

Samuel Beckett and Jonathan Swift: Toward a Comparative Study

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Prefatory note:

John Fletcher's "Beckett and Swift" was published in 1962 in a difficult-to-locate French journal, and yet when I read it in 1967 or so, it had a timely impact on me. While others had looked at Beckett's connection with French literature, Fletcher was one of the very first to mount a case for the important connection between Beckett and a major writer of the British eighteenth century. Some years later, on rereading Fletcher's comparative study while working on my book *Beckett's Eighteenth Century* (Palgrave and St. Martin's Presses, 2002), I was struck by the continuing value of the essay. In pursuing Beckett's 'dialogue' with British writers of two centuries ago, I have built upon what Fletcher and a few others began to see during Beckett's lifetime. I am delighted that this pioneering monograph is now being made available in English and in a form that will make it readily accessible to scholars.

—Frederik N. Smith, Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

The work of Samuel Beckett, the Irish author who writes in French, is increasingly attracting the attention and interest of academic critics, whose efforts at the moment are directed at situating a body of work that, despite its relatively modest dimensions, is of considerable importance. The intent of such efforts is to put this work in context with the literary history of our own time and of past centuries and to clarify the influence exerted on the Beckettian opus by Dante, Geulinx, Joyce and Proust.¹ It is therefore not surprising that critics have noted the existence of certain affinities between the writings of Jonathan Swift and those of Beckett.² In fact, Swift's influence on Beckett seems so profound that it does not appear premature at this point to broach the question of their literary relationship. That is what I shall be attempting to do here. I will, however, restrict myself to drawing attention to the most significant parallels and to sketching the broad outlines of the subject so as to facilitate in due course a full evaluation of the influence that Swift exerted on Beckett.³ I will make no attempt to deal comprehensively with this vast topic but merely to establish a few pointers. With this goal in mind, I will first survey the life, character and literary career of both Swift and Beckett. I will then examine the myths and obsessions that both writers seem to share, and, finally, I will study the literary methods common to both before suggesting some possible conclusions.⁴

I

There are some interesting parallels between Swift's biography and that of Samuel Beckett. Both were born in Ireland, Swift because his English parents happened to have settled there a few years before his birth, Beckett because his family was Irish.⁵ Swift studied at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin, and Beckett at Portora Royal School (a Protestant fee-paying establishment in Ulster) before moving on in his turn to Trinity. But while Beckett thereafter chose exile, settling in France in 1937, Swift was compelled to spend the last thirty years of his life in the land of his birth, which by force of circumstance thus became his adoptive country. Towards the end of World War II, Beckett began to write

in French, the language in which he composed his most important works, the trilogy of novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* and the plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Here there is obviously no parallel with Swift, who, nonetheless, was proficient in his use of the French language.⁶

We know less about the personalities than the biographies of the two authors, but we do have some information concerning their opinions and attitudes toward life that is worth recalling. They both hold their native land in some contempt: Swift, in the *Holyhead Journal* in particular, expresses himself with some vehemence on the matter. His attitude is, however, more nuanced than appears at first sight. Professor Axelrad notes in the introduction to his French translation of *Gulliver's Travels* how deeply, in spite of himself, Swift's roots plunge into Irish soil.⁷ Beckett likewise affects to despise his country,⁸ which nonetheless is present in all his writings, either as setting or as point of reference, and the Beckettian characters often have common Irish names like Murphy, Molloy or Malone.

