Motherhood, Female Ageing and Samuel Beckett

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A major thesis submitted for the qualification of

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

Maynooth University

Department of English

2018

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Acknowledgments

When I registered for my PhD in September 2012, I had no idea where it would take me or how long it was going to take me. Every PhD is an emotional rollercoaster, which changes direction over the course, but mine took a spectacular change of direction in early 2015, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Shortly after that, my PhD supervisor, Dr. Moynagh Sullivan was also diagnosed with breast cancer, so to say that our relationship has been unique over the past few years would be an understatement. However, we both got over it and we are back with a bang! I never considered not returning to finish the programme and pure tenacity has kept me going – there was no way it was going to get the better of me. I would therefore firstly like to thank Dr. Sullivan for her support and intuition over the last six years. Our relationship has been very unusual due to our overlapping health issues, so it was different to the usual supervisor/student one, in that we have both supported each other. Dr. Sullivan let me find my own way in this thesis, while also keeping a very close eye on me. Her professional

advice, editing and mentoring, especially in the last year has been incredible and we got there in the end.

I also had a lot of support from the English Department at Maynooth and would like to thank the following people: Amanda Bent, Tracy O'Flaherty and Anne Byrne, for always helping me out with any printing issues and student issues and other issues! To Dr Denis Condon, Dr Stephen O'Neill, Dr Oona Frawley, Dr Ide Corley, Dr Michael Cronin, Professor Emer Nolan and Professor Colin Graham, who all encouraged me to keep going towards the final push. I would particularly like to thank Dr Sinead Kennedy, who gave very generously of her time to read and comment on my work – her advice has been invaluable, and I am very grateful to her.

They say that to stay young, you should never hang around with people your own age! I took that advice seriously and made the most of the fun chats and coffee with my young colleagues in the research laboratory: Dr. Thomas Connolly, Dr. Matt Fogarty, Daniel Curran, Conor Dowling, Chris Beausang, Gregory Jackson, (philosophy) Daniel, Dr. Bridget English and Sarah O'Brien. Paraig Kerrigan has become my PhD "son" over the last year – I hear I am his PhD "mother" so that is a fair swap! Thanks, Paraig for keeping me young and making me laugh.

My friends and family have been a rock to me over the past three years, especially Aine, Jacquie, Debbie and my friend Ann Fitzgerald who was the first to get me through my diagnosis. I can't name all my friends here, but you know who you are. My dear friend Pat Kennedy has been my mentor and confidante, ever since we met in Maynooth University in 2007 in the Mature Students coffee room, when we both thought it might be a good idea to pursue an undergraduate degree – he got out and has a career, while I am only managing to finish now! Also, to my friend and Beckett colleague, Dr. Feargal Whelan who has also supported me personally and professionally, reading and commenting on my writing and offering valuable advice on Beckett's work. To Clare Byrne, who sorted out my formatting issues in the last week of the mayhem! To my three sisters, Helen, Karen and Claire and my mother and aunt for supporting me all the way also. My mother, Deirdre and my aunt, Roisin are poster girls for positive ageing and they live life to the max, as everyone knows. My mother got me through the challenging year of chemotherapy and we became very close over those long difficult hours – she has an incredible joie-de-vivre and I hope I have inherited at least some of her spirit. I want to thank my three adult children, Shauna, Grainne and Brian who have been so supportive of my work and never laughed at me once! I don't believe that age is

a barrier to anything and my children seem to agree. So much so, that they regularly send me their academic work to edit for them!

Last, but not least, I want to acknowledge my great friend, Jackie Conlon, who passed away from breast cancer on 6 September 2016, at the way too young age of 52. I met Jackie in 2007 when I started my undergraduate degree, and we became instant friends. She had an indomitable spirit which I was immediately attracted to and we had such fun, even though we were always competing in our sociology grades! Jackie has been watching over me these last few months, telling me to get on with it, so I did. I respectfully dedicate this thesis to you, Jackie.

Abstract

This thesis examines the prose and drama of Samuel Beckett's work to analyse the tropes of motherhood and female ageing in his oeuvre. The thesis is divided into two parts: part one investigates themes of misogyny, maternity and motherhood in a selection of the young Beckett's writing. I consider how the trope of misogyny, which spans twenty years, provides a gateway to investigating how matters of sex and reproduction profoundly structure Beckett's work. The first chapter asks how misogyny can illuminate questions of gender in Beckett's writing by investigating the possibility of an alternative queer reading, which may go some way to explaining the caustic treatment of women in Beckett's early fiction. Gender and sexuality are not niche critical concerns in Beckett Studies, but central to Beckett's aesthetics.

Chapter Two focuses on how sexuality and reproduction come together in the figure of the mother or maternally identified women. The representation of fictional and semi-monstrous maternal figures is a central but ambiguous concern of Beckett's early to mid-phase of writing, with these mother figures emerging as simultaneously nurturing and stifling. Part Two of the thesis moves to Beckett's drama to consider the potent combination of age and femininity in his late drama. By adding age as an interpretive category, I argue that age is a missing category of identity in Irish Studies. Chapter Three analyses female ageing on the page, while Chapter Four analyses female ageing on the stage. It also examines the impact of the #WTF movement, before considering the responses of several women directors and actors of Beckett's drama in Irish theatre and performance. The thesis concludes with an analysis of Beckett's influence on Irish performance art and a consideration of Beckett's legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures.

Introduction

> Are the old really human beings? Judging by the way our society treats them, the question is open to doubt. (Simone de Beauvoir)

This thesis analyses the representation of women in a selection of Samuel Beckett's work, closely focusing on themes of sexuality, maternity and female ageing and then examines a selection of recent interpretations of Beckett's women characters, by women actors and directors.[1] There are just two studies entirely devoted to the subject of women in Beckett: Linda Ben-Zvi's *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (1990), which is a series of edited essays and interviews and covers women characters in Beckett's prose and drama, and Mary Bryden's *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other* (1993), which traces the progressive trajectory of gender in Beckett's work from "rigid polarity towards a radically destabilized gender base" (Bryden 1993:1). Each of these opens a door for a more sustained focus on sexuality, maternity and ageing in Beckett's work. Bryden devotes one chapter to a consideration of motherhood in Beckett, noting that maternity, or the impossibility of it, is a central theme of the early prose, while the later drama features complex mother/daughter relationships. The focus on the complex mother/daughter relationships is critical but also occludes the ageing woman/mother as a subject of study in itself. Neither of these studies analyses female ageing and thus my thesis addresses a gap in the field, not just in Beckett Studies, but in Irish literary and cultural criticism where it has been, until recently, curiously ignored.

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[1] Kathryn White's *Beckett and Decay* (2009), is the first full-length study devoted to the trope of decay in Beckett's work. While White devotes a chapter to old age in Beckett, her study does not have a gendered dimension, nor does she provide a clear theoretical framework for her arguments, or a gerontology framework.

The thesis is divided into two parts: in Part One, I firstly consider the under-researched themes of misogyny, maternity and motherhood in a selection of Beckett's early prose, where I indelicately ignore Paul Stewart's warning, in *Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's Work* (2011), that "dealing with the misogyny apparent in the works remains a delicate matter" (Stewart 2011:70). By lifting the polite silence surrounding this "delicate matter", I consider how misogyny provides a gateway to investigating how matters of sex and reproduction profoundly structure Beckett's work. In Part Two, I analyse female ageing in a selection of Beckett's plays, a topic that has received scant attention to date in Beckett Studies. The potent combination of age and femininity in Beckett's work does not form any significant area of scholarship, despite the clear fact that his later drama is populated by ageing female characters. Part One of the thesis, then, comprises Chapter One and Chapter Two, focusing on Beckett's early prose work, the novellas and one of the trilogy novels because the prose constituted the majority of his output at this stage of his development. I have divided the thesis into two parts because the first part concerns the writing of the younger Beckett, and which displays (hetero)sexual antagonism towards women, sarcastic portrayals of ambivalent sons, foul mothers who emerge as both nurturing and stifling, and post-menopausal lovers, valued only for their sterility. The young Beckett's writing, then, exhibits a disturbingly misogynistic construction of women. The second part, Chapters Three and Four, moves to the drama of the older Beckett, where the harsh misogyny that pervaded the early work is replaced by a more complex set of representations of women, as the older Beckett moves towards themes of ageing, as he himself was ageing. I look to Beckett's theatrical work in relation to ageing and femininity, as much of the earlier abjection and horror towards women becomes even more amplified in the older female characters that populate his later stage work. The potent combination of age and femininity does not form any significant area of scholarship to date, despite the fact that Beckett's later drama explicitly centralizes many older women characters.

My thesis therefore addresses a lacuna in both Beckett Studies and Irish Studies where, I argue, age is a missing category of identity. As I move from an analysis of age on the page to the performance of age on the stage in the final chapter, I firstly situate Beckett's work in the larger framework of Irish theatre, paying attention to the absence of female playwrights from the Irish theatrical canon which has not been the subject of any sustained enquiry until recently.

Following on from the impact of the "Waking the Feminists" movement in Irish Theatre, I consider several strategic responses by women directors and actors of Beckett's drama in Irish theatre and performance, whose work formed part of the groundwork which led to the #WTF grassroots movement. I argue that age is performed and performative and look to how these female actors and directors highlight the performance of age in their work. As scholarship has been sparse also in relation to the performance of age in Irish drama, my reading illuminates a dark spot in Beckett Studies and in Irish Theatre Studies. My final analysis considers the work of an Irish performance artist Amanda Coogan, whose work has distinct echoes of Beckett's late theatre, particularly in relation to his themes of embodiment, repetition, and the struggle for articulation. My consideration of the connections and difference between both Beckett and Coogan contributes to an evaluation of Beckett's legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures.

Methodology

This thesis draws on psychoanalytical, philosophical, gender, and queer theory, along with Performance Studies and Age Studies in its arguments. I have drawn on the French feminist psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, whose work is particularly useful for considering the mother figure in Beckett. The state of the maternal has been disputed among feminists for quite some time. In the West, the relationship between subjectivity and the maternal body are contested, with the self often understood in opposition to the maternal body.

In this scenario, one must break from the mother and maternal care-givers on which one is dependent in infancy and early childhood to become a full subject in the spiritual or cultural values of one's community. Matricide, in Kristeva's theory, or separating from one's primary relationship with the mother and her nurturing body is necessary, but violent. Kristeva defends the necessity of matricide, writing within the traditional Freudian-Lacanian model that views the paternal figure necessary to the break up of the mother-child dyad, allowing the child to enter the realm of language and signification. Despite her defense of matricide, Kristeva's work is a useful interpretive tool, as she transforms early maternal relations between the newborn child and the mother in her concept of the maternal *chora* and the semiotic.

This opposition to the maternal body in feminist thinking is deeply problematic as it makes it difficult to consider mothers as subjects, and for mothers to consider themselves as subjects or exercise their potential for subjectivity. To mother a child and to relate to it from a maternal stance means that the mother must re-inhabit the space she had left behind in early infancy of bodily intimacy and dependency. She must, then, drawn on her own archaic and repressed history of her relations with her own maternal mother. In this formula, it seems that mothers cannot be subjects. This thesis set out Kristeva's theories of maternity and motherhood in detail, particularly her notion of abjection, which I argue, is a useful interpretive tool for analysing the mother figure in Beckett's work, and the continuous desire of the male protagonists in my chosen texts to return to the uterine space of the womb, which is also a narrative trope in Beckett's writing.

In considering the ethics of gender in Beckett's work, I employ the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his theories on alterity and the feminine. In questioning how gender operates in Beckett's early work, I consider the possibility of an alternative queer reading in his texts, as a way of explaining the general economy of misogyny and misanthropy in the prose. I draw on a single essay on Beckett, "Beckett and Homoeroticism", by Peter Boxall (2004) that has languished, until recently, at the margins of debates around gender and sexuality in Beckett as it challenges a heteronormative reading of his work. Queer Theory emerged in the foundational work of Michel Foucault, Eve Kovosky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Lauren Berlant and Sarah Ahmed. In my queer reading of Beckett in Chapter One, and in relation to the mother figure in Chapter Two, I draw on the work of Butler and Edelman. As Queer Studies is commonly used in the field of Irish Studies, and its tenets are well established, I am briefly setting out this part of the methodology section in relation to their significant aspects relevant to Chapters One and Two.

In my textual reading of female ageing in Chapter Three, I again draw on Kristeva and Irigaray, and while other textual readings of the late drama also tend to draw on French feminist theories, I more emphatically add age as an interpretive category. I also examine the roots of the phallogocentrism that is challenged in the thesis, in the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. I analyse Beckett's late drama on the "page", employing the psychoanalytic theories of Kristeva and Irigaray in a textual analysis of ageing and desire. In Chapter Four, I investigate the performance age in Beckett's drama, as it is explored on the stage by women actors and directors, drawing on Performance Studies, Affect Studies, and Phenomenology Studies. I will be broadly drawing on the work of Stanton Garner and Bert O. States, who helped define the field of theatre phenomenology and have written substantially on Beckett's theatre. As my analysis investigates Beckett's influence on the contemporary, where I look at echoes of his work in Irish performance practice, this study draws on Performance Studies as understood in the context of live performance, drawing on the work of Peggy Phelan. As I also consider the affective dimension of the performances under analysis in my final chapter, this study draws broadly on the work of Affect theorist Brian Massumi. Age Studies needs considerably more mapping in the methodology section, as it is such a new field. Therefore, I now set out the development of age studies in sociology and literary gerontology over the last few decades.

Age is a missing category in Irish literary criticism. Ageing features as a subject in Irish literature and drama, yet has, until very recently, been overlooked in Irish literary and cultural criticism. Heather Ingman's book, *Ageing in Irish Writing: Strangers to Themselves* (2018), is the first full length study of its kind to explore ageing in Irish writing from the perspective of gerontology, the comprehensive multidisciplinary study of ageing and older adults. Ingman draws on the latest writing in humanistic, critical and cultural gerontology to explore the portrayal of ageing in the fiction of both male and female Irish writers.[2] Forthcoming in late 2018 is a special journal issue, *Women and Ageing in Irish Literature and Film*, edited by Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh, featuring the first collection of articles completely devoted to representations of female ageing in Irish literature and film.[3]

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[2] Other individual articles concerning ageing in Irish literature and culture include Veronica House, "'Words We Can Grow Old and Die in': Earth Mother and Ageing Mother in Eavan Bolan's Poetry." *The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry*, edited by Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006, pp. 102-122; George Bornstein, "W. B. Yeats's Poetry of Ageing." *Sewanee Review*, vol. 120, no. 1, 2012, pp. 46-61; Donald E. Morse, "The Politics of Aging: Frank McGuinness's *The Hanging Gardens*." *Irish Theatre in Transition: From the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Century*, edited by Donald E. Morse, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 82-96; Margaret O'Neill, "'This is How Time Unfolds When You Are Old': Subjectivity, and Joseph O'Connor's *Ghost Light*." *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Reimaginings*, edited by Cathy McGlynn, Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 289-302; Michaela Schrage-Fruh, "'Embarking, Not Dying': Clare Boylan's *Beloved Strangers* as Reifungsroman." *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture*, pp. 55-71; Theresa Wray, "A Certain Truth in Fiction: Perceptions of the Ageing Process in Irish Women's Fiction", *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture*, pp. 181-193; Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh, "Ageing, Families and Contemporary Irish Fiction." *The New Irish Studies: Twenty-First-Century Critical* Revisions, edited by Paige Reynolds, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Carmen Zamorano Llena has written numerous articles, including, "'Words We Can Grow Old and Die In': Female Literary Reconstructions of the Literary Idiom in Eavan Boland's Later Poetry." *Women Aging Through Literature and Experience*, edited by Brian Worsfold, Lleida: DEDAL-LIT, vol. 4, 2005, pp. 127-137; "From Loneliness to Solitude in a Post-Feminist Age: Redefining Love in the Second Half of Life in Clare Boylan's *Beloved Stranger*." *The Polemics of Ageing as Reflected in Literatures in English*, edited by Maria Vidal Grau and Nuria Casado-Gual, Lleida: DEDAL-LIT, Vol. 3, 2004, pp. 177-199; "Looking Very Old Age in the Eye: A Nuanced Approach to the Fourth Age in Contemporary Irish Fiction: A Case Study." *Gerontologist*, forthcoming 2018.

[3] See my article in this collection, which is a special issue, entitled "Samuel Beckett's 'Hysterical Old Hags': The Sexual Politics of Female Ageing in *All That Fall* and *Not I*." *Women and Ageing in Irish Literature and Film*, edited by Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh, *Nordic Irish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, pp. 95-112. An extended version of this article is the subject of my analysis in Chapter Three.

Also opening the field is theatre scholar Valerie Barnes Lipscomb's study *Performing Age in Modern Drama* (2016), which is situated at the intersection of Theatre Studies, Performance Studies, Literary Studies, and Age Studies. Lipscomb analyses the performance of age in plays by both male and female dramatists, including the plays of Irish dramatists Hugh Leonard and Brian Friel. Lipscomb concludes that if we view all age as performative, an intergenerational conversation could begin to break down binaries and contribute to the ongoing fight against ageism. However, there is no similar study in the Irish theatrical canon, so my thesis contributes to closing the gap in the field, by analysing the gendered dimension of representations of age in Samuel Beckett's drama, both "on the page" and "on the stage".

As Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Fruh note in the Introduction to *Women and Ageing in Irish Literature and Film*, "gendered dimensions of ageing" are central themes in Irish literature and culture, where images of a beautiful young girl or an old woman are emblematic of the Irish nation (O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh 2018:1). The most famous female figure associated with the nation is that of Cathleen ni Houlihan, the female allegory of Ireland, which of course was made famous in the play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, co-written by Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats. The play presents Cathleen as a poor old woman lamenting the loss of her four green fields; in her search for young men to go to battle in her name, she transforms into a beautiful girl, with a queen-like walk (O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh 2018:1). O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh consider the theme of ageing in the work of Irish poet, Eavan Boland. In *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*, Boland analyses Francis Ledgwidge's poem "Lament for the Poets: 1916", where the Shan Van Vocht (Poor Old Woman) mourns the death of the leaders of the Easter Rising.[4] She argues that

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[4] The figure of the ageing woman in Irish poetry is associated with that of the Shan Van Vocht, which is the Irish language phrase for Poor Old Woman.

> in his (Ledgwidge's) attempt to make the feminine stand in for the national, he has simplified the woman in the poem almost out of existence. She is in no sense the poor old woman of the colloquial expression. There are no vulnerabilities here, no human complexities. She is a Poor Old Woman in capital letters. A mouthpiece. A sign. (qtd. in O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh 2018:2)

Until recently, these traditional, albeit powerful tropes of feminine ageing, in service to a national story, have historically shaped and overshadowed more complex representations of older women in Irish literature until recently. As Boland points out in *Object Lessons*, passive constructions of female ageing serve to reinforce gender stereotypes which see women relegated to domestic spaces while men occupy the public sphere. This actively contributes to women's cultural invisibility, while also impacting on them economically as they reach old age. O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh argue that despite "postfeminist rhetoric, in contemporary neoliberal society the potential for empowerment through consumerism only serves to heighten gender dichotomies" (O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh 2018:2). A woman's social value is so inextricably linked to her ability to maintain youth through consumption that it inevitably leads to the invisible figure of the ageing woman, who is forced to eradicate her wrinkles in order to stay relevant. As older women are underrepresented in the public spheres of the media, politics, economic security, socially and cultural representations, my thesis aims to contribute to a growing awareness of the rate of occlusion of older women in public life when I consider the complexities of female ageing through an analysis of Beckett's drama. This thesis adds to the cultural and literary constructions of ageing women that are becoming more frequent and diverse in recent Irish writing, by looking at representations of ageing women at a critical stage in the formation of a national canon. Beckett's work provides a rich field of study in which to consider earlier representations of older women as much of his late drama centres on older female characters and their struggles and because his work has shaped the "field imaginary" of the Irish stage.[5]

Recent demographic shifts in Ireland have revealed an increase in the ageing population: Sheelah Connolly, Research Officer with the Economic and Social Research Institute, in "Contextualising Ageing in Ireland", points out that "while Ireland's population is ageing, it remains young relative to other high-income countries. [,,,] [h]owever, a catch-up is projected by 2050, when the proportion of Ireland will surpass that of other countries" (qtd. in O'Neill and Schrage-Fruh 2018:12). A recent article in *The Irish Times* noted the latest UN Report which revealed that, over the last five years alone, living conditions have improved faster in Ireland than anywhere else in the world. Ireland now ranks fourth in the world in the UN's Human Development Index, only lagging behind Norway, Switzerland and Australia. The report focused on three aspects of human development: the ability to lead a long and healthy life, which is measured by life expectancy at birth; the ability to gain knowledge, based on level of education, and the ability to achieve a basic standard of living, which is measured by gross national income per capita (Hilliard 2018). Interestingly, when it comes to gender inequality, Ireland lags way behind in 23rd position. It also revealed that last year, the life expectancy for an Irish woman was 83.6 and 79.7 for men, statistically backing up anecdotal evidence that Irish women live longer than Irish men. Ireland is facing an increasingly ageing population by 2050, the majority of which will be women.

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[5] Robyn Weigman introduced the concept of the "field imaginary" as a method of identifying the ways in which disciplinary frames shape how a field of study is imagined. See *Object Lessons*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2010.

Gerontology and Age

This study partakes in a new research direction that aims to add age to the categories of identity such as gender, race, and class in order to produce more nuanced readings of intersectional identity not only horizontally across the various groups to which one may or may not belong to, but also the way in which these sectors change across a lifetime. As Kathleen Woodward suggests, in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*: "[w]e need to create for ourselves cultural models of older women as a way of generating alternative futures for ourselves as we live into lives longer than we had imagined for ourselves, if we had even previously thought consciously about ageing at all – and many of us have not" (Woodward 1999: 155). Western culture's obsession with youth and the idea of some sort of notional "perfect" adolescent prematernal physical body, produces, in a mass consumer culture, a disparity between those two extremes, rendering the older female body "as both invisible and hypervisible, envisioning ageing as a medical problem to be cured and leaving small explosions of anxiety in its wake" (Woodward 1999: xvi). In her 1972 essay "The Double Standard of Ageing" Susan Sontag referred to a double marginality experienced by older women when she protested that "Growing old is mainly an ordeal of the imagination – a moral disease, a social pathology – intrinsic to which is that it affects women much more than men" (Sontag 1972:37). Her short essay, largely overlooked at the time, but now considered a key touchstone by feminists who are writing about their own ageing, was published in the *Saturday Review*, an American magazine. Woodward also argues a similar point, when she suggests that older women are subject to "double ageing" or "multiple ageing" (Woodward 1999: xiii). Woodward associates the first experience of ageing with the onset of menopause, usually around the age of fifty, an event which is often viewed in negative terms culturally. Female attractiveness in the West is commercially associated with youth, whereas older women tend to be configured in society by the disparaging terms "menopausal" and "post-menopausal" (Woodward 1999: xiii). It would appear that there is no such counterpart for men and therefore they do not experience the same psychological and social consequences. Woodward describes the experience of women's ageing as "the internalization of our culture's denial of and distaste of ageing, which is understood in terms of decline, not in terms of growth and change" (Woodward 1999: xiii). Woodward employs a psychoanalytic framework for her work on ageing. The standard view on ageing is that our youth obsessed society refuses to acknowledge it because it reminds them of their own inevitable death. Woodward argues that psychoanalysis transfers the fear of ageing onto a fear of death, a theme that is central to the work of Beckett. Deep old age or Fourth Age is the most fearful stage of the ageing process as it heralds the end of the life course.

In academic practice, pre-the 1970s, the analysis of ageing was largely the prevail of sociologists and anthropologists. Working with large-scale models of social change, social scientists uncovered a narrative of declining esteem, power and income. Thomas Cole, medical humanities professor and Ruth Ray, gerontologist, in the Introduction to *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* (2010), note that "according to this 'grand narrative', older people enjoyed power and prestige before the coming of urban industrial society" (Cole and Ray 2010:15). They oversaw "three-generational patriarchal households, and their experience, knowledge, and control over property guaranteed a high social status" (Cole and Ray 2010:15). As the industrial revolution took hold, this prestige was severely depleted as older people became separated from their families and forced out of the labour market, relegating them to the "scrap heap" of the industrial society (Cole and Ray 2010:15). Others have noted that in Europe and the United States, the long-held belief that the status of older people is consistently declining is not empirically supported. Cole and Ray point out that the history of old age in the twentieth century becomes "less diverse and more uniform across national, cultural, and social boundaries, as the institutionalized life course and the welfare state become primary social institutions" Cole and Ray 2010:16).

Cole and Ray write that American historians were the first in the humanities to consider ageing itself as a distinct subject. In an essay in 2000, Pat Thane, historian, pointed out that it is difficult to generalize about the history of ageing in the West: "[h]istorians of old-age in Britain have written primarily about demography and the material conditions of older people: the number of old people, their geographical distribution, their living arrangements; … household structures and family relationships:… welfare arrangements, medical provisions, property transactions, work and retirement" (Cole and Ray 2010:15-16). In Thane's essay in the 2010 collection, she argued that to fully understand the history of ageing and old age, it is crucial to draw from "diverse forms of historical knowledge, of demographic and material experiences with cultural histories of the representation and self-representation of older people in different times and places", as these approaches can never be separated from each other (Thane 2010:34). Cultural representations of ageing, drawn from philosophical or medical texts, literature, painting, and film or any other source shape our "field imaginary" of the experience of the life course and individual and collective action. Thane argues that "[i]f people are culturally conditioned to expect to be dependent and helpless past a certain age, they are more likely to become so, with consequences for their own lives and those of others, including those who care for them" (Thane 2010:34). Thane shows how ageing has been perceived in different ways across time. She begins with the estimate that even in ancient Rome it is considered that between six to eight percent of the population lived to over the age of sixty. In medieval Europe, it is also estimated that no more than eight percent of the population lived to old age, and in some regions, it was less than five percent.

In Britain, there are a wealth of population studies which reveal that between the 1540s and 1800s, life expectancy at birth was on average thirty-five years of age. High rates of infant mortality prior to the twentieth century affected these averages, and those who managed to survive early childhood had a reasonable chance, even in the sixteenth century of living to least and beyond the age of sixty. In the seventeenth century, it is estimated that between six and eight percent of the British population lived beyond the age of sixty. In the late eighteenth century, this rose to approximately ten percent in countries France, Spain and Britain. France, by contrast experienced falling birthrates in the nineteenth century, which affected the overall age pattern. In the mid-eighteenth century, seven to eight percent of the population lived beyond the age of sixty. By 1860, this had risen to ten percent, by the early twentieth century we see a rise to twelve percent and by 1946, a further rise to fourteen percent. There is clear evidence to suggest that women in Britain lived longer than men, on average, being in the majority of those aged over sixty from the time that vital statistics began in 1837. Medieval commentators noted and wondered why women did in fact live longer than men when it was assumed that men were stronger; French physicians in the eighteenth-century were flummoxed as to why females outlived their male counterparts. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were in fact, more older men than women, but after World War 1, this was reversed and has remained much the same statistically. Of course, the early deaths of the young men who fought in both World War 1 and World War 11 affected the statistical picture dramatically.

Cole and Ray note that following on from the work of historians, literary scholars were the next to explore ageing in the 1970s and 1980s. Woodward was the most prolific writer on ageing, literature and culture in the late 1970s and the 1980s. She broadened her research to consider how women are doubly aged as they are aged by nature, but more importantly, by culture in a youth obsessed society. The task of literary criticism in the field of ageing studies, then, was to determine the contribution of literature to an understanding of the ageing process and the impact of ageing on the life and work of writers. A convincing argument was made for the inclusion of ageing as a field of research, along with other fields of identity studies such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity.

In an essay in Cole and Ray's collection, literary gerontologist Barbara Frey Waxman compares two texts written about ageing: *Sister Age* (1984) by M.F.K. Fisher and Maya Angelou's *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey* (1994) to analyse changing attitudes towards ageing. She concludes that negative attitudes towards older people has not altered much in the interim years but argues that issues of ageing are far more prevalent in literature and popular culture since the late 1990s, due to ever increasing ageing populations, and that these representations are necessary for any kind of change to occur in society. There is now hope that because of increased diversity in representation, public consciousness regarding the issues and challenges facing older people will be heightened and that old age will not, in the future seem like "a foreign country with an unknown language to the young, and even to the middle-aged", as novelist May Sarton put it (Sarton 1973:23). Sarton wrote novels concerning older women as she herself began to experience ageing. Her masterful autobiographical novel *As We Are Now* (1973), charts the experience of the seventy-six-year-old heroine Caro Spencer, a passionately resistant woman, who has been forced to live in a nursing home that she describes as "a concentration camp for the old" (Sarton 1973:9). Frey Waxman notes that novels such as Sarton's are positive works on ideal ageing, which differ from the "painfully constricting" works of the typical female *Bildungsroman* (Waxman 1990: 320). Waxman argues that these novels represent a new sub-genre of "concluding" work regarding the representation of ageing (Waxman 1990:320). This sub-genre charts a different type of maturing, as it focuses on women who are "freer than many young heroines to develop fully, emotionally and philosophically" (Waxman 1990:320). To distinguish it, Waxman suggests the German term

"*Reifungsroman*": *Reifung* pertains both to ripening and maturing in an emotional and philosophical way, which few young heroines seem completely to achieve" (Waxman 1990:321). The term is intended to challenge the constricting concept of the female *Bildungsroman,* where the young protagonist acquires self-knowledge, only to become trapped in the marriage plot, a classic example of which is Jane Austen's famous novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the 1980s, Margaret Gullette, a self-styled feminist and ageist resister was the first to call for a new research field of "Age Studies", to explore the consequences of societal attitudes to ageing, arguing that the negativity surrounding age and ageing amounted to a form of social pathology. In *Safe at Last in the Middle Years: The Invention of the Midlife Progress* Novel (1988), Gullette identified a subgenre of the feminine midlife progress novel. Since the 1990s, Gullette's work has critically uncovered the cost of ageism not just in society, but within feminism and cultural studies. In *Declining to Decline* (1997), she argued that "we (women) are aged by culture" and concludes that we need much more knowledge about how culture ages us (Gullette 1997::6-7). In *Aged By Culture* (2004), she asked a critical question, "How can we ever have thought we age by nature alone?", thus highlighting the power of culture to create identity categories that are over "naturalized" (Gullette 2004:137). Gullette notes that while critical theory has subverted and deconstructed the old binaries which produce and mark identity, highlighting the role of culture and language in revealing hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, it has, by and large, ignored age as a field of research. Until recently, age remained "a different difference […] many think "age" refers to older people and is thus of no present interest", she astutely observes (Gullette 2004: 111). In a more recent essay, Gullette discusses the emerging field of age studies that merges "humanistic, anthropological, and other social science approaches, by highlighting […] narrative, popular culture, especially the media, literary fiction, political economy, anti-ageist ethics, and/or history" (Gullette 2010:319). Age is "a narrative each of us tells, but with an inadequate backstory. My own ageing narrative rarely becomes analytically informed about how I am being aged by ageist trends in culture" (Gullette 2010:319).

Gullette draws attention to ageist culture that employ phrases such as "'senior moment', 'ageing boomers', 'dried-up old woman'. 'I use the words they teach me, to paraphrase Samuel Beckett", she wryly comments (Gullette 2010:319). Like feminist, race and queer studies, and including social gerontology, age studies "monitor the oppressors" (Gullette 2010:319). She offers three areas of misrepresented trends in American ageism or middle ageism: midlife job losses, menopause and the link between Hormone Replacement Therapy and cancer, and the emergence of the "Duty to Die" (Gullette 2010:329). Gullette provides statistics in her analysis, noting that "capitalism since at least the Reagan years has been eroding seniority to obtain a cheaper workforce that is demoralized and more flexible. Getting rid of midlife workers is an international trend in developed countries (Gullette 2010:321). She notes how midlife women are more at risk than men, which is unsurprising. A study in 2006 notes that unlike men, midlife women are less likely to use job experience as an asset in a job interview as they may have returned to work late, due to child-rearing commitments. As Gullette writers, "They may earn more than their mothers" […] "but they still earn only 73 percent of what men earn" (Gullette 2010:322). Another study in 2001 reveals how, although men begin to experience age discrimination in their mid-fifties, for women it begins almost ten years younger. Also, on obtaining a job, midlife women work longer hours than midlife men.

Gullette argues that the terms associated with menopause are disparaging to women: menopausal, postmenopausal, perimenopausal serve only to medicalize women's bodies and age them earlier than men (Gullette 2010:325). She suggests these disparaging terms should have disappeared in declining narratives by now. She quotes anthropologist Margaret Lock who warns that “the very process of ageing has been widely reinterpreted as a deviation from the normal, a process against which [to] take major precautions” (qtd. in Gullette 2010:325). The social issue is not menopause, which is an unremarkable period in about 90 percent of women, but “exogenous hormones”, or HRT, a “collective public health and cultural concern” (Gullette 2010:325). Gullette warns that “Women still have more to fear from menopause *discourse* than from menopause itself” (Gullette 2010:326).

Gullette notes that in 2002, the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) of the National Institutes of Health announced it was ending its study of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) immediately due to the increased risk of cancer and heart disease. The ongoing debacle about the risks associated with HRT, particularly that of breast cancer, has radically reduced the number of HRT users globally. In 2003, a headline in the *Washington Post* declared that, far from disappearing, “Menopause Has Become the New Hot-Button Topic in Women’s Health” (Gullette 2010:327). In 2004, an article in *Business Week* went as far as suggesting that menopause last from the early forties until death! (Gullette 2010:327). Gullette notes that rarely do we read an article positing the benefits of being postmenstrual such as “no more bleeding, drying up of fibroids, abandoning birth control devices, wearing white suits. Nor do they report that depression, joint pain, and incontinence have nothing to do with menopause and that libido can rise” (Gullette 2010:327). Although the earlier WHI study in 2002 of the associated cancer risks of taking HRT was subsequently deemed to have “overstated the risks”, women are now wary of availing of hormone treatments. Oestrogen is still, according to Gullette “irrationally, linked not to cancer but to a youth-oriented definition of femininity” (Gullette 2010:328). This illusion that ageing women can recapture their youth by taking a pill is the subject of the book *Feminine Forever,* by Robert Wilson; Wilson says of the menopause: “no woman can be sure of escaping the horror of this living decay" (qtd. in Gullette 2010:329). Gullette concludes that these narratives of decline, combined with untested products, the causing of confusion by the HRT studies, the social and medical construction of "menopausal" women, and the "disregard of sceptical feminist perspectives – resurrects oestrogen nostalgia and its sequelae after what should have been a debacle" (Gullette 2010:329). Finally, she notes that a study commissioned by two drug companies in 2003 concluded that one quarter of the women who had stopped using hormone treatments after the 2002 WHI announcement have subsequently resumed the treatment.

Ageing and Philosophy

In the history of philosophy, there is very little written on the topic of ageing. Margaret Urban Walker's *Mother Time*: *Women, Aging, and Ethics* (2000) is the first contemporary series of edited essays that is concerned with feminist philosophical thought on the ethics of ageing. In the collection, the importance of the implications of ageing as a field of identity is emphasised, with the assertion that it cannot be separated from the fields of race, gender and class, as well as from cultural, historical and personal instances. Helen Small's landmark study *The Long Life* (2007) employs longevity as a lens in which to peruse the large questions of moral philosophy: "What is the relation between a long life and a good life? How long does identity persist? Do the changes that accompany ageing alter the capacity for virtue?" (Small 2007:18). Small is concerned with how ageing enables us to understand philosophical issues, rather than the philosophy of ageing: "the old are expected to be philosophical. This is commonly little more than a wish that a life nearing the end of its possible biological span should be reconciled to the proximity and inevitability of death […] Having a philosophy of death or feeling the desirability of such a philosophy in others, is not the same thing as having a philosophy of old age" (Small 2007:1).

According to Small, the philosophers of old age, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Montaigne, Bacon, and Beauvoir have been more interested in “mortal questions” (Small 2007:1). Living a long life has been historically viewed as exceptional. Small’s study focuses specifically on old age, and what that conveys in our culture. She defines it as “the later years of a long life, when there is an inevitable and irreversible deterioration in the organism as a consequence of its age” (Small 2007:3). Her usage of “old” is a highly flexible term, she argues. Our relation to our own age is particularly complex. The age we feel does not necessarily correlate to the age we are in years, nor is it the same as how we perceive ourselves, or how others perceive us. Historically, living to old age was viewed as exceptional, and philosophical writing about age tended towards essays, letters, aphorisms, rather than books. The two main studies on old age are to be found in Cicero’s *De Senectute* and Simone de Beauvoir’s *La Vieillesse*, which take opposing views of ageing, both of which are helpful to look at in detail, as they set out different coordinates of the ageing paradigm I apply in this thesis.

Marcus Tullius Cicero on ageing: *Cato Maior De Senectute*

Cicero was aged 63 and a senator when he wrote his famous short essay in defense of old age, *Cato Maior De Senectute*. Written in 44 BC when he was grieving for the loss of his daughter Tullia, it is, according to Small, “stoicism in its most invigorating guise” (Small 2007:7). It still carries considerable currency when thinking about physical health and mental vitality and it is also taught as a standard Latin text. Although he refers to the “burden” of old age, Cicero argues that old age brings pleasure and wisdom. Written in the form of an address between the 84year-old Cato and two younger men, the 35-year-old Scipio and his friend Laelius, Cato attempts to persuade the younger men of these benefits while on a visit to his house. He claims:

“I am wise because I follow Nature as the best guides and obey her as a god; and since she has fitly planned the other acts of life’s drama, it is not likely that she has neglected the final act as if she were a careless playwright" (Cicero 1923:3).[6] Comparing a good life with that of a flourishing plant, there is the eventual natural conclusion: "And yet there had to be something final, and – as in the case of orchard fruits and crops of grain in the process of ripening which comes with time – something shrivelled, as it were, and prone to fall" (Cicero 1923:3).

There are no vices associated with old age Cato remonstrates, and any bad temperament is due to "character, not […] age" (Cicero 1923:4). He takes four common reasons why old age appears as an unhappy state: "first, that it withdraws us from active pursuits; second, that it makes the body weaker; third, that it deprives us of almost all physical pleasures; and, fourth, that it is not far removed from death", and counters each one in turn (Cicero 1923:4). In answer to the first stereotype, Cato asks "From what pursuits? Is it not from those which are followed because of youth and vigour? Are there, then, no intellectual employments in which aged men may engage, even though their bodies are infirm?" (Cicero 1923:7). We misunderstand if we only consider activity as a physical pursuit; we may as well say that "the pilot does nothing in the sailing of his ship, because, while others are climbing the masts, or running about the gangways, or working at the pumps, he sits quietly in the stern and simply holds the tiller" (Cicero 1923:7).

In relation to the physical weakening of the ageing body, Cato argues that this can similarly afflict the young: "it is not peculiar to old age; generally it is a characteristic of illhealth" (Cicero 1923:13). He asks: "What wonder, then, that the aged are sometimes weak, when even the young cannot escape the same fate?" (Cicero 1923:13). Cato tells the young men that although in his eighties, he is learning Greek and writing a history of Rome, so although the body may be weak, the mind remains passionately active. As to the loss of almost all physical pleasures, Cato welcomes this state of affairs: "O glorious boon of age, if it does indeed free us from youth's most vicious fault! […] No more deadly curse […] has been given by nature to man than carnal pleasure, through eagerness for which the passions are driven recklessly and uncontrollably to its gratification" (Cicero 1923:14-15). Cato revels in the sensual pleasures of companionship, conversation and social gatherings. Finally, there is nothing to fear regarding old age and its proximity to death. All of us, young and old are susceptible to this fate at any time in our lives. However, while Cicero's thoughts on positive ageing are admirable, he was speaking from the position of male privilege at a time in his society when male philosophers were revered. His thoughts on ageing are, though, much more positive than that of Beauvoir in her monumental study on old age, written in 1972.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* (*La Viellesse*)

Beauvoir's expansive study on old age has been relatively unknown, until the recent emergence of Age Studies as a field of enquiry. Woodward joins Gullette when she argues that "ageism is entrenched within feminism itself" (Woodward 1999: xi). This possibly goes some way to explaining why Beauvoir's monumental study of old age was largely ignored by a second wave feminism, concerned with the log-jams of marriage, work and child-rearing of early and middle age when it appeared first, despite her influence on second wave feminism. In *The Coming of Age*, Beauvoir writes that society views old age as "a kind of shameful secret that it is unseemly to mention" (Beauvoir 1972:1). On writing about the subject, she claims she was told, kindly and then again more angrily, that old age did not exist in society. She argues that one of the issues with ageing is that we refuse to recognize ourselves in old people and she quotes Marcel Proust on this refusal: "Of all realities [old age] is perhaps that of which we retain a purely abstract notion longest in our lives. We are all mortal beings, and many of us will live into a ripe old age, but few of us appear to reflect upon it in public culture. As Beauvoir astutely notes: "Nothing should be more expected than old age: nothing is more unforeseen" (Beauvoir 1972:4).

Beauvoir asks, “What does growing old mean ? The notion is bound up with that of change. Yet, the life of the fetus, of the new-born baby and of the child is one of continuous change. Must we therefore say, as some have said, that our life is a gradual death?”[6] She answers:

> certainly not. A paradox of this kind disregards the basic truth of life – life is an unstable system in which balance is continually lost and continually recovered: it is inertia that is synonymous with death. Change is the law of life. And it is a particular kind of change that distinguishes ageing – an irreversible, unfavourable change; a decline. (Beauvoir 1972:11)

Beauvoir quotes American gerontologist Lansing who suggests that ageing be defined as “a process of unfavourable, progressive change, usually correlated with the passage of time, becoming apparent after maturity and terminating invariably in death of the individual” (Beauvoir 1972:20). For Beauvoir this definition presents an immediate difficulty as “it implies a value judgement” (Beauvoir 1972:11). Ageing is perceived by Lansing to be a time of ultimate decline, where older people are beyond their sell-by date, thereby valueless.

La Viellesse (Old Age) was published in French in 1970 and subsequently translated in 1972 under the more euphemistic title *The Coming of Age*, such was the taboo nature of the topic. While it is an exemplary study on the topic of ageing, it is also extreme in its overarching view of ageing as a “tragedy” (Beauvoir 1972:274). As Small notes, references to *La Viellesse* are fewer than one would expect in writings about ageing and old age, and when Beauvoir’s name does appear, she is characterised as “a political agitator on behalf of the old (a problematic one, given her emphasis on decline) […] but not as a philosopher, with a specific conception of what a life is, of how lives accrue and sustain meaning, and of philosophy’s relationship to politics" (Small 2007:2). Beauvoir frames her analysis of ageing with the same combination of Marxist sociology, phenomenological philosophy and Freudian psychology that she applied to women in *The Second Sex.* She astutely sees old age as that which is defined by society. She mourns that "in the end we submit to the outsider's point of view" (Beauvoir 1972:290) However, it is difficult to submit to the rule:

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[6] Here, Beauvoir could be referring to Beckett’s aesthetic that “they give birth astride of a grave” in his play *Waiting for Godot*, where the reference “womb-tomb”, refers to birth as a slow death.

> We must assume a reality that is certainly ourselves although it reaches us from the outside and although we cannot grasp it. There is an insoluble contradiction between the obvious clarity of the inward feeling that guarantees our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our transformation. All we can do is waver from the one to the other, never managing to hold them both firmly together. (Beauvoir 1972:290)

She argues that the contradiction between the inward and outward being is different from other contradictions we face in earlier life. She observes that we do not inhabit the future as present in the same way we inhabited it in our former years. Beauvoir explains: "Even if the present conforms to my expectations [in the past], it could not bring me what I expected – that fullness of being at which life so vainly aims […] no man (sic) can say, 'I've had a fine life' because a life is something that one does not *have*, that one does not possess" (Beauvoir 1972:368). She is here referring to Jean Paul Sartre's work on futurity where he argued that "the future does not allow itself to be overtaken, but slips into the past, a future that is future no more" (qtd. in Beauvoir 1972:368). Beauvoir fears old age and is also angered by it. She views the elderly as victims of poverty, ill health and emotional neglect, and is unable to see the positive moral or intellectual gains historically associated with the wisdom of age. She writes of Gide who, in 1943 complained "my mind almost never succeeds in distracting me from my flesh or in making me forget it, and this is more harmful to work than I can say" (Beauvoir 1972:316-7). Her biggest fear is the shrinking of our future and with it, the impossibility of holding on to the projects that give our lives meaning.[7] She is fearful of the possibility that our minds may disintegrate in old age and with it, the betrayal of ourselves, reneging on projects and sympathies that have subsequently defined our life.

Small argues that there is a "politics of outrage in *La Vieillesse*, but it is not, in the end, a politics with much hope attached for the fate of the treatment of older people in our culture" (Small 2007:14). Beauvoir concludes with the issue she raises at the beginning: is it necessary for the aged to suffer, and if so, how much suffering occurs? According to her, this suffering is unavoidable:

> It is an empiric and universal truth that after a certain number of years the human organism undergoes a decline. The process is inescapable. At the end of a certain time it results in a reduction in the individual's activities: very often it also brings about a diminution in his [sic] mental faculties and an alteration in his [sic] attitude towards the world. (Beauvoir 1972:539)

The treatment of the aged is the "crime of our society"; it is "morally atrocious" and even in an "ideal society", Beauvoir sees no end to their suffering (Beauvoir 1972:542-3). In her final thoughts, she does not support the notion of political activism on behalf of the old, arguing instead, that the problem is systemic, in that our society is only interested in profit, which excludes the elderly and the frail. She concludes with the only solution she envisages: "It is the whole system that is at issue and our claim cannot be otherwise than radical – change life itself" (Beauvoir 1972:543).

Literature critic Jeannette King notes, however, the curious absence of the role of gender in Beauvoir's extensive analysis of ageing (King 2013:68). Beauvoir says surprisingly little on women’s specific experience of old age and focuses primarily on men’s experiences. Beauvoir suggests that it is men who suffer the most from growing old, as after retirement, men are reduced to the situation that women find themselves in: that of becoming an object, denied agency in society. What is significant about ageing, she suggests, is not just that Western society refuses to acknowledge it other than a problem to be avoided, but crucially that it changes our relation to time. Comparing the status of the aged to that of women, Beauvoir does note that both occupy the status of the Other: “since it is the Other within us who is old, it is natural that the revelation of our age should come to us from outside – from others […] Long tradition has loaded the word with pejorative connotations; it has the ring of an insult” (Beauvoir 1972:288). She recalls an incident when she was travelling with Jean-Paul Sartre; one of Sartre’s friends met them in a hotel and remarked that he had just met a mutual friend who was accompanied by “an old lady” (Beauvoir 1972:289). Beauvoir remembers how “utterly taken aback” she was, never considering her friend as an old woman (Beauvoir 1972:289). She writes of the incident: “an alien eye had transformed her into another being” (Beauvoir 1972:289). Beauvoir had a keen sense of how culture ages women more aggressively than men.

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[7] Beauvoir borrows this phrase from Freud, who wrote of ageing as a period where one "no longer discovers new ideas […] all that is left to him [sic] is self-repetition". Beauvoir suggests that this hardening of Freud's mind was because of the "shrinking of his future" (Beauvoir 1972:524).

In her earlier seminal work, *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir mourned the tragedy of the ageing woman. In *The Coming of Age*, she laments “the tragedy of old age” (Beauvoir 1997:274). She suggests that both sexes are no longer regarded as human in old age. King argues that it is not just that *The Second Sex* is about women, while the later work is about old age in general, but it is noticeable how surprisingly limited attention Beauvoir gives to “gender issues” (King 2013:69). Employing the principles of Existentialist philosophy in *The Second* Sex, Beauvoir popularised the use of the term “the Other” as a factor in the subject’s selfimage, specifically locating the older woman as Other in patriarchal discourse. Humanity is "male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (Beauvoir 1997:16). Famously, she argues that the man is "the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (Beauvoir 1997:16). Crucially, then, the older woman is, as King notes: "doubly Other, both Other to man, and Other to youth, the positive in the youth/age binary within modern Western ideology" (King 2013: 42-3). Beauvoir notes the differentiation of sexual issues between the sexes when she argues that "biologically men are at the greater disadvantage: socially, it is the women who are worse off, because of their condition as erotic objects" (Beauvoir 1972: 321). The argument that older men are biologically disadvantaged has been completely reversed due to technological advances in medicine that have resulted in medications such as Viagra, a sexual performance enhancing drug.

Beauvoir on Beckett and old age

Beauvoir addresses the trop of ageing in Beckett's work. Of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, she argues that the theme is "the crumbling of memory and therefore of the whole of the life behind us; and Beckett deals with it cruelly" (Beauvoir 1972:212). She writes that in these plays, growing old means "sliding down gently into eternal life, remembering … the whole of this wretched unhappiness … as though … it had never happened" (Beauvoir 1972:212). While she does not analyse the gendered aspect of ageing in either play, in her attention to Beckett's postwar novel *Molloy,* she examines ageing as if it is not gendered by discourse:

> the hero is already elderly at the beginning of the book, and he sinks lower and lower; his other leg stiffens and he loses half his toes; at first, in spite of these difficulties, he can still just get about on a bicycle. Then he can no longer manage it and he drags himself along on crutches; in the end all he can do is to crawl. His chief occupation, during this gradual dissolution, is the summoning up of his memories; but they crumble, they are vague, amorphous, cloudy, and no doubt untrue. Life is only the recollection that we have of it; and recollection is nothing. This nothing takes up a space in time; time passes, although it goes nowhere; we are in perpetual movement, yet in this journey that has no goal we remain stationary. Looking at it in the light of old age we discover this truth about life, which, fundamentally, is no more than old age hidden under so much tinsel. In Ionescu and Beckett 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. They are not interested in the old men for themselves: they only make use of them to express their concept of mankind. (Beauvoir 1972:213)

Beauvoir also makes no reference to Molloy's ageing mother in the novel, thus limiting her discussion to that of the male experience.

Beauvoir notes the particular role that old age plays in "the theatre of the absurd" (Beauvoir 1972:212). Comparing ageing in both Beckett and Ionescu's work, she notes that in Ionescu's *Les Chaises* we see

> an old couple imprisoned in their blown-up, delirious memories of a past that they do their best to bring back to life. They give a party to which nobody comes; they welcome invisible guests, giving them chairs, moving about among them, bumping into them; and all the time more and more chairs come on to the stage. It is the very reality that their wandering minds call up – the brilliant soirees and fashionable gatherings – which is shown to be absurd. And when in the end they jump out of the window they do so because in losing all meaning their life makes it clear to them that it never had one. (Beauvoir 1972:212)

Beauvoir argues that Beckett's work displays a "similar indictment of life by the pitiful degradation of its end. The old pair in *End Game* who, speaking from one dustbin to another conjure up past happiness and love amount to a condemnation of all love and all happiness" (Beauvoir 1972:212). Paradoxically, then, the writer of *The Second Sex,* which is one of the works can be credited with instilling second-wave feminism, was gender-blind in her own study of ageing.

Second wave feminists on their own experiences of ageing

Second wave feminists such as Kathleen Woodward, Germaine Greer and Lynne Segal, all now in their sixties and seventies have begun to extend the classic analysis of "the personal is political" to the experience of ageing and desire in their more recent work. According to Greer, "to be unwanted is to be free" (Greer 1991:2-4). In her book on the menopause, *The Change:*

Women, Ageing and the Menopause (1991) she insists that women should celebrate ageing as a time when they are "free at last" from the bonds of sexuality and desire (Greer 1991;2-4). Greer is disdainful of late middle-aged women who she brands among the "gallery of grotesques" who aim to please and satisfy men by denying their own ageing (…). How we age is influenced by society's attitudes; currently the cult of youth reigns. But ageing is also dictated by diseases such as cancer, especially breast cancer in women (which now affects one in every nine women in Ireland), desertion and isolation and poverty – one fifth of those who live over the age of sixty-five are in poverty, many them women, all also invisible and ageing. As women bear children in a time when their mothers were ploughing through the menopause, the notion of ageing is changing at a rapid pace. In Britain, ten million people are over the age of sixty-five and soon centurions will be the norm.

Segal's *Out of Time* (2013) explores the ways in which ageing is gendered, especially in the life of desire. She notes that in recent fiction, writers such as Philip Roth depict the distinct "phallic fault lines" of ageing and the narcissistic mortification when the penis begins to let them down; post –Viagra, erectile dysfunction disorder is the illness this feeling has spawned (83). Using abject language depicting the problems with sexual performance in older men, Roth notes that the penis, the symbol of masculinity is always on men's minds, even when it is almost defunct. Its presence is still felt, "like the end of a pipe you see sticking out of a field somewhere, a meaningless piece of pipe that spurts and gushes intermittently, spitting forth water to no end, until a day arrives when somebody remembers to give the valve the extra turn that shuts the damn sluice down" (qtd. in Segal 2013:84). Granted, Roth has always foregrounded the phallus in his work! Older men rarely mention the waning of desire. This is significantly contrasted with the writing of some of the most popular feminist voices such as

Greer who claims that “to be unwanted is to be free” (Greer 1991:2-4). Segal writes that similar sentiments appear in the work of feminist writers Gloria Steinem, Irma Kurtz, Jane Miller and Virginia Ironside. Such apparent gender contrast strongly shows the need for age studies, or ageing studies to consider what is meant by ageing sexuality, and what forces of social rejection may lead older women to feel safer disowning any signs of desire even though, being linked to memory, certain aspects of desire are likely to be timeless.

To conclude my review of the field of Age Studies, I look to what the sociologist Stephen Katz has to say in answer to the pertinent current question, “What is Age Studies?” In his essay of the same name, Katz argues that in age studies the subjective dimension of the field means that “we include ourselves in what we study and write about. As Jon Hendricks says, ‘If we cannot see ourselves in our explanations, perhaps we should pause before proffering these explanations to the profession’” (Katz 2014:1). These reflexive, critical and subjective dimensions “moor critical gerontology to age studies”, whether expressed in the sciences, the social sciences or the humanities (Katz 2014:5). From the humanities point of view, age studies look to “biographical, feminist, and narrative perspectives on self, memory, meaning, and wisdom and imaginative alternative resources and experiences in performative, artistic, fictional, transsexual, poetic, and futuristic fields”, all areas of the “field imaginary” that are now ripe for investigation (Katz 2014:4). My thesis looks to the experiences of female ageing in the performative and textual field of Beckett’s work. Age Studies can provide a platform

> from which “to catch up together, push against the restrictions on creative research and funding, establish new graduate opportunities” in the same way that feminism has achieved in every form of thought constructed against it over the last century, critique the practices by which current forms of knowledge and power about ageing have assumed their authority as truth. (Katz 2014:5)

In 2002, Katz defined ageing as, on the one hand, “the elegant and continuous means by which the forces of nature, from the microscopic to the universal, create the conditions for regeneration”, and on the other hand as having “inspired the human artistic and cultural imagination for millennia” as it makes us confront “the paradoxes of living and dying in time” (Katz 2014:5). He argues that this scope of issues is what identifies age studies. He argues that the study of ageing belongs in university programmes, particularly English departments, where modules on other identity categories such as gender and sexuality race and class already feature. My thesis aims to bring this identity category into the field of English and hopefully Irish Studies.

Chapter One examines a selection of Beckett’s early prose works to unpack what the critic Paul Stewart has termed “the delicate matter” of misogyny in Beckett’s work that spans twenty years, as a gateway to investigating how matters of sex and reproduction profoundly structure his work. It analyses these themes in Beckett’s first novel, the posthumously published *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), before moving to an analysis of the short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) and then the post-war novel *Molloy* (1951). The central concern of this chapter is what function does the overt misogyny serve in these texts? In answering this question, the chapter considers the possibility of an alternative queer reading of *Molloy*, which may go some way to contextualising the general economy of misogyny and misanthropy in the young Beckett’s writing.

