran makes his point taking the myth of Sisyphus, upon whom Albert Camus based his idea of absurd man as a man conscious of the meaninglessness of life, a concept so often used to refer to Beckett's characters and an icon of existentialist philosophy in the twentieth century. Moran elaborates:

> And it would not surprise me if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events. But I do not think even Sisyphus is required to scratch himself, or to groan, or to rejoice, as the fashion is now, always at the same appointed places. And it may even be they are not too particular about the route he takes provided it gets him to his destination safely and on time. And perhaps he thinks each journey is the first. This would keep hope alive, would it not, hellish hope. Whereas to see yourself doing the same thing endlessly over and over fills you with satisfaction.
>
> (*TN*, 128)

Just as Sisyphus may take minimal decisions in his punishment of eternally pushing a rock up to the top of a mountain, where it rolls down again just for him to come down and push it up again, Beckett's characters can change the way in which they tell and relive facts. This explains why they insist on adapting their physical movement, the emotion of Molloy's "Jesus Christ, there's crawling" (83), and the linguistic manipulation by Watt, among others. This idea of adaptation to failure is probably best summed up by Beckett's statement: "There are many ways in which the thing I am trying to say in vain may be tried in vain to be said" (*TD*, 123). In the last stages, their resilience, their ability to retry and endure a doomed existence, when they become physically impeded, is based on their way of telling, lying, changing names, forgetting, inventing and starting again with greater limitations. Disability as a representation of this impotence is essential to create this narrative.

4.3. CONTAGIOUS RESILIENCE AS THE ESSENCE OF SAMUEL BECKETT

In the end, indirectly through the process of searching and trial-error repetition mechanism, the failure of Beckettian characters creates in *us* something similar to hope or ability to endure. This indirect emotional or philosophical load is a special aspect of Samuel Beckett's literature. One of the contentions to be made in this thesis is that one of the main functions ascribable to art is that of generating hope, or at least a peace of mind when facing the prospects, in order to help the receiver endure existence more easily. We could then, in such context, divide art or artists in three groups:

1) A work or artist in which the negative part of an issue is hidden, denied or simply left out. This group offers a fairly happy ending with protagonists that achieve a rather objective success in their goals. As such works fail to look into the deep, dark or hidden part of human beings and their experience, we do not even feel the need for hope, as the artist does not present the full picture in a true way.

2) A work or artist that gives us hope in exchange for nothing. It is a hope insufficiently justified, placed artificially by the artist, who is the only agent in its creation. The author, thus, offers both the problem and the solution, one that might or might not work for us, and that is not necessarily related to some knowledge or ability acquired or put into practice by us.

3) Lastly, we find authors that try to show both what they know and what they do not know. They put us in a journey from which they are back, being as clear and explicit as they can in showing the result and inviting us to create hope ourselves: intellectual and emotional work is, at least partly, our job. Pieces of art in this group would be aptly described by Roberto Bolaño's appreciation, in his novel *2666* (2004), in which he compares between two types of novels:

> [Su colega] prefería claramente, sin discusión, la obra menor a la obra mayor. Escogía *La metamorfosis* en lugar de *El proceso*, escogía *Bartleby* en lugar de *Moby Dick*, escogía *Un corazón simple* en lugar de *Bouvard y Pécuchet*, y *Un cuento de Navidad* en lugar de *Historia de dos ciudades* o de *El Club Pickwick*. Qué triste

> paradoja, pensó Amalfitano. Ya ni los farmacéuticos ilustrados se atreven con las grandes obras, imperfectas, torrenciales, las que abren camino en lo desconocido. Escogen los ejercicios perfectos de los grandes maestros. O lo que es lo mismo: quieren ver a los grandes maestros en sesiones de esgrima de entrenamiento, pero no quieren saber nada de los combates de verdad, en donde los maestros luchan contra aquello, ese aquello que nos atemoriza a todos, ese aquello que acoquina y encacha, y hay sangre y heridas mortales y fetidez.
>
> (2004, 289-290)

Samuel Beckett, I would argue, is one of the most prominent authors of works belonging to the second type in the twentieth century, as he joins such courageous masters in virtually every one of his novels. Thus, his procedure of sinking his characters, pushing them to the limit and then start again in a new, reduced, place, tests us and eventually improves *our* resilience. Theodor Adorno has assessed *The Unnamable* saying it is "as if consciousness wished to endure the end of its own physical presence, while looking it in the face" (2010, 163). This idea seems recurrent throughout Beckett's works, as is the case of Winnie's resistance in *Happy Days* and the Protagonist of the drama *Catastrophe* (1982), who is immobile in the centre of a stage while a Director and his Assistant modify his position, only to move at the end, raising his head to stare at the audience. In fact, in *Malone Dies*, Malone refers to the notion of catastrophe in an illuminating way: "Catastrophe… in the old sense… to be buried alive in lava and not turn a hair, it is then a man shows what stuff he is made of" (*TN*, 255). Beckett's characters are not only victims of life, but become a symbol of dignity in suffering, continually trying to state their humanity and individuality, even if it is after their physical death. To achieve the effect, Beckett puts them in situations that push their limits.

Samuel Beckett's representation of impotence, an image of misery, in the words of Martin Esslin, is positive because of the very fact of its creation, it is "by its very nature a demonstration of defiance of all the horrors of existence" that produces catharsis and thus "lifts us above the void" characters are facing (Buning and Oppenheim 1993, 20). The author's limitation or subtraction of traditional devices – such as plot, movement, action or linguistic ornamentation, tend to draw our attention in some underlying aspect shown by the characters' will, but not made explicit. It is not their words, their recollections, we retain from the novel, but their courage and insistence to go on, "painfully and brutally and at all costs" (85). In this sense, it is with emotion and not intellect that we apprehend Beckett's works, as the author avoids literalization of his concerns with the world since his early novels. In relation to this, journalist Harold Hobson noted:

> Mr. Beckett is a poet; and the business of a poet is not to clarify, but to suggest, to imply, to employ words with auras of association, with a reaching out towards a vision, a probing down into an emotion, beyond the compass of explicit definition.
>
> (Graver and Federman, 1979, 162)

At first sight, it might be difficult to conceive that a procedure based on the elimination of formal content can add expressive value to the works, and it is part of the idea of contagious resilience as well. It is worth to analyse this with T.S. Eliot's idea of *objective correlative*. Originally coined by Washington Allston in the Introductory Discourse of his *Lectures on Art* (1850), it is used by Eliot for the first time to apply it to the case of *Hamlet* in his article *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919). In the article, Eliot states that Shakespeare's play "is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art" (1922, 100). Thus, *Hamlet* is to some extent a "failure" from Shakespeare due to his inability to put everything he transmits into words, as he transmits something that escapes his control. Just as the emotions latent in the play surpass Shakespeare, Hamlet himself

> is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in face of his artistic problem.
>
> (101)

This way, Eliot finds something in the work that cannot be found in the text itself: "We find Shakespeare's *Hamlet* not in the action, not in any questions that we might select [...] so much as in an unmistakable tone" (100). Yet, Shakespeare manages to convey as much emotion as any other author – or even more. As a consequence, Eliot reaches the conclusion that

> the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.
>
> (100)

Eventually, it is the audience – or the reader, who fills the gaps in the works by means of some sort of emotional reception that is activated with the diverse mechanisms used by the author to create them. In the case of Samuel Beckett, these gaps are not anecdotal, but accepted as inherent to language and therefore used as a part of it. Therefore, indetermination is not a secondary element in Beckett's writing, but a defining aspect of his literary production inasmuch as it entails a sense of inevitability and is dealt with as a basic part of literature. If Shakespeare "fails" in *Hamlet*, Beckett, as we have seen, accepts the fact that expression itself is doomed to failure. His work then consists on eliminating polysemy of an open work by means of reducing formal content. The reader eventually completes the meaning and perceives emotions that are not in the textual content *per se*.

Shakespeare's conveying emotions with mechanisms he cannot explain or justify with his text app is the result, perhaps not of his own failure, but of the nature of literature itself, a nature Beckett seems to assume as inherent to art in order to make the best of it. In Eliot's words, Shakespeare addresses a problem that is too big for him, so that in order to understand it "[w]e should understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself" (1922, 103). Samuel Beckett did not understand either, and he finds the only chance of survival in letting confusion enter his works. However, he does accept impotence. If Eliot considers Shakespeare fails it is due to the playwright's confidence on the power of words to explain everything, including elements belonging to the emotional level, which are hardly traceable to a more specific world. On the contrary, Beckett accepts the uselessness of words to explain the world.

This relates to Esslin saying that Beckett's texts are not moralizing, that they are "wholly descriptive, never prescriptive" (Buning and Oppenheim 1993, 13), this way avoiding recommendations or opinions, or, if so, immediately cancelling them. Beckett does not "force" hope, he rather represents an incoherent reality in as many ways as he can and we as readers are the ones to create our own conclusion based on what we feel in the reading experience. In this sense, his novels do have an intellectual and emotional cost: if one wants to get to what is behind the novels, it is necessary to experiment the recollections of disabled, impotent characters. If we witness and join protagonist and author in their struggle, the artistic experience is intensified. By means of repetition, every new readjustment – e.g., Watt changing his speech or Malone changing the protagonists of his stories, seems to eventually convey an image of resilience.

One of the reasons for his success in reaching the reader is the union between form and content when it comes to expressing disability. If the mind of a character is not functioning properly, the narration will be confusing; if the character has trouble in his physical displacement, the narration will be slow, vacillating and re-planning its way. In the end, a process is born in which Beckett's experience becomes that of the main characters in his novels, and the characters' experience becomes that of the reader. Thus, Beckett's style and use of disability joins the form in order not to leave gaps in the outcoming representation of experience. Although there are necessarily gaps in knowledge, the transmission of emotions is not rendered incomplete. It is in this sense that Beckett exploits the contagious nature of resilience. Indirectly, when a reader joins characters in decadence and uncertainty, and watches them try again, the novel prepares the reader and strengthens her integrity to face existence and decay with dignity, for, in a sense, we feel intimately related to their own experience. Linda Ben-Zvi finds in Beckett his perfect author as he accomplishes Martha C. Nussbaum pretension of creating a society that does not hide its humanity, formed by individuals conscious of their vulnerability and who "discard the grandiose demands of omnipotence and completeness that have been at the heart of so much human misery, both public and private" (Ben-Zvi 2011, 695). This seems to be a plausible explanation of the fact that authors such as Esslin (Buning and Oppenheim 1993, 16) and Adorno (2010, 173) coincide in using the word *liberating* to refer to the effect of these narratives that are most usually referred to in terms of impotence. Under the impotence and vulnerability of the dying body, Ben-Zvi finds an innuendo of laughter which is essential to Beckett's achievement of making the human condition bearable (2011, 696). Similarly, Harold Pinter has described Beckett's work as "the maggot under the stone" and reflected on how he uses abjection and decay to create "a body of beauty" (quoted in Ben-Zvi 2011, 681-682).

Beckett is not condescending nor merciful, as he does not help his characters or the reader, instead he increasingly pushes them – and us. By putting us in the same position as he puts characters, Beckett "weakens our power to obliterate his writing's otherness" (Pilling 1994, 19). This is the first step by Beckett to challenge norms in representation. By means of choosing impaired characters as the representatives of the human, he is challenging literary tradition. As a consequence of his choice, elements in other structures of thought are jeopardized. Inasmuch as Beckett rejects the privileged position of fully capable bodies and minds, new questions arise in relation to power and social roles. Moreover, his advance towards dissipation of the body makes both male and female characters lose their identities, so that the boundaries are increasingly blurry, and characters show new forms of dependency. The next section deals with male mastery, the representation of men, the problematic depiction of women and other general issues of gender and dependency.

SECTION 2.

“MAN OR WOMAN, WHAT DOES IT MATTER?”:

REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER

> I am still wondering this evening, in the comparative silence of my last abode, if she was not a man rather or at least an androgyne. She had somewhat hairy face, or am I imagining it, in the interest of the narrative? The poor woman, I saw her so little, so little looked at her. And was not her voice suspiciously deep? So she appears to me today. Don’t be tormenting yourself, Molloy, man or woman, what does it matter?
>
> *Molloy*

5. MEN AS AGENTS: NARRATION, IMPOTENCE AND THE LOSS OF MASCULINE MASTERY

> If the only significant history of human thought were to be written, it would have to be the history of its successive regrets and its impotences.
>
> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

5.1. MASCULINITY, CRISIS AND SAMUEL BECKETT

Masculinity is a crisis-ridden idea marked by doubt and the seeking of validation (Segal 1990; Rose 2010; Lusty and Murphet 2014), a condition that aptly describes the experiences of Samuel Beckett's narrators: they are, as we have seen, constantly uncertain about the reality of the world as they perceive it, doubtful about their means of explaining it, and they even question the decreasing reach and utility of their own bodies. Ultimately, their disability puts them in crisis as individuals. Just as in other aspects of Beckett's career, we find here a progression, an advance through time towards instability until one gets to a critical point where the body is uncertain and texts consist on a monologue that, just as narrators themselves, haltingly moves to and fro in a sea of self-corrections and doubts, never to culminate.

Samuel Beckett lived in a period of cultural reflexivity and malleability (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 6-7) with regard to masculinity, that put the idea of "being a man" under new examination, a situation in which modernism provided, in many areas, an opportunity for the critical reappraisal of prevailing and emergent models of masculinity, fostered by industrialization and the uprising of fields such as psychology or urbanism. In relation to this, Rita Felski has noted that bourgeois masculinity at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century put its value on "the valorization of function over form” and “the sovereignty of the reality principle” (1995, 101), ideas countered by the literary production of modernist authors such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce or Beckett himself. In his article “Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce” (1929) on James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939, by then known as *Work in Progress*) he accuses critics: “You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other” (*DI*, 31). Thus, Beckett advocated for the union of form and content and would himself work with that in mind to make them indivisible in his works. In the first half of the twentieth century, ideas of self-control and courage as manly features were current, and fragility of mind and emotion were suppressed in favour of an image of rationality (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 5). Beckett opened himself to new configurations of mind and made irrationality visible and valid, even necessary, for his literary and aesthetic ideas, further questioning the norm (see chapter one of this thesis).

The present chapter, which opens the section dedicated to gender in the novels of Samuel Beckett, offers an illustration of the links between the threatened nature of masculinity (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 1) and the constant threat upon the characters-narrators’ identity and existence on the narrative level, which is at the same time linked to the role of author as the ultimate, real creator, and his own inability to express. Such threat is that of never achieving success, of action without purpose. It is one that bounds the fragility of the notion of masculinity, that of an individual – the man, who needs to state his position and retain privilege, to the fragility and instability of narrators and their discourses, which at the same time are a materialization of those of the author and his discourse.

In a traditional dialectic of gender, man is at the centre and woman tends to be displaced to the periphery. Woman has been the passive subject of history (Maslow

[1954] 1970; Cixous 1976; Connell 1996), devoid of agency in the sociological sense, and man the active, as occupying the privileged position where he can shape the world and create. This is what is jeopardized in Beckett's novels as these entail an attack on such conception of the world, narrators being increasingly unable to create a coherent discourse or even a coherent, integrated self, in a way that parallels the same inability in the author himself.

5.2. THE FEMINIZATION OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S WRITING

Scholars have studied narrative dissolution in Beckett from a Freudian perspective, relating it more concretely to the death of the father and narratricide (Oppenheim 2004, 183-184), while his writing has also been associated with feminist ideas on language and its use, such as Irigaray's *femme-parle* (Weller 2006, 166) or with *écriture feminine*, understood as the feminization of male writing and creativity (Oppenheim 2004, 184). Such notion of *écriture feminine* or feminine writing is especially interesting, as it was presented by Hélène Cixous in her article "The laugh of the Medusa" (1976), and related to Molly Bloom's final soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Cixous, who had previously discussed Joyce in her doctoral dissertation *The Exile of James Joyce* (1973), shows in "The laugh of the Medusa" how Molly's monologue is positive and performative in her stating her own femininity: "The feminine (as the poets suspected) affirms: '. . . And yes,' says Molly, carrying *Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing; 'I said yes, I will Yes'" (1976, 884). Even though other characters refer to Molly throughout the novel, Joyce reserves the last chapter to offer her own vision from a first-person perspective, thus putting into value the feminine and surpassing, for Cixous, other books. She argues that there is a marked, male writing, in the sense that, traditionally, "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy" (1976, 879), and feminine writing challenges that mark. For Cixous, writing is a locus:

> where woman has never her turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.
>
> (879)

Therefore, a feminine writing is self-conscious about that transforming power and uses it, and can be written by men, as is the case of Joyce, who defy the phallogocentric essence of literature that obliterates women's experiences. Samuel Beckett has been related to Joyce for their personal and artistic relation, and their styles have been compared, as mentioned in previous chapters, first for Beckett's following Joyce's, later due to his consciously distancing himself. However, as a modernist man, and although the way of addressing the feminine might differ from his mentor's, there are aspects in Beckett's literature that can be assessed as feminine.

The notion that Beckett's *oeuvre* underwent such process of feminization is most relevant for this study, understood as the process that permitted the Other to invade his discourse, in the words of Elin Diamond, as his posture as avant-garde author "has been continually to link mastery to failure, speech to silence, syntax to gap" (Oppenheim 2004, 62). In a basic duality of the Otherness, he chooses doubt before certainty, question before answer, and failure before success. His literature is marked by the difference towards the Western tradition: in the form, silence and failure are increasingly present, while in the content, old people, impaired people and outcasts in general are. Formally, the progression towards inability mentioned in section one parallels the elimination of the agency of both protagonists and author. Thus, we also find a "feminization" of writing in a narrative, textual and artistic sense.

Cixous, at the beginning of "Sorties" (1976), offers a series of hierarchical oppositions, the first one of the terms associated to man, the second one to woman: head/heart, intelligible/sensible, logos/pathos, and so on (1988, 287). Beckett's place seems to be systematically along the second one: feeling above reason, pathos above logos. With a reason ineffective to apprehend the world and a language ineffective to describe it, Beckett commits himself to their emotional counterparts, and thus says: "All I am is feeling" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 217). In his rejection to embrace philosophy as a discipline, he rejects a logic-based explanation of the "mess": "I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms" (217). Furthermore, rejection of a logical explanation itself may be linked to Beckett's conception of language as useless as an expressive tool. When he says that grammar and style have become irrelevant to him (*L*, 514), he is foreshadowing this idea of rejecting a discourse based on rules in favour of one that works otherwise. His quest is, I would argue, one that looks for what he refers to in his article "Le Concentrisme" (written ca. 1930) as an art that is "perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable" (*DI*, 51). As mentioned before, Beckett's work as a poet is to suggest, not to explain. He does not want to either: "I want neither to instruct nor to improve nor to keep people from getting bored," he says, for he is conscious about his inability to give "the answers which were hoped for. There are no easy solutions" (Knowlson 1996, 447). This way, he is determined to change the idea of a poet and the role of one as artist.

His position has an effect on form too. Cixous argues that feminine writing cannot be theorized, only be thought of by "subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (1976, 883). This is an expression apt to illustrate Beckett’s rejection of the highest authority, that of a powerful, by definition male, voice, supported by the subversion and manipulation of traditional narrative elements as linear narration, plot, time or space. Most interestingly, we can relate the union of form and content with Cixous’s idea that femininity in writing goes through:

> a privilege of *voice*: *writing and voice* are entwined and intervowen and writing's continuity/voice’s rhythm take each other’s breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspenses and silences, make it lose its voice or rend it with cries
>
> (Cixous and Clément 1986, 92, italics in the original)

We can also relate Beckett’s novels with Cixous’s account of analysing the voice of a woman in a public meeting:

> all of her passes into her voice, and it’s with her body that she vitally supports the “logic” of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she’s thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn’t deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking.
>
> (1976, 881)

Both passages by Cixous’s argument fit Beckett’s artistic claims strikingly well. This is aptly illustrated by his own statement that *Murphy* is deliberately difficult to read (*DI*, 135), more explicitly by the interruptions of Malone’s discourse when he loses consciousness, and even further by the form of the monologue in *How It Is*, where all punctuation signs have disappeared and words are presented in clusters where the narration becomes vomit-like and links with the narrator’s almost still but painstaking crawling in the mud. Form and content, body and voice, are in Beckett’s novels bound, so that the body's disintegration parallels that of the discourse, or the other way around, and the uncertain, slow advances made at the physical level by the narrator of *How It Is* resemble his speech. Due to these kinds of devices, the inability of the characters matches that of the author. The inclusion of disability motifs is only one of the elements that in Beckett evidence the lack of male mastery.

Protagonists in the novels are all men. However, they are not only impotent as characters in the world, but also as narrators whose discourses are full of ignorance and impotence. This way, the focus is both at a physical and at a linguistic level, so that Beckett's critique of male mastery in physical terms gets bound to his critique of language. If patriarchy is a system of domination that includes men's control of institutions (Connell 1995, 41), Beckett denies narrators any ability to control the institution of language. His attack here is double: his notion of an inability to express, together with the lack of anything with which to express, shows that the impossibility escapes human control, and links the uselessness of the agent to the uselessness of the tool.

Other than by the use of physical or mental disability, Beckett deprives characters of further elements of existence, so that they are dependent on individuals external to the story. Thus, Molloy is not only physically unable, but also lacks ability of decision on his own actions, which are limited from the beginning of his story: "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my goodbyes, finish dying. They don't want that. [...] You'll do that later" (*TN*, 3). In fact, his narration is one of the reports he writes for unknown people to collect on a weekly basis. This way, his freedom as a narrator is from the start reduced to accommodate the requirements of the report. Even as a protagonist, he does not know why he is looking for his mother, which is the reason for his journey. Similarly, we find the narrator of *How It Is* "in the dark the mud hearing nothing saying nothing capable of nothing nothing" (*HII,* 44), and his action and narration depend on what he has "been given": "but the wish for something else no that doesn't seem to have been given to me this time" (5). He is even denied the right of having wishes, and rendered as unable to act. These examples are small proof that disability is combined to other conditions related to desperation. Such "inertia" in life is evoked elsewhere in Beckett, such as the passage when Mercier and Camier toss their umbrella to decide which way to go for them (*MAC,* 16) or the famous first line of *Murphy*: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (*M*, 1), which, by means of repetition, makes feelings of anxiety, obligation and resigned abandonment become general feelings for the reader.

Beckett shows concern on mastery as an author when, by the words of Belacqua, he notes in *Dream*:

> 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.
>
> (*DR,* 119-120)

After providing such illuminating reflection, Belacqua asks why we should call that world of mathematical precision *Scenes from Life* or human comedy, as the "clockwork" condition of certain works was for him incompatible for both the mess and the distress found in the world. Human beings are not programmed to behave in a specific way, and therefore characters should not be either. This way, Beckett shows, already in his twenties, his rejection towards a control that he cannot manage and does not feel the owner of. Nevertheless, this is a critique from a theoretical, in a way external, point of view, and it will take years for Beckett to consistently apply it to his style on a practical level.

Beckett's biographer James Knowlson has detected a number of reasons for such rejection of control over plot and characters:

> He clearly saw that in everything that matters, life is simply not like that – living creatures are too complex, mysterious and unknowable to be classified or controlled in such a crudely mechanistic way. He was also composing a work of self-conscious fiction in which there are different rules that offer a much wider range of possibilities for both the author and the reader. It is as if he were playing a game with the reader, talking to him, teasing him, even taunting him. And he actively relished dismantling the props and supports of the conventional novel.
>
> (Knowlson 1996, 146-147)

Thus, Beckett recognized his impotence and inability as an author since the beginning. From a gender perspective, Linda Ben-Zvi has noted that in his writings he "consciously eschewed the power and privilege of law, of naming, of – one might say – the Father, recognizing that writing grounded therein assumes a surety it in fact does not possess" (Stewart 1999, 14). However, he would not refuse that power directly since the beginning, but rather offered in the early novels a critique in the form of linguistic and narrative attempts that, when pushed, indistinctly failed. The change through time allows to see an early style in which language is treated very differently.

Therefore, in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *Murphy*, most notably in the former, we find what I would call simulacra of power, meaning an over-elaborated language that appears to be precise but turns out to be fake when put to the test. The intensity of detail and the Joycean density of language present in *Dream*, along with the personality of Belacqua himself, reveal themselves as farcical when they baffle rather than illuminate the reader. Belacqua seems to be prepared to deal with the world but the reality is that his existence is chaotic and cannot manage autonomy as a mature individual. For *Murphy* the implication is not so much in the use of language but also in Murphy's solipsism and personality, mechanisms that are supposed to make him an independent person, but that cause lack of communication and undermine bonds between him and the world.

It seems as though Beckett was already conscious about the failure inherent to the notion of language and tried to cover it by trying different configurations in narration and speech. It becomes increasingly clear that he cannot express what he wants naturally, a situation perhaps best illustrated by the Unnamable's assertion that "Murphy and the others" spoke now and then but "it was clumsily down, you could see the ventriloquist" (*TN*, 342). Towards the end of his novelistic production – and beyond, Beckett's goals seem to be fixed on the elimination of the "ventriloquist," on erasing the idea of author, most notably achieved after the adoption of a first-person narration. This will take his artistic proposal to a whole new level.

5.3. THE LOSS OF MALE MASTERY: THE CASE OF *MALONE DIES*

In an interview with Israel Shenker in 1956, when asked about his artistic thought, Beckett said: "I am no master of my material" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 148). This provides an interesting context to his subsequent claims about exploring impotence. Beckett strips characters away from any chances to get control over their own existence, limiting, as we have seen in the previous section, their physical existence and their minds in order to represent the mess perceived in the world and the inability to apprehend it. Experimenting with the speech of characters is both representative of that and of Beckett's own inability as an author. In a sense, we could say that there are two different layers in such experiment: the impotence of everyone as a human being and the impotence of the artist as a person incapable but determined to express. So, Beckett does not only deny general privileges of the individual as an abled person, but he works to specifically deny those attached to narrators, such as mastery on words or memories. Since masculinity is particularly vulnerable to unbinding due to its ideological alignment with mastery (Silverman 1992, 61), Beckett is this way defying the traditional position of men as power holders and that of the artist in control of his stories.

This, as many other aspects in Beckett, is present in several different degrees through his *oeuvre*. His early stories seem to be told from the perspective of an outer omniscient narrator, but it is easy to notice how they are not always right or reliable, and Beckett's game consists in showing it to us. As early as in *Dream*, the narrator says: "We simply mean that at the time we are referring to she was not an object at all [...]. Is that what we mean? What do we mean?" (*DR*, 12). In this case, the idea of an omniscient narrator is attacked, as there is a narrator who is supposed to have access to the facts, but he doubts, not on the facts themselves, but on his own purpose and the objective of his account of them.

One more device to demote hierarchy is detected in Beckett's subversion of the dialectical tension between affirmation and negation (Stewart 1999, 74), as he allows both notions to live together rather than placing them against each other, creating a paradoxical narrative with an essence of contradiction. As I quoted before, Beckett was not interested in giving answers or providing coherent representations of reality, if only because he considered it impossible. When Tom Driver asked him if the mess has to be let into art because it is the truth, Beckett rejected the term: "What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other. […] One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 219). Consequently, he does not invert the relationship turning false into true, but, by using the tension of opposites and contradictions, he eliminates any chance of an absolute truth and breaks reliability, giving the novels a new status. In other words, if one of the properties ascribable to literature – or art in general, is its capacity to tell something, to convey a meaning or account a story, Beckett's novels do not have such property in a traditional sense. On the contrary, since nothing is granted the status of "true," the limits of the narration disappear and, as a consequence, it may expand in many directions. Moreover, as Peter Boxall has pointed out, we can say that "Western thought is gendered male, and so, to skew meaning or parody cherished sense-making strategies is to attack Western masculine privilege" (Oppenheim 2004, 74). In this sense, distance from logic implies distance from the norm as well, and therefore confronts hegemony.

Beckett's refusal of literary mastery is detected as well in the use of his sources. As James Knowlson has noted:

> Philosophical, literary and artistic source material is used, however, in these enigmatic books in a way that is strikingly different from Beckett's earlier work. Scraps of erudition are almost submerged now in the flow of questions, hesitations, negations and confusions. He deals in the novels with most of the philosophical problems of Space, the Self and Time. But he never relies on philosophical or (on the whole) psychological language.
>
> (1996, 375)

The change to first-person puts these references in a different position, and they can integrate the narration from the inside instead of being used from the outside. They are, in other words, not used for accuracy but to shape the characters broken minds and discourses. For scholars such as Ulrika Maude, lack of mastery was already figured in a different way earlier, by the bodies of characters:

> Shaking reveals the impossibility of an optimal body-world relationship, of any notion of maximal grip. [...] Beckett's uncoordinated, shaking beings cannot grasp the world; they can, at most, shake or rattle it in return. In this way, shaking becomes an ironic comment on the phenomenology of "gripping;" shaking, in short, does to gripping what blurring does to vision. Shaking itself hence becomes a form of negation, an acknowledgement of the fictional nature of the subject's mastery over the object.
>
> (2009, 95-96)

This way, Beckett puts all efforts in revealing such fictional nature and creates works that challenge "ontological and epistemological conformity" (Jeffers 2009, 89). The subversive essence of Beckett's practices has been long acknowledged, as has been the fact that he committed to a type of writing that:

> seeks to undermine traditional forms, that denies the privilege of the Phallus, if that means pen, that seeks not power in the word, but a literature of the UnWord. [Julia] Kristeva's descriptions of such subversive writing do not focus on women writers but on the male literary avant-garde whom she says has been "introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language," such fragmentation calling into question the idea of any type of mastery.
>
> (Stewart 1999, 13)

By following these practices, Beckett strips his characters from their agency and power in a sense of literary creation. Moreover, as it has been noted that men are in institutions that are not of their creation nor under their control, and might in fact feel oppressed by them (Bordo 1995, 28), there is an interesting relation between the narrative and metanarrative levels in Beckett's stories that conveys a more intense feeling of confinement. Beckett, as noted in chapter four of this thesis, is not condescending in his treatment of protagonists, and does not grant them relief or power to manage their lives. When they are deprived of power, he allows his themes to be universal and abandon earthly issues. Nevertheless, he effectively rejects his own power to create coherent, tangible worlds, but his narrators still want to speak, which creates important contradictions and images of struggle as those examined in section one of this thesis.

Of all the novels by Samuel Beckett, perhaps the most interesting one to analyse mastery both at narrative and metanarrative levels is *Malone Dies*. Susan Mooney makes an extremely insightful analysis in "Malone Dies: Postmodern Masculinity" (2010) of the disruptive elements in the novel that defy tradition. During the twentieth century, Mooney says, the Bildungsroman goes through a process of rethinking itself and narration "becomes fixated on an undoing of the development of character, especially the premises of mastery of the masculine character" (Gontarski 2010, 275). In relation to this, the form and style of *Malone Dies* make it a "postmodern Bildungsroman" because it goes against the achievement of a heroic masculine protagonist (275). This can be analysed for its contrast with what David Gilmore has proposed as the main traits of traditional masculinity, which include heroism and understand man as "a protector, [who] cannot back down from the struggle; he must be competitive and successful" (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 31). Success and traditional heroism are out of the question here, but I would argue we find a different kind of heroism, as it is true that Malone, and others, do not "back down from the struggle" as such. This way, we find a problematic design of masculinity, one that does not counter the norm straightforwardly, but offers images alternative to the norm. On the other hand, the novel explores the potential power of gender, as Malone's stories explore "the relationship between sons and paternal law [and] man's potential submission to woman" (Gontarski 2010, 281). In the novel, Malone acquires two obligations, that of telling past or invented stories and that of telling his own story and current state. Mooney relates it to the traditional requirements for the protagonist of a Bildungsroman, namely "realizing his inner desires and negotiating a coherence of these with the demands of the social world" (275). However, the traditional ideas of growing are different in *Malone Dies*.