Toward the humble and defenseless, moreover, Beckett and Swift demonstrate a similar attitude. Professor Pons has shown us "the sympathetic interest which Swift took in the most anonymous individuals," going on to prove that "of rogues too he had a knowledge as much intuitive as acquired, and very precise too."⁹ The extent to which Beckett understands beggars and vagrants is well understood; indeed, the important place they occupy in his *oeuvre* offers eloquent testimony to it.¹⁰ The insane are also of central concern to both writers. Swift, "an assiduous visitor to the Bedlam hospital"¹¹ and the posthumous founder of an asylum in Dublin was, as is shown by the *Digression Concerning Madness*, well acquainted with the mentally ill. As for Beckett, madness is a veritable obsession with him. Asylums feature in several of his works, above all in *Murphy*, the hero of which finds himself obliged "to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco."¹² Beckett's scepticism about our mental health even goes so far as to make him wonder whether the mad are not after all the only people who are truly wise, while Swift lumps us with the insane (in the *Digression on Madness*) the better to ridicule our pretensions to mental stability.

It soon becomes apparent, too, that where human experience is concerned, the two writers are what is rather loosely termed pessimists. Swift, for example, would read to himself on his birthday the passage in the book of Job to which Beckett refers in *Murphy*:

Neary leaned against the Pillar railings and cursed, first the day in which he was born, then - in a bold flashback - the night in which he was conceived.¹³

Swift declared to Charles Ford that he had a poor opinion of the value of life,¹⁴ and he puts in the mouth of his Gulliver:

They will never allow, that a child is under any obligation to his father for begetting him, or to his mother for bringing him into the world, which, considering the miseries of human life, [was neither] a benefit in itself, nor intended so by his parents¹⁵

Gulliver's remark reminds us of the declaration by Beckett's narrator in *More Pricks than Kicks*:

The tone conveyed to 'earth to earth' was a triumph of passionate and contemptuous

reproach to all the living. How dared they continue full of misery! Pah!¹⁶

I will examine later the literary expression of this pessimism; for the moment I wish simply to note its existence in both Swift and Beckett. What is, however, lacking in Beckett's biography is the political awareness that Swift showed in binding himself so closely to the Harley administration, a binding which gave rise to several political tracts in its support. But the same eagerness to denounce social injustice that lies at the heart of Swift's *Drapier's Letters* can be found, albeit somewhat transformed, in the brutality Beckett allows the police, landowners and officials to show toward his characters.

II

This rapid overview has shown that Beckett and Swift have common preoccupations: Ireland, the humble and human destiny. I will now try to highlight the links that can be discerned between the way their literary careers developed. What is immediately striking is the progression in parallel from amused contemplation in the early writings to a more sombre disillusionment in the later books. It is instructive to set *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* and *Watt* beside *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books* and the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, all works written before their authors were forty. In them can be discerned much vivacity and great intellectual agility, revealed in a marked taste for erudite games with quotation and with esoteric allusion. Everywhere can be seen the force of satire and a penchant for parody.¹⁷ Professor Pons's comments on *A Tale of a Tub* apply equally well to Beckett's first novel: "It is the manual which he composed for himself, a summary of his experience, still brief no doubt, but enriched already with all the experience contained in books."¹⁸ Indeed, the detached gaiety that inspires in Swift expressions of an obviously parodic intention, such as "this great work" or this "elaborate and useful . . . discourse" (used in the Introduction to Section I and in the Preface to *A Tale of a Tub*), and that gives rise to a constantly effervescent humour in the satire against malevolent critics and conceited preface-writers, the same gaiety sweeps the reader along in *More Pricks than Kicks*, where the most serious events are treated flippantly. The account of the death of Belacqua is marked by the same learned tomfoolery as the accident which "dreadfully mars" the beauty of his first fiancée, Lucy. The same is true of his marriage to the second, Thelma née bboggs, whose father, as his name indicates, is a manufacturer of bathroom requisites and necessaries. This short-story collection is a vast burlesque panorama, a hilarious game in which are ridiculed in turn the intellectual women of Dublin and their cocktail parties, the bourgeois family bboggs, the clergyman who buries Belacqua and whose presence puts a damper on the erotic schemes of the widow and the deceased's best friend, and Belacqua himself, who, like his Dantesque namesake, enjoys lifelong repose and troubles himself little with the demands of a career, love or marriage.