Chapter Two focuses on how sexuality and reproduction come together in the figure of the mother in the novella “First Love” (1946) and *Molloy*. Both texts best represent the troubled obsession with the maternal figure and the recurring structural motif of the womb that is a hallmark of Beckett’s writing in this period. The representation of fictional and semi-monstrous maternal figures is a central but ambiguous concern in Beckett’s early and mid-phase writing, with these mother figures emerging as simultaneously nurturing and stifling. I employ the theories of Julia Kristeva, whose work can help to illuminate the tropes of maternity, motherhood and uterine spaces that occupy both texts. The image s of pregnancy and motherhood in Beckett's work identifies an anxiety with reproduction, that has largely been read in Beckett Studies as existential anxiety.

Chapter Three develops the work of the first two chapters, which were concerned with Beckett's response to the feminine in his prose work. This chapter now moves to his dramatic work to consider how the feminine and ageing are explored in his late drama. Much of the abjection and horror in relation to the feminine becomes even more amplified in Beckett's older female characters that populate his later stage work. My analysis is situated in the "field imaginary" of Age Studies, as the potent combination of age and femininity in Beckett's work has received scant critical attention. The chapter brings together established psychoanalytic readings of Beckett's late drama, and by adding age as an interpretive category, identifies resistant older women with sexual desires, a topic which largely remains a cultural taboo in society. Much of Beckett's late theatre is concerned with ageing marginalised female subjects attempting to account for themselves.

Chapter Four considers several strategic responses by Irish women directors, actors and performance artists of Beckett's drama in Irish theatre and performance. Firstly, it examines Irish theatre more generally, paying especial attention to the absence of female playwrights from the Irish theatrical canon in order to establish the context from which these women's work has emerged. As there have been extraordinary recent shifts in Irish theatre, the chapter begins with a sustained analysis of the "Waking the Feminists" movement, which was formed in 2015 in direct response to the Abbey Theatre's 1916 centenary programme, which featured work all by men, with the exception of one work by a woman playwright. The #WTF movement has become a widespread umbrella collectively largely driven by the power of social media. This chapter also explores the performance of age in Beckett's theatre, arguing that there is no such study in Irish Studies, other than a recent study by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb, *Performing Age in Modern Drama* (2016), which includes the performance of age in the work of several Irish male playwrights. The chapter ends with a consideration of Beckett's legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures by looking at how his work is being re-imagined in Irish performance art.

Chapter One

Sex Matters in the Early Fiction of Samuel Beckett

> Bodies don't matter but hers went something like this: big enormous breasts, big breech, Boticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, poppata, mammose, slobberyblubbery, bubbubbubbub, the real button-busting Weib, ripe. (Samuel Beckett *More Pricks Than Kicks*)

> Perhaps after all she put me in her rectum. A matter of complete indifference to me, I needn't tell you. But is it true love, in the rectum? That's what bothers me sometimes. (Samuel Beckett *Molloy*)

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine a selection of Samuel Beckett's early prose works, an output that can fairly be described as challenging in relation to women. I will unpack what the critic Paul Stewart has termed the "delicate matter" of misogyny in Beckett's work, which spans twenty years, as a gateway to investigating how matters of sex and reproduction profoundly structure his work. The chapter begins with Beckett's first novel, the posthumously published *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932, published in 1992), and moves on to an analysis of the short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934). The final part is focused on an example of his post-war fiction, *Molloy* (1951). I have chosen these texts to demonstrate how Beckett's treatment of gender and sexuality follows an approximate chronological order. The central question that concerns this chapter is not whether Beckett may have been a misogynist or even a misanthropist but rather, what does the misogyny *do* in his work? In answering this, the chapter will ask what function does such misogyny serve? How can it illuminate questions of gender in his work? Are any of the female characters constructed so as to display resistance to such characterization, and is there a possibility of an alternative queer reading in the texts, which may go some way to explaining the generalized economy of misogyny and misanthropy in Beckett's oeuvre? In asking these questions, I contend that gender and sexuality are not niche critical concerns in Beckett studies, but central to Beckett's aesthetics, and that focusing on them opens up the field of semantic and performative possibilities to create space for feminist and feminine sensibilities and embodiment that remain locked down when the misogyny in his work is dismissed or excused as an incidental by-product of his time.

Beckett stands as one of the key figures of Irish modernism, with far reaching influence in a number of literary practices, and his influence cannot be underestimated. In the essay "Modernism and Gender", Marianne Dekoven notes how shifts in gender relations were a key factor in the emergence of Modernism, in the period from 1880-1920. She argues that male modernist writers were preoccupied in their writing with "fear of women's new power" (Dekoven 2011:174). This resulted in a combination of "misogyny and triumphal masculinism that many critics see as central, defining features of modernist work by men" (Dekoven 2011:174). This thesis contends that this triumphal masculinism and misogyny was, however, accompanied by its "dialectical twin: a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine that itself forged many of Modernism's most characteristic formal innovations" (Dekoven 2011:174). This "dialectical twin" is also a central feature of Beckett's work – both his early prose and his later theatre work. Beckett's early writing is clearly structured by this "misogyny and triumphal masculinism".

For as long as Beckett's misogyny remains under-investigated and underestimated, he will continue to function as an unproblematic founding 'father' of Irish modernism overseeing a masculinist, androcentric and somatophobic canon and literary and theatrical field. Whilst the disturbing misogyny in his work has been noted by several key critical readers, this aspect remains a discomforting issue for his interpreters and readers. The invitation extended by this crucial observation to read his work as systemically misogynistic has been, for the most part, refused. Critics have found ways of acknowledging the misogyny, yet veering around it, so that it does not have to become a component of their interpretive lens. Stewart's *Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's Work*, the first comprehensive study of sex in Beckett's work, claims that dealing with misogyny in Beckett's early fiction remains "a delicate matter" (Stewart 2011:70).

Critic Chris Ackerley, neither accuses nor exonerates this seam in Beckett's work and concludes that the misogyny "is as much self-laceration as it is flagellation of the fairer sex" (Ackerley 2002: 55). He writes that Beckett's misogyny is a "recurrent grievance" which has prompted critics of the early prose to wish that he had not written "certain caustic passages" (Ackerley 2002:55). In an analysis of an early poem of Beckett's "Hell Crane to Starling", he excuses the "caustic tone adopted towards women" by locating it in a "tradition of misogyny running from Juvenal to Burton", and, I would add, the influence on Beckett's thinking of Jonathan Swift and the unapologetic misogynist Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher (Ackerley 2002:55).[8] One such early critic of Beckett, Rubin Rabinovitz expresses his unease with the grotesque depictions of women in Beckett's fiction, and concludes with a rather personal view of how to judge Beckett's most problematic descriptions of women, such as those in his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*. In his article "Stereoscopic or Stereotypic: Characterization in Beckett's Fiction", he writes: "I am made uncomfortable by passages like the description of the Smeraldina […]. I admire Beckett's work [...] and it is probably for this reason that I find myself wishing Beckett had never written these passages. For all the mitigating circumstances, their rancour still jars" (Rabinovitz 1992:115). These analyses, all made by male critics, represent a reluctance to interrogate the obvious violence towards women in Beckett's work, along with the polite silence surrounding issues of gender and sexuality that also pervades the caution attached to his work.[9] I not only identify this evasion by male critics, but I also directly challenge it, therefore providing an expanded reading of these unpalatable themes. Though fair, such misogyny directly illuminates some of the central ways in which questions of gender and sexuality structure Beckett's work. Although Stewart's view is that misogyny in the work is not to be regretted as it opens up other areas of enquiry into the themes of sex and reproduction in the work, he does not go far enough as he tends to excuse Beckett by arguing that Schopenhauer's disparaging view of women unduly influenced the young and impressionable Beckett. My analysis, therefore, departs from such evasive readings, particularly through suggesting the possibility of a queer reading in the post-war novel *Molloy* and the novella "The Calmative". Since the 1990s, a number of scholars, including Stewart, have discussed gender and sexuality in Beckett, but their concerns have continued to be regarded as marginal in Beckett criticism.[11]

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[8] Beckett had "a temperamental affinity that goes beyond mere approval" with Swift, whose work he re-read intensively in 1933 (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 549). John Fletcher argues that sex in Beckett and Swift's work must be considered through the lens of a joint hatred towards life, arguing that Beckett's misogyny is "no less deep-rooted than Swift's, and [shows] a similar recoil from female sexuality" (qtd. in Stewart 74). In Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, he writes that "what the hero atones for is not his particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself" (qtd. in Stewart 2011:5). For Schopenhauer, "[sexual desire] is the kernel of the will-to-live, and consequently the concentration of all willing" (Stewart 2011:6). To gain salvation, desire must be renunciated; this horror of procreation goes some way to account for the frequent episodes of misogyny found in both Schopenhauer and Beckett's early work.

The women in *More Pricks Than Kicks* with whom the protagonist Belacqua has relations with are disparagingly referred to by the use of the definite article before their names such as "the Frica", "the Alba" and "the Venerilla", which has the effect of de-humanizing them and turning them into archetypes. The passage that prompted Rabinovitz's description of this work as "caustic" is the depiction of Belacqua's lover, "the Smeraldina" in the story "Draff":

> The wretched little wet rag of an upper lip, pugnozzling up and back in what you might nearly call a kind of a duck or a cobra sneer to the nostrils, was happily to some extent

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[9] The annual Samuel Beckett Summer School, which has run at Trinity College Dublin since 2011, holds a round table discussion every year. For the first time, in 2017, it held a "gender and sexuality" round table, after a heated debate the year before when the "Beckett and Politics" Round Table had no speaker on the topic. [11] See: Linda Ben-Zvi's *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990; Mary Bryden's *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other*. Lanham, MD: Barnes & Noble, 1993; Stephanie Ravez's essay "From Cythera to Philautia: An Excursion into Beckettian Love." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 10., no. 1, 2002, pp. 136-151; Peter Boxall's essay "Beckett and Homoeroticism." *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*. Edited by Lois Oppenheim, Basingstoke:_Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 110132 and Jennifer Jeffers' *Beckett's Masculinity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

> amended by the wanton pout of its fellow and the forward jaws to match – a brilliant recovery. The skull of this strapping girl was shaped like a wedge. The ears of course were shells, the eyes shafts of reseda [...] into an oreless mind. The hair was as black as the pots that grew so thick and low athwart the temples that the brow was reduced to a fanlight [...] But what matter about bodies? (Beckett 2010a:168)

Just a page earlier in "Draff", the narrator states that bodies do not matter "but hers went something like this: big enormous breasts, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, poppata, mammose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbubbubbub, the real buttonbusting Weib, ripe" (Beckett 2010a:167-8). This gratuitously carnal description of the Smeraldina as a "duck" or a "cobra" is a common theme throughout the stories. In "A Wet Night", the Frica is compared to a randy "horse" in heat. Her mouth "champs an invisible bit, foam gathers at the bitter commissures" (Beckett 2010a:46). Described as a "throttled gazelle", whose "upper-lip writhed back in a snarl to the untented nostrils", the Frica is a "martyress in rut" (Beckett 2010a:55). The misogyny in this story is so excessive that it borders on the comical; it is so emphatic, so luxurious that it suggests it could be a conceit or a device of some sort, and as such it invites us to consider how it operates in Beckett's work.

Gender Politics

The question of gender politics and the value assigned to the feminine remained at the margins of Beckett studies until the early 1990s. However, in 1990 and 1993, two major studies were published by women which aimed to address the problem of gender in Beckett. The first was a collection of essays and interviews, *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (1990) edited by Linda Ben-Zvi., and the second, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama* (1993), was a monograph by Mary Bryden, which has become one of the most influential studies of the representation of women in Beckett's work. Using a Deleuzian framework, Bryden argued that there was a breakdown of phallocentric gender duality in the late plays and concluded that Beckett employed a writing style that exists beyond the familiar boundaries of gender and social organization. Her close attention to the representation of the feminine in the author's work uncovered a multiplication of differences beyond any binary model of sexual difference. According to Bryden, the evocation of this sensibility can be traced chronologically in the development of Beckett's art.

Bryden argued that Beckett's early work displays an "exuberant misogyny" operating from his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (Bryden 1993:1). In charting the (hetero)sexual antagonism in his early work, providing ample evidence of his sarcastic portraits of ambivalent sons, foul mothers and post-menopausal lovers, she argued that there was a progressive tendency "from rigid gender polarity towards a radically destabilised gender base" (Bryden 1993:1). She noted that the evolution of his art practice began with an "essentialist and often deeply misogynistic construction of Woman" and moved "towards much more erratic, often contingent or indeterminate gender configurations" (Bryden 1993:7). Bryden referred to the women of the early fiction as "space invaders", physically grotesque, sexually menacing predators who pursue and are resisted by the male subject, whose sole aim is the quest for solitude and the life of the mind (Bryden 1993:15). The early pre-occupation with the mind in Beckett's work is, according to Anna McMullan "evidently influenced by Joyce, of whose 'Work in Progress' Beckett pronounced that "[t]he language is drunk ... [h]ere words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. They are alive ... There is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:16). In *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, McMullan's key study of bodies and sexuality in Beckett's work, she argues that similar imagery is employed by the narrator in *Dream* to articulate the activity of the mind. McMullan quotes from *Dream* to demonstrate this:

> The ecstatic mind, the mind achieving creation, take ours for example [as it] rises to the shaft-heads of its statement, its recondite relations of emergal, from a labour and a

> weariness of deep castings— that brook no scheme. The mind suddenly entombed, then active in an anger and a rhapsody of energy, in a scurrying and plunging towards exitus. (McMullan 2010:16)

I argue that this description of the male is in stark contrast to the female, who is portrayed as a mere physical bulk: the Smeraldina-Rima, the first of Belacqua's three lovers in the novel is described as having a body that is "all wrong": "Poppata, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knockknees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mammose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbub-bubub, a real button-bursting Weib" (Beckett 1993:15).[10] The male, on the other hand, whose mind is "suddenly entombed", becomes a creative "wombtomb", producing "real thought and real living, living thought" (Beckett 1993:45). This "wombtomb", where Belacqua wishes to live a spiritual life without being lured by female sexual desire is a blissful state of absolute peace. He describes the mind as:

> Dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a chapelle ardente, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off. The lids of the hard aching mind close, there is suddenly gloom in the mind; not sleep, not yet, nor dream, with its sweats and terrors, but a waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels; there is nothing of him left but the umbra of grave and tomb where it is fitting that the spirits of his dead and his unborn should come abroad. (Beckett 1993: 44)

Comparing the mind to the transitional state of limbo, Belacqua aspires to mentally reside in this "limbo purged of desire", where he can escape from his contradictory emotions around love for a woman (Beckett 1993:44).

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[10] Note that this description is practically word for word the description I quoted earlier of the Smeraldina in *More Pricks*. It has been well established that Beckett was unsatisfied with *Dream*, which remained unpublished in Beckett's lifetime, referring to it as "immature and unworthy", served as a rough, unfinished and unpublished draft of *More Pricks* (qtd. in King 2005:133).

When the privileged position of the lofty male is compared with the earlier caustic descriptions of the female characters, it is very clear that at this phase of the development of Beckett's art, women are associated mostly entirely with the body. Because the male subject here is depicted as so emphatically valuing the pursuits of the mind over the body, Bryden notes that "the mind/body dualism has already been seen at work in the allocation of a 'body' role to Woman"; the body that has to be expelled is thus the female body (Bryden 1993:39) The male experience of interiority is repeatedly figured, as McMullan notes, as a process of "bodily expulsion" (McMullan 2010:16). Through a process of what Beckett refers to in the novel as "dehiscence", where the male body is an impediment to creativity, this process allows the male mind to traverse the boundaries of the text and the body, to break down structures of language to discover that which might "lurk behind it" (Beckett 1983:172).[11]

Beckett's difficulty with the usefulness of language as a means of expression is set out in his famous letter to Axel Kaun, his "German letter of 1937":

> Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.
> (Beckett 1983:171-2)

Beckett's mission to tear apart the surface of language through language itself in his art is described by McMullan as a "matrixial ejaculation" in order to release an eruption of energy (McMullan 2010:16). Through this male ejaculation or dehiscence, Beckett aspired to tear apart the surface of "language, body and world" as his letter to Kaun demonstrates (McMullan 2010:

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[11] Dehiscence is defined as 'a splitting open' or in the case of a bodily wound, associated with a rupture of the uterus, following a caesarean section (https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/dehiscence).

16). One example of this experience of interiority is displayed in *Dream* when, leading up to the break-up of Belacqua and the Smeraldina-Rina relationship, the latter wishes to celebrate New Year's Eve at a party in town, while our hero prefers the idea of philosophical discussion and solitude. Towards the end of the novel, in an episode where Belacqua visits "the Alba", but plans his escape, we see the second mention of the word "wombtomb", the male artist's creative space: "After that he had no excuse for prolonging his visit. He had paid his respects. Perhaps even he had got copy for his wombtomb" (Beckett 1993:175). Angela Moorjani, in "Beckett et le moi-peau: Au dela du fetishisme matrichiel", refers to the male's wombtomb as a "matrix-tomb" a "recurrent figure among male artists for the space of imaginative creation" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:17). Beckett's male characters eternally seek this wombtomb, which, as we shall see, gets its first mention in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*.

Although there is a clear Cartesian dualism evident in Beckett's early writing, Bryden warns against presuming an unquestioned continuous Cartesian binary in reading Beckett. Arguing that his work evolved from a rigid gender polarity to sexual indeterminacy, she begins by placing Beckett's early fiction within an oppositional, but not necessarily Cartesian, structure by stating that, "where [Beckett's] males of the early fiction ponder and agonise over the mind and the body as two separate and impermeable compartments, Woman is undoubtedly placed on the side of physical matter" (Bryden 1993:20). Sher argues that Beckett's "Whoroscope Notebook", which is in some part a feeder for the novel *Murphy* (1938), tellingly reveals the "persistent attachment to quotations and jottings attempting to define women as discrete entities, usually in wry, irreverential or misogynistic style" (Bryden 1993:16). Bryden argues that the fascinating notebook, which Beckett kept in the 1930's is an important document has been viewed by some as marginalia to Beckett's published corpus; if we look more closely at the seam of misogyny that runs through, it reveals insights into the work that have escaped critical attention to date.[12] Bryden notes that the overall tone of the remarks complements the "exuberant" misogyny which is a recurring motif in the early male narrator's voice (Bryden 1993:16). Towards the beginning of the notebook, Bryden finds lists of binary hierarchies such as "male *v.* female, darkness *v.* light, imperfection *v.* perfection" (Bryden 1993:17). In line with my critical framework for examining the young Beckett's misogyny, Bryden herself argues that it is not convincing enough to attribute personal misogyny directly to Beckett in light of several notes which Beckett wrote in the "Whoroscope" notebook. She also argues that the significance of such notes reproduces in "explicit fashion the kind of dualistic gender hierarchy which the early fiction enshrines so frequently as implicit assumption" (Bryden 1993:17). Even though Bryden states that the notebooks contain quotations defining women in "wry, irreverential or misogynistic style" she is not prepared to accuse Beckett of misogyny "on the sole basis of a short schema within a private notebook" (Bryden 1993:17). So, while Bryden touches on these issues, she still upholds the polite silence that reigned in early Beckett criticism, which is now finally, but slowly, being addressed.

Convincing as Bryden's argument of binary hierarchies is, critic Elin Diamond takes issue with Bryden's conclusion on gender in Beckett's work. In contrast to Bryden, who understands phallogocentrism[13] as a choice, Diamond views it as fundamental to identity and discourse. In "Feminist readings of Beckett" Diamond, in line with Derrida and Lacan, points out that it is a fundamental tenet of discourse itself, and not something we can either embrace or discard. Bryden argues that, in the later work:

> the (male and female) beings who populate the work of this period are recognisably, persistently, searchingly human, but their quest is too elusive, too uncertain of outcome

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[12] The "Whoroscope Notebook" is held at the Beckett Archive in Reading University Library at MS 3000/1. Copyright the Beckett literary estate. It is available to researchers on request.

[13] The term, a tongue-in-cheek portmanteau was coined by Jacques Derrida, combining logocentrism with the "phallus" of Lacanian psychoanalysis to describe the linguistic reality in which all human beings become subjects; it is *not* a choice, then, but a reality (my emphasis).

> to permit them to glory in any fullness of gendered being. This factor alone ensures the absence not only of phallocentrism but also of its female (gynocentric) equivalent. (Bryden 1993:193)

Countering this, Diamond makes the valid point that phallogocentrism (a phrase coined by Jacques Derrida combining logocentrism with the "phallus" of Lacanian psychoanalysis) is not a choice but a linguistic reality in discourse in which all humans become subjects and that there is no gynocentric equivalent, other than in the obscure writing of philosophers and psychanalysts such as Luce Irigaray. Diamond notes that Irigaray offers a "discursive fantasy for the impossibility of full female subjectivity" (Diamond 2004:49). Critics of Irigaray's notion of *parler-femme* have notoriously reduced this concept to "women's language" but Diamond argues that it focuses on "the more complex sense in French of "*énonciation*", or what Diamond refers to as "the position of the speaker in discourse" (Diamond 2004:49). She notes that early critics of Beckett emphasized his "solitary brilliance and the universal humanism of texts", but she also notes that despite their "fright wigs and greatcoats" that they are gendered (Diamond 2004:45).[14] Importantly, for my argument here, Diamond argues that reading Beckett through a feminist lens "foregrounds significant features of his gender representations" (Diamond 2004:46). Significantly, she opens the way for bringing in the usually marginalised or excluded effects of the maternal in language, when she also suggests that while Beckett writes in the linguistic order of the father, the "grey voice" of that order, he does so "not by excluding the difficult effects of the mother. That other" (Diamond 2004:49).

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[14] Her essay, "Feminist Readings of Beckett" is an expanded version of the original "Speaking Parisian: Beckett and French Feminism", as part of the edited collection of essays by Linda Ben-Zvi in *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* in 1990, the only other sustained analysis of gender in Beckett's oeuvre.

Other central explorations of misogyny in Beckett's work appear in recent work on the body. In his study, Yoshiki Tajiri's *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body,* goes some way to tackling the often-evaded question of misogyny in Beckett's early fiction. This study, as the title suggests is concerned with the prosthetic body which in Tajiri's reading is "a body that has the inorganic other or the outside within it" or, precisely is itself "the locus for dynamic interactions between the body and material objects (including machines and technological devices), inside and outside, self and other, and for the concomitant problematisation and blurring of these distinctions" (Tajiri 2007:6). He begins with a consideration of autoeroticism in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. He develops the idea of the "masturbation machine" in Beckett's novel, which is closely linked to control and misogyny. He argues that this leads to a mechanization of male sexuality in Beckett's work, a mechanization that also appears in "Assumption", a short story that Beckett wrote in 1929. In the early fiction, this defence mechanism of the "masturbating" male body is always threatening to break down and Tajiri considers that "from *Watt* onwards, the clear opposition between the threat of women's physicality and the allure of the womb coupled with mechanical imagery is no longer the key motif" (Tajiri 34). He argues that the "simple dichotomy of the threatening woman and the introvert misogynist recedes from the foreground" (Tajiri 2007:34). He follows Bryden here, when he concurs with her argument that there is a significant difference between gender representations in the early fiction and the later radio, drama and fiction. While most critics would agree that the change occurs in the first radio play *All That Fall* (1957) where Beckett puts his first female protagonist firmly at the heart of the work, I would therefore disagree with Tajiri that it occurs "from *Watt* onwards", as it was written before "First Love" (1946) and *Molloy* (1951). There is, then, a twenty- year span in which to consider misogyny in the fiction – from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932) to *Molloy* (1951), a fact which has, not until this study, never been pointed out by a single critic of misogyny in Beckett's work.

Interestingly, Tajiri's reading of *The Unnamable* (1953) provides a helpful template for reading misogyny when he argues that gender is complicated in the novel as it is governed by "uncontrollable flows", normally associated in western culture with that of the female. Tajiri draws on the work of philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, who, in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* argues that "women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage" (Grosz 1994:203). For Grosz, "a body that is permeable, that transmits in a circuit, that opens itself up rather than seals itself off […] would involve a quite radical rethinking of male sexual morphology" (Grosz 1994:201). For Tajiri, the presentation of *The Unnamable* as a totally permeable male body, ruled by "uncontrollable flows", complicates gender dynamics in the novel. According to Tajiri, negative prosthetics in the trilogy refer to the sticks or crutches used by the male protagonists, whereas positive prosthetics refer to bicycles, which have a kind of natural fit to the body, being designed with the motility of the body in mind. Considering his study concerns the prosthetic body, Tajiri's reading is oddly Cartesian when he claims that "Beckett inherits from Descartes a completely detached, observing attitude toward the body, the deficient machine"; this argument appears to be at odds with the general spirit of the book (Tajiri 2007:43). However, he proceeds with an interesting debate around the confusion of organs and bodily orifices in Beckett's work, where language becomes scatological and tears, semen and excrement are routinely conflated. Although Tajiri notes Kristeva's work on abjection, which he suggests is a useful tool for considering the ambivalence of the womb in Beckett's work, he does not put her theories to any further use in the study, especially in relation to his debates around bodily orifices. Tajiri notes the movement of one organ into another in *The Unnamable*, when the narrator states that "They could clap an artificial anus in the hollow of my hand […]"; "A head has grown out of his ear […]" (qtd. in Tajiri 2007:47). In *Texts for Nothing* (1967), where words are described as "wordshit" there is a slippage between the mouth and the anus: “the head has fallen behind, all the rest has gone on, the head and its anus the mouth, or else it has gone on alone, all alone on its old prowls, slobbering its shit and lapping it back off the lips like in the days when it fancied itself” (qtd. in Tajiri 2007:48-9). In this description, speech, the primary function of the mouth, is equated with defecation. In *Not I,* which is analysed in Chapter Three, there is a strong association between Mouth’s stream of words and “wordshit”, when she declares that she has a “sudden urge to … tell … then rush out stop the first she saw … nearest lavatory … start pouring it out … steady stream … mad stuff…” (Beckett 2006: 382).[15] Again, male critics of Beckett’s work, in particular *Not I,* argue that Mouth’s outpouring are excremental, which I argue is a covering over of Mouth as labia by Mouth as anus, thereby closing down any discussion of ageing female sexuality which is present in the late drama.[16] Mouth, as representative of “Woman” as negative Alterity is the subject of a recent study on the ethics of Alterity in Beckett’s work.

Female Alterities: The Ethics of Gender

When considering how gender essentialism works differently in the early and late work, I look at how the ethics of gender operates in Beckett. In Beckett criticism, there is just one study that considers the ethics of gender in Beckett’s work. In *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity* (2006), Shane Weller argues that Alterity is repeatedly figured as the feminine, who is inferior to the male protagonist; however, Weller argues that the male protagonist’s attitude to the female is ambiguous. In the novel *Murphy,* the eponymous protagonist both loves and hates Celia Kelly. However, the early Beckett’s writing assigns a subversive value to the feminine. Although Theodor Adorno’s influence on post-Holocaust thought has been considerable,

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[15] In *Frescoes of the* Skull, James Knowlson and John Pilling suggest that Mouth’s outpourings are excremental when they argue that “the wild stream of words is expressly linked by Mouth with excremental discharge” (200).

[16] See James Knowlson and John Pilling’s *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. London: Calder, 1979.

Weller writes that it is Emmanuel Levinas who has proven to be the most influential thinker on Alterity, and of the relation between literature and ethics in post-Holocaust Europe. His famous work, *Time and the Other* (1948) was originally delivered as a series of lectures in Paris at the College Philosophique in 1946/47, where Levinas was attempting to think about an Alterity beyond the principle of identity, which he termed its "birth and first formulation" (qtd. in Weller 2006:4). According to Weller, the central argument of *Time and the Other* is "in thinking time not as a degradation of eternity, but as the relationship to *that* which – of itself unassimilable, absolutely other [*absolument autre*] – would not allow itself to be assimilated by experience; or to that which – of itself infinite – would not allow itself to be com-prehended" (Weller 2006:4). As Weller argues, it is only when the other is considered as *absolutely other* that an ethics as a first philosophy can respond to the history of philosophy, which is conceived as "that project to achieve a totality or 'universal synthesis' which reaches its culmination in Hegel […], the absolute mastery of thought as knowledge or Reason" (Weller 2006:4). For Levinas, the history of philosophy is the history of nihilism, or unethical thought. Levinas' thoughts on Alterity as the feminine have recently been challenged by an emerging psychoanalytic theorist, Bracha L. Ettinger, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Other than death, the two forms of absolute Alterity in Levinas' thinking are the feminine and the son, with the corresponding ethical relations of the erotic and the paternal. Levinas argues that if Alterity begins with death, it is "accomplished in the feminine" (Weller 2006:8). The feminine occupies an "exceptional position" in the economy of being, as "not merely the unknowable, but a mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light" (Levinas 1987:86-7). Levinas writes: "I think the absolutely contrary contrary […], whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*"

(Levinas 1987:85). Levinas had reached a limit in his thinking on the feminine; in his last writings he refused to speak of the feminine in any capacity, until he agreed to discuss it with Ettinger. In Levinas' formulation, sexual difference, "conditions the very possibility of reality as multiple, against the unity of being proclaimed by Parmenides" (Levinas 1987:85). Here we see Levinas attempting to challenge an entire philosophical tradition which is ruled by the principle of identity in his assignation of absolute priority to sexual difference, which precedes and makes possible all other differences. The feminine as a mode of being which constantly slips away is unmasterable, mysterious and "defined by modesty" (Levinas 1987:87). For Levinas, the feminine is not an existent; it represents an event of Alterity and the relation is not visual but tactile: as Weller notes, it takes the form of a caress. This caress is, as Weller explains "not to touch, in that it is a seeking governed by unknowing and directed openly not towards contact but towards that which remains for ever to come, alien to any possible present" (Weller 2006:8). The caress does not know what it seeks and this not knowing is essential for Levinas. It is, for Levinas, a "game without project or plan [...] always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come" (Weller 2006: 8). Ultimately, the feminine as absolutely Other is never responsible for itself but, as Weller puts it "responsibility is always responsibility for the feminine" (Weller 2006:8). As we shall see later, in his late writings, Levinas reconsidered his own unfinished attempts to theorise responsibility for the feminine.

Simone de Beauvoir was the first to observe that this argument appears to be determined by Levinas' unanalysed inheritance of an entire tradition that considers woman as Other[17] (Beauvoir 1997:16). As Beauvoir notes "when [Levinas] writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is mystery for man. Thus, his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege" (Beauvoir 1997: 16). Beauvoir points out that the risks of identifying the feminine as a pure form of Alterity may simply reproduce the phallocentrism it is supposed to challenge. In *The Second Sex*, she argues that even asking “what is a woman” is problematic as a man would never present himself as being of a particular sex as he represents “both the positive and the neutral [...], whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity” (Beauvoir 1997:15). According to Beauvoir, the subject had remained masculine because of women’s lack of “concrete means for organising themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They (women) have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat” (Beauvoir 1997:19). Women, then, have only existed in relation to men, never to other women. Women have been disempowered in history and culture which distinguishes them from other historical figures of Alterity such as Blacks, Jews and Homosexuals. For Beauvoir, then, for the oppression of women to end, they must occupy the subject position of men. However, this solution is highly problematic as this is simply reproducing the mechanism of oppression of which women have been the victims. Beauvoir is aware of this and argues not for a new subject-object relation for women but on an intersubjective exchange where the subject, be it masculine or feminine, enters into a relation with an unfixed Alterity, where that subject perceives itself to be the other’s other. As she astutely observes, if this conception of “woman” as a negative Alterity remains tied to phallocentric thought, it is ironic that Levinas’ positioning of the feminine as absolute Alterity as a method of breaking with this tradition in fact only further serves to confirm his attachment to it through the very gesture that marks his detachment from it. Far from breaking with phallogocentrism, then, Levinas’ thought signals its troubled continuation within postHolocaust philosophy. Alterity is no longer that of the feminine but is located in the freedom of a subject that may be either masculine or feminine. In philosophical thought, man is the

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[17] Beauvoir challenges Levinas' thoughts on Man as "the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (16).

Subject, the Absolute, while woman is the Other. In Beauvoir's formula, if Alterity was repositioned as an intersubjective exchange, in a relation of unfixed Alterity, subjects could consider themselves to be the other's other and Alterity would not be the exclusive realm of the feminine. In *The Second Sex*, she outlines her theories on the ethics of Alterity.

In her outline of existential ethics, Beauvoir posits a particular kind of transcendence and thus a negative Alterity, grounded in the freedom of an emerging subject which may be either masculine or feminine, but is neither one nor the other:

> There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the '*en-soi*' – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingence. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. (Beauvoir 1997:28-9)

Alterity for Beauvoir is, then, no longer fixed as the feminine, but still appears as that absolute evil which is the limitation of this emerging subject's freedom. In Levinas' thinking, there can be no ethics without experiencing absolute Alterity, which takes the form of the feminine in its pure form. For Beauvoir, Alterity as a limitation is absolute evil, as she traces women's alterification as the history of the unethical. In more recent psychoanalytic theory, Bracha Ettinger, artist, practising psychoanalyst and feminist theorist, has produced a major theoretical intervention which is a combination of her clinical practice, and her art work. Her theories of the *Matrixial Borderspace*[18] aims to add to Freud and Lacan's elucidation of the castrated phallic subject. Ettinger's theories, which have recently been emerging as "Ettingerian Studies" include her published conversations with Levinas on the issue of the feminine. As Ettinger's theories are recent and ground-breaking, my inclusion of her thoughts on ethics has not been part of any study or conversation on gender in Beckett Studies to date. As a second-generation Holocaust survivor and as a practising psychoanalyst, Ettinger has, according to art historian Griselda Pollock, come "perhaps closer than anyone" other than Levinas "to imagining a future capable of reconstructing a basis for ethical existence" (Pollock 2006:8). Her reconstruction, which is based on her theories of *matrixial transsubjectivity*, *metramorphosis*, and *borderlinking* between *partial-subjects I and non-I*, have both ethical and political implications, thus linking her work with that of Levinas. She disrupts his theory with her emphasis on the feminine as *the* sexual difference, as distinct from the difference between the sexes. This possibility of originary feminine sexual difference is crucial to Ettinger's theory, and she has challenged Levinas on this precise issue. In "Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference?", Pollock notes that Lacan, in his late writings, began to reconsider his own unfinished attempts to theorize sexual difference "'from the ladies' side'" (Pollock 2006:9). Levinas, on the other hand, refused to speak of the feminine in his final writings. Ettinger reads this not as foreclosure of the feminine; rather it is due to the fact that the feminine is at the very centre of the ethical subject, which is the quest of futurity, itself a question of death. Ettinger, in a published conversation with Levinas remarks:

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[18] Ettinger challenges the position taken by Lacan that the womb can only appear in culture as unthinkable, based on the belief that whatever is thinkable must pass through the castration mechanism. For Lacan, the womb is abject and must be rejected, with violent consequences. In her critique of Otto Rank's Genius-MaleHero model, whose status is elevated precisely for forgetting his begetter, Ettinger argues that the hero performs the ruse that he invented himself or gave birth to himself. In Rank's formulation, the hero and the father have crucial roles in the myth, whereas the role of the mother is minor. The mother is either "an attractive object of father-son-rivalry or a nursing object: either a copulating animal or a nourishing animal […]

> You have articulated the feminine with notions that inaugurate the ethical space itself, which makes it possible. That's what overrides the rest. In relation to this, I see the possibility of conceiving of a particular relation as feminine. I interpret even the relation

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But between copulating and nursing it seems there is a void" (Ettinger 2006:172). Working within a Lacanian framework, Ettinger proposes that the inauguration of the birth of the new subject who does not acknowledge his/her begetter-past (re)produces trauma that is effectively feminised. The forgotten begetter, the birthgiving-mother is whom Ettinger calls "the archaic m/Other and analysed as poietic Event and Encounter. In order for the hero to give birth to himself and establish a male filiation, the mother must disappear in the formulation, the "woman-becoming-mother figure" (Ettinger 2006:172). As Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic

> of filiation as feminine-matrixial; the father/son relation of filiation is ‘a woman’. (qtd. in Pollock 2006:8)

model is founded on the necessity of the exclusion and total erasure of the pre-birth scene, Ettinger’s intervention appears blasphemous in terms of the current model. In Ettinger’s thinking, the intrauterine phantasy is not based on separation or rejection and should not be “folded retroactively into the castration phantasy but must be considered as coexisting with it “(Ettinger 2006:47).

Levinas finally agrees to speak of the feminine with Ettinger:

> *EL*: Woman is the category of the future, the ecstasy of the future. It is that human possibility which consists in saying that the life of another human being is more important than my own, that the death of the other is more important than my own death, that the Other comes before me, that the Other counts before I do, that the values of the Other are imposed before mine. In the future, there is what might happen to me. And then there is also my own death.
>
> *BE*: Then is the deepest of the feminine the ultimate responsibility? Or the ultimate measure of the ethical relation?
>
> *EL*: This is the *k’dusha* (in Hebrew). And in the feminine there is the possibility of conceiving of a *world without me*, a world which has a meaning without me. But we would not be able to develop this idea in so few worlds. Many intellectual precautions are needed. There is too great a risk of misunderstanding. One might think that I am saying that a woman is here to disappear, or that there will be no woman in the future. (qtd. in Pollock 2006:8-9)

Here Levinas is pointing out the great dangers associated with any radical reconstruction of the feminine outside the phallic model, let alone Ettinger’s concept of *matrixial transsubjectivity*, which could be misinterpreted as that which confines the feminine to its negative situation. Levinas, although much criticized by feminists, can be considered as a thinker who cautiously allows for a philosophical reading of the feminine in his work. In her essay “Reinhabiting the House of Ruth”, Clare Katz posits this aspect of Levinas’ writing on the feminine. She argues that to understand Beauvoir’s criticism of Levinas, we must realize that this interpretation is based on the relationship between the subject and the other in its most derogatory form (Katz 2001:146). In her critique, Beauvoir reads this as a masculine privilege where he, Levinas *qua* male, takes up the position of subject, while the mysterious feminine takes up the position of object. Katz points to a note written by Richard Cohen, translator of Levinas' *Time and the Other*, wherein he challenges Beauvoir and defends Levinas by suggesting that Beauvoir misunderstands Levinas by simplifying the relationship. Katz argues that Cohen's defence of Levinas reminds us that "for Levinas, the other has priority over the subject" (Katz 2001:146). However, although both views represent an extreme position, Beauvoir is justified in raising this issue with Levinas. Ettinger, in her conversation with Levinas, gains some insight into his (late) thoughts on the construction of the feminine; in his earlier writings, he reached a limit in his thoughts, and that limit was specifically the feminine. As Ettinger's work is concerned with questions of trauma and the feminine, it unexpectedly links her theories with those of Levinas and Lacan. Levinas' response to Ettinger's central theory of "conceiving of a particular relation as feminine" shows his willingness in reconsidering his earlier thoughts on Alterity (Ettinger 2006:9).

In an earlier consideration of Levinas' thoughts on the passivity of the feminine, Beauvoir, in her anticipation of one of the founding principles of postmodern theorizations of the feminine and gender studies generally, famously claimed that "one is not born a woman; one becomes one", thereby exposing the categories of "woman" and the "feminine" as social constructions (Beauvoir 1997:295). Taking Levinas' claim that the role of the feminine has been thought of as passive and reduced to matter, many recent theorists of the feminine have attempted not simply to reverse this hierarchical binarism but to displace it through a reinscription of the feminine as that which precedes and exceeds such binarity. Such acts of reinscription are evident in the radical thinking of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, whose idea of the feminine, and particularly the maternal feminine, respond not just to a philosophical but also to a psychoanalytic and a literary tradition. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, who draw on the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and Freud, all privilege feminine Alterity in their work arguing that Alterity is a value in the struggle against what they consider the nihilism of phallogocentrism.

At this stage, it is useful to examine the roots of the phallogocentrism that is challenged in this chapter in more detail. In his psychoanalytic theory, Lacan dramatically remodelled Freud's central concepts, transforming identity into subjectivity, unconscious into language and psychoanalytic theory into the study of language. In other words, the sexual determinations of identity in Freud's theory of psychoanalysis were replaced by linguistic determinants in Lacan's theory, where language, which he named the Symbolic Order, became the Order of the Father and the Phallus the transcendental signifier through which all meaning is produced. The apparent phallocentrism of Freud's conception was first stated in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), when he argued that women's sexual development is "more difficult and complicated" than men's due to the girl child having to "change her erotogenic zone and her object – both of which a boy retains" (Freud 1960a:117-19).

Freud proceeded to make a series of generalisations about the nature and history of women, which, according to Weller was "simply reiterating within a psychoanalytic framework Schopenhauer's observation in his notoriously misogynistic essay 'On Women'" (Weller 2006:141). Freud's theory of penis envy, first detailed in 1908 in his paper "On the Sexual Theory of Children" explained how a girl child develops into a "normal" (heterosexual) woman (the vagina replaces the clitoris as her erotic zone and the father replaces the mother as her love-object). The boy has a completely different experience of the castration complex as a result of his awareness (upon viewing the female genitals) that the girl does not possess a penis which he therefore recognises as a lack in the other – that which is not male; the girl child, then, also recognises that lack in herself: she is not threatened by castration as she already is castrated and is therefore dismissed as negative in relation to the male child who is possessor of the penis and ultimately of the phallus. While he remains dedicated to the inconceivability of Freud's conception of the unconscious, Lacan turns to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of linguistics to re-conceptualise the unconscious as part of an unending chain of unconscious meanings which are driven by desire. Despite Lacan's linguistic re-conceptualisation of the processes Freud describes, the conception of the female as a negative Alterity remains firmly in place in his revised theory. Lacan claims: "[t]here's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence [...] she is not-whole" (qtd. in Weller 2006:142). Even though it might seem unimaginable how this essentialising conception of the female as negative Alterity might be proposed as a site of resistance, the work of Kristeva has reconceived the feminine as precisely one of resistance to the phallic organisation of sexuality, and her work on the maternal feminine remains a notion with a critical edge. This will be central to my argument in Chapter Two in my analysis of motherhood as a trope in Beckett's prose. "Woman" in Beckett's early work is predominantly conceived as a negative Alterity, a threatening Other who is objectified by a male consciousness. In tracing themes of gender and sexuality in this chapter, which follows a chronological order I argue that this objectification of Woman is the main theme of Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and the short stories of *More Pricks Than Kicks*.

"Clods, Whores, and Bitches": The "Space Invaders" of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*

Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women,* posthumously published in 1992, draws on much autobiographical material. According to his biographers, it hinges on a double geography of Germany and Ireland, with some scenes in Paris, overlaid with an Italiante slant as in the naming of the central character as Belacqua and other Dantean references. The novel served as the inspiration for some of the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, where Belacqua continues as the main protagonist in his seemingly paradoxical comical pursuit of and yet flight from the female. Written in 1932, *Dream* was Beckett's first major attempt at a novel, after his essay on Marcel Proust in 1930.[19] As a young man with "nothing to say and an itch to make", (Beckett's own dismissal of his early works), Beckett had "adapted the Joyce method to his poetry with original results" (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:287). Highly influenced by Joyce in his early writing career, he copied the writer's technique of reading for the sake of writing, copying phrases and ticking them off in notebooks to show how he had woven them into his work; he admitted of *Dream* that "of course it stinks of Joyce" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:287).[22] Beckett's own attitude to it was critical, describing it to his biographer Deirdre Bair as "immature and unworthy" and "*the chest into which I threw my wild thoughts*" (Bair 1978:146). According to Mark Nixon, in the essay "Between Art-World and Life-World: Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the novel "dramatizes Beckett's own escape from the pressures of reality, from academia, love lost and psychological tensions, and pits the world of cultural exchange against one firmly embedded within a social, commercial and domestic sphere" (Nixon 2009:98). The writing of the novel was a "purging of a recent past and an even more recent present and specifically of Beckett's unhappy love affairs" (Nixon 2009:99). Beckett was reluctant to have the novel published in his lifetime, as it appears to draw heavily from his early unhappy life experiences.

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[19] In 1930, Beckett was offered the opportunity of writing an essay on Proust, which he entitled "Proust". He had read Proust's *A La Recherche* twice over that summer, and in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, he wrote that he looked forward to "pulling the balls off the critical and poetical Proustian cock" (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:460). The essay was submitted to Chatto and Windus in mid-September 1930 and appeared in Dolphin Books in March 1931. The essay is published in *Proust and the Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1987), edited by John Calder. It is in this essay that Beckett claims, in true Proustian tragedy that original sin is

It should be noted that this autobiographical layer in the novel would remain indecipherable to today's reader were it not for the recent availability of biographical data, in what has been termed the archival turn in Beckett Studies.[20] Beckett wanted his acquaintances and former lovers to detect their own characterisations, but was also concerned with causing offence, so as a result, when the novel was recast for publication as *More Pricks Than Kicks* in 1934, the satirical elements of *Dream* had been softened, although the underlying biographical reality remained visible. James Knowlson, in *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1996), has painstakingly uncovered the real-life experiences which encompass the fictional framework of the novel, such as Beckett's visit to a dance school that his cousin Peggy Sinclair, with whom he was in love, attended and the end of their difficult love affair in Kassel on New Year's Eve 1929 (Knowlson 1996:83-5). Peggy, who is satirised in *Dream* as "the SmeraldinaRima/Smerry", appearing again as "Smeraldina" in "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, subsequently died on the third of May1933 from tuberculosis. In a letter to Peggy's brother Morris in 1934, Beckett refers to his "embarrassed

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"the sin of having been born" (Beckett 1970: 67). Beckett is drawing on Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*, who writers that the "true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself" (qtd. in Stewart 2011: 5).

[22] Beckett met Joyce shortly after he arrived in Paris, where he became one of the inner circle, visiting Joyce's flat in the Place Robiac, and assisting him with literary tasks, which included translating "Anna Livia Plurabelle". Beckett began to imitate Joyce's posture, holding his cigarette affectedly and wearing tight shoes. Henry Miller told him that he had too much talent to waste it on imitating Joyce, but it was many years before he shook off Joyce's influence. Later, he famously said that while Joyce tended towards "omniscience and omnipotence", he (Beckett) was working with "impotence, ignorance". In an assertion of his own artistic terrain, he made this observation: "I don't think impotence has been exploited" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:287).

[20] In a recent "empirical turn", research on manuscript materials has transformed Beckett Studies over the last generation. A recent collection of edited essays offers new readings of Beckett by returning to the archive of Beckett's notebooks, letters and drafts. See Matthew Feldman's *Falsifying Beckett: Methodology in Beckett Studies*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2015.

pain" over the way he had proceeded (Nixon 2009:100). The novel can be read in this light, as an attempt to chart

Belacqua's and, perhaps Beckett's, aim "to come to a little knowledge of himself" (Nixon 2009:106). The fact that Beckett refused to allow publication of *Dream* in his lifetime demonstrates that, as a mature writer, and with his treatment of gender and sexuality radically different in his later drama, where he portrays older women sympathetically, he was acutely aware of the arrogance which he displayed towards his female characters in his early work, both fictionally and autobiographically.

Dream is most detailed in its revelations about attitudes to sex, sexuality and women. Paul Stewart notes the "recurrence of defecating horses in Beckett's oeuvre" in his chapter of the same title (Stewart 2011:17). He argues that there are a variety of expressions of "nonnormative, distorted, and oblique forms" of sexuality throughout Beckett's work, including the unsavoury notion of defecating horses as sexual stimulation (Stewart 2011:17). Faeces, defecation and scatological references abound throughout Beckett's entire work, the most prominent being that of the portrayal of Lulu/Anna in "First Love". Critically, for my purposes here, Stewart also argues that the figure of the mother is often associated with that of the defecating horse. In *Molloy*, the narrator expresses his regret at having been born at all: "her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit" (Beckett 2009b:13). In Chapter Two, I will expand on the association of the mother with faeces, an aspect of the recurring theme of the "wombtomb" in Beckett's work, where there is a simultaneous flight from and towards the feminine: the maternal body is cast both as origin and end of being, a theory which Beckett encountered on reading Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* (1924), a study which, as I argue in this thesis, had a profound and systemic influence on his world view.[21] As already mentioned, the word appears twice in *Dream*: "[b]ut in the umbra, the tunnel, when the mind went wombtomb, then it was real thought and real living, living thought" (Beckett 1993:45). Jeri L. Kroll describes Belacqua's sexual encounters as a failed attempt at living completely in the mind: "Belacqua 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" (Kroll 1978:11).

The structure of the novel centres on the main protagonist Belacqua Shuah and his failed attempts at meaningful relationships with three women, the Smeraldina-Rima, the SyraCusa and the Alba. The telling of these doomed relationships is so disorganized that the narrator himself, attempting to shape the chaotic narrative, continuously interrupts the so called "story" to explain the breakdown of the "story". The opening line of *Dream* sets the tone for the rest of the novel: "Belacqua sat on the stanchion at the end of the Carlyle Pier in the mizzle in love from the girdle up with a slob of a girl called Smeraldina-Rima whom he had encountered one evening when as luck would have it he happened to be tired and her face more beautiful than stupid" (Beckett 1993:3). The tone is cynical and, as John King observes, "calls into question the aligning of desire and narrative design" (King 2005:138). According to King, the women of this novel almost invariably make the first advances to the male in pursuit of sexual union in what Belacqua refers to as "the heavy gloom of carnal custom" (King 2005:166). In this "heavy gloom of carnal custom", the females are all physically objectified with no part of their body immune from the penetrating gaze of the male onlooker. Belacqua takes "stock of his Smerry":

> She was pale, pale as Plutus, and bowed towards the earth. She sat there, huddled on the bed, the legs broken at the knees, the bigness of thighs and bell assuaged by the droop of the trunk, her lap full of hands. Posta sola soletta, like the leonine spirit of the troubadour of

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[21] This will be dealt with in depth in chapter 2.

> great renown, tutta a se romita. So she had been, sad and still, without limbs or paps in a great stillness of body, that summer evening in the green isle when first she heaved his soul from its hinges; as quiet as a tree, column of quiet. [...] it was only a question of seconds before she would surge up at him, blithe and buxom and young and lusty, a lascivious petulant virgin, a generous mare neighing after a great horse, caterwauling after a great stallion, and amorously lay open the double-jug dugs. She could not hold it. (Beckett 1993:23-4)

These cruel descriptions of Smerry, comparing her to a "generous mare neighing after a great horse", a mere receptacle, as she "amorously lay open the double-jug dugs", represent the bizarre stereotypical characterizations that Beckett employs in this novel. Belacqua's first sexual affair with Smerry is prompted by the dramatic episode a page earlier when he suddenly announces that their affair takes a sinister turn when "she raped him. Then everything went kaput" (Beckett 1993:18). Although the portrait of Smerry is cruel and misogynistic, it remains the defining relationship of the novel, based as it is on Beckett's relationship with Peggy. Belacqua and Smerry are, at this stage of his life and career, doomed because of Beckett's own inability to separate love and sex, which were, for him, intellectually far apart.

However, it is difficult to excuse the deeply troubling descriptions of the fictional Smerry and of her sexual appetite. She is part of a group of women who are devoted to healthy living; in the summer, they are to be seen lying on the roof bronzing their strapping bodies. The Beckettian male is intensely fascinated with such Botticellian women. The women in the novel also have a healthy, almost voracious appetite for food and drink. There is a sexual energy emanating from them, with their seemingly insatiable appetites for sex and food, which is shown to be dangerous for the male protagonist. Becoming repulsed by "the merely snout-fair Smeraldina, that petulant, exuberant, clitoridean puella", our hero briefly turns his attentions towards the Syra Cuse, his second lover in the novel. The highly sexual tones used to describe

Smeraldina, particularly “clitoridean puella”, point more to Belacqua’s sexual and emotional inadequacies when everything went “kaput” (Beckett 1993:18). According to Belacqua, his attempts to ward off Smeraldina, “the insatiate”, were clearly expressed by him, in an attempt to keep “the whole thing pewer and above-bawd” (Beckett 1993:18). In his personal life, Beckett’s relationship with Peggy was doomed, due to his inability to separate love and sex, and because she was terminally ill with tuberculosis. Her death haunted him: the memory of her eyes and her green coat appears in the poems “Eneug 1”, “Ascension”, the prose *Texts for Nothing* 6, the play *Krapp’s Last Tape* and the television play *Eh Joe*.[22] The fact that memories of Peggy prevailed in Beckett’s later writing reveals not only the depth of his affection for her, but we can say this with certainty due to the fruits of archival research. These incidents of autobiographical references pervade *Dream*, to the effect that Beckett’s friends and relatives clearly recognised themselves in the characters. This explains why Beckett refused to have the novel published in his lifetime; he deeply regretted the offence he caused, only recognizing it in his mature life and writing.

In another autobiographical reference, The Syra-Cuse, whose body is “more perfect than dream creek”, but her head “null”, is based on Lucia Joyce, James Joyce’s daughter, whom Beckett first met when he visited Joyce’s flat in 1928 (Beckett 1993:33). Beckett was initially attracted to Lucia, who was studying dance and had a vivacious personality. As Ackerley and Gontarski note, Beckett became “attuned to her unpredictability, the product of an irregular family life and (ironically) the lack of a stable language”, but he soon perceived early signs of mental instability in Lucia, who became obsessed with the young Beckett (288).[23] Compared to the plotline of the Smeraldina-Rima, which spans some eighty pages, the brief dalliance with between Belacqua and the Syra-Cuse consists of random cruel sketches, concluding with "[s]he was a cursed nuisance. Be off, puttanina, and joy be with you and a bottle of moss" (Beckett 1993: 51). Susan Brienza argues that although Beckett's female characterizations alternate between stereotype and bizarre reversal of stereotype, it is difficult to avoid disturbing generalizations in Beckett's "disparaging depictions of female protagonists […] insistent derogatory remarks about female characters take on the cumulative force of dogma" (Brienza 1992:101). In "Clods, Whores, and Bitches: Misogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction", Brienza suggests that this is not necessarily a male superiority type of dogma, as Beckett's males suffer physical disease and decay to the extent that renders them wholly unattractive to women. The difference is, however, that the male heroes transcend their bodily limits, entering their mind instead to wrestle with their philosophical predicaments. As one of Beckett's early protagonists claimed of women: "They were all the same when it came to the pinch – clods" (qtd. in Brienza 1992:91). Elsewhere in Beckett's work, prostitutes, or "whores", cater for male appetites – Celia, in the novel *Murphy* and Lulu/Anna in the short story "First Love". These "whores" who are frequently featured in Beckett's work complicates a reading of Beckett's attitudes towards sexual expression and the body.[24] Nixon, in his work on editing Beckett's "German Diaries", which Beckett kept on his trip to Nazi Germany in 1936-7, has uncovered material that throws light back on the brothel scenes in *Dream*. Nixon argues that the novel stages a “confrontation between the aestheticisation of Belacqua’s attitude towards brothels and Beckett’s own, autobiographical experience of visiting them” (Nixon 2017). Nixon’s argument that anxiety about reproduction and sex is key to interpreting Beckett’s depiction of gender and sexuality is extended here to consider how a fear of reproduction haunts most of Beckett’s prose works. If the fear of sex and reproduction is the central dilemma for Beckettian males, which leads to masturbatory acts and the pursuit of other forms of non-reproductive sex, then those potentially reproductive encounters mostly occur with prostitutes. Chapter Two will discuss this in detail.

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[22] In “Eneug 1”, “my darling’s red sputum” refers to Peggy’s illness; images of her green eyes recur in “les grands yeux verts” of the dying girl in “Ascension” and the eyes in “Text 6”; in the boat scene, Krapp recalls “A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform, into whose eyes he had gazed. He (Krapp) “could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic”; *Eh Joe* remembers “the green one” (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:528).