As mentioned, it is during the trilogy that Beckett manages to subvert the tension between positive and negative and makes opposite terms live together, making contradiction a valid situation. Again, the most paradigmatic example of this is in the Unnamable's last statement: "I can't go on, I'll go on" (*TN*, 407). With his characteristic style of discourse, Beckett creates a context in which the reader eventually finds that opposite terms do not cancel each other, but stay valid together. Thanks to contradiction, masculine mastery becomes "centrally constitutive and precariously ephemeral for the subject" and becomes "both possibility and failure, as a subjectivity oscillating between dominance and submission" (Gontarski 2010, 275-276). The fact that it can be both things reveals, I would argue, a specific kind of subversion, one in which none of the components of masculinity is straightforwardly rejected, but also one in which masculinity is questioned, suspended and balanced. This problematizes the construction of the subject and the complexity of such an issue.

A similar device used by Beckett in *The Unnamable*, and even more radically in *How It Is*, is "the elimination of the hierarchical distinction between the phrases (dependent and independent)" (Harper 2012, 154) due to the peculiar presentation of the text in separate short blocks that ignore basic rules as punctuation and capitalization at the beginning of sentences. What is more, the idea of sentence seems to be erased and gives the novel its particular flow:

> sudden quasi-certitude that another inch and I fall headlong into a ravine or dash myself against a wall though nothing I know only too well to be hoped for in that quarter his tears me from my reverie I've arrived
>
> (*HII*, 29)

Furthermore, going back to *Malone Dies*, Beckett keeps the "urge to progress and achieve" while every male protagonist is placed in anti-bourgeois positions, which disrupts conventions of masculinity (Gontarski 2010, 277). Sapo is mistreated and rejected by his own family, he is sort of a pariah due to his failure to fit the norm. He does not have a healthy, structured environment at any moment, and neither does Macmann. Beckett ultimately denies achievement for the integration of his characters, both in society and self-integration, they never really get there, and Malone "rejects a pleasing tale of masculine accomplishment and mastery" (277).

In addition, the fact that we, as readers, have access only to the discourse of Malone raises the question of how and to what extent the rest of impairments, especially those acknowledged by himself in memory and perception, are affecting the reliability of his narrative and the narrator's ability to retain power. This is something true for most of Beckett's novels, but especially present in *Malone Dies* for its metanarrative condition. In the rest of the novels, we read about the story of a person, but here the activity of that person is telling stories, openly addressing the issue of creation, invention and remembrance. Therefore, "Malone embodies and expresses a modern masculinity of renunciation and paradoxical retention of power" (281) that mirrors Beckett's fundamental paradox.

As a modernist technique, the depiction of male inaction in Irish literature from the twentieth century has been described as shifting from "modes of enchantment and self-sacrifice in Yeats to the more conscious rhetoric of refusal and obduracy in Joyce and Beckett" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 72). Therefore, Beckett enters the modernist tradition continuing and developing this in his own way, but, as we have seen, adapts it not only to representation but to his own role as writer, which in the case of *Malone Dies* is replicated by the narrator-protagonist.

Eventually, rejecting his own mastery as an author and denying it to his narrators is one step more in his refusal of identity. Not only does he deny male narrators a privileged identity, but his works progressively revolve around the idea of identity itself. Nevertheless, Beckett's rejection of mastery is the main issue linking masculinity and privilege in terms of its narrative and linguistic implications, but it is an issue better understood when offered together with an analysis of the representation of male and female characters themselves. Therefore, and in order to get the full picture, the next chapter is dedicated to see how Beckett combines deprivation of mastery with the progressive alteration of masculinity models in representation.

6. THE REPRESENTATION OF MEN: REJECTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THE *HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX*

> In the meantime, in the systems that seemed so eternal and universal that laws could be extracted from them, laws that could be stuffed into computers, and in any case for the moment stuffed into the unconscious machinery, in these systems, thanks to our action and our language, shifts are happening.
>
> Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*

6.1. ON MASCULINITIES AND REPRESENTATION

At the border between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, we find a whole new level of attention to all kinds of identities. Race, sex, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or body, are just a few of the notions that have been subject to debate lately, as a consequence of quick changes in the political, social, historical and economic context. In modern society, the individual is constantly reassessed and reconfigured, frameworks change and theories must adapt to them. As a result, the meaning of identities is now less stable and fixed than before, which encourages the study of masculinities in art in order to reassess traits related to gender from new perspectives. This is especially related to the mentioned changes: inasmuch as they threaten power relations (Rose 2010, 144), they threaten the notion of masculinity, based on power and domination, and its meanings. Indeed, changes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Western world caused accounts of masculinity to be even more strongly marked by a rhetoric of crisis (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 1).

By the decade of the 1970s, scholars were already offering new approaches to gender. One of them was Natalie Zemon Davis, who noticed a bias in the historical record that needed correction, and so proposed that we should look at both men and women in order to rethink "some of the central issues faced by historians – power, social structure, property, symbols and periodization" (Davis 1976, 90). Taking the idea that feminism is, in Michael Kimmel's own words, a "system of relationships between women and men that revolves around notions of power and, therefore, of inequality" (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 16-17) masculinity studies began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to Kimmel, as a positive response to women's studies and to feminism itself (17). While in the early stages of the development of masculinity studies there was an understandable fear that by opening the history of gender to men, women could be displaced in the record again, others have noted that attention to men and male issues emphasizes the idea that masculinity and femininity exist in relation to each other (Rose 2010, 41). As a consequence of the increasing instability of the term, scholars refer to "masculinities" in plural instead of referring to a "masculinity," thus indicating that there was never one only way to "be a man" (Rose 2010, 124). This way they acknowledge the fluid idiosyncrasy of the "masculine" condition, as it changes constantly depending on the context.

Raewyn Connell, in her seminal work *Masculinities* (1995), criticizes the four most common definitions or approaches to masculinity and the basic faults in their conception. The first one, Connell calls essentialist, groups descriptions by those scholars whose method consists in picking a specific feature that "defines the core of the masculine, and hang an account of men's lives on that" (1995, 68). For Connell, this slightly matches Freud's linking masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity. Essentialism looks for an essence that often includes risk-taking, responsibility, irresponsibility, aggression, and the like. "Perhaps the finest is the socio-biologist Lionel Tiger's idea that true maleness, underlying male bonding and war, is elicited by 'hard and heavy phenomena'" (68). This approach to masculinity is general and arbitrary. Second, there is the positivist view, which "yields a simple definition of masculinity: what men actually are" (69). Following modern epistemology, Connell notes that "there is no description without a standpoint," that "to list what men and women do requires that people be already sorted into the categories 'men' and 'women'", and finds such pseudo-empirical definition problematic. Then, Connell talks about the normative view, which offers a standard, as it defines masculinity as what men ought to be. Linking this standard to "the toughness and independence acted by [John] Wayne, [Humphrey] Bogart or [Clint] Eastwood," Connell asks: "What is 'normative' about a norm hardly anyone meets? Are we to say the majority of men are unmasculine?" (70). The last one, called the semiotic view, which has been effective in cultural analysis, works by contrasts and oppositions in a system in which "[m]asculinity is, in effect, defined as not-femininity." However, a theory of gender needs more, as we should also talk about "gendered places in production and consumption," about any processes and relationships that transform the cultural and social place and expression of men (71).

All these conceptions of masculinity depart from prejudices based on the "main traits of traditional masculinity," as collected by David Gilmore: "It usually includes an element of heroism, of bravery [...]. As a protector, he cannot back down from the struggle; he must be competitive and successful. [...] A man should be sexually potent" (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 31). As mentioned in chapter five, these traits become problematic when assessing Samuel Beckett's novels, as his characters are by definition unsuccessful but offer new, subversive images of heroism and struggle.

For Connell, we cannot define masculinity as an object, i.e., in terms of a specific behaviour or a norm, but focusing on "the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives." He elaborates:

> “Masculinity,” to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.
>
> (Connell 1995, 71)

In these relations, there is a hegemonic masculinity that is not fixed either, “but occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable,” and thus “embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 1995, 76-77), patriarchy understood as a system of gender domination that includes “men’s control of institutions, better jobs, economic wealth, of the means of violence” (Rose 2010, 41).

Our analysis on Samuel Beckett’s treatment of gender must necessarily deal with the representation and relations of men in his novels. Determining the extent to which these accommodate or subvert the hegemonic model of masculinity will reveal further details to us on visibility and message in his works. In addition, it will allow for appealing intersectional views on the author’s *oeuvre* and its context.

6.2. ALTERNATIVE CONFIGURATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN THE NOVELS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

Beckett’s novels imply an attack not only on patriarchy but also on hegemonic masculinity, while characters at times try to cling to their shattered superiority: “But the best is to think of myself as fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be. This is also the most pleasing to me” (*TN*, 289). This appreciation made by the Unnamable appears in similar forms in drama as well, as shown in *Endgame* by Hamm's urgency to be at the centre of the stage:

> HAMM: Am I right in the centre?
>
> CLOV: I'll measure it. [...]
>
> HAMM: I'm more or less in the centre?
>
> CLOV: I'd say so.
>
> HAMM: You'd say so! Put me right in the centre!
>
> (*CDW*, 104)

In this sense, the emphasis on the instability of the male subject is represented by the lack of mastery at a number of levels but also by their integration in non-hegemonic or alternative models. In the mentioned examples, protagonists long for their centrality in their respective universes, thus despising – and fearing, displacement.

Beckett's subversion of male elements has been, from a Freudian perspective, related to his need to step away from his literary father, James Joyce, as he represented "the law, transmitter of a cultural/literary heritage," so that "Samuel Beckett's departure from the language of the father was a means of making room for himself" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 379). It has also been linked to his need to leave Ireland (Knowlson 1996, 273) and the change in his style, as it involved focusing on "folly, failure, impotence, and ignorance" which "are not admired or respected characteristics in Western society" (Jeffers 2009, 68).

Most importantly, Beckett expressed his feelings of guilt for not meeting his parents' expectations in his letters and conversations. Referring to his mother May, Beckett writes to Tom MacGreevy:

> I am what her savage loving has made me, and it is good that one of us should accept that finally. As it has been all this time, she wanting me to behave in a way agreeable to her in her October of analphabetic gentility, or to her friends ditto, or to the business code of father idealized – dehumanized – ("Whenever in doubt what [to] do, ask yourself what would darling Bill have done") – the grotesque can go no further.
>
> [...] Which I suppose all boils down to saying what a bad son I am. Then Amen.
>
> (*L*, 552-553)

This way, Beckett is pointing out the extreme pressure of his mother May and the constant presence of his father William as a masculine referent. This "grotesque" situation affects both the representation of women by the author, as we will see in chapter seven, and that of men, as it entails a rejection of representing traditional models of masculinity. Not living up to these "masculine bourgeois expectations" such as getting a job, getting married or remaining in Ireland (Jeffers 2009, 12) would mark Beckett's relations with his parents and gender relations in his works since his twenties.

However, while Beckett's personal situation was marked by elements of his personal life such as his feeling of confinement in Ireland, the difficulties in dealing with his father's death in 1933, or changes in the value system in a convulse political period (Jeffers 2009, 11), at least in his early days, this situation is also of an artistic nature. An attempt to determine a clear cause-consequence relation between both aspects – i.e., personal needs and artistic needs, seems sterile, as both interrelate continually and are not understood separately. However, it is notable that scholars have assessed that "[t]he compulsion to repeat a counter-discursive of Western masculine standards attests to Beckett's artistic need to master a situation out of his control" (Jeffers 2009, 35), or that his defiance of his parents' expectations consisted "of a literary urge that he could not justify to them" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 192). Following this, while Beckett's attitude might be seen as a way of dealing with his life, it is also a way of dealing with art itself, with literature as an exhausted means of expression, the loss of references and the obsolescence of language. Nevertheless, the present chapter deals more directly with the use of specific motifs and elements in the representation of men in his works and its relation to the subversion of tradition.[17] In a sense, we can illustrate the situation by the quote commonly attributed to Gustav Mahler that "tradition is not the worship of the ashes, but the preservation of the fire."[18] There is no doubt that Beckett had a profound respect for the old masters, especially, due to his personal relationship with him, for James Joyce. However, this did not prevent him from perceiving a strong need to renew an extinguishing fire with new means, which lead him to reassess his own art and look for new ways of representing the world, ones that often subverted traditional norms.

One of the most easily detectable aspects of such subversion is the treatment of myths and classic models of masculinity. The fact that Irish modernists were keen "to demythologize [the] cult of militant masculinity" (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 75) is well represented in Murphy when Neary bangs his head against the buttocks of the mythical hero Cuchulainn at the General Post Office in Dublin. Beckett uses irony to lower the status of a hero, reducing the epic of their figures while he conversely chooses other models to create his own characters and their convictions. This is the case of Moran reflecting on the myth of Sisyphus or Beckett's own election of Belacqua as an alter ego, a character who in Dante's Purgatorio is a model of laziness and indolence sitting in foetal position, in contrast to any traditional idea of hero and man. Moreover, Rónán McDonald sees a political gesture in that:

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[17] For an in-depth discussion of masculinity in terms of psychological loss, culture and nation, see Jeffers (2009).

[18] This quote, although widely used, is mainly attributed to Mahler, but also, in the same or similar forms, to varied people such as Thomas More, Benjamin Franklin, Ricarda Huch or Jean Jaurès, among others. I could not prove whether an original written source of it does in fact exist or is not lost. However, the quote is a common expression pertinent for the illustration of Samuel Beckett's artistic claims.

> As Irish modernism develops, some of the binds of masculinity are loosened through a more overtly androgynous identity, like that of Leopold Bloom, or met more by self-conscious gestures of denial and withdrawal, such as those of Stephen Dedalus or Beckett's Murphy.
>
> (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 84)

Rising up against cultural fathers is implied by subversion and parody and appears in *Dream*'s accounts given by Belacqua on Balzac and Flaubert, or his parodies of Joyce's style, but also in later works in satirizing characters that imply paternal authority, as in the relationship between Neary and his students (Cousineau 1999, 29). Susan Mooney notes:

> Malone [...] resists typification within the modernist tradition. He does not correspond to a grand mythology or symbolism as do Joyce's key men. Nor does he fulfill the qualities of the dandy-aesthete of early modernism (Wilde; Huysmans), who would seem to lay claim to feminine mystery and allure.
>
> (Gontarski 2010, 277)

Malone in his bed, Molloy crawling on the forest, or the narrator of *How It Is* are the opposite to male power and hypermasculinization of characters. Just as mastery on mind and discourse, physical strength and virility are out of the question here: decaying bodies are the norm at least from *Watt* on.

There are other details in physical representation that counter the custom at the middle of the twentieth century, in a way mocking the elements characteristic of "gentlemen" in that time. For example, the motif of a moustache might be easily linked to William Beckett's having one, while this was the case for "most respectable men of his generation" (Baker 1995, 145). Thus, the moustache seems to be a motif used playfully in Beckett. In *Murphy*, we find the case of Neary, forced to have his whiskers "[s]uppressed without pity, [...] in discharge of a vow, never again to ventilate a virility denied discharge into its predestined channel" (*M*, 30).

Instead of making his characters meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity, the treatment given to traditional notions is ironic. The idea of "gentleman" itself is obsolete and often mocked by the author, while respected by characters. Miss Counihan uses the term when, after repeatedly declining propositions by Neary, acknowledges that "[i]f he were not gentleman enough to desist on his own bottom, she would have him legally restrained" (*M*, 32). Also, Molloy notes how Lousse dug the hole to bury her dog and also put him in the hole, "though [he] was the gentleman" (*TN*, 31-32). The naïve repetition of the formula "though I was the gentleman" shows how present the idea of a norm is present in a constraining way. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Beckett says in the German Letter that grammar and style have become for him "as irrelevant as […] the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask" (*L*, 518). The idea of man appears in other novels, usually mentioned in a veiled ironic way. In *Murphy*, the first reason for Celia to insist on the protagonist's finding a job is "her desire to make a man of him" (*M*, 40), which is not only a common expression of the bond between male success and occupational success, but also the exact words used by Beckett's mother to him (Knowlson 1996, 215). It is also a way of showing a concern for her partner's situation that he himself does not show. However, Celia's efforts turn out to be counter-productive on Murphy's account, as he notes that "her loving nagging had gone astray" and only served "to set him up more firmly than before in the position against which it had been trained, [...] efforts to make a man of him had made him more than ever Murphy" (*M*, 114). This way, Beckett creates a character who, as him, does not meet the expectations of his closest relatives and who lacks social success. His protagonist lives under the pressure of Celia and society, but that situation starts a loop in which pressure makes him be more disenchanted with his environment. In contrast to Beckett's own anxiety and affliction, Murphy sticks to his conviction and even seems to relish his situation and be sure of being right while the rest of the world is wrong. In any case, Murphy's case contrasts with the fact that work defines a man: "If a man is successful, he's manly, and if he's unsuccessful, he loses something" (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 34). Not only Murphy, but most male protagonists in Beckett lack a professional occupation most of the time. In a way, the focus is elsewhere in Beckett, but their fail to fit social requirements in a professional sense is no less true. This might as well be seen as prefiguring the inclusion of wandering – or waiting, vagabonds as protagonists, who face, as Mercier, Camier or Molloy, the classist reactions of people who encounter them.

The representation of most characters, but especially of Murphy, reminds of other proposals later in the century. It is interestingly similar to John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980), which features a character who is a misfit and has a female partner who urges him to find a job in order to develop a normal social and personal life. Ignatius Reilly's reactions are reminiscent of Murphy's in that he thinks his friend Myrna Minkoff is wrong and attacking him. It is also similar in that Ignatius is obsessed with Augustine's theories and tries to apply them to his modern life, just as Murphy follows Geulincx's *ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* ["where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing"]. Both are, in this sense, representatives of a particular unsuccessful model of masculinity in the twentieth century who paradoxically try to live according to old philosophical models. In *Murphy*, Beckett presents us with a character that has no control on his life and feelings, a situation that causes him anxiety: "The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shriveled up at the thought of her. The voice lamented faintly against his flesh" (*M*, 5). Similarly, Wylie notes that "Murphy's need for Miss Counihan was certainly greater than hers for him" (*M*, 76) and, lastly, we see that Murphy's attempts to retain Celia are in vain:

> "Then is the position unchanged?" said Murphy. "Either I do what you want or you walk out. Is that it?"
>
> She made to rise, he pinioned her wrists.
>
> "Let me go," said Celia.
>
> "Is it?" said Murphy.
>
> "Let me go," said Celia.
>
> He let her go.
>
> (*M*, 26)

Moreover, this is an example of Murphy being rendered ridiculous by the author, as he understands the efforts by Celia to make him get a job and be happy as "doing what she wants." Hegemonic masculinity is similarly parodied by Arthur's exaggerated proselytism in *Watt* of Bando, a medicine for erectile dysfunction. Such medicine, Arthur observes, made him change: "From being a moody, listless, constipated man, covered with squames, shunned by my fellows, my breath fetid and my appetite depraved" to become "vivacious, restless, a popular nudist, regular in my daily health, almost a father and a lover of boiled potatoes" (*W*, 139). This is a manner of linking sexual potency to the rest of features of masculinity as physical strength and activity, and to overall health, making sexual virility central for the overall health and aptitudes.

The idea of man is further problematized in *Watt*, where the protagonist thinks he can no longer call himself a man, "yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man" (*W*, 66). It seems as if language, again, would not be prepared to define reality. In a way, this raises questions about the definition of man: biologically, Watt is a man, but doubts appear as he progressively loses the features inherent to men, such as physical capacities or activity in the world. Finally, it is stated that “he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn” (66), emphasizing again the passive nature of the character.

Furthermore, characters despise traditional social structures, but they are ironically excluded from them involuntarily, they do not have actual power of decision on it. It is the case of Molloy, who stays with Lousse because “he could not do otherwise” (*TN*, 46), but the rejection is also expressed more ironically elsewhere: “Happily Mr. Micks was childless” (*W*, 178), “the mere fact of having a family should have put me on my guard” (*TN*, 315). In the late novels, the notion of family itself disappears as well, as characters such as Molloy and Moran “no longer define themselves in terms of familial relations” (Stewart 1999, 71), while Malone does not provide an account of his own family, and the family unit is, “to say the least, seriously under attack in the relevant episodes (Stewart 1999, 71).

In the end, the deactivation of traditional masculinity motifs and structures is a part of Beckett’s attack on norms, and it is further developed and enhanced in its combination with changes in aspects of sexuality. Therefore, the next point is dedicated to see how Beckett deals with sexual orientation and practices when creating his characters.

6.3. THE REJECTION OF THE *HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX*

Samuel Beckett’s attack on the norm is especially strong at a sexual level, including non-normative and non-reproductive expressions of sex, such as anallity and onanism, as well as sexual impotence and the rejection of heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation. The inclusion of descriptions of such activities in his novels would lead to accusations of obscenity and even to censorship.[19] But most interestingly, the presence of these practices, combined with other elements of refusal towards the norm, entails an attack on the so-called *heterosexual matrix*. Introduced by Judith Butler, it is one of the main concepts presented in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), by which she refers to the set of cultural discourses and practices, a state that seems natural rather than constructed, that promotes heterosexuality as the natural and default condition, stating heterosexual thought as the legitimate, normal one. She uses the term "to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (1990, 151) and that regulates the norm according to which bodies are coherent, meaning "there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female)" (151).

Just as they lack coherence in their identity at many other levels, the protagonists of the novels of Samuel Beckett also lack the continuity and coherence between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire, which are needed for being "intelligible" genders (Butler 1990, 17). In the same way, if we take Butler's idea of gender performativity, meaning she understands gender as a performance, thus acknowledging the fluidity and instability of the term, Beckett's characters seem to perform a new masculinity. If, according to theorists belonging to the third wave of feminism, gender is a social construct, non-static and diverse, what these alternative practices do to Beckett's model of gender is to expand its limits. Thanks to the inclusion of non-normative sexual practices or expressions, gender as an action can effectively "proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex" (Butler 1990, 112). On Butler's account, the multiplicity of these kinds of sexualities – those that break "heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies" is subversive and suppressed by a binary regulation (1990, 19). Beckett, especially after the "revelation," defies such regulation in his works. By means of eliminating other limits related to body and age, and combining them with other elements such as contradiction, he undermines the value of binary. It has been noted that in his "mature works (post-1946)," the author abandons dualism (Maude 2009, 6). In this sense, Beckett's artistic project can somehow be aligned with the third wave of feminism, understood as "something of a liberal humanist approach to discourse and to construction" (Sunderland 2004, 174).

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[19] In *Damned to Fame*, Knowlson recalls how an extract of *The Unnamable* was published in the 1953 issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* with a whole section removed. The section spoke about the "tumefaction of the penis" and "contained an amusing account of a figure who has no hands with which to excite himself trying to provoke the imagined 'flutter' of an erection by thinking about a horse's rump" (1996, 390).

Therefore, in this point we are analysing how Beckett's approach to the representation of male characters changes through time, so that, following Jennifer Jeffers argument:

> With the postwar fiction, including the Trilogy of novels, Beckett begins to counter the normative interpretative strategies with characters whose situations and contexts are repulsive to Western masculine heterosexual culture.
>
> (2009, 68)

The reference to Molloy being in his mother's room "all shame drunk, my prick in my rectum, who knows" (*TN*, 15) defies heteronormative behaviour at so many levels it is difficult to understand it as a real representation of a normal situation. It seems rather a provocation simultaneously containing or reminiscent of incest, homosexuality, onanism and anallity. These are added to the mention of drunkenness, which makes it all the more scandalous for the social norm. Since the beginning of his career, Beckett includes occasional images of sexual activity, as is the case of the close descriptions of Belacqua's masturbation and sexual impotence (*DR*, 5). Images of pleasure in the penis, erections and ejaculations can be, says Peter Boxall, seen as "the refusal of women and the Other" (Oppenheim 2004, 115). This might be true especially for the early works due to its combination with misogynist discourses, but it is hard to determine to which extent these are rather, in later works, offered as a provocation towards the norm. If, as Monique Wittig claims, oppressing discourses take for granted that any society is founded upon heterosexuality (1992, 28), then Beckett's attacks on oppressing systems is reinforced by subversive images of sexuality.

In the middle-to-late works, Beckett opens interpretation to the inclusion of homosexual and homoerotic elements. Molloy's acknowledgment to having "rubbed against a few men" (*TN*, 33) contrasts with the earlier representation of Ticklepenny in *Murphy*. As Knowlson has noted, the character of Ticklepenny is the literary representation of one of Beckett's literary rivals, Austin Clarke, represented with a traditionally stereotypical and disdainful view of homosexuals that emphasizes promiscuity and has him even try to overreach Murphy. According to Knowlson, "though his first marriage, which lasted less than two weeks, was reputed not to have been consummated, [Clarke] was not known to be homosexual," and picturing him as one was a joke by Beckett, one "in rather poor taste" (Knowlson 1996, 214). Homophobia is, according to Raewyn Connell, "not just an attitude," but also defines a standard masculinity "by its distance from the rejected" (1995, 40). In fact, we could say that every form of discrimination has also the effect of defining one's identity by opposition. However, and as problematic as that particular homophobic representation results, tendency to abstraction and indifference in Beckett rejects the homophobic ideology that imagines gay men as feminized men and lesbians as masculinized women (40).

In this sense, indifference appears in Watt's account on his relationships and those of Mrs. Gorman, in which homosexuality and bisexuality are naturalized and do not even get a mention of their being out of a hypothetical norm. The norm here seems to be inexistent, or not applicable for Watt:

> Watt was not a man's man [...] As to whether Mrs. Gorman was a woman's woman, or not, that is one of those things that is not known. [...] Not that it is by any means impossible for a man to be both a man's man and a woman's man, or for a woman to be both a woman's woman and a man's woman, almost in the same breath. For with men and women, with men's men and women's men, with men's women and women's women, with men's and women's men, with men's and women's women, *all is possible*, as far as can be ascertained in this connexion.
>
> (*W*, 112-113, italics added)

"All is possible" is perhaps one of the best statements to defy a norm and its power. In a sense, a norm might try to regulate behaviours, but it can never regulate reality, the "possibility" is an element of subversion *per se*.

Molloy's utterance that "Now men, I have rubbed up against a few men in my time" not only "might suggest that he defaults" to a gay sexuality (Ben-Zvi 1990, 116), but also might suggest an indifference, especially when combined with his not knowing whether Lousse/Loy is a man: "Don't be tormenting yourself, Molloy, man or woman, what does it matter?" (*TN*, 51), an uncertainty that in fact does not cause him any trouble. It actually does not seem to make any difference or mark any limits with regard to how his behaviour should be towards her. Social pressure, thus, has disappeared for him.

Indifference for the gender of the partner appears in the case of the narrator of *How It Is* as well. Having had a female partner during his life, the narrator later shows dependency towards Pim, a male figure, emphasizing the importance of love – i.e., of the personal relationship itself, over any gender issues, as he wonders:

> yes or no if he loved me a little if Pim loved me a little yes or no if I loved him a little in the dark the mud in spite of all a little affection find someone at last someone find you at last live together glued together love each other a little love a little without being loved be loved a little without loving answer that leave it vague leave it dark
>
> (*HII*, 53)

This way, as it has been noted with regard to Beckett's dramatic production, in late novels as well "the phallocentric gender duality breaks down, to be replaced by a gender fluidity in which the masculine is no longer the locus of value" (Weller 2006, 166-7). By means of representation, Beckett is displacing the masculine from the central position to benefit a new model in which dualities make no sense. The disregard for any social implications of gender orientation joins here the disregard for ontological and epistemological certainties – shown by the coexistence of contradictions.

The mentioned gender fluidity results in characters that do not have a unified male identity but instead show traditionally feminine elements, lacking virility or physical domination, so that their borders are "so weak as to produce moments of gender uncertainty" (Oppenheim 2004, 112). In relation to this, Ruby Cohn has linked the waiting in *Godot* with feminine passivity, an assumption of lacking control that is a "societally inculcated female supposition" (Stewart 1999, 12). This is true as well for the novels, at least for *Molloy*, which includes a first part whose last line meaningfully reads "Molloy could stay, where he happened to be" (*TN*, 85), an ending that might be seen as the ultimate triumph of passivity. Moreover, its second part features Moran lying in the forest as well, waiting for his son to go buy a bicycle. In any case, the character of Molloy further endangers "the traditional value system of the middle class in regard to his body, sexuality, and irrational social behavior," and his emasculation shows for Jeffers "a deliberate attempt to insult the health and fitness standards erected in the West" (Jeffers 2009, 74).

However, when decomposition enters, incest and self-pleasure appear as provoking as ever in Malone's account. He does not expect nor wish to see his sex again, his sex "from which when I was yet a virgin clouts and gouts of sperm came streaming and splashing up into my face, a continuous flow, while it lasted, and which must still drip a little piss from time to time" (*TN*, 228). Rejection to the body is also related to the rejection of masculinity, as it commonly includes references to sexual parts of the body and their functions. Thus, when Molloy states that he would not care about being castrated, one of the reasons for his indifference is that there is "not a drop" to "be squeezed" from his testicles (31). He actually says he would be happier like that, as though signalling the anxiety caused by the presence of a no longer successful masculinity that confronts the idea of sexual potency attributed to males (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 31). In a sense, castration would save Molloy from seeing and feeling a part of his body that is no longer useful in sexual terms, a presence that does not (only) evidence powerlessness, but the *loss* of male power itself. In general, there seems to be an idea in the late novels that it is better not to have a part of the body than to have it but being unable to use it: as mentioned in the discussion of disability, the notion of past ability accentuates the negative feelings (Maude 2009, 13).

Beckett's novels seem to imply an attack on hegemonic masculinity as they show characters who lose their legitimacy of domination by several reasons. In this sense, it is interesting to note that "[h]ealth behaviours are one means by which men signify their manhood," and are combined by an emphasis on "toughness" that naturalizes such dominance (Calasanti et al. 2013, 15). Physical strength is not ascribable to any

Beckettian protagonist, since from Watt on, all of them experience falls, starting with Mercier and Camier, and later literally crawl or simply lie on the floor. Attack on the body is strongly linked to the attack to male and heterosexual norms at several levels.

It is by all these practices that Beckett defines his "critique of the cultural and textual mechanics by which gender is produced" (Oppenheim 2004, 111) and shapes an artistic work in which form and content act together to enable such critique. When discussing modernity, Rita Felski notes:

> for many of those alienated and disaffected from the dominant norms of middleclass masculinity, such a scenario offered the hope of a radical alternative to prevailing forces of positivism, progress ideology, and the sovereignty of the reality principle.
>
> (Felski 1995, 90)

Beckett offers that kind of alternative as he combines alternative representations of masculinity with surreal situations and contradictions, thus defying the reality principle and distancing himself from traditional representations of men. As a consequence of the combination, Beckett represents what Mooney has called post-patriarchal masculinity (Gontarski 2010, 278), relating it to Schoene-Harwood's notion of *écriture masculine* as a writing "employed to describe the anti-phallogocentric and non-patriarchal disposition that characterizes (pro-)feminist men's writing" (2000, 102).