Later on, after World War II in the case of Beckett (he was involved for a time in a network of the French resistance) and after the incursion into politics in the case of Swift, there is a marked darkening of mood. Anyone who reads *Gulliver's Travels*, the *Introduction to Polite Conversation* and the scatological poems of Swift's last years will think of *The End*, *Molloy*, *The Unnamable*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Juxtaposing these works highlights a similar contempt that expresses the most violent disgust

where humanity is concerned. *Gulliver's Travels* attacks the foolish pride of humankind,¹⁹ the scatological poems dwell upon human filth, and the treatises aimed at servants and people in high society are catalogues, drawn up with a terrifying degree of sang-froid, of the futility, the fatuity, and the base pettiness of our economic and social activities. The same tone is to be found in Beckett: sexual activity makes human beings laughable (*Molloy* and *Malone Dies*); filth makes them disgusting (*The End*); and solitude makes them unsociable (*The Unnamable*), or tyrannical (*Endgame*), or quite simply pitiable (*Waiting for Godot*). Malone catalogues too our futile human efforts and mocks conjugal love, while the *Unnamable* strives to make filial love hateful in our eyes. So it can be seen that the tone of Swift's last works, fierce, haughty, and cruelly contemptuous, is to be found in Beckett's postwar writings as well.

III

After this examination of their literary evolution, I move on to the study of the myths and obsessions to be found in both Swift and Beckett. There are five subsections in this part: 1. God

2. human knowledge, death 3. dualism 4. human beings in society 5. people as human creatures.

1. God

The question of God naturally looms large in the works of Swift and Beckett, although in different ways. As a minister of the Church of England, Swift was supposed to be a believer; by the time he left Trinity, Beckett certainly was not. But Swift's faith was heavily qualified: according to Murry, it is more a case of "*credo quia impossibile*."²⁰ Swift is always far less certain of the goodness of God than of the wickedness of human beings,²¹ and his conception of religion appears as the expression of his pessimism with regard to humankind. He views Christians in particular as heirs to an idealistic religion that they have so debased and corrupted²² that they are unworthy of an ideal that Swift undoubtedly holds in high esteem.²³ Because he has an aristocratic conception of faith,²⁴ he vows unstinting loyalty to the Church of England as by law established,²⁵ and he holds in equal horror free-thinkers, Roman Catholics and Protestant fanatics, who represent such a great danger either to peace or to public decorum that they must be pursued with the full rigour of the law or chastised with ridicule.²⁶ There is obviously no question here of apostolic fervour, since people cannot be forced to believe: rationalists cannot, and bigots will not. Therefore, it behooves all persons to keep their opinions to themselves and to respect public order. This attitude on the part of Swift has led some people to accuse him of religious insensitivity.²⁷

Beckett seems just as impervious to religious fervour, which he takes delight in holding up to ridicule. Several times in his work the contradictions of Roman Catholic theology²⁸ are subjected to erudite examination and abstruse discussion, the satirical intention of which is scarcely concealed.

"Certain questions of a theological nature preoccupied me strangely," says Moran, "as for example: what is one to think of the Irish oath sworn by the natives with the right hand on the relics of the saints and

the left on the virile member?"²⁹ This humour at the expense of religion reminds one of Swift's parody, marked by complex subtleties, of the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*.

Swift, like Beckett, takes much pleasure in reducing faith to a mechanism which scornful irony can freely

mock.

But if theology becomes the subject of satire in Beckett, God himself is hated, for this *oeuvre* is imbued with the negative awareness of God. For Beckett, the Deity is a mysterious tyrant, a “hidden God,” and even an “abominable Jehovah”³⁰ who (as in *The Unnamable* and *Waiting for Godot*) makes us suffer for reasons that are deeply obscure. Beckett has not Swift’s faith, which, impersonal though it is, reveals in the last analysis Swift’s reluctance to apply his satirical criteria to the doctrines of the Church of England. Beckett, who has no interest in Dissenters, does not need the same angle of purchase, and his whole pessimism about the absurdity of our condition can explode in the terrible myth of the hidden tyrant of *The Unnamable* and in the frightful absence called, for want of a better name, Godot. But let there be no mistake about it: Swift’s pessimism about humankind implies by its very nature a complete lack of confidence in the central tenet of Christianity--the possibility of divine redemption. Swift never alludes to redemption, and, if, in *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett speaks of it (“one of the thieves was saved”), it is in order to underline all the more effectively its laughable impossibility.