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[23] Bair notes that Beckett himself was fascinated "by aspects of the father's (Joyce) mind running rampant in the daughter" (Bair 1978:84). Ultimately though, Beckett was only interested in Joyce's company and eventually had to come clean to Lucia and spurn her affections. This caused a major rift between Beckett and Joyce, which was not repaired until early 1932, when Joyce finally accepted that Lucia's mental illness had little to do with Beckett's treatment of her. There is, however, much uncertainty as to the nature of the relationship between Beckett and Lucia; biographers suggest there was more to it than admitted and that Joyce's outrage against Beckett may have had some warranted substance (Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:289).

[24] Prostitutes feature in the poems "Dortmunder" and "Sanies 11", the short story "Echo's Bones", the novel *Murphy*, the post-war short story "First Love" and the later play *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The “clod” women continue in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, where they are either: “a shortbelow-the-waist, a big-hip, a sway-back, a big-abdomen or an average” (Beckett 2010a:47).

Typically, the women of these stories are routed in the physical world, objectified and subject to the male’s intense gaze. Our hero, re-enacted from *Dream,* has relations with numerous women: Winnie - “pretty, hot and witty, in that order”, the Smeraldina (again), the Alba (again) and Ruby Tough, “for whom at no time did he much care”, but intended to “prime her for the part she was to play on his behalf”, a part that appears to be that of a rape victim, as she is described as “ripe” with her “taut Sabine coiffure” (Beckett 2010a:17, 92). Further on, there is Lucy – “Truly there was no fault or flaw in the young woman” and Thelma bbogs (Beckett 2010a:99). In the course of his adventures, Belacqua marries Lucy, the Smeraldina and Thelma, albeit reluctantly. Sexual characteristics are prominent and pervasive in *More Pricks,* stressing the absolute corporeality of women:

> Behold the Frica (a prostitute), she visits talent in the Service Flats. [...] A septic pudding hoodwinks her, a stodgy turban of pain it laps her horse face. The eyehole is clogged with the bulbus, the round pale globe goggles exposed. The mouth champs an invisible bit, foam gathers at the bitter commissures. [...] the osseous rump screams behind the hobbleskirt. (Beckett 2010a:46)

The Frica, another working prostitute, is compared to a stodgy pudding dessert and a randy horse in heat, reduced and demeaned. Prostitution seems to be a major source of income for many of Beckett's early female protagonists, who earn their livelihood with their bodies and not their minds. They are constructed as highly sexed and pose a threat to their male counterparts. I argue, however, that they display a passion for life, with their overt appetites for food and sex, which both attracts and disgusts Belacqua equally.

Women are portrayed in the early fiction as lascivious and revelling in their sexual lust: "I want your body", announces the Smeraldina in *More Pricks Than Kicks,* (Beckett 2010a:143) and they also revel in their desire for food and drink, appetites that serve widely as metaphors for sexual desire. While eating in Beckett's cosmography emphases sexual appetite in excess for the women characters, in contrast, in relation to the male characters it tends to refer to an act of repugnant necessity. Steven Connor, in "Beckett and Sartre: The Nauseous Character of All Flesh", suggests that through the act of eating or not eating, Beckett enacts a fundamental refusal of the choice of being. To illustrate his argument, he focuses on the elaborate lunch that Belacqua prepares in "Dante and the Lobster", one of the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, which is a parodic re-enactment of Bloom's lunch in the "Lestrygonians" section of *Ulysses*. In that episode, Bloom takes his lunch with a certain kind of relish: "Mr Bloom ate his strips of sandwich, fresh clean bread, with relish of disgust pungent mustard, the feety savour of green cheese" (Joyce 2008:142). However, Belacqua's lunch contrasts with Bloom's as he insists that the bread he is toasting must be incinerated: "[i]f there was one thing he abominated more than another it was to feel his teeth meet in a pathos of pith and dough" (Beckett 2010a:4). The narrator tells us that the bread was "spongy and warm, alive. But he would very soon take that plush feel off it, by God but he would very quickly take that fat white look off its face" (Beckett 2010a:5). The cheese does not escape his wrath either, as it is insufficiently putrid: "[h]e wanted a good stench. What he wanted was a good green stanching rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese, alive, and by God he would have it" (Beckett 2010a:7). As he proceeds to eat this mixture of incinerated or dead bread with the smelly and alive cheese, he demonstrates a kind of oral mastic rage: "his teeth and jaws had been in heaven, splinters of vanquished toast spraying forth at each gnash. It was like eating glass. His mouth burned and ached with the exploit" (Beckett 2010a:10). According to Connor, this eating displays a rage which seems designed to "obliterate its object entirely, and to deny the very appropriation involved in alimentary consumption" and he amusingly compares he scene to "like not having one's cake and violently expelling it at the same time" (Connor 2009:65).

It is noteworthy that in contrast to these angry and problematic episodes of the experience of eating by the male narrators, the women are constructed as having voracious yet healthy appetites, for both sex and food. Very often the male characters are disgusted by this appetite. In *Dream*, it is the Smeraldina's greedy appetite that eventually disgusts Belacqua and prompts him to leave. When she orders a dish of soup for him, he rejects it, angrily retorting: "I don't want the bloody stuff, I don't drink it" (Beckett 1993:106). The Smeraldina happily eats a feast of hot chocolate and cookies "genteelly with a fork", while Belacqua looks on in disgust at her greedy appetite: "she was like a cat or a bird feeding, making happy little pecks and darts and licks at the food" (Beckett 1993:107). She then attempts to exercise her sexual appetite over him, which revolts him also: "he felt queasy from all the rubbing and pawing and petting and nuzzling, all the rutty gobble-gobble and manipulation" (Beckett 1993:107). This episode recalls breastfeeding and maternal fussing over a child-like adult, while also presenting sexual relations as a satisfying, fulfilling act. Also, the feline imagery which is used to describe the Smeraldina's cream feast (a reference to breastmilk) is, according to Bryden, a reminder of

> the separate feeding arrangements for males and females in the big cat family. In further reinforcement of the cattish metaphor, the Smeraldina is said at one point to have 'turned on him like a leopardess', while her mother is attributed with a 'tigress tone'. (Bryden 30-31)

For most of the male characters of Beckett's fiction, sexual encounters prove to be unsuccessful: in *More Pricks*, an early liaison with Winnie leaves our hero feeling like "a very sad animal indeed" (Beckett 2010a:17). In another episode, Ruby Tough and Belacqua set out in a joint bid to kill themselves with a firearm; their shocked surprise at the failure of this attempt, results in "a great turmoil of life-blood" which "sprang up in the breasts of our two young felons, so that they came together in inevitable nuptial" (Beckett 2010a:91). Their only death, then, is the one that occurs after sexual orgasm, *le petit mort*. Belacqua blames Ruby for the fact that the afternoon's activities descend from the metaphysical goal of suicide to the physical sexual act. These women appear desirable and lovable creatures who nonetheless distract the male's philosophical preoccupations with metaphysics. Beckett's male characters are eternally drawn to, and flee from, fertilizable females in *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*.

The women characters in *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*, some of whom are based on real-life women who had been emotionally involved with Beckett, such as Peggy Sinclair and Lucia Joyce, are presented as devouring hag-like creatures, highly reminiscent of the Celtic stone-carvings known as "Sheela-na-gigs", which show women in a crouching position opening their exaggerated vagina. Sheela-na-gis are plentiful in Ireland, largely carved over church doors or on buttresses, but they are also found in Scotland, Wales, and the north of England as well as parts of mainland Europe. Interpretation of the Sheelas varies and anthropologist Molly Mullin, in "Representations of History, Irish Feminism, and the Politics of Difference (1991)", discusses these variations to draw connections between theories of meaning, feminist consciousness and historical representation. She charts the complex history of the Sheelas, which were first brought to wide attention in the 1840s by antiquarians, who offered a range of descriptions for them such as “fetishes, or charms to keep off the evil eye, grotesque or repulsive figures, and even stone idols of truly Eastern character” (Mullin 1991:36). In the 1930s, they began to be more associated with fertility and protection, with the symbolism of birth inherent in the crouching and enlarged vagina being foregrounded, and Mullins connects this fear of reproduction to the “familialism then being inscribed in the social policies of the new Irish state” (Mullin 1991:36). However, since the 1970s, academic interpretations have upheld the largely patriarchal nineteenth-century speculations about protection, continuing to ignore the work of Marja Gimbutas, who highlights the Sheela’s midwifery direction and connects them to archaeological findings that indicate underpinned Goddess worship in “Old Europe”. Gimbutas’ work on goddess culture is only slowly being assimilated into a patriarchal academy. Archaeologists have turned to Irish folktales[25] in which they find that “women ward off the mythic figure Cuchulainn with the sight of their vulvas” (Mullin 1991:36).

Vivien Mercier ‘s 1961 essay ‘Samuel Beckett and the Sheela-na-gig’, an early account of male/female relations in Beckett’s work, discusses the hag like creatures in Irish mythology, which bear a disturbing resemblance to depictions of women in Beckett’s early fiction. In this useful essay, which occurs within a fixed paradigm of the masculine/feminine binary, Mercier suggests that Beckett’s work could be considered, along with Jonathan Swift, in the light of the Gaelic tradition of the largely feminine grotesque and the macabre, which is exemplified in the female Sheela-na-gig figures. He describes them as possessing “grossly exaggerated genitalia or a posture which directs attention to the genitalia” and have in common, “an ugly masklike or skull-like face, with a huge, scowling mouth; skeletal ribs, huge genitalia held open by both hands; bent legs” (Mercier 1961:305). Mercier admits that Beckett’s relationship to the Gaelic tradition "seems tangential indeed" suggesting that it might be best described as "*in* the Gaelic tradition but not *of* it" (Mercier 1961:323). This is in part an explanation of the reluctance to consider Beckett as properly Irish because of his Protestant heritage, in a culture that demanded that natural identity was Catholic. However, Beckett's place within the tradition is based on his use of grotesque humour, often overtly sexual, which "serves as a defence mechanism against the holy dread with which we face the mysteries of reproduction" (Mercier 1961:324). Beckett continues the misogyny of this tradition in his early fiction which simply highlights the hag/maiden dimensions of these figures and not the powerful mother/queen aspects.

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[25] See James Dunn, “Sile-na-gCioch,” *Eire*, vol. 12, 1977, pp, 68-85.

Mercier also notes how psychoanalysts suggest that the female organ can threaten castration for the man "as well as that first cruel expulsion from a nine-month paradise" (Mercier 1961:308). This links Beckett's work to that of Otto Rank 's *The Trauma of Birth*, which Beckett had read as part of his own psychoanalytic therapy with Wilfred Bion between late 1933 and late 1935, a therapeutic journey which centred primarily on Beckett's own prenatal and peri-natal experiences.[26] Beckett augmented this physic journey with a concurrent intellectual one, and extensively read the work of Rank, along with works by Ernest Jones, Freud, Wilhelm Stekel and Alfred Adler, all of whom departed from Freud (who remained wedded to the Oedipus scene as the physic origin of consciousness) and instead considered *birth* itself as the primal scene or origin point of psychic life. In Rank's work Beckett would have encountered the idea that the "importance of the castration fear is based […] on the primal castration at birth, that is, on the separation of the child from the mother" (Rank 2010:20). I discuss the influence on Beckett of Rank's work in detail in Chapter Two, but briefly, much of the note-taking that Beckett engaged in when undergoing therapy was directed at an understanding of psychology and psychoanalysis. However, it was also in a bid to understand the psychosomatic symptoms that Beckett thought were the cause of physical maladies that he was suffering from at the time, brought on by the traumatic events of the early death of his cousin Peggy Sinclair from Tuberculosis, followed shortly after by the sudden death of his father.

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[26] This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Rank argues that misogyny is the outcome of this separation trauma if it remains unprocessed, resulting in an "abhorrence of the female genitals, and this because of its close relation to the shock of birth" (Rank 2010:35). Rank argues that this fear relates to "homosexuality", where the "homosexual" "sees in woman only the maternal organ of birth, and hence is incapable of acknowledging it as an organ for giving pleasure" (Rank 2010:35). Yet, in Beckett's early fiction, the sexual attraction to the female remains, as "the only real possibility of an approximate reinstatement of the primal pleasure is given in sexual union, in the partial and purely physical return to the womb" (Rank 2010:188). So far in this thesis the Beckettian male seems sexually confused and exuberantly misogynistic but, as Peter Boxall notes: "despite increasingly flexible approaches to 'Beckettian man,' however, he remains more or less as straight as ever" (Boxall 2004:111). In one of the most provocative essays on gender and sexuality in Beckett, Boxall confronts the "mass denial" in Beckett Studies, which, until recently, has blindly accepted that Vladimir and Estragon, the main protagonists of the play *Waiting on Godot* are "just good friends" (Boxall 2004:110).

Alternative Sexualities: Homoerotic Possibilities in *Molloy*

In the recent debates around the themes of gender and sexuality in Beckett Studies, Boxall's essay, having languished since 2004, is now being quoted as the single essay that attempts to deal with the issue of homoeroticism in Beckett's work. Boxall notes that both Bryden and Ben-Zvi have produced "feminist reading of Beckett without seriously challenging assumptions about his representations of heterosexuality" (Boxall 2004:112). Despite feminist readings of gender and sexuality in Beckett's work and flexible approaches to masculinity in Beckett, his work remained as straight as ever, until recently. The text most that seriously challenges these heteronormative assumptions is the post-war novel *Molloy*, the first of the Trilogy novels. *Molloy* is a quest novel, but in a departure from the Joycean quest plot, in which sons seek fathers and fathers seek sons, the eponymous narrator goes in search of his mother, a quest, which in the first page, we are told that has already been completed. It's opening lines: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now", suggests that Molloy has completed his journey to find his mother, having not so much found her but displaced and replaced her in her house (Beckett 2009c:1). The novel is divided into two equal parts: the first part concerns Molloy's quest for his mother and the second part is told by a second narrator Moran, a private detective, who has been tasked by the mysterious Youdi to track down Molloy. My analysis deals with the first part of the novel, where numerous incidences of transgressive sexual encounters occur that challenge heteronormative relationships.

Molloy's quest is overtly oedipal, with the figure of his mother looming over many instances of implied gay sex. Molloy muses about his mother: "I took her for my mother and she took me for my father" (Beckett 2009c:14). This suggests a sexual fantasy between the mother and son, who replaces the father in the mother's affection. In today's world, we would call this out as possible sexual abuse. Molloy encounters a woman named Lousse, whom he moves in with, and whose house could be a nursing home. He describes her, wondering about her gender and how it is of little concern to him:

> I will confine myself to the following brief additional remarks, and the first of which is this, that Lousse was a woman of an extraordinary flatness, physically speaking of course, to such a point that 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 a somewhat hairy face [...] the poor woman, I saw her so little, so little looked at her. And was not her voice suspiciously deep? [...] Don't be tormenting yourself, Molloy, man or woman,

> what does it matter? [...] was such an encounter possible, I mean between me and a woman? Now men, I have rubbed up against a few men in my time, but women? Oh well, I may as well confess it now, yes, I once rubbed up against one. I don't mean my mother, I did more than rub up against her. And if you don't mind we'll leave my mother out of all this. (Beckett 2009c:55-56)

The above passage demonstrates the narrator's confusion about his own sexuality, where he appears to favour (and have considerable more experience of) sex with men over sex with women. The narrator wonders if Lousse could in fact be a man; nevertheless, he appears unperturbed by the possibility of such a homoerotic encounter. In noting that the figure of the mother looms large over the entire scene, Boxall suggests that her invocation here is "both inviting sexual attention to her own physicality and, perhaps, directing Molloy's sexual energies towards an appropriate sexual subject" (Boxall 116). There is confusion around both Molloy's object choice and the prominence of his mother either as an object herself of fiercely repressed sexual desire by Molloy or as lawmaker, enforcing his heterosexuality. The mother, in enforcing Molly's heterosexuality, operates in a similar way to how Beckett criticism has historically closed down suggestions of homoeroticism in Beckett's work.

When it comes to describing the sexual act itself, there is more confusion around names (Molloy cannot remember if her name is Ruth or Edith), which demonstrates his ambivalence towards her as an object of desire, rather than a subject, and a naive knowledge of the female body:

> She had a hole between her legs, oh not the bunghole (synonym for bumhole) I had always imagined, but a slit, and in this I put, or rather she put, my so-called virile member, not without difficulty, and I toiled and moiled until I discharged or gave up trying or was begged by her to stop. (Beckett 2009c:56)

The key word here is "imagined": Molloy is imagining anal rather than vaginal sex in this scene, leading to the possibility of a homoerotic encounter. However, Ruth/Edith directs the sexual encounter towards one of accepted heterosexual reproductive sex while the figure of the mother looms large for the narrator throughout. After the act, Molloy still muses on possible alternatives:

> Perhaps after all she put me in her rectum. A matter of complete indifference to me, I needn't tell you. But is it true love, in the rectum? That's what bothers me sometimes. Have I never known true love, after all? She too was an eminently flat woman and she moved with short stiff steps, leaning on an ebony stick. Perhaps she too was a man, yet another of them. But in that case surely our testicles would have collided, while we writhed. Perhaps she held hers tight in her hand, on purpose to avoid it. (Beckett 2009c:56)

The key word in this passage is "indifference": Molloy crudely describes a sexual encounter between men, but confuses the reader, as there is no clarification on whether his sexual partner is in fact a man or a woman, and he is indifferent to their sex As the sexual fantasy/encounter heads away from normative sex towards one of transgression, it plays out beneath the gaze of Molloy's mother from whom he is so anxious to escape yet whom towards he is so constantly drawn.

In contrast, critic AnJanette Brush argues against a reading of a homoerotic possibility in *Molloy*. In the earlier essay, "The Same Old Hag: Gender and (In)Difference in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy in 2001," Brush suggests that a "liberatory politics" can be revealed in Beckett's trilogy by following the ways in which the figures move "out of and away from the confining logic of the metanarratives" that produce gendered subjectivity (Brush 2001:127). Brush sees no value in focusing on "accusations of misogyny" as a productive method of analysing gender in Beckett's work, albeit she admits that we should not assume that "a neutrality is involved with an erasure of gender differences" (Brush 2001:129). Again, here is another critic refusing to critically engage with the exuberant misogyny at work in Beckett's work and in particular in *Molloy*, the subject of her analysis. She is, however, interested in the sexual encounters and the ambiguity and hostility around women in the novel. While the women who populate the novel are similar (Molloy cannot remember their names), I disagree with Brush, who states that she is “tempted to think of them as one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life” (Brush 2001:130). Instead of teasing out the distinct possibility of a homoerotic aesthetic in the novel, she confines her argument to insisting that the sexual encounters, which constitute quite a heady mix, are in every incident, with women, not men. However, Molloy appears to find it more natural to “rub up” against men rather than women.

Brush forensically searches for but fails to find a developed homoerotic in Beckett’s writing because she posits that the sexual encounter/fantasy is always firmly located in a heterosexual and reproductive economy. For Brush, then:

> One would certainly be hard-pressed to find evidence of a coherent character ‘Molloy’, but whether or not that which Adrienne Rich was first to term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ is also missing is questionable. It is clear that Beckett has shaped a tremendously fragmented figure in Molloy – one split between mind and body, ambivalence and action. It is not quite as clear, however, whether his radical indifference to his sexual partners somehow signifies more than the fact that they are all nevertheless women, that there are in fact heterosexual encounters, encounters between a man whose voice is shifting and a woman whose name he shifts himself. (Brush 2001:134-5)

Boxall notes Brush’s “laudable refusal to join a trend which has given Beckett’s gender and sexual politics the benefit of the doubt,” but questions her conclusion that Beckett’s writing is shaped by “a heterosexual male gaze that can’t be argued away, that fixes gender in place, objectifies women, and that makes their bodies matter” (Boxall 2004:112). He finds it “both mystifying and understandable” that Brush and like-minded critics find it difficult or refuse to consider a “Beckettian homoerotic” in Beckett’s work (Boxall 2004:112). It is mystifying because of the centrality of homoerotic encounters throughout the writing and understandable because of this centrality of transgressive encounters. Boxall counters the arguments for the dominance of the heterosexual frame, by advancing another theory on the possibility of a homoerotic in Beckett's writing:

> The eroticism produced by central male relationships bleeds out to color the entirety of his oeuvre, and it does so in such a way as to defy, or at least impede the attempt to understand it as a drive, an impulse, or a tendency. All of the ingredients that go to make up the characteristic Beckettian scenario – hatred of the body and of its functions, a gluttonous revelling in the body, resistance to forms of community, longing for community, longing for an impossible companionship, the persistence of companionship under straitened conditions, love for and hatred of the father and the mother, a generalized violent misanthropy and misogyny, a gently poignant nostalgia – are bound up with this central homoeroticism. But because these things are routed so directly through an underlying gay economy, they can easily appear not to be homoerotic at all. Homoeroticism is such an important connecting and networking element in the Beckettian psychosexual complex that it can become invisible and can shade over into those features that have become standard attributes of a straight Beckett. (Boxall 2004:114-115)

This long passage demonstrates that the misogyny and misanthropy that I have analysed in Beckett's early prose are potentially bound up with a "central homoeroticism". Although Boxall's argument is persuasive, it has itself been "invisible" in Beckett Studies to date for critics who insist on a heteronormative reading of his work.

Boxall identifies a homoerotic encounter in the novella "The Calmative", as being of prime importance for any queer reading of Becket's work. In a highly sexualized scene between the narrator and a sinister character with shining teeth, there is a mixture of the violent and the erotic that is disturbing:

> All of a sudden his hand came down on the back of my neck, his sinewy fingers closed and with a jerk and a twist he had me up against him. But instead of dispatching me he began to murmur words so sweet that I went limp and my head fell forward on his lap. Between the caressing voice and the fingers rowelling my neck the contrast was striking […] And if you gave me a kiss, he said finally. I knew there were kisses in the air […] Come, he said. I wiped my mouth in its tod of hair and advanced it towards his. […] He took off his hat, a bowler, and tapped the middle of his forehead. There, he said, and there only. He had a noble brow, white and high. He leaned forward, closing his eyes. Quick, he said. I pursed my lips as my mother had taught me and brought them down where he had said. (Beckett 2000:60-61)

Taking Boxall's identification of the centrality of the homoerotic to Beckett's aesthetic, I conclude this chapter with the assertion that the "space of an abandoned homoerotic in Beckett's remains a "trembling possibility that is circumscribed by the prevailing, heteronormative modes of reading, of writing, and of production" (Boxall 129). As I have detailed, recent debates in Beckett Studies have begun to lift the lid on this, still, controversial aspect of Beckett's work, and this chapter contributes to these debates.

To conclude, this chapter unpacked the "delicate matter" of misogyny in Beckett's early prose writing. It analyzed three texts, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, More Pricks Than Kicks* and the post-war novel *Molloy* to demonstrate how Beckett's treatment of gender and sexuality follows a chronological order. The chapter considered how misogyny operates in these texts, and how it illuminates questions of gender in his work. Beckett's work displays an exuberant misogyny and misanthropy which spanned more than twenty years, as my texts demonstrate. As I argued, sterility precludes reproduction where possible in the world of the male protagonists of Beckett's work, who favour sexual encounters with prostitutes, postreproductive women, or masturbation, while also fantasising about same-sex encounters. In a close reading of the erotic sexual encounters/fantasies that occur in *Molloy,* I argued that an expanded reading which questions a heteronormative reading, uncovers an alternative queer reading, which has historically been closed down in Beckett Studies. Until recently, in an inexplicable mass denial, there is an assumption that Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in Beckett's most famous play *Waiting for Godot,* are simply life-long friends. In directly challenging the disparaging portrayals of women in these texts, and considering a homoerotic element to his work, I argued that gender and sexuality are not niche concerns in Beckett Studies, but central to Beckett's aesthetics.

Chapter Two

“Back in the Caul”: ‘Maternity, Motherhood and

Uterine Spaces in "First Love" and *Molloy*

> Unfortunately it is not of them I have to speak, but of her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit. (Samuel Beckett *Molloy*)
>
> I found myself inscribing the letters of Lulu in an old heifer pat or flat on my face in the mud under the moon trying to tear up the nettles by the roots. [..] Would I have been tracing her name in old cowshit if my love had been pure and disinterested?
> (Samuel Beckett "First Love")

Introduction

Chapter One concentrated on how a focus on the "delicate matter" of misogyny opened a window into how sexuality and reproduction were key structuring themes in Beckett's early writing, beginning with *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks* and up to and including the postwar novel *Molloy*. Sexual reproduction and sexual activity are not the same thing in Beckett's work and the previous chapter explored how in the figure of the Beckettian male, sexual activity was related to reproduction in the early work. In this chapter, the focus moves from sexuality and reproduction as they are constellated in select male protagonists in his early work, to a focus on how sexuality and reproduction come together in the figure of the mother or maternally identified women in the novella, "First Love" (1946) and the post-war novel, *Molloy* (1951). I have chosen these two texts because, for the purposes of this analysis, they most clearly foreground the troubled obsession with the maternal figure and the recurring structural motif of the womb that is a hallmark of Beckett's early to mid-phases. The representation of fictional and semi-monstrous maternal figures is a central but ambiguous concern of Beckett's

early and mid-phase prose, with these mother figures and allegories emerging as simultaneously nurturing and stifling.[27] In contrast to the sexual activity of male protagonists from this period, reproduction and pregnancy in the female characters has a different outcome and effect, and this chapter explores this difference. The imagos of pregnancy and motherhood in Beckett's work exemplifies an anxiety with reproduction, that is figured, and that has largely been read in Beckett studies as an existential anxiety about a cultural "going on". In this chapter I look at the representation of the female bodies that carry this anxiety.

The troubled relationship of sexual activity to offspring is centred on the maternal figures in these texts. If and when pregnancy does occur as a result of sexual congress of sorts, the mothers, as Mary Bryden argues "in the Beckettian setting are not discerned as welcoming hosts. Their wombs tolerate their burden rather than embrace it" (Bryden 1993:166). To analyse the mother figure in my chosen texts, I employ a psychoanalytic theoretical framework, drawing primarily on French feminist writer and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and her theories on abjection, motherhood and the semiotic *chora*. Although a Kristevan critical framework has been used extensively by critics to read the grotesque in Beckett's work, it has only been recently employed to analyse maternity and motherhood tropes in Beckett's work.[31]

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[27] Studies on maternity and motherhood in Beckett: see Mary Bryden's *Women in Samuel Beckett,* who was the first to address the importance of mothers and the resentment towards them in Beckett's work; already mentioned is Tajiri's study on the prosthetic body in Beckett, where the "mechanization" of the body is a shield against the intrusion of female alterity; David Houston Jones, in *The Body Abject: Self and Text in Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett* (2000) analyses abjection in "First Love" and *Watt*. A recent article by Kristin

Motherhood itself has received surprisingly little attention so far in Beckett Studies, until the recent study *Gadda and Beckett: Storytelling, Subjectivity and Fracture* by Katrin WehlingGiorgi, which associated abject imagery with the maternal trope, and its direct link with the dissolution of the self.

Drawing from arguments in Wehling-Giorgi's study, in this chapter I argue that the fear and hatred often displayed towards the mother in Beckett's work, powerfully demonstrates a fear of the "archaic mother" which, according to Kristeva "turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power" (Kristeva 1982:77). The female sex in Beckett's work is not just cursed for having generative powers, but the male protagonists of Beckett's early fiction also take active revenge on their progenitors by never ceasing to blame them for their existence, as a scene in *Molloy* displays: "Look at Mammy. What rid me of her, in the end? […] Perhaps they buried her alive, it wouldn't surprise me. Ah the old bitch, a nice does she gave me, she and her lousy unconquerable genes" (Beckett 2009c:82) Judging from the negative attitude displayed towards the female characters in Beckett's early prose as established in Chapter One and the awkward sexual encounters between men and women, this thesis makes the precise argument that a general fear of the female sex and her generative powers was one of the stimuli for Beckett's early art. While this thesis has established that Beckett's misogyny was in line with the misogynistic seam that was a structural part of avant-garde modernism itself, what

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Czarnecki, ""Signs I Don't Understand": Language and Abjection in *Molloy*" focuses on the close relationship between abjection and language formation. Julia Kristeva's essay on Beckett "The Father, Love, and Banishment", analyses the importance of the father in relation to the narrator's quest for an authentic, nonpaternal language in "First Love" and *Not I*. Kristeva does not, however, comment on motherhood in Beckett's work.

[31] The only studies I uncovered in my research that uses Kristeva as a theoretical framework to analyse the maternal figure in Beckett is Katrin Wehling-Giorgi's study: *Gadda and Beckett: Storytelling, Subjectivity and Fracture*. London: Legenda, 2014 and Shane Weller's *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

interests this analysis is how Beckett expressed this in his own particular way. Here, I explore how Beckett drew on the wider cultural repository of misogynistic views of female bodily creativity to use as a metaphor to explore anxiety about social and cultural reproduction in general, and his own creativity in particular.

Along with an obsession with the maternal, both “First Love” and *Molloy* display a recurring motif of the narrative space of the womb. In “First Love”, the narrator turns his room in Lulu’s apartment into a type of “wombtomb”, when he moves the sofa to the back wall, “so that the back, hitherto against the wall, was now on the outside and consequently the front, or way in, on the inside. Then I climbed back, like a dog into its basket” (Beckett 2000:80). In *Molloy*, the opening lines “I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now”, sees Molloy residing in a womb-like space, having searched but now replaced his own mother. In Chapter One, the “wombtomb” analysis associated with a superior state of mind is first mentioned. In a recent study on the maternal trope as a complex discourse on selfhood in Beckett’s writing, Wehling-Giorgi argues that undertaking a reading of the maternal through the lens of Kristeva’s theories suggests a “direct link between the insistent presence of the maternal element, the notion of abjection and the dissolution of the self” (Wehling-Giorgi 2014:5). Wehling-Giorgi suggests that matricidal desires and resentment towards the mother in Beckett’s prose and drama “constitutes an integral part of the subject’s process of individuation” (Wehling-Giorgi 2014:5). This failure to accomplish the process of “disengagement from her underlies the close mother-son relationship” in Beckett’s writing, which is of central concern in *Molloy* (WehlingGiorgi 2014:5). Drawing on Wehling-Giorgi’s study and previous psychoanalytic readings of both texts by Phil Baker, I argue that a reading of these recurring tropes through a Kristevan lens develops established psychoanalytic readings of Beckett, as Baker does not employ

Kristeva in his theoretical framework. This chapter reconsiders Kristeva's theories of the feminine, maternity and motherhood as explored in her texts *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Desire in Language* (1980), and *Tales of Love* (1987). Using my reconsideration of the texts, I will then analyse how each Beckett text expresses "mother", in several ways, including how narrative spaces are constructed as womb-like recurring tropes. But firstly, I will discuss Beckett's ambiguous and intense relationship with his own mother, May, which has a significant bearing on his writing.

Beckett's Mother

In this thesis, I contend that maternity and motherhood are near-obsessive tropes in Beckett's work, and here I explore how the recurring mother trope can be read as inflected by Beckett's deeply troubled yet attached relationship with his own mother. This is not to suggest that Beckett's textual work can be reduced to his autobiography, but the documentary sources that provide an archive of this primary, prolonged and difficult attachment, provide ample evidence that the journey from misogyny to maturity in Becketts's work follows a developmental pathway what is echoed in his evolving relationship to his mother. Thus, in a study of motherhood in his work, it seems perverse NOT to examine this mother/son bond, especially given the attention Beckett himself devoted to it. Here, I make the case that Beckett's childhood memories of his relationship with his mother are emphatically relevant to an understanding of recurring motifs in his writing. I am not the first of Beckett's readers to consider his view of the maternal relationship as foundational for his symbology. Beckett's close friend Geoffrey Thompson famously declared, "the key to understanding Beckett […] [is] to be found in his relationship with his mother" (Knowlson 1996:178). In this chapter, I combine Beckett's view of his relationship with his own mother, impressions by friends and confidants of the role of his mother in his life, with a feminist and Kristevan interpretative lens to read “First Love” and *Molloy*.

Beckett’s relationship with his mother was not easy and Beckett and his friends recall his experience of her as being an over-bearing presence and a powerful influence in his life. Knowlson details how in this difficult relationship she apparently regulated and controlled everyday life at Cooldrinagh, the family home in Dublin’s Foxrock. May Beckett was an authoritarian matriarch, who insisted on strict codes of proper behaviour. From a large wealthy Anglo-Irish family, she had a strong personality who “suffered fools badly and could be very forthright in her criticism when she felt that someone was in the wrong” (Knowlson 1996:5). She exhibited a “dramatic kind of temperament”, enforcing “a rigid code of conduct and a concept of decorum”, which led to difficulties when the young Beckett began behaving in bohemian ways that she disapproved of (Knowlson 1996:5). She also appears to have suffered from severe bouts of depression, when she appeared “’strange’, ‘ill-tempered’, ‘bottled up’, ‘tricky’, and difficult’” (Knowlson 1996:5). May Beckett entirely disapproved of her son’s ambitions to become a writer, encouraging him instead to follow in the footsteps of his brother Frank who ran the family building contractor business. As Beckett wrote to Thomas

MacGreevy, upon publication of his collection of poems, *Echo’s Bones and Other Precipitates*, not one member of his family uttered a word of congratulation or even recognition; despite Beckett presenting his mother with three copies, his work was met with “revolted silence” (Knowlson 1996:224). The difficulties in the relationship were exacerbated because Beckett remained financially dependent on his mother into his late twenties and early thirties as he continued to suffer from the poor health that had plagued his youth. He regularly returned to Foxrock as he could not maintain a living in London, where he lived intermittently. Beckett blamed his mother for putting him on a pedestal on the one hand, while enforcing her strict regimes on the other hand. This fierce tug-of-war is described by Knowlson as an "almost umbilical dependence on and a desire for independence from his mother" (Knowlson 1996:178). The superior attitude that the young Beckett displayed as a defence against such a lack of mature individuation, along with a sense of isolation from others resulted in an "obsessive immersion in self", which came to light when Beckett underwent psychotherapy in London in the years 1933-35 (Knowlson 1996:180).

Beckett's difficult relationship with his mother culminated in a final and dramatic quarrel in September 1937, the cause of which is not entirely clear. On the 28th September, he wrote to MacGreevy that it was "a great relief" for him to move from Dublin and that he had given up on any reconciliation "une fois pour toutes [once and for all]" (Knowlson 1996: 272). On 6 October 1937, he again wrote to MacGreevy, venting his anger: "I am what her savage loving has made me, and it is good that one of us should accept that finally. […] the grotesque can go no further" (Fehsenfeld and Overbeck 2009:552). Here he identifies that his sense of his own grotesquery was created by his mother's relationship with him, and thus his work gives form to and processes his own sense of monstrosity through female and specifically maternal figures. In the middle of October, Beckett moved to Paris, which was to be his home for the next fifty-two years. Upon settling there, he wrote that "nothing changes the relief at being back here. Like coming out of gaol in April" (Fehsenfeld and Overbeck 2009:567). Despite this dramatic break, Beckett continued to return to Ireland intermittently to visit his mother and he nursed her for the final weeks of her life, which ended on the 25 August 1950, an experience which Beckett found traumatic. Although he had physically removed himself from his mother, he appeared unable to sever the emotional ties to her. He also felt an increasing sense of remorse for "not having been the dutiful son that she wanted" (Knowlson 1996:383). According to Deirdre Bair, Beckett did not keep anything belonging to her after her death; Bair suggests that in "this rejection of May's effects", Beckett "finally, symbolically, managed to kill her" (Bair 1978:430). However, given the nuanced exploration of older women in his later work, it would seem that it was less as if he wanted to kill her, and more that he wanted to constitute himself authentically in relation to her. This love/hate relationship with his mother influenced Beckett's portrayal of mother figures in his work, which represent his own coming to accept and understand the aspects of himself that May appeared to see as unlovable. This exploration of rejection begins for Beckett in the earliest stage of this critical relationship –in the womb. Beckett asserted that he had clear memories of being in the womb, and his work explores the sensory dimensions of this early awareness of the presence of another, beside, around and interleaved with the self.

Intrauterine Memories and Psychotherapy

It is fascinating to learn that Beckett insisted that he had a clear memory of his own intrauterine life; he told Peggy Guggenheim that "ever since his (Beckett's) birth, he had retained a terrible memory of life in his mother's womb. He was constantly suffering from this and had awful crises, when he felt he was suffocating" (qtd. in Bryden 1993:161). In an interview with John Gruen, Beckett again confirmed this awareness, when he said: "I have a clear memory of my own foetal existence. It was an existence where no voice, no possible movement could free me from the agony and darkness I was subjected to" (qtd. in Bryden 1993:161). Although this refers to a pre-natal existence, the phrase "subjected to" clearly hints at the helplessness and its association with victimhood that many Beckettian characters voice in their outrage at being unwillingly born into a world of pain and suffering. This intrauterine trope appears in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, when Belacqua pines: "I want very much to be back in the caul, on my back in the dark forever" (Beckett 2010a: 22). The reference to the intrauterine caul appears also in the poem "Sanies 1": "Ah to be back in the caul now with no trusts" (Beckett 1986:17). Along with these psychosomatic symptoms, the young Beckett experienced other emotional trauma which ultimately led to his psychotherapy treatment with Wilfred Bion, in which he explicitly explored his pre-natal sense of stasis.

The year 1933 was a traumatic and chaotic one for Beckett; in May, he had treatment to remove a cyst from his neck, resulting in him spending many days in bed. While there, he discovered that his cousin Peggy Sinclair had died suddenly from Tuberculosis, quickly followed by the also sudden death of his father in June. Beckett described his serious health deterioration during a passage when he recalled how his father's death affected him psychologically: "I was walking down Dawson Street. And I felt I couldn't go on. It was a strange experience I can't really describe. I found I couldn't go on moving" (Knowlson 1996:172). Beckett admitted that he was psychologically, emotionally and financially drained and dreadfully unhappy in his life. On the recommendation of Geoffrey Thompson, he undertook psychoanalytic therapy between Christmastime 1933 and Christmastime 1935, with the now-renowned and influential but then apprentice therapist, Wilfred Ruprecht Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London.[28] He presented with severe anxiety symptoms, described by him in his first session as a "bursting, apparently arrhythmic heart, night sweats, shudders, panic, breathlessness, and, at its most severe, total paralysis" (Knowlson 1996:16). Although there is no archival evidence of the professional relationship between the two men throughout that time, Beckett did make use of his treatment by taking notes relating to this experience.

Beckett took copious notes both in Psychology and Philosophy which were only discovered after his death in 1989.[33] As Matthew Feldman's forensic investigation of the

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[28] Matthew Feldman suggests that it is wrongly referred to as the Tavistock Clinic and was in fact called "the Institute of Medical Psychology" when Beckett attended his thrice-weekly sessions. The Institute burned down in the Second World War, alongside much of London.

"Psychology Notes" highlight, "much of this material was directed towards a systematic understanding of psychology and psychoanalysis, in addition to a focus on (mainly) psychosomatic symptoms that Beckett thought might be the cause of his physical maladies at the time" (Feldman 2006:14).[34] Of interest to my argument here are the notes he took from Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth*:

> Anxiety of child left alone in dark room due to his unconscious being reminded (erinnert) of intrauterine situation, terminated by frightening severance from mother. […] Analysis the belated accomplishment of incomplete mastery of birth trauma. Analytic situation identified with intrauterine one, patient back in position of unborn. Just as all anxiety goes back to anxiety at birth (dyspnoea), so every pleasure has as its final aim the reestablishment of the primal intrauterine pleasure. (TCD MS 10971/8/34)[35]

Here Beckett's interest in how Rank's work distinguishes between intrauterine pleasure and the trauma and anxiety that can accompany birth, which are experientially different things, directs us to his own self experiencing and the spatial symbology that is repeated throughout his works. Beckett's detailed accounts of his own primal intrauterine experiences appear different from Rank's map of this time. While contemplating the child's conscious memories of intrauterine experience and the anxiety of the necessary separation at birth, Rank also claims that "all neurotic disturbances in breathing (Beckett's heart "started its jigs again, with night sweats and panic attacks" (Knowlson 1996:172) (e.g. asthma), repeating feelings of suffocation, refer directly to physical reproductions of the birth trauma", a passage which

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[33] Feldman argues that "the composition date of these (Psychology) notes can be fixed with relative certainty to late 1934 and early 1935, thanks to the MacGreevy correspondence […]" (Feldman 2004a:81)

[34] Beckett took notes from nine texts: Karin Stephen's *Psychoanalysis and Medicine: A Study of the Wish to Fall Ill* (1933), Sigmund Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), Robert S. Woodworth's *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1931), Ernest Jones's (Beckett refers to Jones as "Erogenous Jones") *Papers on Psychoanalysis*(1923) and *Treatment of the Neuroses* (1920), Wilhelm Stekel's *Psychoanalysis and Suggestion Therapy* (1923), Alfred Adler's *The Neurotic Constitution* (1921) and *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1932) and Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* (1929) (See Feldman 2006: 29-30).

[35] I am extremely grateful to Matthew Feldman, who transcribed the "Psychology Notes" as Appendix B, in his unpublished thesis, "Sourcing Aporetics: An Empirical Study on Philosophical Influences in the Development of Samuel Beckett's Writing" (2004b). All further citations, with permission, are from Feldman's thesis.

Beckett copied into his notes (qtd. in Wehling-Giorgi 2014:121). As Wehling-Giorgi notes, Beckett symbolically associated his own birth with the crucifixion of Christ, having been born on Good Friday, 13 April 1906.[29] This association with a symbolic religious signification, combined with the traumatic pre-birth memories, which he claimed he had a clear memory of, fuelled Beckett's pessimistic attitude to life. We can empirically say, then, that this pessimism became the central concern for his earlier fictional protagonists' wish "never to have been born", resulting in resentment towards their mothers for birthing them in the first place. Beckett developed the idea for his writing of strange birth circumstances after attending a famous lecture by psychologist C. G. Jung between September and October 1935 at the Tavistock Clinic in London. Jung told the story of a young girl who had foreseen her own early death in a "mythological dream" (qtd. in Bair 1978:221). Jung concluded that the girl had, in fact, "never been born entirely" (Bair 1978:221). This remark had an everlasting effect on the young Beckett, where it resurfaces in the appendix to his novel *Watt*, where Beckett wrote "never been born properly", along with a further annotation on the soul of the embryo: "the foetal soul is full grown" (qtd. in Wehling-Giorgi 2014:122). Later, the entire Jungian episode is reconfigured by Mrs. Rooney in the radio play *All That Fall,* in one of her reminiscences:

> I remember once attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors. I forget what you call them. […] I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. […] Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with her was she had never really been born. (Beckett 2006:195/6)

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[29] Knowlson notes how Beckett's birth certificate recorded his birth as 13 May 1906, and his father registered it on 14 June. However, In the Births and Deaths column of *The Irish Times*, his birth was recorded as 16 April 1906. Knowlson argues that the confusion in dates was a simple error: everyone who knew Beckett knew his birthday to be the 13 April. There remains the possibility, then, that the Registrar simply wrote down May instead of April.

Beckett appears to be suggesting, along with Jung, in these instances that the individual is endowed with a pre-natal heightened form of consciousness, which is subsequently repressed in the process of subject formation. The trope of birth and rebirth is central to Jung's world view that we must be imaginatively born again as part of the process of individuation. In "Psychology Notes", Beckett managed to turn his anxiety into rhetorical tropes in his work. As already mentioned, the neurotic mother/son relationship heightened his grief at his mother's passing, but from that emotional matrix came some of his best writing. *Molloy*, the first of the three novels of the trilogy, is concerned with the narrator's mother, an absent figure that Molloy searches for. Beckett's interest in these pre-natal recollections and his ambiguous relationship with his mother systemically structure his work, as I shall show later in this chapter.

First, I turn to Julia Kristeva's work, whose theories on maternity and language acquisition and abjection proves useful in illuminating the dimension of the maternal in both texts. Beckett Studies have tended to draw heavily on the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher, who's unremittingly disparaging attitude towards women has been seen as casting a long shadow over Beckett's oeuvre. Schopenhauer's conception of woman constitutes the dominant gender stereotype in Beckett's writing, both early and late. In the essay "On Women" (1851), which aims to determine the "true" value of women, Schopenhauer identifies woman as an intermediate stage between a child and a man, the man being "a human being in the real sense" (Schirmacher 2010:166). The distinguishing feature between man and woman is primarily the latter's "limited faculty of reason", resulting in her incapacity for logical thought; in short, woman is an "intellectual myope" (Schirmacher 2010:167). A reading of this fear and hatred towards the feminine through the lens of Kristeva's theories suggests that along with the cultural validation provided by Schopenhauer, part of the grotesquery in his work was Beckett re-birthing himself through facing into the legacy of his own experience of maternal monstrosity.

Kristeva on Feminism, Motherhood, Maternity and Female Sexuality

Kristeva's writing on Beckett makes no specific reference to mothers and maternity in his work in "The Father, Love, and Banishment" (1976) which focuses on "First Love" and the later drama monologue *Not I* which, between them enclose Beckett's textual universe. She suggests that both texts model and criticize the construction of modern identity within the limits set by the Law of the Father. Beckett displays this negative repressed law that poetic language seeks to subvert. In both texts, the narrators are the product of patriarchal discourse. The repressed son of "First Love" and Mouth are, according to Kristeva "a fascinating and impossible couple, also sustained, on both sides, by censorship of the maternal body" (Kristeva 1976:154). As Shane Weller notes, Kristeva is "among the first to argue not only that Mouth's utterance remains under the nihilistic shadow cast by the death of the father-god, but also that her utterance, and all utterance in Beckett" is sustained by this censorship (Weller 2006:165). In this part of the chapter, I reconsider Kristeva's theories of difference, identity and maternity, and the challenges that some aspects of second wave feminist theory had with theories of motherhood. Kristeva has been both criticised and lauded for her theories on the feminine in equal measure. As Kelly Oliver notes in the essay "Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions", feminists have had radically opposing reactions to Kristeva's work. Feminists such as Toril Moi argue her theories are politically left and therefore helpful for feminism, while others such as Gayatri Spivak suggest they are politically right-wing and unhelpful. Kristeva has been accused of essentialising the idea of woman and the female body by Elizabeth Grosz, Kaja Silverman and Jennifer Stone, while Jacqueline Rose suggests that her views undermine any essentialist idea of woman. Critics such as Judith Butler strongly argue that Kristeva's views on maternity are essentialist, which I will challenge further in this chapter. Other critics like Terry Eagleton argue that Kristeva's writing promotes anarchy (Oliver 1993:94-5). That Kristeva's work invites such diverse responses, suggests that it touches on some very important and highly cathected cultural nerves.

In her challenge to phallocentrism, Kristeva attempts to avoid the masculine-feminine binary opposition that Irigaray and Cixous are said to have traditionally represented in their work.[30] In her most important essay on feminism, "Women's Time" (1981)[31], Kristeva controversially suggests that the only way for women to re-establish their identities with the maternal body is through becoming mothers themselves. The event of pregnancy allows for a recognition of the other: "pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an Other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech" (Moi 1986:206). As the biggest issue for feminism is motherhood, Kristeva's comments have been criticised as essentialising the female body. Kristeva begins the essay by identifying three strands of feminist development in the West. Prior to 1968, she identifies the earlier suffragettes and existentialist feminist phase, the aim of which was social, economic and political equality with men, particularly the concern with the vote. These women argued that the ideal “woman” is characteristically the same as the ideal “man”, but the task was to insert woman into men’s linear history, in which women had been ignored. This suffragette struggle was, according to Kristeva grounded in a “logic of identification with […] the logical and ontological values of a rationality dominant in the nation-state” (Moi 1986:194). After the 1968 movement, the next phase Kristeva is concerned with is the feminism of psychoanalysis and artists, which was a struggle against reducing the identity of woman to that of the identity of man by inserting her into his linear history time. Kristeva points out that these feminists were concerned with developing a unique essence of the feminine, a radical alterity that falls outside phallic discourse and time. Kristeva rejects both strategies, allying herself instead with that of a third generation, who challenge identity in general, are concerned with difference, rather than sexual difference, and who challenge identity and essential notions of man and woman in particular.

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[30] In her two major works *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), Irigaray sets out not just to expose the phallocentricity of both Freud and Lacan's notion of female sexuality as lack, but she also endeavours to disrupt the entire phallocentric order in which their writing belongs, by reconceiving of the feminine, and particularly feminine "style" or "writing" or "woman-speak" which she terms *femme-parler* in a formula that is not determined by the masculine. She argues that the way in which to disrupt phallocentric thought is to disrupt it from within, in a risky strategy that she names *mimesis*. This takes the form of a counter valorization of feminine alterity, accompanied by a laughter that is itself "the first form of liberation from a secular oppression" (1985:163). This laughter is gendered: "women among themselves begin by laughing. To escape from a pure and simple reversal of the masculine position means in any case not to forget to laugh" (163). In Irigaray's notion of mimesis, then, the phallocentric conception of the feminine as negative and lack is affirmed, but as a value in its own right: "One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it" (76). This is a risky strategy as it appears to be simply an act of reversal, thereby still attaching to the binary opposition that it seeks to disrupt. Cixous, like Irigaray, aims to disrupt phallocentric discourse by calling it into question through a countering affirmation of the assigned feminine alterity. In her essays "Sorties" and "The Laugh of the Medusa" (both published in 1975), she calls for woman to write: "woman must write woman" (1981: 247). Feminine writing, which she terms *ecriture feminine* is the "passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not" (1986: 85-6). She argues that writers such as James Joyce, in Molly Bloom's female monologue at the end of *Ulysses* is a display of feminine writing and she finds this also in the writings of Colette, Marguerite Duras and Jean Genet.

[31] This essay was first published as "Le temps des femmes" in *33/44@ Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents* in 1979 and then translated in *Signs, 7* in 1981.

In this third phase of identification to which Kristeva commits herself, she insists on the need to undertake a “demassification of the problematic of *difference*” in a movement beyond the very notion of sexual identity and sexual difference (Moi 1986:209). In this formula, the individual would not have any fixed sexual identity, not even a bisexual one. Sexual difference, then, could be experienced not as a fixed binary opposition but rather as a method of differentiation, or the idea of a “subject-in-process”, which she theorises in her essay “From One Identity to an Other” in *Desire in Language* and in her seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva 1980:136). From a feminist perspective, this essay is important, addressing as she does the question of feminism and its relation to femininity on the one hand,

and the symbolic order on the other. As is clear from “Women’s Time”, not only is Kristeva unwilling to read Freud and Lacan as unremittingly phallocentric in their writing, but she also asserts that a “careful reading” of Freud can uncover where his texts exceed phallocentrism (Moi 1986:197). His castration theory can be read beyond that of sexualization as “the imaginary construction of a radical operation which constitutes the symbolic field and all beings inscribed therein” (Moi 1986:198). What both Freud and Lacan suggest is a method of understanding how the entry into the Symbolic (not to be confused with Kristeva’s notion of the symbolic and its relation to the semiotic which will be further discussed), that of language and order and family structure, involves, in Kristeva’s formulation “a *separation* from a presumed state of nature” (Moi 1986:198). While Freud and Lacan insist on the fundamental differences between male and female child sexual development, Kristeva pays close attention to this break with the natural, a separation from the mother, which is the condition of entry into the Symbolic, and is the “common destiny” of both sexes (Moi 1986:198).

To reiterate, sexual difference becomes subordinated in Kristeva’s thinking to one of universal separation from the mother. Kristeva addresses the emerging generation of feminist thinking as one which will have to confront the difficulty of reconciling maternal time or motherhood with linear (political and historical) time. We need a discourse around the fact that women continue to desire to bear children. In the deconstruction of the concept of identity in her formulation, a space opens up which allows individual difference free play. In her insistence on a movement to tackle difference, she calls for an end to the “‘fight to the death’ between rival groups and thus between the sexes” (Moi 1986:209). Women themselves need to support other women in their choice to become a mother or not. In “First Love” and *Molloy*, motherhood is rejected by the males or treated with cruelty and indifference.

Motherhood and Maternity

Kristeva first wrote about maternity in “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini” (1975)[32], when pregnant with her own son. Here, as in the later “Stabat Mater”, she suggests that pregnancy and childbirth could potentially be experienced as a reunion with one’s own mother: “[b]y giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood” (Kristeva 1980:239). In this essay, Kristeva powerfully evokes the uncanniness of the experience of pregnancy as a space, double and foreign where “no one is present” (Kristeva 1980:237). In the symbolic order, as traversed and codified by the law of the father, it is impossible to signify the event of pregnancy; the woman who is experiencing it becomes temporarily dispossessed, psychotic in her own body, removed from language itself.

Her body is engaged by an “it” that objectifies the woman it unhinges. This reformulation of pregnancy and childbirth as that which reunites woman and mother and recalling primal archaic homosexual bonds is a controversial and radical re-thinking of Freud’s theory of childbirth as a product of penis envy. The “becoming-a-mother” is described by Kristeva:

> Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. ‘It happens, but I’m not there.’ ‘I cannot realize it, but it goes on’. Motherhood’s impossible syllogism. (Kristeva 1980:237)

Further, according to Kristeva, this ‘becoming-mother’ can only be accounted for by two discourses, both of which are inadequate: “*science”* and “*Christian theology”* (Kristeva 1980:237). At the time “Stabat Mater” was published, neuroscience was not yet able to account for the splitting of subjectivity in the maternal body, and thus Kristeva’s argument rests on exploring the image of the Virgin Mary through which the move from nature to culture is mediated in Christian Roman Catholicism; this iconic image of motherhood only served to reduce the maternal body to silence, as birth is only viewed from the point of view of the son, who symbolically "kills" his begetter. Science explains maternity as a natural process, yet the mother as subject is curiously absent in this process. As alternatives to those discourses, Kristeva, as Oliver notes, "suggests a notion of the maternal body that locates its *jouissance* in femininity and maternity itself rather than the Freudian notion of the maternal body, which is always defined in relation to masculine sexuality and a phallic economy of desire" (Oliver 2002:296).

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[32] This essay was first published in *Peinture* in 1975 and subsequently reprinted in *Polylogue* in 1977.

This is most clearly set out in "Stabat Mater" (1983)[33], which for most scholars is considered her most important essay on maternity. In it Kristeva calls for a new theory of maternity, and she considers the possibility that if "Woman" cannot exist according to Lacan, could motherhood function as an ontological category, previously unpacked in psychoanalysis and philosophy, because this a function (currently) only available to the female sex. However, here too we are "caught in a paradox" (Moi 1986:161). In Western culture, motherhood is regularly unconsciously seen as representing femininity in its entirety, and more often than not, refers to the fantasy, rather than the reality of lived motherhood which Kristeva considers to be a "lost territory" (Moi 1986:161). The result is that second wave feminism largely rejected the notion of motherhood, as it struggled with a new representation of femininity.[34] Real, lived motherhood was therefore, in such articulations shrouded in silence and secrecy, theoretically speaking. Kristeva's main argument in "Stabat Mater" is that due to the demise of the cult of the Virgin Mary and religion in general, along with the anti-motherhood bias of Beauvoir influenced feminism, motherhood remained "without a discourse" (Moi 1986:184). She writes:

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[33] This essay was first published in 1977 as "Herethique de l'amour" in 1977 in *Tel Quel*, 74. It was reprinted as "Stabat Mater" in *Histoires d'amour* in 1983. The title "Stabat Mater" refers to the agony of the Virgin Mary at the Crucifixion contained in a Latin hymn which has been set to music by many famous composers, including Pergolesi. As Toril Moi notes, this essay is unique among Kristeva's work not just for its easy and deeply personal style, but specifically for its "deliberate typographical fragmentation of the page" (Moi 1986:160).