Finally, the present chapter is more revealing when combined with an analysis of the representation of women in the novels. Both kinds of representation are in a constant dialogue and give a full representation of the world of Samuel Beckett. Noting that an essential part of masculinity studies is the effect of masculinity construction on women, the next chapter is dedicated to providing a reading of women roles in the novels.

7. THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: DEACTIVATION OF THE *FEMININE MYSTIQUE*

> Her morning mantra in the bathroom mirror:
>
> I am highly presentable, likeable, clubbable, relatable, promotable and successful.
>
> Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other*

7.1. MISOGYNY IN THE NOVELS

In the 1990s new attention was given to the role and representation of women in Samuel Beckett's works, as a consequence of the development of gender studies applied to literature and of the certainty that gender itself was an obscured area of criticism in Beckett. Since then, partial agreement appeared with regard to this issue, while scholars keep differing in some of their conclusions. There is a consensus that the woman in Beckett, at least in the early works, is "objectified, conceived as a threatening 'other' and predominantly a negative alterity" (Weller 2006, 164) and, therefore, that these works offer misogynist representations (Moorjani 1982; Ben-Zvi 1990; Stewart 1999). Nevertheless, scholars do not coincide when it comes to the assessment of the late works, both prose and drama, as the change in the treatment of gender seems to be directly related to a shift in genre (Weller 2006, 166). Due to that change, gender representation moves from this "essentialist and often deeply misogynistic construction of Woman towards much more erratic, often contingent or indeterminate gender configurations" (quoted in Tajiri 2007, 34).

Especially in the early works, Beckett offers a stereotypical view that follows traditional representations and social positions of women, resulting in biased treatment with foundations on a phallocentric vision of the world. Thus, scholars have noted the existence of a male consciousness (Weller 2006, 164) and a heterosexual male gaze (Oppenheim 2004, 112) that objectify women, fix gender and highlight the importance of the body. A mean, sexist tone is predominant in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *Murphy* but still appears, although much more sporadically, in the rest of novels, where women and their identities are dismissed and obliterated. This, in a way, survives in Molloy's thinking of the women he loved as "one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life" (*TN*, 54) or Malone's focusing his story on Macmann and not on Moll, "who after all is only a female" (*TN*, 256). Early depictions of women in Beckett, with a focus on physicality, are predominantly negative and cruel in their use of disgust and humour to present and emphasize the idea that woman impedes intellectual man and his pursuits (Ben-Zvi 1990, 91). This is also combined with the depiction of women as emotional beings in front of men as intellectual ones. Especially at the beginning of Beckett's career, the description of women often remarks their bodies and the effect characters have on other people. Indeed, Beckett follows the tradition of associating woman to body, man to mind (Ben-Zvi 1990, 91; Stewart 1999, 169; Weller 2006, 164). For example, when Murphy's friends decide to go to London to look for him, Wylie decides that "[Miss Counihan] would be the heart and soul, he the brains, Cooper the claws, of the expedition" (*M*, 77), reducing the woman to the emotional, irrational part of it, men being the intellectual, physically strong ones. This is also related to the idea that "[the] nature/culture discourse regularly figures nature as a female, in need of subordination by a culture that is invariably figured as male, active, and abstract" (Butler 1990, 37).

Women, however, show devotion to their male partners and try to help and understand them, failing repeatedly to do so. In a sense, their pleasure and well-being are dependent on the protagonists. This is represented by Celia choosing Murphy's pleasure above her own, when we are told that the geometry of the floor of their new room "delighted Murphy because it called Braque to his mind, and Celia because it delighted Murphy" (*M*, 39), in a way that recalls Celia's concern on making "a man of him," as noted in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, this is perceived as an added pressure by the protagonists, so that they need women but often react with repulsion and rejection to their presence. The case of *Molloy* is the most paradigmatic for this situation that seems true in works by Beckett in general. Molloy's oedipal quest for his mother, in contrast to the disgusting portrait he makes of her, illustrates how "the only good woman is a lost one and any present woman is a menace, abject in her oppressive presence" (Moorjani 1982, 33), which is at the same time representative of Beckett's difficult relationship with his own mother.

There is, in this sense, a marked difference between male and female characters that will progressively be less marked with the apparition of each new novel, as decay and misery become increasingly present. Consequently, a proper assessment of the representation of women in Beckett's novels needs to take into account that there is not one idea of "woman," but that the depiction and her relationship with male characters changes through time. In these first novels, as we will see, the feeling that women threaten the peace of mind of the protagonists is emphasized by the prominence of obscene, detailed and explicit language. Belacqua's and Murphy's thoughts and reckless behaviour, sometimes merging into insults and humiliations, incur in a legitimation of patriarchal behaviour that will be abandoned later on, when the author moves towards more physically indeterminate depictions of the human. Such advances parallel a change in the treatment and depiction of women in his novels, which moves from objectification and disparagement to a merging of male and female features.

7.2. THE *FEMININE MYSTIQUE*: THE CASE OF *DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLING WOMEN*

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which was to become a foundational work for the second wave of feminism and remains to this day illustrative of traditional models of femininity. In her book, she calls directly for a deep reform of the cultural image of femininity (1963, 318) and introduces two essential notions for the analysis of culture and society half way through the twentieth century: the *problem that has no name* and the *feminine mystique*. The first of these notions refers to a feeling she noticed when interviewing many middle-class women. While these women seemed to have achieved success with regard to societal expectations, – i.e., getting married, becoming a mother, being a housewife, they reported somewhat of an uneasiness, a feeling of emptiness, which they couldn't connect to any aspect of their lives. They were in this strange, unknown situation, as nothing in their environment seemed to give a proper answer to that feeling. This was called by Friedan "the problem that has no name," and she dedicated her efforts in *The Feminine Mystique* to find the causes and solutions for it. This problem that rooted on a lack of true aspirations, dependency and incompleteness had its core not in sexuality, but in identity. "For the first time in their history," Friedan tells us,

> women are becoming aware of an identity crisis in their own lives, a crisis which began many generations ago, has grown worse with each succeeding generation, and will not end until they, or their daughters, turn an unknown corner and make of themselves and their lives the new image that so many women now so desperately need.
>
> (69-70)

She thus encourages research and self-analysis as a means to revert the situation and solve the crisis that has become as much global as evident in Western societies.

In order to contextualize the *problem*, Friedan comes up with her second great contribution to feminism, the idea of a *feminine mystique*. This notion describes a series of preconceived ideas and discourses that stop women from being important as individuals in society, to improve intellectually and to advance in the pursuit of happiness and identity of their own. In an illustrative way, the mystique is what allows, even pushes, women to ignore their own identity, so that, when asked "Who am I?," they answer "Tom's wife… Mary's mother" (63). While men live dealing with pursuit and identity crisis, this has not been detected in women because, Friedan argues:

> In terms of the old conventions and the new feminine mystique women are not expected to grow up to find out who they are, to choose their human identity. Anatomy is woman's destiny, say the theorists of femininity; the identity of woman is determined by her biology.
>
> (69)

So, the author criticizes how social expectations make a meaningful difference in this, threatening women's identities and depreciating them in favour of men's. As women were not expected to grow as citizens, they simply did not develop full identities. Relevant enough for our study is the reading Friedan makes of an idea by psychologist A. H. Maslow:

> Capacities clamor to be used, and cease their clamor only when they *are* well used. That is, capacities are also needs. Not only is it fun to use our capacities, but it is also necessary. The unused capacity or organ can become a disease center or else atrophy, thus diminishing the person.
>
> (Maslow 1962, 40, italics in the original)

Friedan relates this to women in the United States, who are not encouraged nor expected to fully use their abilities, but "[i]n the name of femininity, they are encouraged to evade human growth" (1963, 274). The problem that has no name, reasonably, is the consequence of this social pressure against their development. Women were, and had long been, denied the right of developing a series of human features that were natural while their use was still reserved for men only, such as the will for knowledge and self-fulfilment. Thus, women were confined to the family house and devoid of intellectual goals. Although they had achieved new legal rights in the first half of the twentieth century, in the practice they were still a second sex with a role that was largely based on supporting their husbands' life projects. This did nothing but spoil women's abilities that by definition implied, for Maslow, needs. The fact that women could not develop and master their abilities was an important source of conflict, even though they could endure it silently for a long time.

One of the most interesting novels for the analysis of misogyny in Beckett's representation of women is *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Firstly, because the sexual and bodily description of women and their lack of an actual voice match Friedan's notion of the mystique in several ways as the predominant model of femininity in the first half of the century. Secondly, because it depicts young Belacqua and his successive, disastrous love affairs and experiences with three different ladies: the Smeraldina-Rima – a character strongly based on Beckett's cousin Peggy Sinclair (Knowlson 1996, 80-82); the Syra-Cusa – a fairly less evident reflection of Lucia Joyce, possibly, according to Knowlson, due to an effort by Beckett "[n]ot wishing to upset Joyce any more than he had already done by rejecting Lucia" (151); and the stunning Alba, who is to great extent a fictional version of Ethna MacCarthy (135). Since the novel is full of these elements linked to Beckett's life, part of the misogyny found at least in *Dream* might be representing the author's bitterness towards his own artistic and personal failure. In relation to this, Beckett recognizes in a letter to Tom McGreevy in 1935 his having been unhappy for years, consciously isolating himself and to have "lent myself to a crescendo of disparagements of others & myself" (*L*, 258), a situation that would not change until he developed physical symptoms and eventually had to undergo psychotherapy: "In short, if the heart had not put the fear of death into me I would be still boozing & sneering & lounging around & feeling that I was too good for anything else" (259). Consequently, the letter is, for his biographer James Knowlson,

> perhaps the first convincing explanation of how the arrogant, disturbed, narcissistic, young man of the early 1930s could possibly have evolved into someone who was noted later for his extraordinary kindness, courtesy, concern, generosity, and almost saintly "good works."
>
> (1996, 179)

Dream is also the only novel written before Beckett became aware of his own isolating and disparaging behaviour, which makes it the one containing the highest amount and the harshest expressions towards women. Belacqua, who, like Beckett at the time, is a young man trying to be an artist, must face a world that suffers a lack of rules or coherence, and he shows strong difficulties to deal with it and follow social and interpersonal standards. Time after time, this results in love-related failures due to different reasons, which the protagonist seems to attribute to women. Nevertheless, the treatment given by Belacqua to his lovers contrasts with their descriptions, which often contain a strong sexual component and expressions that idealize women while objectifying them, and combine references to mythological or classic works with elements that suggest wild and animal features. This not only enhances the role of women as a threat, but also reflects the idea coming from feminist theory that "to be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men" (Butler 1990, vii). Idealization and disdain, in fact, combine and give information about both the women in the story and the protagonist as well.

In the case of the Smeraldina-Rima, "that powerful vedette" (*DR*, 113), "the powerful diva" (114), she is presented as being "everybody's darling," so young and with a lovely face who "stimulated this gentleman [Herr Arschlochweh] to certain velleities of desire, or so at least she allowed it to be understood" (14). Her physical presence is remarkable as she looks "unspeakably lovely in her coarse tweed mantle and the pale green casque reducing the fanlight of the forehead to an absurd white fin" (29). In her presentation, the stress is on her physical appearance and how she amuses her friends and other men.

The case of the Syra-Cusa makes the strongest impact on the reader due to the poetic use of language and the overwhelming amount of references:

> The Syra-Cusa: her body more perfect than dream creek, amaranth lagoon [...]. Her neck was scraggy and her head was null. [...] To take her arm, to flow together, out of step, down the asphalt bed, was a foundering in music, the slow ineffable flight of a dream-dive [...]. Would she sink or swim in Diana's well? That depends what we mean by a maiden.
>
> (*DR*, 33-34)

With the inclusion of references to a perfect body and a head that is "null," Beckett chooses to poetically and allegorically describe her company, and then inevitably finishes by questioning her chastity. In his tracking of classic references in *Dream,* Chris Ackerley notes how Beckett seems to have found the inspiration in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1562), which tells that in Diana's well "maids did swim, [and] unchaste were drowned" (Ackerley 2002, 62). However, it is in his goodbye to the Syra-Cusa that

Beckett offers the most intense description, formed by a series of references to literature and mythology.

> The Great Devil had her, she stood in dire need of a heavyweight afternoon-man. What we mean is she was never even lassata, let alone satiata; very uterine; Lucrezia, Clytemnestra, Semiramide, a saturation of inappeasable countesses. [...] But from throat to toe she was lethal, pyrogenous, Scylla and the Sphinx. [...] She shone like a jewel in her conditions, like the cinnamon-tree and the rich-furred cony and Aesop's jay and Pliny's kantharis. Another of the many that glare. She was always on the job, the job of being jewelly.
>
> (*DR*, 50)

Beckett combines descriptions of passive beauty, such as shining like a jewel or the cinnamon-tree, to images of violence and toughness: "lethal, pyrogenous, Scylla and the Sphinx," in a way presenting the Syra-Cusa as a forbidden treasure, the source of mystery Beauvoir and Butler referred to. The "inappeasable countesses" are not chosen randomly: Lucrezia was a poisoner, Clytemnestra murdered her own husband, Semiramide was known for her sexual excesses (Ackerley 2002, 64). Whether these are recognized by the reader or not, they certainly are in the text and add to the intensity of the passage and to the mythological epic of the tone. There is further contrast in the fact that they are compared with mythical women and the excess in language sounds also like a joke, a contrast further emphasized by Belacqua's harsh treatment to them.

The most sexual reference in the passage is that she was "never even lassata, let alone satiata." This is coincidentally quoted by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949, 469) and belongs to Juvenal's Satire VI. The original reads: "*Et lassata viris, necdum satiata recessit*" [Then, exhausted by men, but not satiated, she left]. Beauvoir uses it in her argument to show how pleasure has not the same characteristics for women and men (469) before addressing differences in sex and the frustrations and errors of men. Juvenal's original tale is about an emperor and an empress who wanted to test the idea that women were more willing and passionate, with the result that he had sex with ten prisoners in one night, she with twenty-five men according to her taste. In *Dream*, Beckett is talking first about her being in love, "the Great Devil" meaning love (Ackerley 2002, 63), but then blends it with the sexual meaning, and even amplifies the expression by means of using the formula "never *even* lassata, *let alone* satiata," further reinforcing the implications of wild sexual potency and her threatening nature for Belacqua's already weakened sexual and social performance.

The last one of the main female partners of Belacqua, the Alba, is similarly presented as something impressive and supreme, strongly marking the difference between Belacqua, in his condition of average man, and her. Her presence is so important that the narration stops as the narrator requires the attention of the reader:

> Silence now we beseech you, reverence, your closest attention. For whom have we here. Follow us closely. Behold it is she it is the
>
> ALBA.
>
> (*DR*, 151)

This is countered by her first intervention: "She would have brandy, hijo de la puta blanca! but she would indeed and be damned to the whole galère. Carajo!" (*DR*, 151). Thus, decision and cursing show a strong character and emphasize the threat she implies for a man like Belacqua. However, similar "divine" pictures appear related to other women, as the Smeraldina-Rima:

> Incorruptible, uninjurable, unchangeable. She is, she exists in one and the same way, she is everyway like her herself, in no way can she be injured or changed, she is not

> subject to time, she cannot at one time be other than at another. That or – nullity. Whore and parade of whores.
>
> (*DR*, 42)

or Ginette "Mac Something":

> Belacqua saw at once how lovely she must be, he was quite sure she was very remarkable, and dare he hope that on some not too distant occasion he might be privileged to catch a glimpse of her sailing through the dusk when the dusk was she?
>
> (143)

The focus on the beauty and exaltation of the body is present in *Murphy* as well, as it appears in several passages, as the following one:

> "What folly is this?" said Neary. "You don't know her."
>
> "Not know her is it," said Wylie, "when there is no single aspect of her natural body with which I am not familiar."
>
> "What do you mean?" said Neary.
>
> "I have worshipped her from afar," said Wylie.
>
> "How far?" said Neary.
>
> "Yes," said Wylie pensively, "all last June, through Zeiss glasses, at a watering place." He fell into a reverie, which Neary was a big enough man to respect. "What a bust!" he cried at length, as though galvanized by this point in his reflections. "All centre and no circumference!"
>
> (*M*, 37)

The knowledge of her body and the worship take up the divine image of Miss Counihan, fostered by "All centre and no circumference!" that seems to refer to the definition of God: “a sphere of which the center is everywhere, the circumference nowhere” (Ackerley 2004, 81).

However, the overall presence of misogyny is countered by sporadic but meaningful images of feminine empowerment. It is the case of the Alba, most notably when she receives an intense love letter by Jem, a weight-lifter loves her “more than words can utter” and feels bewitched by her (*DR*, 152). While she reads his letter containing clichés of romantic love – “[y]ou were like an angel come down from Heaven,” “I never knew what love was until I met you” (153), she stops to reflect on what she is reading, giggle and guffaw, and finally concludes tersely in a way that contrasts with his lover’s style: “Trincapollas! Sighed Alba, raising her glass, but all men are homo-sexy, I wish to Christ I’d been born a Lesbian” (154). This way she rejects that romantic, heterosexual model and the idea that she should be enchanted by the weight-lifter’s vocabulary and pretensions. In the same way, a similar image of empowerment appears when, in a dream, she tears her wedding dress off (198).

Broadly put, the interaction between sexes is illustrated by the following model:

> The woman makes the first advances and will, if necessary, initiate sexual relations. Soon, however, she begins to make emotional demands that the man is unable or unwilling to fulfil. If she is lucky, the physical desire that she has deliberately aroused in him will continue, but even this is all too likely to fade and disappear. Tenderness or any abiding emotional attachment on his part is virtually out of the question.
>
> (Mercier 1977, 188)

This model is revealing about the nature of women depictions in Beckett, but is no less descriptive of how male characters are unable to fit a standard in which they should fulfil the needs of their partners, due to their confusion and lack of maturity. Martin Esslin notes how in Beckett's model "[a]lways it is the man who rejects the love of woman, woman who yearns for the love of man" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 61). However, women remain dependent of men's movements and decisions, they stick to their devotions, thus perpetuating the role reserved to them by the *mystique*.

In this sense, women in *Dream*, even after being neglected, try to help Belacqua, as much as Celia endures Murphy's mockery and urges him to find a job. The Smeraldina-Rima, who rejects men to please Belacqua, is worried about him leaving:

> "You're going away" she vouchsafed to begin with "and then I won't see you for months and months. What'll I do?"
>
> "Oh" he replied lightly "the time will be no time slipping over. I'll write every day, and think how wunnerful it'll be meeting again."
>
> "Men don't feel these things" she complained "the way women do."
>
> "No indeed" he said "I suppose not indeed."
>
> (*DR*, 24)

Belacqua's plain answer is the confirmation of the idea that men are not as emotional as women and that is how it must be. There is no chance for objection, and when women try to object they are often mocked or insulted:

> "I am what I do," said Celia.
>
> "No," said Murphy. "You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing." He threw his voice into an infant's whinge. "I cudden do annyting, Maaaammy." That kind of doing. Unavoidable and tedious.
>
> (*M*, 24)

Men, in their treatment to women, are implacable, in a way that contrasts very strongly to their actual performance in other areas of life, as if their attitude came from frustration and low self-esteem. In this sense, both *Dream* and *Murphy* support Monique Wittig's feminist critique that although women are very visible as sexual beings in society, "as social beings they are totally invisible, and as such must appear as little as possible, and always with some kind of excuse if they do so" (Wittig 1992, 8). Again, this is the case of the Smeraldina-Rima. When she is late to her date with Belacqua due to her meeting another man, she moans "Don't be cross with me Bel don't be so böse [angry]," and he bitterly answers "You don't love me [...] or you wouldn't keep me waiting for such Quatsch [rubbish]" (*DR*, 19). Even though Belacqua has reacted with an unjustified, childish rapture of anger, she feels the necessity to apologize and justify herself, thus participating in the perpetuation of an unequal model of relationship.

In relation to this, Simone de Beauvoir notes in *The Second Sex* that writings reflect the great traditional myths. Thus, the woman:

> is akin to *nature*, [...] she can hold the keys to *poetry* [...] she opens the door to the supernatural, [...] but should she refuse this role, she becomes praying mantis or ogress. In any case, she appears as the *privileged Other* through whom the subject accomplishes himself: one of the measures of man, his balance, his salvation, his adventure, and his happiness.
>
> (1949, 306, italics in the original)

Violence in descriptions seems to be a means of announcing that women are potential monsters, which in turn reveals the actual fear to such transformation felt by Belacqua – or even Beckett, himself.

As noted, the image of women being the emotional beings in the duality is present in the early novels, but it is also recovered later, perhaps only abandoned in *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*. In *Malone Dies* Sapo's mother is again the most emotional, the father the rude, strong, impassive one:

> And sometimes he was carried away to the point of saying, It might have been better to have put him [Sapo] to a trade. Whereupon it was usual, though not compulsory, for Sapo to go away, while his mother exclaimed, Oh Adrian, you have hurt his feelings!
>
> (*TN*, 187)

She is the only one reacting compassionately and sympathetically to his son's feelings. In Malone's story, the prototypical sexist model of family is reproduced, although a slight critique can be detected: "What age is he [Sapo] now? asked Mr. Saposcat. His wife provided the information, it being understood that this was of her province. She was always wrong." (182). This and other passages expose the prejudice of the mother being the one responsible of taking care and knowing her son best, for there seems to be no doubt that knowing her son's age belongs to "her province." This matches the *mystique* and the traditional models and sayings on women and motherhood in which it partly finds its origins, such as the German "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" [children, kitchen, church] or the American "barefoot and pregnant," both implying that a women's place is the household and children are her responsibility. This message is reinforced when Big Lambert and his own natural son leave Sapo, the adopted son, with the mother and the daughter (196), thus placing him in the same group as them, closer to the traditional place of women than to that of men. However, Sapo is the character who is ultimately mistreated, because Mrs. Lambert "was always wrong" about his age, which seems to render both parents as incompetent characters, and also because both mother and daughter abandon him to do their own – women's work, leaving him in isolation. Further images of the predominant model of femininity appear in that part of *Malone Dies*, but they will be addressed in the next point as they are problematic for a straightforward assessment of their scope and meaning.

7.3. THE PROBLEM OF THE VOICE: CHARACTER VS NARRATOR VS AUTHOR

An explanation has been given of the general role of women in Samuel Beckett's fiction. We can affirm that there is a strong misogynist component both in actions of the male characters and in description, and most notably in the early novels. Complications appear if we try to grasp the author's actual intention. Notwithstanding the amount of critical literature on Beckett's *oeuvre*, prominent scholars have different opinions about delimiting to which extent the treatment of women comprises a subtle irony, a critique or a personal opinion. Samuel Beckett's works can be misleading in this sense and, in a way, the debate on whether misogyny is true, deliberate or subversive is reminiscent of the long-standing debate to decide whether Beckett is an optimist, a pessimist, or neither: His works are often contradictory and filled with irony, and thus it is difficult to assess them in a natural way. It is hard to detect Beckett's true positioning – if there is one, as the final effect of his works comes from the combination of a number of elements in complex relationships.

That women in Beckett's novels are limited to the body and to the emotions is a general agreement, but it has been hard to discern whether this is "paragon or parody" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 91). Some scholars have noted problematic aspects, as is the case of the irony in the title of *Dream*, which "might have prompted the initiated to see more satire and more aggressive hostility in Beckett's view of women than is actually there"

(Oppenheim 2004, 188). However, while treatment to women in the early novels is rather overtly misogynist, it is convenient to analyse to what extent characters, narrators and author are conscious of the discriminating nature of their behaviour. This way, one can make a better evaluation of the social implications of their relationships.

First of all, the narrator seems to be conscious, if not of his own treatment to women, then of that given by the protagonists. Thus, in *Dream* we learn that a lady:

> told Belacqua to his brazen face that he was treating her like dirt and behaving like a cad, taking everything and giving nothing; and he said behind her back that she was jealous of the Smeraldina-Rima.
>
> (*DR*, 11)

Here Belacqua shows a lack of self-criticism and assumes a position of superiority, taking for granted that there is nothing wrong with his behaviour and the only reason for a woman telling him such things must be female jealousy. He does not assume social responsibilities whatsoever and gives a simple, sexist explanation instead of questioning why a woman would accuse him like that. Actually, as we read Belacqua's and Murphy's complaints on women, an underlying feeling emerges that they are caused by their fear to assume social and personal responsibilities: "Women are all the same bloody same, you can't love, you can't stay the course, the only feeling you can stand is being felt, you can't love for five minutes without wanting it abolished in brats and house bloody wifery" (*M*, 24). Murphy's immature reactions when asked for commitment are exaggerated and seem to hiddenly ridicule him. Then, when Murphy mocks Celia comparing her to an infant – "I cudden do annyting, Maaaammy," the narrator immediately disparages the protagonist's behaviour more directly:

> An atheist chipping the deity was not more senseless than Murphy defending his courses of inaction, as he did not require to be told. [...] To die fighting was the perfect antithesis of his whole practice, faith and intention.
>
> (24)

The narrator always seems to have a soft spot for his characters, but at some points he criticizes the protagonists and finds unjustifiable behaviours. This is also true for Belacqua, who is actually pictured as a ridiculous young man with some delusions of grandeur that lead him to blame everyone around him for his own misfortunes. As noted above, women play the role of slowing Belacqua down in his aspirations, while this is perhaps closer to the character's own opinion than that of Beckett himself. In this regard, Jeri L. Kroll suggests that in the early fiction, "Beckett does not make the women who try to seduce Belacqua (or whom he tries to seduce) the real culprits. They are often deceived systematically by the poet's arcane methods of lovemaking and are no more ludicrous than he" (1978, 37). Belacqua is, as many male protagonists in Beckett's novels, a person that does not understand and is not understood by the world in which he lives. So much so that one would not be surprised if, should he stay long in his delirium, selfish behaviour and disconnection from the real world, he would become a person like Murphy or Molloy, to name just two.

It is in fact undeniable that insults and humiliations to female characters appear in *Dream*, but perhaps one of the keys to assess the actual scope of misogyny is to look at the main protagonist, a man, Belacqua. He, the first of all Beckettian miserable, lost characters, is not pictured in a much more optimistic way than his female counterparts. Be it due to the title or the shocking tone and insistence in women's flaws, we may be inclined to focus on their own failure to meet the protagonist's requirements rather on how unclear or absurd these might be. However, and as Chris Ackerley notes, as much as women “may intrude into [Belacqua’s] being, [...] the object of mockery is less the Woman than this very deep young man” (2002, 58). Ackerley, too, detects the “saving grace of an ironic self-awareness” as an aspect both in the early short-story *Assumption* (1929) and *Dream* (58), and finally asserts that Belacqua is more the object of scorn than Smeraldina-Rima, as “his sexual and emotional inadequacies are as much to blame for everything going “kaputt,” concluding:

> A curious complexity arises. The cruelty is unforgivable and unforgiven; but the pain of that “first love” is intense. The ruthless withholding of pity compels a strange respect for the honesty of the portrayal, in which the victim is finally Belacqua, who neither seeks sympathy, nor makes it easy for the reader to grant it.
>
> (61)

In fact, that is one of the main points to take into account. The portrait of Belacqua is not softened or washed. It is indeed difficult to approve many of his actions, even though the narrator says “we are so attached to our principal boy” (19) we cannot agree when we see Belacqua’s actions. He is also criticised, both as a man and as a literary hero, when the narrator states: “We picked Belacqua for the job, and now we find that he is not able for it” (126). Women, moreover, do realize he is “sovereignly ridiculous,” even comparing him to “something […] that a dog would bring in” (233). Ultimately, even Belacqua’s misogyny might be “as much self-laceration as it is flagellation of the fairer sex” (Ackerley, 2002, 54).

In *Malone Dies* we find which is probably the harshest depiction of cruelty and abuse in Beckett:

> And even his young wife had abandoned all hope of bringing him to heel, by means of her cunt, that trump card of young wives. For she knew what he would do to her if she did not open it to him. And he even insisted on her making things easy for him,

> in ways that often appeared to her exorbitant. And at the least show of rebellion on her part he would run to the wash-house and come back with the beetle and beat her until she came round to a better way of thinking.
>
> (*TN*, 194)

The fact that the line "beat her until she came round to a better way of thinking" – and the whole passage, are so unemotional, hard and selfish has in a way the effect of emphasizing the insanity of the whole scene. With this crude representation of violence, Beckett culminates the depiction of Big Lambert as a despicable man. Furthermore, he shows Mrs. Lambert's position as well:

> Then she little cared whether she was observed or not, whether what she was doing was urgent or could wait, no, but she dropped everything and began to cry out and gesticulate, the last of all the living as likely as not and dead to what was going on about her.
>
> (196)

This implies that Beckett is not foreign to the consequences of Mr. Lambert's actions and somehow problematizes domestic violence. It highlights the toxicity of Sapo's environment, a dysfunctional family that affects his integrity. While Beckett sticks to his claim of not willing to educate or moralize anyone, the mere representation of the effects of abuse in Mrs. Lambert shows his own concern on it and entails a critique. However, representations of abuse from the point of view of the victim do not necessarily involve a feminist position *per se*, as physical abuse and violence are more easily perceived and more visual, but sexism deals with deeper structures of thought.

While we cannot say that Beckett appears as a feminist author, we might read elements in his novels as critique to the predominant models of masculinity and femininity. It is true that we find traces of hegemonic masculinity and female inferiority, but assessing the change in gender treatment is a difficult job. Women depend emotionally on protagonists in the first novels, but this dependency progressively shifts and is reverted: Molloy depends economically on his mother, and his whole narration depends on his quest for her; from Moran's narrative we get a feeling that he could not subsist without his maid Martha; Moll takes care of Malone; the Unnamable is taken care of by a woman as well; the narrator of *How It Is* wants to be helped by a woman who leaves him in the mud. The dissipation of male superiority is combined with Beckett's prose being a journey towards dissolution of identity that erases gender difference and physicality that reduces the gap between man and women.