2. Human Knowledge, Death

Swift “proscribes all human meddling in things divine and seeks to make human beings ashamed of their arrogance.”³¹ His attitude springs from an obvious scepticism with regard to human knowledge but also from a certain indifference toward it. When he writes that he is not responsible before God “for the doubts that arise in my own breast,”³² one divines behind his words a profound boredom. This Irishman, who has little sympathy for Descartes, feels that those who strive to understand are in most cases driven by “petulancy, ambition, or pride.”³³ And if the *Tritical Essay*,³⁴ which adds up to a charming bundle of nonsense, is to all appearances a simple parody of the pseudo-philosophical treatises of the time, it undoubtedly has another purpose, that of implying that genuine philosophy, too, can with surprising ease be reduced to vacuous jargon. For Swift here displays the anti-intellectualism of which Professor Quintana speaks and that leads Swift to sweep away classic problems of ontology and theology with a gesture of impatience.³⁵ In Beckett this same trait of anti-intellectualism has no more telling example than Lucky’s tirade in response to Pozzo’s command to “Think!” in *Waiting for Godot*. When Lucky finishes, Pozzo snatches Lucky’s hat and tramples it underfoot as he expresses the only reaction possible to such efforts--“There’s an end to his thinking!” We call to mind also these ironical words of Molloy:

In any case, whether it was my town or not, whether somewhere under that faint haze my mother panted on, or whether she poisoned the air a hundred miles away, were ludicrously idle questions for a man in my position, though of undeniable interest on the plane of pure knowledge.³⁶

“Ludicrously idle,” too, are the questions that Watt asks himself concerning his experiences at Mr. Knott's house, questions which never get an answer:

He felt the need to think that such and such a thing had happened then, the need to be able to say, when the scene began to unroll its sequences, Yes, I remember, that is what happened then. This need remained with Watt, this need not always satisfied, during the greater part of his stay in Mr

Knott's house.³⁷

Thus, both for Beckett and for Swift, the human condition implies epistemological anguish. The awareness that both authors have of our incapacity to *know* goes hand in hand with a profound scepticism to which I drew attention earlier about the value of life, and which is also revealed in their attitude toward death. Swift has painted in the *Struldbrugs* a terrifying portrait of immortality consisting of senility stretching to infinity. It is typical of Swift that he sees so clearly into the myth of immortality and shows its absurdity. But for Beckett also life is a “pensum” that, happily for the common run of humanity, has a natural term. Only the Unnamable cannot hope to die, and the long and painful meditation that is this novel is as excruciating as the vision of the *Struldbrugs*. So there is in both authors a “hatred of life,” the Irish sources of which have been investigated by Vivian Mercier.³⁸ Other critics have noted, moreover, that the “reason” of the Houyhnhnms represents an aspiration toward death and that this notion derives in the last analysis from Christian pessimism,³⁹ the same pessimism, in fact, that dictates that there can be no possible redemption for Vladimir and Estragon. For it is here a case, according to Professor Mayoux, of “the haunting sense of *mea culpa* and the idea, so deeply rooted in Protestantism, of predestination.”⁴⁰

3. Dualism

The dualist principle of the separation between body and mind plunges its roots so deeply in Beckett's *oeuvre*, as it does in Swift's, that it can easily be overlooked. But it is the basis of many a reflection in the two authors and derives in the last analysis from Christianity, with the added influence in Beckett of the post-Cartesian philosophers, particularly Geulincx and Malebranche. Geulincx is quoted in *Murphy*, the novel most profoundly marked by dualism: “*ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*,”⁴¹ a phrase that Murphy calls to mind as he seeks to anchor himself within an indifference toward the activities and needs of the flesh. There still resides in this flesh “the part of him that he hates” because it shows a “deplorable susceptibility” to Celia, ginger biscuits, and so on.⁴² After *Murphy*, dualist thought will be represented by an ever sharper division between the degraded body and the rebellious spirit of the Beckettian hero.