[34] Simone de Beauvoir ironically argued that maternity is a woman's "natural 'calling', since her whole organic structure is adapted for the perpetuation of the species" (Beauvoir 1997:501). She considers maternity as a form of slavery when she suggests that "enforced maternity brings into the world wretched infants, whom their parents will be unable to support and who will become the victims of public care of 'child martyrs'" (Beauvoir 1972:502).

> First, we live in a civilisation where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood. If, however, one looks at it more closely, this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory, what is more, it involves less than an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized – an idealization of primary narcissism. Now, when feminism demands a new representation of femininity, it seems to identify motherhood with that idealized misconception and, because it rejects the image and its misuse, feminism circumvents the real experience that fantasy overshadows. The result? – A negation or rejection of motherhood by some avant-garde feminist groups. Or else an acceptance – conscious or not – of its traditional representations by the great mass of people, women and men.
> (Moi 1986:161)

As it stood, the maternal "stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, nonlanguage or body" (Moi 1986:162). Kristeva's essay is profoundly disturbing in that it specifically outlines the limits of Lacanian "beyond the phallus" theory. Pregnancy is an institutionalized form of psychosis, an on/off choice: "me *or* it" (Moi 1986:297). As Griselda Pollock puts it, pregnancy is a "split identity, a threshold between nature and culture, between biology and language, *with no singularity and no relations to an ethical Other*" (Pollock in Ettinger 2006:35). In pregnancy, woman succumbs to this type of psychotic disintegration; in Lacan's formula, for any subject to emerge, the maternal body must be conceived of as abject, an interior kind of killing, which necessitates matricide, a symbolic loss. This act of abjection is explicitly explored in a series of different scenarios in Beckett's work.

Traditionally, the cult of the Virgin offered some solution to what Kristeva terms the problem of "feminine paranoia"; with the decline of religion in the West, women are left with nothing to replace it. In pregnancy, woman defers to this paranoia but also to “psychotic disintegration”, which becomes separated from ethical relations (Pollock in Ettinger 2006:35). Freud offers “a massive *nothing*, which, for those who might care to analyse it, is punctuated with this or that remark on the part of Freud’s mother, proving to him in the kitchen that his own body is anything but immortal and will crumble away like dough” (Moi 1986:179). Feminist critiques of traditional representations of motherhood have consistently failed to produce any fresh understanding of women’s continued wish to have children: this woman who desires to bear children is “alone of her sex” (Moi 1986:180). Kristeva asks, “What are the aspects of the feminine psyche for which that representation of motherhood does not provide a solution or else provides one that is felt as too coercive by twentieth-century women?” (Moi 1986:182). In reply to her own question, Kristeva considers the need for a new understanding of the maternal body and of the “corporeal and psychological” adversity of bearing children; of mother and daughter relationships and of the female foreclosure of masculinity (Moi 1986:183). There is a silence surrounding maternity in feminist thinking that Kristeva aimed to challenge. She argued that what was needed was need a “post-virginal” discourse around maternity, one which would direct both men and women towards a new ethics: Kristeva terms this a “herethics”, which would envelop reproduction and death (Moi 1986:161). Writing from a personal maternal point of view, Kristeva suggests that this herethics is “perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable […] So let us again listen to the *Stabat Mater*, and the music, all the music” (Moi 1986:185).

Kristeva’s initial thoughts on maternity, motherhood and language were first formulated much earlier in her seminal text *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), where she developed the notion of the “semiotic *chora*”. I set out Kristeva’s theories in detail as a framework for analysing both texts because they provide a powerful psychoanalytic framework for analysing motherhood and uterine spaces in Beckett Studies.

The semiotic *chora*

The beginning of Kristeva's psychoanalytic thematization of the maternal are found in her bestknown text, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), in which she links language to maternal, a concept developed from her PhD thesis.[42] Her argument is that nineteenth-century postSymbolist avant-garde literature revolutionises poetic language by accessing a special feminine, a specifically maternal creative register; she identifies this poetic revolutionary effect in the writing of Comte de Lautreamont, Stephane Mallarme, Marcel Proust, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, Antonin Artaud and James Joyce, all of whom produced avant-garde and experimental writing characteristic of this feminine impulse. Kristeva argues that these writers perform this revolution through the disruption of what she terms the "semiotic chora" in language. Kristeva suggests that these writers manage to reach the semiotic "chora", which modifies linguistic structures, thus undoing identity, including sexual identity. This undoing of identity is a return to that which precedes the Symbolic and its network of structured, meaning-making differences, that which is the distinguishing mark of "great" literature. Although criticised for writing only about male writers, she posited that their aesthetics are decidedly feminine. Both Kristeva and Plato view the chora in maternal terms: the Platonic space or "receptacle is a mother and a wet nurse", which draws on the notion of the female potential as distinct from the paternal creator present in Plato's story (Kristeva 1984: 14,240). For Kristeva, the maternal body is "the ordering principle of the semiotic chora" (Kristeva 1984:27). In Beckett, the maternal body, in a series of manifestations is the 'ordering principle' of his symbology.

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[42] This was Kristeva's doctoral thesis, which was first published in 1974; the English-language version was translated by Margaret Waller and published in 1984. It contains only a third of the original French edition, thus presenting the reader with her general theories on linguistics. As Moi notes, the crucial difference

between this text and her earlier writing is "the way in which Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis here is presented as the indispensable theoretical starting-point for her exploration of the signifying process" (Moi 1986: 89)

If the Symbolic is ruled by Lacan's paternal function or the Law of the Father, then that which finds expression in poetic language is anterior to the Symbolic and is that which Kristeva terms the "semiotic *chora*" (Kristeva 1984:25). This is the space that Beckett creates, both on the page and on the stage. Kristeva challenges Lacan's theory which assumes that any cultural meaning necessitates the repression of primary libidinal drives, which include the radical dependence of the infant on the maternal body. Lacan's "subject" evolves as a result of this primal repression, thereby facilitating its entry into the Symbolic, the universal organizing principle of culture and meaningful language. Kristeva deconstructs Lacan's theory of subjectivity necessitated by repression of the primary relationship to the maternal body. Before the Law of the Father, then, the infant is subject to maternal regulations, or what Kristeva terms "the law before the Law" (qtd. in Oliver 2002:296). Her notion of the semiotic locates a dimension of language, not formally considered in psychoanalysis, which is occasioned by the maternal body. While in the womb, the foetus engages in processes of exchange with the mother which are regulated by her body. There are further exchanges between mother and infant after birth; the mother monitors and regulates what goes into and out of her infant's body. For Kristeva, the acquisition of formal language and socialization are founded in the maternal function, which is prior to the Symbolic realm. Her theory not only refutes Lacan's central reliance on the symbolic and paternal function as the origin of the subject in traditional psychoanalysis but also positions the semiotic as a continuous site of subversion within the Symbolic. Kristeva, then, argues that the rhythmic semiotic disrupts the Symbolic order. This alterity, which is "enigmatic and feminine, […] unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation" could be applied to Beckett's own repeated obsession with rhythm, especially when he was directing his own drama (Kristeva 1984:29).[35] This is precisely why Beckett’s work appears at the edge of the intelligible, on the border of meaning, and is profoundly focused on somatic relating and disconnection.

Kristeva suggests that there are “’*two modalities*’ in the signifying process, *‘the semiotic’* and *‘the symbolic*’. These two modalities are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language” (Kristeva 1984:23-24). She borrows the Greek term *chora* from Plato’s *Timaeus*, where it is explicitly related to the maternal: “[w]e may indeed use the metaphor of birth and compare the receptacle [the *chora*] to the mother, the model to the father, and what they produce between them to their offspring” (qtd. in Weller 2006:153). For the ancient Greeks, chora represented space, area or land. Kristeva employs the term to locate a space in which drives enter language. Put most simply, the *chora* is the articulation of “primary processes which displace and condense both energies and their inscription” and drives; it is the material from which language emerges (Kristeva 1984:25). It is also defined as “a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their status in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated” (Kristeva 1984:25). It is an interruption of the Symbolic by that which is radically anterior to it. In the opening scene of *Molloy*, the narrator tells the reader that he is in his mother’s room; it is where he lives now, although he does not have any memory of how he got there. He says: “I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I resemble her more and more now” (Beckett 2009c:1). This receptacle that Molloy now occupies is related to the maternal, to his own mother. Molloy occupies a womb-like space, a semiotic chora, and it is here that rebirthing appears to happen.

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[35] In a letter to Alan Schneider on 16 October 1972, Beckett wrote of *Not I*: “I hear it breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without undue concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the

Kristeva understands the semiotic in its Greek sense: “distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration” (Kristeva 1984:25). The *chora* is not a sign or a position but a kind of place or receptacle; it is “generated in order to attain to this signifying position” (Kristeva 1984:26). All discourse “moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it” (Kristeva 1984:26). It is a “preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonists of family structure” (Kristeva 1984:27). The subject, who is always a subject-in-process, has no understanding of this process as it involves pre-symbolic drives, which are connected to and oriented towards the mother. In Beckett’s work, particularly in “First Love” there is an endless mourning for the father, as the maker of meaning for the protagonist. This unresolved melancholia leaves the son wandering aimlessly in a cadaverous space, separated from the rotting corpse of the father but not liberated. As John Lechte puts it: “The subject in process is a subject of flows and energy charges, of jouissance[36] and death” (Lechte 1990:124). The semiotic is the subterranean element of meaning within Kristeva’s formula of signification that does not signify. It is, then, difficult to make this semiotic element intelligible as it is not, strictly speaking, representable –at least linguistically. It is formed through sensory processes and thus its expression must rely on sensory affects. What is representable, conceived, thought of, imagined and a product of order is part of the symbolic order, or simply put, the symbolic. To even write or speak about the *chora* is paradoxical; to do so is to give it a place in the symbolic. These drives “involve

understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense *share her bewilderment*”. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume IV:1966-1989.* Edited by George Craig et al., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016.

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[36] As Lechte notes, for Kristeva, jouissance is “inseparable from drive charges, rhythms, flows, and the constraints which generate these flows through a ‘damming’ up or what Freud calls repression” (Lechte 1990:153).

pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother" (Kristeva 1984:27). In her deliberate focus on the maternal body as the location of the *chora*, she insists that the mother's body "mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*" (Kristeva 1984:27). The *chora* is a pre-linguistic state of nature from which the infant must separate in order to become a speaking subject. It cannot be spoken of as it escapes and precedes language. Kristeva aims to theorize the untheorizable in her notion of the semiotic and symbolic elements of language, which is why she turns to avant-garde literature where she sees the ways in which poetic language allows us to return to this pre-symbolic space, one that transcends language and threatens it but also necessary for it to emerge and transform. I suggest that in Beckett's late play *Not I,* Mouth's outpourings, which I analyse in Chapter Three, represent a form of poetic language, unintelligible, but rhythmic and maternal in its experimental form.

Kristeva deliberately associates the semiotic chora with the maternal as the young infant's drives are structured around the mother's body. While maintaining a Lacanian focus on language in early childhood development, Kristeva insists that the mother and the maternal body perform a central function in the formation of the subject. The child's necessary separation from the mother, represented in child-birth, coincides with the passage from the prelinguistic semiotic to the symbolic realm of structured language and social order. The mother, then, assumes a "marginal position" between the two modalities because she is linked to the child in pregnancy in a symbiotic bond, but she also becomes the lost Other in the necessary separation from the child as it becomes an autonomous subject. This is a difficult transition for the child, as there is a deep desire to return to the infantile stage when the child experienced a sense of a unitary self; the mother must, however be rejected or "abjected", as

Kristeva puts it in order for the child to have a sense of selfhood. In her analysis of female depression and melancholia, she considers this “Death-Bearing Woman”:

> For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sinequa-non-condition of our individuation […] (Kristeva 1989:27-28)

This notion of maternal abjection is a rite of passage necessary for the emergence of the subject. This symbolic “killing” of the mother results in the psychological separation from a narcissistic union with her. Writing on Melanie Klein, whose psychoanalytic emphasis on the positive role of motherhood in psychic development deeply influenced Kristeva’s thinking, Kristeva notes:

> In Klein’s view, the cult of the mother, which is paramount, is transformed into *matricide*. The loss of the mother – which for the imaginary is tantamount to the death of the mother – becomes the organizing principle for the subject’s symbolic capacity. […] Matricide is far more than just the cult of the mother: without matricide, the internal object cannot be formed, the fantasy cannot be constructed, and reparation, as well as the redirection of hostility into the introjection of the self, is foreclosed. […] in order to think, one must first lose the mother. (Kristeva 2001:129-30)

This archetypal “beheading” of the mother, understood as both a “putting to death” and a “flight” is a “necessary precondition for the psychic freedom of the subject” (Kristeva 2001:131). In this formulation, the mother, at the threshold of selfhood emerges as both desired and rejected. This difficult process which is triggered by the separation from the mother produces a constant longing for the primal unity and bliss space of the intrauterine experience. As Klein writes, this “desire to re-discover the mother of the early days, whom one has lost actually or in one’s feelings is also of the greatest importance in creative art and in the ways people enjoy and appreciate it” (Klein 1988:334). Kristeva’s semiotic *chora* offers a similarly useful role in which to analyse maternal space. The narrator of “First Love” longs for the intrauterine bliss of the womb, when he barricades himself into the room that his lover, Lulu provides for him. He displays an obsession with clearing the parlour, except for the sofa, which he places behind the door, locking himself in. This logistical 'beheading' will be discussed further in my analysis of the short story.

In "From One Identity to an Other" (1975)[37], Kristeva grounds this theory of the semiotic more fully in psychoanalytic terms, suggesting that poetic language makes it clear that significance is a process not totally controlled by a unified subject. The semiotic and symbolic elements suggest a split subject, the split subject of psychoanalysis who operates between unconscious and conscious realms. The subject is, then, always a "subject-in-process" for Kristeva:

> One should begin by positing that there is within poetic language (and therefore, although in a less pronounced manner, within any language) a *heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification. This *heterogeneousness*, detected genetically in the first echolalias of infants as rhythms and intonations anterior to the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences; this heterogeneousness, which is later reactivated as rhythms, intonations, glossalalias in psychotic discourse, serving as ultimate support of the speaking subject threatened by the collapse of the signifying function; this heterogeneousness to signification operates through, despite, and in excess of it and produces in poetic language 'musical' but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness (of the signified object and ego) – for example, carnivalesque discourse, Artaud, a number of texts by Mallarme, certain Dadaist and Surrealist experiments. The notion of *heterogeneity* is indispensable, for though articulate, precise, organized, and complying with constraints and rules (especially, like the rule of *repetition*, which articulates the units of a particular rhythm or intonation), this signifying disposition is not that of meaning or signification: no sign, no predication, no signified object and therefore no operation consciousness of a transcendental ego. (Kristeva 1980:133)

In *Not I*, the semiotic erupts into the symbolic, where Mouth's unintelligible outpourings of nonsense deliberately challenges Beckett's audience, addressing their nerves instead. Anna McMullan, in a psychoanalytic reading interprets Mouth as "a disruptive force which threatens the conceptual stability and fixity established by the Symbolic", while Bryden argues that

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[37] This essay was first read as a paper at a seminar at the College de France on January 27, 1975; it was first published in *Tel Quel* in 1975 and then in *Polylogue* in 1977.

Mouth is “the ultimate deterritorialized voice” (McMullan 1993:76; Bryden 1993:118)). Such readings locate *Not I* within the European avant-garde tradition that Kristeva refers to in which the “*heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification” that represents the rhythmic semiotic actively disrupts the Symbolic order.

Kristeva maintains that poetic language is not dependent upon a repression of primary drives; in fact, she claims that it is an element of language in which primary drives interrupt the usual unitary form of language, revealing this irrepressible heterogeneousness of multiple sounds and meanings. Poetic language, then, has its own meaning which does not conform to formal unitary language requirements. Kristeva now suggests that the primary drives that are repressed by the Symbolic are maternal drives, understood as belonging to both the mother and the infant. The Symbolic, then, is predicated upon absolute rejection of the mother, while the semiotic, through its rhythms, intonations, sound play, and repetition recovers the maternal body in the artistic practice of poetic speech. These infant “echolalias” and “glossolalia in psychotic discourse” are a manifestation of the co-dependence of the mother and infant relationship, a heterogeneous environment which is firmly located prior to the compulsory separation of both the infant and mother, in order to eradicate the incest taboo. Kristeva suggests that this taboo is expressed in language as a division of sound from sense. She writes:

“a phoneme, as distinctive element of meaning, belongs to language as symbolic. But this same phoneme is involved in rhythmic, intonational repetitions; it thereby tends towards autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a semiotic disposition near the instinctual drives’ body” (Kristeva 1980:135). Such phonemic iteration, this rhythmic repetition, and intonal emphasis is a key feature of Becketts work, as for example in the late play *Footfalls* which is concerned with complex mother/daughter relationships. I will be analysing this work in Chapter Three.

Critiques of Kristeva's Semiotic

Critics have long argued that Kristeva runs the risk of essentialising the female body in this formulation, as Fanny Soderback notes in "Motherhood: A Site of Repression or Liberation? Kristeva and Butler on the Maternal Body" (2010). She writes that Kristeva's account could be read as one which appears to split "a pre-symbolic, drive-ridden, natural, passive, maternal mold or receptacle from a symbolic-logic, cultural, active, paternal force of creation", resulting in categorizing along gender lines (Soderback 2010:2). Soderback considers how the state of maternity and motherhood has been argued about among feminists for quite some time, where Kristeva has been criticized for her emphasis on maternity and motherhood, linking both to the feminine, thus seeming to essentialize the female body and reducing it to the biological function of motherhood.[38] However, Soderback's underscoring of Kristeva's position that for as long as women continue to desire to bear children, we must have a discourse for maternity, difficult as that may be, is most useful. Soderback notes how Judith Butler has been particularly critical of Kristeva's stance on these issues, writing that Kristeva "assumes the female body *as* a maternal body" (qtd. in Soderback 2010:9). Kristeva is fully aware of the fraught difficulties when speaking about maternity when she says that it is "difficult to speak today of maternity without being accused of normativism, read: of regression" (Lechte and Zournazi 2003: 207). Soderback argues that in her view, Kristeva does not in any way undermine woman in the role of motherhood. Rather, she "returns to the maternal body at least in part to free woman from this very reduction" (Soderback 2010:2). It is the future of motherhood that Kristeva is concerned with; by bringing the issue out of the shadows, a female history which has been repressed, Soderback suggests that motherhood emerges as a choice, not a predefined and social societal obligation. Indeed, many women deliberately choose **not** to be mothers in western society so a discourse on the topic in particularly relevant in our society. Thus, I would read this return to motherhood as a subject of enquiry, and as a critical framework, as neither essentializing nor nostalgic; it concerns new beginnings, and the possibility of a future "pregnant with change and transformation" (Soderback 2010:3).[39]

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[38] Jacqueline Rose argues that "essentialism and primacy of the semiotic" is "one of the most problematic aspects" of Kristeva's work; Gerardine Meaney discusses a "quasi-mystical realm" that "looks suspiciously like the eternal feminine"; and Gayatri Spivak is "repelled by Kristeva's politics" accusing her of a "long-standing implicit sort of positivism: naturalising of the chora, naturalising of the pre-semiotic" (qtd. in Soderback 2010:2).

Judith Butler on the other hand, argues that Kristeva's strategy of subversion "proves doubtful" (Butler 2007:108). In Butler's view, Kristeva's theory appears to "depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace" (Butler 2007:108). In her seemingly "self-defeating theory", the maternal body is portrayed as:

> bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality. Her naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability. (Butler 2007:109)

Soderback raises two legitimate concerns regarding Butler's critique: firstly, Butler is sceptical of the "subversive potential and emancipatory status of the semiotic"; and second, she is concerned that Kristeva's alleged attempts to delimit "maternity as an essentially precultural reality" could lead to a reification of motherhood which excludes "an analysis of its cultural construction and variability" (Butler 2007:109). Butler further argues that by positing the female maternal body as outside of culture, Kristeva is blinded to the possibility that this "repression may be understood to produce the object that it comes to deny" (Butler 2007:126). However, this serves to further deny the material basis of life. While Soderback notes that these worries are significant, as they articulate a lot of feminist concern about the maternal body in culture and society, she nevertheless argues that Butler "misses the target due to some fundamental misconception of Kristeva's thought" in her argument (Soderback 2010:6). The main misconception is the linking together of Kristeva and Lacan as thinkers who "speak of an unspeakable outside that is *prior to* and *opposed to* culture and the symbolic order" (Soderback 2010:6). Kristeva's entire project is, in Soderback's view, a "sustained attempt to *avoid* such oppositional and exclusive structures", which is why Kristeva continuously describes the semiotic and the symbolic as "co-dependant, co-existing, intertwined" (Soderback 2010:6). [40] Kristeva explicitly states this exclusive relationship between both realms is relative

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[39] In the older Beckett's work, particularly his late drama, he positions older mothers as his subject of enquiry. Women populate the stage in this later phase of Beckett's writing, where he also deals with complex mother/daughter relationships. This will be the subject of Chapters Three and Four.

> precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. (Kristeva 1984:24)

Soderback argues, then, that when Butler discusses the semiotic as "distinct" from or in "opposition" to the symbolic, that she "misconstrues a central aspect of Kristeva's work, namely that which marks her as different from Lacan" (Soderback 2010:6). Kristeva's semiotic is a condition for *and* a product of the symbolic:

> Although originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic. Therefore the semiotic that 'precedes' symbolization is only a *theoretical supposition* justified by the need for a description. It exists in practice only within the symbolic and requires the symbolic break to obtain the complex articulation we associate with it in musical and poetic practices. (Kristeva 1984:68)

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[40] Sara Beardsworth illuminates this point by comparing Kristeva to Kant: "Not only are intuitions without concepts blind – in Kristeva, semiotic content without symbolic form is mute, invisible, and deprived of a history. But concepts without intuitions are empty – in Kristeva, a linguistic, symbolic universe deprived of connections with the infrasymbolic representations of exposure to otherness, separateness, loss, and death, is one without meaning or values" (See note 20, qtd. in Soderback 2010:14).

As the semiotic is “always already social and therefore historical” and the semiotic *chora* “is always already inevitably and inseparably symbolic”, there is therefore nothing “biologically pure about it, as Butler would have it” (Soderback 2010:7). Thus, Beckett’s work can be read as semiotic, “always already and social and therefore historical”. Tracing the mother exposes the personal history and the social relations that initially appear missing in the discussions of his characters.

Soderback concludes by noting Butler’s final remark on Kristeva’s theory, describing what would occur if we stop specifically focusing on the mother: “[t]he culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its ‘natural’ past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities” (Butler 2007:127). Butler’s views here are in line with Kristeva, who also aims for this “open future” in her continuous return to maternal bodies. If we consider maternity as a kind of “corporeal-temporal experience”, our culture has more or less erased pregnancy in discourse. However, Soderback notes that not all women are mothers or desire to be mothers, but rather that all human beings are, (at least as of yet), born from mothers. If we continue to refuse to acknowledge our dual origins, we reproduce the patrilinear conception of time that dominates Western discourse. We must acknowledge that our birth is the outcome of a dual origin, “maternal *and* paternal” (Soderback 2010:10). This is precisely what Kristeva aims to express in her writing, which explains why she continuously returns to the *chora* in her work on language, embodiment, and time, employing the maternal body as her point of departure. The narrator of “First Love”, upon hearing that his lover Lulu is pregnant with his child, refuses to acknowledge that birth is the outcome of “maternal *and* paternal” origin, when he claims, in response to Lulu’s announcement that she can feel the baby “lepping” inside, “If it’s lepping, […] it’s not mine” (Beckett 2000:84).This semiotic struggle continues throughout the story, where the narrator wishes to return to the pre-birth maternal body

Kristeva on Abjection of the Maternal Entity

Kristeva's theory of abjection is a critically useful interpretive tool for an alternative reading of the attitude towards women, the mother and maternity in both of Beckett's texts. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva writes that "fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power" (Kristeva 1982:77). The fear of reproductive sex is a consistent trope in Beckett's writing, as I discussed at length in Chapter One, driving the male anti-heroes to pursue alternative sexualities, including prostitutes, masturbation and postreproductive women. Kristeva recalls her loathing of the skin of the surface of milk as a primary example of the phobic horror that is instilled by food loathing which produces the most archaic form of abjection, that which disgusts us, and which lies at the boundary between self and other:

> When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of the milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail pairing – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with that sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. (Kristeva 1982:2-3)

Kristeva argues that culture is safeguarded through the process of abjection, which originates from our earliest attempts to abject our "*maternal entity*" (Kristeva 1982:13). This is a difficult process, as it occurs before we exist in language and outside of the mother, resulting in the risk of "falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva 1982:13). The child must abject the mother to initiate a separation from her; however, "I" cannot be "like" another or cannot identify with another before I have separated from the mother. If the becoming subject assumes a masculine identity, the mother must be split/cut in two, the abject and the sublime. This is a clear action in "First Love" and *Molloy*. The male child can love the sublime mother and separate from the abject mother. However, for the becoming subject who assumes a feminine identity, the process is more complicated: abjection of the mother involves abjection of the girl child herself and abandonment of the mother for the father as the object of her love. In the phallic model, the woman never obtains the phallus and therefore lacks a stable identity within the Symbolic order. Abjection, is then, for Kristeva a "precondition of narcissism" (Kristeva 1982:13). It coexists with it and remains frail. We will see this in Beckett when the narrator of "First Love" barricades himself into the parlour in his lover's house, in an attempt to return to the intrauterine space of symbiotic bliss, which represents his failure to successfully abject from the maternal entity in order to enter subjectivity.

The abject disgusts us as it exists on the borders that threaten the construction of our identities. In order to establish the self, I must "expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*" (Kristeva 1982:3). This initial separation from the mother, before the acquisition of language and the ability to exist in language confronts us in the form of the abject. It fascinates and repulses us in equal measure. It is not easily identifiable, and as it is positioned as that which is outside of the subject, it places the subject in a meaningful place; it is that which threatens to annihilate ourselves.

Abjection is not a lack of cleanliness or health, but that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982:4). Abjection is a "universal phenomenon", which takes the forms of "defilement, food, taboo, and sin" (Kristeva 1982:68). Kristeva draws heavily on the fundamental work of British Anthropologist Mary Douglas' germinal study *Purity and Danger* (1980), who looks at defilement in so-called primitive religious cultures. Douglas argues that the contours of the body are formed through bodily markings that endeavour to establish certain codes of cultural integrity. In this, she draws on a phenomenological framework, making space for the condition of being that is not only or fully dependent on language. So-called primitive religious society, such as Polynesian or Central Africa, is an energised and powerful entity, but subject to external pressure.

Douglas writes that discourses are established around bodily boundaries which serve the purpose of naturalizing certain taboos:

> Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (Douglas 1991:4)

In such societies, religious rites are essentially purification rites which aim to separate certain groups from one another by prohibiting a filthy or defiling element. Douglas maintains that in a variety of cultures there are other dangers to be considered:

> These are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He [*sic*] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone. (Douglas 1991:114)

Butler, in her critique of Douglas, relates pollution powers in this case to homosexuals and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, which produced hysterical and homophobic responses to the bodily disease that was entirely portrayed as a "gay disease" (Butler2007:179-80). Both the disease and the homosexual body were considered polluting and therefore contagious. The fear of the exchange of bodily fluids between gay men bolstered homophobic fears around the dangers of the permeable bodily boundaries and the threat to social order because of such sexual activity. Butler concludes her analysis by arguing that the rites of passage that control bodily orifices assume a heterosexual construction of "gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities" (Butler 2007:181). The deregulation of such exchanges to allow for "abject" bodily exchanges disturbs the ultimate definition of what a body represents. As we saw in Chapter One, the incidences of homoerotic encounters/fantasies in *Molloy* and elsewhere, precisely "disturb the ultimate definition" of what constitutes pollution in the body. In *Dream*, Belacqua shrinks away from normal sexual encounters with women, often resorting to masturbation. This act is itself a way to control sexual desire as Belacqua can satisfy it without having to encounter the alterity of another's body.

As Elizabeth Grosz points out, the abject is "not that which is dirty or impure about the body: nothing in itself, as Douglas has argued, is dirty" (Grosz 1994:192). Dirt is that which is not in its proper place, as the previous paragraph has illustrated. Dirt "signals a site of possible danger" to social systems, a site of "vulnerability insofar as the status of dirt as marginal and unincorporable always locates sites of potential threat to the system and to the order it both makes possible and problematizes" (Grosz 1994:192). What is most interesting for Kristeva's theory on abjection is Douglas' claim that in specific primitive cultures each of the sexes can pose a threat to the social order, and this threat is firmly located in the polluting powers of both men and women's bodily fluids. In line with Butler, Grosz notes how significant this claim is when analysing sexual difference in a society where sexuality has become reassociated with notions of contagion and death, as a consequence of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and the fact that the disease is making a slow but significant comeback in Western culture, a fact that appears to be unrecognized by governments and society alike. As Douglas writes:

> I believe that some pollutants are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order. For example there are beliefs that each sex is a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids. According to other beliefs only one sex is endangered by contact with the other, usually males from females, but sometimes the reverse. Such patterns of sexual danger can be seen to express symmetry or hierarchy which apply in the larger social system. What goes for sex pollution also goes for bodily pollution. The two sexes can serve as a model for the collaboration and distinctiveness for social units. So also can the processes of ingestion portray political absorption. Sometimes bodily

> orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit into social units, or bodily perfection can symbolise an ideal theocracy. (Douglas 1991:3)

As Grosz points out, Douglas makes clear that the body can and does "function to represent, to symbolize, social and collective fantasies and obsessions: its orifices and surfaces can represent the sites of cultural marginality, places of social entry and exit, regions of confrontation or compromise" (Grosz 1994:192). As Beckett's male characters favour any form of sexual encounter that does not result in procreation, they are obsessed with bodily orifices, including other men's.

In her incorporation of Douglas' study to her own reformulation of Lacan, defilement is, for Kristeva, "what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*'" (Kristeva 1982:65). Defilement is what escapes "that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*" (Kristeva 1982:65). Kristeva ascertains that filth is that which relates to a boundary and represents the object which is ejected to the margins. Matter which is emitted from the orifices of the body is, as Douglas claims "marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat" (Douglas 1991:122). For Douglas, the dangers associated with defilement are "not powers invested in humans" but depend on a power "inhering in the structure of ideas" (Douglas 1991:114). Having considered Douglas' study, which draws on other major anthropological works of the modern era, Kristeva considers the unanswered question of why corporeal waste represents "the objective frailty of symbolic order" (Kristeva 1982:70). This frailty is echoed in the frailty of Beckett's characters which is opposed to the sturdiness of the maternal grotesqueries as depicted in "First Love" and *Molloy*.

For Kristeva, corporeal waste such as menstrual blood and excrement represent the two main types of abject. Excrement and its associated elements of infection, disease, decay and death represent the threat to identity that comes from outside; on the other hand, menstrual blood represents the social or sexual threat that comes from within. Menstrual blood "threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (Kristeva 1982:71). Blood and excrement are historically associated with the maternal and/or the feminine. I will be returning to this aspect of abjection in detail in Chapter Three in my analysis of ageing feminine sexual desire in Beckett's late drama. In the primitive societies that Douglas observed, defiling ritualization were primarily concerned with separating the sexes, resulting in male domination over females. As Kristeva points out though, although the masculine appears victorious, there is a constant threat by the feminine (Kristeva 1982:70). That other sex, the feminine, is "synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed" (Kristeva 1982:70). Pollution is therefore associated with the feminine and is potent. As Douglas writes, "pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined" (Douglas 1991: 114). The potency of pollution is directly proportional to the potency of the exclusion that it is founded upon. For Kristeva, abjection takes different shapes depending on the signifying system. Her arguments are based on signifying systems which are constructed around exclusion and power. The symbolic order is based on differences and distinctions between subject/object, clear/dirty and as such, it is exposed to that which it excludes. Abject menstrual blood is clearly associated with sexual difference and the maternal feminine. Kristeva argues that maternal authority effectively maps out the body through exclusion and frustration but that this mapping is the precondition for language. This mapping of the "self's clean and proper body" instigated a separation in language by "repressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts against them" (Kristeva 1982:72). Menstrual blood and excrement are, then, polluting objects associated with abjection and the maternal feminine, whereas other leaking bodily matter such as tears or sperm are not considered to have a polluting value. In *Not I*, male critics have suggested that Mouth's outpouring are excremental, reading Mouth as anus, instead of Mouth as labia, which I argue for in my analysis of the televised version of the play in Chapter Three.

These polluting fluids draw attention to the permeability of the body and its dependence on an outside; they threaten our autonomy and self-identity, as they represent the impossibility of a clean or proper body. This anxiety with dependence and yet attraction to dependence is central to Beckett's work. He both needs and abjects the mother. They are difficult to control and eradicate; vigilance is required in order to control them. They demonstrate the limits of bodily subjectivity; they are necessary but embarrassing realities:

> These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly, and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such waste drops so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. (Kristeva 1982:3)

The abject also includes "loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung" (Kristeva 1982:2). Dung is of particular importance to a psychoanalytic reading of "First Love" where the narrator links the female reproductive body with excrement, specifically cow dung.

Excrement and constipation are central themes in the story, linking the abject with that of Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth*, where constipation is linked to the neurotic and his failure to resolve the birth repression normally experienced in the pleasurable experience of heterosexual sexual gratification. This emotional constipation links back to the association of withheld excrement with that of the female body, which we now understand to this analysis as a "fear of the archaic mother", or "essentially fear of her generative power" (Kristeva 1982:77). We will now see just how fearful Beckett's male characters are of the generative powers of women in my analysis of the short story "First Love".

Abjection in "First Love": An Intertextual Psychoanalytic Reading

Beckett wrote four novellas "First Love", "The End", "The Expelled" and "The Calmative" in French between February and December 1946. They represent the first substantial fruits of his transfer to the French language as his chosen form of literary composition. Prior to this, he had been working for the Irish Red Cross Hospital in the Normandy town of Saint-Lo. His contract had ended, and he returned to Paris, embarking on what he later called "a frenzy of writing" (Beckett 2000:1). As Gerry Dukes notes, the novels were unprecedented for Beckett for at least two reasons: they were written in French and are presented as a first-person narrative (Beckett 2000:1). By 1946, Beckett had been living in France for ten years and much of his daily life involved speaking exclusively in French. "First Love", originally written as "Premier Amour", was published in 1970 and translated by Beckett himself in 1973.

"First Love" appears not to be a typical example of the misogyny found in the earlier prose, which I discussed at length in Chapter One, which is characterised by exaggerated disgust at female forms, and women constructed as lacking in basic intelligence. I argue, however, that this story is the most misogynistic of Beckett's writing; there is overt misogyny and the threat of sexual violence inherent in descriptions such as "[s]he began stroking my ankles […] I considered kicking her in the cunt" (Beckett 2000:70). Performing a close reading of this story also allows me to consider the function of the pervasive hatred of women that continues to permeate Beckett's work, up to and including this chapter. "First Love" is one of Beckett's most disturbing works in relation to its treatment of maternity and motherhood, demonstrating the narrator's fear and ultimate rejection of fatherhood, when Lulu gives birth to his child at the closing of the novella and Beckett's largely disparaging attitude towards female reproduction.

The twenty-five-year-old narrator of "First Love" begins by telling his readers about his fondness for graveyards and the dead who inhabit them: "[p]ersonally I have no bone to pick with graveyards, I take the air there willingly" (Beckett 2000:64). He enjoys "the smell of corpses, distinctly perceptible under those of grass and humus mingled" albeit a little "on the sweet side", but he infinitely prefers it to the smell of the living who "stink […] their feet, teeth, armpits, arses, sticky foreskins and frustrated ovules" (Beckett 2000:64-65). The narrator displays an abjection towards the living but not the dead. Having been evicted from the family home after the death of his father, our narrator spends his days and nights on a park bench, where he meets a woman named Lulu and an unlikely relationship develops. Lulu, "a most tenacious woman", pursues her man, turning up at the bench every evening (Beckett 2000:69). The narrator is uneasy about her determination: "The next day it was raining, and I felt in security. Wrong again. I asked her if she was resolved to disturb me every evening. I disturb you? She said. I felt her eyes on me" (Beckett 2000:70). As a sexually provocative initiative taker, with a penetrative gaze, Lulu displays significant inherited traits from the earlier female characters of chapter One, which demonstrates that Beckett's treatment of his female characters has not yet matured.

A kind of love develops between the narrator and Lulu, but quickly becomes reduced to the insatiable sexual appetite of Lulu; our narrator, who "didn't understand women at that period" must contend with an emotion that he reluctantly admits is a form of love (Beckett 2000:71). In an ironic tone, our unreliable narrator tells us that he has no previous experience of love "but of course had heard of the thing, at home, in school, in brothel and at church, and read romances, in prose and verse … in which it was handled at length" (Beckett 2000:73). A dread of love that Beckett's anti-heroes fear will threaten them with a loss of autonomy is manifest in the following passage:

> What mattered to me in my dispeopled kingdom, that in regard to which the disposition of my carcass was the merest and most futile of accidents, was supiness in the mind, the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short. But man is still today, at the age of twenty-five, at the mercy of an erection, physically too, from time to time, it's the common lot, even I was not immune, if that may be called an erection. It did not escape her naturally, women smell a rigid phallus ten miles away and wonder, How on earth did he spot me from there? One is no longer oneself, on such occasions, and it is painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is. For when one is one knows what to do to be less so, whereas when one is not one is any old one irredeemably. What goes by the name of love is banishment, with now and then a postcard from the homeland, such is my considered opinion, this evening. (Beckett 2000:70).

This passage reveals the narrator's dilemma by blaming women for his own conflicting attitude to desire. He condemns Lulu and her sexually provocative behaviour which can "smell a rigid phallus ten miles away"; his emphasis on the word "smell", positions Lulu as the active participant, whereas his "erection" positions him as the passive responder. There is an unresolved tension between the narrator's desire for and resistance to Lulu, based on his fear that this will lead to him becoming "no longer oneself" (Beckett 2000:70). Sexual encounters interfere with the mind of the narrators, who search for existential meaning, while tormented by their own sexual desires.

In an attempt to escape the dangerous lure of Lulu, the narrator abandons the bench and moves to a disused cowshed, partly because of the recent chill in the air, but also "for other reasons better not wasted on cunts like you" (Beckett 2000:72). Our narrator, who seems fond of this deeply insulting word which continues to have freight in our culture, directs his insults both at Lulu and his reader. While contemplating his newfound "dread" in the cowshed, the narrator finds himself "inscribing the letters of Lulu in an old heifer pat", asking himself if his love is "love-passion?" or "platonic love?" (Beckett 2000:73-74). He disregards the latter, concluding that platonic love is "disinterested": Would I have been tracing her name in old cowshit if my love had been pure and disinterested? And with my devil's finger into the bargain, which I then sucked?" (Beckett 2000:74). This "dread" of any kind of emotional attachment further reveals the narrator's simultaneous contradictory attachment to and detachment from Lulu – who represents the abject entity, clearly associated with excrement. Phil Baker notes that these cowpats are a "mysterious feature" of this novella: despite Beckett's "general scatology, cowpats belong particularly to the Novellas" (Baker 1997:93). Although his thoughts are all of Lulu, he now decides that he is "sick and tired" of her name and decides to re-name her as Anna.

This disturbing passage, which draws attention to the close link between the feminine, sexuality and excrement, echoes Kristeva's notion of abjection. There is also a fear of the female reproductive body at work in this story. In the first comprehensive study of sexuality in Beckett's *oeuvre*, Paul Stewart's *Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's Work* (2011), argues that Beckett's work displays a deep mistrust of procreation, an array of supremely awkward oedipal sexual encounters, and a variety of non-reproductive forms of sexuality, including the solitary, the homoerotic and the geriatric, challenging established notions of identity politics in Beckett criticism. Employing a psychoanalytic framework and drawing on the work of Otto Rank and Arthur Schopenhauer to bolster his arguments, Stewart's productive and provocative framework does not, however consider Kristeva's theories on abjection or the maternal as an alternative reading.

Eventually, the narrator moves into Lulu/Anna's house, where he resides in a second room, listening to the sound of her entertaining her clients. He recalls his one "night of love", where he displays a mostly passive role in the sexual act, demonstrating "a lack of engagement" as though he were "watching an experiment", rather than "taking part in a seduction" (Stewart

2011:69). According to Stewart, the protagonist turns away from “the womb-substitute of sex for the most satisfactory substitute of the womb-as-room” (Stewart 2011:69). We can also note that the narrator does not focus on Lulu/Anna’s body, but rather on her face, where a squint is observed: “She took off everything, with a slowness fit to enflame an elephant, except her stockings, calculated presumably to bring my concupiscence to the boil. It was then I noticed the squint” (Beckett 2000:78-9). The female body is, yet again, considered as a foreign site: “I knew she would not explode” as the narrator seems disinterested (Beckett 2000:79). Rank argues that the neurotic “fails in sexuality”, meaning that he is not “content with the gratification of partially returning to the mother” as a way of overcoming the birth trauma, remaining “’infantile’” and “even still desires to go *completely* or as a whole back into the mother” (Rank 2010: 47). In this pursuit of returning to the womb-like space of intrauterine bliss, the narrator makes the parlour room his own and indulges his obsession with clearing spaces. He clears the furniture into the corridor, except for the sofa, which he places behind the door, thus barricading entry, and effectively turning it into a “womb-as-room” space. The deliberate descriptions of Lulu’s lovemaking and singing that emanates from the room next door suggests, according to Baker, “both the primal scene and intra-uterine disturbances caused by the mother’s sexual activity” (Baker1997: 96). The narrator’s haven is only temporary however, as the impending arrival of his first child is a real expulsion from the womb, necessitating a figural expulsion for the protagonist. As soon as the birth of his first child occurs, the narrator flees, with the cries of childbirth and infant accompanying his escape.

When the narrator discovers that Lulu/Anna is pregnant with their child, he retorts: “[o]ne day she had the impudence to announce she was with child, and four or five months gone into the bargain, by me of all people” (Beckett 2000:83). His explicit advice is “Abort! Abort!” (Beckett 2000:84). This fear of impending fatherhood links back to the opening of the novella where the death of the narrator's father leads to his expulsion from the family home into, what Weller describes as "an intolerable outer realm … which is figured as an encounter with the feminine" (Weller 2006:72). Love of a woman, as distinct from love of a father is presented here as the paradigm of exile: "What goes by the name of love is banishment" (Beckett 2000:70). This exilic encounter with the feminine and impending fatherhood is the precondition for a very literal – and for the hapless narrator, intolerable incarnation: the novella ending with the narrator fleeing from the cries of childbirth. Fatherhood is not an option for the narrator in this story, who appeared initially to be unaware of Lulu's profession as a working prostitute; on becoming aware of this and her pregnancy, he recommends abortion as the only viable option. At the conclusion, the narrator aborts both the responsibility of fatherhood and the story itself.

Stewart argues that the images of expulsion which dominate "First Love" might lead to a reading of the text through the lens of Rank's *The Trauma of Birth*, which we know that Beckett read. Not only does the death of the narrator's father lead to his expulsion from the family home but also to his own impending role as a father, from which he ultimately flees. This flight from the "fertilisable" female has its origins in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, (as discussed in Chapter One) and *Murphy*, surviving Beckett's postwar switch from English to French. The flight from the female is also a flight towards her, in the direction of the "wombtomb" space of *Dream* which represents the maternal body as both origin and end of being, the theory of which Beckett encountered on his reading of Rank in

1935, when he underwent psychoanalytic therapy in London with Bion. Baker describes Beckett's womb-tomb as a kind of "narcissistic self-containment (Beckett's 'womb-tomb' in the head)" (Baker 1997:118). This withdrawal to a womb like space or as Baker refers to it, an "inward turning of the libido" is apparent in many of Beckett's characters, including our narrator of "First Love" (Baker 1997:118). Our narrator seems unable to overcome the initial disaster of being born; normally, the birth trauma can be worked through successful heterosexual intercourse with the satisfaction of partially returning to the mother is encompassed in the act. As Beckett wrote in the "Psychology Notes", when consulting Alfred Adler's *Neurotic Constitution*: "The motive of the fear of women is the strongest incentive to art" […] Mystery of female genitalia to reinforce fear of women" (TCD MS 10971/8/27). Judging from the attitude our narrator exhibits towards the mother of his child, a general fear of the female sex and her generative powers is clearly shown to be one of the stimuli for

Beckett's work.

Not only is the female sex cursed in this novella, then, for her generative powers, but the narrator also takes a gruesome form of revenge on the maternal: intimate relationships are considered a retribution for the birth trauma, which signals the individual's first encounter with female genitalia. The repression of the primal scene, or the Uncanny, is described by Freud as a morbid vision of the "oceanic", a term coined by Romain Rolland, whose work Freud discussed at the start of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, describing the uncanny as consisting of "a peculiar feeling […] limitless, unbounded – as it were 'oceanic'" (qtd. in Baker 1997:109). Beckett reverses and mocks the positive myth of creation and it is also in this respect that the figure of the mother is continuously rejected. As Lulu's abject menstrual blood evaporates into pregnancy, the narrator's fear grows daily: "she kept plaguing me with our child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment, she could feel it lepping already. If it's lepping, I said, it's not mine" (Beckett 2000:84). By denying his newborn child, the narrator reasserts this desire to return to the intrauterine bliss state of the womb.

The narrator's earlier lack of engagement in the sexual act on his one night of love, coupled with his fear of impending fatherhood, signifies his rejection of both sex and the child as insufficient compensation for the trauma of birth. The child represents a rival, then, for our narrator whose only option is escape.

The climax of the novella arrives with the birth: "what finished me was the birth. It woke me up" (Beckett 2000:84). As there was "no competing with those cries", this awakening represents the corresponding (re-)birth of the narrator: "I crawled out over the back of the sofa … opened the door to the corridor. A mass of junk barred my way but I scrabbled and barged my way through in the end" (Beckett 2000:84-85). As the novella comes to its violent conclusion, he flees with the image of the child firmly in his mind: "what that infant must have been going through", the memory of which does not leave him: "for years I thought they (cries) would cease. Now I don't think so any more" (Beckett 2000:84-5). In its conclusion, the narrator's comment on what the infant experienced in the birth process, is also indicative of a genital horror: the physical process of birth and the shared pain between both the mother and the infant as it is finally expelled from the "paradise" of the womb, to employ Rank's term. In this scenario, sex and the new-born child are both rejected as inadequate compensation for the birth trauma. In "First Love", the narrator manages to avoid fatherhood. In endless mourning for his own father, the narrator's quest is for an authentic non-paternal language; the novella ends with the narrator under the consolation of the starry sky that he once shared with his father.

Beckettian Smothering/Other Mothers: *Molloy*

In Chapter One, I analysed homoerotic fantasies in *Molloy*: here, I return to the novel to focus on Molloy's treatment of his own mother. The deeply ambiguous relationship between Beckett and his mother and his clear intrauterine memories are reflected in the nostalgia for the symbiotic realm of the womb in his work, despite Beckett's nightmares about his own memories of life in his mother's womb, which he claimed to have a clear memory of. Mothers are a much more pervasive presence in Beckett's writing than fathers. They remain on the scene, but away from the labour-rooms and nurseries. Mothers loom large in Beckett's work, despite Vivien Mercier's memorable quip about motherhood in Beckett that "[t]he best mother, then, is the one who has no children" (Mercier 1977:205). From the cord-severing moment of birth, there mostly exists mother-baby disharmony. This pattern can be observed throughout Beckett's prose. There are, however, moments of rare harmony; in *How It Is,* one of his later prose pieces, the infant narrator lies prone, vulnerable, looking into his mother's face:

> next another image yet another so soon again the third perhaps
> they'll soon cease it's me all of me and my mother's face I see
> it from below it's like nothing I ever saw we are on a veranda
> smothered in verbena the scented sun dapples the red tiles yes I
> assure you
> the huge head hatted with birds and flowers is bowed down over
> my curls the eyes burn with severe love I offer her mine pale
> upcast to the sky whence cometh our help and which I know
> perhaps even then with time shall pass away.
> (Bckett 2009a:10)

In this peaceful scene, we see one of the rare moments of mother/son harmony in Beckett's writing. However, mother love in Beckett is never consistent, predictable or to be relied upon - it is always positioned on the knife edge of the abject– it can be removed at a minute's notice. In a scene in the novella "The End", a child asks his mother why the sky is blue: "[a] small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky, asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said" (Beckett 2000:12). Similarly, in the short prose work *Company*, another child experiences the withdrawal of the mother's approval as inexplicable:

> A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand […] You make ground in silence hand in hand through the warm still summer air. It is late afternoon and after some hundred paces the sun appears above the crest of the rise. Looking up at the blue sky and then at your mother's face you break the silence asking her if it is not in reality much more distant than it appears. The sky that is. The blue sky […] For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten.
>
> (Beckett 2009a:5-6)

What connects all of these episodes is that the mother is being asked to mediate the vastness of the sky for the child and to account for it in some way; it is the child's philosophical enquiry that is cut off and wounded by the mother. Further on in *Company,* we see both parents displaying a lack of connection to their children in the following scene: "A mother's stooping over cradle from behind. She moves aside to let the father look. In his turn he murmurs to the new-born. Flat tone unchanged. No trace of love" (Beckett 2009a:31). This mirrors Mouth's outpourings in *Not I*, when she declares that she was born from a "godforsaken hole"; Mouth's parents are

> unknown … unheard of … he having vanished … thin air … no sooner buttoned up his breeches … she similarly … eight months later … almost to the tick … so no love […] no love such as normally vented on the … speechless infant […] no love of any kind. (Beckett 2006:376)

The "godforsaken hole" that Mouth refers to directly references the vagina, which is the birth canal, a naming that cuts the woman who surrounds the birth canal out of the picture, thus further instrumentalising the relating to the mother and emphasising the absence of any affection that was displayed towards Mouth's own mother. Bryden describes motherhood in Beckett's work as embracing "the whole process of womb-embedding, womb-ejection, suckling, and infant instruction, from potties to prayers" (Bryden 1993:163). Biological mothers display a lack of commitment to the loving acts of mothering, which is clear from the moment of procreation as outlined by Mouth. Although the narrator in “First Love” tries to convince Lulu to abort their baby, their wombs “tolerate their burden rather than embrace it”, as Bryden puts it (Bryden 1993:166). As I have argued in my analysis of “First Love”, the prenatal stage of pregnancy is particularly emphasised in Beckett’s work, where the narrator wishes to return to. Mothers, where they do occur in the prose, are distinguished by their physical absence, as is the case in *Molloy,* where, apart from one scene when Molloy visits his mother to extract money from her, she remains elusive.

The novel, written in French over a short period of six months in 1947, is the first of what is referred to as the Trilogy: *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Meurt* (1951) and *L’Innommable* (1953). The opening line of *Molloy* sets the scene, when our eponymous narrator announces: “I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now” (Beckett 2009:3). As I argued earlier in relation to Kristeva’s semiotic *chora*, this space that Molloy now occupies is maternal, likened to the *chora*. Molloy’s quest throughout the novel is for his absent mother, which the first page claims has already been completed, so this alerts us to the continuing relationship accompanied by the desire to separate. In an overly oedipal episode, the narrator tells us that himself and his mother “were so old, […], she had me so young, that we were like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations” (Beckett 2009:13). Despite his “sexless” claim, Molloy then claims that “perhaps she took me for my father. I took her for my mother and she took me for my father” (Beckett 2009:14). This emotional incest/ sexual fantasy hints at autoeroticism as the narrator has now taken her place, residing as he does in her room, despite telling us that he doesn’t know how he got there. Ackerley and Gontarski argue that Molloy’s journey, “like all oedipal activity, is a quest for sources, origins, true literary parents, and it finally returns him to himself” (Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:377). The origin is clearly the mother’s body, the womb space of the earliest home, rather than the oedipal starting pint of oedipally based theories of the subject.

In *Molloy*, the relationship between the eponymous protagonist and his mother is difficult and violent: “she never called me son, fortunately, I couldn’t have borne it, but Dan, I don’t know why, my name is not Dan’ […] and I called her Mag, when I had to call her something” (Beckett 2009c:14). Indeed, the narrator’s confusion around women’s names is prominent in both texts. Molloy, in his need to “have a Ma, that is a mother”, muses as to whether to call her “Ma, Mag or the Countess Caca” (Beckett 2009c:14). As we saw in Chapter One, the woman with whom the narrator has the erotic sexual encounter is named either “Ruth” or “Edith”, who “might have been [his] mother” (Beckett 2009c:56). This indeterminacy is a characteristic of this middle-period of Beckett’s writing and his narrators’ treatment of the women who nurture them. Molloy introduces his mother to the reader in highly abjected terms, associating her with bodily secretions such as excrement or urine, when he presents the following disturbing image of his birth as: “her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit” (Beckett 2009c:13). Although there is no denying his birth, Molloy doesn’t think “too harshly of her” as he knows that “she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing” (Beckett 2009c:15). Molloy’s mother falls short, then, of being the best type of mother – one who has no offspring. Indeed, waste products repeatedly feature in descriptions of Molloy’s mother, whom he calls Mag, further linking mother and son; she is described as “quite incontinent, both of faeces and water”, her faeces compared to “a few niggardly wetted goat-droppings”, emanating “a terrible smell” which “must have come from the bowels” (Beckett 2009c:14). Although his mother’s uncontrollable flows disgust the narrator, by residing in her room, which is the opening scene of the novel, and by sleeping in her bed, “[pissing] and [shitting] in her pot, Molloy, who has “taken her place” begins to resemble her more and more, becoming his own abject. I argue that Molloy’s mother, then, displays the paradoxical nature of abjection, that which repulses and fascinates us in equal measure. Although Molloy is physically repulsed by his mother, the narrative space of her room/womb where he is found at the beginning of the novel demonstrates his umbilical dependence on her. This link between "woman" and "womb" is backed up by Beckett's reference to Freudian dream theory as transcribed by Matthew Feldman in the "Psychology Notes": "It is true that the symbol may [10971/8/12 [numbered 12 on top] be ambivalent (as room for womb or for woman) & that there may be as many interpretations as there are layers in the dream condensation" (Feldman 2004:275). This ambivalence is what continues to attract and fascinate Beckett scholars, readers and audiences.

When Molloy comes to visit his mother, the conversation is stilted due to the mother's deafness and noisy rattling dentures. In a rather violent encounter, Molloy thumps his answers on his mother's skull, stopping just short of killing her:

> I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye. I was hard put to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end […] and finally found a more effective means of putting the idea of money into her head. This consisted in replacing the four knocks of my index-knuckle by one or more (according to my needs) thumps of the fist, on her skull.
>
> (Beckett 2009c:14-15)

There is no satisfactory conclusion to this conversation, but Molloy is compelled to return to his mother time and time again, where the same process begins again. Finally, Molloy and his bicycle leave, where he meets and moves in with Lousse, who replaces his mother by feeding and clothing him, and fulfilling his sexual desires. All the women with whom Molloy is involved with are substitute mothers in the novel. The graphic descriptions of Molloy's sexual encounters with the various women he encounters, which were the subject of Chapter One, further emphasize his reluctance to engage in either sexual or emotionally fulfilling relationships. The narrator cannot escape the gaze of his mother when engaging in sexual activity: “God forgive me to tell you the horrible truth, my mother’s image sometimes mingled with theirs, which is literally unendurable, like being crucified” (Beckett 2009c:58). Molloy’s mother is not only evoked here, but his relationships are often defined by surprising moments of tenderness, which recall the bond between expectant mother and foetus. Molloy’s “commerce” with Ruth/Edith is “not without tenderness, with trembling hands she cut my toenails and I rubbed her rump with winter cream” (Becket 2009c:57). Lousse similarly feeds, clothes and looks after Molloy’s basic needs. But the narrator admits that his memories are confused, and he thinks of all these women, who could be men, or his mother as “one and the same old hag, flattened and crazed by life” (Beckett 2009c:58). Molloy has spent all his life going to his mother, with the intention of improving their relationship. When he is with her, he does not pursue this, and when he is without her, he hopes to “do better the next time” (Beckett 2009c:89). In fact, his sole purpose in this circular narrative is to find his way to her home, where we find him, having replaced and displaced her, at the opening scene of the novel.