Finally, here comes one of the problems in terms of assessing masculinity in *Dream*. In the novel, as confusing and playful as it is, we can, as readers, hardly dissociate the different voices between themselves. This is problematic to scholars such as Jeri L. Kroll, who finds that most of Beckett's readers take humour or satire for granted in his depiction of women, thus avoiding confronting the issue of what Beckett is actually saying (1978, 12). She finds a fundamental paradox that has not been defined:

> why would Beckett exploit a traditional portrayal of women, women as essentially physical beings or at least as inherently contradictory creatures (the Weib v. the Madonna), when he so distrusted conventional literary practice? True, much of what could be called traditional material is presented ironically, but this explanation does not encompass all the material.
>
> (13)

Kroll detects that Belacqua conceives himself "first as an artist, and then as a lover, but he has trouble conceiving others as anything more than 'other'" (10). She also notes that he "cannot deal with sexual experience because it reminds him that he is, in fact, a creature composed of two seemingly contradictory elements**:** mind and body" (11). This contradiction makes him miserable and affects his way of dealing with women. Thus, to his failure on emotional affairs, Belacqua reacts hypocritically. As Kroll puts it, he "adopt[s] a bohemian pose as a way of differentiating himself — the lone-wolf intellectual sits in a lower-class pub immersed in an upper-class newspaper," rejects such "romantic entanglements" and "dislikes those whom he calls 'stallions,' men who have no difficulty in pursuing relationships with the opposite sex. They either do not perceive women as spiritual partners, or they do not feel that one type of communication necessarily precludes another" (17). This is a common anti-hero hypocritical reaction to one's own social flaws, answering with angry criticism and "I wouldn't want that" to something he, subconsciously or not, cannot achieve and cannot stand the idea of losing. Since Belacqua is unable to engage with a girl and have a normal, happy relationship, he shows hate towards them, but he still needs them, thinks of them in their absence and shows constant frustration. Eventually, as Beckett career develops, the differences between genders tend to dissipate in favour of a much more egalitarian representation, but that remains problematic. That issue will be addressed in the next chapter, but first we should observe the effects of gender when assessing Beckett's writing in general terms.

7.4. FEMININE WRITING

Of course, all these changes through time in the treatment of representations and relationships of men and women have implications in the overall analysis of Samuel Beckett's fiction. While Linda Ben-Zvi agrees with Peter Gidal that men cannot be feminists (Stewart 1999, 12) she does point out that men and their writings can be feminine:

> if by that one means a conscious attempt to subvert hierarchy, categorization and objectification; to inveigh against power and privilege (fascistic or linguistic); and to seek new ways of thinking, of talking, and of writing. To be feminine may be to choose a position in a world rapidly going in another direction. Beckett, with his usual insight, foresaw the implications of such a world.
>
> (Stewart 1999, 15)

Furthermore, Adele King notes the possibility of reading *Molloy*, *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) as writing against patriarchy due to the disillusionment they show towards the values of western civilization, even though she also acknowledges the "obvious difficulties" to frame them into feminism arousing from the depiction of women (Stewart 1999, 169). In this sense, Beckett's *oeuvre* might be seen rather as feminine than as feminist. While subversion of hierarchies implies feminization in structures of alterity, we should also assess how this affects the gender of characters. In this regard, Ben-Zvi argues that one can think of Beckett's plays and characters as fundamentally feminine, a conclusion that can be extended to his prose:

> At the same time that Beckett delineates roles that fix his people in place, he also tends to subsume both men and women under categories culturally assigned to females, and theoretically assumed to delimit their world.
>
> (Stewart 1999, 12)

The word "feminine" is used here by Ben-Zvi in three senses. First, the "sociological" sense, meaning the inclusion of sets of characteristics traditionally assumed to be intrinsic to women and their behaviour, arising not from their nature but from "female tactics for survival and the necessity of performing the roles foisted on them." Second, the theoretical sense, which allows us to read Beckett's as a writing that controverts the law of the Father, phallic agency and defies linguistic hegemony to counter the dominance of patriarchal language and thought. Lastly, the aesthetic sense, related to Beckett's questioning "of theatrical depiction arising from the historicized representation of the woman on the stage" (Stewart 1999, 12). This, as the present dissertation intends to illustrate, seems to be true for the novels too, most notably in the sense of challenging phallogocentrism.

An anti-female spirit and resentment has been detected in the voices of young male modernists as part of an attempt to position themselves in the cultural world. Women had increasingly important power, so that authors undergoing economic struggle could feel a threat upon their cultural and professional ambitions and try to reduce or obstruct the increase of such power, as is the case of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (Lusty and Murphet 2014, 25). However, resentment in the case of Beckett seems to have been rooted in his personal emotional affairs – both with lovers and with his mother, rather than in economic or social issues. He seems to have treated characters of both genders in ways progressively more similar, especially from his middle period onwards. He was more pragmatic in theatre, explaining his refusal to women performing *Waiting for Godot* by laconically saying "Women don't have prostates" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 11). In relation to this, according to Billie Whitelaw, women are more present in theatre due to the passing away of Jackie MacGowran and Patrick Magee, Beckett's two main male actors, and only Whitelaw herself remaining of his classic triplet (Ben-Zvi 1990, 10). Female characters are not so present in his late fiction, which could be due to Beckett drawing from his own experience and therefore making the first-person narrator be closer to a male identity.

In any case, in the later works we find a situation different to that found in the early works. Malone says: "There is so little difference between man and woman, between mine I mean" (*TN*, 15), which is representative of Beckett's approach to gender at that moment. In this sense, Leslie Hill has wittily pointed out that Beckett's works are defined by the instability of binary oppositions (Oppenheim and Buning 1996, 19), and it is my contention to show how such instability increases at more levels than the linguistic one, but is also crystallized in gender representation and gender relations. What Hill has called a savage de-anthropomorphization of stage, body, voice and gender in the case of Beckett's theatre (Oppenheim and Buning 1996, 26), I intend to show in the case of the novels. Therefore, the next chapter deals with Beckett's creation of a "displacement and subversion of the usual male/female opposition [that] joins contemporary theoretical critiques of self-presentation" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 139). At the end of Beckettian production, dependency is an idea that transcends aspects of gender and is better explained in terms of human isolation.

8. GENDER IN SAMUEL BECKETT: A SYSTEM OF RECIPROCAL DEPENDENCY

> How we need another soul to cling to, another body to keep us warm. To rest and trust; to give your soul in confidence: I need this, I need someone to pour myself into.
>
> Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals*

8.1. THE DISSOLUTION OF GENDER AND THE ADVANCE TOWARDS ABSTRACTION

The subversive nature of Samuel Beckett's style offers, as mentioned above, "a new sense of the feminine and even a mode of expression akin to Irigaray's *femme-parler* or Cixous's *écriture feminine*" (Tajiri 2007, 166) due to its rejection of power and revalorization of the feminine. Moreover, such style includes several motifs in representation that shape the author's expression. The mechanisms applied by Beckett in issues related to disability, gender and femininity push characters towards areas of instability and indifference. Eventually, characters lose interest in the confirmation of their partners' identities. This is shown, as Vivian Mercier notes,

> with their "Pam I think" [*How It Is*] and "Ruth, I think," [*Molloy*], their confusion of Marguerite and Madeleine [*The Unnamable*]. That hallmark of uniqueness, one's baptismal name, means nothing to them, perhaps because they lack one themselves.
>
> (Mercier 1977, 190)

A new path is opened in the middle period of Beckett towards universalization of suffering and isolation of the individual, starting the quest towards disintegration and indifference. Murphy wants to be free from bodily needs and desires, but eventually despairs and returns to Celia. As Mercier points out, “ironically, death prevents him” (Mercier 1977, 212).

In *Samuel Beckett’s Hidden Drives*, J. D. O’Hara reflects on Carl Gustav Jung’s structure of the psyche as having a dominant and an inferior side determined by sex: in the female the inferior one is made of masculine qualities and in the male it is made of female qualities. Consequently, “[i]n order to achieve individuation and a complete self, one must integrate the qualities of the inferior side with those of the dominant side” (1997, 108-109). I would argue that in Beckett’s novels the division between the dominant and the inferior side tends to disappear in the representation, and characters show configurations of the psyche with dissipated limits, showing both male and female qualities. This is shown both by means of the indifference they show towards the world but also in the body and identity configuration of both genders, that become increasingly similar.

The idea that a complete self is achieved when integrating both male and female qualities can be linked with A. H. Maslow’s findings on the notions of needs and fulfilment and to his Pyramid or Hierarchy of Needs. This Pyramid has self-realization on top of all other levels, representing the stage where all prior needs are covered. In *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Maslow would expand his theory and analyse diverse data and cases to illustrate the working of the Pyramid. On the highest level of the Pyramid he places and studies figures such as Albert Einstein, Ludwig van Beethoven, Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt or Jane Addams (these two being the only women in the list). According to Maslow, when relating with others, these people “made no really sharp differentiation between the roles and personalities of the two sexes” ([1954] 1970, 189), which for Betty Friedan means that they were so sure about their masculinity or femininity that they would not care about adopting cultural aspects belonging to the role of the opposite sex (1963, 281). This is a very interesting, ground-breaking way to see it, pointing out to the need of a disintegration of prejudices and clear traditional boundaries between the behaviour and expression of sexes. Maslow also suggested: “either you have to describe as ‘masculine’ both high-dominance men and women or drop the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ altogether because they are so ‘misleading’” ([1954] 1970, 192). Thus, I would argue that what we find in Beckett is the opposite situation: dominance is so low that gender differences disappear, so that using “masculine” or “feminine” is pointless as well. In other words, Beckett does not invert the hierarchy or restore the role of women, but rather cancels the duality. Instead of granting privilege to women, he eliminates men privilege, so that both groups are equal in their misery. In the end, the relevance of gender marks disappears in Beckett’s road towards indifference.

The most obvious contrast is that between the description of women in *Dream* and the description of the woman in *How It Is*. While the Alba is even announced between her apparition: “Silence now we beseech you, reverence, your closest attention. For whom have we here [...]” (*DR*, 151), the style of Beckett undergoes so extreme a change that the first time the woman appears in *How It Is,* she is presented as follows: “another image so soon again a woman looks up looks at me the images come [...] looks at me says at last to herself all is well he is working” (*HII*, 4). She is plainly a woman, we do not find redundant or long descriptions of exaltation, no references to her body. Actually we are told:

> seen full face the girl is less hideous it’s not with her I am concerned me pale staring hair red pudding face with pimples protruding belly gaping fly spindle legs sagging knocking at the knees [...]
>
> (*HII*, 19)

We see the narrator just does not care about beauty anymore, and "hideous" comes as a pretty good adjective compared to the ones he gives to himself throughout the novel, it is just the "objective" fact, as the narrator does not provide any subjective appreciations or detailed language, be it to exaggerate the good or the bad things. She is in the same mud the narrator-protagonist is in, they are in the same condition and we do not have any hints that he holds more power than her. Rather, on the contrary, she is the one who could help him. Finally, the treatment given to both men and women in Samuel Beckett's novels is fairer at the end of his career than at the beginning, as both men and women share positions of misery and anguish.

One of the most widespread conclusions on Samuel Beckett's novels, and on his *oeuvre* as a whole, is that there is a reductive tendency in the sense that it moves away from unnecessary ornament and detail, taking a direction towards minimalism, in what Olga Bernal has called the progressive abandonment of representation (Bernal 1969, 177). For Bernal, *How It Is* matches the end of an itinerary in which each novel prior to this one[20] represents a stage of de-construction and covers a distance towards what we see in this last novel.

In terms of gender, the present section has dealt with three main aspects that are valuable in assessing the meaning of gender and its evolution over time in Beckett's works: 1) the loss of mastery in narration and conscious rejection of phallogocentric expression; 2) the aperture towards alternative, non-heteronormative, configurations of sexual and interpersonal relations; and 3) the problematic representation of women in the novels. All three evolve hand in hand with Beckett's works, and they simultaneously both shape and are shaped by the author's artistic aspirations.

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[20] While she marks the start of this abandonment with *Murphy*, it is notable that she wrote about it 20 years before the posthumous publication of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Since this first novel is more Joycean, more erudite and shows a stronger commitment to knowledge, in a way believing *more* in language as a tool for expression and its own power to explain, I would argue that we have enough reasons to take *Dream* as the virtual starting point of the process of stripping everything away referred to by Bernal.

As noted, the prevailing model of gender relations in Beckett is that it is always men who reject the love of women (Ben-Zvi 1990, 61), women the ones to start making emotional demands that men are unable or unwilling to fulfil (Mercier 1977, 188). Women are the ones who feel more attracted and still keep devoted to men. This precedent is set as early as in *Dream* and it will repeat itself throughout Beckett's works. Nevertheless, the model undergoes meaningful changes as we advance through Beckett's works, moving towards an equality and indifference as a consequence of the progressive subversion of this model. By the time we get to the so-called trilogy, Beckett's works are mostly about *doubt*, a situation properly illustrated by his statement that "the key word in my plays is *perhaps*" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 23, italics in the original).

Boundaries between men and women, which are better defined in the early works, verge on dissolution. Furthermore, as characters get immersed in a world of doubt, we find an increasing indifference that affects their gender identity and perception of it. Molloy is not sure of the sex of his lover, or of his destination, nor is he worried about it (*TN*, 51), Malone presents his stories as "neutral and inert" as himself (173) and the discourse of the Unnamable is an ontological reflection around identity that advances through cognitive mistakes and rephrasing, showing no interest in differences in terms of gender roles or body: "Why should I have a sex, who have no longer a nose?" (307). Similarly, this indifference appears in *How It Is*, illustrated by the fact that its narrator once had a wife, but now loves – or wants to love, his male partner Pim, as he explains both in emotional and physical terms: "if Pim loved me a little yes or no if I loved him a little in the dark the mud […] live together glued together love each other a little" (*HII*, 53).

Dependency is almost always present, and when it is not explicit, it is suggested by constant feelings of isolation and loneliness. However, the motif of dependency is a deceiving one, as it generally seems to be from woman to man, while a deeper reading reveals situations in which men cannot maintain their position of privilege and are rendered powerless. Eventually, the path towards the dissolution of identity ends up in an indifference towards gender that we will assess in the following points.

8.2. CHANGES IN THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

As noted previously, protagonists in Beckett's novels fail to provide for their female partners, but these remain by their side and bear great suffering (Mercier 1977, 188). Although men seem at first sight to be represented as superior to women, due to women's devotion to them, a more complete observation reveals that gender relations are not so plain. There is an emotional dependency to women, as they stand men's bad temper and childish behaviour. Dependency is not only emotional, but also economical, as in the case of Belacqua-Alba, Murphy-Celia, or Molloy and his mother, and even at the physical and ontological levels. In fact, of all models of dependency, mothering is a special one in Beckett's career, and appears in several forms throughout his *oeuvre*.

While the main mother-son relationship appears in *Molloy*, where the narration tells the protagonist's quest for his mother, there are also several different scenes, in this and the other novels of the trilogy, reminiscent of mothering. In general terms, there is a motif, as noted by Steven Matthews, that repeats itself in several novels after the short story *The End* (1946), in which a male protagonist:

> finds himself in a single room having his meals delivered, and his chamberpot emptied, by an anonymous woman on a regular basis – a return to a primal scene of

> mothering, but also setting the speaker of the tale in the position of an animal in a zoo.
>
> (Maude and Feldman 2009, 137)

Apart from his need for his mother, images of mothering appear in the representation of other women, as is the case of Sophie/Loy/Lousse, who takes Molloy home, after he runs over and kills her dog, to take care of him, saving him from the angry crowd. Molloy recalls: “She needed me to help her get rid of her dog, and I needed her, I’ve forgotten for what” (*TN*, 29). Paradoxically, she would not have needed him if he had not run over her dog, and Molloy’s need might be merely related to his need to escape the crowd or to have a room. However, she gives him a room, feeds him and tries to make him stay, but he eventually leaves (54).

In *Malone Dies*, a woman appears to take care of the protagonist, and he reckons: “She is an old woman. I don’t know why she is good to me. Yes, let us call it goodness, without quibbling. For her it is certainly goodness” (*TN*, 179). At this point, he does not know if the cause is “sheer charity, or compassion or affection” (179). Help seems selfless here, and appears later as well. When, in his narration, Moll appears, “having applied for [Macmann], formally” (250), Malone is equally surprised by how good she is, and recalls happy anecdotes of her taking care of the protagonist of the story.

A similar image of a woman taking care of a protagonist appears in *The Unnamable*, as the narrator emotionally recalls:

> And when snow fell she covered me with a tarpaulin still watertight in places. It was under its shelter, snug and dry, that I became acquainted with the boon of tears, while wondering to what I was indebted for it, not feeling moved. [...] Yes, it was fatal, no sooner had the tarpaulin settled over me, and the precipitate steps of my benefactress

> died away, than the tears began to flow. Is this, was this to be interpreted as an effect of gratitude? But in that case should not I have felt grateful?
>
> (322)

In fact, the Unnamable recognizes the "maternal instinct" in the woman's behaviour, which curiously only arises when snow falls (323). In any case, she keeps inventing new things to relieve him and he shows a strong dependency: "Please God nothing has happened to my protectress" (334). However, this fear might be due to the fact that her taking care of him can be understood as a proof of his existence, as the Unnamable himself wonders: "Would she have put me in a cang, raised me on a pedestal, hung me with lanterns, if she were not convinced of my substantiality?" (337).

More literal motifs of mothering might be caused by Beckett's particular relationship of "savage loving" with his own mother May. The mother role is a source of contradiction for characters, best expressed in *Molloy*. In the novel, the protagonist is not sure about his mother's name, but he calls her "Mag" (13). This is representative of the author's relationship with his own mother and, in a way, the "Ma" seems to satisfy "his desires for his mother, and the 'g' his need to deny her" (Moorjani 1991, 59). In Molloy's own words, "without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other letter would have done" (13). Similarly, in the second part of the novel, Martha – notice the "Ma" (Moorjani 1991, 61), is Moran's housemaid and she seems to play the role of a mother in his patriarchal system, at least in the most traditional way of taking care of the house and feeding him, both as a mother and as a wife. The threatening nature of women appears here as well, in a much more radical way than ever, as both protagonists express the idea of their female counterparts (Lousse for Molloy, Martha for Moran) poisoning them: "I accuse her without ill-feeling of having drugged my food and drink with noxious and insipid powders and potions" (*TN*, 48), "You will keep all that hot for me, I said, as best you can. And knowing her capable of poisoning me I added, You can have the whole day off tomorrow, if that is any good to you" (92). These accusations differ from Belacqua's being or pretending to be hurt and accusing the Smeraldina-Rima of not loving him, as in *Molloy* these are serious – and yet gratuitous, concerns that ridicule protagonists, inasmuch as there is no verifiable hints that women might poison them and it is not a consequence of their own fears. At the same time, the poison motif retakes an idea already present in *Dream*, when the description of the Syra-Cusa includes Lucrezia, a poisoner, in the comparison: the underlying sense of women as a threat is still there.

On the other hand, parental dependency advances further in the case of Moran, and he becomes more dependent on his son than the other way around. Dependency becomes an essential part of his existence as his leg becomes stiff and sends Jacques Jr. to buy a bicycle. However, the role of a threatening Other is always present in the figure of the boy as well, as Moran shows his conviction that his son would "doubtless […] with pleasure have cut my throat" (*TN*, 125). In fact, Moran displays a deep hate towards his own son, probably caused by his own fear, that leads him to mistreat him throughout the novel. Thus, when Jacques Jr. eventually abandons him in the woods, the reader is pleased (Jeffers 2009, 83). Just as mentioned regarding Belacqua, Moran is a character that makes it hard for the reader to have sympathy for him.

Thus, mothering is the only motif of dependency that remains marked in Beckett, most probably due to the importance of his relationship with his mother, the notion of wombtomb and the parallelisms between life and birth discussed in chapter four of this thesis. Towards the end of Beckett's novelistic production, dependency becomes a general motif that is not affected by gender difference, as it is based on general feelings of isolation.

In *Dream*, although women depend emotionally on Belacqua, his own dependency on them is clear as well. At the end of the novel, for example, we see the Alba take care of Belacqua.

> "Can you pay this man" he said, when they arrived, "because I spent my last make on a bottle."
>
> She took the money out of her bag and handed it to him and he payed the man off.
>
> "Well" he said, intending at the most to clap a chaste kiss on her hand and take himself off on his ruined feet, and let it go at that. But she shrank away from the gesture and unlatched the gate. [...]
>
> "Come in" she said "there's a fire and a bottle."
>
> He went in. She would fill two glasses and poke up the fire and sit down in the chair and he would sit down on the floor with his back turned to her.
>
> (*DR*, 237-238)

If we imagine the situation, even though she is taking care of him and meeting his needs, his attitude is not one of gratitude whatsoever: he sits with his back turned to her, like he is – as always, blaming her for his own misfortunes. Due to his personality, Belacqua – as Murphy, is not a person who acknowledges the importance of other people in his life. Instead, he notices his dependency (he cannot even economically provide for her due to his spending his money on drink) and that causes him frustration. On the other hand, if we take a look at *How It Is*, the last novel by Beckett, we can see a very different model. *How It Is* displays a plain but meaningful moment of happiness coming from not being alone: "the empty hands mingle the arms swing the dog has not moved I have the impression we are looking at me I pull in my tongue close my mouth and smile" (*HII*, 19). This is the first time man and woman make contact, and the narrator smiles at her touch, giving big importance to her presence. After almost twenty pages of obscure and negative sentences about crawling in the mud, this is unexpected and has a shocking power for the reader, and also goes against the general working of a love relationship in Beckett as Vivian Mercier puts it, in which tenderness from the male part is out of the question (1977, 188). This is subverted here, where the male narrator is actually the only one both making emotional demands and showing feelings or tenderness, leaving us the following account of his feelings when he imagines a situation that is told with a bit of humour but is also the purest representation of happiness we see in the novel:

> my darling girl I bite she swallows my darling boy she bites I swallow brief black and there we are again dwindling again across the pastures hand in hand swinging heads high towards the heights
>
> (*HII*, 20)

This is a rare thing in Beckett's late works, as passages like this are few and often lost or hidden among dozens of dark and anxious pages, but it shows how expectations of happiness for the narrator are based on the presence of this woman and, later in the novel, of Pim. A feeling of empathy and personal connection is enhanced, as characters seem to share the same positive expectations on their future when they are accompanied.

Nevertheless, there are cases in which the man's needs or requirements are not met successfully, and herein lies one of the biggest differences through time. When Belacqua is not given what he wants, he often reacts angrily and childishly. For example, when the Smeraldina-Rima is late to their date because she met another man who played music by Johannes Brahms for her, this happens:

> Brahms! That old piddler! Pizzicatoing himself off in the best of all possible worlds. Brahms! She started to coax and wheedle. Such a cat she could be.

> “Don’t be cross with me Bel don’t be so böse [angry]” stretching out the vowel in a moan.
>
> Brahms!
>
> “You don’t love me” he said bitterly “or you wouldn’t keep me waiting for such Quatsch [rubbish].”
>
> (*DR*, 18-19)

The repetition of the name also suggests that the composer matters, in a way showing Belacqua partly justifying his reaction for the fact that it is Brahms and not another one. Also, Quatsch seems to refer to Brahms but it could also refer to the man, or at least be an example of Belacqua’s projecting his anger. This reaction fits the paradigm explained by David Gilmore as follows:

> A woman rejects a man who is interested in her sexually, and this rejection becomes a great narcissistic blow to the male ego, bringing up all of that male rage and male sensitivity and fear about loss of control and loss of masculinity.
>
> (Armengol and Carabí 2009, 35)

This is shown as well by Murphy confronting Celia, as quoted above: “‘you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing.’ He threw his voice into an infant’s whinge. ‘I cudden do annyting, Maaaammy’” (*M*, 24). As we can see, he selfishly ridicules her and does not show any intention of dialogue with her whatsoever. On the contrary, at the end of Beckett’s career, characters tend to resignation, they keep asking for care and love, but offer plain descriptions when rejected. In *How It Is*, the narrator-protagonists is in a confused world, and the aseptic prose of his statements, the lack of punctuation, convey some feeling of indifference or resignation. In a way, he seems to be too tired to show violent reactions:

> she would not come to me I would go to her huddle in her fleece but they add no a beast here no the soul is de rigueur the mind too a minimum of each otherwise too great an honour
>
> (7)

The main difference here is that when help does not arrive from the woman, the narrator of *How It Is* does not feel frustrated or angry. It is when he abandons hope of an improvement that he avoids that reaction, so the narrator tells:

> that's not all she stoops to her work again the needle stops in midstitch she straightens up and looks at me again she has only to call me by my name get up come and feel me *but no*
>
> I don't move her anxiety grows she suddenly leaves the house and runs to friends
>
> *that's all* it wasn't a dream I didn't dream that nor a memory I haven't been given memories this time it was an image the kind I see sometimes see in the mud
>
> (*HII*, 4, italics added)

Therefore, the reaction is not even close to Belacqua's, or his accusing his lovers of not loving him, or being paranoid about their behaviour, or Murphy mocking Celia. On the contrary, the denial of a positive outcome is reduced to a "but no" and a "that's all."

At the beginning of Beckett's career, in *Dream* and *Murphy*, rejection mostly generates frustration and anger towards women, while at the end, in *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*, it only furthers the all-encompassing doubt and raises feelings of resignation and, finally, of gratitude and love. While Belacqua rejects the idea of love, saying it is "[a] great Devil" (*DR*, 173), the narrator in *How It Is* desperately wants to know if he is or has been loved, as if that would give a different meaning to his existence. Having been married to a woman, he is now just seeking love and of course this wish would be pleased by anyone regardless of the gender:

> samples whatever comes remembered imagined no knowing life above life here God in heaven yes or no if he loved me a little if Pim loved me a little yes or no if I loved him a little in the dark the mud in spite of all a little affection find someone at last someone find you at last live together glued together love each other a little love a little without being loved be loved a little without loving answer that leave it vague leave it dark
>
> (*HII*, 53)

The narrator does not seek for different specific things in women or men and there is not explicit reference to one group or the other as having different qualities as it happens in *Dream*, which includes gratuitous misogynist judgments: “A man knows but a woman knows better” (*DR*, 19), “No man had ever whistled like that, and of course women can’t” (*DR*, 146). However, we should note that Beckett puts in *Dream* his own anger, personal problems and affairs with women, as all three female protagonists are based to some extent, as mentioned above, on Peggy Sinclair, Lucia Joyce and Ethna McArthy, real women in Beckett’s life. As we have seen, some of the attitudes of Belacqua in *Dream* are consequence of a man who takes things too personally and is in a conflict with his surrounding world. After a few novels, or stages, the narrator of *How It Is* is “hearing nothing saying nothing capable of nothing” (*HII*, 44) and even expresses his lack of interest in understanding. This naturally leaks into the conditions of relationships with other people. As noted in chapter six, Beckett introduces ambiguity and indifference about the sex of the beloved one: “Now men, I have rubbed up against a few men in my time” (*TN*, 51). Therefore, as he turns towards abstraction, Beckett abandons earthly elements to focus on more universal themes. At the end of his career, the importance of the outer world is minimal, words lose their meaning and indifference covers it all, and the same happens to traditional ideas of man and woman.

Finally, we can say that the change in the treatment of gender in Beckett's career is not that women are now the main theme or that they are treated nice, but that such treatment is equal for both genders by an attitude that we could rather call anti-humanism, as we find that gender makes no difference. However, any ideas such as anti-humanism or misanthropy in Beckett must be dealt with carefully, as they are detected on the representation, but a deeper reading seems to suggest that Beckett stands by his characters and he is merely depicting their misery, as a literalization of the human experience.[21] Notwithstanding the harsh treatment provided to women in the early works, we can detect a progression that ends up in indifference and emphasizes ontological reflection. As Jeri Kroll puts it, "[t]he voice in the dark, or the lone figure on the stage, is sometimes a man and sometimes a woman; and sometimes it is difficult to tell—the anguish is all that counts" (1978, 37). As a consequence of Beckett's advance towards dissolution, gender differences disappear, so that, eventually, the essence remaining seems to be that notion mentioned by Neary that "two in distress make sorrow less" (*M*, 32), and characters, regardless of their gender, are better defined by their condition as "nightmare pals" (*MAC*, 34). The last point in this chapter – and section, addresses the importance of dependency regardless of the gender in order to understand where Beckett is heading to in his novels.

8.3. FROM GENDER RELATIONSHIPS TO DEPENDENCY RELATIONSHIPS

In the final works, the change and refinement of Beckett's themes changes the paradigm of gender relationships:

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[21] A deeper discussion of Beckett's position in relation to these representations is provided in chapter eleven of this thesis.

> When Beckett squarely faces what Belacqua avoids (the irrationality of human experience), women cease to function as symbols of the dilemma […]. [G]enerally sex is irrelevant in demonstrating Beckett's cardinal themes. In the later novels and plays, men and women are treated in much the same manner.
>
> (Kroll 1978, 11-12).

This way, the *esse est percipi* appears again as the ultimate issue in Beckett, as he provides us with works in which characters depend on each other. Winnie, in *Happy Days*, explains: "just to know that in theory you can hear me even though in fact you don't is all I need" (*CDW*, 148). In a way, the mere presence of Willie is what comforts her. As Kroll puts it, "the more traditional portrayal of female character, patronizing or satiric, has generally been exorcized along with Beckett's reliance on traditional form and style" (Kroll 1978, 37).

The need to avoid loneliness appears in *Mercier and Camier*, as we are told that "[a]dmittedly strength was needed for to stay with Camier, no less than for to stay with Mercier, but less than for the horrors of soliloquy" (*MAC*, 59). They are conscious of their dependency and are afraid of being left alone: "It's all the dark thoughts I've been revolving, said Mercier, ever since you went. I even wondered if you had abandoned me" (47). They not only feel the need to be perceived, but they also need each other to perform actions such as drinking and eating:

> There were moments, minutes on end, when Camier lacked the strength to raise his glass to his mouth. Mercier was subject to the same failing. Then the less weak of the two gave the weaker to drink, inserting between his lips the rim of his glass.
>
> (14-15)

They are committed to stay together "to the last" (34). This kind of images appear with increasing frequency in the novels and, similarly, the narrator of *How It Is* associates his time with Pim to happiness and good moments (*HII*, 35), and refers to it as probably the best in his life (39).

As mentioned above, Beckett is not condescending when it comes to placing his characters in hard situations, and women are not an exception. In the end, novels are full of what Susan Mooney has called "images of unheroic but resilient masculinity and femininity" (Gontarski 2010, 284). Beyond the fluidity displayed by discourses and bodies, Mary Bryden detects a voice that is "sexually impartial," sexual difference having become sexual indifference (Weller 2006, 167). In relation to this, Carol Hemstetter has argued that *Molloy* is "not about men and women; it is about what is left of humanity when all that can be stripped away has been stripped away. It is thus both resistant to a feminist reading and demanding of one, for it names and defines human reality" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 118). I would argue that, inasmuch as the novels after *Molloy* share themes and approaches with it, and even take them further, that conclusion is applicable to them as well.

In the end, this is summed up by the Unnamable when he notes: "Ah a nice mess we're in, the whole pack of us, is it possible we're all in the same boat, no, we're in a nice mess each one in his own peculiar way" (*TN*, 365). This mess, that recalls Beckett's own idea of one, can be overcome or avoided by one means, explained by the Unnamable himself when he talks about his existence being some kind of public show:

> but then where is the hand, the helping hand, or merely charitable, or the hired hand, it's a long time coming, to take yours and draw you away, that's the show, free, gratis and for nothing, waiting alone, blind, deaf, you don't know where, you don't know

> for what, for a hand to come and draw you away, somewhere else, where perhaps it's worse.
>
> (*TN*, 375)

This excerpt is extremely representative of the essence behind Beckett's words. Throughout his novels, we keep watching characters that do not fit their environments, characters that do not understand the world nor can relate with it properly. The conclusion suggested by Beckett is that there might be a helping hand somewhere. In a sense, he seems to suggest that loneliness is a reality, one intrinsic to life, but knowing that the rest of the people is lonely and helpless as well makes it a bit better. Dependency will be further developed later on in Beckett's career, as the ideas in *Mercier and Camier* are present in *Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, among others. Indeed, loneliness and the need of being listened to will be a major theme in his theatre plays.