To conclude, this chapter has focused on how sexuality and reproduction come together in the figure of the mother or maternally identified women in the novella, “First Love” (1946) and the post-war novel, *Molloy* (1951). I chose these two texts because they best represent the troubled obsession with the maternal figure and the recurring structural motif of the womb that is a hallmark of Beckett’s early to mid-phases. The representation of fictional and semimonstrous maternal figures is a central but ambiguous concern of Beckett’s early and midphase prose, with these mother figures and allegories emerging as simultaneously nurturing and stifling. In contrast to the sexual activity of male protagonists from this period, reproduction and pregnancy in the female characters has a different outcome and effect, and this chapter explored this difference. The imagos of pregnancy and motherhood in Beckett’s work exemplifies an anxiety with reproduction – as Molloy puts it “Good God, what a land of breeders, you see quadrupeds everywhere” (Beckett 2009c:27). As we move away from the early Beckett’s writing into the more mature Beckett’s late drama, women begin to take centre stage.

Chapter Three

"From Middlepause to Fourth Age": The Sexual Politics of Female Ageing in Beckett's Drama

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Beckett's drama, and the treatment of ageing women in his theatrical *oeuvre*. Developing the work of the first two chapters which have been concerned with Beckett's response to the feminine in his prose works, covering themes of sex, misogyny, maternity and motherhood, this chapter moves onto his dramatic work and specifically considers how the feminine and age are explored in this area of his work. I have chosen to look at his theatrical work in relation to ageing and femininity, as much of the abjection and horror in relation to the feminine as discussed in the previous chapters becomes ever more amplified in the older female characters that populate his later stage work. To date, the potent combination of age and femininity in Beckett's work does not form any significant area of scholarship, even though his later drama explicitly centralises many older women characters. Textual readings of Beckett's late drama have largely been analyzed through the psychoanalytic French feminist theories of Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, while theatre scholars have tended to focus on the performance of embodiment in these plays.[41] I will be bringing both of these readings together in the next two chapters, through adding age as an interpretive category, which is absent in readings of these late plays and missing as a field of enquiry in Irish Studies. In this chapter, I analyse the plays as texts through the lens of age and in the final chapter I will analyse the plays as performances.

In Beckett criticism, there is a paucity of analysis of ageing femininity, as to date most criticism has focused on the more dominant subject (for Beckett) of men's ageing.[50] This chapter addresses this lacuna with a close reading of several Beckett's plays that feature older women. Hence, in an Irish Studies context, I also argue that Beckett's staging of these prematurely aged and ageing women in his theatre is also expressive of the deep-rooted anxiety in Irish society about issues of reproduction, sexuality and authorship, which is related to historical tropes of femininity and the mother figure in the Irish theatrical canon.[51] As well therefore as situating my reading within Beckett Studies, I am also situating this chapter in the "field imaginary" of age studies, an emerging field of research in Irish Studies, which I referred to in detail in the Introduction. Beckett's drama provides fruitful research for an analysis of older women and their sexuality, a topic which largely remains a cultural taboo in society.

Much of Beckett's late theatre is concerned with ageing marginalised female subjects attempting to account for themselves. In this chapter, and following a chronological order, I shall look at *All That Fall* (1957), *Happy Days* (1961), *Not I* (1972), *Footfalls* (1976) and *Rockaby* (1981), which all feature an older woman as the central character.[52] I have chosen these particular plays as they feature women from the ages of fifty to seventy, which in social gerontology is termed “Third Age”, and women aged seventy plus, termed “Fourth Age”. Each of the plays in different ways, also deals with themes of menopause, post-menopause, sterility and sexual desire. With the rise of the interdisciplinary fields of age studies and cultural gerontology, it is becoming ever clearer that there is a pressing critical need to reassess cultural representations of age and ageing in literature, particularly with regard to women. Second wave feminists Kathleen Woodward, Germaine Greer and Lynne Segal, all now in their sixties and seventies, have begun to extend the classical analysis of “the personal is political” to their own experience of ageing and desire in their more recent work. This is a suggested model for an examination of women and ageing in Irish cultural studies, as this area has been underresearched until now. How we age is influenced by society’s attitudes; today we can say that in neo-liberal western society, “youthism” reigns. For Irish women, ageing is also dictated

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[41] See Shane Weller's *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Weller's study on alterity includes a section on feminine alterities, utilising a French feminist psychoanalytic framework for analysing the late drama; for a psychoanalytic overview of Beckett's *oeuvre*, see Angela Moorjani's essay "Beckett and Psychoanalysis", in *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, edited by Lois Oppenheim. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; for a psychoanalytic reading of mother/daughter relationships, see Moonyoung Chung's article "The Mother/Daughter Relationship in Beckett: 'Footfalls and Rockaby'." *Irish University Review* 29.2 (1999): 281-293; for a psychoanalytic reading of women in Beckett's work, see Rina Kim's study *Women and Ireland as Beckett's Lost Others: Beyond Mourning;* for a detailed analysis of Beckett's presentation of the body in his theatre, film, television and radio, see Anna McMullan's study *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

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[50] Kathryn White’s *Beckett and Decay* (2009) is the first full-length study on decay in Beckett’s work. In part 1 of her study, “Physical Decay”, White’s main argument is that “the body is essentially programmed to decay and there is no escaping this reality” (21). She rightly argues that for Beckett, physical decay begins at birth. However, she assumes a Cartesian dualism as integral to Beckett’s aesthetic, ignoring recent studies that would challenge this (see Matthew Feldman’s *Beckett’s Books* (2006) as well as alternative readings on the body (see Yoshiki Tajiri’s *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body* (2007). See also essays by Gary Adelman, “Old Age and Beckett: A Partial Autobiography.” *New England Review* 26.3 (2005): 138-48; Ruth Pe Palileo, ‘” What Age am I Now? And I?”: The Science of the Aged Voice in Beckett’s Plays.” In *Staging Age. The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*. Eds. Valerie Barnes Lipscomb and Leni Marshall, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, 129-49; Kathleen Woodward, “The Transitional Object of the Oldest Age … Samuel Beckett’s *Malone Dies*.” In *Aging and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991; Chris Gilleard, “Old Age and Samuel Beckett’s Late Works.” *Ageculturehumanities*, vol. 3 (2016). http://ageculturehumanities.org/WP/old-age-and-samuel-becketts-late-works/

[51] Although there are no Mother Irelands or Cathleen ni Houlihans in Beckett’s theatre, Rina Kim argues that the predatory women of Beckett’s early fiction are hostile send-ups of the idealised heroines of the Celtic revival and the feminine personification of Ireland. This is specifically satired by Beckett in his novel *Murphy*, where, in a desecration of W. B. Yeats famous play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Beckett’s character Miss Counihan is portrayed as a highly sexualised version of Kathleen: “Standing in profile against the blazing corridor, with her high buttocks and her low breasts, she looked not merely queenly, but on for anything” (Beckett 2009:136).

[52] A shorter version of this chapter will be published late 2018: “Samuel Beckett’s ‘hysterical old hags’: The

by diseases such as breast cancer, which currently affects one in every nine women in Ireland, by isolation and by poverty; one fifth of those who live over the age of sixty-five experience poverty, the majority of whom are women. As this chapter is mostly concerned with the shifting perceptions of "middle-aged" and "old", I look to Beckett, who was one of the most influential dramatists of the twentieth century. I argue that an analysis of his depiction of women and ageing can contribute towards an understanding of theatrical practices that have led to the omissions and occlusions that occasioned the recent phenomenon in Irish theatre, the "Waking the Feminist" movement.[53] Beckett is of course not to blame for the androcentrism and ageism of Irish theatre or modernist drama practices, but as a key influencer, his work can be considered an important shaper of later theatrical conventions.

Women over the age of fifty are often referred to as the invisible generation. in a recent article the novelist Hilary Mantel wrote about her surprise when she woke up one Sunday morning in 2009, to discover that her historical fiction novel *Wolf Hall* was a strong favourite to win the Man Booker prize (the novel subsequently went on to win the prize). However, she was equally shocked by the description of herself as "the 57-year-old novelist from Glossop" (Mantel 2009). Seeing the truth about her age in print surprised her as she could not think how she had arrived at that age; do men ever ask themselves the same question she wondered, and worse still, how stating a woman's age in the media appears to be some "sort of accusation" (Mantel 2009). In the same article, Mantel noted the disappearance of older women from

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Sexual Politics of Female Ageing in *All That Fall* and *Not I*." *Women and Ageing in Irish Literature and Film*. Editors Margaret O'Neill and Michaela Schrage-Frueh, Norway: Nordic Irish Studies, 2018, Forthcoming.

[53] The "Waking the Feminists" movement occurred in 2015 in response to the "Waking the Nation" programme launched by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, Ireland's National Theatre, to commemorate the 1916 Rising, which saw a series of events throughout Ireland in 2016 in a year of commemoration. The Abbey's programme featured an all-male line up, which provoked an immediate reaction in the arts and the media. My final chapter deals with the impact of the Waking the Feminist movement in detail.

television screens and the difficulties they faced in negotiating public life. Patriarchy has placed such a premium on reproduction that women are conditioned to continually appear as if they are still in their reproductive years. The cult of youth with which capitalism renews itself is carried by women in patriarchally ordered societies, and this can be seen most clearly in the surgical intervention that older female celebrities subject themselves to in a sustained attempt to postpone the ageing process for as long as possible. Professor Mary Beard, the classicist and public intellectual renowned for refusing to conform to beauty and age standards, and for calling attention to the relationship between imposed standards of youth and beauty and the prohibition of women's voices in public spaces, has called for a "grey revolution": complimenting someone for *not* looking their age is, she argues "one of the weirdest doublethinks in our culture" (Johnston 2014). Speaking at the Cheltenham Literary Festival in 2014, in a talk called "Oh Do Shut Up, Dear" Beard rallied for a new campaign aimed at the public to reclaim the word "old", to combat the stereotype of the notion of the "hunched little old lady" (Johnston 2014). There is currently a "vocabulary" issue around ageing, argues Beard, who describes herself as what a 59-year-old woman "looks like when she hasn't had anything done" (Johnston 2014). In her bid to reclaim the word old, she compares it to other kinds of activist linguistic positivism, such as the ways in which "black" or "queer", originally terms of derogation, were re-appropriated by those against whom they had been used (Johnston 2014).

Beard claims she now enjoys the "un-budgability" and "un-bashability" of older age, which helps her to remain resolute against the severe criticism she is subjected to, mainly by internet trolls (Johnston 2014).

Lynne Segal, speaking at the same festival, noted that although older people may be viewed as "fragile and incompetent … we don't feel like that", pointing to the "Grey Panthers" campaign by older people in the United States of America (Johnston 2014).[42] Segal also noted the "lethal combination of ageism and sexism" on television and warned that "a lot of older women are going to have a tough time" in the future (Johnston 2014). In 2002, American actor Rosanna Arquette made a documentary "Searching for Debra Winger", in which she and other female Hollywood stars revealed the scarcity of acting roles for older women. Former BBC presenter Anne Ford said, on leaving the station in 2006: "how many presenters do you know on television who are over the age of 60?" (Cochrane 2006). Madonna has also commented on age discrimination, saying that "[o]nce you reach a certain age you're not allowed to be adventurous, you're not allowed to be sexual. I mean, is there a rule? Are you supposed to just die?" (Cochrane 2006). Susie Orbach, feminist psychoanalyst and author of *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, and *Bodies* notes that "thirty years ago, a woman of my age (62) wasn't really in public space or contributing – you were terribly exceptional if that happened" (qtd in Cochrane 2006). We can say, then, that historically, older women are still in the very early stages of negotiating a path to remain valid in the public eye. As the mounting pressure on women to maintain the appearance of (white) youth at all costs has reached the point where health is increasingly compromised, it becomes ever more critical to consider how older women have been historically presented in literature and drama. By writing this chapter on Beckett, women and aging, I am aligning this analysis with a wider conversation about the difficulties that middleage women face and are facing, both in the media and in western society, in terms of employment, relationships and sexuality. Looking to literature and drama to historically trace the depiction of older women, brings both the gendering of age and this period of life into focus.

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[42] The Grey Panthers is an American organisation which tackles ageism and other social justice issues. It was founded in 1970 by Maggie Kuhn, in response to her forced retirement from the Presbyterian Church at age 65.

Much has been written about Beckett's portrayal of the women in the plays under analysis here as sympathetic characters, but little has been written about how the plays explore their experiences of *ageing*. The women in these plays range in age from the fifty-year-old Winnie in *Happy Days*, in her Third Age, or "middlepause", to the seventy plus year old women of *All That Fall, Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* in their Fourth Age of the life cycle.[43] This consideration of Beckett's response to ageing femininity argues that these plays depict the embodied experience of ageing women and their sense of longing. My main argument in this chapter is that despite his struggles and challenges with the feminine, here, in the later plays, female ageing and sexuality are portrayed by Beckett as much as a force of resistance than as a condition to be resisted.

After completing the Trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*) in 1953, Beckett felt that he had exhausted his theme of a "literature of the unword", having deliberately used the Trilogy to try to destroy conventional form.[44] Earlier, in his conversations with George

Duthuit, Beckett had expressed the dilemma of the artist, when he said 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" (Beckett 1983:139). After he completed *The Unnamable*, the last in the Trilogy, the period from 1950 to 1958 only saw Beckett publish the novella, *Texts for Nothing* (1956) and one piece of prose work, entitled *From an Abandoned Work* (1958). By the summer of 1956, Beckett had, however, written three plays, *Eleutheria* (1947, in French, published posthumously), *Waiting for Godot* (1952, in French) and *Endgame* (completed later in 1956, in French), but as yet still had no real ambition to become a dramatist. He still considered himself a novelist, albeit one in a cul-de-sac, cornered by himself on his own blocked path. However, in 1956, Beckett's path was to change in ways he did not foresee: In June 1956, only a short period after admitting that his days as a novelist were coming to an end, the BBC approached him with a request for a play in English for the Third Programme. The consequences of his decision to accept the commission were far reaching; in three months, he had completed his first radio play *All That Fall*, his first work in a return to writing in English. The challenge of writing for radio opened up an exciting new channel for Beckett's creative energy and his developing career turn as a dramatist. As his prose fiction diminished following the Trilogy, his plays increasingly adopted the stream of consciousness form of his novels. His introduction to the possibilities of the medium of radio allowed him to develop the monologue form, or voices in the head. *All That Fall* heralds the beginning of an important stage in Beckett's career and is an appropriate starting point for my study of ageing femininity in his drama as it is the first time that Beckett puts a woman, who is in her seventies, or Fourth Age, as his central character. Ageing in general as a theme in both his prose and drama had been, at this stage, incubating for many years in Beckett's thinking.

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[43] See "Going through your second adolescence – aka the "middlepause", by Marina Benjamin who has written a book on the subject, named *The Middlepause*.
https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jul/17/going-through-your-second-adolescence-akathemiddlepause

[44] Beckett wrote in a now famous letter to Axel Kaun, whom he befriended on a trip to Germany in 1937, that he sought a "literature of the non-word" in his art. His mission was to undo language, via language, "to bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – began to seep through" (Fehsenfeld and Overbeck 2009:512-16). Beckett considered this to be the highest goal achievable for any writer.

Beckett and Ageing

Ageing and old age permeates Beckett's entire oeuvre, and he himself was interested in ageing as a theme in his work from an early stage. Scholars have responded to this focus in his work and there have been some significant studies on Beckett and age, most notably Kathryn White's monograph *Beckett and Decay* (2009) and Elizabeth Barry's essay "Samuel Beckett and the Contingency of Old Age (2016)". Barry recounts that in 1981, the then seventy-four-year old Beckett told the writer Lawrence Shainberg:

> I always thought that 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. (Barry 2016:206)

In this, Beckett alerts us to the interesting fact that, even as a young writer, he was already contemplating ageing as a trope in his future writing. Barry notes that in philosophical thinking, the concepts of ageing and old age have been conspicuous by their absence, as traditionally, the focus of philosophical study has been death, as reaching old age was, according to essayist Michel de Montaigne, "unique and out of the normal order" (qtd. in Barry 2016:205). Barry argues that Beckett had been anticipating the experience of old age for most of his life, not for the "wisdom, philosophical or aesthetic maturity, […] but, imaginatively at least, for a diminishing of powers that might force upon a writer the qualities he had in fact been seeking all along" (Barry 2016:206). Beckett explored the same themes of ageing again in a later conversation with Shainberg:

> 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 […] 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. […] in old age, with only a few grains of sand one has the greatest possibility. (Barry 2016:206)

As he himself got older, Beckett appeared even more concerned with the possibility of ageing as a vehicle for expression. Barry argues that this "chance" that Beckett refers to might relate to the "impotence" which he famously claimed was his "modus operandi", or it could also represent the use of "scant means to achieve a distilled or concentrated expression of his abiding concerns" (Barry 2016:206). Becket's long preoccupation with ageing was an aesthetic preoccupation. He understood it as a challenge to narrative unity and it deeply marked his work long before he reached old age himself.

Indeed, in her influential study of old age, *The Long Life* (2007), Helen Small reminds us that Beckett, at the young age of twenty-four as a student in Trinity College, Dublin, was already displaying this interest in the potential of old age as a subject for theatre. In a student spoof of Corneille, Beckett played in *Le Kid* the part of Don Diegue, who laments the powerlessness of old men. The young Beckett brought an alarm clock on stage, which he had timed to go off half-way through Diegue's famous lament, forcing him to speak faster and faster (Small 2007:205). Small's study, which is about "thinking *about* old age […] and thinking *with* old age", also notes the difficulties of thinking well about age, as it is simultaneously a barrier and an opportunity (Small 2007:2). She argues that thinking about ageing has always tended towards "extremes of optimism and pessimism, often in close conjuncture" (Small 2007:2). In other words, for every stereotypical negative connotation of ageing, there is a counter-association: "rage/serenity; nostalgia/detachment; folly/wisdom; fear/courage; loss of sexual powers and/or opportunities/liberation from sex" (Small 2007:2). In keeping with my argument here, Small also argues that old age in general is an emerging and interesting theme as it challenges "narrative unity" (Small 2007:89). The notion that we are working towards a purpose is problematised by the indeterminate period of old age which can be relatively static, as depicted by the narrator of *Molloy*: "[My] life, my life, now that I speak of it as of 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" (Beckett 2009:34). Beckett here is ironically pointing to the fact that the elderly are undervalued in western society, alive but dead. Although Barry and Small are concerned with ageing and old age as a theme in Beckett's work, neither take gender into consideration in their analysis. Neither does influential feminist Simone de Beauvoir, who examines both women and ageing, and Beckett and ageing, but not together in her monumental study of old age, published in French as *La Vieillesse* (1970) and subsequently published in English as *The Coming of Age* (1972) as discussed in the Introduction. While she devotes two pages to ageing in Beckett's work, taking a general approach to the topic, the gendering of age in Beckett remains un-noted in her reading.

In her analysis of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961), the former concerning the ageing male protagonist Krapp, while the latter concerns the suffocating experience of the fifty-year-old Winnie, Beauvoir argues that "the theme is the crumbling of memory and therefore of the whole of the life behind us; and Beckett deals with it cruelly" (Beauvoir 1972:212). Of the post-war novel *Molloy*, Beauvoir is only concerned with the anti-hero Molloy, and makes no reference to his violent treatment of his ageing mother. She focuses instead on Molloy's main preoccupation as the recollection of memories, which dissolve and become vague and murky. Comparing old age in Beckett to that of playwright Eugene Ionesco, Beauvoir claims that both artists are "not interested in the old men for themselves; they only make us of them to express their concept of mankind" (Beauvoir 1972:213). Beauvoir makes no attempt to analyse ageing women in Beckett's work. I now, therefore, begin my own analysis of women and ageing as represented in Beckett's drama, beginning with his first radio play *All That Fall*.

The Post-Menopausal Feminine in *All That Fall*

> Am I then invisible, Miss Fitt? Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry? [. . .] This is right, Miss Fitt, look closely and you will finally distinguish a once female shape. (Beckett 2006:182)

All That Fall, Beckett's first radio play, was written in 1956 and first broadcast by the BBC on 13 January 1957. The work is unique in that it presents Beckett's first female protagonist, Maddy Rooney, who is in her seventies. The play is only the second work Beckett had written in English, his mother tongue, after he had been writing exclusively in French for almost ten years.[45] It is important to note the connection between Beckett's return to writing in his mother tongue and the fact that he presents his first female protagonist at the centre of the work. It has been suggested that, triggered by this return to writing in English, Beckett's boyhood memories of his home town Foxrock, a leafy Dublin suburb where the play is set, and of his mother came flooding over him during the writing of it.[46] Beckett had a difficult and ambiguous relationship with his mother, which has been well documented. This relationship has more than a passing role in the themes in his work. His friend Geoffrey Thompson declared that "the key to understanding Beckett [. . .] [is] to be found in his relationship to his mother" (Knowlson 1996:178). Patrick Casement claims that Beckett took refuge from his family, not only in moving to France but also in choosing to use the French language. This "disowning" of his mother tongue enabled Beckett to "achieve the separateness and freedom from [her]"; it is only upon his return to writing in English that Beckett manages to "lay to rest the suffocating influence of the mother" (Casement 1982:37-38). As I argued in Chapter Two, motherhood is a near obsessive trope in Beckett's work, including *All That Fall*, which is influenced by memories of his mother and his childhood village of Foxrock.

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[45] Beckett wrote the prose text *Watt* in English in 1948, before turning to writing exclusively in French; then in a return to writing in English, he wrote *From an Abandoned Work* (1954-55).

All That Fall is a one-act play, where the action is simple, but eventful. Mrs Rooney, who is recovering from a long mysterious illness, shuffles to Boghill station to meet her blind husband Dan. The play has a rich sense of topography in its realistic dealing with the day-today world of its inhabitants. On her way she meets various friends and acquaintances, with whom she discusses ailing relatives and her own poor health. Upon reaching the station, Maddy discovers that her husband's train has been delayed. Eventually, it arrives and Maddy and Dan begin their arduous walk back home. Despite Maddy's questioning, Dan is unwilling to reveal the reason for the train's delay, which is subsequently revealed by a boy named Jerry, who declares that the delay has been caused by the horrific death of a child falling onto the tracks. The end of the play remains ambiguously unresolved, as Dan remains silent on the matter, suggesting the possibility of his involvement. *All That Fall* is primarily concerned with sterility, longing and loss as well as the embodied experience of physical pain, well established themes for Beckett. What is remarkable here is that they are constituted in a woman protagonist.

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[46] In a letter to Aidan Higgins in 1956, Beckett wrote that he was tempted to write a play about 'feet dragging and breath short and cartwheels and imprecations from the Brighton road to Foxrock station and back [. . .] - boyhood memories' (Knowlson 428).

Maddy pines for “little Minnie”, the infant she lost over forty years ago: “in her forties now she’d be, I don’t know, fifty, girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change” (Beckett 2006:176). She firstly meets Mr Tyler and upon enquiring about his daughter, he confides to her that she is, “Fair, fair. They removed everything, you know, the whole … er… bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless” (Beckett 2006:174). Paul Stewart argues that sterility haunts the play, noting the connection between sterility and animals, which are all female. He discusses the role of the “defecating hinny” in the play, with whom Maddy identifies: “Well! If someone were to do that for me I should not dally. [Pause] how she gazes at me to be sure, with her great moist cleg-tormented eyes!” (Stewart 2011:27). Stewart suggests here that Maddy identifies with the hinny, who is sterile but whose look still expresses longing, such longing that Maddy cannot bear, when she declares “Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful” (Beckett 2006:173). There is no possibility of reproductive sexuality as a hinny is “a sterile hybrid as the offspring of a female donkey and a male horse” (Stewart 2011:27). Even though Maddy is aware of this fact, she still asks Dan for confirmation: “Can hinnies procreate, I wonder […] You know, hinnies, or jinnies, aren’t they barren, or sterile, or whatever it is?” (Beckett 2006:196-197). Even though the hinny produces fresh dung, which represents regeneration and fertility, Maddy declares: “Dung? What would we want with dung, at our time of life?” (Beckett 2006:173). Further on, she witnesses a hen squashed to death by Mr Slocum’s car, in a seemingly insignificant episode where Maddy shouts: “Mind the hen [*Scream of brakes. Squawk of hen.*] Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! […] What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath and then – bang! – all her troubles over. [Pause.] All the laying and the hatching” (Beckett 2006:179). The hen has been rendered useless, not just by her sudden death but by the implication that she was past her egg laying “sell-by” date: no more “hen-pecking” for this bird.

The hen’s death, which renders it eternally infertile, represents the end of not only the animal itself, whose value is based on continued fertility in the production of eggs, but of the species through procreation. In other words, all sources of female fertility are violently targeted in the play, and, on these occasions, by males who are driving machines. Mary Bryden notes how “Mrs. Rooney is merely reflective, not mournful, about the abrupt death (and the enforced sterility) of the previously prolific hen” (Bryden 1993:101). This subtle analogy between female sterility in humans and animals point to Beckett’s preoccupation with non-reproductive forms of sexuality, which is prevalent throughout his entire *oeuvre*. The reference to “*all* the laying and hatching” draws attention to Maddy’s preoccupation with the loss of her sexuality – both as allure and as sterility; yet her sexuality and her desire for love remain vital to her in this play. Although in her seventies, and rendered sexually abject by culture, Maddy still yearns for intimacy in her marriage; the analogy between infertility in humans and animals is a central theme in this play.

Ageing and Desire

All That Fall comically alludes to loss of sexual powers that older women and men experience. When Maddy meets Mr. Slocum (pun intended), he endeavours to help her into his car, in a scene charged with comic sexual innuendo: “Oh! … Lower! … Don’t be afraid! … We’re past the age when … There! … Now!... Get your shoulder under it … Oh! … [Giggles.] Oh glory!” (Beckett 2006:178). In a further sexual pun directly referring to his name, Mr Slocum retorts: “I’m coming, Mrs Rooney, I’m coming, give me time, I’m as stiff as yourself’ […] Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and front [To herself] The dry old reprobate!” (Beckett 2006:178). Maddy admits to pining for regular sexual intimacy with her husband when she declares: “Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher’s regular, what normal woman wants affection? A peck on the jaw at morning, near the ear, and another at evening, peck, peck, till you grow whiskers on you” (Beckett 2006:174). In the first scene, the sexual act is comically depicted as still worth pursuing, but with some difficulty, whereas in the second scene, Maddy appears to be longing for physical touch, rather than actual sex. It would seem she is achieving neither. Again, we see Beckett’s male characters unable or unwilling to develop fulfilling sexual or emotional relationship with women.

Maddy is portrayed as a compassionate maternalistic woman in need of love and sexual intimacy. This stands in direct opposition to the male indifference directed towards her and towards female reproduction in Beckett’s work in general. Upon meeting Dan, she passionately demands “Kiss me!’ Dan rebukes her with the retort, ‘Kiss you? In public? On the platform? […] Have you taken leave of your senses?” (Beckett 2006:188). Further instances of male hostility include the character Christy, who severely beats the hinny, Mr Slocum’s verbal “*violent unintelligible muttering*” towards Maddy after the car incident, and the wife beating that Maddy suspects Mrs Tully is subjected to (Beckett 2006:178). Dan verbally refers to Maddy as “two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat”, calling upon her “*violently”* to “Let go of me” (Beckett 2006:191). Perhaps the most disturbing instance of violence in the play is the ambiguity over the possible involvement by Dan in the death of the child on the train track, and the mysterious object that he had dropped at the station, that the boy Jerry was returning and that he seemed unwilling to share with his wife, indicating an attitude of patriarchal superiority and misogyny. Dan had earlier expressed a murderous desire to kill a child, when he asks Maddy: “Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy.

[Pause.] Poor Jerry! [Pause.] What restrained me then? [Pause.] Not fear of man. [Pause.]" (Beckett 2006:191). Dan's possible involvement in the child's death indicates the misopedia prevalent in the play. Terence Brown notes that "Beckett's universe is a curiously childless one" (qtd. in Stewart 2011:77). In an earlier play *Eleutheria* (1947), one of the characters Dr. Piouk advocates his solution to the "problem" of humanity: "I would establish teams of abortionists, controlled by the State. I would apply the death penalty to any woman guilty of giving birth. I would drown all newborn babies" (Beckett 1996:44). The figure of the child in Beckett's work represents the guarantee of all future suffering, which explains Dan's violent desire to "nip some young doom in the bud". However, Dan's involvement in the incident on the train tracks is left ambiguously unresolved in the play, with the reader/listener left to solve the mystery in their own minds.

Although Beckett's texts are quite populated with children, they have, until recently, remained almost completely invisible in Beckett criticism.[47] The child in Beckett's *oeuvre* has only recently become the subject of study; Daniela Caselli notes that Beckett and the child "are a rather disconcerting couple" (Caselli 2005:259). Lee Edelman, writing on the futurity of the child, claims that "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order" (Edelman 2004:11). The child equals narrative "unity" telos; denying the child, Edelman argues is a political denial by those who are marginalised by a commonplace pro-procreative order; If there is "a baby, there is a future" (Edelman 2004:12). He therefore argues that if there is "*no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself"

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[47] For articles on the figure of the child in Beckett, see *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, vol. 15, 2005, https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25781496

(Edelman 2004:13). Edelman suggests here, along with Dr. Piouk, that the solution could be to bring life itself to an end. The child is considered far from welcome as it represents the reproduction of a regrettable past into an altogether regrettable future. The presence of the child in Beckett can be read, as Stephen Thompson argues, as "an emissary' of the future" (qtd. in Stewart 2011:81). In *All That Fall,* Dan is further enraged by all signs of family and domesticity; along with "the dusting, sweeping, airing, scrubbing, waxing, waning, washing, mangling, drying' there are also 'the brats, the happy little healthy little howling neighbours' brats" (Beckett 2006:193). He prefers his quiet office to the "horrors of home life" and the sound of children, which potentially links him to the mystery surrounding the loss of Minnie, whose fate, like the child on the train, remains famously unresolved in the play (Beckett 2006:193). Dan is not a modern husband it would seem, preferring to leave all the domestic issues to women.

I suggest that Dan's violent hatred of children is linked to the verbal hostility that he expresses at times towards Maddy, female reproduction in general and the secrecy surrounding Minnie's death. Although a woman's voice dominates the narrative, the play highlights an underlying suggestion of male aggression threatening to silence it. As Shane Weller argues:

> male violence is directed, then, against the very possibility of the maternal feminine: the death of the maiden, the loss of children, the destruction of the mother hen, sterilization through breeding […], the decay of the womb […] and even hysterectomy. It is the feminine as mother (or as potential mother) that is threatened, and threatened by male violence. (Weller 2006:177)

Motherhood, and fertility more generally, are targeted in the play by these regular instances of male violence, highlighting the systemic violence in society usually suffered by women. In many ways, Maddy lives up to and appears to have internalised the stereotypical notion of woman as emotionally excessive, when she exclaims "Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and churchgoing and fat and rheumatism and childlessness" (Beckett 2006:174). Crucially, even though Maddy is "destroyed" by her decrepit body and its sterility, her sexuality is still vital, as the episode with Mr. Slocum would suggest. Beckett, then, presents a powerful portrayal of post-reproductive women as still desiring subjects, despite the vulnerability that follows from such longings. The play draws attention to the invisibility of older women through Maddy's thoughts and remonstrations. I argue that the audience/reader is invited to consider their own unconscious bias towards older people as sexually desiring subjects, which Beckett highlights in *All That Fall*. Beckett, in his later drama, portrays a much more sympathetic representation of older women, an argument which has been under developed in analyses of his theatrical output.

The Pain of Ageing

Although Beckett highlights sexual desire in older women, he also, however points to the physical challenges of the ageing body; as the play is a radio play, the audience can actually "hear" the pain of decrepit bodies. In a letter that Beckett wrote to his American publisher Barney Rosset in 1957, he emphasised that *All That Fall* is "a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies" (Craig et al. 2014:63). However, I argue that Beckett's effective use of sound accounts for the play's striking visual power, making Maddy's painful embodied journey to and from the station a highly visual experience. As Martin Esslin has pointed out, *All That Fall* is an "intensely visual play" (Esslin 1986:365-6). According to Anna McMullan, Maddy represents "an indomitable voicing of self, world and body doomed already to extinction" (McMullan 2007:105). This is borne out by Maddy who wittily questions her own physical existence on two occasions: firstly, on one occasion when she is being ignored by two men, she quips, "Don't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. That fact is well known" (Beckett 2006:179). Further on in her journey, in an exchange with a Miss Fitt, she again asserts her physical presence, when she wonders, "Am I then invisible, Miss Fitt? Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry? […] That is right, Miss Fitt, look closely and you will finally distinguish a once female shape" (Beckett 2006:182). Maddy's absent body, both physically and culturally invisible, continuously finds its way into the drama both through these self-referential comments, and through the sound of the pain of ageing and ill health. Although positive ageing is promoted in gerontology studies, the reality is that the experience of ageing is diverse and complicated.

Louise Cleveland argues that the play is a "record of an excruciatingly physical journey. Maddy's body is not abstracted from the drama by being rendered invisible. Her concrete existence is a continual embarrassment – breathing, shuffling, requiring ministrations of others" (Cleveland 1968:268). Theatre director notes that through the intimacy of the medium of radio, the listener has a direct line into Maddy's mind: "nothing that occurs in *All That Fall* is independent of Maddy Rooney's awareness of it" (Frost 1997:200). While radio freed Beckett from the material representation of the ageing female body on stage, there remained a visceral awareness of Maddy's bodily form through the sound of it. The play is dominated by the sound of her excruciatingly painful journey to the train station and back, highlighting her ailing body, which she refers to as having "a once female shape" (Beckett 2006:182). Through the sounds of shuffling and panting, which abound in Beckett's instructions, the audience, through listening, conjure up a picture of an overweight older woman with joint pains, while being reminded by her that she was once a younger woman who was visible in society. What makes Maddy visible to the audience is the physical difficulty of her journey to and from the train station. Following Small's argument, while thinking "about" old age, and "with" old age, the play demonstrates the possibilities for intimacy and longing, while pointing to the decline of the body, which can be an obstacle to positive ageing.

Ulrika Maude argues that by adding the body to the experience of hearing, "Beckett's experiments with sound […] ultimately bear witness to the persistence with which he grounds subjectivity firmly within a materialistic context" (Maude 2009: 48). The bodily experience of agedness comes into existence for the audience through an array of corporeal painful sounds that Maddy continually makes: the huffing, puffing, moans, groans, shuffling – all of which would be virtually impossible to stage. Linda Ben-Zvi remarks that "the inhabitants of Boghill seem literally bogged down, impeded" (Ben-Zvi 1985:26). Although Ben-Zvi suggests that the world exists "within the skull of Maddy Rooney", she also accurately concludes that the play ultimately "explores the possibility of verifying self through physical means" (Ben-Zvi 1985:28-29). Absent bodies, including Maddy's, which is both physically and culturally invisible, continuously manage to find their way back into the play's dialogue, and are transmitted to the audience through the medium of sound. Maddy rejects the notion of herself as an older invisible woman, when she tells the much younger Miss Fitt, "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on" (Beckett 2006:185). Beckett's directions border on obsessive in their insistence on the painful sounds of the aged body: the sounds of "*dragging feet*" "*panting*" and "*sobbing*" occur numerous times in the text. The audience's heightened awareness of Maddy's pain triggers a difficulty in representation, due to the impossibility of its expression in language. This is important to note as the medium of sound enabled Beckett to overcome this difficulty of representation.

In her definitive study on pain and inflicting pain, *The Body in Pain* (1985), Elaine Scarry draws attention to the rarity with which physical suffering is depicted in literature, especially when compared to the persistence with which psychological suffering is represented in literary works. Scarry notes the difficulty with representing physical pain when she argues that it differs from:

> every other bodily and psychic event, by not having an object in the external world. Hearing and touch are of objects outside the boundaries of the body, as desire is desire of x, fear is fear of y, hunger is hunger for z, but pain is not "of" or "for" anything – it is itself alone. This objectlessness [. . .] almost prevents it from being rendered in

> language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal. (Scarry 1985:161-2)

By introducing the sound of Maddy's ageing body, this crisis in representation is overcome in the play. I argue that Beckett's consistent reference to "*dragging feet*", or "*dragging steps*" which occurs approximately thirty times in the directions, highlights the acute pain of the ageing body in a way that would be almost impossible to stage. When viewing a play on the stage, the audience can "turn away"; listening to a play for sense highlights sensory perception of the audience who can then hear the sounds of ageing bodies. Maddy's absent body repeatedly forces its way as a material presence in the drama through the record of her painful physical journey. As a radio play, I argue that the audience are highly attuned both to Maddy's longings and physical sufferings in Beckett's sympathetic portrayal of ageing because of this. Despite her physical suffering, cultural invisibility and her preoccupation with the loss of her own sexuality, Maddy's quest for love and intimacy remains vital to her. In the next play under discussion, *Happy Days*, we see Beckett's portrayal of a woman, around the age of fifty, in what has become one of Beckett's most iconic depictions of a middle-aged woman in the dramatic canon: a woman buried up to her neck in the scorching earth.

The 'Middlepause': *Happy Days(!)*

Happy Days is a two-act play, written in English in 1960 and first published by Grove Press in 1961. The audience are initially presented with a startling image: a middle-aged, middle-class woman is buried to her waist in a scorching desert, with her husband located somewhere in the background. In the second act, which is considerably shorter than the first, Winnie is now embedded up to her neck as the earth consumes her body. Although I focus on female entrapment in this play, immobility in Beckett's work is not confined to women: in *Endgame* (1957), Hamm's parents Nell and Nagg are confined to two dustbins, Beckett's pun on how elderly people are often considered as past their "sell-by" date and therefore dumped into the rubbish bin. In Beckett's *Play* (1963), all three characters, one man and two women, are confined to urns, with just their heads protruding. However, it is in *Happy Days* that we are confronted with the most unforgettable image of a woman trapped in the earth, surrounded by "*blazing light*" and a relentless piercing bell, that dictates Winnie's daily routine. Beckett describes Winnie as an "opulent blonde, fiftyish, all glowing shoulders and *décolleté*" (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:244). In the stage directions, she is specifically referred to as a woman "*about fifty, well-preserved, blonde for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace*" (Beckett 2006:138). The objects of her interest are her "*capacious black bag, shopping variety*" on the ground to her left and her "*collapsible collapsed parasol*" placed to her right. The bag contains several "useful" objects that Winnie depends on to keep her busy: showing the audience its contents made up of a toothbrush, toothpaste, a mirror, and lipstick, she engages in the gendered rituals of combing her hair, applying lipstick, filing her nails, and checking her teeth in her mirror, foreshadowing "Mouth" of *Not I*, as these items all relate to the mouth. The bag represents more than that, though; the barren landscape mirrors the fact that the opportunities for sexual encounters appear impossible in Winnie's predicament, which is the fact that she is post reproductive and now perceived by society as a "useless old bag". The most interesting object in her bag though is a **gun**, arguably there should she need to escape these desperate rituals, which she considers, but does not act on. Her body has metaphorically become the "waste" of landfill sites.

As a "well-preserved" fifty-year old, Winnie initially does not appear to represent a positive image of a menopausal woman, or "middlepause". Indeed, a sociological study undertaken in the United States of America in 2005, concluded that many women considered menopause as a positive experience. The study, "Menopause is the 'Good Old': Women's Thoughts about Reproductive Aging", undertaken by sociologist Heather E. Dillaway, argued that menopause should be distinguished from other types of ageing processes, as it is specific to women, along with menstruation, conception, pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding. In her sample of middle-class, heterosexual women, many considered the experience of menopause as a "good old", a positive experience (Dillaway 2005:399). Her findings demonstrated that the women interviewed distinguished ageing and menopause as separate processes; most felt younger than their biological age, most felt sexier after menopause, with a heightened interest in sex, and more than half of the sample women were excited at the prospect of not having to think about contraception any more, empowering them with sexual freedom for the first time in a long time. The women generally experienced menopause in a positive light, while perceiving other ageing processes as more negative. As one woman described it ”There is a bad old and a good old […] the bad old is ill health, not being able to take care of yourself, and the good old is a wonderful lifetime of memories and things you've done […] living a full life, continuing to work […] being able to travel and to be active […] that's good old" (Dillaway 2005:411). Winnie, on the other hand, seems to be in the category of the "bad old", trapped by her gender and her "use-less" middlepause body, a predicament highlighted by the play. However, like the women in the sociological study, Winnie retains a fascination with the sexual act.

Although sterility continues as a theme in this play, there are moments of sexual interest between Winnie and Willie. Upon seeing a postcard that Willie is contemplating, she demands that he hands it over to her. As it becomes clear that it is a pornographic scene, Winnie, who has just announced that "hardly a day (goes by), without some addition to one's knowledge, however trifling", is horrified but fascinated (Beckett 2006:143):

> Heavens what are they up to! [*She looks for spectacles, puts them on and examines card.*] No but this is just genuine pure filth! [*Examines card.*] Make any nice-minded person want to vomit! [*Impatience of Willie's fingers. She looks for glass, takes it up and examines card through glass. Long pause.*] What does that creature in the background think he's doing? [*Looks closer.*] Oh no really! [*Impatience of fingers. Last long look. She lays down glass, takes edge of card between right forefinger and thumb,*

> *averts head, takes nose between left forefinger and thumb.*] Pah! [*Drops card.*] Take it away! (Beckett 2006:144)

This comic interplay between Winnie's expression of disgust and her compulsion to closely examine the postcard maintains a moral disdain alongside a compulsive fascination. The scene depicts a couple in a possibly unorthodox sexual act, with a masturbating man watching. As she must perform her status as a middle-class woman, she feigns moral indignation, declaring the entire scene as "genuine pure filth!", while revealing her interest in it as she "examines" "looks closer" and takes a "last long look" (Beckett 2006: 144). Looking and being looked at, are central themes of *Happy Days* and we are thus invited to "look at" how culture "looks at" menopausal women. Winnie has a "strange feeling" that someone is looking at her; admitting that she is "getting on … in life […] No longer young, not yet old", she recalls an encounter with a couple who pass by, when the man who stood before her "gaping" at her, sneered to his wife, "Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. *[Pause.]* Seen worse shoulders, he says, in my time" (Beckett 2006:165). Winnie muses over the man's name, "Mr Shower – or Cooker", which Paul Lawley notes derive "from the German words *schauen* 'to look' and *gucken* 'to look or peep (a *Zusshauer* is a theatrical spectator)" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:54). Although Winnie is the sexual object of the male gaze, by these passers-by and of course, she is gazed at by the audience, the play parodies this as Winnie also returns the gaze, both to Willie and the audience. When Winnie recounts Shower's comments to his wife "what's she doing? […] what's the idea? […] stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground – coarse fellow – what does it mean?", the spectator is subjected to a reverse interrogation, when Shower's partner retorts "And you, she says, what's the idea of you, she says, what are you meant to mean?" (Beckett 2006:156).

Winnie needs constant reminding of her existence in her conversations with Willie, who provides monosyllabic replies to much of her anxieties about her dwindling appearance. She makes observations such as "The earth is very tight today, can it be that I have put on flesh", possibly referring to a middle-aged spread that many women often experience in middlepause (Beckett 2006:149). She removes a mysterious bottle of red medicine, almost empty, and reads out the label: "Loss of spirits … lack of keenness … want of appetite … […] daily … before and after meals … instantaneous … [*looks closer*] … improvement" (Beckett 2006:141). In an amusing gesture, she unscrews the bottle cap, swigs it and then throws it in Willie's direction. At the sound of the glass breaking, she says "Ah that's better" and she is instantaneously revived (Beckett 2006:141). This medicine might be the modern-day equivalent of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) that some women take to stave off the symptoms of menopause, and our Winnie is no different. The play continuously highlights the ways in which women's ageing is negatively constructed by society. To justify her usefulness, Winnie asks:

> Was I lovable once, Willie? [*Pause.*] Was I ever lovable?" (Beckett 2006:150). She recalls how she was once "young and … foolish and … [*faltering, head down*] … beautiful … possibly … lovely … in a way … to look at" (Beckett 2006: 152).

With such nostalgia for a lost youth, "sorrow keeps breaking in" (Beckett 2006:152). While Winnie's movement is constricted, Willie is associated with animal tendencies as he is seen or heard crawling around on all fours. Mostly monosyllabic, he is not as articulate as Winnie, although in the final scene of the play, he suddenly appears to her right, "*dressed to kill – top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, etc. white gloves in hand* ", signifying a type of music-hall performer, a nod to the performativity of gender roles in the play (Beckett 2006:166). The final gaze between Winnie and Willie, as he climbs up the steep mound to join her, prevents the audience from seeing his expression, leaving it ambivalent and up to the spectator to form their own conclusion to how it might end for Winnie.

Beckett as both author and director exerts his authority over the body of the female actor with his explicit stage and costume directions. In *Happy Days*, Winnie performs her femininity, embodying female stereotypes in her costume and actions. In Aoife Monks' lively study of the history of costume she draws attention to the importance of it in Beckett's work. In *The Actor in Costume* (2010), Monks, notes how Beckett's characters are:

> emphasised by the ordinariness of their clothing. The bowler hats, straw hats, handbags, grey dresses and morning suits, do not ground the characters in a realist universe, or offer the audience transcendence, but rather render them other-worldly. The costumes in conjunction with mounds, and trees, and shafts of lights, are rendered relic-like; fragments from another time or a previous life. Winnie's straw hats and décolletage become an act of remembrance and absurdity when she is trapped in a mound … these characters are caught between life and death, like ghosts, and their costumes are remainders and reminders of a forgotten past and an impossible future. (Monks 2010:129-30)

In Deborah Warner's version of *Happy Days* in 2008 performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, starring Fiona Shaw, Winnie's mound was set very high, placing the audience directly at her eye level. Despite her confinement, Winnie, dressed in a black cocktail dress and a straw hat, is full of action from the start: she moves her arms around in grand poses, she tests the mound for any possible extra movement, she fixes her hair, while humming the theme tune from *The Archers*. By Act 2, however, her movement is progressively shut down, as the reality of her cultural invisibility becomes apparent to her. Costume is integral to Winnie's performance of her gender, which she is highly aware of; in her daily rituals of application of lipstick, filing her nails and brushing her hair, she chants "keep yourself nice, Winnie, that's what I always say, come what may, keep yourself nice" (Beckett 2006:156). With her absurd costume, *low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace,* which requires her arms and shoulders to be bare, and her treasured objects, her fussy over-sized black bag and collapsed parasol, Winnie could be described as a caricature of the traditional middlepause woman, who is performing her femininity to the audience. However, I argue that Beckett is staging this in an ironic fashion; by allowing Winnie a heightened awareness of her own physical and psychological entrapment, together with her inventive routines, she can ward off the despair that she feels. In other words, Winnie is not just a middle-aged, middle-class woman with no purpose in life – she is the physical embodiment of the condition of being a fifty-year old woman in her society of the 1960s. The play is teasingly suggesting to its audience what that society has to offer women like Winnie – nothing much. Beckett seems to be acutely aware, then, in his staging of Winnie, of the loss of self-worth she is experiencing because of the end of her reproductive life, (albeit we are not told if Winnie and Willie are parents); but more importantly, the play uncannily observes this dilemma from the point of view of his female figure, caught as she is between her own inner self-worth and the outer demands that negate her sense of being.

Winnie, I suggest, is the embodiment of a woman dealing with menopause and her physically deteriorating body, which inadequately represents her inner self. Her society is not concerned with Winnie's inner life, as it is her outward appearance and her loss of youth that has led to her entrapment. What awaits her is the loss of her sexuality and social invisibility as the earth consumes her. Her entrapment in the earth mound is a startling image, and even more so in Act 11, when Winnie is now trapped up to her neck. As she transitions from being halftrapped to practically suffocated, this exaggeration of her dilemma confronts the audience directly to consider how the middlepause years require an even more radical shift in selfunderstanding and societal understanding than any other transitional stages on a woman's life. The mound is, therefore, part of Winnie's costume – she is, literally and metaphorically, stuck in the mud of middlepause. Social gerontologist Susan Hogan, in her article "Age is Just a Number, Init?: Interrogating Perceptions of Age and Women within Social Gerontology" notes how age has been described as an "involuntary change of dress" (Hogan 2016:58). When faced with illness or disability, there is a heightened awareness of one's physical body; a breast cancer diagnosis for a woman around the age of fifty, an increasingly common occurrence, linked to the onset of menopause, makes her more aware of her bodily fragility, regardless of how young she may purport to feel. It is not only illness however that can bring awareness of the body as costume at this stage of life; even healthy middlepause women report that they feel a disconnect between their calendar years and their inner selves. In patriarchal societies, women's self-worth is closely tied to reproduction, motherhood, and the appearance of youth at all costs. Once women transition into their middlepause years, they are then faced with the pressure to remain youthful by advertisements for cosmetic surgery and radical weight loss programmes, which invade every aspect of social media. It seems that in order to experience "good old", women must first look "young(er)".

Hogan notes one participant in a study who admitted: "I see my arm with the skin hanging loosely from my forearm and cannot believe that it is really my own. It seems disconnected from me; it is someone else's, it is the arm of an old woman" (Hogan 2016:58). Winnie, in consultation with her mirror, feels the same when she exclaims: "what are those wonderful lines – [*wipes one eye*] – woe is me – [*wipes the other*] – to see what I see […] Mustn't complain. [*Takes up mirror, starts doing lips.]* What is that wonderful line?" (Beckett 2006:141). Hogan notes how ageing women are under increasing pressure to look younger to avoid being referred to as an old "slapper" or "mutton dressed as lamb" (Hogan 2016:69). The rich inner and emotional life of a woman is not made visible by conventional cultural values and practices, which is why feminist responses are so important as they supply new maps and coordinates for showing the inner life and not reinforcing the non-reproductive idea of the body as waste, useless. There is a peculiar silence around positive aspects of older women's lives, particularly their social interaction and strong sense of self-identity. Winnie displays this strong sense of self-identity via her handbag, which defines her outer self for the audience.

Winnie, who is defined by her cultural handbag full of reminiscences, performs her femininity as an old-fashioned stereotype. Her bag and "*collapsed*" parasol represent, then, her collapsed womb, which is as barren as the mud that is consuming her body, but not her intellect. Winnie's handbag is crucial to her identity and her performance of it; closely connected to the individual, handbags contain, like Winnie's, numerous highly personal objects that support the enactment of self: make up, identity cards, money, photographs and memory objects. Julia Twigg, sociologist, who works on embodiment and age, notes that as an aspect of dress, handbags have been described as an "extension of the self" or an "identity kit – a literal container for the self" (Twigg 2014:15). Handbags are highly gendered; closely associated with femininity, the female body and a crucial item of costume, they are sometimes viewed as "vaginal" or "womb like" spaces (Twigg 2014:15). They often contain highly personal objects connected to intimate feminine hygiene and bodily practices, such as tampons, make-up and condoms. As their interiors are particularly private spaces, they cannot be entered without permission. Twigg notes that studies have shown that handbags are used differently to reflect how women "do" femininity in different spaces (Twigg 2014:16). As an example, she quotes from studies that show that in male-dominated scientific work places, women often bring a briefcase to work instead of a handbag, due to its association with femininity. Other studies reveal that the ever-expanding size and contents of women's handbags is a reflection on their escape from domesticity, while reversely, with the complexity of women's role as both mothers and working mothers, their handbags reflect their feelings of being "weighed down" by their responsibilities (Twigg 2014:16). Although handbags occupy a particular place in the lives of many women, including Winnie, her bag does not contain any products relating to menstruation or sexual activity; *her* bag and her parasol have "collapsed" into its womb like interior, identifying her instead as a "useless old bag", who desperately clings on to her daily routines as she "does" her femininity in this barren landscape. The play therefore demonstrates that the barren landscape Winnie resides in represents her barren post-reproductive body, with little left than to outwardly maintain her dignity in a culture who has relegated her to the scrapheap.

At just fifty years old, Winnie is already subject to what Susan Sontag, writer and activist, referred to as "a double standard for ageing" where women experience "most brutally" the demise of their sexual attractiveness to men as they age (Sontag 1972:20). Sontag notes how when a couple who divorce when the woman is in her forties or fifties, her husband, who may be older again than his wife, has a good chance of re-marrying, probably to a younger woman (Beckett describes Willie as "*a man of about sixty*"). The divorced woman, on the other hand, is less likely to re-marry and may have to settle for a man much older than herself. Sontag sums up this issue when she depressingly concludes that "for most women, ageing means *a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification*" (Sontag 1972: 20). I suggest that Winnie's predicament is an analogy of this humiliating process, as she gradually moves from being buried in the earth up to her waist and finally up to her neck. McMullan argues that what foregrounds Winnie's "performance of femininity is the contrast between her gendered reproduction of middle-class *manners* or *habitus* (suggested by details of costume, behaviour, speech and accent), and the desert or wasteland indicated on stage: no one has passed this way for some time" (McMullan 2010:53). She is also acutely aware of her own restricted embodiment, which remains alert to sensory experiences, when she tells the audience that there is "something gnawing at me; "holding up wearing the arm"; [c]rick in my neck admiring you" (Beckett 2006:148). As her body is cut in two by the mud mound, most of it exists only in her own memory and the audience's memory. Winnie asserts herself through her voice and her powerful immovable image on the stage.

I argue that Beckett is demonstrating how society treats older women, by placing her in the earth, traditionally linking the female with "Mother Earth", but subverting it here into a negative stereotype of older woman as only fit for the scrap heap, where "nothing grows", pointing to her post-reproductive womb (Beckett 2006:152). As McMullan puts it, "Winnie's body is fractured spatially, as well as temporally, as the 'low mound' of 'scorched grass' acts as a substitute body, associating her post-reproductive womb […] with dysfunctional nature" (McMullan 2010:55). When Winnie muses, "What a blessing nothing grows, imagine if all this stuff were to start growing", there is an irony to her comments, as she yearns for the younger version of herself, the sexually desirable, lovable Winnie. Her post-reproductive barren body mirrors the barren landscape that she is being consumed by, as she is finally "up to her neck" in the mud of a mid-life crisis. The play is therefore staging this very crisis and providing a nuanced portrait of the dilemma facing women when caught on this axis. Later, in *Not I* (1972), we see the ageing female reduced to its most abject form: a spewing mouth, made later via television into an image highly suggestive of a vagina. This reduction of woman to one mouth, "the body as mouth", where mouth collapses into vagina, is a highly sexualised image. For the post-menopausal Mouth, aged seventy, her spirit and intellectual life is blatantly reduced, on the one hand, to a sex organ, an abject image of an older woman, and on the other hand, to the sexual act, which she is forbidden to desire or partake in, as she is "way past it".