However, we must note that this dependency in the novels is closely related to the loss of power coming from disability and the lack of a system that supports characters. Being out of the norm provokes, as mentioned above, further anxiety and troubles for the protagonists. Furthermore, the way towards indifference is closely related to the loss of identity, in which the body is one of the protagonists. The bodily decay mentioned in chapter one is necessarily related to time, and therefore to ageing. At one point in Beckett's works, both being alive and being dead seem to be one state and the same, and this way the author rejects again one of those binary hierarchical oppositions on which the world is supposed to be traditionally built according to basic feminist theories, such as good-bad, life-death or man-woman. Finally, the rejection of a defined hierarchy between genders joins Beckett rejection of body normativity. Both rejections are complemented by the representation of old protagonists, as these represent one more category under the idea of Other, one that shares elements with the other ones previously analysed. The next section will provide an assessment of how old age affects characters, the importance of death, the intersections between all three categories of disability, gender and old age and Beckett's position in relation to them.

SECTION 3.

"I WAS ALWAYS AGED, ALWAYS AGEING": REPRESENTATIONS OF OLD AGE

> But has nothing really changed, all this mortal time, I'm speaking now of me, yes, henceforward I shall speak of none but me, that's decided even though I should not succeed, there's no reason why I would succeed, so I need have no qualms. Nothing changed? I must be ageing all the same, bah, I was always aged, always ageing, and ageing makes no difference [...].
>
> *The Unnamable*

9. THE LIFE COURSE AND ITS MEANING: AGEING AND THE NOVELS

> - You don't think about getting old when you're young… You shouldn't.
>
> - Must be something good about gettin' old?
>
> - Well I can't imagine anything good about being blind and lame at the same time but, still at my age I've seen about all that life has to dish out. I know to separate the wheat from the chaff, and let the small stuff fall away.
>
> - That's cool man. So, uh, what's the worst part about being old, Alvin?
>
> - Well, the worst part of being old is remembering when you was young.
>
> David Lynch, *The Straight Story*

9.1. ON AGEING STUDIES AND SAMUEL BECKETT

In the introduction to *The Coming of Age* (1970), a precursor text of ageing studies, Simone de Beauvoir quotes from Proust when noting that "[o]f all realities [old age] is perhaps that of which we retain a purely abstract notion longest in our lives" (quoted in 1970, 12). In her work, Beauvoir reviews the issue of ageing and old age from several fields, including history, medicine and ethnology, but also acknowledging its economic, institutional and social implications. The author reflects extensively on the fact that old age is our biological fate and on the contrast perceived between that and our apprehension to it. Old age is something we perceive in others but we try to avoid seeing in ourselves for as long as we can extend the farce. In this sense, denial and rejection are notions that appear here and there throughout ageing studies, something seen by Beauvoir as some kind of self-defence by individuals, old age provoking in us a "biological repugnance"

(323). Fear to death and social exclusion are just two of the most evident causes for this rejection, while, as we shall see, there are plenty of other implications, such as the fear to experience a decline in physical and psychological abilities. This loss might force us to change habits as we realise we are no longer able to do the same activities we could do in the past, which in turn changes our identity itself.

Socially, Beauvoir notes that, in some primitive communities, both old people and children are placed under the same age category (323), and she mentions an analogy between the historical attitude by adults towards both groups, which reveals an essential difference: "since the child is a potential active member, society ensures its own future by investing in him, whereas in its eyes the aged person is no more than a corpse under suspended sentence" (323).[22] So, the power and presence of both groups is denied by a third one that, in the fashion of the group "Man" on the duality Man/Woman, has agency to shape the world and establish the norm: the group of adults. However, following Beauvoir's statement, there is a hope on children that makes a difference and places old people in the lowest position, as these are virtually unable to repay society in the long, medium and even, sometimes, in the short term. Beauvoir understands that "[s]ociety cares about the individual only in so far as he is profitable" and elaborates, "[t]he young know this. Their anxiety as they enter in upon social life matches the anguish of the old as they are excluded from it" (543). With such comparison she insists on the link between life before adult age and life after it, thus foreshadowing the central idea in the field, developed by scholars in the years to come, of life as a changing process. In this situation, the individual, placed under a capitalist view of economy and means of production, is rated according to her ability to both consume and create wealth. It is essential to keep this in mind so as to understand how all three categories, disability, gender and old age, take part in the social configuration of the individual to this respect.

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[22] The analogy between old age and infancy is recurrent throughout ageing studies. For a deeper discussion of it, see the chapter by Hockey and Allison in Featherstone and Wernick 1995 (135ff.).

Along the same lines, Betty Friedan detects an obsession in society towards the issue of ageing, and the apparition of many new methods to try to avoid it, as well as “a *growing* impatience for some *final solution* to that problem” (1993, 3, italics in the original). She perceived such obsession in the media of the United States, which showed the rise of a full industry of cosmetic products, the strength of beauty-based standards, and commercial efforts that more than evidently affected the individual’s perception of the world as brands sought for the maximum economical profit. In her analysis, Friedan also pays attention to a “media blackout of older people,” and to a new perception of age as a problem, as a condition carrying a series of health and cognitive issues, society focusing in what “vastly increasing numbers of ‘unproductive’ older people” mean in terms of an economic and personal burden (7). There was a fundamentally negative view of the notion of old age, as the old individual represents an “Other,” to use the feminist dialectic, that differs from the traditional term in that all of us will eventually become that Other. This prevision of our becoming the Other in the system we live in by natural, inescapable conditions causes anxiety and encourages our firm pursuit of mechanisms that help us avoid it. This, according to scholars, is only natural and belongs in essence to human experience:

> Although social arrangements clearly produce surplus suffering (Dannefer, 2006), the generic experiences of suffering, anxiety and vulnerability are fundamental to lived experience. They are an integral part of the ontogeny of the organism, through which the material world is linked to human society, and they are preoccupations of

> every cultural tradition, bound up with issues of human interest, significance and meaning.
>
> (Dannefer et al. 2008, 102)

In her analysis, Friedan turns to old age with a basis on feminist notions of her previous work, and refers to *the mystique of age* as one that is “much more deadly than the feminine mystique, more terrifying to confront, harder to break through” (1993, 9). If one can think of a worse thing, socially speaking – and in many other ways, than being the Other, it might be *becoming* the Other, by means of a natural process that entails a displacement and a deprivation of our natural rights. Due to the process of ageing, the individual is rendered powerless, useless, and ultimately identity-less. Therefore, while the reaction to realizing one is a woman historically tended to be based on resignation and self-invisibilization, the reaction to getting old seems to involve stronger and more prolonged feelings of denial and anxiety.

Lynne Segal reassesses the mission and needs of ageing studies after decades of theory, and concludes: “From the humanistic perspective the key epistemological question on ageing is: ‘what does it mean to grow old?’” (2013, 61). The question itself is distinctive of theories based on or related to the *cultural turn*, a trend in social sciences and humanities in the last decades of the twentieth century that focuses on cultural and social aspects and their relations to create constructions and meanings, basically a point of view that stresses culture. The field of social gerontology became related to this perspective and explored old age in terms of perception and subjectivity, trying to find the meaning of age and the ageing process. While by the 1990s there were scholars fully aware of weaknesses in the definition of these and other similar concepts, a condition that is broadly summed up in Bryan S. Turner’s claim that “the sociology of aging [could] be said to be in its infancy” (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, 245), decades of research would eventually lead to a series of new ideas relevant to an insightful analysis of ageing in society, making ageing studies one of the most prolific fields in social and cultural theory of the last three decades.

These elements of invisibility, fear and rejection towards old age have been found in literature as well. Elizabeth Barry notes how in our culture "[a]geing is a taboo; old people are invisible" (Barry 2015, 132), a condition true in literature and philosophy as well, as they historically failed to address it properly, in a straight-forward and in-depth way. She notes this absence in works by philosophers in the twentieth century that were interested in areas of the human experience closely related to old age and death, as is the case work of Maurice Merlau-Ponty, "who claims to write from the perspective of the lived body, and to explore the way in which our bodily frame determines our perception and activity" or of:

> Heidegger's monolithic *Being and Time* (1927) – a work that purports to uncover the experience of being and time from the subject's perspective, and in relation to the threshold of death – [which fails] to account for the changing nature of time as death gets nearer.
>
> (135)

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the general absence of relevant images of old age in literature, interest in theoretical approaches was paralleled by a growing interest shown by writers in the twentieth century. Due to old age becoming "both a realistic prospect and a forbidding fate [...], [m]odernist titans such as T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett were preoccupied with ageing relatively early in their writing lives" (134). In relation to this, as early as in 1935, Beckett wrote to his friend Tom McGreevy "I begin to think I have gerontophilia on top of the rest" (*L*, 274), and talked about little old men flying kites on the weekend, and notes "My next old man [...] must be a kiteflyer" (274). This seems to have inspired the epilogue in *Murphy*, as it shows Mr. Kelly flying a kite in Hyde Park, as Celia wheels him. This is proof of that "gerontophilia" and is representative of young Beckett's active observation of old people. It is certainly interesting that even before turning thirty, Beckett was already observant of such elements and their literary potential. Old age is a concept that seems to have been in his mind for decades as he aged, and he seems to have found in it an essential source for a more accurate expression of the mess inherent to human life:

> It's a paradox, but with old age, the more the possibilities diminish, the better chance you have. With diminished concentration, loss of memory, obscured intelligence – what you, for example, might call "brain damage" – the more chance there is for saying something closest to what one really is. Even though everything seems inexpressible, there remains the need to express. A child needs to make a sand castle even though it makes no sense. In old age, with a few grains of sand, one has the greatest possibility.
>
> (Quoted in Shainberg 1987, 103)

This is perhaps one of the keys to understand why Beckett chooses old people as their protagonists. It is not only due to his own growing old, but due to the coincidence between their representation and the things Beckett wants to express. Impairment in memory and logical thought might be liberating for the author when it comes to transmitting emotion. In this sense, the decrease in possibilities and abilities can be related to Beckett's shift to French. In a way, writing in a second language would offer Beckett a context akin to his concerns on expression. In fact, Beckett himself expressed to Shainberg – at age seventy-six, in the following terms:

> I always thought old age would be a writer's best chance. Whenever I read the late work of Goethe or W. B. Yeats I had the impertinence to identify with it. Now my

> memory's gone, all the old fluency's disappeared. I don't write a single sentence without saying to myself, “It's a lie!” So I know I was right. It's the best chance I've ever had.
>
> (Quoted in Shainberg 1987, 103)

Thus, adopting French as his expression language can be understood as an attempt by Beckett, when he was still young, to experience that lack of fluency and immediacy imposed by old age. The increasing difficulty to use one’s own language over time can be paralleled with the difficulty to speak a foreign language, and therefore it becomes essential for his poetics of failure. Hence, choosing French is yet another literary decision to give meaning to his works: in a way, it would not make sense to choose disabled protagonists and narrators while retaining mastery as an author, so he artificially put himself under limitations similar to the ones he found in old age.

In any case, Beckett seems to be conscious of the decadence of the body in traditional terms and its co-existence with a desire to keep on “being.” As shown with the example of *Murphy*, the author refers to old age in the early works, but he will address it more radically after the shift to first-person narration. Since his youth, Beckett finds connections between his own artistic and vital concerns. These connections were suppositions to be only confirmed later, when experienced from within. As a consequence, early references to old age by Beckett have a rather foreshadowing idiosyncrasy, and are based more on his external – while accurate, observation than on his own experience. Thus, in his first novels, the notion of old age is better defined by the contrast with traditional depictions of youth.

9.2. YOUTH IN THE NOVELS

At the beginning of his career, Beckett concedes that youth equals naivety and partly justifies the inability to fit in the world. The author seems to have been in conflict to what life required from young people, i.e., activity and interest in interpersonal relations, as it came into conflict with his own nature. This is shown by the "dreadful manoeuvers" required of Belacqua by his sentiment for the Smeraldina-Rima, which constituted, "given his youth, his salad days, a forced move" (*DR*, 43). In a way, old age means for Beckett an approximation to the longed-for idea of wombtomb. As explained in *Murphy*, the protagonist "thought so highly of this postmortem situation, its advantages were present in such detail to his mind, that he actually hoped he might live to be old" (*M*, 47). It is in this sense that the subtraction of physical abilities in an aged body is linked to the reach of peace of mind. Given the importance of death for Beckett, and its presence both implicit and explicit in his late works, the limitation of the body is used as an artificial means to achieve impotence. This is most explicitly shown by Murphy's habit to tie himself to the chair in order to free his mind. It is only later in Beckett's life, when he confirms the loss of fluency and motility, and the apparition of impotence by means of the natural process of ageing, that he and his characters can develop existence in the "ideal" context for the author's aesthetic claims.

In any case, and while Beckett's approach to old age is more distant in the early novels, he is by no means foreign to such condition, but rather questions it from the outside. Thus, in the final addenda to *Watt*, we find the following verses:

> who may tell the tale
> of the old man?
> weigh absence in a scale
> mete want with a span?

the sum asses of the world's woes?
nothingness
in words enclose?

(*W*, 205)

Thus, the author places together the idea of the old man with absence, woes, nothingness, and seems to have in mind a conception exploited later in which old age is a useful motif to better represent the human condition as a general concept. In this same addenda we see how, as Beckett aged, his position towards youth remained still one of nostalgia:

Bid us sigh on from day to day,
and wish and wish the soul away
till youth and genial years are flown,
and all the life of life is gone

(206)

This conception of youth matches the popular metaphor of youth as a happy time, which on its part seems to act as a metaphor for energy, mobility and appetite, or the state of "wanting" (Sontag 1972, 31), as opposed to passivity and abandonment. In any case, it is in *Watt* where Beckett reflects on the intermediate point between youth and old age in a rather direct way for the first time. In the novel, the narrator offers a passage that mirrors the author's own realization of the process of ageing:

> To think, when one is no longer young, when one is not yet old, that one is no longer young, that one is not yet old, that is perhaps something [...]. [S]aying, No, it is not the heart, no, it is not the liver, no, it is not the prostate, no it is not the ovaries, no, it is muscular, it is nervous. [...] [One is] at the foot of all the hills at last, the ways down, the ways up, and free, free at last, for an instant free at last, nothing at last.

(*W*, 165-166)

The notion of one's own ageing is something valuable, ageing as a human overall condition, one that ultimately entails freedom. This passage represents a midway point in which the individual embraces the idea of impotence. This is probably the worst situation, as one is not fully powerful nor fully impotent, but in the middle, having power but losing it progressively while one tries to retain it, or to manage the decreasing power that is left. Beckett's tendency to repeat ideas is particularly useful for the assessment of old age in his works, and one can compare the "revelation" above to a very similar one in *The Unnamable*:

> [...] you try the sea, you try the town, you look for yourself in the mountains and the plains, it's only natural, you want yourself, you want yourself in your own little corner, it's not love, not curiosity, it's because you're tired, you want to stop, travel no more, seek no more, lie no more, speak no more, close your eyes, but your own, in a word lay your hands on yourself, after that you'll make short work of it.
>
> (*TN*, 393)

Here, Beckett goes further and links inaction or exhaustion of a quest to freedom or rest. This second passage parallels the previous one, if only by chance. The first one is a reflection on the end of youth, while the second one deals with the end of life, and both are similar in their style. That final stage of freedom and quietness appears in other forms in Beckett's novels. There is also the case of Mercier and Camier, who were "old young" (*MAC,* 8), an expression that suggests that they do not fit neither category and matches Belacqua's position in that it shows contradiction in their identities and social roles. This is further evidenced by their misfortunes and more explicitly by the constable's inquiry "Are you not ashamed of yourselves, at your age?" (71). The question shows that age has an effect on how their behaviour is perceived, and that characters surrounding protagonists do have a series of expectations based on their age that these fail to meet.

Moreover, *Mercier and Camier* provides a representative depiction of Beckett's characters and his vision of old age: "In the end he said, I am Mercier, alone, ill, in the cold, the wet, old, half mad, no way on, no way back. He eyed briefly, with nostalgia, the ghastly sky, the hideous earth" (45). Nostalgia is an important mark of Beckett's style, and it is very present in this novel. Beckett finished the novel in 1946, when he was about forty years old, and it is therefore probable that old age was by then a reality more powerful than ever before for him. As a consequence, *Mercier and Camier* contain images more clearly nostalgic of youth than the previous ones. In the novel, an old man the protagonists meet on the train tells them: "For my life is behind me and my only pleasure left to summon up, out loud, the good old days happily gone for ever [...]. That was fifty years ago, feels like five hundred" (28). Such reference to the good old days joins Belacqua's "salad days" and Watt's "genial years" in the stereotypical idealization of youth that contrasts with the potential of old age as a literary motif for Samuel Beckett. This kind of nostalgia when one is leaving youth behind might be a protective mechanism, as explained by Kristana Arp's statement that "[b]y focusing on memories of their youth, [old people] assert their identity with their younger selves in order to ignore the changes old age brings" (2016, 142).

These references to the past also foreshadow the tone and the exploration of memory that Beckett will present in his theatre plays, perhaps more specifically similar to the ending lines of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). In the play, Krapp is listening to his old biographical recordings, and finally concludes: "Perhaps my best days are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back" (*CDW*, 223), as an acceptance of the lost past and of life. It is no coincidence that Simone de Beauvoir used Samuel Beckett as an example in *The Coming of Age* and talks about *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, since protagonists in both plays go through their own memories, which often appear disordered, mutilated and felt as alien, while protagonists hold on to the myth that to age is to progress and instruct oneself (1970, 317). On the other hand, this myth they hold on to is attacked in the novels, as we saw when assessing the case of *Malone Dies* in chapter five, but this is problematical as well. In relation to this, time and memory become essential to understand the theme of old age in Beckett's novels.

9.3. MEMORY, TIME AND REACHING OLD AGE

The fact is that Beckett's poetics of subtraction developed in his middle-to-late works captures the dissolution linked to growing old (Rehm 2016, 164), which is also closely related to memory. The loss of memory traditionally associated to old age is, as analysed in chapter one of this dissertation, a central idea in the trilogy and *How It Is*, as these are novels that to a great extent consist of reports or recollections. Beauvoir's assertion that "[l]ife is but the memory we have of it, and memory is nothing" (1970, 317) is especially relevant when memory starts failing. It is also expressed similarly by Malone's statement that "[a] minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really" (*TN*, 201). Molloy's task in his decomposition is to remember, telling memories that are foggy and probably false. Characters are conscious that their memory is failing, as is the case of the narrator of *How It Is* presenting his situation as the last state, last version of his life "ill-said ill-heard ill-recaptured ill-murmured in the mud" (*HII*, 1). In this sense, and following the form-content union, broken memory becomes broken syntax. However, Molloy seems to recall certain situations with details, often unreal, that imbue the narrative with a surreal aura. In this sense, amnesia is used playfully in the novel and memories seem to project reality, as in the passage where Molloy describes how he walked in his room at Loy's house, to then note that "[i]t may seem strange that [he] was able to go through [those] motions" without the help of his crutches (*TN*, 33). His explanation, however, is that "[y]ou don't remember immediately who you are, when you wake" (33). In this sense, memory is sometimes used to enhance the feeling of contradiction and surrealism, supported by the rest of motifs of old age.

In our trip going nowhere, we find the truth of life, which is "but an old age hidden among tinsels" (Beauvoir 1970, 316). Beauvoir says that in Beckett's works, as in Eugène Ionesco's, "old age does not appear as the further boundary of the human state, but, as in *King Lear*, it is that state itself at last exposed," so that old people seem to be used as a means to show a conception of man (317). In any case, concerns on memories and old age reveal a preoccupation on time that is depicted by the use of related motifs. Just as the treatment of body and gender moves towards abstraction and indifference, some passages in Beckett only provide ambiguity as the final result of the passing of time. In other words, Beckett dedicates lines to show how time makes things tend to neutrality, working as some kind of a regulatory agent, as when he notes that Mercier and Camier's hat and coat pass from being very different, one yellow, the other green, to being very similar: "So it is with time, that lightens what is dark, that darkens what is light" (*MAC*, 180). He tells:

> It was to be expected that, once met, they would not stay, no, but continue, each as it must, to age, until the hat was green, the coat yellow, and then through the last circles paling, deepening, swooning cease, the hat to be a hat, the coat to be a coat. For so it is with time.
>
> (180)

These lines can be extrapolated to what time does to characters in Beckett: just as the hat and the coat progressively lose what defines them, people in Beckett lose their body, their gender-defining features, and eventually their identity. Curiously enough, the yellow hat turns green, the green coat turns yellow, in a way suggesting that time can invert the most representative features of objects – and subjects, at the same time problematizing perception. Finally, their essence, that of being a hat, that of being a coat, dissipates into non-being. The passage in *Mercier and Camier* shows an interest in time unprecedented in Beckett, who later on in his career will choose the ageing process as the mechanism to represent that.

By the time of writing the trilogy, Beckett makes references to old age more explicit and detailed. Molloy is nearly as old as his mother, and if he himself had a son, he would be nearly as old as him (*TN*, 13). In fact, old age tends to infinity in the late novels, there are no precise measures, and the best we get in *Molloy* is a series of indeterminate references by the protagonist to his own "interminable existence," his "enormous history" or his "life without end" (10). This way, mother and son are "like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations" (13), in such a way that differences between them have disappeared, as if time rendered them identity-less. With extreme age comes extreme disability, to the extent that Molloy's mother, blind and "deaf as a post," recognizes his son by his smell (14).

As Molloy wants to say his goodbyes, "finish dying" (3), he seems to be almost at the end of his life, while its ultimate end is never reached. Rather, it goes on and on, becoming a quest that is resumed by the next protagonists. That is the case of Malone, who "was very old already before I found myself here. I call myself an octogenarian, but I cannot prove it. Perhaps I am only a quinquagenarian, or a quadragenarian" (179). In the trilogy and *How It Is*, time seems to pass so slow that it is difficult to assess, it rather seems to have stopped and tend to eternity. Eternal existence is surplus suffering for the

Unnamable: “To saddle me with a lifetime is probably not enough for them, I have to be given a taste of two or three generations” (324).

When time reaches that sense of eternity, characters begin to lose track of their previous existence, and memories of their past state are obliterated. Both Molloy and Malone seem to be unable to explain how they came to their current position and state, but this is best summed up at the beginning of *The Unnamable*:

> Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn’t far. Perhaps that is how it began. You think you are simply resting, the better to act when the time comes, or for no reason, and you soon find yourself powerless ever to do anything again. No matter how it happened.
>
> (285)

This is discussed in an abstract way that does not clarify the subject the narrator is talking about. The Unnamable does not name that situation, and in fact develops it in several directions by means of his meandering monologue, but the definition itself could definitely apply to old age, as it seems to support Beauvoir’s contention, taken from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, that “[a]ge takes hold of us by surprise” (1970, 339). This is actually a common idea regarding old age, and it is probably favoured by denial, as individuals try to avoid identifying themselves as old as long as they can. In normal conditions, old age reaches everybody, while it does it in different ways and at different times. It does not reach us unpredictably as such, although attitudes of denial might enhance such feeling, but it is in any case irreversible. Once a person becomes, or rather assents to identify oneself, or is perceived by society, as old, there is no going back. In a way, this specific conception of old age as something unexpected is evoked later by a question by the Unnamable that links it to birth and life themselves: “Why did I have myself represented in the midst of men, the light of day?” (*TN*, 291). Similarly, Molloy refers to a place where one does not go, “but where you find yourself, sometimes, not knowing how” (35), and Malone says “[o]ne day I found myself here, in the bed” (177). These descriptions are in fact linkable to both life and old age. In other words, protagonists bear old age stoically, “if only because the condition associated with old age is seen simply as an amplification of the general one” (Barry 2015, 141). Ontologically, old age is partly a literary representation of what life is, in terms of an inescapable reality, and it seems to be complementary to disability as a mechanism to convey the meaning of the trauma of life for Beckett.

10. THE END OF WANDERING: REPRESENTATIONS OF OLD AGE AND DEATH

> Morning or night, Friday or Sunday, made no difference, everything was the same: the gnawing, excruciating, incessant pain; that awareness of life irrevocably passing but not yet gone; that dreadful, loathsome death, the only reality, relentlessly closing in on him; and that same endless lie. What did days, weeks, or hours matter?
>
> Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

10.1. ON THE EFFECTS OF AGEING

One of the most basic claims when addressing old age is that it causes rejection, still nowadays, in a large part of society. In previous chapters, this thesis discussed the loss of abilities, the fear of social exclusion and other situations that frighten individuals. However, we left out of the discussion which is probably the idea that causes more anxiety and fear: death. Old age is frightening, ultimately, because it is associated to an impending, inescapable death. A paradox arises when a society is described as "death denying" while studies show that people think of death commonly, with diverse degrees of apprehension (Neimeyer and Werth 2005, 388). Denial is thus one of the main mechanisms of defence used by individuals when they face the ideas of old age and death. Both are closely related, and to this day we find a taboo in Western society about both notions that provoke anxiety in most of us. One of the most evident pieces of proof of this taboo is that, as Stokes notes, "[a]n elaborate vocabulary (e.g. Chapel of Rest, rest in peace, sleep peacefully, knowing you are in God's care) is employed to convey the feeling that the deceased person is not really dead" (1992, 129). In the same way, Susan Sontag provides an account of how we tend to postpone the moment in which we assess ourselves as old. In "The Double Standard of Aging" she displays the tragically comic case of her friend, who at age twenty-one told her "I'm not young anymore," to then correct herself at thirty saying that "thirty […] is really the end," later telling her that "forty was the most upsetting birthday of all" (1972, 33). In relation to this, postponement and denial have as well caused death to be a traditionally under-researched area within gerontology. However, scholars have in the last decades turned to death as an intrinsic part of the ageing process and to the relationship between both concepts. In this sense, Elizabeth Barry has noted that ageing offers "the challenge of looking at [death] from the inside – as an experience we will all go through, and that can be spoken of (if anyone cares to listen)" (2015, 133). Representing old age in art is thus an attempt to illustrate a condition under what Jean-Paul Sartre called "unrealizables," a series of categories, like Jew or ugly, named like that because "no one can realize what it means to be such things in inward experience" (Arp 2016, 139). Among all the "unrealizables," old age "is the one that we are most urgently required to realize, and it is the one that consciously and unconsciously we are the most reluctant to assume" (Beauvoir 1970, 292).

This situation is even more interesting when assessing the works by an author like Samuel Beckett, as his own ageing pushes him towards the qualities he had been looking for, due to his own diminishing of powers (Barry 2016b, 206). While he had been interested in the power of impairment for years, first-hand experience allows him to make more accurate portraits of old age and impotence. This has led to paradoxical observations, such as the detection of a link between the sought wisdom and the conditions imposed by the decline of abilities (207). In other words, "freedom from the body" could be attained by means of the natural loss of ability: the body's being rendered useless might provide new perspectives unattainable before.

Judith Kegan Gardiner has acknowledged that "[a]ge begins as a biological category that is intrinsically tied to those genuinely essential definers of human existence: temporality, embodiment, and mortality" (2002, 95), so that age is marked by bodily changes through time. Before inflicting such changes upon his protagonists, Beckett already showed them from external perspectives repeatedly throughout his *oeuvre*. It is the case of the description of the Lynch family in *Watt*:

> There was Tom Lynch, widower, aged eighty-five years, confined to his bed with constant undiagnosed pains in the caecum, and his three surviving boys Joe, aged sixty-five years, a rheumatic cripple, and Jim, aged sixty-four years, a hunchbacked inebriate, and Bill, widower, aged sixty-three years, greatly hampered in his movements by the loss of both legs as the result of a slip, followed by a fall, and his only surviving daughter May Sharpe, widow, aged sixty-two years, in full possession of all her faculties with the exception of that of vision.
>
> (*W*, 81)

The fact that one of them is hampered due to a slip and a fall pictures disability not only as a product of biology but also as a product of life in the sense of a process of interaction with the surrounding world. Hence, disability comes not only due to a natural isolated process of bodily decay, but is rather the consequence of experience itself. After so bleak an image, it is comprehensible that in *Malone Dies* Sapo's parents prefer to think of him as a future doctor: "He will look after us when we are old, said Mrs. Saposcat" (*TN*, 183). From an external point of view, accounts of old age are pervasively negative in Beckett, and Mrs. Saposcat's statement shows the importance of dependency and necessity in the Beckettian universe, as a means of avoiding loneliness when one's abilities are minimal. In fact, the loss of abilities is a preoccupation for Mr. Lambert as well, whose "old heart exulted" when he remembered that

> in spite of his great age he was still needed, and his methods preferred to those of younger men [...]. Yes, at an age when most people cringe and cower, as if to

> apologize for still being present, Lambert was feared and in a position to do as he pleased.
>
> (*TN*, 194)

As long as he maintains his ability to work, Lambert is needed, so he keeps his position of privilege and inspires fear in others. In fact, his being valued at work and his methods preferred show in a way the capitalist view of society by which one's value is assessed in terms of economic production. Lambert enjoys the feeling of being needed for the system, as he seems to know that, as soon as he is no longer efficient, he will be left out of it at many levels. In fact, the observation that old people seem to "apologize for still being present" recalls Monique Wittig's assertion that women are invisible as social beings and have to use "some kind of excuse" for their presence (Wittig 1992, 8). In a way, this highlights the bound as Others between old people and women.

In relation to the loss of abilities and its relationship to old age, Elizabeth Barry has addressed decay as a progressive physical approximation to death:

> The body becomes sluggish and finally supine and immobile; it is prone to untimely sleep; it shrinks visibly, becomes skeletal and desiccates. Skin and hair turn white, anticipating the whiteness of the bone, and the body's temperature lowers.
>
> (Barry 2015, 134)

Desires that do not culminate in success or action can be both a failure of will or a body which cannot execute commands (140). For Barry, this inability entails a "critique of a positivist structure of progress," a structure according to which living implies "the acquiring of learning, wisdom, authority, or any of the expected boons of experience" (140).

10.2. IMPAIRMENT AND REJECTION TO THE IDEA OF AGEING

The critique is present in Beckett's novels inasmuch as there is not a positive image of old age. Instead, that condition seems to be the conclusion of life as a process, so that he associates it to being tired (*DR*, 113) and to a constant decay:

> saying to myself he's better than he was better than yesterday less ugly less stupid less cruel less dirty less old less wretched and you saying to myself and you bad to worse bad to worse steadily
>
> (*HII*, 3)

In that sense, the Unnamable refers to a "rumour rising at birth and even earlier, What shall I do? What shall I do? now low, a murmur, now precise as the headwaiter's And to follow? and often rising to a scream" (*TN*, 246). Therefore, we find an idea of ageing as a life-long process that already starts with confusion and anxiety, feelings that do not get better with time. This is shown not only by Beckett's references to youth before he gets old, but by his own characters' recollections of their own lives. In the words of the Unnamable "I must be ageing all the same, bah, I was always aged, always ageing, and ageing makes no difference" (*TN*, 392). This reveals that old age is the essence of life and in fact protagonists never felt any notable difference. In the words of Elizabeth Barry, the protagonists bear old age stoically, "if only because the condition associated with old age is seen simply as an amplification of the general one" (2015, 141).