Abject Ageing in *Not I*

> … how she had lived … lived on and on … guilty or not … on and on … to be sixty … something she- … what? … seventy? … good God! … on and on to be seventy … something she didn't know herself. (Samuel Beckett, *Not I*)

Not I stages the most famous of Beckett's female characters: a mouth. Mouth is, as Ben-Zvi notes, "the most searing gender image of all [. . .], a gushing orifice spewing the words of her fragmented life, attempting to talk herself into being" (BenZvi 1990: xii). Originally written for the theatre in 1972, the stage is set in darkness except for a mouth, "*faintly lit from close up and below*" with the "*rest of face in shadow*", set about eight feet high above stage level (Beckett 2006:376).[48] The rest of the actor's body is concealed from the audience. Downstage, on the left is the Auditor, a shadowy figure of undetermined gender facing Mouth and who moves slowly on four occasions only during the monologue, raising and lowering the arms "in a gesture of helpless compassion" (Beckett 2006:375). Over the course of about fifteen minutes and at breakneck speed, Mouth pours out a story of birth, loneliness, marginalisation, ageing, fear and loss. *Not I* has produced radical, irreconcilable feminist and critical responses: Julia Kristeva, for whom the work exists purely as text, far removed from its original medium for the theatre, links the persona of Mouth with the narrator of Beckett's earlier short story "First Love", arguing that both identify with the order of the Father, the symbolic order of language (Kristeva 1980:148-158). Peter Gidal, approaching *Not I* as a play, its original medium, argues that Mouth represents a resistance and subversion to the patriarchal order, by birthing the voice of feminine sexuality. Gidal argues that Mouth's speech represents "anti-patriarchal/anticapitalist language and speech production", as Mouth's words displaces traditional male discourse, making Mouth's endeavours the central experience of all, subverting the audience's desire for art to be coherent (Gidal 1986:114). Ann Wilson, in a psychoanalytic framework, argues that Mouth is "the figure of a woman written in a scene over determined by the Order of the Father [. . .] marked by absence – an absence which is the absence of the phallus" (Wilson 1990:199). In Wilson's analysis, Mouth is both castrated and castrating, and cannot be construed as feminist. While I agree with Gidal's analysis that the play births the voice of feminine sexuality, he fails to consider the role of ageing sexuality in this birthing. Indeed, none of the standard readings of the play consider the possibility that the play is also birthing the voice of the experience of a marginalised woman.

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[48] The play premiered at the 'Samuel Beckett Festival' in New York on 22 November 1972, directed by Alan Schneider, starring Jessica Tandy as Mouth and Henderson Forsythe as Auditor. It premiered in London at the Royal Court on 16 January 1973, directed by Anthony Page, starring Billie Whitelaw as Mouth and Brian Miller as Auditor. Samuel Beckett was in attendance.

The play is unique in Beckett's canon, then, in that it can be analysed in a variety of forms: as a piece of theatre, as text, and as television film.[49] My analysis is focused on the televised version and the text because by reading through the lens of Age Studies, the televised version reveals the problematic reduction, not just of the feminine, but in particular of the ageing feminine to a mouth, both speech organ and sex organ. On the one hand, any consideration of older women reduced to a "mouth-body" is an abject notion, but textually, Beckett is also giving a voice to the experience of marginalisation. I argue that despite the complexities of this reading, Mouth finally represents a dramatization of the silencing of older women's voices and their desires, a silencing or speaking into a darkness which remains an under researched topic of cultural studies. In the televised version, the close-up of Whitelaw's mouth, which blatantly draws attention to her saliva, which cannot be contained, gathering on the corners of her lower lip, is a profoundly abject image. As Linda Ben-Zvi notes, in this version, there is less emphasis on the monologue itself and its disjointed narrative "than on the physical activity of speech: lips, teeth, saliva, tongue – the physical apparatus of speech-making captured by the mechanical apparatus of the television camera" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:103).

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[49] *Not I* was performed in Battersea Arts Centre (28 Feb – 17 March 2018) by Jess Thom, an actor with Tourettes, a condition where movements and noises are uncontrollable (Thom uncontrollably uses the word "biscuit"). This production, "Touretteshero's Not I" explores neurodiversity and considers who can perform and who gets the final say, aligning Beckett's work with disability studies, and

This is a disturbing image: the sexual overtones of Whitelaw's uncontained saliva are obvious: Mouth is aroused and this visual sign challenges the taboo of older women as sexually desiring subjects. In the text, Beckett gives a shape and voice to the desire of an older marginalised woman, which is uncomfortably positioned in our culture. It is clear from this that as Beckett continued to put older characters centre stage in his drama, his treatment of gender and sexuality became more sympathetic.

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reimagining the play for further exciting analyses. In another recent interpretation of the play, theatre director Sara Jane Scaife's "Beckett in the City", which had a recent sell-out run in New York, was powerfully performed by Brid Ni Neachtain, aged sixty. Jonathan Kalb describes Ni Neachtain's performance as distinguished by its "pacing. She doesn't speak at the breakneck speed actors usually adopt in this role but rather at a sober conversational clip, as if struggling to articulate a thought. [. . .] She's rather a whole, adult woman striving to communicate through obscure impediments". Read full blog: https://www.jonathankalb.com/single-post/2017/10/01/Beckett-in-the-City. Scaife's work is analysed in Chapter Four.

In the text of *Not I* the experience of older female marginalisation and the cultural invisibility of ageing women is represented. Beckett explains this as one of his key inspirations for the work:

> I knew that woman in Ireland. I knew who she was – not 'she' specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard 'her' saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it. (Knowlson 2006:590)

Although not the initial inspiration for the play, it was the main one when it came to writing it.[50] Mouth describes herself as an "old hag already" […] walking all her days … day after day [. . .] drifting around …" (Beckett 2006:380). As Dina Sherzer notes, through Mouth's words, "Beckett displays a keen sense of what stigma, difference, and rejection mean" (Sherzer 1990:203). Both the old hag that Beckett described, and Mouth are "coming up to seventy … wandering in a field … looking aimlessly for cowslips" (Beckett 2006:376). Mouth's marginality is revealed in her daily interactions with others, describing how

> practically speechless … all her days ... how she survived! … even shopping … out shopping … busy shopping centre … supermart … just hand in the list … with the bag … old black shopping bag … then stand there waiting … any length of time … middle of the throng … motionless … staring into space … mouth half open as usual … till it was back in her hand … the bag back in her hand … then pay and go … not so much as goodbye … how she survived! (Becket 2006:379)

These are painful experiences, along with that time Mouth was in court, when she was told to "stand up woman … speak up woman" but she "stood there staring into space … mouth half open as usual … waiting to be led away … glad of the hand on her arm …" (Beckett 2006:381). However, this cultural silencing is dramatised when Mouth is given a steady stream of words as Mouth's retort to the "staring into space" is constructed as eventually refusing to remain silent, when she declares that, despite being deprived of "love of any kind", "suddenly she felt ... her lips moving … imagine! … her lips moving" (Beckett 2006:379). This is the key moment in the text when Mouth begins the vocalisation of her marginalised identity. Mouth is marked by absence both on television and in the text, absence being understood as lack in psychoanalytic terms. Mouth also refers to herself as "whole body like gone", suggesting that women lose their sexual desire and/or desirability (even identity in a patriarchal culture that values women as body and not as mind/spirit) as they age (Beckett 2006:381). This idea of older women as sexually desiring subjects is abject: as British writer Sarah Maitland writes: "[t]o acknowledge and address the sexual desire of women who can no longer bear children is to expose the whole structure; it is better to act as though they did not desire, and if they do, it is peculiar, tasteless and neurotic" (qtd. in Segal 97). Mouth's saliva clinging to her lips, with all its sexual connotations is fascinating and repulsive in equal measure. Mouth on screen is the most blatant image of all the plays under discussion in this chapter with which to confront the idea of older women and their sexual desires.

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[50] Knowlson writes that Beckett's initial inspiration for the play occurred on a visit to Malta in 1971, where he viewed the Caravaggio painting, the "Beheading of St. John the Baptist"; Beckett later wrote that the "image of *Not I* (was) in part suggested" by the painting. A second inspiration occurred on a holiday to Morocco in

In 1975, Beckett agreed to do a televised version of the play for the BBC, starring Billie Whitelaw, who also famously performed the staged version.[63] Whitelaw was much younger than the seventy-year-old woman of the text, demonstrating that despite the obvious theme of ageing in *Not I*, longstanding theatrical conventions that make older women invisible, consistently cast younger actors to play the roles of older characters, thereby reifying stereotypical visions of the aged as weak and vulnerable, unable to represent themselves, further underlying the invisibility of older bodies invisible on stage. I also acknowledge that both the staged version and the televised version reveal just part of an ageing female body. I

February 1972, when Beckett observed a woman covered in a djellaba, which provided the idea for the Auditor, originally written in the text, but subsequently dropped by Beckett in later theatre performances.

[63] Whitelaw performed the British premiere of *Not I* on 16 January 1973 at the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Beckett.

will be dealing with this issue in detail in Chapter Four, when I move from analysing Beckett's work from "the page" to "the stage", looking at the staging of age in three of his late plays. The context between *Not I* on stage and on screen is marked: the effect of Mouth is different "in" television than "on" stage, as Gidal points out (Gidal 1986:94). On stage, Mouth is placed at a distance from the audience, whereas on television, it is filmed in close-up, filling the entire screen and closely resembling a vagina. As James Knowlson notes, although Beckett did not intend this reaction, he "displayed no trace of displeasure as, watching the BBC television version, he realized that Mouth had the appearance of a large gaping, vagina" (Knowlson and Pilling 1979:200). Wilson notes that Beckett reportedly believed that the play was "more fully realized" on television, presumably because technology allowed for the rest of the (assumed) body to be fully erased, bar the lips (Wilson 1990:195). In the theatre, the actor who portrays Mouth's suffering of being who is trying to voice self, while vehemently refusing to "relinquish third person", is shifted in the television film; Mouth is no longer a vulnerable organ of speech suffering in front of the audience (Beckett 2006:375). On video, the analogy of Mouth's lips as labia, organ of sex, is difficult to avoid, as critics have widely noted and as Beckett himself acknowledged. Abjection, and particularly abjection and the feminine is the subject of much of Kristeva's work and a useful lens with which to consider what this startling image on screen can represent.

Abjection and the Feminine

James Knowlson and John Pilling suggest that Mouth's outpourings are excremental; in *Frescoes of the Skull*, they argue that in the text "the wild stream of words is expressly linked by Mouth with excremental discharge, "nearest lavatory … start pouring it out … steady mad stuff"" (Knowlson and Pilling 1979:200). Knowlson and Pilling's covering over of Mouth as labia by Mouth as anus, is reflective of the same "cover-up" of the vagina by the anus in queer studies generally. In this reading, which is emblematic of the erotics of language, there is no allowance for a discussion of the inscription of ageing female sexuality which necessarily accompanies such a recognition. For Kristeva, the link between the female body and excrement is considered in her theory of abjection. Kristeva argues that abjection is that which disgusts us as it exists on the borders that threaten the construction of our identities. In order to establish the self, I must "expel *myself,* I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (Kristeva 1982:3). In Kristeva's reformulation of Lacan, defilement is that which is "jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*'" (Kristeva 1982:65). Filth is that which relates to a boundary and represents the object which is ejected to the margins. Abjection is a "universal phenomenon", which takes the form of "defilement, food, taboo, and sin" (Kristeva 1982:68). Kristeva draws heavily on the fundamental work of British Anthropologist Mary Douglas' seminal study *Purity and Danger* (1980), on defilement in primitive cultures. Matter which emits from the orifices of the body is, as Douglas claims, "marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body" (Douglas 1980:122). For Kristeva, spittle, in the case of Mouth, represents the abject, that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982:4). The association of the feminine with abjection and disorder is analogous with Freud's theory that the sexual life of a girl child is so obscure and faded with time that one would have to dig deep into the recesses of civilisation to gain any insight into woman's sexuality, the "Dark Continent" (Freud 2001:212). Mouth's spewing speech, with saliva sticking to her mouth, analogous with female orgasm, very visible on screen, forms part of the marginal "stuff" that traverses the boundary of the body, thus disturbing "identity, system, order".

For Kristeva, corporeal waste such as menstrual blood and excrement represent the two main aspects of the abject. Excrement and its associated elements of infection, disease, decay and death represent the threat to identity that comes from outside; on the other hand, menstrual blood represents the social or sexual threat that comes from within. Blood and excrement originate, according to Kristeva, "from the *maternal* and/or the feminine, of which the maternal is the real support" (Kristeva 1982:71). Kristeva links both defilements by suggesting that menstrual blood clearly signifies sexual difference, whereas excrement can be traced to the anal penis with which, as Kristeva writes, "infantile imagination provides the feminine sex and that […] maternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the essentially oral frustrations, as sphincteral training" (Kristeva 1982:71). This goes some way to explaining how Mouth's outpouring can be considered excremental. These defilements threaten our autonomy and self-identity; they represent the impossibility of a clean or proper body. They demonstrate the limits of bodily subjectivity; they are necessary but embarrassing realities. As Kristeva argues: "These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly, and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. [. . .] such waste drops so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit" (Kristeva 1982:3). Mouth, aware of her outpourings, laced with spittle, describes herself as an "old hag already", as she struggles to "make some sense of it … [. . .] just the mouth" (Beckett 2006:380-1). The spewing out of her speech in a blatant genital display reduces Mouth to the gaze of the camera into the very object whose tale she tells. As Mouth rushes to the "nearest lavatory", in her "sudden urge to [. . .] tell" her story, a slippage occurs between the mouth and anus and female speech and bodily waste (Beckett 2006:382). In my reading of Mouth as sex organ, I argue that this old hag also has a guilty secret: her sexuality. In the birthing of her sexuality, the moment in the play when Mouth's lips start moving is the moment to consider the possibility of speech, of sensual pleasure and of masturbation. The multiplicity of female sexuality, as theorised by Irigaray, cannot be accounted for in patriarchal discourse and is therefore a disruption to order and borders. This is where Beckett's play most radically departs from his early "caustic" representations of women. At this threshold, the work unravels the psychic borderlands that woman is asked to occupy by the culture at large.

Ageing and Desire

In the essay "When Our Lips Speak Together", which celebrates lesbian love, Irigaray writes that lesbians are "luminous. Neither one nor two […] our two lips cannot separate to let just *one* word pass" (Irigaray 1985:208). Irigaray eloquently writes about same sex desire where as I argue above, regardless of age or age differences, women "never separate simply: *a single word* cannot be pronounced, produced, uttered by our mouths. Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth" (Irigaray 1985:209). The moment in *Not I* where Mouth recalls that "suddenly she felt … her lips moving … imagine! … her lips moving", is precisely the moment in the text when, as Wilson notes, the play "opens itself to the inscription of the feminine, for the lips moving allows the possibility of pleasure, [and] the sensuality of speech" (Wilson 1990:197). In this moment, Mouth resists the culturally ascribed asexuality of ageing femininity.

Irigaray seeks new ways of speaking about relationship between women, whether it be lesbian relationships or mother/daughter relationships. She argues that this is essential if women are to create a new identity for themselves within the symbolic order as outlined by Lacan's psychoanalytic model. Irigaray challenges the lacanian notion that women represent only lack: "we are not lack, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude fulfilment from the other. By our lips we are women" (Irigaray 1985:210). Within a masculine structure of desire lies the impossibility of desire being fully sated: Mouth, as organ of multiplicity, celebrates a different type of desire, that of self-touching and self-pleasure which cannot be accounted for in patriarchal discourses of sexuality. As a number of key architects of the second wave of the women's movement have themselves moved into the next stages of their lives, they are turning their analytical eyes to ageing and gender, recognising that much of the activism and politics of second wave feminism focused on the question of desire in relation to reproductive rights and public life. A different feminist focus is needed to rethink desire in an age where preventing pregnancy is no longer an issue and where a woman's desire is culturally invisibilised and written off, seeing that she no longer occupies a body that can reproduce. This is the radical intervention issued by *Not I*.

Re-thinking this question of desire, Segal, in *Out of Time* (2013), and in her essay "Forever Young: Medusa's Curse and the Discourses of Ageing" (2007), addresses the sexual politics of ageing, where she considers the failure of feminists, including her younger self, to develop a discourse of ageing, particularly in relation to sexual relationships. Noting the slogans of the 1970s which opposed male-centred predatory understandings of straight sex, which were not aimed at (useless) older women, she asks: "[w]hat slogans have we to address the situation of the older woman? She who will not so much be press-ganged into servicing men's sexual needs, but rather, just as coercively, will be rendered sexually invisible?" (Segal 2007:43). In a slightly defeatist attitude, Segal herself suggests that for those older women who are not experiencing a satisfying sexual relationship, it may be easier to take Germaine Greer's advice, give up the struggle and embrace the slogan that "to be unwanted is to be free" (Greer 1991:2-4). Segal, who is nevertheless sceptical of Greer's advice, finds more positive avenues for older women's sexuality in the lives and literature of lesbians, where sexual desire and age barriers seem far less important, and where the double standard of ageing which relegates women sexually undesirable long before men is irrelevant.

She notes that the double standards that feminists rallied against in the 1960s and 1970s have survived "in the disparities appearing in the sexual options of men and women as they age" (Segal 2007:43). In answering the question she poses, "How shall we theorize it? The sudden brakes on love" she references Philip Roth, whose novel *The Dying Animal* problematically suggested that when a woman gives herself intimately to a much older man, this "provides [her] with the authority of a kind she cannot get in a sexual arrangement with a younger man […] both the pleasures of submission and the pleasures of mastery" (Segal 2007:43). Women have generally been encouraged to look for a father figure in relationships, to "eroticise" the father figure, while still maintaining their "femininity" (Segal 2007:47). Men, in contrast are encouraged to flee the mother figure, as we have seen in the first two chapters where Beckett's characters are in constant flight to and from the feminine, to achieve masculinity.

Jeanette King, in *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism* (2013) argues that older women, even when rich and powerful, lack the parallel sexual allure of older men because "male fears of the engulfing mother are exacerbated with ageing" (King 2013:147). Although relationships between older women and younger men subvert patriarchal power structures, the older woman must be demonised and ridiculed, and the relationship must ultimately fail, a theme which regularly plays out in the media.[51] The trauma of ageing for women in a society that prematurely writes them off, a position such as represented by Mouth, remains largely unaddressed by cultural theorists who otherwise seek to empower those in marginal positions. Greer clearly takes the view that desire only relates to being desired by others, especially by men, thereby implying that self-worth for older women comes from outside desire; Mouth firmly resists her call to embrace the asexuality of ageing. All of this assumes that women are only able to sexually respond to desire when they are themselves desired. But, as Irigaray notes, there are many other sexual and sensual avenues available that patriarchy does not consider, as older women writers are now bringing into visibility.

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[51] A classic example of this demonization by the media was the frenzied backlash against the recently elected French President, Emmanuel Macron, aged 39 and his wife Brigitte, aged 64 years of age. In a newspaper article, under the title "Criticism of age gap between Emmanuel and Brigitte Macron is 'sexist' and 'ageist'", Brigitte's daughter found it "outrageous" that the 24-year age gap between the couple had come under such media scrutiny. https://www.independent.ie/world-news/europe/criticism-of-age-gap-betweenemmanueland-brigitte-macron-is-sexist-and-ageist-her-daughter-has-claimed-35716784.html

In contrast to some of the other depictions of femininity in both his early and late work, and in *Not I* especially, Beckett appears to have luxuriously explored the abjectness and possibility for self-determining pleasure of the feminine, and specifically ageing femininity, in direct opposition to the culture at large, which ceases to see women as sexual once their reproductive usefulness is over. In his portrayal of ageing femininity in *Not I,* then, Beckett gives voice to the perils of ageing and desire, where the invisibility of older women remain a challenge in contemporary culture. Mouth represents, in the most abject form, a resistance to the experience of ageing and an arresting image in which to consider the dissident desire of older women in culture who are deprived of sexual intimacy. Both Mouth's words in the text and the sensuality of the mouth in the televised version, which is represented by the arresting and abject image, give vent to the desire of the marginalised (old female) identity that Mouth represents. As we move to the next stage of Beckett's theatre, the ageing women become much more ghost-like, as they near towards the end of life.

"Fuck Life": Dependency, Decrepitude and Fourth Age in *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*

> Monotone, without colour, very distant. You are composing. It is not a story, but an improvisation. You are looking for the words, you correct yourself constantly … at the end it can't go any farther. It is just at an end. (Samuel Beckett in rehearsal, *Footfalls*)
> There was father. That grey voice. There mother. That other. (Samuel Beckett *A Piece of Monologue*)

Beckett's plays *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* centre on the experience of "old age" and its new imaginary, the "Fourth Age" of the life cycle. In gerontology research, new ageing is represented as active, healthy or successful ageing, thereby relegating "old" old age as a period of inactive, unhealthy and unsuccessful ageing. There is so much emphasis on positive ageing that "old" old age gets relegated to the shadows, operating silently behind the scenes, in hospitals, nursing homes and in care-giving environments. Both plays feature women who are at this shadowy stage of life, one dependent on her ageing care-giving daughter, and the other alone in a rocking-chair, nearing death. Although old age affects both men and women, deep "old" age predominantly affects women. Julia Twigg notes that one of the trademarks of emerging feminist gerontology is its strong engagement with personal experiences and feelings of the authors as they try to make sense of their own and other's lives as they get older.[52] As I have already noted, these writers explore the oppression of age and ageing as they themselves reach Third Age, which is regarded as being between the ages of fifty and seventy-five; however, regarding the next stage of the life cycle, Fourth Age, gender is very relevant to the issue of gerontology because, as Twigg argues:

> Deep old age is predominantly female. Most of the sex differential in old age studies relates to this stage, partly the product of women's greater longevity, and partly their tendency to suffer more from disability and thus to spend longer in the Fourth Age of infirmity. Issues concerning the body in the Fourth Age are thus gendered, but in an implicit way. Part at least of the negative meanings of deep old age relate to this. Misogynistic discourses have long focused on the bodies of women, and these feelings are extended and amplified in relation to old women. The body in old age thus comes to carry an additional freight of negative meaning. (Twigg 2004:65)

Twigg's perceptive reading of deep old age as mostly affecting women and the extended misogyny that accompanies it is timely, as most studies on women and ageing in social gerontology tend to focus on Third Age. As far back as 1972, Susan Sontag was aware of the gendered nature of old age, when she wrote that "[g]rowing old is mainly an ordeal of the imagination – a moral disease, a social pathology – intrinsic to which is that it affects women much more than men" (Sontag 1972:37). As *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* feature the women that Twigg discusses, my analysis will consider how the female body in old age staged in each play carries that "additional freight of negative meaning".

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[52] Second wave feminists now writing about ageing include Susan Bartky, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Margaret Gullette and Kathleen Woodward.

While the body is the major theme of gerontology, it is also highly problematic. There has been much research on the social construction of ageing, which is entrenched in societal structures. Age cannot simply be concerned with biology alone; age and ageing are therefore deeply social. Writing about the ageing body is a central concern for gerontology but it is crucial to avoid essentialism and the dominance of biomedical or reductionist approaches that "claim to present the 'truths of ageing' in terms of its bodily basis" (Twigg 2004:70). According to Twigg, we need to consider the intricacies and plurality of the social construction of the ageing body and acknowledge the ways in which the body and bodily experiences are formed in and through discourses. Some of the most insightful commentaries have developed from feminist writings on the ageing female body. Twigg argues that: "Until now, a focus on the body in relation to older people has been seen as an implicitly oppressive one […]. Feminist and cultural critics in challenging this have regained important territory for social gerontology, and in ways that have deepened our understanding of the experience of old age" (Twigg 2004:71). The analysis in this chapter so far has challenged the negative stereotypes of middlepause women in their Third Age. Most of the feminist literature referred to mostly deals with Third Age, leaving the Fourth Age still relatively under-researched. Twigg argues that more work needs to be undertaken into the challenging territory of deep old age, Fourth Age, which remains "essentially Other" (Twigg 2004:71).[53] As the women of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* are in deep old age, a phase of life that is considered a period of dependency, decrepitude and death, the inclusion of them in my analysis adds to the work needed to address the deeply gendered aspect of Fourth Age.

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[53] Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, social theorists of ageing and old age have published extensively on the social and historical aspects of ageing and old age. For an in-depth analysis of Fourth Age, see their recent study *Rethinking Old Age: Theorising the Fourth Age*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

As much of Beckett's late theatre focuses on older marginalised female subjects attempting to account for themselves, by the time we get to *Footfalls* we are presented with ghostly figures who, as Beckett himself said are "not quite there", yet "not entirely gone either" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:105-6). The play opens with the ghost-like figure of May, prematurely aged with "*dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing*" over unseen feet, and a woman's (recorded) voice (V) "*from dark upstage*" (Beckett 2006:399). May is confined by her wrap but also by her restricted pacing on a narrow board nailed down on the stage. This relentless and ubiquitous action of walking is key to the play; Beckett advised that "if the play is full of repetitions, then it is because of these life-long stretches of walking. That is the centre of the play. Everything else is secondary" (Knowlson and Pilling 1979:221). In fact, Beckett often referred to *Footfalls* as his "pacing" play (Knowlson 1997:614). *Footfalls* and the later *Rockaby* specifically feature complex mother/daughter relationships, and for my purposes, relationships between ageing women.

Although it is considered short for a play, running for just under thirty minutes, *Footfalls* contains four distinct movements marked by blackouts, a series of fainter chimes and a succession of dimmer lights. In the first three movements, May paces back and forth on the narrow board, her steps reducing as the lights become dimmer and the chimes fainter. The dialogue dramatizes an intense mother and daughter relationship. In the first movement, May, in her forties, who is prematurely aged, dialogues with the voice of her mother V, looking after her physical and spiritual needs; V's voice is recorded throughout the play and therefore unseen by the audience. In the second movement, a monologue by the invisible V recounts the genesis of May's pacing which began as a young child. The third movement, a monologue by May, is itself divided into three parts: Sequel, Semblance and a scene involving a Mrs. Winter and her daughter Amy, an anagram of May. In this movement, May is unable to be fully present, when she says, "I was not there" (Beckett 2006:403). Although V's voice is silent in the third movement, it forms part of May's monologue, when she recounts the episode between her fictional shadow Amy, who is described as "a most strange girl […] … dreadfully un-…" and Mrs. Winter (Beckett 2006:402). Amy tells the audience how her mother, towards the ending of the play, asks Amy: "Will you never have done … revolving it all?" (Beckett 2006:403). May is unable to differentiate or split herself from her mother, yet as Anna McMullan notes, "she also appropriates her mother's voice in order to reproduce and witness the visual, vocal and aural traces of her existence: 'I mean, Mother, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall'" (McMullan 2010:120). May constantly needs her mother to support the idea that she actually exists. This represents the cultural invisibility that May, (and earlier Maddy) who is just in her forties, but already prematurely aged with her "*dishevelled grey hair"* falls foul of.

This is another example of a middlepause woman who is culturally invisible, except to V, who is now at the dependency stage of deep old age, therefore relying on May to look after her physical needs. Yet the fourth movement is a brief ten seconds long, where there is "*no trace of* May" (Beckett 2006:403). These fragments of utterances by May and V, describing experiences of a vague past, morph over the course of the short performance with the images and sounds experienced by the audience, such as the pacing, the chiming and the dramatic lighting, in what Ruby Cohn refers to as the "theatereality" of Beckett's drama, where the fictional place of the text and the actual space of the stage seem to meet (Cohn 1980:28). Here, the relative darkness of Third and Fourth Age are dramatized. Cohn argues that Beckett has woven "tapestry" from the "tangle of tatters" of his earlier portraits of ageing women, such as Nell, Maddy and Winnie, who all feature in my analysis also (Cohn 1992:170). Like these women, May and V observe their own enclosed world sparingly but "precisely" and like Mouth, they often speak in "the third person - not I" (Cohn 1992:170). The audience are invited to witness the mother-daughter dyad of May, V, Mrs. Winter and Amy in three separate monologues which mirror each other and where the boundaries of "self and other, interior and exterior, are unclear" (McMullan 2010:120). The play centres on the relationship between mother and daughter, voice and body, where, because V is unseen to the audience, there is uncertainty as to whether the dialogue is in May's head or in her memory. The audience bear witness to these sequels and semblances which appear to be there, yet not there, as the ghostlike May tries to make sense of herself, echoing that of Mouth's earlier predicament.

The first movement begins with May attending to her mother's medical needs, when she asks her "would you like me to inject you again? … Straighten your pillows? Change your drawsheet?"; all words familiar to anyone who has ever cared for an older person (Beckett 2006:400). In this narrative of decline, there is a biblical resonance to the invisible V's suffering who is in her fourth age and nearing death, when she refuses May's offer to "dress your sores? … Sponge you down? … Moisten your poor lips? … Pray with you? … For you?" (Beckett 2006:400). May's obvious role as her mother's carer, coupled with the analogy of the care of Jesus' body at the crucifixion, indicates that V has come to the end of her life, an uneventful one for both her and May. Although it is unclear what is meant by Mrs. Winters plea to Amy, "will you never have done … revolving it all", ("It All" was in fact Beckett's initial name for the play), but in terms of the frameworks I utilise here, it can productively be read as relating to the ambiguity surrounding May's birth, personified by her relentless pacing. May is so unsure of her own existence that she constantly seeks reassurance of it from her mother V, who does not appear in the play but whose voice is heard "*from dark upstage*": "what age am I now?", asks May (Beckett 2006:399;400). May, never having had a proper existence, cannot find a way to properly end it. We are told that she is in her forties, or third age, while V is shocked to learn that she is almost ninety, or Fourth Age. As she paces relentlessly up and down a specific number of steps, as per Beckett's explicit stage instructions, her existential trauma continues as she "must hear the feet, however faint they fall […] the motion alone is not enough" (Beckett 2006:401). May's uncertainty around her existence, not only her cultural existence as a middlepause woman, began long before that, beginning at the curious circumstances of her birth.

May does not appear to have been born: she just "began" (Beckett 2006:401). In the second movement, we discover that while "other girls of her age" were playing lacrosse, May began her relentless pacing at home, demanding to hear her own steps, "however faint they fall" (Beckett 2006:401). The ambiguity around her birth and the faintness of her steps suggests that May is still longing for the muffled space of the womb, or, perhaps, is still there. Beckett changed the number of steps from seven to nine, which represents the term of gestation. May paces nine steps to the right and left, as per Beckett's explicit stage instructions: *starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R* (Beckett 2006:399). She appears to be enveloped in her mother, V's, voice, again suggesting a refusal of separation from the mother. This very clear and emphasised ambiguity about birth can be read as referring directly to an experience that Beckett had when he was undergoing psychoanalysis with Bion in London in the 1930s. In 1935, Beckett attended a lecture by the founder of Analytical Psychology, Carl Jung at the Tavistock Clinic in London. In this lecture, Jung referenced a case of a young girl whom he had difficulty in treating. She girl died shortly after and Jung famously declared that the problem was that she had "never really been born" (Knowlson 1996:616). Beckett's reference to Jung in *Footfalls* can be confirmed by his remark to actor Charlotte Joeres that May "hasn't been born. She just began. It began. There is a difference. She was never born" (qtd. in Asmus 1977:84). Beckett was intrigued by this notion and utilised it elsewhere in his work; in *All That Fall,* Maddy recounts a story told by a mind doctor, at a lecture she attended about "a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. […] The trouble with her was she had never really been born!" (Beckett 2006:195/6). As

Knowlson argues, May is “Beckett’s own poignant recreation of the girl who had never really been born, isolated and permanently absent, distant and totally encapsulated within herself” (Knowlson 1996:616).

In Beckett’s presentation of her as prematurely ageing, May’s only relationship is to her mother, or the voice of V, which is inside us all. We are all born, regardless of gender, from our mothers and we all have the potential to become mothers, or to mother. As Irigaray writes, “we must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origins of our culture. We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us” (Whitford 1991:43). All women are mothers in the symbolic order of language, as they are positioned as objects rather than subjects. In *Footfalls,* as both women are post-reproductive, and inhabit a co-dependent closeted world, the question of non-differentiation between women arises in a dark setting. In the fourth movement/Fourth Age, a bare ten seconds long, there is “*no trace of May*” (Beckett 2006:403). The ghostly May disappears with no explanation, invisible in culture, and never really having been born, echoing my view and that of Hilary Mantel’s that women over the age of fifty are “seen” as the invisible generation. Throughout the play, the ninety-year old V, in deep old age, is only represented by her recorded voice, her decrepit and dependent body too abject and useless to be physically present on stage. The play gives shape and form to how culture treats the old in society, while sympathetically portraying the mutually dependent relationship between May and V, who are both culturally invisible in Third and Fourth Age/movement.

Textual readings of the late drama tend to be framed in the psychoanalytic theories of the French feminists, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Kristeva’s work has been useful to my argument in Chapter Two when I analysed the role of the mother figure in

Beckett's prose works. The mother figure penetrates deeply into Beckett's entire *oeuvre* and is centre stage in *Footfalls*. As we have seen earlier, in Kristeva's formulation, the semiotic is located in the pre-verbal moment of bonding between mother and child, where the child is totally dependent on the maternal body, where its drives and rhythms are unconsciously absorbed. In order to enter the symbolic and enter the realm of language and subjectivity, the child must separate from the mother. *Footfalls* stages a crisis in feminist psychoanalytic theory as the play, while celebrating maternal origin and mother/daughter relationships, May cannot fully separate from the mother and enter subjectivity. In Elin Diamond's psychoanalytic reading, which focuses on the text and language, the intense mother-daughter relationship of *Footfalls* is described as a maternal rhythm which has "atrophied into a menopausal parody of the death drive, a linear repetitive dance by the daughter" (Diamond 2004:55). In her essay "Feminist Readings of Beckett", she argues that it is difficult to imagine any "metaphorical milk" flowing between the aged mother and ageing daughter (Diamond 2004:55). In this second movement, V instructs the audience to look at May: "But let us watch her move, in silence. [M *paces. Towards end of second length.*] Watch how feat she wheels. [M *turns, paces. Synchronous with steps third length.*] Seven, eight, nine, wheel" (Beckett 2006:401). There is an echo and repetition of both narratives, a deliberate orchestration by Beckett who explained that May's story should be a parallel of V's: "The daughter only knows the voice of the mother", having been isolated all her uneventful life (qtd. in Ackerley and Gontarski 2006:201).

As in his prose, there is a link between motherhood and Beckett's revulsion towards it, as it is the mother, in this case, V, who simultaneously gives life and death. The narratives of both mother and daughter overlap and intertwine, echoing each other. The Mother's 'Not enough' should sound exactly like the 'Not there?' of Mrs. Winter in Amy's story" (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004:201). May's pacing, then, which is key in the play, is the link between motherhood and the revulsion towards it, as birth and death are closely linked to the mother who is coming to the end of her own life. The most famous line in Beckett's work which links birth and death closely is to be found in his play *Waiting for Godot*, when the character Pozzo declares: "One day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second" (Beckett 2006:83). At ninety years old, V, with her absent decrepit and dependant body, is close to death but kept alive by the ministrations of May.

Diamond draws on Irigaray's essay 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other', arguing that May's inability to be born, and her difficulty with improvising any narrative that separates herself from her engulfing mother, is not just a persistent trope in Beckett's prose but also a "brilliant theatrical metaphor of the paralysis of woman/mother's place in language" (Diamond 2004:57). This is a very important framing of the play and recuperates it powerfully for feminist purposes. By dramatising the psychic fusion that is enforced upon women by a patriarchal system that afford women only "the place of the mother", the play can be understood as potentially highlighting the limits and oppressions of patriarchy, rather than simply reinforcing them. Also, Beckett gives voice to the plight of these women, in their uneventful lives, highlighting the role than often falls to women when looking after ageing relatives, again reinforcing the gendered aspect of care-giving in society. Death is in the air in this play; when it comes to inviting us to face our fear of death, nowhere is this more challenging than in *Rockaby*; here, Beckett stages the ultimate cul-de-sac of Fourth Age, placing his female character in a rocking-chair, which can be read as the cradle from birth to death, or the awaiting coffin. Either way, there is no way out.

“Fuck Life”

Given its subject matter, and its further exploration of the Fourth Age, *Rockaby* could be read as Act II or the sequel to *Footfalls*: as in the latter, we are presented with a single character, W, in a rocking-chair, and we hear the recorded voice of a woman, V, from some invisible source. The text stipulates that the recorded voice is that of W. From Beckett’s instructions, we can gauge that W is “prematurely old. Unkempt grey hair. Huge eyes in white expressionless face. White hands holding ends of armrest” (Beckett 2006:433). The chair she inhabits is “highly polished to gleam when rocking. Footrest. Vertical back. Rounded inward curving arms to suggest embrace” (Beckett 2006:433). This is the embrace of death, however, as it lulls W into a premature death, in the arms of her mother, represented by the rocking chair, “those arms at last” (Beckett 2006: 442). As May paced to and from on a narrow wooden board, this extravagantly dressed W rocks to and fro in her mechanically controlled chair. W charts her life-long search “for another, another like herself, another creature like herself” (Beckett 2006: 435). Her story is told through the voice of V, and the only word W emits is “More”, which occurs four times in the text, thus dividing the play into four brief segments. W’s memories, told by the recorded voice, emphasize her desire for fusion with her own mother, wishing to be lulled into her arms like a mother rocking her child to sleep, Again, birth is connected to death as W gives in to the mother’s embrace, represented by the rocking-chair. The first movement describes W’s search for “another like herself”, even though she agrees with herself that it is “time she stopped” (Beckett 2006: 436). W has succumbed to the reality of Fourth Age, in what I argue is a narrative of decline. In the second movement, she searches from her window, “quiet at her window”, continuing to tell herself that it is “time she stopped” (Beckett 2006: 437). This movement echoes the loneliness of W, suggesting a nursing-home scenario, where old people sit in chairs all day, looking out windows, superfluous to society.

The third movement continues with its windows theme, and the beginning of the fourth movement sees W moving from her window to go “down the steep stair” (Beckett 2006: 440). The fourth and longest movement traces W’s descent into her rocking-chair, where her “mother rocked, all the years, all in black, best black, sat and rocked, rocked, till her end came, in the end came, off her head they said, gone off her head” (Beckett 2006: 440). This suggests that the mother had dementia and may have ended her days in a nursing home. W now repeats her mother’s actions, as she moves “right down into the old rocker, those arms at last”, admitting that it is “time she went right down, was her own other, own other living soul” (Beckett 2006: 441). Like the title of the play, this is suggestive of a mother rocking her child to sleep, the lull of which is suddenly subverted as death is coming for W, who ends with the words, again in the third-person, “rock her off, stop her eyes, fuck life, stop her eyes, rock her off, rock her off” (Beckett 2006: 442). The words “fuck life” are shocking but strangely appropriate for W, because if she is prematurely aged, then she is prematurely dying. It is also a statement of sexual intent as “fuck” is a sexually violent verb. As she is superfluous to society as an older woman, W could either be physically dying or dying in the sense that she is past her sell by date in culture, where youthism reigns. The elderly end languishing in trolleys in Accident and Emergency hospital departments, or left to disintegrate in hospital wards, or committed to nursing homes either by family or lack of family. As long as the elderly and dying are out of sight, they are out of mind. As the elderly population increases rapidly, society faces a major challenge in how it plans to accommodate its elders. W represents the fear that elderly people face when left isolated and alone in deep old age.

Black is, as we know, the official colour of mourning. W’s black costume also designates the colour of mourning; explicitly, her costume is a “black lacy high-necked evening gown. Long sleeves. Jet sequins to glitter when rocking. Incongruous flimsy head-dress set askew with extravagant trimming to catch light when rocking” (Beckett 2006: 433). W’s costume is the emblem for the end of a life, where ultimately the voice and the rocking cease. McMullan notes how in theatrical stagings of death, although the audience see the character die before their eyes, they are aware that the actor is still alive. She notes Herbert Blau's observations that in our willingness as audience members to suspend disbelief in the space of the theatre, the actors are in fact dying in front of us, and we in front of them. Blau argues that "of all the performing arts, theatre stinks most of mortality" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:108). I argue that performing age also includes the performance of death, often by a younger actor. In *Rockaby* and *Footfalls,* this is complicated by the fact that, as Beckett explicitly notes, both May and W are "prematurely aged", having lead an uneventful life from girlhood to middle age. As I have already note that as women are valued for their reproductive rights, these women are alive yet dead in society, which views them as past their sell by date; "fuck life" in French translates as "aux chiottes la vie", which translates back as "down the toilet with life" (qtd. in McMullan 2010:120). As elderly people are often described as having abject uncontrollable leaking bodies, W realises that her usefulness has been exhausted as she is finally enfolded into the arms of the rocking-chair, or cradle, or coffin. Fuck Life.

To conclude, this chapter turned its focus to Beckett's drama, and his treatment of the ageing women that populate his late theatre. The potent combination of age and femininity in Beckett's work has not, until now, formed any significant area of research, despite the fact that his later drama explicitly centres on the experiences and longings of older women. The chapter in situated in the "field imaginary" of Age Studies, an emerging category in identity politics. With the rise of the interdisciplinary fields of Age Studies and cultural gerontology, I argued that there is a critical need reassess cultural representations of ageing in literature, particularly of older women and their potential for marginalisation. By analysing the plays *All That Fall*, *Happy Days, Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* through the lens of Age Studies as an interpretive category, my reading addressed this lacuna in Beckett Studies and in Irish Studies. These plays demonstrate the embodied experiences of ageing women, with their desires, longings and remonstrations. I argued that any consideration of older women as desiring subjects remains a cultural taboo. In these plays, Beckett confronts this taboo, portraying female ageing and sexuality as much as a force of resistance, as of a condition to be resisted.

Chapter Four

"Gender Counts": "Waking the Feminists", Performing Age and Feminine Interactions with Beckett's Drama in Irish Theatre and Performance

Introduction: From Page to Stage

The first two chapters of this thesis analysed samples of the younger Beckett's exploration of aspects of the feminine in his prose, investigating how he approached misogyny, maternity, motherhood and menopause. Chapter Three focused on the work of the older Beckett and analysed ageing women in his theatre "on the page" so to speak, and this chapter will now consider a number of strategic responses by women directors and actors of Beckett's drama in Irish theatre and performance. This represents a move from page to stage. First, I will examine Irish theatre more generally, paying especial attention to the absence of female playwrights from the Irish literary canon in order to establish the context out of which these women's work has emerged. The highly gendered state of the public stage and gallery, long noted by feminist academics and writers, has now come more fully to public attention, when it was highlighted in 2015, due to an extraordinary grass roots movement called "Waking the Feminists", with its unintended double entendre "What the Fuck?". This was formed in direct response to the Abbey Theatre's 1916 centenary programme, announced in October 2015, which featured work all by men, apart from one work by a woman playwright.[54] The "Waking the Feminists" movement became a widespread umbrella collective largely driven by the power of social media.

The extraordinary impact of Waking the Feminists, which subsequently became known by the hashtag #WTF, has resulted in major shifts in the theatre sector. This chapter, then considers responses of women and performance artists to Beckett, whose work formed part of the groundwork that eventually crystallised as #WTF. It is important, therefore, to situate their work not only in relation to Beckett's aesthetic legacy, but also in relation to the Irish literary, specifically theatrical, canon, which historically has been overwhelmingly androcentric. It is apparent that in Irish theatre, female playwrights have been excluded, or "fired" from the canon, as journalist Sara Keating puts it (Keating 2015). The first part of the chapter examines how #WTF creatively highlights and responds to this "firing", while the second part of the chapter considers Beckett's legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures by looking at how his work is being re-envisioned by Irish women artists in new and exciting ways. I will be focusing closely on the work of theatre actor and director Sarah Jane Scaife, actor Lisa Dwan and performance artist Amanda Coogan. I will be broadly drawing on performance studies and phenomenology studies in the work of Peggy Phelan, Stanton Garner and Bert O. States. I will also consider the affective dimension of the performances under analysis, drawing on the work of Affect theorist Brian Massumi. Importantly, in a continuation of my analysis of ageing in Beckett's late plays, I will be arguing that age is performed in these works, and that age is also performative, extending Judith Butler's formulation of gender as socially constructed and therefore performed to that of age.[55] My argument draws on a recent study, *Performing Age in Modern Drama*, in which theatre scholar Valerie Barnes Lipscomb argues that theatre "most specifically highlights age as performative" (Lipscomb 2016:1). As scholarship has been sparse on the conventions of performing age, particularly of the casting of younger actors to play the role of older characters, my reading illuminates a dark spot in Beckett studies, where this aspect of performance has not been addressed to date. Firstly, though, I will outline the development of the #WTF movement which has highlighted the work of Irish women theatre artists who have been hidden in plain sight.

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[54] "Waking the Nation" featured work by David Ireland, Sean P. Summers, Phillip McMahon, Shakespeare, Tom Murphy, Frank McGuinness and Sean O'Casey; there was one play dealing with Israel and Palestine by Mutaz Abu Saleh, and a staged reading of an adaptation by Jimmy Murphy. The only work by a woman playwright was a monologue for children written by Ali White.

Waking the Feminists: Gender "Counts"

In this part of this chapter, I analyse the impact of an extraordinary shift in the politics of gender in the Irish theatre sector. This occurred in direct response to the formation of the grassroots movement, "Waking the Feminists" in 2015, hereafter #WTF. #WTF specifically highlighted the inexplicable absence of female playwrights from Irish stages. A subsequent report, *Gender Counts*, published in 2017 set out to address the gender imbalance in the top ten Arts Councilfunded organisations in Ireland that either produce or present theatre. The Irish

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[55] Butler's concept of performativity is inspired by J. L. Austin's formula of performativity, as that which is an illocutionary speech act, such as "I pronounce you husband and wife" etcetera. In Butler's reformulation, gender performativity "is not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (Butler 1993:12). Identity, then, is not fixed, but constituted through the process of performing or failing to perform one's "sex", or regulatory norms which define, until recently, "a viable subject" (Butler 1993:232).

Government, via the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, gives considerable funding to these organisations, of which the Abbey Theatre receives the most, 76.6 million euro (2006-2015), which represents around fifty-seven percent of the overall allocated funding. The funding given is for national programmes that celebrate “Irishness”; in the wake of the “firing” of women playwrights from the Abbey Theatre’s “Waking the Nation” programme, it appeared that only male playwrights were worthy of representing Irishness.

Theatre scholar Patrick Lonergan recently highlighted the absence of female playwrights from the Irish literary canon, when he noted that Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*, first performed in 1926 at the Abbey Theatre “established that the function of the Abbey [Theatre] in an independent Ireland would be to analyse the nation’s sense of itself” (Lonergan 2014). The play famously provoked a series of sustained protests that were based on the faith that national theatre was worthy of real debate and contestation. This legacy of Ireland’s national theatre was unwittingly invoked by the Abbey’s artistic programme, entitled “Waking the Nation”; upon its announcement in October 2015, it provoked a level of protest unseen in Irish theatre since O’Casey’s provocative play. “Waking the Nation” was part of the countrywide centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising and the proclamation of the Irish Republic. The centenary year of 2016 was a highly mediatized event, comprised of parades, reenactments, speeches, including a clear emphasis on the role that women played in the Easter Rising, evident even in a major drama on national television.[56] The plays of “Waking the Nation” programme were, in contrast, all by men, with just one work by a female playwright.

This extraordinary exclusion of women from the Abbey’s programme provoked a swift reaction on social media, led by Lian Bell, a Dublin-based freelance theatre-maker. In response to Bell’s inquiry about the wisdom of their selection and the notable absence of female playwrights, the then Abbey director Fiach Mac Conghail, who was on his way to Dublin airport to catch a flight, hurriedly replied in what has now become an infamous "tweet":

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[56] *Rebellion* was a six-million-euro budget, five-part drama series about the birth of modern Ireland. The story is told from the perspective of various fictional characters, including three women who lived through the political events of the 1916 Easter Rising.

"[t]hem's the breaks" (@fmacconghail, 29 October 2015).

The programme and Mac Conghail's initial response caused an immediate uproar. The *Irish Times* journalist and activist Una Mullally, who was among the first to write about the Abbey's programme selection, wondered whether it was "time for another riot", making reference to the Abbey riots in 1907 when scandalised protestors objected to the use of the word "shift" in J. M. Synge's "Playboy of the Western World" (Mullally 2015). Also writing for The *Irish Times*, Peter Crawley commented that "instead of commemorating 1916 we are reflecting on, perhaps, the failed potential of 1916 … if gender equality was one such potential, it may be disappointing to find just one woman writer on the programme announced so far" (Crawley 2015). It was not just disappointment but anger that animated responses to the exclusion and following an invitation from a chastened Abbey Theatre, a public meeting was quickly arranged by Bell and her team, from which #WTF emerged; the five hundred (free) tickets were booked out in under ten minutes. Held on 12 November 2015, the historic event gained worldwide media attention, including postings of support on social media platforms by high-profile actors such as Meryl Streep, Debra Messing and film director Wim Wenders.

The meeting was designed to showcase stories of women who had found no platform on the official programme: chaired by Irish Senator Ivana Bacik, the event saw thirty presenters speak for strictly ninety seconds each. As Emer O'Toole noted, the fact that the presenters sat in a semi-circle and spoke from the "centre of the hallowed stage from which they have been so excluded" was a powerful statement in itself (O'Toole 2017:139). The women, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, spoke with conviction and on occasion with justifiable anger.

Playwright Gina Moxley detailed the reluctance that women have of speaking out for fear of being viewed as "difficult to work with" (my notes). Director Laura Bowler noted that when only half the world is listened to, "you only get half the story" (my notes). Playwright Rosaleen McDonagh, from a Traveller background and with a disability, reminded the audience about the need for inclusion within feminist movements. Director Catriona McLaughlin noted that "being fair takes work", while black Irish playwright Mary Duffin revealed that any chance of having her work staged would involve casting her characters as white actors (O'Toole 2017:139). What emerged was an intersectional picture of a network of exclusion and oppressions that showed the extraordinary difficulties that female theatre-makers have endured in trying to have their work produced in Ireland's national theatre and beyond.

When Mac Conghail stepped down as Director of the abbey a year later in December 2016, he noted that:

> Putting on a play is a political act … [I]t's the Abbey Theatre's job to create work that challenges and reflects Irish society. That ideal was challenged late last year. The Waking the Feminists movement pointed out that our Waking the Nation season did not represent gender equality. An urgent conversation began online, and we welcomed the debate, hosting a public meeting … to give voice to the call to redress the gender inequality that exists across the arts industry. The board of the Abbey Theatre is committed to the development of a comprehensive policy and detailed implementation plan to ensure that the Abbey Theatre leads the way in achieving a much-needed cultural shift towards gender equality in the Irish theatre sector. (http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/fiach-macconghail-2005-2016-at-the-abbeytheatre/)

The historic public meeting at the Abbey, the fastest booking "show" in its history, was just the beginning of that "cultural shift towards gender equality". The response to #WTF, a social media phenomenon, has been wide-reaching and irreversible, as there is now a new awareness of how power is exercised on Irish stages. In this section of the chapter, I trace the development and impact of #WTF, a grassroots movement that has resulted in highly significant shifts in Irish theatre: a networking and activist organisation formed by mothers in theatre; a recently published commissioned report on gender in Irish theatre, and academic work focused on the recovery of Irish women playwrights. That these events unfolded in the centenary year of Irish independence meant that Ireland was granted another glimpse of itself in that "mirror [held] up to the nation", and one that spoke clearly of the urgent need to address blatant inequalities in the arts sector. Along with the unconscious and not so unconscious biases against ageing women, there also exists a powerful and structural discrimination against mothers. The relationship between the arts sector and reproductive politics is such that large numbers of arts practitioners are systematically excluded by virtue of being a parent, most usually a mother, in a system that demands the reproduction of bodies for labour, but refuses to pay, value or support those who expand or keep the population stable.

At the first #WTF meeting at the Abbey, theatre-maker Tara Derrington stood apart from the crowd, brandishing a slogan with the words: "Where are the DISAPPEARED women of the Arts? … At the school gates now" (my notes). Photographers noted Derrington's solo stand and her image was widely circulated in the media. On the day that the #WTF rally received international attention, the seeds of MAM – Mothers Artists Makers (#Mam Ireland) – were thus sown.[57] As I have been tracing instances of historic treatment of mothers and motherhood in Irish literature and drama, specifically Beckett's work of course, I now extend this analysis to trace the exclusion of real mother artists in Irish theatre and the arts sector in general. My interpretation of Beckett's work uncovered what Madelon Sprengnether, in *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1990), calls the "spectral mother" in a selection of his work, and MAM uncovers, fleshes out, and gives multiple expressions to maternal perspectives and practices that have been "spectral" on the wider stage of theatre, performance and art practice in Ireland.[58] MAM highlights the unconscious bias by women (including mothers who have internalised their own invisibility) towards mothers in both theatre and the media in general.

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[57] After a meeting held on International Women's Day in 2016, MAM was officially formed by Derrington, Fiona Browne, Cerstin Mudiwa, Emma Lowe, Susie Lamb, Oonagh McLaughlin, Charlotte Harrison, Melanie Clarke Pullen, Kate Harris, Sarah Fitzgibbon and others.

MAM functions as an advocacy organization for approximately three hundred and fifty feminist female theatre practitioners across Ireland who felt disenfranchised from the theatre community upon becoming mothers. The irregular working hours and demands of theatre work are particularly difficult for mothers; as Derrington puts it, the "logistics of reality" make working in any capacity almost impossible; "suddenly", she tells Sarah Keating, "you're not put forward any more, you're not considered, and your confidence is just drip, drip, dripping away until you end up believing you're just not capable" (Keating 2016). Derrington *is* an accomplished artist, whose capability can be in no doubt. She arrived in Ireland in the late 1990s after completing her theatre training in the United Kingdom, became a successful director of interactive theatre and formed her own company. After the birth of her second child, the rising cost of childcare forced her to opt out of theatre work altogether. However, at the second #WTF meeting, "One Thing More", which was again held at the Abbey on the 14 November 2016 to assess the year's progress, Derrington, who was now an invited speaker, highlighted this absence of motherhood from the original agenda. Now, with the firm support of the Abbey as well as other Irish theatres who host MAM workshops such as FringeLab, The Project Arts, The Lyric, Fishamble, Smock Alley and the O'Reilly Theatre, these artist mothers are re-stating their position and systemic exclusion for a new public.[59] Alongside regular meetings and provision of networking and artistic support, MAM continues to seek Irish governmental grants and support for childcare and to advocate for artists-in-residence in Irish university theatre departments and studio spaces where children are freely welcomed, as well as devising plans for symposia.[60] Artist mother Sara FitzGibbon has described the MAM movement as having "small boots, but taking big strides" (Spencer Hewitt 2016). As a small but expanding organisation, the MAMs have made big strides in their campaign for equality and visibility.

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[58] Sprengnether's study in 1990 was one of the essential texts to grow out of the intersections of feminism, literary theory and psychoanalysis.

[59] Michelle Brown, mentor and founder of The Mothership Project, gave MAM crucial advice: "if you feel invisible, meet in places that make you feel visible" (Spencer Hewitt 2016).

The #WTF meetings revealed the sinister erasure not just of women playwrights, who were simply "fired" from the canon, to borrow Sarah Keating's term, but also, on a second level of discrimination, the firing of female theatre-makers who happen to be mothers (Keating 2016). As an advocacy group, MAM draws attention not just to the absence of mothers in Irish theatre work of course, but also to historical questions of how mothers and motherhood are treated in Ireland. The group works to highlight the mostly female issues of domestic isolation, marginalization and the disproportionate impact of parenting on the income of single parents. In a survey of their 350 members, they reported that over half lost all their income and ninetyfive percent suffered significant reduced income as a direct result of having children. The MAMs believe that one of the main factors that contribute to gender imbalance in theatre is the silent but swift exodus of women after childbirth. The conversation about working mothers thus highlights that the working practices of arts sectors, like other public and private sectors, are structured around traditionally masculinist models and no structures are in place to support working parents, especially mothers. Derrington argues that the "one thing" that remains unresolved in today's feminist movements is motherhood. Central to MAM's mission, then, is the need to heal this division between women regarding motherhood and to unite to fight inequality in the arts sector.

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[60] MAM advises several measures in their "5 Family Friendly Practices towards Gender Balanced Irish Theatre", which includes sympathetic scheduling, children in the work space, family friendly staff training, and childcare facilities.

Derrington’s comments indicated how Irish attitudes towards motherhood and gender roles have been remarkably static, with a continued lack of infrastructure and support making it extremely difficult for many mothers to remain in any type of employment, but particularly in the arts sector. MAM’s mission is to challenge the invisibility of artist mothers in Irish theatre; its members include Sara FitzGibbon, a professional theatre artist who works as an education consultant to the Abbey, and actor Susie Lamb, who has argued that the narrow view of women and mothers depicted onstage is more than the simplification and conflation of many complex experiences that I have identified, but that it actually amounts to a “form of censorship” (Spencer Hewitt 2016). Lamb identifies the main obstacles to mothers in theatre as “unaffordability and lack of access to childcare, exclusion of children in the rehearsal and performance space, and lack of ‘pathways back in’ to the professional network for professionals who take maternal time” (Spencer Hewitt 2016). Since mothers comprise fiftyfour percent of Ireland’s female population, this is a significant omission that has ramifications at a cultural, social and financial level, not only for the mothers affected but also for the wider society which cannot access the lost perspectives, experiences and expressions. Journalist Spencer Hewitt has argued that Irish theatre’s refusal to accommodate professional artist mothers “not only reduces its talent in terms of contributors, but also cuts off a large portion of potential audience members” (Spencer Hewitt 2016). Thus, even audience demographics are affected by the current structures. As women, and theatre audiences, we need to confront our own biases regarding women artists and playwrights; I argue that audience numbers tend to be somewhat lower when the work of a female playwright is being staged.[61]

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[61] I noticed this at the recent staging of Teresa Deevy’s *Katie Roche* at the Abbey Theatre. But it is a trend in general, along with the trend of staging female playwrights work on the smaller stage of the Peacock.

MAM’s determination to make the invisible visible materialized in a devised work, entitled “Observe the Mothers of Theatre Marching Towards the Stage”, a work which was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre in 2016. The piece was a direct response to the Abbey’s revival – as part of “Waking the Nation” – of playwright Frank McGuinness’s acclaimed work *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, which features eight male characters who march their way onto the stage. Where McGuinness’s play was ground-breaking in its focus on Irish and particularly Ulster participation in the First World War and in addressing issues of homophobia, MAM’s response similarly sought to challenge cultural norms regarding motherhood. Performed on 21 September 2016, shortly after Ireland’s national theatre committed to an “eight-step” gender equality initiative, MAM’s theatrical response was rehearsed over a period of six weeks by over forty women and children. Taking four sections of McGuinness’s play and exploring their themes, the women added “mother” to the play’s themes of “soldier, war, loyalty, identity, heroism, and sacrifice”, realizing the analogy between a military battlefield and the battleground of motherhood (Spencer Hewitt 2016).

The result was a performance that made visible the women – mothers, wives, sisters, daughters – who hover outside the perspective of McGuinness’s play, and whose wartime experience has historically often been ignored also. In a scene named “Bonding” (as in

McGuinness’s play), the MAMs recreated the original “bridge scene”: in McGuinness’s play; the character Millen tries to coax fellow soldier Moore to cross a high rope bridge to help him overcome his terror of returning to the war. Having explored the similarities between motherhood and soldiering in their workshops, MAM’s version connected the trauma of war with the female-centred experience of post-natal depression, a subject that remains underrepresented and under-researched. Performer Marianna Marcote, who herself suffered from severe post-natal depression, played the role of Moore, a mother who cannot face her baby after giving birth.[62] The character of Millen, played by Kathleen Warner Yeates, encourages Moore to bond with her new-born. This analogy of motherhood as a battlefield directly challenges the male-centred war themes that are the focus of McGuinness's play.

At the end of the performance, all the children joined their mothers on stage; each woman stepped forward, some with babies strapped to their bodies, stating their mother-soldier names and whether they were volunteers or conscripted into motherhood. The Abbey Theatre Co-Director Graham McLaren described the work as "Brilliant, Brave, Beautiful, Honest, and Very, Very, Necessary" (@MCLAREN_G, 21 September 2016). This "necessary" work took on a new significance in Ireland recently in its analogy of motherhood as a battlefield for choice; on the 25 May 2018, a fourth Referendum on the controversial issue of abortion rights in Ireland took place, in which the electorate were asked to vote Yes or No to "Repeal the Eighth Amendment", an article inserted into the Irish Constitution after the first abortion referendum in 1983, which had given equal rights to life of both the mother and the unborn.[63] The Referendum was a highly charged issue, with both sides of the campaign seemingly mutually opposed in their view on the definition of personhood and the right to bodily autonomy. In what has been termed "a quiet revolution", Ireland voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment by a resounding 66.4 percent of the vote, taking both sides of the campaign by surprise at the margin in favour.[77] Although the Eighth Amendment was repealed and by a significant percentage of the electorate, the fight for gender equality in Irish theatre and the arts remains high on the theatre sector agenda.

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[62] Marcote has written about her experience with post-natal depression: https://www.irishtimes.com/life-andstyle/health-family/you-lose-control-and-lose-your-life-when-you-become-a-mother-1.2512336

[63] On the 7 September 1983, the first referendum on abortion was held in Ireland. The Irish State sought to legislate for the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right" (Article 40.3.3). It was approved by 67% to 33% of the voters, with a 53.6% turnout. On 25 November 1992 a further referendum, proposing three amendments, was put to the Irish people: the 12th amendment, seeking to exclude the risk of suicide as grounds for a legal abortion in Ireland was rejected, the 13th amendment, proposing that prohibition would not limit the freedom of travel abroad to seek an abortion was approved; the 14th amendment, which was also approved, proposed that information regarding abortion services abroad would be legalized. In 2002, a third

Gender "Counts"

The need to fight for equality in the arts was clearly illustrated in a 2016 report on gender in Irish theatre over the last decade. Commissioned by #WakingTheFeminists and funded by The Arts Council, *Gender Counts: An Analysis of Gender in Irish Theatre 2006-2015* was officially launched on 9 June 2017.[78] In the report, Lian Bell writes that within one year of the foundation of #WTF, there were "extraordinary shifts" in working practices, and a newfound openness in debating gender issues in Ireland's major arts organisations (Donoghue et al. 2017:5). She notes, however, that the report "gives us the what – but we still in many cases need to work out the why and the how" (Donoghue et al. 2017:6). The report sought to consider "the gender balance in the top Arts Council-funded organisations that produce or present theatre in Ireland" (Donoghue et al. 2017:17); "to measure female representation in Irish theatre, providing information that can form the basis for evidence-based solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the sector"; and "to investigate how public funding relates to female representation in the selected organisations" (Donoghue et al. 2017:12). The results make for stark reading.[64] Below I set out the information in graph form and in bullet point in order to highlight the extent of the inequalities:

referendum, seeking to legislate into the constitution the right to an abortion in Ireland in the case of the threat to the life of a woman, but not in cases where there was a threat of suicide, was narrowly defeated. [77] There was a 64.13 percent voter turnout, with 66.4 percent voting yes and 33.60 percent voting no. Only one county, Donegal, voted against the proposal.

[78] The report was researched and authored by Brenda Donoghue, Ciara O'Dowd, Tanya Dean, Ciara Murphy, Kathleen Cawley and Kate Harris.

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[64] All data quoted is taken directly from the Report.

The sampled organizations were:

Company Name	Funding in € millions (2006-2015)	% of Total funds (2006-2015)
1. The Abbey Theatre	76.6	57%
2. The Gate Theatre	10.6	8%
3. Dublin Theatre Festival	8.6	6%
4. Druid	8.5	6%
5. Project Arts Centre	8.1	6%
6. The Ark	6.4	5%
7. Rough Magic Theatre Company	6.2	5%
8. Dublin Fringe Festival	3.7	3%
9. Barnstorm Theatre Company	2.8	2%
10. Pan Pan Theatre	2.8	2%

Data analysed from 1,155 productions revealed startling facts:

- In the ten years studied, just eight percent of plays produced at the Gate Theatre were directed by women. In six of those ten years, the Gate did not present a single play directed by a woman.
- In 2008, all plays produced at the Abbey Theatre were by men.

The key findings of the report, which also counted 9,205 individual roles, are as follows:

- The four highest-funded organizations in the sample have the lowest female representation; the Gate and Abbey Theatres have the lowest of all.

- In the first eight sampled organizations, there is a general pattern of an inverse relationship between levels of funding and female representation: the higher the funding received, the lower the female presence.
- In six of the seven roles studied (in every role except Costume Designer), women are poorly represented.
- 28% of Authors employed by these organizations are women.
- “Sound Designer” and “Costume Designer” are gendered male and female roles respectively; women constitute only 9% of Sound Designers employed.
- The highest female representation occurred in The Ark, Rough Magic Theatre Company and Dublin Fringe Festival. In 2011, 77% of actors at The Ark were female; notably, The Ark is a cultural organization for children.
- The gap to achieving gender parity ranges between 41 and 8 percentage points in the roles studied.

The overall percentage of female representation in each category studied is as follows:

Directors	37%
Authors	28%
Cast	42%
Set Designers	40%
Lighting Designers	34%
Sound Designers	9%
Costume Designers	79%

As a direct result of #WTF and the report's findings, the Abbey Theatre established a Gender Equality Committee, which developed an eight-step set of guiding principles to be enshrined for the future; other theatres are working collaboratively to establish gender equality guidelines for the industry.[65] Heather Humphreys, then minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, suggested that all Irish cultural institutions implement their own gender policies by 2018. Bell notes that institutions who do not reflect this push are increasingly "taken to task by their audiences" (Donohue et al. 2017: 5). Immediately following their gender guidelines policy, the Abbey Theatre devised its innovative "5x5" (#Abbey5x5) series, which invites "communities who feel marginalised and silenced" to submit an idea or project that they wish to develop. Awarding through an online submission process, the theatre selected five projects, allowed five days of theatre space and technical assistance, and awarded €5000 per project. This program, which gained a lot of attention on social media, is another direct response to the Abbey's commitment to "creating an environment that promotes equality and dignity" (www.abbeytheatre.ie).[66]

There now appears to be a sea change in programming and equal-employment opportunities across the arts sector which reflects a deeper understanding of gender and unconscious bias. Part of this recalibration of power has involved the breaking of silence around sexual abuse, misuse of power and discrimination in the Arts sector. In part, this came on the back of the expression of unheard experiences represented by MAM, and on the exposure of sexualised abuses of power in the Roman Catholic Church and in a number of state institutions more widely. This will be discussed in more depth in the second part of this chapter when I analyse the work of Irish Performance artist Amanda Coogan, whose art practice exposes such atrocities. One of the most significant examples of this shift occurred in April 2017, when British-born theatre director Selina Cartmell was appointed director of the Gate Theatre; not only is Cartmell the first ever woman to occupy the position, but she is only the third ever director of the theatre.[82] Founded in 1928 by Hilton Edwards and Micheál Mac Liammóir, Cartmell replaced the controversial director Michael Colgan who stepped down after thirty-three years in the position. Since taking up the role, Cartmell has focused on producing exciting work by female playwrights, rapidly reversing the Gate's abysmal record to date. [83] Shortly after Colgan's departure, however, a significant number of women working in Irish theatre came forward with serious allegations against him which quickly reverberated around the wider arts and academic sector (Gallagher and Mackin 2017; F Kelly 2017). For a time, the Colgan controversy and the legacy of abuse that Cartmell inherited overshadowed her

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[65] The Abbey first appointed Sarah Durcan, leading WTF spokesperson, to their Board and then declared their eight "guiding principles on gender equality". The principles are: to amend the theatre's mission statement and other key documents to reflect the goal of gender equality; to make gender equality a "key board priority and responsibility" with immediate effect; to commit to continued gender equality at "board level"; to achieve gender equality in "all areas of the artistic programme", to be measured every five years starting in 2017; to pursue gender equality in play commissioning; to deliver workshops for "all employees, examining issues of gender equality in the workplace"; to create a yearly programme for second-level students with "a view to raising awareness of the career opportunities for women"; and, finally, to report progress made by gender equality "initiatives" in the Abbey Theatre's Annual Report (www.abbeytheatre.ie).

[66] In 2017, work written or directed by women at the Abbey/Peacock included Noelle Brown and Michele Forbes, Cora Bissett, Annabelle Comyn, Amanda Coogan, Teresa Deevy, Emma Donoghue, Lurlene Duggan, Lisa Dwan, Sarah Finlay, Tara Flynn, Stacey Gregg, Orla O'Loughlin, Dael Orlandersmith, Jane Madden, Caitriona

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McLaughlin, Frances Poet, Annie Ryan, and Maeve Stone. The theatre's 2018 programme features new and adapted work by female playwrights: Deirdre Kinahan makes her belated debut at the Abbey with two productions, *The Unmanageable Sisters*, a new version of Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles Soeurs*, and *Rathmines Road*, which deals with the timely subject of sexual assault. Acclaimed playwright Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) is directed by Caitriona McLaughlin; Gina Moxley collaborates with choreographer Liv O'Donoghue and film-maker John McIlduff in *The Patient Gloria*; Louise O'Neill's novel *Asking For It*, which deals with sexual assault, is adapted for the stage by Meadhbh McHugh and Annabelle Comyn; and Tara Flynn writes and stars in *Not A Funny Word*, a monologue about the highly contentious issue of abortion rights in Ireland. This work was staged off-site at The Complex in Smithfield, Dublin.

[82] See the recent publication on the Gate: *The Gate Theatre, Dublin: Inspiration and Craft*. Edited by David Clare, Des Lally and Patrick Lonergan. Dublin: Carysfort Press and Peter Lang, 2018.

[83] Cartmell has directed work ranging from Greek tragedy and Shakespeare to contemporary international and Irish drama. Her productions have been nominated for thirty-five Irish Times Theatre Awards, winning ten, including three for best Director. She directed three award–winning productions for the Gate, *Catastrophe*, *Festen* and *Sweeney Todd*, described *in The Guardian* as "a new dawn for the theatre" (https://www.gatetheatre.ie/about/). In 2017, plays by women at the Gate included the award-winning *Tribes* by Nina Raine and *The Red Shoes*, adapted by Nancy Harris. 2018 will feature work directed by Selina Cartmell, Annabelle Comyn, and Elizabeth Freestone (http://www.gatetheatre.ie/).

initial success in reviving the theatre. In November 2017, the theatre's Board commissioned a report "Gate Theatre Confidential Independent Report", conducted by Labour Court Judge Gaye Cunningham, following the allegations made concerning inappropriate behaviour on Colgan's part towards theatre workers who were vulnerable due to the precarity of their work, in the years between 1983-2017.[67] The purpose of the review was to establish if Colgan had a case to answer in respect of "any dignity of work, abuse of power and related inappropriate behaviours and failings on the part of any person associated with the Gate and to make recommendations arising from the process" (Cunningham 2018:1). The review involved interviewing over thirty individuals, former and current staff, former and current Board members and members of the art community, freelance and others, an across-the-board selection of affected parties. This demonstrates the endemic nature of abuses of power, mainly against women, that have remained, until recently, unchallenged in the Irish arts sector. However, in general the problem still exists in other areas, such as academia and the wider employment sector which needs the same level of excavation as the arts sector.

The findings of the review, published on 1 March 2018, concluded that Colgan did have a case to answer in relation to "dignity at work" behaviours, "abuse of power" and "inappropriate behaviours", in line with the definition of sexual harassment (Cunningham 2018:10). On the 9 February 2018, in anticipation of the report's findings, the Gate issued a formal apology to those who experienced these "abuses of power and inappropriate behaviours" at the theatre, where an insidious culture pervaded "which was not conducive to people speaking out freely" (www.gatetheatre.ie).[68] The stark findings of this report, while casting a shadow over

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[67] The full report is available to read at: https://www.irishtimes.com/polopoly_fs/1.3419457.1520499809!/menu/standard/file/Gate%20Report%201%20March.pdf

[68] https://www.gatetheatre.ie/the-board-of-the-gate-theatre-issues-apology/

Cartmell's historic appointment, promises meaningful change for all those working not just at the Gate, but also in the wider arts and freelance community. This report, along with *Gender Counts*, forms part of what appears to be a remarkable revolution in Irish theatre which is directly linked to the centenary year of 2016 and the Abbey's "Waking the Nation" programme. There is real hope now for change: alongside the failure to produce the work of female playwrights in Ireland, until 2016, the One City, One Book initiative, which each year promotes a single book across Dublin, chose books written by men. Significantly, in 2018 the book chosen was *The Long Gaze Back* by Sinéad Gleeson, an anthology of thirty new short stories comprised of eight deceased and twenty-two living Irish women writers. The prestigious International Dublin Literary award, with a 100,000-euro prize for a novel written in English and sponsored by Dublin City Council, has been won for the last seventeen consecutive years by a man; in 2018, although it was won by Irish author Mike McCormack, six out of the ten nominees were female authors.

In light of the deluge of allegations of sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace made against Colgan and, globally, the allegations made against American producer Harvey Weinstein, which resulted in the #MeToo social media movement, there was another robust response from the Irish theatre community. On 21 March 2018, and event "Speak Up & Call it Out: Establishing a Code of Behaviour for Irish Theatre" was hosted at Liberty Hall in Dublin city centre. This initiative was led by the Irish Theatre Institute and supported by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The one-day event brought members of the Irish theatre community together to discuss and identify pathways to cultural change in behaviour across the sector. The initiative aims to introduce a "robust and workable Code of Behaviour to protect Irish theatre practitioners, makers and presenters" (http://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/attachments/c512602b-e015-48fa-a071b70ed31a5e65.PDF). This Code will include the elimination of the abuse of power that has pervaded the sector to build a safe environment for all theatre workers. This latest response at the time of writing is one of a series of domino effect outcomes in the Irish arts sector, as a direct result of the astonishing impact of the #WTF movement. Although the founders stepped down in 2016 to re-focus on their own art practices, their extraordinary achievement continues to be acknowledged locally and abroad. On 21 March 2018 Lian Bell, the co-founder, won a Tonic Award in London for a "brave and creative campaign to effect positive change in regard to representation of women in Irish theatre" (Falvey 2018). The Tonic Awards, established in 2017, celebrate women's achievements in theatre and support the goal of greater gender equality in the sector. The award was presented to Bell by Irish-Indian playwright and author Ursula Rani Sarma, playwright whose work is practically unproduced in Ireland, acknowledged Bell's important intervention when she that "to say it was a movement isn't enough. We were all part of something that was bigger than our individual experiences" (Falvey 2018). Considering the responses outlined in this chapter so far, a Revolution can be said to have begun. The domino effect of #WTF has continued to impact academic research where, as the "long gaze back", (to borrow Sinead Gleeson's anthology title) continues, there has been an expeditious move to highlight and recover "fired" female playwrights from the Irish literary canon.

In Response to the Irish Literary and Dramatic Canon: Research and Recovery of Irish Female Playwrights

The reverberations of #WTF have not alone been felt in the arts sector but also in academic research. Academics working in the area of theatre, gender studies and related disciplines have responded quickly. The "Irish Women Playwrights and Theatremakers" conference (8-10 July

2017) coincidentally took place the week of the launch of the *Gender Counts* Report, which was discussed at the event by researchers.[69] The conference highlighted the historical difficulties that Irish women playwrights have faced trying to have their work produced in Ireland, echoing the theme of the #WTF public meeting at the Abbey. David Clare cited as an example the canonical novelist Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), who resorted to having her plays performed as "home theatricals" in her home town of Edgeworthstown (my notes). Also cited was one of the most successful but forgotten Irish female playwrights of the twentiethcentury, Teresa Deevy (1904-1963); Deevy produced an impressive body of work for the Abbey stage in the 1930s, which is more remarkable for the fact that she became profoundly deaf as a young adult. However, when Ernest Blythe took control of the Abbey in the 1930s Deevy was eventually shunned with the rejection of her play *Wife to James Whelan* in 1942. Clare pointed to the unfortunate fact that since the early 1980s, playwrights such as Lucy Caldwell, Anne Devlin, Stella Feehily, Deirdre Kinahan, Ailís Ní Ríain, Lynda Radley, Ursula Rani Sarma, Christina Reid, Abbie Spallen, and Lisa Tierney-Keogh have debuted their work in London, Edinburgh and New York, while being mostly ignored in their home country of Ireland (Clare 2017). Until recently, research shows that there has been an inexplicable reluctance to revive the work of successful playwrights like Deevy and Lady Gregory, even though major Dublin theatres have continually staged male playwrights' work, such as Beckett at the Gate. The recent revival of Deevy's *Katie Roche* at the Abbey is a timely first step towards engagement with what theatre professor Melissa Sihra calls "its remarkable legacy of women dramatists, starting surely with Lady August Gregory" (Sihra 2017).[70] Gregory, author of over 40 plays and co-founder of the theatre (Abbey), "was not represented in any way" (Sihra 2009:158) at the Abbey's 2004 centennial celebrations, when, in fact, not a single work from a female playwright was performed.

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[69] The conference was organised by Dr David Clare, Dr Fiona McDonagh and Dr Aideen Wylde and hosted by the Department of Drama & Theatre Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

[70] The Abbey Theatre commissioned a research pack on the 2017 revival of Deevy's play, compiled by Marie Kelly. See: "Abbey Theatre Research Pack on Teresa Deevy: Katie Roche." 2017, https://3kkb1z11gox47nppd3tlqcmq-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/KATIE-ROCHE_RESEARCH-PACK-2017.pdf

As the "Irish Women Playwrights and Theatremakers" conference and ongoing research demonstrates, Irish women playwrights and theatre-makers have experienced profound difficulties across the centuries. These women were "fired from the canon" in three ways: through lack of production, lack of revival and lack of publication (Keating 2015). Alongside Christine Longford and Teresa Deevy, Keating names other playwrights such as Geraldine Cummins, Suzanne Day, Eva Gore-Booth, Dorothy McArdle and Alice Milligan, whose work should be re-visited and re-staged. The startling list of playwrights emerging, most of which Irish audiences would be completely ignorant of, and I might add, theatre researchers, invokes a sense of sadness and loss on the one hand, but also, a huge opportunity for future researchers who must recover these forgotten women playwrights. Melissa Sihra's work focuses not only on the work of women writers, but also on the structural apparatus that allows such discrimination to continue generation after generation. In a notable plenary address at the "Irish Women Playwrights" entitled "Beyond Token Women: Towards a Matriarchal Lineage from Lady Gregory to Marina Carr" she took on the task of recovery when she challenged the "tokenistic" placement of Lady Gregory in the male dominated canon.[71] Sihra powerfully argued that to redress the violent gender imbalance, we must begin "by tilting the lens, to reestablish a foundational status of Irish women in theatre" (my notes). In fact, in what seems like a simple, but subtle move, Sihra re-positions Gregory as "matrilineal origin point, a centrifugal force" from which all Irish playwrights, both male and female, descend and produces a radical effect (my notes). After all, Sihra points out, it was in fact Gregory and not J. M. Synge who first visited the Aran Islands and who first mastered Hiberno-English as a dramatic language. Famously, it was also Gregory who predominantly wrote the play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a seminal Irish play, for the Abbey Theatre, for which W. B. Yeats was given sole credit until very recently.[72][73] Gregory also experimented with absurdist forms and subversive humour and pioneered the act of waiting as dramatic device in *The Gaol Gate* (Nakase 2017). Gregory emerges, in Sihra's research, as a highly innovative playwright who was not simply the co-founder of the Abbey Theatre, but, in her stagecraft, language, folklore practices and themes, an important precursor to the work of J. M. Synge, Tom Murphy, Marina Carr, and the male dramatist who is the subject of my thesis, Samuel Beckett.

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[71] In the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, edited by Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (2016), Lady Gregory is awarded a mere eight lines for her work with the Abbey, while Oscar Wilde, Brian Friel and Tom Murphy get two dedicated chapters each.

Sihra's critical work complements other recent academic research presented at the same 2017 conference by Cathy Leeney, who argued that ways of looking and seeing in theatre are highly gendered. In her plenary address "Waking up to Theatrical Aesthetics: Women's Way of Looking", Leeney noted that work by women is often analysed "as if they don't know what they are doing" (my notes).[74] As academic Justine Nakase writes, Leeney challenges audiences' unconscious bias towards women's theatre, which is sometimes regarded as messy, the intended assumed to be error, with failure to conform to a "masculine aesthetics … seen as failure" (Nakase 2017). Leeney's work highlights the importance of historical research as an act of “recovery of the roots of self”, which is vital in serving to challenge the audience, including women themselves, to re-evaluate their own unconscious biases in how they look at women’s theatre and begin to embrace those “new ways of seeing” (my notes).

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[72] In *The Irish Dramatic Revival: 1899-1939* (2015), Anthony Roche sets the record straight when he states that *Cathleen ni Houlihan* represents the "first staging of a play by Lady Gregory, albeit a collaboration" (Roche
[73] :33-35). See also James Pethica's article: "Shedding light on Lady Gregory before the Celtic dawn." *The Irish Times*, 17 September 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/shedding-light-on-lady-gregorybefore-the-celtic-dawn-1.3643517;

[74] Moynagh Sullivan has also written on the repression of the maternal feminine in Irish Studies in the context of Irish female poets – see her essays: "The Treachery of Wetness: Irish Studies, Seamus Heaney and the Politics of Parturition." *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2005, pp. 451-468; "Irish Poetry after Feminism: in search of 'Male Poets'." *Irish Poetry after Feminism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Justin Quinn, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 2008; "Raising the Veil: Mystery, Myth, and Melancholia in Irish Studies." *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008.

One such playwright who remains virtually unknown on Irish stages is Ursula Rani Sarma, an acclaimed playwright, screenwriter and poet who has collaborated with theatres in the United States and Britain, but who remains practically unproduced and therefore unknown in Ireland.[75] Rani Sarma, of Irish/Indian descent, grew up in County Clare, Ireland. Since 1999, she has written thirteen stage plays, three radio plays and has published poetry in several anthologies. Her awards include an Edinburgh Fringe award, an Irish Times/ESB Theatre award, and awards for Best New Play and Best Production for her work *The Dark Things* (2009) at the 2010 Critics’ Awards for Theatre in Scotland.[76] A pattern emerges, then, of the many blind spots in Irish theatre, notably how women playwrights have been hidden, as Feargal Whelan succinctly put it, “in plain sight” (my notes). If we “tilt the lens”, to quote Sihra, numerous instances of playwrights “hidden in plain sight” are revealed to us, such as Mary Balfour, Belfast’s only woman playwright of the nineteenth century. David Clare noted that her 1814 play *Kathleen O’Neill* was arguably a prototype for many of the tropes that eventually became fixtures of Irish melodrama, yet it is the plays of her contemporary Dion Boucicault, Irish dramatist and actor, that are regularly re-staged.

Because of the “Irish Women’s Playwrights and Theatremakers”, a two-volume edited collection of essays on women playwrights is, at the time of writing, being produced to begin to redress their inexcusable erasure form the Irish dramatic canon. The impressive list of playwrights under analysis, some, or even most of which will be unfamiliar to readers and audiences, will go some way towards re-balancing their firing from the canon, and will "tilt the lens" in favour of "women's way of looking". The conference, which ran over three days of presentations and performances, revealed a new picture of the Irish dramatic landscape, one in which women are not just present but central to its development. Academic researchers and archivists play a pivotal role in recovering lost histories and lost voices; in this thesis, I am fulfilling my own role in recovering women's lost voices, not only in the prose and drama of my chosen male, middle-class, modernist writer, Beckett, and the voices of ageing women and their desires, but also in highlighting forgotten female playwrights and theatre-makers in Irish theatre. By doing so, I play a pivotal part in feminine responses to the male dominated Irish dramatic canon. Taking my cue from Kimberle Crenshaw's powerful TED talk, where she makes available and visible the unknown black women who have been subjected to brutality by North American police, I also name and bring into representation the forgotten women playwrights.[77] I am, therefore, duty-bound to individually name every woman playwright, in **bold**, to be included in the publication:

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[75] For an interview with Rani Sarma, see Jody Allen Randolph’s *Close to the Next Moment: Interviews from a Changing Ireland*. Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2010.

[76] Rani Sarma’s plays, which have been translated and published extensively, also include *… Touched …* (2002), *Blue* (2002), and *The Magic Tree* (2008).

Volume One: 1716-1992

***The Northern Heiress* (1716)** by **Mary Davy**

***The Discovery* (1763)** by **Frances Sheridan**

***The Platonic Wife* (1765)** by **Elizabeth Griffin**

***The Double Disguise* (1786)** and **The *Knapsack* (1801)** by **Maria Edgeworth**

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[77] Kimberle Crenshaw, American civil rights advocate has spoken at numerous TED talks on intersectionality. See: https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality#t-126923 In her videos, she discusses the #SayHerName movement, which highlights the forgotten names of women of colour who have been the subject of police brutality in America.

Kathleen O'Neill **(1814)** by **Mary Balfour**

The Daughter of Donagh **(1900)** by **Alice Milligan**

The Rising of the Moon **(1903)** and ***Grania*** **(1912)** by **Lady Gregory**

Fox and Geese **(1917)** by **Cummins and Day**

Youth's the Season …? **(1932)** by **Mary Manning**

The King of Spain's Daughter **(1935)** and ***A Wife to James Whelan*** **(1942)** by **Teresa Deevy**

Mount Prospect **(1940)** by **Elizabeth Connor**

Tolka Row **(1951)** by **Maura Laverty**

An Triail **(1964)** by **Máiréad Ní Ghráda**

Tea in a China Cup **(1983)** by **Christina Reid**

Ourselves Alone **(1985)** by **Ann Devlin**

Eclipsed **(1992)** by **Patricia Burke**

Volume Two: 1993-2016

I Know My Own Heart **(1993)** by **Emma Donoghue**

Yours, Truly **(1993)** by **Maria Jones**

Danti-Dan **(1995)** by **Gina Moxley**

By the Bog of Cats **(1998)** and ***Women and Scarecrow*** **(2006)** by **Marina Carr**

Blue **(2000)** by **Ursula Rani Sarma**

Pumpgirl **(2006)** by **Abbie Spallen**

O Go My Man **(2006)** by **Stella Feehily**

Intemperance **(2007)** by **Lizzie Nunnery**

The Forgotten **(BBC Radio 4, 2009)** by **Anne Devlin**

I Heart Alice Heart I **(2010)** by **Amy Conroy**

Moment **(2011)** by **Deirdre Kinahan**

***Futureproof* (2011)** by **Lynda Radley**

***Our New Girl* (2012)** by **Nancy Harris**

***Shibboleth* (2015)** by **Stacey Gregg**

***Luíse* (2016)** by **Celia de Fréine**

As Sihra concluded in her plenary, "to be forgotten, women must first be acknowledged. And women refuse to be forgotten anymore" (Nakase 2017). In fact, as a first step towards not being forgotten, particularly in academic writing, perhaps we could go further still, and employ **bold** any time a female playwright is written about, as a type of *parler-femme*, as part of a "new way of looking" at women's theatre work. As theatre-goers and academic researchers, we must also show up for women's work, particularly the revival of neglected playwrights such as Teresa Deevy, whose work is finally being acknowledged, fruitfully researched and re-staged in Ireland and abroad. As we await the publication of these volumes, a recent publication, *A History of Modern Irish Women's Literature* (2018), is the first systematic overview of the achievements of Irish women writers. It covers all genres, including drama, poetry, literature, the short story, children's fiction and life-writing. Again, in the theme of being hidden in plain sight, it seems remarkable that it has taken so long for a publication like this to evolve but it is another example of how the landscape of the Irish literary canon is being completely overhauled at an accelerated rate.

Part Two: Complicating Beckett's Legacy in Irish Theatre and Performance Cultures.

Colgan's directorship of the Gate was strongly associated with Beckett. Colgan successfully mounted three festivals celebrating Beckett's work. The most significant was the 1991 Beckett Festival, where all nineteen of Beckett's plays were staged; while in 2006, the Beckett Centenary Festival, marking Beckett's 100th birthday, saw nine of his stage plays produced; and in 2006, the Beckett Pinter Mamet Festival featured *Endgame* and a performance of the novel *Watt*. David Clare argued in "The Gate Theatre's Beckett Festivals: Tensions between the Local and the Global", that Beckett's legacy in Ireland and Irish theatre was significantly changed by the impact of these festivals. He notes that the most significant aspect of the festivals was "the degree to which they altered popular perceptions of Beckett's relationship to his native country" (Clare 2016:39). By subtly highlighting the Irish aspects of Beckett's drama, and a desire to reassert Beckett's "Irishness", Colgan reframed Beckett for Irish audiences, as they were invited to reconsider the plays in an Irish context. As Clare wrote, many critics noted the use of Irish accents in the festival productions, drawing attention to the fact that Beckett employed a "subtle Hiberno-English" in his drama; Colgan decided, from 1991 onwards, to have the plays performed with Irish accents and with "wry, dark, 'Irish' humour, which helped audiences to relate to the perceived darkness and difficulty of Beckett's drama" (Clare 2016:40). Hitherto Beckett's plays had been largely considered as "ahistorical" universal, existential dramas with a specific location, seemingly set "nowhere" as Clare noted (Clare 2016:39).

Colgan's work contributed to the evolution of theatre in Ireland, most especially legacy, in his bid to "festivalise" Beckett's work. By generating an experience for audiences and creating the impression they were participating in and attending an "event", (to use Colgan's word), Colgan brought Beckett's work onto a wider stage than the Gate. The "festivalisation" of Beckett's work began with the 1991festival,[94] and this was considered a foundational event by observers. In her essay, "'Getting known': Beckett, Ireland and the Creative Industries", Trish McTighe notes that Colgan's "eventing" of Beckett, opened the door for such companies as Gare St. Lazare Players and Mouth on Fire who have successfully adapted many of Beckett's drama and prose works for the stage. She writes that the 1991 festival was "a coup that heralded a claim on Beckett's drama that the theatre retains to this day" (McTighe 2014:158).[95] This festival appears to have paved the way for several key Irish women artists who have been reimagining Beckett's work in new and exciting ways. In this chapter I will focus on the ways in which actor Lisa Dwan, theatre director Sarah Jane Scaife, and performance artist Amanda Coogan have refigured and entered into a dialogue with Beckett's work. I argue that recent productions and performances of Beckett's work by women practitioners have "tilted the lens" and brought his work into a new focus. Their work examines how tradition, represented by Beckett's theatre, and contemporary concerns intersect. In their work, Beckett's theatre is reimagined at the intersection of theatre and installation, an intersection where the concept of theatre is itself being re-worked through a focus on performance itself.

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[94] Brian Singleton coined the phrase "festivalisation" in his essay "The Revival revised." *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish* Drama, edited by Shaun Richards, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, pp. 258-270; for a detailed account of Beckett's relationship with the Gate, see David Clare's essay "The Gate Theatre's Beckett Festivals: Tensions between the Local and the Global." *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, edited by David Tucker and Trish McTighe, London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016, pp. 39-51; see Trish McTighe's essay "'Getting Known': Beckett, Ireland, and the Creative Industries." *"That Was*

Performance as a subject is not limited to Theatre Studies but has been the subject of diverse disciplines from sociology to gender studies. In "Performance as Metaphor", Bert O. States a theatre phenomenologist, posits that "performance" is one of those terms that Marxist academic Raymond Williams calls "'keywords,' or words (e.g. *Realism, naturalism, mimesis, structure)* whose meanings are inextricably bound up with the problems they are being used to discuss." (States 1996:1). When an everyday word is removed from its normal semantic

Us": Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance, edited by Fintan Walsh and Willie White, London: Oberon Books ltd, 2013, pp. 157-171; see Anna McMullan and McTighe's essay "Samuel Beckett, the Gate Theatre Dublin, and the Contemporary Irish Independent Theater Sector: Fragments of Performance History." *Breac*, 10 July 2014, https://breac.nd.edu/articles/samuel-beckett-the-gate-theatre-dublin-and-the-contemporaryirish-independent-theater-sector-fragments-of-performance-history/

[95] for information on Mouth on Fire's productions, see www.mouthonfire.ie; for Gare St Lazare, see http://garestlazareireland.com/

practice, it gets tested and extended until its new "key" meaning is decided and settles into the vocabulary. States argues that keywords are "two-edged in that they belong to the fields of both ideology and methodology: they are at once an attitude and a tool" (States 1996:2). The field of Theatre Studies is being re-shaped by the principle of performance, aided by the rise of multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity and gender studies; equally, the fields of Literary Criticism and other more text-based practices are being reshaped by performance. For instance, in 2014, the *Journal of Beckett Studies: The Performance Issue*, was entirely dedicated to Beckett and performance; other prestigious theatre journals include *Contemporary Theatre Review*, which also had a special issue in 2018, "Staging Beckett and Contemporary Theatre and Performance Cultures".[78] States addresses the semantic problem that arises when defining performance theory, referred to as a "limit-problem" (States 1996:2). He suggests that this limit-problem is because we are all, in a manner of speaking, performers. This idea found purchase earlier in Erving Goffman's sociology classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), which examined social performance at the everyday level. Concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, Goffman's study closely observed the experiences that individuals had at any given moment of their social lives. He defined performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959:15). He adopted the conventional theatre space as the ideal metaphor for his project, as it is here where art mirrors life that is lived in the real world. If we take the well-known phrase that "all the world's a stage", Goffman considered the theatre as the space most likely to experience life as it is lived in the real world. Goffman could not have foreseen the shift to site-specific performances, such as those analysed in this chapter, where the notion that all the world *is* a stage, is taken in its literal meaning. Goffman viewed people as stage performers; being a stage performer meant that one appeared in a social place where behavioural patterns were established and carried out, like a rehearsal/performance theatre pattern. Goffman applied the theatre/performance metaphor, respectively, to the individual and society. His typical everyday performer is the individual who traverses a world saturated with behavioural do's and don'ts. By taking theatre out of the conventional space, and into sitespecific locations, as I analyse in this chapter, performers and audiences are affected by the geographical location of the event, whether outside or inside, which becomes part of the performance itself.

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[78] See *Journal of Beckett Studies: The Performance Issue*, vol. 23, no. 1, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014; *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2018, https://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2018/28-1/

At the other end of the performance spectrum, the work of Peggy Phelan, a performance studies scholar, is concerned with live artistic performance. Phelan's seminal essay "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" argues that

> [p]performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. Performance's being […] becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan 2006:146)

In *Unmasked: The Politics of Performance,* Phelan examined the complex relationship between the self and the other as represented in "photographs, paintings, films, theatre, political protests, and performance art" (Phelan 2006:4). Phelan's notion of presence as the ontological foundation of performance is a characteristic of performance art and the most persistent debate in any discussion of performance in general. Analysing the work of a female performance artist, Phelan argues that as women are invisible within the "dominant narratives of history and the contemporary customs of performance literally", women's performance art, where the body is both subject and object, highlights new considerations about "the central 'absence' integral to the representation of women in patriarchy" (Phelan 2006:163). By disrupting the patriarchal system, these artists create a radical intervention into that culture. She also argues that in live performance, "the interaction between the art object and the spectator is, essentially, performative" (Phelan 2006:147).

In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, States takes Beckett's work as exemplary of theatre as a phenomenological experience in the sense that "it focuses on the activity of theatre *making itself* out of its essential materials: speech, sound, movement, scenery, text, etc." (States 1985:1). States argues that the theatre medium creates a "unique ontological confusion" for audiences, as it relies on sensory, perception and linguistic illusions; my thesis contends that these confusions were attractive to Beckett's theatre craft and deliberately utilised by him. Anna McMullan, in *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, supports the usefulness of States' phenomenological approach for the study of theatre. She writes that the "concept of a 'bifocal' approach to performance analysis which negotiates between sensory, phenomenal experience, and semiotic interpretation is particularly relevant to a theatre, which as Beckett said of *Not I*, is geared more to the audience's nerves than to their intellect" (McMullan 2010:13). In this thesis, location is added to this list, as this notion of theatre "making itself out" is heightened in a site-specific location, as demonstrated by Dwan, Scaife and Coogan. Taking the focus from staging to experience allows audience experience to become a coordinate in analysis. In *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, Stanton Garner argues that an important aspect of theatre phenomenology is its focus on not just the corporeal experience of the actor but also that of the spectator:

> The locus of Beckett's theater of the image remains the audience, that individual/collective 'third body' (along with character and actor) of the stage's intercorporeal field. For Beckett stages his spectator as deliberately as he does his characters, consciously manipulating the experiential orientations of audience to stage. (Garner 1994:81)

Audience members are not simply detached observers in site-specific performance, but rather find themselves confronted with being a central dimension of the performance, opting to either immerse themselves or resist the performance. Finding oneself as integral to the performance, an experience that is often unexpected and may be accompanied by feelings of being uncomfortable could be deemed as Affect, defined by Massumi as a visceral, pre-raw feeling. The performances under analysis negotiate between sensory and phenomenal experience from the audience perspective.[79] Massumi argues that affect is the manifestation of the body's internalisation of an intensity, which cannot be rendered by language; it is more bodily than cognitive, therefore difficult to express. Clare Hemmings, reading Massumi from a feminist perspective argues that he insists that affect "is important to the extent that it is autonomous and outside social signification. To support this, she quotes art historian Simon O'Sullivan's definition of affect:

> There is no denying, or deferring, affects. They are what make up life, and art … Affects are … the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification. But what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them? … You cannot read affects, you can only experience them. (qtd. in Hemmings 2005:548-9)

His analysis of art history is "tilted at the lens", embracing affect as offering a new critical trajectory for cultural theory. As part of my following analysis of site-specific performances, I draw on Performance Studies and Affect Theory to theorise and situate my own experience of spectatorship. As the focus here is performance on the "stage", rather than text on the "page", the following analysis and argument is predicated on my experience as a spectator; therefore, this analysis is spectatorial and, by extension, concerned with affect. Affect theory seeks to reintroduce a subjective dimension to a critical practice that has becomes increasingly detached from individual experience. Massumi argues that affect denotes not an actual observable "thing", but a feeling of "an event or a dimension of every event" (Massumi 2015:47). Put simply, affect is an event of feeling.

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[79] Other major theorists of Affect include Sarah Ahmed and Lauren Berlant.

Lisa Dwan's Interaction with *Not I, Footfalls and Rockaby*

As the concept of the festivalisation of Beckett's work took hold as an effective marketing strategy, in 2012, the "Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival" had its inauguration in the Northern Irish town of Enniskillen, where Beckett attended the Royal Portora boarding school as a teenager.[80] In the 2013 festival, *Not I* was performed in the spectacular location of the Marble Arch Caves near Enniskillen.[81] While the site of the play was an exciting departure, critics have observed that the staging of Beckett in a festival also served to reinforce tradition. In "The Revival Revised", Brian Singleton noted that one can locate the "canonical" in Irish theatre by noting those (male) writers whose work is "festivalised"; this approach to a writer's work guarantees international recognition and their canonical status is subsequently reinforced (Singleton 2004:259). At approximately two hours' drive from Dublin theatres, the "Happy Days Festival" took place in around the environs of this relatively small town, and as McTighe notes, this smallness was considered a "gift" by its director, Seán Doran, who said that because of the limitations of space, the festival needed to innovate by extending its reach to the margins of the town, the forgotten areas and, in a lot of instances, the picturesque (McTighe 2018:28). One of the more interesting performances of the

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[80] For a review of the Happy Days Festivals of 2013 and 2014, see my articles "Three dialogues on Enniskillen." (co-authored by Nicholas Johnson). 17 March 2014, https://thebeckettcircle.org/2014/03/17/three-dialogueson-enniskillen/ ; "Happy Days: Enniskillen Beckett Festival 2014." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2015, pp. 124-132. See also review of the 2013 festival by Sarah Jane Scaife: "Happy Days: Enniskillen International Festival, 22-26 August 2013." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2014, pp. 255-67.

[81] For a more comprehensive engagement with the role of affect in Beckett's work, see Adam Piette's essay, "Beckett, Affect and the Face." *Textual Practice*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2011, pp. 281-295. See Charlotta P. Einarsson's recent study, *A Theatre of Affect: The Corporeal Turn in Samuel Beckett's Drama*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2017.

2013 festival, and the highlight of the "event", was the performance of *Not I* by Irish actor Lisa Dwan. [82] Performed in the unusual location of the Marble Arch Caves, it ran from Wednesday 21-Sunday 25 August 2013. Doran's inspiration for the first "Happy Days Festival" was drawn from Dante's *Divine Comedy* Trilogy, which was Beckett's favourite literary work and muchreferenced in his own writing. Doran incorporated Dante's epic poetry into three special events, "Inferno – into the caves", "Purgatorio – to the islands" and "Paradiso – through the clouds" (which involved flying from Edinburgh to Enniskillen – this ambitious "performance" was subsequently dropped from the programme.) Dwan's performance in this space was such that is has become a signature role for the actor and has become as identified with the festival as the spectacularity of the site.

The Marble Arch Caves is described as a "[g]lobal Geopark, host to one of Europe's finest show caves. Visitors are guided though a fascinating, natural underworld of rivers, waterfalls, winding passages and lofty chambers."[101] At the heart of the Geopark is Cuilcagh Mountain Park, which takes in 2500 hectares on the northern slopes of Cuilcagh Mountain. The spectacular staging of the play in the caves affects the audience long before the performance even begins. In what could be termed, then, as the grandest off-site "stage", the fifty-minute performance, down one hundred steps into the belly of the cave had three components: The performance of *Not I*, an audience walk through the caves to the soundscape of *Inferno* recited by thirty-three "souls", using various technologies in a babble of different languages; and finally, upon reaching journey's end, the opera singer Ruby Philogene, Doran's wife, performed a haunting version of *Dido's Lament* and *Amazing Grace*. As Scaife noted, entering the Marble Arch Caves was "like being sucked into the belly of the mountain, bringing to mind many images from Beckett’s prose writing, of long corridor-like tunnels, shapes and sounds near and far […] the moisture and drips of this visceral cavern like the stomach of Jonah’s whale” (Scaife 2014:261). This description draws attention to the womb-tomb spaces of Beckett’s work that I have been tracing in my earlier chapters. The staging of *Not I* outside the conventional theatre space and into such a spectacular but enclosed space in what became a journey for the senses, reinforces the womb-tomb spaces of Beckett’s prose, now transferred to his drama - literally. To access the cave, we had to descend a hundred steps into the cold temperatures; a palpable “feeling” of trepidation was experienced by the audience when venturing into the unknown cavernous depths. The off-site staging in such an ancient location forced the audience out of the comfort zone of the organised theatre space, where personal safety is normally taken for granted. The difficulties of such an ambitious staging became apparent when staff gave a lengthy demonstration of the health and safety procedures involved, including the use of life jackets. The cavern where the play was to be performed was where three sinkhole rivers, dripping ice and ancient stalactites met: this had quite a disturbing initial “affect” on me: having a fear of water, I had not anticipated the element of risk involved and briefly considered leaving. We were taken by three boats across a glassy black underground river which was exhilarating but all too short. Dwan’s performance was viewed from the boats, at some distance from the “stage”, a large construction resembling a black box. A “*stage in darkness but for* MOUTH” which is crucial to the normal staging of the play, did not need much further engineering by the lighting technician (Beckett 2006:376). As Mouth suddenly appeared and began her machine-gun dialogue, the affect was one of disorientation and it was difficult to focus on Mouth as Dwan’s voice ricocheted around the vaulted walls.

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[82] Dwan performed *Not I* in the first Happy Days Festival in 2012, in the auditorium of Portora Royal School. Dwan has been performing the role on and off since 2005, where she first performed it, alongside *Play*, under the directorship of Natalie Abrahami, at the Battersea Arts Centre, London. [101] https://www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com/

In much the same way that Beckett’s Irishness was emphasised by the Beckett festivals at the Gate, Dwan's distinctive Irish accent became a marker of this performance, which was noted by the small but discerning audience. Apart from the obvious Irishness of the actor performing, the spectacular setting at first seemed to be a stroke of genius on Doran's part. However, even in this grandest of off-site locations, the problem of context still arose. The unique setting aimed to enhance the performance, but instead it competed with it, and ultimately, the ancient caves won out. Place here was not integral to the performance; it vied with it and overshadowed it. However, despite the difficulties with staging, the experience of being deep within a cave while hearing Mouth's spewing speech was an unforgettable and haunting experience for the audience. Beckett famously said that he was "not unduly concerned with intelligibility", but that he wanted *Not I* "to work on the nerves of the audience" (qtd. in Ackerly and Gontarski 2006:411). This "audacious curation", which has increasingly become Doran's *modus operandi* over the festival years, in the magical setting of the Marble Arch Caves certainly worked on the nerves of its audience (McTighe 2018:28). Its haunting experience mirrored that of Billie Whitelaw, who described performing Mouth in a conventional theatre space as "like falling backward into hell" (Gussow 1996:84). In landing the audience, the performer and the crew together in the dark belly of the cave and of the play itself, there was a shared sense of being swallowed up by the ancient earth and by time, jointly surrounded by, and in awe of, the calcified limestone that has built up over thousands of years. Ultimately, the caves themselves were a "natural" tour-de-force.

Dwan went on to reprise the role again that same year, describing how physically demanding it was becoming. In her performances at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 2013, she described the remarkable physical demands involved: "I get trembling and faint, and I can still feel the hernia sticking out that I got from doing it […] my neck goes all the time […] but it's not just that. I find the head space I have to go into deeply frightening" (Marlowe 2014). Blindfolded, Dwan's arms were placed in restraints to restrict her body, cruciform, against a board, with her head tightly strapped into an aperture. Other actors have commented on the extreme demands that performing Beckett's drama had on their bodies: Beckett's favoured actress, Billie Whitelaw, who became famous for performing his drama, especially the televised version of *Not I* that I analysed in Chapter Three, described performing *Not I*: "your head spins and the floor moves without you actually moving – I felt as if I had an open wound, and every night I went on in all that pain. You are not allowed to move your head a fraction of an inch one way or another" (Ben-Zvi 1992:9).

Whitelaw, who described herself as suffering from "raging Beckettitus", also noted the mental effect of performing, when she told Ben-Zvi that "every damn play of Beckett's that I do involves some sort of physically or mentally excruciating experience" (Ben-Zvi 1992:5). Whitelaw also described, how following the stage directions that forced her to twist her spine when performing *Footfalls*, led her to experience a feeling of "disappearing". She recalled that "in fact something happens whereby my spine starts to spiral down as though I am disappearing. And its physically very painful to do" (qtd. in Kalb 1989:147). One cannot, then, underestimate the demands that Beckett made on his actors when directing his own drama. Another actor Irene Worth, who also had to remain faithful to the exacting stage directions recounted how she had to visit a specialist because she developed a "terrible muscular spasm through tension [during *Happy Days*]. And so I've had to learn to get just the right sense of relaxation in my body and shoulders and my neck and yet give the sense of being trapped" (qtd. in Kalb 1989:147). Although performing any one of Beckett's plays is, then very physically and mentally demanding of its actor, as both Whitelaw and Dwan have attested to, Dwan took this to the next level when she subsequently took *three* plays, *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, directed by Walter Asmus, and performed them together, in what I am terming a "theatrical

Trilogy", to borrow Corey Wakeling's phrase (Wakeling 2017:343). Wakeling notes that although the plays were not written to be performed together as such, Whitelaw's touring performances of them from the 1980s onwards has established them as a theatrical Trilogy.[83]

Beginning in 2014, the Trilogy was performed in London's Royal Court theatre and Duchess Theatre, before travelling to Galway, as part of Galway International Arts Festival, prior to a whistle-stop international tour.[84] Also, this innovative idea of performing the three plays as a theatrical Trilogy demonstrates that they seem to be enjoying a moment in contemporary theatre and performance and have become representative of Beckett's late theatre.[85] For one single actor to perform all three shorts in one performance is admirable, and Dwan, under the experienced directorship of Asmus, who worked directly with Beckett himself, rises to the challenge. Having seen all three plays performed individually and in different theatres and, of course, the Marble Arch Caves setting, they operate very successfully as a Trilogy, as all three centre on the experience of marginality of older women, as discussed at length in Chapter Three. Again focusing on my experience as a spectator, the production at An Taibhdhearc theatre in Galway, entitled *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* was performed in complete darkness, lasting just an hour, causing feelings of uneasiness and claustrophobia among some audience members.[86] In much the same way as the Marble Arch Caves delivered an affective experience due to its location in the belly of the cavernous caves, the pitch darkness of the theatre was possibly the most memorable aspect of Asmus' production. The theatre is normally a taken for granted safe space, where the audience is subject to theatrical affect and drama – but in a recognisable container. Here, the container was made unfamiliar by the darkness, and in this play/Trilogy/staging, the safety of the container was challenged by the complete black out, causing a lot of whispering about what was about to occur. It had the effect of focusing complete attention on the actor on stage, as nothing else was visible. Having already discussed the three plays at length in Chapter Three, here I focus on Dwan's performance of *Not I*, as this forms a continuous thread through her performances. This is a play, according to Whitelaw, Beckett insisted should be delivered at the "speed of thought" (qtd. in Wakeling 2017:354). Reviewing it in the *Independent*, Paul Taylor wrote that "Dwan's 9-minute performance is the quickest on record", colourfully describing how watching the "manic Irishaccented gabble" was "like watching a non-driver trapped at the wheel in a hurtling vehicle with no brakes" (Taylor 2014). In 1972, at the world premiere of *Not I*, the actor Jessica Tandy took twenty-three minutes to deliver Mouth's outpourings, while Whitelaw's subsequent interpretation was fifteen-minutes. Dwan's contracted performance of just under nine minutes has been the subject of some controversy, however.

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[83] Whitelaw's first experience of performing Beckett's drama was in *Play* in 1964 at the Old Vic theatre in London. She appeared in three premieres – the London premiere of *Not I* (1973) and the word premieres of *Footfalls* (1976) and *Rockaby* (1981). Whitelaw became famously known as Beckett's chosen actress; she toured the triple-bill of *Rockaby*, *Enough* and *Footfalls* in 1984 and 1986. For an in-depth interview with Whitelaw, see Jonathan Kalb's *Beckett in Performance* (1989), pp. 234-242.

[84] In 2017, Dwan performed her newest work, *No's Knife,* adapted from Beckett's prose work *Texts for Nothing*, at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, having played in London and New York, co-directed by Dwan and Joe Murphy. For reviews on the Dublin performance, see: https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/theatrearts/a-star-is-dwan-35831369.html; https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/no-s-knife-review-lisa-dwangoes-on-with-beckett-redux-1.3118183

[85] Other innovative productions of these late plays include the recent performance of *Not I* by Jess Thom, which I noted in Chapter Three. Thom, an actor with Tourettes, played to a sell-out audience at Battersea Arts Centre in London. Thom uncontrollably uses the word "biscuit", which therefore becomes part of the performance. See Note 8 in Chapter Three for more detail on this.

In the essay "Samuel Beckett's Hypnotic Theatre" Wakeling discusses this aspect of Dwan's contracted performance. When Dwan first met Whitelaw in 2006 she noted: "[W]e bonded immediately, like two shell-shocked war veterans. […] Soon she was conducting me over her kitchen table. […] She [Whitelaw] recalled what Beckett had told her: 'You can't go fast enough for me'" (qtd. in Wakeling 2017:358). Dwan seems to have taken Whitelaw's advice literally, delivering the monologue such to create what Wakeling describes as "the hypnotic effects of vertigo encouraged by the play" (Wakeling 2017:358). This machine-gun delivery was problematic because Dwan focused on delivering the dialogue at the "speed of thought", and thus disregarded Beckett's advice on "syllabic precision", when he told Whitelaw "if the word has several syllables, use them. Ev-er-y-thing. No-thing" (qtd. in Wakeling 2017:358). Although Beckett was more concerned with the play acting on the nerves rather than the intellect of the audience, Dwan's breakneck speed of delivery in Asmus' production was the most problematic aspect of the overall performance. Although it is meant to be delivered at the speed of thought, the audience still need to be able to hear it, regardless of whether they understand it or not. As a result, Dwan's reputation for performing *Not I* has rested on this single aspect alone. Although her delivery is totally controlled, it puts the audience in a difficult position, especially if they are new to the play, as it is not possible to keep up with the speed of the dialogue and the content is not audible. Thus, a cognitive veil arises between actor and audience and the affect of this is to confuse us with unintelligibility.