In relation to this, Beckett's vision counters the idea of successful ageing that gerontology deals with. In an attempt to provide advice and highlight the positive aspects of old age – one of the main aspirations of social gerontology (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, 31), Robert Havighurst proposed the activity theory, according to which successful ageing means the maintenance as far and as long as possible of the activities and attitudes of middle age, and the disengagement theory, according to which it means the acceptance and the desire for a process of disengagement from active life (1961, 8). Beckett's protagonists are unable to maintain their fitness or abilities and, if we look at the earlier novels, they were never actually engaged in active life.

In this sense, Beckett does not accept any positive aspects of old age in social or health terms. He associates old age to decay, impairment, immobility, loss of memory and death. At the end of the Gender section, a conclusion has been provided that Beckett does not invert or restore the role of women. Similarly, the approach adopted by Beckett does not consist in restoring positive elements of old age, but in making the most of the negative ones as they fit his literary ideas of impotence. Once more, Beckett does not use his agency as writer to save his characters or be indulgent with them. In this regard, Barry has noted that Beckett "identif[ies] the grotesque and slavish confinement to our bodies, and the bootlessness of social and political activity, as simply the true condition of humanity writ large; anything else is pomp and circumstance" (2015, 141). This condition was always there, "hidden among tinsels" (Beauvoir 1970, 316), that at the end of Beckett's career have disappeared. As he gets progressively rid of physical elements and gender difference, he is able to approach the essence by means of ontological reflections.

On the other hand, Robert Kastenbaum noted a human tendency to "think of a person as 'old' […] when this person has relatively little exchange with the environment," in terms of attention and response to stimuli, to which he referred by applying the medical notion of "habituation" to social gerontology (1980-1, 165). In this sense, Belacqua's longing for the wombtomb and Murphy's attempts to free his mind already show rejection towards such exchange, as does their selfish behaviour. In a way, all characters seem unable and unwilling to take part in the exchange, both in medical and social terms. Kastenbaum identifies what "we see in the typical configuration of advanced aging" as the “triumph of habituation” (165). Therefore, I would argue that old age provides characters the state closest to what they sought during their life, as it does for Beckett.

However, old age still involves the problem of memory, as the narrators tend to reminisce on the past. At one point, they are incapable of barely any movement, so that, when they look around,

> [the] recurring bicycles that the characters are unable to ride and the chairs that they can no longer sit on or the food their bodies no longer digest, function in a similar manner, accentuating the bodily disabilities of the characters.
>
> (Maude 2009, 13)

In relation to this, their inability is combined with the certainty of a past, lost ability and generates further anxiety of them, in a way similar to that expressed when characters in the trilogy say they would prefer to be amputated, meaning they would like to get rid of impotent limbs that enhance the constant presence of their own impotence.

In *Molloy*, both narrations are hidden under the motif of reports, but after that – in *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*, narrators are openly telling stories, inventing and looking at their past, a situation that fits Kristana Arp’s comment that “[s]ome old people spend hours thinking about and telling stories from their past” (2016, 141). In these works, remembering – with difficulty, is barely the one thing protagonists can do. Thus, the use of memory by characters who are trapped in immobile bodies emphasizes the relation between age and temporal and physical conditions. As Robert Kastenbaum (1980-1) puts it, there are difficulties in the assessment of ageing, “particularly the ‘contamination’ of ‘pure’ ageing by experiential, lifestyle, health, and situational variables” (159). Since they do not affect us the same, our responses are not the same either, but patterns exist according to which we perceive our body and ourselves and define who we are and how we feel. For Lynne Segal "what really matters is neither the sociology nor the biology of ageing, but the narrative of the self, the stories we tell ourselves of how to be our age as we age" (2013, xiv). In Beckett's novels, the narrative of ageing is pervasively negative until they reach a static point that seems to prolong the end of life. "It is a commonplace to think of old age as a short span of life preceding death," Kathleen Woodward says, "but Malone defines old age as a vast expanse of time that is followed by a short period of strange 'decomposition'" (1985, 141). Thus, *Malone Dies*, which for Barry is "the epitome of ageing in Beckett's work" (2016b, 208), shows a protagonist who has lost mobility and seems to have been in a terminal state for an unclear amount of time.

In fact, as noted in the previous chapter, the expansion of time is extreme in *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*. As mentioned in chapter four of this thesis, it is a common saying about Beckett's works – both fiction and drama, that "nothing happens" in them.[23] I would argue that things do happen, just in a way different to the traditional one. If any story is a point in a hypothetical bigger story, Beckett zooms in to the limit, so that he reaches a point close to the end in which time, due to such zooming in, has dilated to an extent in which it seems to have stopped, thus postponing an ultimate end in a seemingly permanent way. His stories, in the late fiction, take place in contexts in which time has lost its meaning. Hence the references by the Unnamable: "There are no days here, but I use the expression" (*TN*, 286), or: "I say years, though here there are no years. What matter how long? Years is one of Basil's ideas. A short time, a long time, it's all the same" (302). Similarly, the narrator of *How It Is* says he has "centuries of time" (*HII*, 9) and he is telling “this old life same old words same old scraps millions of times each time the first” (100). Childhood is so far away at this point that it is felt as alien as well: “that childhood said to have been mine” (50), and the feeling arises of “having been born octogenarian at the age when one dies in the dark the mud (50), i.e., of having always been in the same situation. It is in fact so far away that it is, as many aspects in narrators’ lives, negated and cancelled: “the childhood the belief the blue the miracles all lost never was” (50).

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[23] This was most famously expressed by Vivian Mercier in his critique on the première of *Waiting for Godot*, noting that Beckett managed to write a play "in which nothing happens, twice" (1956, 6). This, in turn, is related to Estragon's noticing in the play itself: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (*CDW*, 41), a pun that works as a reminder that Beckett was conscious about the nature of his own work.

Nevertheless, there is a positive aspect reserved to time in Beckett’s novels, namely its capacity to bring changes and transform actions, thanks to repetition and the accumulation of attempts to progress. This is expressed by the Unnamable:

> But perhaps one day he will stir, the day when the little effort of the early stages, infinitely weak, will have become, by dint of repetition, a great effort, strong enough to tear him from where he lies.
>
> (*TN*, 351)

As we see, weak efforts, when combined with time, may become a strong effort and convey an idea of relative success. A similar hope appears in *How It Is* when he says “keep trying one day it will be possible” (*HII*, 2), and later in the novel as well:

> if it will kindly be considered that while it is in our interest as tormentors to remain where we are as victims our urge is to move on
>
> and that of these two aspirations warring in each heart it would be normal for the latter to triumph if only narrowly
>
> (107)

This is representative of Beckett style as it evokes the above-mentioned idea of Beckett being against a wall and the obligation to go on: “the wall will have to move a little" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 29). In this sense, as mentioned in earlier chapters of this thesis, repetition is essential in Beckett's style, as it provides the only opportunity of change. This was most famously expressed by his "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (*WH*, 81). Ultimately, it is time what gives meaning to that quote. When combined to old age, it offers some kind of escape, which reveals itself not as success but as a different failure. Changes in the repetition are minimal, as mentioned by Moran with regard to the example of Sisyphus, or as suggested by Watt's speech adaptations. At the same time, this is illustrated by Beckett's assertion that "[t]here are many ways in which the thing [he is] trying to say in vain may be tried in vain to be said" (*TD*, 123). For these attempts to work – i.e. changing, while not solving, the situation, characters need a big amount of time, which necessarily involves ageing and further impairment.

Thus, the representation of old age combines both a particular idea of progress in the sense of repetition and an idea of eternal decay. Beckett seems to present a struggle in which physical and mental abilities progressively disappear while the number of attempts to advance continues to rise. Finally, action is minimal and the idea of death is more present than ever, which raises new questions about the characters' existence. The next point deals with the ideas of death, life and birth and how they merge with each other.

10.3. DEATH IN THE NOVELS

In Beckett's later works, old age is an experience lived by characters from within. At this point, the characters' inability becomes all encompassing, as is the case of Malone: "I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort, if I could wish, if I could make an effort" (*TN*, 173). They are incapable of finding a solution for their impairment but also of living with dignity in the sense of successfully fulfilling vital functions and everyday actions. However, the idea of suicide is never put to practice and is postponed, in the case of Malone blaming his impairment, in the case of Molloy with no explanation provided: "But the thought of suicide had little hold on me, I don't know why, I thought I did, but I see I don't. The idea of strangulation in particular, however tempting, I always overcame, after a short struggle" (*TN*, 73).

Treatment to death changes from Neary's hypochondria and "alarming conviction that every second was going to announce itself the first of his last ten minutes of a quarter of an hour on earth" (*M*, 133), which contrasts with Wylie's own conception of life as a syndrome that is "too diffuse to admit palliation" (35-36), towards a wider acceptation of death as it is perceived more closely. As we advance through Beckett's work, death is more strongly wished and comically longed for: "[Lousse's dog's] death must have hurt him less than my fall me. And he at least was dead" (*TN*, 30). As they approach death, narrators start to reflect on their life while keeping a distance from it, as if they had never actually lived or just forgot what that meant: "I say living without knowing what it is. I tried to live without knowing what I was trying [...] After the fiasco, the solace, the repose, I began again, to try and live" (189). The notion of fiasco, which was used in *Murphy* in reference to the social system, is now representative of a general disillusionment after failing to reach a proper way of living, and by extension related to a confusing world that provides no guidelines to survive it. As identity progressively dissolves, one's life becomes alien and confusing and the notion of not having lived properly raises questions about the borders between life and death itself. Thus, life is for Molloy a "long confused emotion," remembered only "since I have ceased to live [...], in the tranquility of decomposition" (21). Similarly, the Unnamable reckons he took himself for Mahood

(311), which highlights the alienation between present and past identities, and in *How It Is* we even find a physical separation between his past life "above" and his present life in the mud:

> my life above what I did in my life above a little of everything tried everything then gave up no worse always a hole a ruin always a crust never any good at anything not made for that farrago too complicated crawl about in corners and sleep all I wanted I got it nothing left but go to heaven
>
> (*HII*, 56)

In these cases, the separation between different times of their lives – and the words used, suggest that narrators might be in some kind of post-mortem situation. Molloy's ceasing to live should perhaps not be taken in a biological sense, but we can assume, as he does, that his state is closer to death than to life at least in social and physical terms, meaning his body is almost fully impaired and he has no longer contact with society. Thus, he is figuratively closer to death in those two senses – an approximation that is one of the meanings of "old age."

Their existence in temporal terms has been expanded to an extent in which protagonists find themselves "contemplating death" (*TN*, 186), and even seem to feel permanently at the borders of old age: "but what are four days when you have all old age before you, and then the lingers of evaporation, a drop in the ocean" (225). As a consequence, they choose to refer to their situation rather in terms of dying than of living: "I was on my way to my mother, whose charity kept me dying" (18), "I keep dying in a dying age" (*HII*, 9). The last novels change the conception of death from an event to a condition that can be extremely prolonged, which has led Georges Bataille to compare Molloy's wanderings to "habit or perseverance *in* death" (Gontarski 2007, 134, italics in the original). Similarly, Elizabeth Barry takes up Frank Kermode's assertion that "the end" is felt in these novels as immanent rather than imminent, meaning:

> a perpetual state of ending which is deprived of the promise of knowledge, realization and possible salvation that the end of life is traditionally accorded as part of a narrative arc which suggests some idea of completeness.
>
> (2016b, 210)

Due to this perception of an end of life that is not an event but a state, and to the failure to completing the life-course, characters despise life itself and show indifference towards the boundaries between life and death:

> But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am.
>
> (*TN*, 219)

In this sense, Beckett's late protagonists do not seem to find any meaningful difference, as if it were a matter of terminology. They find no interest in assessing their existence as life or death, they seem to only have consciousness of the present moment, and the certainty of being dead would make no difference in their necessity to go on, exhausting language and existence itself. In fact, there is doubt on whether death actually means an end: "Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave" (229). However, their monologue advances and it is by that indirect means that they notice, rather infer from things they tell, their being alive and leave a door open to that information: "I am still alive then. That may come in useful" (10).

However, narrators in the trilogy alternate the ways of referring to their own lives, perhaps unable to distinguish a static, passive life from death: "my life, now I speak of it as something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that?" (31). *Molloy*, in its alternation between present and past, reason and insanity, stands as one of the best examples of Beckett's aesthetics with regard to death and old age, as it introduces contradiction and indifference shown by later protagonists, as when Malone wonders whether he is dead: "Perhaps I expired in the forest, or even earlier" (220).

As the ideas of life and death – as a state, are increasingly similar in the eyes of protagonists, the motif of assimilating birth with death – as an event, is increasingly present in the late works. In the novels after the shift to first-person narration, Beckett's characters seem to get increasingly closer to the ideal of the wombtomb and move in the above-mentioned post-mortem situation, which has led to comparisons, from a medical perspective, to Cotard syndrome, in which patients might show the belief that they are dead (Fifield 2008, 170).

The link between birth and death is very present throughout Beckett's works, perhaps expressed in the most minimalistic way in *Breath* and most poetically in *Rockaby*, with its link between discourse, lullaby and death, and that between the movement of the rocking chair and a cradle. However, it is perhaps in the novels where it is expressed more explicitly. One of the clearest examples of this is perhaps that of the Unnamable's impression of "being given […] birth into death" (*TN*, 276). Curiously the feet, which were the first ones to fail in the bodies of the trilogy, are the first ones to leave "the great cunt of existence," as the narrator notes: "Favourable presentation I trust. My head will be the last to die" (276). As well as the inversion of the birth motif, in the sense that the feet come out in the first place, the head dying in the last place has a connotation of the mind – although impaired, being the last resort for immobile bodies, their last means to experience the world. For Tom Cousineau, "[t]he most striking feature of the major texts of this latter period is the serenity of their narrators, who have abandoned the hopes that had led their earlier incarnations to pursue futile quests," as the wish for a different life shown by Murphy and Belacqua disappears (1999, 138).

Moreover, the union between birth and death is especially clear when the Unnamable describes himself as follows:

> a sperm dying, of cold in the sheets, feebly wagging its little tail, perhaps I'm a drying sperm, in the sheets of an innocent boy [...] ah you can't deny it, some people are lucky, born of a wet dream and dead before morning.
>
> (*TN*, 373)

The passage is illustrating of Beckett's concern on the idea of "having never been properly born," which is present during the composition of many of his works and mentioned in the addenda to *Watt* (*W*, 207). The idea, borrowed form Carl Jung's lectures, might shape Beckett's thoughts of never experiencing life fully, of birth marking the start of a troublesome life. In this sense, this return to the womb symbolizes an "unresolved desire for quietude" that troubles these old men (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004, 290) and shows how Beckett, who claimed to remember his time in his mother's womb felt that, in his case, "psychic birth, the most fundamental transition, ha[d] not been realized" (290). Finally, and as Yoshiki Tajiri points out, physical paralysis experienced by Molloy, Moran and Malone "is reminiscent of the foetus constrained in the womb" (2007, 35). The room of Molloy's mother and the jar the Unnamable is in add to this sense of confinement and immobility that recall the womb as well, most clearly in the case of the mother's room for its obvious connotation.

In the end, the bleak representation of old age and death in the novels reinforces the overall effect achieved by the motifs mentioned in the previous sections and completes feelings of impotence, loss of power and abandonment. However, Beckett defies the norm inasmuch as he shows awareness of the effects these people's identities affect their experience when dealing with other individuals in society. Consequently, the last chapter of the thesis deals with some interesting variables when all three categories are combined and with Beckett's posture regarding social stigmas.

11. OLD AGE: INTERSECTIONS, THE SOCIAL STIGMA AND TAKING A STAND

> Vulnerability is the least celebrated emotion in our society
>
> Mohadesa Najumi, *The Red Car*

11.1. GENDERING AGEING STUDIES

During the last two decades, the most meaningful efforts on ageing studies have concurred around the idea of using feminist perspectives and strategies in order to provide a full picture of the issue. As mentioned above, there was a general opinion among scholars that they were facing an undertheorized field. As such field developed, the links of age with other sources of discrimination or oppression indicated a need for intersectional approaches in order to reach a global understanding and proper solutions. Most notably, for an important part of researchers it was increasingly evident that, as Jeff Hearn puts it, "[t]he sociology of ageing should be fully, not partially, gendered" (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, 98). Just as there are differing gender categories, there are differing age categories, that "correlate with differences in social power, status, and access to resources," and also "[f]orm part of systems of power relations that shape and are shaped by all other social hierarchies" (Gardiner 2002, 94). At the same time, in the words of Toni Calasanti:

> many feminist gerontologists (e.g., Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Estes, 2001; McMullin, 2000) acknowledge that gender is inextricably linked with other social inequalities such as race, ethnicity, sexual preference, and class. Each of these hierarchies comprises power relations in which the privilege of one group is tied, intentionally or not, to the oppression of another.
>
> (2004, S306)

Age is similar to gender in that it appears to have a biological basis (Gardiner 2002, 94), so theories of gender and age are easily combined and deal with similar forms of oppression. Nevertheless, "[t]o believe that we can understand the social world through a biological demarcation is to misunderstand the relation between bodies and social processes" (Rose 2010, 43-44). Therefore, while age partly defines people, it is not usually seen as an intrinsic attribute like gender (Gardiner 2002, 95), as we do not find a universal marker of "old" (Calasanti 2005, 10), but the perception rather varies according to the above-mentioned categories and others.

In order to find theoretical frameworks that are successful, the call for intersectionality is a traditional one in ageing studies. In the same line of the conclusions provided by Calasanti or Gardiner, Clary Krekula notes:

> older women have been the object of study, but not necessarily with theories that have a potential for understanding intersections of age and gender, together with other central positions such as ethnicity, class, sexuality and disability.
>
> (2007, 156)

In the first stages of theoretical work on gender, Woman was conceptualized homogeneously in order to create a "strong political subject" (156) in opposition to Man as another homogeneous group. Eventually, scholars noted that Woman is in fact a diverse concept and a general conception ignored such diversity, rendering many women invisible in the model, in a way similar to the effects of hegemonic masculinity dealt with in chapter five. The reality of invisibility is exemplified by the fact that some of the main theorists in gender studies, such as Betty Friedan or Simone de Beauvoir, based the model of woman they criticized to a great extent in that of the housewife whose role is reduced to taking care of the house and children. That is the "Woman," but yet, by such definition, "many women and their experiences are left out. The images of the younger woman, of the childless woman and of the no longer working older woman become invisible" (Krekula 2007, 158). As a consequence, the necessity has been determined from gender studies to investigate "how masculinities and femininities vary as these intersect with age relations" (Calasanti 2004, S306), while from ageing studies a relative lack of concern with gender relations has been detected, which indicates the necessity to study the interaction between masculinities and other power relations "to construct old age" (S307). The relationship between both fields is reciprocal, as the value of attention to age categories has been noted to "complicate, depolarize, and contextualize discussions of gender" as well (Gardiner 2002, 107).

Thus, the relationship between age and gender has been studied for decades, leading to different conclusions. One of the earliest meaningful analyses on the implications of gender in relation to ageing is that made by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Coming of Age*. This work deals with men and the change of their construction when facing the ageing process and old age. This follows Beauvoir's interpretation that:

> the women, both young and old, may perfectly well lay claim to authority in private, but in public life their status is always the same – that of perpetual minors. The masculine state, on the contrary, changes with the passage of time: the young man becomes an adult, a citizen, and the adult an old man.
>
> (Beauvoir 1970, 134)

In her view, men would be the ones whose position is affected the most when reaching old age, as they have an agency to lose in the world, and when that happens, their condition is equated to that of women, for these never had such agency. Men lose power, but women were never allowed to have it in the first place. Following Beauvoir's argument, ageing would affect the construction of men more than that of women. However, this is only one interpretation of the relationship among a number of them that would appear with time. Regarding Beauvoir’s view, Lynne Segal wittily detects in *Out of Time* (2013) that “she held this view both despite, and also because of, the feminism she by then espoused” (77). In this sense, Segal is understanding that, as striking as it might be to picture men as the group who suffers the most in that context, that is a conclusion that comes from a feminist consideration that problematized old age for its capacity to subtract power from the individual. If we accept the idea of male privilege, it is logical that men have more privilege to lose than women.

Nevertheless, other feminist thinkers soon spotlighted otherwise. In “The Double Standard of Aging” (1972), Susan Sontag reflects on the importance of attractiveness and how it works differently for men and women. She claims that beauty is more important in the life of women – as she calls it “[their] business in this society” (1972, 35), than in that of men – while at the same time beauty standards and models might work in different ways. For Sontag, discrimination in this sense works as follows:

> Only one standard of female beauty is sanctioned: the *girl*. The great advantage men have is that our culture allows two standards of male beauty: the *boy* and the *man*. [...] [When a man becomes] heavier, rougher, more thickly built [...] he has only exchanged one form of attractiveness for another.
>
> (35, italics in the original)

When they are old, women are still required to have young, clear skin in their bodies and faces. Sontag’s argument counters that of Beauvoir in that it depicts the aesthetic oppression towards women, but both can coexist and be true. This is one of the problems of investigating old age: it is an unclear and unstable concept, often lacking defined boundaries, and it both works at various levels and can be read from various perspectives, so analyses can sometimes appear contradictory at first. Of course, the need to clarify all this is also a cause for the interest in investigation. In “The Double Standard of Aging," Sontag discusses how old age has different meanings and implications for men and women, explaining how women are affected more negatively by ageing than men. The importance put by society on women's bodies and physicality contrasts to that put on men's minds. While ageing can imply an acquirement of wisdom, this is conceded to men, but the focus when it comes to women usually stays on the aesthetic level and the loss of beauty in the body. This notion of a double standard of ageing is directly related to Dowd and Bengtson's hypothesis of double jeopardy in social gerontology. As Krekula (2007) has explained, this hypothesis:

> builds on the assumption that prejudices and discriminations against a minority group are worse when combined with prejudices against another disadvantaged group.
>
> (161)

On his part, Jeff Hearn has noted that greater age has been a major source of power for men. In this sense, he has stated that, since we live in a male-centrist society, all three stages of a man's life might be linked to certain positive aspects, all of them might signify power.

> Older age [...] not just through the historical carry over of generational and patriarchal power, but through mental labour-power and the accumulation of resources.
>
> Middle age [...] through formal, organizational statuses as well as through physical labour-power and indeed patriarchal power.
>
> Youth: through physical strength, body shape, cultural image, and sexual virility. [...]

> This may help to explain why age has such a contradictory significance for men. [...] The important issue is that age is construed as a maker of power, or as a reference point of power, even when power is lacking.
>
> (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, 102)

In fact, this is representative of a male-centrist worldview. An external agent as age, in the sense that it cannot be changed by the individual, is always positive for men, while women stay as they are, i.e., powerless. However, there is another point of view that allows us to say that the features we perceive in an old man contradict those that Raewyn Connell originally attributed to hegemonic masculinity (Calasanti 2004, S307). Furthermore, Calasanti has noted how age relations "shape manhood such that old men are often depicted as 'other,' even those who may be able to approach hegemonic masculinity" (S307).

In any case, age intersects with disability and gender, and with other categories as well, to create more complex relationships of power that shape the individuals' identities. In the end, Beckett's protagonists are affected by these systems, and the way these intersections are depicted suggests the author's positioning with regard to issues of oppression.

11.2. INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

Samuel Beckett's depiction of women is at first sight coherent with the idea of associating youth with beauty in women. Descriptions that in his first novels are sexualized and focused on beauty and the body keep that focus over time, and the superficial devotion present in *Dream* advances towards disgust and disparagement in the late novels.

When Molloy thinks about women in his life, he dismisses them doubting whether they might be “one and the same old hag” (*TN*, 54). This is representative of Beckett’s own relation with his mother as discussed in chapter seven of this thesis. Mothers, in their condition of old women, receive an especially negative representation. In this sense, Molloy runs over Lousse’s dog on his bicycle and describes him as “old, blind, deaf, crippled with rheumatism and perpetually incontinent” (*TN*, 28). The description, as Ato Quayson has noted, “uncannily echoes” Molloy’s description of his mother: she is “deaf as a post,” a “deaf blind impotent mad old woman,” and “quite incontinent, both of faeces and water” (2007, 58). On the other hand, the fact that Molloy is an old man but has “not yet come to terms with his mother” implies “that his failure to develop properly began long ago, and that the chance of therapeutic success is therefore slight” (O’Hara 1997, 113). Therefore, in *Molloy*, the presence of a threatening mother appears in archetypal images and Molloy shows his hostility to her, which shows how he is “in the latter half of life and still far from individuation” (113).

As Kathleen Woodward has noted:

> the male fear of woman as the all-engulfing mother is exacerbated when women grow old; moreover, in psychoanalysis the attraction to the mother is understood as a taboo, and the older woman necessarily occupies the position of the mother or, worse, the grandmother.
>
> (Featherstone and Wernick 1995, 87)

This seems to be related to Beckett’s depiction of old women. The difficult relationship with his mother and her “savage loving” (*L*, 552) might have intensified disturbing pictures of old women in general. Due to the traditional models, the woman who is not in childbearing age anymore becomes an Other in the hegemonic model. At the beginning of his career, Beckett’s protagonists seem to assess old women’s ability to procreate, as shown by Belacqua's reference to the mother of Smeraldina-Rima: "that competent multipara" (*DR*, 149). In this sense, the number of children seems to modify the construction of women but not of men, which is yet another disparity.

In general terms, there is a difference in the assessment of the body of men and that of women: "For women, appearance in terms of sexual attractiveness prevails; for men, appearance means looking like one can 'perform'" (Calasanti 2005, 10). This seems to be true in the early novels and in the story about Lambert in *Malone Dies*, who is concerned about his ability to continue working. As noted above, this is also a consequence of a capitalist view of people in terms of means of production and related to other chapters of this thesis. In the case of old men, disability coming from their age affects their masculinity in terms of sexual performance as well. It is the case of the Unnamable, who notes "I have lost all my members, with the exception of the onetime virile" (*TN*, 321). The model in Beckett functions according to Calasanti's observation, since impotence for the Unnamable is represented in terms of sexual virility, and in the case of the fishwoman met by Watt, whom we are told is "of an advanced age and by nature also denied those properties that attract men to women" (*W*, 113). In this sense, old women are assessed according to their attractiveness, while men assess themselves in terms of virility, labour force and bodily abilities. Not only in sexual terms, but the above-mentioned idea of men getting authority and wisdom, i.e., power, with the coming of age is attacked elsewhere in Beckett too. Thus, the narrator of *Mercier and Camier* notes that "[o]ld men weep quite readily, contrary to what one might have expected" (*MAC*, 94). Ultimately, Beckett's fiction is not a case in which women are mistreated to a greater extent than men.

In any case, the overwhelming presence of disability in the novels shapes the role of men further. Bodily decline can be frightening "since it associates the male body with weakness, dependency and passivity, qualities that men might have dedicated a lifetime to protect themselves against" (Krekula 2007, 162). Beckett's male characters seem to age prematurely and, although they do not express that fear, they are certainly limited by old age. This is emphasized with the inclusion of disturbing and disgusting images. Thus, Beckett counters the idea, remarked by Toni Calasanti, that

> [b]ecause the culture equates health with goodness and moral virtue, and most people think health is apparent on the surface, we take those who "look good" to be healthy. Attractiveness and health are thus linked […].
>
> (2005, 10)

In other words, ageing implies a decline in physical and mental conditions, which are marked by multiple pathologies and alterations of body and cognition. In *Out of Time*, Lynne Segal points out: "The one thing that both young and old people, men and women alike, seem most to hate about the notion of old age is that it symbolizes forms of 'dependency'" (2013, 35), which, as noted in chapter eight, is the essence of relationships in the Beckettian universe.

Nevertheless, Beckett's depiction of old women is problematic in this context in that it is, ultimately, not very different to that of old men. We cannot conclude that Beckett's old male protagonists are placed in better situations than his old female characters as the traditional dual structure is uncertain here and protagonists, whom Beckett seems to stand by, do not seem to benefit from any privilege whatsoever that could distance them from the position of women. The measure of man in the mid-twentieth century is success at several levels, especially on love and career-related issues. Such ideas of success are challenged and reassessed after the World Wars, attacked by the existentialists and most illustratively by Beckett and his subversion of the success-failure duality. As a consequence, the representation of men in his novels is essentially anti-hegemonic in its conception and exposition, and joins the questioning of identity itself.

Thus, there are many instances of Beckett's thought countering the traditional associations between age and health or attractiveness. In *Watt*, we are told that the fishwoman has lost her attractive properties, but also that "of all the women who had ever pleased him up till then, not one could hold a candle to this fishwoman, in Watt's opinion" (*W*, 113). This shows physical attractiveness as an irrelevant element for Watt, a situation that goes against standards based on the body. The relationship between characters is no longer affected by gender or sexuality issues, and a double standard does not work anymore.

On the other hand, just as death does, old age brings the experiences of both genders closer between them. The fact that it blurs identities affects sexual identities as well, and the human experience is shared by both genders, as *Watt* explains:

> No, it is not the heart, no, it is not the liver, no, it is not the prostate, no it is not the ovaries, no, it is muscular, it is nervous. Then the gnashing ends, or it goes on, and one is in the pit, in the hollow, the longing for longing gone, the horror of horror, and one is in the hollow, at the foot of all the hills at last, the ways down, the ways up, and free, free at last, for an instant free at last, nothing at last.

(*W*, 165-166)

Again, Beckett provides an image of equality when facing death, and when noting that the prostate and ovaries are not involved, he seems to be enhancing the idea that death has the same meaning for both genders. Finally, it is worth to address the position suggested by Beckett's representations, in order to see where he stands in relation to his characters.

11.3. SOCIAL STIGMAS AND TAKING A STAND

As this thesis has shown before, Samuel Beckett's male characters very often have troubles in society due to the dissipation of the body and their general failure to meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity, especially in the trilogy. This way, protagonists are devoid of any privileges they could have for being men. Again, this is shown by the encounter between Molloy and Lousse when Molloy runs over and kills her dog. When the crowd is about to lynch him for that, it is the woman who assesses the situation best and defends him:

> But it is clear he has not all his wits about him, that he is beside himself, for reasons of which we know nothing and which might put us all to shame, if we did know them. I even wonder if he knows what he has done.
>
> (*TN*, 29)

It is she who at first sight takes for granted that Molloy is not "normal" nor aware of his acts and adopts a paternalist position to protect him. Even though the protagonist has just killed her dog, she is the one who stops the raging crowd. Cumulative jeopardies on Molloy eventually threaten his identity, which *per se* is a notion at risk in Beckett. In this sense, the existence in social terms of Beckettian characters is better explained by Deborah K. King's notion of *multiple jeopardy* and Patricia Hill Collins's *matrix of domination*. Drawing from the above-mentioned idea of double jeopardy, King uses the term multiple jeopardy to refer "not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism" (King 1988, 47). She uses the term in a context of black feminism and class, but the notion is useful to refer to the relationship between other social oppressions, and could as well be expressed by the formula "ableism multiplied by sexism multiplied by ageism." We can even include classism in the equation, since Beckett's protagonists are sometimes tramps, or so they look in the eyes of society, as is the case of Mercier, Camier and Molloy. To use Patricia Hill Collins words, the combination of oppressions would create a "matrix of domination," referring to:

> how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression.
>
> (1990, 18)

The term refers to "the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society" and any specific matrix has "a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression" (1990, 299). In relation to this, protagonists in the novels are certainly affected by this combination of oppression. The Unnamable, for example, sums up many non-normative aspects that threaten identity of a man in the following passage:

> at your age, to have no identity, it's a scandal. [...] here's the record, insults to policemen, indecent exposure [...], impertinence to superiors, impudence to inferiors, deviations from reason [...] does he work, good God no, out of the question, look here's the medical report, spasmodic tabes, painless, ulcers, I repeat, painless, all is painless, multiple softenings, manifold hardenings, insensitive to blows, sight failing, chronic gripes, light diet, shit well tolerated, hearing failing, heart irregular, sweet-tempered, smell failing, heavy sleeper, no erections [...]
>
> (*TN*, 370)

This excerpt could be a valid universal model for protagonists from *Molloy* onwards. Not only is the man's masculinity dismantled – no erections, he does not work, and he is also fundamentally disabled, but his behaviour in society is not normative either, as he is indecent and disrespectful. His insults to policemen are actually illustrative of his defiance to rules, and above all, social rules. Finally, all of this is combined to the reference of the “scandal” of not having an identity when he is already an old person. In this sense, Beckett’s characters do not follow a regular path of building an identity of their own as they grow. In fact, they rather lose whatever identity they had as they live on. The subversion of the Bildungsroman Susan Mooney talks about becomes actually an inversion, a path towards non-identity as what defines them – i.e., their physicality and masculinity, progressively dissipates.