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[86] I attended the performance on July 26, 2014 at An Taibhdhearc Theatre, Galway, where it ran as part of the Galway International Arts Festival, from 22-26 July 2014 and I discussed the affect with other audience members who reported such feelings.

After a long eerie blackout, Dwan re-appears, black tar make-up removed, and wearing a wig and an old-fashioned ball gown, possibly reflective of Dwan's *actual* age, her late thirties, instead of the traditional "*grey wrap*", as she begins to play May, the ghostly middle-aged woman in her forties, with "*dishevelled grey hair*" (Beckett 2006:399). The production is expertly lit by James Farncombe, with spectral lighting evoking May's sense of "never having really been born". Under Asmus' expert direction, Dwan's performance and movement here is technically brilliant and moving, remaining faithful to Beckett's stage directions of walking nine steps up and down a board, nailed down to the stage, "*starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R"* (Beckett 2006:399). In the final play *Rockaby,* Dwan is clothed in a sequinned black dress, as per Beckett's instructions, as she rocks herself off to death, albeit in a somewhat soothing performance. This is a welcome reprieve for the bewildered audience after the manic delivery of *Not I*. At the ending of *Rockaby*, Dwan's head droops to one side, either in sleep or death, an ambiguous ending. Taken together, the Trilogy appears gloomy as all three plays present older women who have led uneventful lives, being superfluous to society as post-reproductive women. Dwan's performance and Asmus'

production is chilling but also moving. Although performed in a small conventional theatre, the decision to black out the entire space, together with the impressive lighting, ensures that the audience has an affective experience, without much meaning, exactly as Beckett wished. Again, the production grated on the audience's nerves, rather than their intellect, due to the total blackout throughout the hour-long performance.

Another aspect of the performance that is rarely commented on, either by critics or audiences, is the dissonance between the age of the actor and the age of the character on stage. Dwan was in her late thirties when she played Mouth, who is in her 70s, when she played May who is in her 40s, and W who is in late middle age. In each case the characters were much older women (as Beckett specifies their ages in the text) than the actress, and this gap is now being addressed here in my thesis. Notably, however, reviewers do not mention this discrepancy in age, referring to "the middle-aged daughter", or the "elderly woman" (Taylor 2014; Gardner 2014). Indeed, both audiences and critics alike suspend belief when it comes to this aspect of performing age in theatre. As an example, May in *Footfalls* is not only trapped by her restricted movement on the board, but also by her costume, the grey wrap that Beckett calls for, which is crucial to the performance.[87] Peter Gidal argues that:

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[87] Beckett was explicit about the colour of May's wrap. In a production of the play in 1995, directed by

> The figure on stage in *Footfalls*, wrapped, is never a figure *inside* a wrap. It is as a whole a wrap. The wrap … thus functions as a point of reference for … the initial referent (that which one associates with the theatrics of ‘old age, hunched back, walking slowly, etc’) having been expunged as useless in terms of realistic *motive*. (Gidal 1986:163)

Gidal’s observation that May’s wrap functions as a “referent” which is associated with the “theatrics” of ageing is an important one, as it draws attention to the notion of age as performative, as per Judith Butler’s framework.[88] In *Performing Age in Modern Drama*, Valerie Barnes Lipscomb argues that as theatre, television and film directors regularly cast against chronological age, actors need to convince their audiences of the age they are portraying. This issue around casting against age and the performance of it are, as Lipscomb points out, “nowhere more evident than on the modern stage” (Barnes Lipscomb 2016:1). Dwan is a classic example of this casting against age in her performance of Beckett’s late short plays; as a very attractive, slim, blonde, blue-eyed woman, she is far from the ageing women specified in Beckett’s text. Writing at the intersection of theatre studies, performance studies, literary studies and age studies, like my thesis, Lipscomb argues that literary and age-studies scholars can gain insight from theatre performance approaches, while performance-study scholars have begun to explore age as a field of enquiry. By viewing all age as a performance, Lipscomb maintains that an intergenerational dialogue could ensue, resulting in the breakdown of barriers and contributing to the battle against ageism in our culture.

In Butler’s formula, the “repetition” of an action over time creates a “reality” (Butler 2007:198-203). As Beckett employs obsessional repetition in his stage directions, the wrap that

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Deborah Warner and starring Fiona Shaw, there was controversy over costume choice in the staging, with Shaw presented in a red dress, instead of the requisite grey wrap. As a consequence, Warner and Shaw were infamously banned for life from directing and performing Beckett’s work by the writer’s estate. The ban was, however, lifted by the time the 2007 version of *Happy Days* debuted at the National Theatre in London, starring Fiona Shaw. That production also travelled to the Abbey theatre in Dublin in 2007.

[88] See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 2007; “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531.

the actor wears, along with the incessant pacing, convinces the audience of the "reality" of that age on the dramatic stage. The repetitive moment and text of the play, along with the nightly repetition of the play itself, then, convinces the audience, who are prepared to suspend belief, of the intended age of the character being performed. Audiences have rarely pointed to the fact that there is a discrepancy between the age of the actor and the age performed, testifying to a wider cultural blind-spot about the ageism that permeates our media and cultural sphere. This is complicated slightly in *Footfalls* as we are told by Beckett that May is "in her forties", but appears much older, if the "*dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing*" is strictly adhered to in the production. Social theorist Chris Gilleard usefully notes that Beckett, in these late plays, seemed less preoccupied with the body as diseased and decayed but had turned instead to a fascination with the body "as a vehicle for performance" (Gilleard 2016:7). This new emphasis opens up a whole new interpretive territory, in which the body in many varied time-space registers becomes the focus of criticism, most especially how the body in time, or the ageing body, occupies and makes space. What is most interesting is how this is explored in relation to specifically gendered bodies. The body in Beckett's theatre is, as Pierre Chabert notes "considered with minute attention" (Chabert 1982:23). Chabert claims that

> whereas the actor's body is usually a 'given' which does not vary – aside from that part which contributes to the 'composition' of the role (costume and make-up) – in Beckett's theatre the body undergoes metamorphoses. It is *worked*, violated even, much like the raw materials of the painter or sculptor. (Chabert 1982:23)

Clearly, then, what is notable is how in the late plays, Beckett insists on presenting his ageing female characters as ghostly, "not quite there", isolated and mostly immobile, where the audience only see fragments of these ageing bodies, instead of the whole. When the whole body is presented, it is enveloped by a costume, such as May's wrap, or the elaborate black dress and rocking-chair of W in *Rockaby*. While it is clear from the earlier testimonies from actors that there are serious physical demands made on their bodies when performing these plays, it should not over-shadow the fact that age is being performed here and that age is performative. In other words, the female actors of Beckett's late drama are expected to physically suffer along with the ageing characters that they embody.

Much has been written about women actors being cast to play the mothers of actors who are only a few years younger than themselves, thus supporting the cosmetic industry by casting younger women in older women's roles, as is the case of Dwan performing older women in Beckett's drama. In a recent newspaper article, "There's no country for old actors in Hollywood – and that matters", John Semley picks up on the reluctance in Hollywood to cast older actors, both men and women, in the roles of older people. He notes, however, that women fair much worse in this scenario:

> The problem is not a new one—and, predictably, it's much worse for women. 'We all watched James Bond as he got more and more geriatric,' Helen Mirren said in 2015, 'and his girlfriends got younger and younger. It's so annoying.' Mirren was right, and not just in describing how watching the lovemaking scenes in late-era Roger Moore Bond movies feels at least vaguely perverse, if not wholly nauseating. In 2017, *Vanity Fair* reported that *Orange Is the New Black* star Jamie Denbo was deemed 'too old' to play the wife of a 57-year-old man; Denbo was just 43. In 2015, actress Maggie Gyllenhaal stated that, at 37, she was likewise deemed too old to play the wife of a 55year-old. (Semley 2018)

This results again in the cultural erasure of older women who are often denied the opportunity to play the actual age of the characters that they are themselves. When directors cast actors who are close to the age/life stage of the characters they portray, the shock of the representation of actual age in a culture that consistently excludes older women who have not had cosmetic surgery, takes on considerable significance and alters the effect of the play.

Company SJ's *Beckett in the City: The Women Speak*

This is precisely what Irish theatre director Sarah Jane Scaife has done in her recent production of her version of the theatrical Trilogy, entitled *Beckett in the City: The Women Speak*. Actor and theatre director Scaife, together with her company, Company SJ, (co-founded by producer Polly O'Loughlin in 2009), have been at the forefront of staging Beckett's work in off-site locations around Ireland and internationally.[89] Scaife has been working on Beckett's texts and drama for over twenty-five years, while also directing the work of other Irish playwrights such as Marina Carr and W. B. Yeats. Trained in Polish mime and Butoh dance, which originated in Japan and is a type of dance or silent theatre which displays extreme visual images created by white painted dancers, Scaife is known for her approach to choreography and directing that focuses on the actor's body. She writes that, as she has grown older, she has worked with many different social and cultural groups, both in Ireland and abroad, but the "one thing" that has remained a constant in her career has been "the insistence on the importance of the live body, both of performer and watcher, and of the site where the event takes place" (Scaife 2018:115). She first began presenting Beckett's mimes in Dublin in the late 1980s, having returned from theatre training in New York. In 2006, she received funding from Culture Ireland to stage Beckett's drama, particularly his later short works, with international theatre companies in China, India, Malaysia, Mongolia and Singapore, (McMullan 2017:364).

Working with these intercultural companies brought Scaife an acute awareness of the cultural and social markers of location when staging Beckett's plays. Her focus on the site and setting creates them as co-creators of meaning, not as mere background or foil for the characters on stage. She noted that "even Beckett's bodies, once on stage, are forced into a confrontation with specificities, site and location" (Scaife 2016:154). This intercultural work also led her to reflect on the "specificity of her own cultural markers and milieu: "[t]his experience of watching as ‘other’ in a geographical and cultural space I was not familiar with drove me to look back at my own culture, assessing the incultured and socially inscribed body within the social and architectural spaces of my own city” (Scaife 2016:156). This was what inspired her long-term project *Beckett in the City* series, which began in 2009, and which aimed to “foreground this neglected area of performing Beckett: the specificity of the audience’s embodied interaction with the performance” (Scaife 2018:115). It also aimed to re-work Beckett’s drama into “the social and architectural spaces of the city”, producing *Rough for Theatre I* and *Act Without Words II* (2009-12), *Fizzles* (2014), and *The Women Speak: Not I, Footfalls, Rockaby,* and *Come and Go* (2015-2017) (www.company-sj.com). Since 2009, Scaife has been presenting Beckett’s late plays, mimes and prose texts in disused site-specific locations in Dublin, Limerick, London and New York. The first play in the series, *Act Without Words II*, a mime between two men, A and B, was staged in 2009 as part of the Dublin Absolut Fringe Festival and performed at the back of the famous Christchurch Cathedral in the heart of Dublin city, close to a homeless support service which provides a methadone service. In the context of the site, A and B become easily recognisable as two homeless men, living on the streets, their lives centred around their banal daily routines, similar to Winnie in *Happy Days*.[90] The “*sacks*” become sleeping bags in Scaife’s production, grounding the men’s situation in the harsh reality of street life and the drug issues that can accompany it (Beckett 2006:209). Scaife describes the work as “a phenomenological piece of theatre, operating on a somatic and perceptual level through a deep engagement between the performer and the spectator, without the barrier that language can sometimes construct” (Scaife 2016:162). Beckett’s mimes, pushed out of the conventional theatre space and into Scaife’s dramatic chosen site, result in such a phenomenological experience. Such was its success, it subsequently moved to other sites, each with its own resonance, in Limerick, London and New York. In 2013, Scaife presented

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[89] https://www.company-sj.com/

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[90] A and B were performed by theatre experts, Raymond Keane and Bryan Burroughs.

Beckett's *Rough for Theatre I* and *Act Without Words II* for Company SJ and Barabbas at the Dublin Fringe Festival in a disused car park, on a derelict site that used to be a warehouse, before touring to Tokyo and London.[91][92] The Dublin site drew attention to the fall-out of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy that Ireland enjoyed for many years, before it came crashing down spectacularly in 2008, when the country came precariously close to being bankrupt.

Specificity of location is key to the uniqueness of Scaife's oeuvre. Derval Tubridy notes how Company SJ's work "responds directly to the urban space in which the work is performed, each iteration of a production establishing what Douglas Crimp calls new "coordinates of perception" between spectator, artwork, and the place inhabited by both" (Tubridy 2018:69).[93] In this, she is part of a more widespread growing awareness of the importance of site-specific productions in Irish theatre, which has been mostly driven by Irish women theatre practitioners. Brian Singleton, in his essays "Politicizing Performance: ANU Productions and Site-Specific Theatre" (2014), and "Beckett and the Non-Place in Irish Performance" (2016), has traced the rise of the development of site-specific performances in Ireland, noting that many Irish theatre practitioners are moving beyond the conventional space of the theatre into the interactional space of outdoor sites. One example of this is the phenomenally successful Irish theatre company ANU Productions, formed by Louise Lowe.[94] Most of these practitioners have in fact been women, a fact mentioned by Singleton's attentive decisive analysis. As Miriam Haughton notes in the essay on ANU, "From Laundries to Labour Camps", their powerful interactional work Laundry (2011) reveals the power of site-specific theatre to interrogate historical institutional abuse in Ireland and the consequences of shaming. This ground-breaking work interrogates the irony that one of the most radical acts in theatre is the performance of silence, the power of which I will be returning to in my analysis of Amanda Coogan's work. *Laundry* concerned the women who were incarcerated in the now infamous Magdalene Laundries all over Ireland from the early 1760s through to the late 1990s.[95] Crucially, *Laundry* was performed in the very building where these experiences were contained. By the powerful use of silence in the performance, Haughton notes how attention is drawn to "this rule of silence (which) dominated the wider public and private spheres of modern Irish society, ensuring their complicity in the discrimination, slave labour and forceful imprisonment of these vulnerable women" (Haughton 2015:57). As audience members were only allowed into the performance one by one, they are thus immersed, and alone, contributing to the sense of being haunted by inhabiting historical spaces. In this way, the audience is prompted into a direct confrontation with a deliberately hidden shameful episode in Irish history. The shame heaped on the women who did not conform to the notion of the "ideal" woman as set out in the Irish Constitution of 1937, was in fact the shame of those who incarcerated them, and the transmission of this shame is highlighted by the logic and logistics of the performance.[96] As McTighe notes, although Company SJ differs from ANU's work, in that she employs "pre-existing" Beckett texts, she also cleverly utilises the possibilities of site, "creating new meanings and resonances in the text" (McTighe 2018:30).[97] In charting feminine responses to Beckett and in considering his legacies for performance cultures, Scaife's re-working of performance beyond the traditional space of the conventional theatre is political in its aims to re-imagine Beckett's texts. In conversation with Derval Tubridy, Scaife has said that her decision to take Beckett's drama to the streets, thereby foregrounding the ethical nature of his work, is because these are the places "where the homeless spend their time" (Tubridy 2018:76).[98] Singleton emphasises the political nature of site-specific theatre when he argues that "moving theatre out of buildings – and thus from their marginal socio-cultural arena of impact – and into the streets, is a hugely political act" (Singleton 2014:1).

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[91] For a detailed analysis on the 2009 and 2013 productions, see Anna McMullan's essay "Staging Ireland's Dispossessed: Sarah Jane Scaife's Beckett in the City Project." *Samuel Beckett/Aujourd'hui*, vol. 29, 2017, pp.

[92] -374, http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/18757405-02902012; Derval Tubridy, "Theatre and Installation: Perspectives on Beckett." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2018, pp. 68-81, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10486801.2017.1405394; for a review on the 2013 production, see Fintan O'Toole's article, "Culture Shock: Two Samuel Beckett Plays in a Car Park? Unmissable." *The Irish Times*, 21 September 2013, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/culture-shock-twosamuel-beckett-plays-in-a-car-park-unmissable-1.1533672

[93] Tubridy also analyses the work of Irish theatre company Pan Pan Theatre, who have staged *All That Fall* and *Embers* in their innovative productions.

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[94] Singleton has written several essays on ANU: "ANU Productions and Site-Specific Performance: The Politics of Space and Place." *"That Was Us": Contemporary Irish Theatre*, Walsh, pp. 21-36; "Politicizing Performance: ANU Productions and Site-Specific Theatre." *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies*, July 2014, pp. 1-7, https://breac.nd.edu/articles/politicizing-performance-anu-productions-and-site-specific-theater/; "Beckett and the Non-Place in Irish Performance." *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, edited by Trish McTighe and David Tucker, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 169-184. See also his monograph: *ANU Productions: The Monto Cycle*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

[95] The atrocities of the Magdalene Laundries were exposed by Irish journalist, the late Mary Raftery in her television documentary, "States of Fear", which aired on RTE television in 1999. The Irish Government issued a formal state apology in 2013, with a major compensation scheme.

Scaife's 2015 production *Beckett in the City: The Women Speak*, comprising of the four shorts *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and *Come and Go*, was innovative not only in terms of its emphasis on urban spaces, but also in terms of its casting. As this is the only production under analysis that I could not attend, instead of my own direct experience as a primary source, I use interviews I conducted with Scaife on her experience as a director, interviews with Scaife, and

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[96] In article 41.2 of the Irish Constitutional Act of 1937, two sentences appear to bear all the hallmarks of a paternalistic state that reduces women to the domestic sphere: ", the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". See: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1937/act/40/enacted/en/html Ireland will have a referendum on article 41.2, but at the time of writing, in late 2018, this has been postponed.

[97] For an interesting analysis of Place in Beckett, see McTighe's essay "In Caves, in Ruins: Place as Archive at the Happy Days International Beckett Festival." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 28, no.1, 2018, pp. 27-38.

[98] For an in-depth analysis of Scaife's productions of *Act Without Words II* and *Rough for Theatre I*, see Tubridy's essay: "Theatre and Installation: Perspectives on Beckett." *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 28, no.1, 2018, pp. 68-81.

Anna McMullan's recorded experience as a spectator at the performance to read affect. Scaife describes her vision for *Beckett in the City: The Women Speak*, as it was presented at the Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2015, thus:[99]

> We are only now beginning to recognise the ways in which Ireland has failed its women and, in many cases, harmed them beyond reparation. The 'unruly' female body has been hidden and controlled behind walls: walls of the laundries, the mother and baby homes, even the domestic home itself. How is it possible for Beckett's abstract, modernist works to speak to this trauma? (https://www.company-sj.com/samuel-beckett-the-womenspeak/)

Like ANU productions, Scaife aimed to highlight the historical injustices perpetrated against women in Ireland in her reinscriptions of Beckett's drama, by taking it out of the conventional theatre space and positioning it in carefully chosen sites; this performance of Beckett's Trilogy *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and *Come and Go*, was performed in numbers twenty and twentyone Parnell Square, near the Hugh Lane Gallery in north inner-city Dublin. Scaife writes that the piece operated as

> a case study for exploring how Beckett's work can foreground broad cross-cultural questions around gender, social, and other forms of marginalisation through heightening the audience's experience of the specific socio-political, historical, and cultural conditions and resonances of the site in which the performance takes place. (Scaife 2018:114)

Site-specific performance has been highly instrumental in drawing attention to historical and continuing injustices against Irish women and differentiating between the types of injustices inflicted by virtue of class. Taking *Not I* as "the lynchpin for this approach" of framing the performances within the institutions of the past while remaining conscious of the present,

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[99] In 2017, it performed in a sell-out run from 20 September to 01 October, meeting at the Irish Arts Centre in New York, and waking the short distance to three small rooms in a former piano factory on West 52nd Street.

Scaife reads Mouth as “a woman howling from the margins of Ireland’s history. […] for me, *Not I* underpinned the decision to situate these four plays within the site of the house – not just a house, but the institution of ‘house’” (Scaife 2018:118). Not only, then, did Scaife’s production highlight the unheard women’s voices of Ireland’s institutional past, but it also highlighted another of the sites of discrimination against women: age. Unlike Asmus, Scaife consciously cast older actors Bríd Ní Neachtain, Michele Forbes and Joan Davis, to play the roles of Mouth, May and W respectively, who range in age from their fifties to their seventies. In this seemingly obvious act, Scaife made a clear feminist point.

Jonathan Kalb an expert in Beckettian drama, described Scaife’s production in New York as “a canny, subtle and startlingly beautiful event … one of the most intelligent and resonant feminist readings of Beckett I’ve ever seen” (Kalb 2017). In his review, he noted that the characters are marginalised and discarded, but “not valueless” (Kalb 2017). In her decision to perform these plays in a factory, where predominantly working-class women worked in the past, Kalb notes that Scaife is determined to confront her audience with such matters as “the burdens that gender and sex stereotypes hang on women, and their historical warehousing, sidelining (sic) and dismissal” (Kalb 2017). In *Beckett in Performance* (1989), Kalb noted how the exacting nature of Beckett’s drama “distinguishes itself from most other dramatic literature to a large extent because of its effects in production, its demands on those acting, directing and watching it” (Kalb 1989:144). As Beckett was specific in naming the ages of his female characters or referring to them as “prematurely aged” in his late drama, Scaife remained faithful to this aspect of his stage directions in her casting. She responds to the demands of Beckett’s drama with careful consideration, insight, innovation and a deep commitment to the integrity of Beckett’s “obdurate insistence that his works be performed as written” (Kalb 1989:153).

"Act your age", a well-known phrase, has been taken on board by Scaife in this production; she writes that she had always wanted to work with the three actors she cast, and had simply been waiting for a suitable project. In this, she gravitated towards these three actors as they brought a wealth of theatre experience and "intelligence" to the project (Scaife2018:118), along with Scaife's own wealth of experience as a director, and as a woman who is also in her "middlepause". Forbes, actor and novelist, somewhere in her "middlepause", and Ní Neachtain, actor, sixty years old, both broke new ground in Irish theatre in the 1980s, when they were part of the experimental group of actors that worked with playwright and poet Tom MacIntyre at the Abbey Theatre. Davis is a dancer in her seventies, who "pioneered contemporary dance in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s and has experimented with collaborative art as a professional artist and therapist" (Scaife 2018:118). Authentic voice was very important for Scaife here, as she notes: "I was specifically looking for the timbre of an older woman's voice", while also looking for voices that resonated from different parts of Ireland – Ní Neachtain hails from Connemara in the west of Ireland, a bilingual speaker whose first language is Irish. Scaife noted that "the very recognisable hard, rough, harrowing Irish voice that she brought to Beckett's work was inspiring" (Scaife 2018:119). Beckett himself said of Mouth in *Not I*, that he "knew that woman in Ireland. […] stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them" (Knowlson 1996:590). I suggest, then, that Scaife's casting of Ní Neachtain for the role of Mouth was a considered and insightful decision, coming as close as possible to Beckett's vision. Scaife also wanted voices from different parts of Ireland, along with different ages; Forbes is from Northern Ireland, with a subtending accent that is almost musical. These specifics of older female bodies and voices inflected by age and region were integral to Scaife's vision for this work. This was immediately apparent in her iteration of *Not I,* played by Ní Neachtain.

As the audience entered the performance space in the Dublin production, a film was projected onto the wall, featuring the three female performers wandering around the rooms aimlessly as if incarcerated in some kind of a nursing home or institution, possibly one like the Magdalene Laundries (the film had been shot in the initial location of a boys' secondary school in Dublin, Coláiste Mhuire, which subsequently became unavailable). Scaife also chose to project Article 42 of the Irish Constitution onto the wall, referring to Article 42.1 which states that women's role is defined within the home (see note 36). The audience were taken into a series of rooms, where they sat on chairs or benches. *Not I* was performed in the first room, where the spectators were no more than fifteen feet from Ní Neachtain's powerful performance. Scaife describes the staging of Mouth:

> We presented her in a very small room on a specially designed chair that had elongated legs, that left her as in Alice in Wonderland, with her mouth at the required 8 feet. She wasn't held in, in any way, but had her head resting on the back of the chair (which reflected the institutional look we were registering with the rocking chair). She just gripped the arm rests of the chair and set off. Her mouth was not 'perfectly' lit as in red lips, perfect teeth - only the lips seen, but as in the stage directions for the piece. You could see the age of her chin a bit and all the details of a woman past her youth. The audience were breathtakingly close to her so even though she was in darkness you could feel the body attached to the mouth and sense, if not even smell, the anxiety and frustration felt by a woman desperately trying to make sense of an intolerable, nonsensical situation.[100]

The lighting of Mouth here is crucial: the audience are not presented with the characteristic red lips and perfect teeth of Dwan's performance, or the "*faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow*" (Beckett 2006:376), of Beckett's instructions, but instead, are offered the reality of an ageing woman's face, drawing attention to the "age of her chin and all the details of a woman past her youth". The audience were therefore left in no doubt that the seventy-year old Mouth was in fact being played by an older woman; also, here Mouth's delivery is not pitched at the breakneck speed of Dwan's performance but is instead delivered at a much more leisurely pace, as if "struggling to articulate a particular thought" (Kalb 2017). Scaife was conscious of this and carefully adapted the pacing: "We slowed down the piece a bit so that at least at the start the audience could find their way in to this most visceral and disturbing pieces. Everyone who came was so incredibly moved by the piece and some who had seen it in a traditional space said that they had never got it before but just thought it was a vocal marathon."[101] Dwan's machine-gun delivery has become famous for being the fastest on record; in Scaife's version, the slowed down version, contrary to Beckett's instructions that it should be performed at the speed of thought, resonated with the audience, simply because they could keep up with the dialogue and could relate to the fact that Mouth was being performed by a woman of similar age, which, although seemingly obvious, is not common enough on Irish stages.

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[100] Scaife, in conversation with Brenda O'Connell, 15 September 2018.

The casting of older women was also specifically noted by Kalb who referred to Ní Neachtain's performance of Mouth as "not just the childlike, impulsive headcase she's often taken to be. She's rather a whole adult woman striving to communicate through obscure impediments" (Kalb 2017). The staging is also unique in that Scaife chose to re-introduce the Auditor, which was dropped by Beckett, in this case played by Joan Davis in the "garb of a homeless woman, dishevelled hair, her gaze fixed on the frantic Mouth" (McMullan 2017:371). Although Beckett explicitly described the Auditor as "sex undeterminable", the clearly recognizably female Davis, who grips the pillar she is standing beside and gradually sinks to the floor, transforms what is usually a sealed hermetic experience into an affective encounter between Mouth, Auditor, and the audience. The original figure of the Auditor, whose role was to move "in simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion" is re-interpreted in Scaife's production. As McMullan has noted, while clearly neither male nor of indeterminate sex, the Auditor is a seventy-year old woman, "dressed as a homeless person, with dishevelled hair, her gaze fixed on the frantic Mouth" (McMullan 2017:371). Instead of presenting the Auditor as a compassionate observer, the audience are invited to see her as a woman who is as marginalised as Mouth, lending a very specific gendered aspect to the interpretation.

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[101] Scaife, in conversation with O'Connell, 15 September 2018.

The next play performed in the sequence was *Footfalls*, played by Forbes, who provides the voices of May and her mother, in a performance that McMullan describes as "both familiar, respecting the stage directions, yet also defamiliarized by very slight departures from the precise choreography" (McMullan 2017:371-2). McMullan notes that Forbes' movement is more of "everyday gestures, reaching out for something beyond reach, then coiled around herself" (McMullan 2017:372). This had the effect on the audience of witnessing a traumatised woman, albeit one who resists her lack of agency, determined to articulate herself and her experience. In these late plays, which focus on marginalised older female subjects attempting to account for themselves, Beckett appears to transform his early struggles with the feminine, to produce dramatisations of female ageing and sexuality which are as much as a force of resistance as of a condition to be resisted, as I argued in Chapter Three. *Rockaby*, played by the oldest actor Davis, brings the audience uncomfortably close to the idea of a life about to end, dressed in a plain black dress, rather than the "*black lacy high-necked evening gown. ... Jet sequins to glitter when rocking"* that Beckett called for (Beckett 2006:433). Rather than the focus being on the elaborate costume, the plain black dress, emblematic of mourning, draws the audience towards the reality of W's situation; as Scaife puts it "the chair, the aged body of the woman, the fireplace long unused, the blocked-up windows, and the light that came in at a slant to create a skull from Joan's head as she rocked, all conspired to make one breathing, rocking, haunting image” (Scaife 2018:121). The end is nigh for W, confirmed by one of her last shocking declarations: “fuck life” (Beckett 2006:442). This graphic phrase points to the fact that we all die, sooner or later and insists on the actor’s age as a signifier of this reality, not a deflection of it as represented by a younger actor in the part.

Costume played an essential role in this production and no more so than in the final play, *Come and Go*, played by all three actors. McMullan noted the welcome reprieve from the monochrome of the first three performances, when the door opened to reveal the three women sitting on a small bench, dressed in colourful three-quarter length coats and “matching floral” skirts (McMullan 2017:372). Although Scaife remained loyal to the eye shading hats and matching colour coats of Beckett’s instructions, images from this performance recall the fashion of older inner-city Dublin women of three-quarter length coloured coats and matching patterned skirts. Scaife and her costume designer, Sinead Cuthbert took to the streets of Dublin for their inspired choice of costumes which again, firmly connects the audience with the women who lived through Beckett’s time of writing, resonating with Irish women’s lives from “across the decades” (Scaife 2018:125). Scaife’s casting of older actors to play Mouth, May and W, succeeds in staging a profound encounter between performance and the audience, where the reality of ageing women’s presence is iterated. The slowed down pace of Mouth, which audiences found much more personally relatable and moving, was an ingenious move on Scaife’s part. Taken together, the four performances were woven together as a snap shot of the experiences of older women, their fragmented lives and their indomitable spirit in their determination to tell their stories. This rethinks Beckett’s plays in a different frame and looks at the ageing female body through a lens tilted to bring the women, in their actuality, into focus. Scaife’s work is located at the intersection between theatre, performance, and installation. Tubridy argues that Scaife’s site-specific work is an example of how Beckett’s dramatic works "provide exemplars of the intersection between art and theatre, particularly as they develop an immersive experience for the audience and respond to the site of their installation" (Tubridy 2018:68). Company SJ's transformation of Beckett's late theatre, away from the conventional stage, challenges the notion of spectatorship as passive, shifting both spectator and site closer to what cultural theorist David Houston Jones terms the "disputed ground of embodiment" that "gives rise to the very dilemmas which have led to the recent 'reembodiment' of Beckett's work as installation" (Houston Jones 2016:20). I have argued that recent innovative productions and performances of Beckett's work by Asmus, Dwan and Company SJ demonstrate the continuing significance of Beckett's work for contemporary cultures, particularly at the intersection between theatre, performance and installation. In this regard, Beckett's work is also a major influence on practitioners of performance art or live art, for whom the body is a major vehicle of expression. In this final section, I examine the work of Irish performance artist Amanda Coogan, who cites Beckett as an influence, and whose work has distinct echoes of Beckett's late theatre, particularly in relation to his focus on embodiment, repetition, and the struggle for articulation.[102] Coogan crucially transforms Beckett's work through her deliberate use of her use of silence, duration performance, and her own corporeal strategies. This transformation is a critique of the dominant discourse in Irish society, and she questions the normalisation of patriarchy, discrimination and disability. Employing her body as both subject and material, her silent articulation makes a radical intervention into the catalogue of historical institutional abuse that I have been discussing so far, particularly abuse of women, including deaf women, thus highlighting the gendered political aspect to her work. I argue that a consideration of the connections and differences between Beckett and Coogan contributes to an evaluation of Beckett's legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures, along with the work of Dwan and Scaife.

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[102] Although I focus specifically on Coogan's work here, Beckett's work has influenced other renowned performance artists such as Alastair MacLennon, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic, whom Coogan trained with.

Echoes and Transformations of Samuel Beckett's Theatre in Amanda Coogan's Performance Art[103]

Coogan is an established Irish artist, living and working in Ireland. Born hearing, to deaf parents, Coogan's first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL), which was only recently formally recognised by the Irish State.[104] Growing up in such a manual-visual milieu, she explains that everything was expressed "through the body and received through the eyes: love, pain, happiness, sadness, hunger, satiation" (O'Regan 2005:8). Coogan initially trained as a painter before gravitating towards performance art, when she trained with Marina Abramovic during her MA, at Abramovic's legendary class at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunste in Braunschweig, Germany. One of Coogan's earliest works *Medea* (2001) was performed at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin as part of the *Marking the Territory* performance event in 2001, which was curated by Abramovic. Over the course of three hours, employing ISL, Coogan repeatedly "tells" the secrets of the Irish deaf community: accounts of sexual abuse, humiliation, and oppression, which had been relayed to her by deaf adult survivors. Poised on an elegant chaise longue and dressed in a searing blue floor length gown, the initial image is one of beauty and serenity, but the scene is quickly subverted by the deliberate placement of her right hand on her genital area, drawing attention to a large stain on the dress. The colour blue is deliberate, drawing on the oppressive notion of the purity of the Virgin Mary. Coogan explains how the staging of the performance was crucial: although she appeared to be lying in an elegant pose, her crotch was saturated, she was lying "in her own dirt, reliving the physical effects of sexual abuse."[105]

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[103] My analysis here is drawn from my two recently published essays on Coogan: "The Art of Exhaustion in Amanda Coogan's Performance Art." *I'll sing you a song from around the town*. Dublin: Royal Hibernian Academy, 2015 and "'I'll sing you a song from around the town': Echoes and Transformations of Samuel Beckett's Theatre in Amanda Coogan's Durational Performance Art." *Contemporary Theatre Review*. Vol. 28, no. 1, 2018, pp. 82-94, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10486801.2017.1404462 .

[104] The "Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community" Bill, which was put forward by Fíanna Fáil Senator Mark Daly, was passed into Irish law in early 2018. This mean that Irish Sign Language is officially recognised as a minority language, bringing with it enhanced rights of Deaf ISL users in the Republic of Ireland. There are approximately 5,000 deaf people in Ireland who use ISL. However, another 40,000 hearing people also use it, ranging from regular to occasional usage.

The use of ISL, unfamiliar to most observers, and the drawing of the audience's attention to the deliberate gesture of her hand makes a powerful silent intervention into the abuse scandals in Ireland. Performance artists Joanna Linsley and Helena Walsh observe that in this performance "it is not through loud screams of condemnation, but rather through an interrogation of the very nature of silence, and the communication that happens within silence, that Coogan actively contributes to the un-gagging of a culture's secrets" (Linsley and Walsh 2012:164). Live art, then, acts as a sounding-board "that enables deafening silences to scream louder than words, beyond words even" (Linsley and Walsh 2012: 164). Coogan's work mirrors that of ANU productions, which I discussed earlier. Miriam Haughton, writing on ANU, argues that one of the most radical acts that theatre can engage with is "silence" (Haughton 2015:57). This same conspiratorial silence surrounded the abuse suffered by the deaf community, who were doubly constrained by their inability to effectively communicate their experience.[106] Drawing on a marginalised visual language, Coogan actively draws attention to the need to unlock the horrors of institutional abuse in Ireland. The urge to tell the stories of marginalised bodies alienated from the dominant systems of social order and communication connects Coogan's work with Beckett's late theatre. Coogan acknowledges the centrality of Beckett and his engagement with the body in her own practice. She notes how his late theatre "exist[s] somewhere between installation and poetry, their strict aesthetic bringing the meditative rhythms of visual art into performance. His works are essentially pivots for performance practitioners globally" (Coogan 2011:18). She responds to Beckett's work by transforming his themes, particularly repetition and endurance.

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[105] Interview with Coogan, 22 September 2016, by telephone.

[106] Coogan recently wrote and narrated a documentary on the abuse suffered by the residents of St. Joseph's School for Deaf Children in Dublin, which her father attended as a child and where Coogan claimed she had many happy memories. *These Walls Can Talk*, directed by Garry Keane, was broadcast by the Irish national broadcaster RTE One Television on 8 October 2015, while Coogan was performing at the RHA Gallery. The documentary uncovered the terrifying memories of many of its former inmates, together with others who described their experience as a positive one. The Irish Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse revealed, however, that she school was an institution where sexual abuse was tolerated and silenced. See also, Nicky Ryan's article, "Abuse at a Deaf School: I screamed at night, but no one could hear me." *The Journal.ie*, 8 October 2015, http://www.thejournal.ie/st-josephs-school-deaf-abuse-2372759-Oct2015/

Tubridy, in the essay "Beckett and Performance Art" argues that Beckett's work can legitimately be situated within "a larger conversation concerning the relationship between concept and material as it engages the performing body in space and time" (Tubridy 2014:36). She traces Beckett's influence on performance artists Alastair MacLennan and Bruce Nauman. She notes how Nauman's engagement with Beckett's work is apparent in his video *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* (1968), when Nauman's body pivots through a series of strictly patterned movements. MacLennan's work is concerned with the visceral experience of time, with some of his pieces directly referencing Beckett's plays; in *KillSkill* (2009), photographs show MacLennan "buried up to his neck in a room filled with boxes, shredded paper and analogue media tape", like Winnie's predicament in *Happy Days* (Tubridy 2014:37).[107] As I have argued in Chapters Three and Four, much of Beckett's late theatre focuses on marginalised female subjects attempting to account for themselves. The traumas displayed by Mouth in *Not I* and May in *Footfalls* are of an existential nature, where they are marginalised both in the text, and in the specific case of Mouth, from the visual and linguistic communication systems that might (mis)represent them. Although Mouth and May do speak, their stories can never be "owned" as theirs. They struggle for articulation and even to be, appear, or to move. On the one hand, Coogan's work is evidently inspired by this alienation of Beckett's (female) subjects from the dominant apparatus of representation, while, on the other hand, she employs a subversive act to articulate the experiences of marginalised Irish women through the radical act of verbal silence and embodied telling.

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[107] See also Tubridy's essay "Beckett's Spectral Silence: *Breath* and the Sublime." *Limit{e} Beckett*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 102-22. Tubridy points to the "prosthetic element" of Beckett's work in his briefest play *Breath.* A version of the play was directed by Coogan at The Project Arts, Dublin, from 11-22 April 2006, as part of the Beckett Centenary Project. The placing of the mannequin limbs on the stage points to the "centrality of the body in Coogan's own art practice", whose work focuses on "the intense relationship between the body, space and time, emphasising repetition, futility and endurance" (Tubridy 2010:101).

The critical distinction of women's performance art, regardless of the chosen site is, as Jeanie Forte argues, "inherently political […] all women's performances are derived from the relationship of woman to the dominant system of representation, situating them within a feminist critique" (Forte 1988:217). By disrupting this system, women performance artists create a "subversive and radical strategy of intervention *vis-à-vis* patriarchal culture" (Forte 1988:217). Coogan's radical art practice embodies the notion of a specific female language, or "writing the body" as Helene Cixous terms it (Cixous 1976:880). Cixous calls for women artists to disrupt patriarchal discourse from the position of sexual difference, rallying that "anything having to do with the body should be explored" (qtd. in Forte 1988:225). Coogan takes control of her own body as material and medium, challenging the notion of the male gaze as initially posited by Laura Mulvey, the active/passive/looked-at split[108], when she claims: "I decide to show parts of my body that could be titillating and sensational but it's extremely important that I decide […] I am absolutely in control of the gaze […] I'm not in control of the interpretation of it" (Interview). Coogan's performances are politically disruptive as they clash with the traditional patriarchal text, posing different, multiple texts mirroring real women's experiences.

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[108] See "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, New York: Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 833-44.

In order to analyse these intersections between Coogan and Beckett, I am focusing on Coogan's most recent performance series, entitled "I'll sing you a song from around the town", which showcased at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) art gallery in Dublin, from 2 September to 18 October 2015.[109] Announcing the series in their autumn catalogue, gallery director Patrick T. Murphy announced that the gallery was presenting for the first time "art that challenges, to begin all over again re-honing our definition of art" (Murphy 2015:3). By investing in live art, the RHA was acknowledging its value and legitimacy within the art gallery environment. Over the course of six weeks, Coogan re-performed her seminal works, five hours a day, five days a week, for six weeks. Her most ambitious project to date, she performed solo in week one; in week two, she began the second performance, handing the first to a second artist and so on, culminating in six live performances on week six. In total, a troupe of fifteen female artists performed over the six-week period. Drawing over thirty-one thousand spectators over the six weeks, the event was hugely successful both for Coogan and the gallery. The "urge to tell" the stories of marginalised females are at the heart of both Coogan's aesthetic and Beckett's theatrical Trilogy. Although Beckett's females speak, the presentation of their embodied situation is crucial to their attempt to articulate themselves and their stories beyond language. While acknowledging that this particular durational performance is staged in the grand location of an art gallery, and the cultural capital that accompanies that, it is perhaps not all that unusual to see echoes of Beckett's work in such a setting; Billie Whitelaw noted how Beckett once said to her "I don't know whether the theater (sic) is the right place for me anymore. He was getting further and further away from writing conventional plays. And I know what he meant. I thought, well perhaps he should be in an art gallery or something. Perhaps I should be pacing up and down in the Tate Gallery" (Kalb 1989:235). As Whitelaw made this observation to Kalb as far back as 1986, and obviously to Beckett sometime earlier again, she unconsciously predicted the Coogan performances at the RHA.

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[109] For further reading on Coogan's work, see my articles: "'The Horror, the Horror': Performing 'The Dark Continent' in Amanda Coogan's *The Fountain* and Samuel Beckett's *Not I*." *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*, edited by Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi, Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015, pp. 121-133; "The Art of Exhaustion in Amanda Coogan's Performance Art." *I'll sing you a song from around the town: Amanda Coogan*. Dublin: Royal Hibernian Academy, West Cork Arts Centre and Limerick City Gallery of Art, 2015, pp. 19-24. See also Kate Antosik Parson's essay, "Bodily Remembrances: The Performance of Memory in Recent Works by Amanda Coogan." *Artefact: Journal of the Irish Association of Art Historians*, Dublin: Irish Association of Art Historians, c/o UCD School of Art History and Cultural Policy, 2009, pp. 6-19.

Two earlier iterations from Coogan's "Yellow Series" are *Yellow Mountain* (2009) and *Cut Piece* (2009), which make overt references to Winnie's containment in her mound in *Happy Days*. In *Yellow Mountain*, Coogan placed fifteen fifteen-year olds in an out-sized garishly painted yellow aran-style jumper, heads protruding, as they lip-synched to the *Alleluia Chorus* from *Handel's Messiah*. In an interview I conducted with Coogan, she contextualised the vision for the piece, when she said that "where Winnie is being consumed by the earth mountain, they (the teenagers) are being born and they are emerging".[110] As we have seen in Chapter Three, Winnie is confined up to her waist in the mound in Act 1 and up to her neck in Act 11, progressively shutting down her movement. In contrast, Coogan's iteration positions the teenagers as struggling to emerge from their entanglement in the yellow mountain. Similarly, in *Cut Piece*, Coogan was enveloped in a costume of twenty metres of painted canvas, covering most of the gallery rom; over the course of three hours, she methodically cut herself out of and ripped apart the mountainous yellow material, occasionally using her mouth. Here see Coogan re-working Beckett's themes of repetition and endurance, in a live work, which results in an intense relationship between artist and spectator, described by Phelan as a "maniacally charged present" with Coogan's body at the centre, tested to its limits (Phelan 1993:148). As Coogan herself writes, "the audience become interpreters or co-creators when experiencing live performance […] the descriptions, or rather storytelling of these artworks ultimately re-contextualises the works. The 'truth' of these live performances remains evasive" (Coogan 2015:119-20). The durational aspect of Coogan's live performances can only be appreciated by a willingness on the part of the spectator to observe over a long period of time in order to become a co-creator.

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[110] Interview with Coogan, 12 July 2011, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, Unpublished.

Coogan's iteration of *Yellow* at the RHA was performed on week five.[129] Costume is central to Coogan's art practice and took on a particular relevance in *Yellow*. Helen Carey, curator noted how the setting for *Yellow*, which was "designed as a triangular intrusion from a high right-hand corner of the rectangular", created an "armature of performer" (Carey 2015:65). Performed on week five, the armature waited impatiently for its turn, dimly lit and ghost-like. Behind the costume that Coogan would inhabit stood five similar figures, echoing earlier iterations of the work. Although her body was confined in the swathes of yellow material, Coogan's constant and potentially violent washing of the skirt refused to be contained, as the water seeped out over the designated space. As Carey wrote: "In competition with the other works, the presence of *Yellow* was the wild one contained in the politeness of the urban gallery, reinforcing yet again the strength of the work as it walks through a devastated forest" (Carey 2015:65). One of Coogan's most important works, *Yellow* involves embodied repetition and physical endurance. Sitting astride a tall bucket, wearing a voluminous yellow dress, Coogan repetitively scrubs away imaginary stains over the course of the six-hour performance. There are four main actions: the scrubbing of the skirt, regularly immersing it in cold water and working up lather, the displaying of the skirt to the spectator, the clenching of the skirt between her teeth, and the wringing of it between her hands. These actions, specific to the experience of the Irish women who were forced to work and live in the Magdalene Laundries, draws attention to their actual suffering and the conspiratorial silence of Irish State and the wider community in the incarceration of these women.

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[129] *Yellow* was first performed in 2008 at the Oonagh Young Gallery in James Joyce Street, Dublin, close to the Monto area, where ANU have staged their work, which is a former area of prostitution and close to the Magdalene Laundry on Sean McDermott Street. In a re-working in 2010, in St. Mary's Abbey in Dublin, six performers, including Coogan, performed over six evenings, for four hours each evening.

As I argued earlier, Beckett as author and director exerted his authority through the extraordinary demands he placed on his female actors in his theatre. Coogan places similar demands on her own body, framing the exercise of endurance and repetition in all her live performances. She is, however, both acknowledging and resisting the idea of the female body as contained. Her explicit actions in *Yellow* of washing, wringing, and scrubbing the material become visceral actions which draw attention, not to the performance of femininity, like Winnie, but to the extreme hardship of Irish women who were incarcerated in the Magdalene laundries. Observing at the RHA iteration, Luz Mar Gonzales notes how, after hours of endurance, Coogan's discomfort became obvious: "swollen legs from sitting on that impossible bucket for too long, sore hands from the endless scrubbing, reddened limbs from their continuous contact with cold soapy water, facial expressions of exhaustion […] became the core of the performative action itself" (Gonzales-Arias 2015:77). The containment of the female body is evident in both Coogan and Beckett's work; however, Coogan transforms his themes by drawing on the radical act of silence, her gender, extreme duration, to draw attention to historical female hardship within a patriarchal institutionalised context. Her work, then, articulates resistance and the forms of discourse it authorizes, thereby disrupting it from within, in order to reclaim Irish women's histories. Beckett's influence on Coogan's work is summed up by Carey, when she notes that in Coogan's silent radical work, "all the vocabulary hints at a theatricality compounded when one knows that the methodologies of Coogan's 'script' is modelled on the Beckett pared down approach. Coogan, in this activity is acutely aware of the traditions she mixes and messes; this Irish theatricality is infused into the work" (Carey 2010). While understanding Beckett's explicit stage instructions, Coogan maps fixed points of his work and provides room for an interpretation in between. She reclaims Beckett's drama, showing his influence on the contemporary. She demonstrates that the emphasis in Beckett's work on the restrictions of the embodied performer in terms of space and physicality and in terms of language and representation continues to inspire other performance practitioners in their own exploration of the mechanics of exclusion and silencing in today's world, and in their own quest for modes of resistance.

To conclude, this chapter focused on several strategic responses by women directors and actors to Beckett in Irish theatre and performance. In order to frame these feminine interactions with Beckett's work, I charted the extraordinary impact of the #WTF, formed in direct response to the Abbey Theatre's 1916 centenary programme in 2015, which featured work all by men, apart from one work by a woman. The work of Scaife, Dwan and Coogan laid part of the groundwork for the #WTF grassroots movement, which has resulted in swift but major shifts in the Irish theatre sector. In considering the responses of these artists to Beckett, I situated their work not only in relation to his aesthetic legacy, but also in relation to the Irish literary, specifically theatrical canon, which, historically has been overwhelmingly androcentric. Analysing Beckett's theatre on the stage, I argued that age is performed and is performative, contending that age is an essential and missing category in critical theatrical discourse. As Beckett's plays illuminate cultural constructions of age and female ageing and this chapter has addressed a dark spot in Beckett Studies, where this aspect of performance has not been given due attention to date.

Conclusion

Samuel Beckett's work provides fruitful research for an analysis of the themes of maternity, motherhood and female ageing that this thesis has investigated. Although I focused on his prose and drama, there are few male writers of the twentieth-century whose work has ranged across genres to the extent that Beckett's has. As the themes of gender and sexuality follow a broadly chronological order in the development of his work, my thesis distinguished the early Beckett's prose writing from the more mature Beckett's drama. It is timely to enter into a dialogue gender and sexuality studies and Beckett Studies – to this I added the potent combination of ageing and femininity, which has received scant attention in both Beckett Studies and Irish Studies. I argued that age is a missing category of identity, and one that should be added to the categories of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity that Cultural Studies have been concerned with. I also took the view in this study that issues of female ageing and performance are nowhere more evident than on the stage, especially Beckett's stage. Scholarship has been sparse in an investigation into the performance of age on the stage, particularly the conventions of casting actors against their chronological ages, uncovering the reluctance to cast older actors, particularly women actors.

Firstly, I challenged the resistance in Beckett Studies, until recently, to examine the "delicate matter" of misogyny that pervaded Beckett's work over a twenty-year period. By focusing on his first novel *Dream*, the short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks*, and the post-war novel *Molloy*, which were all written within a twenty-year timeframe, I demonstrated how Beckett's treatment of gender and sexuality followed this chronological order. I considered how misogyny operated in these texts, and how it might illuminate questions of gender and sexuality in Beckett's work. In my close reading of the frequent erotic sexual encounters/fantasies that occurred in *Molloy*, I argued that an expanded reading which questioned a heteronormative reading of the novel, uncovered the possibility of an alternative queer reading, which is blatant in the text but has been the subject of mass denial in Beckett Studies. Recent debates at Beckett conferences and Beckett summer schools have finally begun to raise these important themes in Beckett's work, which are not niche critical concerns but central aspects of Beckett's aesthetics.

My study then moved on to focus on how sexuality and reproduction came together in the figure of the mother or maternally identified women in Beckett's prose. The two texts that best represent the troubled obsession with the maternal figure and the recurring structural motif of the womb which is a hallmark of Beckett's writing at this stage of its development is the short story "First Love" and *Molloy*. The representation of fictional and semi-monstrous maternal figures is, I argued, a central but ambiguous concern in both texts, where mothers emerge as simultaneously nurturing and stifling. The theories of Julia Kristeva on maternity, motherhood and abjection, provided a useful interpretive tool to explore the links between the narrative portrayal of maternity and the nostalgia for the intrauterine fusion with the mother, a frequently recurring trope in Beckett's work. The imagos of pregnancy and motherhood in Beckett exemplified an anxiety around reproduction, as the narrator is constantly in search of, while fleeing from, the mother figure.

The second part of this study turned its focus on the mature Beckett's dramatic output, and his treatment of the ageing women that populate his late theatre. Using the psychoanalytic theories of Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, I added the potent combination of age and femininity, a topic that has not formed any significant area of research, which is even more surprising as his late drama explicitly centres of the experiences and longing of older women. The second half of this study is located in the "field imaginary" of Age Studies, a missing category in Irish Studies. With the rise of the interdisciplinary fields of Age Studies and cultural gerontology, my study argued that there is a critical need to reassess cultural representation of ageing in literature and theatre, particularly of older women who are more at risk than men to being marginalised in society. Beckett's plays *All That Fall*, *Happy Days*, *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Not I* all demonstrate the embodied experiences of ageing women, with their sexual desires, longing for intimacy and their loneliness when faced with the Fourth Age of the life cycle. W, in

Rockaby, sums her situation up in two words: “Fuck life”. Any consideration of older women as desiring subjects remains a cultural taboo; in these plays Beckett confronts this taboo, in his portrayal of female ageing and sexuality as much as a force of resistance, as of a condition to be resisted.

My final chapter investigated Beckett’s legacies for twenty-first century performance cultures by looking at how his work has been re-envisioned by several Irish women actors and directors, including a performance artist. To contextualise Beckett’s drama, I firstly situated his work in Irish theatre more generally, paying attention to the marked historical absence of female playwrights from the Irish theatrical canon. Irish theatre has experienced significant shifts in the politics of gender since 2015. This came about from a single grassroots movement called “Waking the Feminists”, which formed overnight as a direct response to the Abbey theatre’s 1916 centenary programme, which featured all work by men, apart from one token work by a woman. The extraordinary impact of #WTF cannot be underestimated; it became a widespread umbrella collective largely due to the power of social media. The work of actor Lisa Dwan, director Sarah Jane Scaife, and performance artist Amanda Coogan laid the groundwork for what became #WTF. I situated their work not only in relation to Beckett’s aesthetic legacy, but also in relation to the Irish theatrical canon, which has been overwhelmingly androcentric, where female playwrights have been “hidden in plain sight” but “fired” from the dramatic canon. I also considered the performance of age in both Dwan and Scaife’s work, arguing that age is performed and performative, drawing on a single study by Lipscomb, who argues that theatre, television and film directors regularly cast against chronological age. This is nowhere more evident than on the modern stage, where my final analysis looked at how age is performed in Dwan’s interpretation of Beckett, comparing it to

Scaife's interpretation, who deliberately casts older actors to play the roles of the characters whose age Beckett specified in his stage instructions. If we view all age as a performance, there is the possibility for an intergenerational dialogue, which could result in the breakdown of binaries and contribute to the ongoing battle of ageism in our culture, where "youthism" reigns and the pressure to stay looking young at all costs. And that costs.

Finally, this study concluded with an investigation of Beckett's influence on practitioners of performance art or live art, for whom the body is a vehicle of expression. I examined the work of Irish performance artist, Amanda Coogan, whose work displays echoes and transformations of Beckett's theatre in her durational live art. While her work is influenced by Beckett's themes of embodiment, repetition and the struggle for articulation, crucially she re-works them, transforming them into her art practice. She achieves this by a combination of the radical act of silence, durational live performance and her own corporeal strategies. I argue that her silent articulation makes a political intervention into the catalogue of historical institutional of marginalised communities in Ireland, particularly the suffering of the women in the Magdalene Laundries, which has been highlighted over the last number of years by the Irish and international media and by academics. Employing her body as both subject and material, Cogan actively contributes to the unlocking of the rule of silence that dominated Church and State institutions in Ireland, ensuring complicity in the forced incarceration of these women, which still impacts at the time of writing. The urge to tell stories of marginalised female subjects is at the centre of Beckett's and Coogan's work; although Beckett's females speak, their confined embodied situations are crucial to the articulation of their own alienation from dominant discourses. While female bodies are restricted in the work of both artists, Coogan resists the idea of the female body as contained by corporeal strategies of relentless washing, spitting and durational walking up and down stairs, actions that seep beyond the confines of the female body, costume and performance space. The feminine interactions that I focused on in my last chapter demonstrate some of the ways in which Beckett’s legacy for contemporary performance cultures lives on. Much of this important work is being undertaken by women actors, directors and performers. To conclude, #WTF, and its unintended doubleentendre “What the Fuck” has started another theatrical riot in Irish theatre. As the “long gaze back” continues, a Revolution has begun. Up the Revolution.

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