Similarities between old age and other forms of exclusion appear throughout Beckett’s works. It is the case of Macmann being in the House Saint John of God and asking Lemuel, his caretaker, if it is “private or run by the State, for aged or a madhouse,” and whether he can go out and how (*TN*, 259), although he never gets a proper answer. This way, the treatment and stigma of old age and mental disability are placed together.

The most representative case is that of Molloy, if only because he is the last character in Beckett with real contact with society in the present moment. Decomposition of body and mind is so extreme in the subsequent novels that a proper assessment of social behaviour and roles becomes all the more problematic. At the beginning of his story, when stating the reasons and context of his journey, Molloy says: “I was on my way to my mother, whose charity kept me dying” (18). His dependency on his mother counters hegemonic models at several levels: first, it counters the model of masculinity because he is not independent, he depends on a woman’s charity, both economically and emotionally. Such independence is not only necessary for a man in terms of gender but also for any adult according to prevailing standards of age. The fact that he needs not only to borrow money from her mother but to work on his reports in a situation with an aura of confinement and obligation, is all the more striking since he is depicted as far passing a standard age of retirement, and is coherent with the idea that socioeconomic position may limit the chances to shape one's own process of ageing (Baars 1991, 1). Even though his situation of dependency may make sense due to his extremely advanced age, the idea is more complex due to the fact that he depends on someone who is even older than him. Finally, her charity does not keep him living but *dying*, which implies both that his age puts him closer to death than to life in chronological terms and that his abilities – physical, mental, social, are as well closer to those of a dead person than to those of the living.

Other critique on stigma seems to appear in *Mercier and Camier*, as the protagonists reflect on their exclusion in sexual and romantic terms. They note:

> Venal love is the only kind left to us, said Mercier. Passion and dalliance are reserved for blades like you.
>
> And solitary enjoyment, said Camier.
>
> (*MAC*, 87)

It shows how the stigma of old age affects the sexual identification of people, leaving them apart from normative love relationships and relegating them to prostitution and masturbation. Moreover, the term "venal" refers to purchasing a service, but it also has a connotation of dishonesty, showing that characters resign but are concerned about their situation. In the same way, we are told that Camier, and most probably Mercier as well, stinks "with the double stink of the old and the unwashed, that strongish smell" (87), in a way emphasizing the image of misery and indigence characteristic of Beckett's tramps. The novel also shows the fact that "[w]here there is no personal connexion, adults feel a contempt not unmixed with disgust for the aged" (Beauvoir 1970, 326) and are often ridiculed.

In the end, Beckett combines a number of social stigmas and identity conflicts with apparently no condescendence but an underlying feeling of mercy. On the one hand, his works definitely deal with distress, a fact he discussed in an interview with Tom Driver in 1961. In the interview, he talks about an encounter with someone who inquired about the author's childhood, anticipating it must have been a troubled one, due to the portraits of misery found in his works. Beckett claimed that he had in fact had a very happy one, but that misery is around us all the time. When he took the taxi home, the glass partition showed three signs:

> one asked for help for the blind, another help for orphans, and the third for relief for the war refugees. One does not have to look for distress. It is screaming at you even in the taxis of London.
>
> (Quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 221)

Elain Showalter, in her introduction to Lynne Segal's *Out of Time*, wisely highlights: "Laughter, rather than another documentary on Alzheimer's or a nice night out to see Michael Haneke's film *Amour*, is among the truest pleasures and consolations of ageing" (Segal 2013, xviii). This seems to apply to Beckett as well, as humour is probably the only element that is as present as images of misery and impotence. As a matter of fact, it might be the only element that saves Beckett's novels from defeat.

Beckett does show a traditional representation of old age in the sense that it carries disability with it, but it is a struggling old age, one that fights to conquer its dignity against all odds. Although victory is never represented or attained, I would argue that the struggle itself is what gives them dignity, and that is what Beckett's style is about. He does not explicitly subvert the image but the message. He does link old age with impairment, but not as a mark of an Other, but as the unmarked, universal One. In this sense, the difference between Beckett and an author who restores positive values of old, impaired men, is that he puts the Other at the centre of his *oeuvre*. Beckett seems to find the features traditionally associated to old age legitimate and representative of the human condition itself, and he does not seem to care much about what that means in their construction as men.

“MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD JOB”:

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has analysed the representations of disability, gender and old age in Samuel Beckett's novels, as well as the relationships between themselves and with the author's artistic thought. In the first section, focused on disability, we saw how Samuel Beckett uses it to represent his own inability to understand and explain life and the world. This works in two directions: as he recognizes the value of disabled individuals, the author is vindicating their importance and legitimacy in society. Notwithstanding his being a cryptic author, we clearly perceive elements of critique and interest in the characters' helpless minds, fragmented speech and lack of movement. Just as Beckett does not "give us hope for free," as mentioned in such section, he does not want to instruct us or soften the image of disabled people, either, but rather seems to express that there is nothing to soften. From a general point of view, Beckett does not seem to differentiate between a "fully abled" person and a deaf or amnesic person: the world is equally incomprehensible for both of them, i.e., for all of us. Beckett, as we saw in the case of *Murphy*, seems to feel more comfortable with the vision of the world held by patients in the asylum than with that of people outside it, and tries in fact to offer harsh critiques on stigma here and there, such as the mistreatment by caretakers or the scorn of society in the case of *Molloy*. Beckett uses characters unable to properly deal with their lives as a means to represent his own personal difficulties. The fact that characters perceive incoherence in the world entails a conflict with Western thought, which at the same time is founded on patriarchy. Thus, an attack on the main conventions and structures of thought is *per se* an action against hegemonic masculine standards. This way, according to Lusty and Murphet,

> [a]fter World War II, Beckett begins an unprecedented assault on patriarchy and the

> value system of Western masculinity, which is, in effect, an assault on our ability to know and understand what it means to be human.
>
> (2014, 4)

On the other hand, this conflict is supported and developed by the specific representations of gender in Beckett. As he moves towards indifference in his treatment of gender, he is thus not as direct in his commitment as in the case of disability. After his "revelation," it is hardly impossible to find characters with normative bodies. In the case of gender, more open references appear to homosexual and other non-reproductive practices, but we still find references to women that remain problematic for anyone who would try to classify Beckett plainly as feminist – or even profeminist. In relation to this, Elin Diamond has said that "Beckett had no known allegiance to feminism per se and he consistently denied any political or social motives to his deracinated characters and bleak landscapes" (Oppenheim 2004, 45). However, I would argue that choosing specific representations and themes is a political action itself, especially when, as in the case of Beckett, this choice consists in recovering marginalized individuals and resignifying their roles. In this sense, and in line with the classic feminist slogan that "the personal is political," we can say that certain themes and the ways they are dealt with encourage political rethinking.

It would be certainly difficult to label Beckett as feminist inasmuch as he denies any clear political background and rejects the idea of writing prescriptive literature, meaning he does not have a proactive position. In that sense, he often seems to be beyond any gender debate, but it is true that in his final works the boundaries that constitute the basis of a gender-based regulation are blurred, regardless of the intention. In the end, the author thus keeps avoiding dualistic gender divisions and finally offers a reflection on loneliness and the (genderless) need of company in the most existential sense. That is what is left at the end: Moran, a hard, traditional man, is abandoned by his son and his maid; Malone invents characters hoping they will stay with him; the narration in *How It Is* is structured around the presence and absence of Pim – as the purpose itself is to tell "how it was" before, with and after him, and so on. Eventually, all of them show gratitude for care and company, which was not so apparent at the beginning of the author's career, since in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *Murphy*, for instance, characters are in trouble and despise their female counterparts more, meaning they do not thank them for their concern. Mercier and Camier express a similar fear for loneliness, illustrated by their strong union and reciprocal dependency, later reproduced in *Waiting for Godot*, and more concretely with their question of "what would one do without women" (*MAC*, 55). In the later works, narrators reach an unmatched level of sincerity, as shown by Malone's and the Unnamable's expressing fear about their female caretakers abandoning them, or the narrator of *How It Is* desperately calling for his partner Pim, finally accepting his own loneliness. In such a situation, it is easy to understand that the gender of the helping hand – "or merely charitable" (*TN*, 375), is not relevant. In that sense, the idea of solidarity is highlighted above any gender differences. Finally, the feeling aroused by the later novels (and short stories and theatre plays beyond that) seems both "sexless and ageless," as Billie Whitelaw says of *Not I*, concluding that "I just don't think of Beckett in terms of gender or age" (Ben-Zvi 1990, 4).

In relation to that, it has been observed that, in the late novels, "[the characters'] bodies putrefy and prematurely age as if the loss of social and linguistic abilities has contaminated by extension their biological lives" (Louar 2018, 74). The categories studied in this dissertation act as a whole and affect the protagonists' experiences and identities. Thus, the despair undergone by Beckett's characters is often reflected in their own bodies. For example, the Unnamable's "[c]an it be that one day [...] I simply stayed in [...]. Perhaps that is how it began" (*TN*, 285) is similar to the words by a woman to Betty Friedan, "[t]hen you wake up one morning and there's nothing to look forward to" (Friedan 1963, 22) or to Goethe's "[a]ge takes hold of us by surprise" (quoted in Beauvoir 1970, 339). In the end, all of them show pain caused by impotence and by being in an unforeseen inescapable situation that is representative of disability, women, men that do not fit hegemonic masculinity and/or old people, and which is used by Beckett as a metaphor for both life and his artistic thought. In the end, the overall effect is still a devolution of male power, as, for example, "*Not I* instantiates the loss of male power-positions, and instantiates the power of a woman's speech and gesture" (Gidal 1986, 27). Men in theatre are not very different from men in the novels, and women are more present but, again, gender differences in general disappear as Beckett focuses on more abstract issues of pain and trauma.

In the same way, some of the marks in Beckett's theatre are prefigured in his late novels – namely premature ageing, grey or white hair, and ghostly appearance. Notwithstanding these aspects reminiscent of the author's prose, like protagonists reduced to heads in urns and limited mobility, in his late theatre we find bodies that do not show so visible physical impairments, but they are effectively disabled for the limitation of movement patterns. One explanation might be, as mentioned above, that Beckett in fact turns to theatre to make the most of movement motifs and that characters are ghostly representations of minds, as the idea that action takes place inside the head suggests (see Knowlson and Pilling 1979, xiii).

The inclusion of these alternative configurations of lives and bodies is enhanced when added to Beckett's attack on literary conventions and his stubbornness to join form and content. For his novels but also his drama, Beckett chose an unconventional mode of expression that systematically destroyed ideas of linear time, dialogue, plot and characters. Symptomatic of his particular style is the common saying that, as mentioned, in his first play "nothing happens" (Mercier 1956, 6). Nevertheless, the genre does affect the concretization of his ideas. More specifically, minds appear in theatre as broken as in the novels, but Beckett is able to present it in more visual ways, for example through the inclusion of Doppelgänger in the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, where the only two characters, Reader and Listener, are "as alike in appearance as possible" (*CDW*, 445). Similarly, speech in *Not I* is a frantic confusing discourse which is at times reminiscent of that in *The Unnamable*, and many of the protagonists in that period talk about relevant or traumatic events of their own past, in monologues with styles similar to those found in the trilogy or *How It Is*. However, a remarkable aspect is Beckett's recovery and emphasis on movement. In *Rockaby*, Beckett combines the inescapability of the discourse in representation of a trapped mind with the repetitive movement of the rocking chair in which the protagonist sits, a movement that is explicitly linked to speech in the script: they both start, stop, slow down and end together. Most meaningfully, Beckett provides diagrams of the movement to be made by protagonists in plays such as *Footfalls* and *Quad* (see Annex 2), the latter being wordless and having been referred to as a "ballet for four people" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2010, 472). Thanks to such devices, Beckett makes the most of the particular traits of theatre, so that part of the importance of the discourse of the novels is, in theatre, placed on, or at the very least linked to, the force of image, movement and pattern repetition.

Interestingly enough, Monique Wittig presents in "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" (1983) a series of reflections on literature which are very relevant to our purpose here of assessing Beckett's rupture with tradition and his active effort to link form and content. It is curiously convenient that Wittig, who made essential contributions to (lesbian) feminism, connected certain aesthetic convictions and claims to the representation of traditionally oppressed or invisible groups. She did indeed argue that "since Proust we know that literary experimentation is a favoured way to bring a subject to light. This experimentation is the ultimate subjective practice, a practice of the cognitive subject" (1983, 64-65). Thus, the recurrent ambiguity found in Beckett's works, the subversion of the preference of reason above feeling, truth above falseness, clashes with traditional Western thought, which, based on hierarchical dualities, has always favoured speech over silence, success over failure, ability over disability. This is the unexplored region of art with which Samuel Beckett seems to be centrally concerned. As we have seen throughout the present dissertation, Beckett takes traditionally dismissed conditions frontstage, and he increasingly prefers to show the old before the young, the impaired before the fully capable, ignorance before knowledge. The characters' despair and inability to make sense of their world mirror similar feelings of the artist, which are in turn reflected in text and language themselves: the narration is as unstable as the narrator's mind, its advance is slower and harder as the characters' legs become more and more ineffective. In relation to this, Wittig insists that form and content go hand in hand, and that "a writer's practice consists in constantly reactivating letter [signifier] and meaning [signified], for, like the letter, meaning vanishes. Endlessly" (68). This does indeed seem to apply to Beckett, too, who recurrently complained about the inability of conventional literary forms to express meaning. As Lawrence Shainberg noted:

> Form is offered because, as [Beckett] has so often remarked, that is an obligation before which one is helpless, but any pretense that it will endure is constantly shown to be just that, pretense and nothing more, a game the author can no longer play and doesn't dare relinquish. "I know of no form," he said, "that does not violate the nature of Being in the most unbearable manner."
>
> (Shainberg 1987, 105)

In turn, this provides an explanation for what this thesis has described as Beckett's practices of self-cancellation and reformulation. Beckett lives and writes in contradiction and, for him, to deny the value of a specific utterance is not enough: it must be uttered, one must confirm its uselessness "just in case," and then proceed to try another way and go on. This is explained by Molloy in his naming his mother Mag: "Ma" for his need to state her, "g" to cancel her. So, Beckett's idea of writing seems to be close to Monique Wittig's, except for the fact that for him the meaning of the word does not disappear, it never exists properly. What for other writers might be updating the meaning of the text, for Beckett is rather a prolonged effort to reach meaning, to bypass that "violation" of Being found in every textual form. For Shainberg, Beckett thus reaches a new level of reality in which he ends up exposing himself: Molloy's change of mind is Beckett's, Molloy's ignorance is Beckett's. Such an exposition would explain why, though many "speak of Joyce or Proust or other masters in terms of genius, so many writers will speak of Beckett in terms of courage" (Shainberg 1987, 105). Beckett seemed to have these issues in mind in his own way, and repeatedly commented on the relationship between the form and meaning of the word.[24] This thesis has shown that, just as he is concerned about the form of words, he deliberately chooses specific representations of body, gender, and age that might help him convey the final meaning he is looking for. In this sense, form meets content in Beckett at a new level. Such union was praised by himself when he found it in Joyce's *Wake,* stating that:

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[24] As an illustrative example, Loreto Casado, in her lecture "*Mirlitonnades* de Samuel Beckett" at the International Samuel Beckett International Conference 2018, reflected on Beckett's concern about the case of *birth*, an essential word for him. According to Casado, Beckett appreciated how the pronunciation of the word involved the tongue coming out between the teeth, a feature reminiscent, for the author, of the baby's physical arrival to the world. Thus, *birth* would have for Beckett a more complete or effective meaning, due to the convenience of its form, than its counterpart in, for example, French, in which *naissance* lacks this specific element, while Spanish *nacimiento*, on its part, preserves it. The importance of form and accuracy for Beckett is well known, and commented by Lawrence Shainberg in "Exorcising Beckett" (1987): "Though [*Endgame*] was thirty years old for him and he believed that his memory had deteriorated, his memory of the script was flawless and his alertness to its detail unwavering. 'That's not 'upon.' It's 'on.'' He corrected 'one week' with 'a week,' 'crawlin'' with 'crawling'" (116).

> Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read — or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself* [...]. When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep [...]. When the sense is dancing, the words dance [...] How can we qualify this general esthetic vigilance without which we cannot hope to snare the sense which is for ever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself?
>
> (*DI*, 32-33, italics in the original)

lndeed, in "Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," Beckett confronts critics and discusses such union as a requirement for the best writing. He deplores the situation, defends Joyce and explains that the more arbitrary the form is, the higher amount of essential content is lost:

> You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. [...] The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension. [*Finnegans Wake]* should be proof against the usual volley of cerebral sniggers.
>
> (*DI*, 31-32)

So, Beckett's articulation of discourse seems to be driving both form and content towards the visibilization of minorities and obscure areas of human knowledge. Content is complete only in combination with form, which involves the author's placing stigmatized groups at the centre of his novels, giving them the role of protagonists and narrators. As a consequence, if Joyce's writing is "that something itself", Beckett's novels are very close to become impotence or failure themselves thanks to Beckett's choice of old, disabled characters. His way of depicting what one would probably prefer to ignore, and his tackling an androcentric scheme, has led scholars to find a "feminization" in his writing. While we, as mentioned above, find difficulties in labelling Beckett a feminist or profeminist author, his placing human dilemmas above gender issues, whether consciously or unconsciously, makes his *oeuvre* a feminized one, meaning, in Linda Ben-Zvi's words, "a conscious attempt to subvert hierarchy, categorization and objectification; to inveigh against power and privilege (fascistic or linguistic); and to seek new ways of thinking, of talking, and of writing" (Stewart 1999, 15). Thus, Beckett "permitted the other to invade his discourse" (Oppenheim 2004, 62), thus undermining "linguistic patrimony and phallic privilege" (Stewart 1999, 14). This dissertation has delved into the literary devices and implications of this feminization, highlighting how form and content combine to convey meaning, so that broken discourses match impaired bodies, impotent discourses match people and narrators who have lost male power, and exhausted discourses match tired old characters. In the words of Monique Wittig:

> Form and content correspond to the body/soul division [...]. Through literature then we can learn something that should be useful in any other field: in words form and content cannot be dissociated, because they partake of the same form, the form of a word, a material form.
>
> (1984, 48-49)

Ultimately, the essence of the style of Samuel Beckett is one of visibility against taboo. When Beckett tells Tom Driver about a new form that "will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that it is really something else" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 219), he is in fact showing that he has no will to hide reality, let alone cover it with words. Nor does he try to make sense of it. As eminently nonprescriptive, his literature does not step into those areas. It does not actively defend alternative configurations of body, gender or age, but it simply represents them, acknowledging their existence and treating them as normal. Thus, most things are not directly vindicated by Beckett. For example, in the case of Molloy, who does not know if his lover was a man or a woman, and suggests sexual intercourse with men, he lives both situations with normality. Beckett does not reflect on those situations, yet the fact that these are exposed with neutrality may have stronger effects than an open claim of defence. In this sense, the indifference resulting from Beckett's career does not seem an indifference to invisibility or rejection, but one of a rather "democratizing" or liberating kind. It is when Beckett accepts failure as the only possible outcome that the representation of his main themes becomes really universal. In so doing, he progressively abandons any earthly representation of conflicts, thereby avoiding the irrelevant aspects that belong to such representation. Thus, narrators refuse to display coherent identities, just as Beckett himself refuses to accept dialectical thought. In this sense, narrators eventually stop telling stories and stop seeking, for that is when "you make short work of it" (*TN*, 393). As Molloy puts it, "the less I think of it the more certain I am" (8). However, by refusing to have an identity, they challenge any norm that intends to label them in simplistic ways, especially according to traditional biological categories. In the end, Beckett's (often disgusting) images of body and behaviour entail a subversion of traditional models of disability, masculinity and old age that can be read as both an artistic and a political posture due to their relationship with the construction of one's identity. As Linda Ben-Zvi has noted:

> Their evocative power is what provides the potential of "ugly feelings," as [Sianne] Ngai suggests, to undermine traditional notions of beauty, and traditional social,

> political, and cultural hierarchies as well. They can also, as in the case of writers, undermine traditional forms of writing. Beckett is a case in point.
>
> (2011, 686-687)

The fact that he often chose "ugly" individuals as protagonists for his novels, alongside the underlying feelings of empathy and piety they generate, seems to suggest that he was standing on the same side as his characters, as both the things he tells and the form he uses tend to coincide. He does not tell it from an external point, but shares their subjectivity. In other words, he produced works whose style seems to deal with the same impotence and inability as his characters do. No wonder, then, that Beckett has often been used as an example, however unintended, to illustrate the specific dilemmas of old people and, as recently as in 2013, by Lynne Segal to relate him to what Jack Halberstam calls "the queer art of failure":

> To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die, rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy (2011, 187). That sounds promising in relation to reflections on the experiences of ageing, for which Beckett's "Fail again. Fail better," can often serve as a mantra.
>
> (Segal 2013, 247)

In this sense, Beckett may indeed be related to "failure" not only in terms of ageing, which is Segal's approach in her analysis, but also in general terms, as Halberstam's proposal is that "one form of queer art has made failure its centerpiece and has cast queerness as the dark landscape of confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness" (2011, 97). Thus, Beckett studies would surely benefit from further research on his politics of failure when addressed from the field of queer theory.[25] Besides being, while not the first, one of the most interesting records of failure, Beckett's *oeuvre* combines his subversion of norms with a characteristic disregard for logical thinking, which, in Halberstam's view, may be instrumental in putting forward attacks on other traditional behaviours and norms, particularly heteropatriarchal relations:

> "common sense" depends heavily on the production of norms, and so the critique of dominant forms of common sense is also, in some sense, a critique of norms. Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique.
>
> (Halberstam 2011, 89)

Limitation or decrease in physical and mental abilities is a condition common to virtually all characters in Beckett's literary universe, which eventually serves to represent the imperfection and confusion referred to. In Beckett's words, "the only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 218-219). Beckett thus seems to make Judith Butler's assertion true that destruction is always restoration, that is, "the destruction of a set of categories that introduce artificial divisions into an otherwise unified ontology" (1990, 119). Beckett lets that mess enter his works, as it "invades our experience at every moment" (quoted in Graver and Federman 1979, 219), in the form of interpersonal, communicative and physical barriers. He is concerned about the “bad job” of “finding a form that accommodates the mess” (*Id.* 219), and the form he finds provides indifference and blurs frontiers: between being and not being, man and woman, life and death. Disabilities question the idea of masculinity as impenetrable and self-reliant, as well as that of author, just as old age is a motif that entails perpetuation and “chronification” of conflicts raised by the other two categories. As mentioned above, all three categories ultimately function as metaphors for Beckett’s existentialist concerns. In Angela Moorjani’s words:

---

[25] It is convenient to note that Calvin Thomas has recently, in "Beckett's Queer Art of Failure" (2019), drawn from Halberstam and his writings. However, he mainly uses them to discuss and develop the notion of failure in Beckett and its relation to Leo Bersani's theories, in a way reading the former through the latter. What I am referring here is rather to the use of queer theory to assess Beckett's work extensively with the mentioned ideas of "confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness" in mind.

> What makes Beckett’s novels such inexhaustible texts is partly that they produce codes of such symbolic force that they seem to call up the entire semantic universe which through the ages has been applied to the human condition.
>
> (1982, 69)

By subverting conventional literary modes, Beckett ultimately represents his own epistemological and in a way artistic impairment, which both reflects and is reflected in the disability of his characters. This, in turn, seems to be naturalized through its combination with old age and the passing of time, which, at the same time, have the effect of diminishing gender differences.

If, as Dirk Van Hulle has argued, “[t]exts are necessarily reshaped or recontextualized by each new critical encounter” (2015, 19), then I hope to have provided a rereading that is profitable to existing Beckett criticism and, especially, to ongoing discussions on his literary (re-)presentations of minorities. Hopefully, it will serve at least to shed some new light on the value of such representations for a better understanding of the Othering processes to which disabled and older people, men and women, have commonly been subjected to in art and society.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1.

1. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written 1932, published 1992)

This novel, written by Beckett at age twenty-six, includes a great deal of his own life and his preoccupations in the references, depictions of characters and other autobiographical details. The protagonist, Belacqua, is a young artist who does not fit his environment and feels the need for change as he wants to be in the tranquility of his mind and has problems to manage his life. The novel revolves around issues of sexuality, love and literary expression as it tells Belacqua's conversations with his friends on music, art and life, and most notably depicts his troubled relationships with women (the Smeraldina-Rima, the Syra-Cusa, the Alba), evidencing the differences between them and problems in communication. As happens with other novels by Beckett, it is hard to provide a summary of the plot, as the final object is rather achieved by the conscious rejection of a realist representation of characters and world, the avant-garde use of language and Belacqua/Beckett's discussion of his ideas on life and art.

2. *Murphy* (1938)

This novel tells the story of Murphy, a 'seedy solipsist' who enjoys the habit of being tied to his rocking chair to enter his mind and achieve freedom from the body. Celia Kelly, a prostitute who is Murphy's love, urges him to find a job, and he eventually starts working at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, where he shows notable success with the patients and a certain sympathy towards them and their condition. At the same time, the novel tells the trip by Murphy's friends to find him: Neary, his friend and love rival, Miss Counihan, who has a romantic attachment to the protagonist, Wylie, who wants to be with Miss Counihan, and Cooper, Neary's servant.

3. *Watt* (written 1945, published 1953)

Watt is the last novel written originally in English by Beckett, and its general plot is simple and divided in four sections: Watt goes to Mr. Knott's house and begins working for him as a servant; then, Watt tries to get to know Mr. Knott and understand how life in the house works by means of (unsuccessfully) adapting his logical thinking; he eventually collapses and, in an asylum, Watt adapts his language to the confusion he perceives, and language too becomes unrecognizable; the last part tells Watt's departure from Mr. Knott's house. The novel is marked by philosophical humour and by Watt's difficulty to understand the simplest things, which leads him to approach the world in several different ways, so that the narrative is full of series, repetitions, ellipsis and permutations. At the end of the novel, Beckett included a series of addenda that are not present in the final text due to "fatigue and disgust."

4. *Mercier and Camier* (written in French 1946, published 1970, English version 1974)

In this novel, the first one written originally in French by Beckett, the "pseudocouple" Mercier and Camier wander without a precise direction. They try to leave a city, enter it again, visit a pub, walk and, most importantly, they talk to each other and to people they meet. In this sense, the novel is not so much about their journey or goals but about scenes and dialogues, their relationship, dependency, isolation and life. In a way that prefigures the style of *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Mercier and Camier* tells a story articulated by humour and witty dialogues about a couple of vagabonds who depend on each other and are uncertain about their goals or future.

5. *Molloy* (French 1951, English 1955)

This novel is considered to be the first part of a trilogy completed by *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. It is also the first novel written in first-person, which allows for new depictions of mind and subjectivity. *Molloy* does propose a plot, one that is systematically undermined as the book advances. The first part consists of Molloy's report of his journey to find his mother, in whose room he lives now. His report tells his encounters, travelling by bicycle, with strange characters, such as a policeman who arrests him for resting in a way considered obscene, a woman whose dog he kills by running over it, or a charcoal burner whom he beats. It most notably tells his opinions on the world, his recollections, and his progressive physical decline. The second part of the novel tells the journey of detective Jacques Moran, who is ordered the task of finding Molloy and leaves with his son Jacques Jr. Moran's body suddenly starts failing as well and, in the forest, he sends his son to buy a bicycle so that they can go on with the mission. Abandoned by his son, he eventually – and with difficulty, goes back home. Moran starts questioning the world and seems to be losing his mind. At the end, he gets home and starts writing a report as well, one that begins with the same words that appear at the beginning of his part of the novel.

6. *Malone Dies* (French 1951, English 1956)

Malone Dies is marked by a non-traditional narrative, based on a discourse of a meta-narrative nature. Malone is in a bed of a hospital or an asylum, and he spends his time telling and inventing stories, especially dealing with his own situation and with the life of a boy, Sapo, who later grows up and is referred to as Macmann. In Malone's story, Macmann is eventually taken to an institution where he meets Moll, a woman who takes care of him and with whom he starts a sexual affair. Moll disappears, Macmann learns she died and she is substituted by a man called Lemuel. At the end of the novel, Lemuel takes Macmann and other four inmates in a boat. Lemuel suddenly kills two of them with a hatchet and, although Malone states that he will not kill anyone anymore, the final words in the novel are shattered and inconclusive. However, considerations on the novel are most usually made on Malone's observations on his belongings and situation, his philosophical thoughts, perceptions and digressions in his own stories.

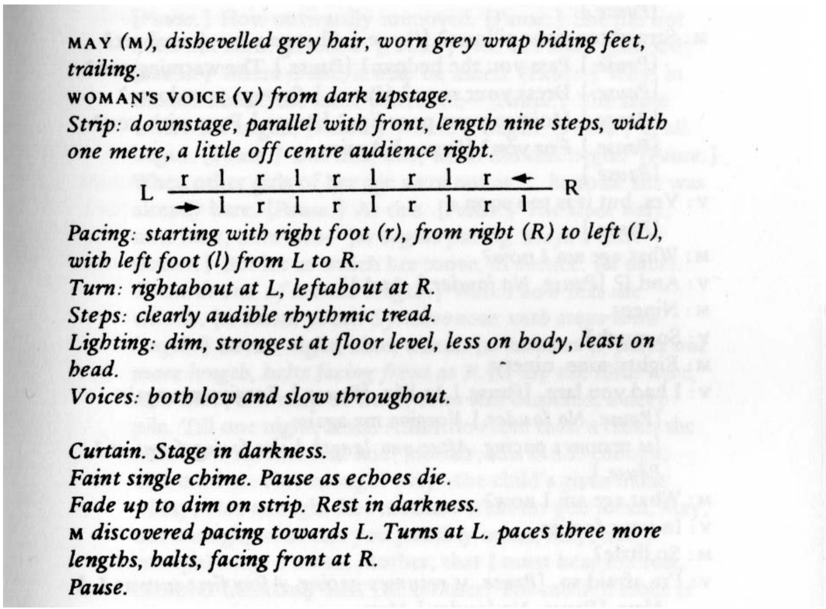
7. *The Unnamable* (French 1953, English 1958)

The last part of the trilogy consists of a monologue delivered in one long paragraph by an unnamed and immobile protagonist-narrator. The monologue deals mainly with a series of considerations on existence, language and discourse. The Unnamable's talk seems to be some kind of punishment as he tries to find a correct combination of words. The idea of going on speaking appears linked to that of going on existing, and the narrator-protagonist often refers to the extreme impairment and decay of his body, telling how parts of it seem to fall off or disappear.

8. *How It Is* (French 1961, English 1964)

The last novel by Samuel Beckett is an inner monologue as well, this time by a narrator who crawls through the mud and reflects on his life, with the purpose of explaining "how it was" before, with and after the presence of a partner creature named Pim. Time seems static or eternal, and the narrator-protagonist tells how he pushes and pulls to advance, how he carries a sack, and often imagines or reflects on his past life, a woman, his parents, Pim and the idea that others might be in the same situation as him. The monologue is formed by clusters of words that do not follow literary conventions and are not separated by any punctuation marks whatsoever, which complements the motifs of crawling and impotence present throughout the text.

ANNEX 2.



MAY (M), *dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing.*

WOMAN'S VOICE (V) *from dark upstage.*

Strip: downstage, parallel with front, length nine steps, width one metre, a little off centre audience right.

L
r l r l r l r l r ←
→ l r l r l r l r l
R

Pacing: starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R.

Turn: rightabout at L, leftabout at R.

Steps: clearly audible rhythmic tread.

Lighting: dim, strongest at floor level, less on body, least on head.

Voices: both low and slow throughout.

Curtain. Stage in darkness.

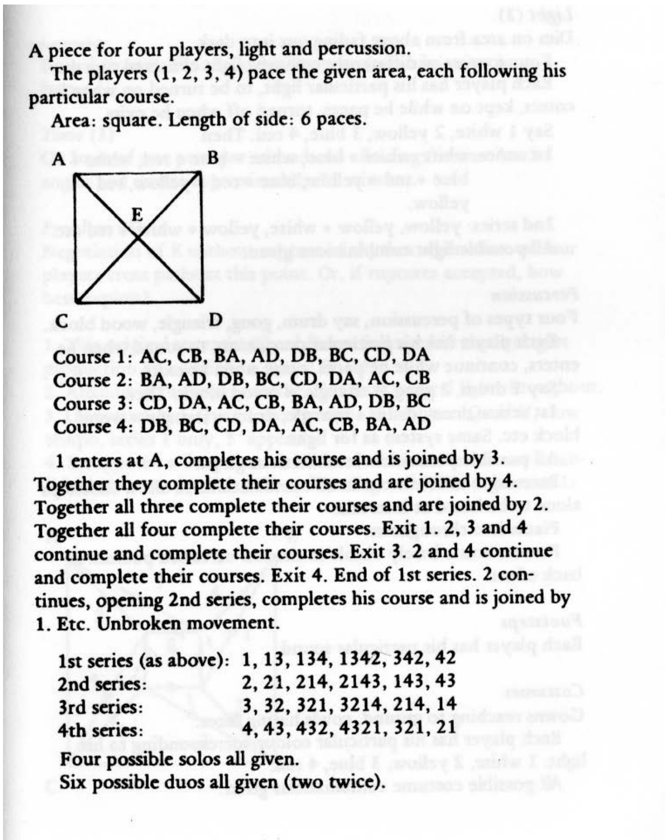
Faint single chime. Pause as echoes die.

Fade up to dim on strip. Rest in darkness.

M *discovered pacing towards L. Turns at L. paces three more lengths, halts, facing front at R.*

Pause.

Fig 1. Initial stage directions for *Footfalls* (1975). *CDW*, 356.



A piece for four players, light and percussion.

The players (1, 2, 3, 4) pace the given area, each following his particular course.

Area: square. Length of side: 6 paces.

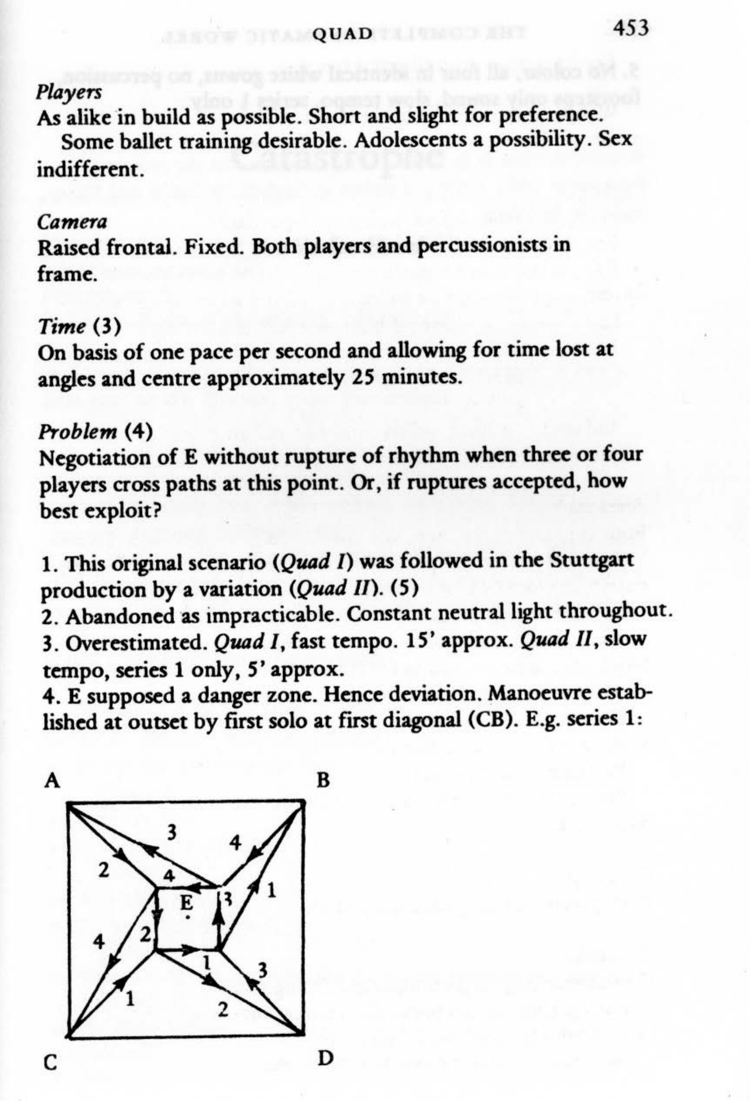
Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA
Course 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB
Course 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC
Course 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

1 enters at A, completes his course and is joined by 3. Together they complete their courses and are joined by 4. Together all three complete their courses and are joined by 2. Together all four complete their courses. Exit 1. 2, 3 and 4 continue and complete their courses. Exit 3. 2 and 4 continue and complete their courses. Exit 4. End of 1st series. 2 continues, opening 2nd series, completes his course and is joined by 1. Etc. Unbroken movement.

1st series (as above): 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42
2nd series: 2, 21, 214, 2143, 143, 43
3rd series: 3, 32, 321, 3214, 214, 14
4th series: 4, 43, 432, 4321, 321, 21

Four possible solos all given.
Six possible duos all given (two twice).

Fig 2. Initial stage directions for *Quad* (1981). *CDW*, 451.



QUAD 453

Players
As alike in build as possible. Short and slight for preference.

Some ballet training desirable. Adolescents a possibility. Sex indifferent.

Camera
Raised frontal. Fixed. Both players and percussionists in frame.

Time (3)
On basis of one pace per second and allowing for time lost at angles and centre approximately 25 minutes.

Problem (4)
Negotiation of E without rupture of rhythm when three or four players cross paths at this point. Or, if ruptures accepted, how best exploit?

1. This original scenario (*Quad I*) was followed in the Stuttgart production by a variation (*Quad II*). (5)
2. Abandoned as impracticable. Constant neutral light throughout.
3. Overestimated. *Quad I*, fast tempo. 15' approx. *Quad II*, slow tempo, series 1 only, 5' approx.
4. E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation. Manoeuvre established at outset by first solo at first diagonal (CB). E.g. series 1:

Fig 3. Stage directions for *Quad* (1981). *CDW*, 453.

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RESUMEN EN CASTELLANO

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Tradicionalmente, los campos teóricos de estudios de género, de discapacidad y de la vejez han estado unidos, en parte por la idea de que tratan categorías en torno a las cuales se crean relaciones de poder y opresión que funcionan de manera similar entre ellas: sexismo, capacitismo y discriminación por edad organizan la sociedad por medio de mecanismos similares de exclusión y privilegios. En este sentido, dichas categorías, junto a otras (clase, raza, religión, etc.), configuran la identidad de los individuos, la forma en que se perciben a sí mismos y son percibidos.

La identidad es una noción que ha recibido una atención renovada desde comienzos del siglo XX, en gran medida por los avances tecnológicos y la globalización. La conquista de derechos fundamentales por parte de las mujeres dio soluciones al feminismo a la vez que planteó nuevas preguntas. De la misma forma, el envejecimiento de la población, gracias a los avances médicos y de bienestar social, fomentó el desarrollo de los estudios de la vejez.

Esta tesis propone un análisis de las representaciones de estas tres categorías en la producción novelística de Samuel Beckett. El argumento principal de la disertación se articula en torno a la dirección escogida por Beckett de centrarse en aspectos tradicionalmente ocultos en el arte, con el objetivo de mostrar que dicha decisión influye directamente en la inclusión progresiva de individuos que no encajan en modelos hegemónicos. Samuel Beckett contaba con una formación filosófica y artística muy profunda, lo que le llevó a trabajar y perfeccionar sus ideas literarias constantemente durante su carrera, llegando a configurar un complejo sistema de expresión propio. Así, Beckett, buen conocedor de la obra de Joyce, considera que este ya ha agotado un camino dedicado al conocimiento, a la polisemia, a la lengua como herramienta útil para explicar

el mundo. Como consecuencia, Beckett refiere una “revelación” a mitad de su carrera por la que asume que su camino se dirige hacia el lado opuesto: la ignorancia, el silencio, la impotencia.

En concreto, la disertación compara los procesos de visibilización de personas discapacitadas, masculinidades alternativas, mujeres y personas viejas con la teoría estética y literaria de Beckett. En general, la disertación es una comparativa de un proceso artístico frente a uno social. Por un lado, tenemos una Obra literaria compuesta en gran medida por elementos tradicionalmente considerados negativos o ignorados, tanto por creadores como por lectores, incluso opuestos a una supuesta finalidad de la escritura: Falta de rigor, de claridad, de secuencialidad, de sentido, de acción y movimiento, contradicciones, silencio, afasia, amnesia. Por el otro, desde el punto de vista social, uno de los elementos más llamativos de la obra de Beckett es la presencia y el interés mostrado por cuerpos no normativos y edades avanzadas, con lo que ello implica en cuanto a la configuración de una masculinidad hegemónica. En otras palabras, esta tesis pretende analizar la correlación entre la inclusión de sujetos tradicionalmente apartados de la sociedad y la de temas e imágenes literarias tradicionalmente apartadas de la literatura. Por todo ello, la tesis se estructura en tres secciones que tratan respectivamente con las representaciones y significados de discapacidad, género y vejez.

La sección sobre discapacidad comienza con un capítulo sobre la mente y la percepción. Samuel Beckett tenía conocimientos sobre psicología y él mismo recibió tratamiento psicoterapéutico en su juventud. El capítulo repasa, en primer lugar, cómo los personajes hacen referencia a la incoherencia del mundo desde las primeras novelas, y conforme pasa el tiempo, el autor cambia sus representaciones de la mente para adecuarlas a dicha visión. Esto es especialmente importante en el caso de *Murphy*, cuyo protagonista muestra una profunda desconexión con la realidad y con su alrededor y precisamente acaba trabajando en un asilo mental. Las descripciones de Beckett sobre los pacientes y cuidadores, y el éxito de Murphy como cuidador, parecen representar la simpatía del propio autor hacia gente cuya percepción difiere de la "normal".

Aparte de esta especie de apología de la discapacidad mental, Beckett hace un uso artístico de los problemas cognitivos en el resto de novelas. Así, muestra personajes que progresivamente tienen mayores problemas para saber qué sucede a su alrededor, y dota de una gran importancia a la memoria como método para percibir el pasado. Las configuraciones de la mente son esenciales para lo que Beckett busca transmitir. Si bien los protagonistas hacen referencia a un mundo confuso y la incapacidad para relacionarse está presente desde la primera novela, el paso a la narración en primera persona a mitad de la carrera de Beckett dota a sus obras de una subjetividad inmersiva que transmite mejor esas ideas.

El segundo capítulo de esta sección trata el tema de la incomunicación y el fracaso del lenguaje. La idea beckettiana de un mundo incoherente y confuso se une a la del lenguaje como mecanismo que no es efectivo para representarlo. Pese a que Beckett desconfía desde un principio de las posibilidades reales del lenguaje para explicar el mundo, también percibimos una progresión. De este modo, en sus inicios, Beckett parodia los mecanismos de la lengua por medio de conflictos entre personajes que no se entienden entre ellos ni saben expresarse. Conforme avanza su producción, adapta su acercamiento al problema del lenguaje con nuevas perspectivas. La primera, la perspectiva lingüística, alcanza un pico en *Watt*, donde el autor abiertamente hace que el protagonista manipule las palabras y frases alterando estructuras y reglas básicas de la lengua para intentar explicar lo que ve, dando lugar a un lenguaje incomprensible e igualmente inefectivo. De este modo, *Watt* pone de manifiesto el problema, pero no consigue solucionarlo. El segundo acercamiento consiste en un intento de subvertir las estructuras discursivas como tales, y tiene como consecuencia el estilo de las novelas finales que, mediante el paso a una narración en primera persona y un monólogo interior confuso y frenético, lleva el mensaje de Beckett a un nuevo plano, lo transmite mejor, en gran parte porque permite al lector adoptar un punto de vista interno y así identificarse mejor con los sentimientos y experiencias de los protagonistas. Es decir, que Beckett desestima un acercamiento lingüístico, acepta en cierto modo las convenciones a ese nivel y pasa a manipular el discurso por medio del monólogo interior.

La sección sobre discapacidad continúa con un capítulo dedicado al cuerpo en las novelas de Samuel Beckett. El cuerpo en su obra alcanza una importancia máxima para entender las historias, y es uno de los aspectos más notables sobre su producción. En este sentido, es de especial relevancia el caso de *Molloy*. Es muy significativo que Beckett elija para una obra basada en la noción de "viaje" a sendos protagonistas, Molloy y Moran, que progresivamente ven sus capacidades físicas mermadas. La voluntad y la incapacidad de avanzar son omnipresentes en Beckett y están relacionadas con la voluntad y la incapacidad de entender y representar el mundo. De este modo, *Molloy* muestra, más que cualquier otra novela, procesos de adaptación y resiliencia en los que los protagonistas desarrollan nuevos métodos para avanzar: de ir en bici pasan a andar con muletas, a cojear y a arrastrarse. Finalmente, cuando la parálisis llega, su avance debe continuar en la mente que está atrapada en el cuerpo, contando historias y recordando situaciones para seguir vivos. La parálisis culmina con una disolución surrealista del cuerpo que acompaña a un discurso basado en repeticiones y auto-correcciones que recuerdan a las adaptaciones hechas anteriormente en el plano físico, ahora con el objetivo de dar con una combinación concreta de palabras que signifique algo, y siempre bajo la idea de seguir adelante.

El resultado de la combinación de todos estos mecanismos (percepción, expresión, movimiento) se analiza en el último capítulo de la sección. Dicho capítulo toma la noción de vida como trauma, habitualmente utilizada en análisis de la Obra beckettiana. De este modo, se hace una lectura de la falta de integración en las experiencias de los protagonistas como consecuencia del evento traumático de nacer. Beckett vuelca la mayoría de experiencias traumáticas, así como el deterioro del cuerpo y los sentidos, en sus protagonistas, lo que puede ser un indicio de que elige esos cuerpos como representantes de su propia experiencia. La combinación fatídica de deterioro extremo e insistencia por sobreponerse desemboca en uno de los principales valores de la literatura beckettiana, la *resiliencia contagiosa*. El concepto de resiliencia contagiosa se refiere a cómo Beckett acepta los puntos a los que no llega el lenguaje, las cosas que no puede expresar, y los aprovecha para transmitir sin explicar. Tomando la idea eliotiana de *correlato objetivo,* la propuesta aquí es que las emociones inexpresables de Beckett son a la vez las de sus protagonistas, y es la forma de la obra, la unión entre discurso y representación de personajes, lo que hace que el lector se integre en la narración y perciba esas emociones de manera más efectiva. En este sentido, se hace hincapié en la idea de que Beckett busca transmitir emociones, y no explicar situaciones.

Todo esto tiene consecuencias en diversos planos. Principalmente es importante para un análisis de género en las novelas, ya que los protagonistas, todos ellos hombres, no muestran las condiciones y capacidades tradicionalmente asociadas a los modelos de masculinidad hegemónica. Por ello, la sección de discapacidad da paso a la sección de género, empezando por el campo de las masculinidades.

Así, el primer capítulo de la segunda sección sitúa a los protagonistas de las novelas de Samuel Beckett bajo una serie de consideraciones teóricas de los últimos avances en los estudios sobre masculinidades. El autor desarrolla su obra en un momento histórico complicado, mediados del siglo XX, en el que la idea de masculinidad está siendo cuestionada debido a cambios sociales y culturales. Fundamentalmente, ese cuestionamiento es comparable al que Beckett hace de la literatura como medio artístico. En relación a ello, se ha hablado de una “feminización” en su escritura, en la medida en que su discurso está poblado por individuos en conflicto con el mundo y basado en nociones tradicionalmente negativas como el silencio y la impotencia. Del mismo modo, el hecho de que Beckett elija emociones por encima de intelecto y no pretenda explicar sino sugerir implica un desmarque de representaciones clasicistas y el rechazo de su propio poder como autor.

En consecuencia, en la obra de Beckett se cuestiona y subvierte la noción de autor como creador con control de su obra y la de los personajes como hombres con control de su vida y discurso. El caso de *Malone Dies*, por su composición y el uso de una narración dentro de una narración, es especialmente ilustrativo. Por un lado, la novela subvierte la idea de novela de crecimiento o *Bildungsroman*, en la que un personaje cumple sus objetivos y se desarrolla como persona. Por otro lado, la falta de coherencia y estabilidad en el monólogo de Malone replican la impotencia del propio Beckett como autor.

El rechazo a elementos esenciales de masculinidad y poder se complementa finalmente en Beckett por medio de la inclusión de modelos alternativos y anti-hegemónicos de masculinidad. Repasando la importancia de analizar el papel del hombre para un análisis de género completo, el capítulo seis trata la representación de los hombres. Así, vemos que todo lo comentado anteriormente en la tesis afecta a su identidad como hombres, ya que no muestran las características de poder, valentía y éxito que el modelo hegemónico de masculinidad asocia a los hombres. Así, la relación de Beckett con sus padres, su falta de éxito en los primeros años y el distanciamiento de sus “padres” culturales (Irlanda, Joyce, la tradición) muestran a un autor que no cumple las expectativas familiares y sociales. Así, el concepto de “hombre” como tal es parodiado cuando se usa, así como la idea de familia. Finalmente, el autor desafía la hegemonía cuando deja entrar en su relato a prácticas sexuales no reproductivas (analidad, onanismo), homosexuales y otras a menudo tachadas de obscenas, como el incesto. Los personajes de Beckett muestran una falta de coherencia a varios niveles, y uno de ellos es el sexual. También aquí se puede apreciar un cambio en el trato a ciertos temas. Es el caso de la representación de la homosexualidad, en *Murphy* utilizada para ridiculizar e insultar a un rival literario, a partir de *Molloy* referida con gran indiferencia como una opción ya no válida, sino que no necesita validación.

Del mismo modo que Beckett modifica el trato de la sexualidad masculina a lo largo de su carrera, hace lo propio respecto a la representación de las mujeres. Así, el siguiente punto en la tesis explica cómo en las primeras novelas se ofrece un relato misógino de la experiencia femenina, objetificando y percibiendo como amenaza a las mujeres. Este trato está presente de manera muy notable en su primera novela, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Sobre las mujeres en la obra todavía pesa en cierto modo lo que Betty Friedan llamó la *mística femenina*, una preconcepción específica y tradicional que condena a las mujeres al hogar y a estar subyugadas como seres sociales al hombre. El propio Beckett da cuenta tres años después de la escritura de *Dream* de su propia actitud de aislamiento, arrogancia y un desprecio hacia los demás que en la novela vemos centrado en las mujeres. Así, en *Dream* se ofrecen descripciones que siguen la tradición en tanto que ofrecen una imagen de la mujer idealizada, salvaje (asociada con la naturaleza) y objetificada. Tanto en esta primera novela como en *Murphy* hay descripciones basadas en el físico y la belleza que contrastan con las duras palabras de los protagonistas hacia sus parejas, especialmente cuando se contradicen sus necesidades o deseos.

El mismo capítulo intenta arrojar luz sobre el debate abierto que dejan estas representaciones de la mujer. Por un lado, el componente misógino existe, especialmente en la producción temprana, pero Beckett se encarga de mostrar a los protagonistas masculinos como humillados y obcecados en sus razonamientos sin tener razón. Sus obras presentan retratos complejos en los que las ideas de autor, narrador y protagonista se pueden confundir. Finalmente, los protagonistas no son perdonados ni reciben un trato amable, y no acaban en una posición superior a la de la mujer, sino que son ridiculizados o criticados. Esto se entiende mejor cuando Beckett comienza a abandonar representaciones concretas de la realidad: conforme aumenta el nivel de abstracción, los componentes de género pierden presencia e importancia y las descripciones de las mujeres son más planas. Todo esto, unido a la ya mencionada devolución del poder masculino, hace una obra que encaja en descripciones de "femenina," más en el sentido de retirar poder al hombre que en el de dárselo a la mujer.

La indiferencia alcanzada más plenamente al final de la carrera de Beckett se concreta en el hecho de que las relaciones entre personas se basan en una dependencia independiente del género. Así, el último capítulo de esta sección muestra cómo las novelas tienden a rechazar lo absoluto y buscan neutralidad en ese aspecto. Las interacciones entre mujeres y hombres se han visto marcadas por la idea de dependencia, y es de cara al final cuando se universaliza ese sentimiento de soledad y necesidad. En este sentido, solo las imágenes de maternidad parecen quedar marcadas, probablemente por sus implicaciones en cuanto a la idea de *uterotumba* y la propia relación de Beckett con su madre. En las últimas novelas, las reacciones de los hombres al rechazo se acercan mucho más a la resignación que al despecho, y protagonistas en el pasado unidos a parejas femeninas ahora no se preocupan del género de quien les pueda acompañar. En ese sentido, *Mercier and Camier* es una historia de amistad (si no amor) entre dos hombres que se apoyan mutuamente hasta el final y expresan su miedo a la soledad, un miedo desarrollado en *The Unnamable*, donde el narrador plantea cuestiones sobre un sentimiento universal de confusión y la necesidad de ayuda.

Finalmente, es importante entender cómo el efecto que la discapacidad y la impotencia tienen en las representaciones y relaciones de género en las novelas está íntimamente relacionado con la categoría de vejez. El paso del tiempo es lo que acrecienta la incapacidad de los protagonistas y la disolución de su identidad como individuos. Por ello, la última sección incluye observaciones sobre la idea de vejez para Beckett, las representaciones de ella que hace y cómo se relaciona con las dos categorías comentadas previamente.

La vejez es una idea que suele provocar miedo y negación en el ser humano. En este sentido, los estudios formales sobre tal fenómeno no proliferaron hasta la segunda mitad del siglo XX, cuando los avances tecnológicos, médicos y sociales hicieron de la vejez una realidad mucho más segura e importante, al aumentar considerablemente la calidad y esperanza de vida. Es por ello por lo que en las últimas décadas se ha tratado de encontrar modelos dignos y útiles de vejez, así como de teorizar el proceso de envejecimiento en sí, dejando el tabú de lado. Samuel Beckett mostró desde su juventud interés por la vejez, especialmente debido a las posibilidades que contenía para expresar sus ideas artísticas de impotencia y agotamiento.

Sin embargo, las primeras consideraciones serias que Beckett hace son por contraste respecto a la juventud, cuyo potencial respetaba, siguiendo la idea tradicional de una juventud asociada a la energía y la vitalidad. Conforme crece, incluye referencias nostálgicas desde el punto intermedio en el que uno ya no es joven, pero aún no es viejo, probablemente una situación más angustiosa para el individuo, al ver cómo las capacidades disminuyen constantemente y sin remedio. Esto hace que la memoria, y su pérdida, cobren especial relevancia en las historias de Beckett, especialmente de cara al final de su carrera novelística. En estas últimas novelas, las narraciones consisten en informes o recuerdos confusos, ofrecidos por personajes con movilidad mínima y cuerpos poco definidos. Finalmente, el análisis nos lleva a dos conclusiones: primera, que los efectos de la vejez sobre objetos o personas los hacen tender a la neutralidad, en el sentido de que confunden su identidad y minimizan las diferencias; segunda, que la vejez parece ser una representación de la vida en sí, en la medida en que es una situación marcada por las limitaciones, en la que uno se encuentra sin estar preparado para ello y que *per se* conlleva la certeza cercana de la muerte.

Si este capítulo repasa las implicaciones culturales de la idea de vejez y su papel en Beckett, el siguiente profundiza en las propias representaciones de esta con especial atención a la incapacitación que parece implicar, y a la idea de muerte. El rechazo que causa la vejez está en gran parte causado por la cercanía a la muerte que conlleva y que la mayoría de nosotros percibimos con mayor o menor aprensión. En las últimas novelas de Beckett, los protagonistas parecen estar atrapados en un momento temporal estático y eterno, de manera que la muerte es siempre inminente y la distancia respecto del pasado es inmensa, hasta el punto de que los personajes se sienten como si hubieran nacido viejos y no reconocen su juventud o infancia como suyas. Sin embargo, un aspecto positivo de esta prolongación del tiempo es que les permite (u obliga) a repetir sus intentos de avanzar, de manera que queda abierta la posibilidad de que la repetición sirva de algo, siquiera para “fracasar mejor,” en términos beckettianos.

Así, en las últimas novelas, la parálisis de los personajes y la distancia percibida respecto del pasado hace que la propia diferencia entre vida y muerte se diluya y ambos conceptos parezcan coincidir. De este modo, más que vivir, los personajes parecen “morir,” entendiendo la muerte como un estado más que un evento, y efectivamente dudan de si están vivos o de si llegaron a nacer. Esta confusión entre términos lleva también a relacionar muerte y nacimiento y al *uterotumba*, con la muerte imaginada como retorno a la tranquilidad del útero.

El último capítulo de la tesis propone una visión interseccional entre los tres campos elegidos. Esta importancia viene dada por la certeza de que el género funciona de manera similar a la de otras estructuras de poder y desigualdades en la sociedad, lo cual fue esencial para el desarrollo de otros campos como los estudios de discapacidad y vejez. Por un lado, el hombre puede tener más poder y privilegios que perder a medida que envejece, mientras que el pensamiento androcéntrico consigue modificar el discurso de manera que cualquier edad pueda implicar poder según el punto de referencia que se tome. Mientras, la imagen de la mujer está fundamentada en la belleza y el atractivo sexual, y por tanto también se ven perjudicadas por el envejecimiento.

En Samuel Beckett, dicha visión se mantiene hasta cierto punto, pero de nuevo la vejez es un mecanismo que ayuda a neutralizar las diferencias entre géneros en las novelas tardías, en las que la vida y la muerte implican lo mismo para hombres y mujeres. Al final, la necesidad de compañía es más importante que la sexualidad, y el género no es un elemento de peso para los protagonistas. Este último capítulo toma la idea de la *matriz de dominación* para explicar cómo los sistemas de opresión interseccionan y afectan a la identidad de los protagonistas de Beckett. Esta se ve atacada a varios niveles por referencias a comportamientos basados en capacitismo, discriminación por edad y clasismo que afectan a los personajes de Beckett, quienes no consiguen ser miembros activos de la sociedad. La forma en que Beckett representa estos mecanismos de discriminación, el hecho de que los protagonistas sean víctimas, el tono de las novelas y la idea siempre presente de "seguir adelante," sugieren que Beckett se posiciona del lado de sus protagonistas y dignifica la existencia de estos.

Así, lo expuesto en la tesis da lugar a varias conclusiones. La primera de ellas es que Samuel Beckett demuestra un interés creciente en la representación del mundo a través de mentes y cuerpos impedidos. En cierto modo, identifica en ellos su propia sensación de mundo inaprehensible e inexplicable, y la inclusión de la discapacidad en sus protagonistas implica una reivindicación de dichas mentes y cuerpos como válidos o, como mínimo, no menos válidos que los de personas que encajen en la norma. A su vez, esto desafía el pensamiento occidental, que está fuertemente arraigado en el patriarcado y las jerarquías dualistas. Este desafío Beckett lo acompaña con su particular representación del género, de manera que, conforme la obra de Beckett avanza y los cuerpos de los protagonistas se alejan de la norma, sus prácticas e identidades sexuales lo hacen también.

En cualquier caso, es complicado calificar de feminista a Beckett por dos motivos; Uno, la presencia de misoginia en sus primeras novelas, sobre todo *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* y *Murphy*; y dos, que la relación jerárquica entre hombres y mujeres no se llega a invertir, sino que se suprime para dar paso a relaciones entre personajes en las que el género es irrelevante. En este sentido, no se empodera a los personajes femeninos, sino que se despoja del poder a los masculinos.

Por último, Beckett muestra una concepción negativa de la vejez, en la medida en que para él implica una pérdida de las capacidades, y por ello encaja con su concepción del mundo y el arte, en el sentido de estar condenado a la impotencia y el fracaso. Por ello, la vejez complementa e intensifica la presencia de la discapacidad en sus novelas, y a la vez remarca la pérdida de poder de los protagonistas (todos ellos hombres).

Del mismo modo, la representación de cuerpos, mentes, géneros y edades tradicionalmente invisibles en la sociedad y la literatura encaja con la idea de unión entre forma y contenido que Beckett defendía. En cierta manera, la mejor manera de representar la impotencia en la vida es a través de estos personajes. Por ello, Beckett parece reivindicar el papel de estas personas en su obra. Al final, en su crítica a un sistema basado en el éxito, legitima el fracaso. El éxito ha regido tanto la representación literaria como la vida en sociedad, y Beckett visibiliza y reivindica lo “otro.”

Al final, su representación no invierte las relaciones ni trata de restaurar la imagen de las personas fuera de la norma, sino que hace suya la imagen negativa tradicional. De esta manera rechaza directamente las ideas de hegemonía y poder y encuentra en estas categorías, discapacidad, vejez y masculinidad no hegemónica, a los representantes del humano en general.