In Swift, it is dualism that dictates the *Digression Concerning Madness*: “vapours issu[e] up from the lower faculties” to take control of the minds of human beings and push them either toward war, philosophy, or religious fanaticism. The thought of the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* is fundamentally dualist, as these famous words show:

Lovers for the sake of celestial converse are but another sort of Platonics, who pretend to see stars and heaven in ladies' eyes, and to look or think no lower; but the same pit is provided for both; and they seem a perfect moral to the story of that philosopher, who, while his thoughts and eyes were fixed upon the constellations, found himself seduced by his lower parts into a ditch.⁴³

This dualism in Swift is the expression of his abiding mistrust of humankind's pretensions and serves to remind us that we are made of flesh. With Beckett, dualism is more an expression of his pessimism with regard to the body, a pessimism that explains his obsession with physical infirmity as it appears, for instance, in *Malone Dies*. Therefore, it could be said, roughly speaking, that Swift's dualism seeks to

remind the proud intellect of its links with carnal matter whereas Beckett's (more radical) dualism would be happy to sunder the spirit from a body which is only an impediment hobbling it.

4. Human Beings in Society

It comes as no surprise that social phenomena give rise in Beckett and in Swift to similar reactions of satire. We know how abundantly Swift's irony flows from every allusion to royal courts and ministers. A famous passage that deals with entertainments at the court of Lilliput is the sly parody of the English court where, under the guise of Flimnap, we recognize Swift's pet hatred, the then prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole. But it is above all the cult of false values in royal courts that arouses Swift's ire, especially the capricious frivolity of rulers, forever pilloried in the "panegyric" of the mercy shown by the king of Luggnagg:

When the King hath a mind to put any of his nobles to death in a gentle indulgent manner, he commands to have the floor strowed with a certain brown powder, of a deadly composition, which being licked up infallibly kills him in twenty-four hours. But in justice to this prince's great clemency, and the care he hath of his subjects' lives . . . it must be mentioned for his honour, that strict orders are given to have the infected parts of the floor well washed after every such execution; which if his domestics neglect, they are in danger of incurring his royal displeasure. I myself heard him give directions, that one of his pages should be whipped, whose turn it was to give notice about washing the floor after an execution, but maliciously had omitted it; by which neglect a young lord of great hopes coming to an audience, was unfortunately poisoned, although the King at that time had no design against his life. But this good prince was so gracious, as to forgive the poor page his whipping, upon promise that he would do so no more, without special orders.⁴⁴

Despite this ironic pose of deference to rulers--a deference which Gulliver stresses on several occasions--Swift presents in the fourth voyage a terrifying caricature of such people and of their favourites:

. . . in most herds there was a sort of ruling *Yahoo* . . . who was always more deformed in body, and mischievous in disposition, than any of the rest . . . [T]his leader had usually a favourite as like himself as he could get, whose employment was to lick his master's feet and posteriors, and drive the female *Yahoos* to his kennel . . . This favourite is hated by the whole herd . . . He usually continues in office till a worse can be found; but the very moment he is discarded, his successor, at the head of all the *Yahoos* in that district . . . come in a body, and discharge their excrements upon him from head to foot.⁴⁵

A few pages earlier, Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master compliments the traveler on being the son of a noble family, a station that provides Swift with the opportunity to denounce the English aristocracy in the following terms:

. . . a weak diseased body, a meagre countenance, and sallow complexion, are the true marks of noble blood . . . The imperfections of [the] mind [of a man of quality] run parallel with those of his body, being a composition of spleen, dullness, ignorance, caprice, sensuality and pride.⁴⁶

Most of the time Gulliver (Swift's mask) does not go in for direct attacks, but by his neutral tone allows the author's irony to shine through, as in this passage in which he is condemned to lose the sight of his eyes:

I was so ill a judge of things, that I could not discover the lenity and favour of this sentence, but conceived it (perhaps erroneously) rather to be rigorous than gentle I confess I owe the preserving [of] my eyes . . . to my own great rashness and want of experience: because if I had then known the nature of princes and ministers. . . and their methods of treating criminals less obnoxious than myself, I should with great alacrity and readiness have submitted to so easy a punishment.⁴⁷

The tone of this passage recalls the one in which Molloy finds himself at the police station:

It was late afternoon when they told me I could go. I was advised to behave better in future. Conscious of my wrongs, knowing now the reasons for my arrest, alive to my irregular situation as revealed by the enquiry, I was surprised to find myself so soon at freedom once again, if that is what it was, unpenalised Were they of the opinion that it was useless to prosecute me? To apply the letter of the law to a creature like me is not an easy matter. It can be done, but reason is against it.⁴⁸

Police officers crop up in Beckett as often as government ministers do in Swift, and, the better to denounce their victims, they both adopt a humble tone to highlight the irony more sharply. The way in which Swift belittles the pomp and ceremony surrounding the king of England,

what an indignity . . . to be exposed . . . as a public spectacle to the meanest of the people the King of Great Britain himself . . . must have undergone the same distress,⁴⁹

recalls the mockery Beckett heaps on the political orator:

It was a man perched on the roof of a car and haranguing the passers-by. That at least was my interpretation. He was bellowing so loud that snatches of his discourse reached my ears. Union brothers . . . Marx . . . capital . . . bread and butter . . . love. It was all Greek to me All of a sudden he turned and pointed at me, as at an exhibit. Look at this down and out, he vociferated, this leftover Then he bent forward and took me to task Do you hear me, you crucified bastard! cried the orator He must have been a religious fanatic, I could find no other explanation.⁵⁰

As for the satire on royal courts, the Beckettian equivalent would, for example, be this ironic description of the leisure activities of those who work all day long in our cities:

All hasten towards one another, knowing how short the time in which to say all the things that lie heavy on the heart and conscience and to do all the things they have to do together, things one cannot do alone. So there they are for a few hours in safety. Then the drowsiness, the little memorandum book with its little special pencil, the yawned goodbyes.⁵¹

There is however another theme that seems to me more particularly Beckettian, that of society's cruelty toward those whom it rejects. Early on Belacqua feels oppressed by the indiscreet attentions of his

fellows.⁵² Watt, understandably, suffers even more from their hostility,⁵³ and Molloy has a pressing need to take refuge in a hiding place the better to escape other people's hatred:

Morning is the time to hide. They wake up, hale and hearty, their tongues hanging out for order, beauty and justice, baying for their due But towards noon things quiet down, the most implacable are sated, they go home, it might have been better but they've done a good job, there have been a few survivors, but they'll give no more trouble, each man counts his rats Day is the time for lynching, for sleep is sacred, and especially the morning, between breakfast and lunch.⁵⁴

Although this last theme has no echo in Swift, I hope I have been able to show convincingly that the Beckettian mistrust of society can be compared with that peculiarly Swiftian disillusionment which finds in the Yahoos its fullest expression.

5. People as Human Creatures

The satire of Swift and Beckett is directed as much against individuals as it is against people collectively. Swift "lifts the deceptively respectable coat-tails of humankind to reveal suddenly the beast or the machine, obscene ugliness or unspeakable frivolity."⁵⁵ Likewise, as early reviewers have been quick to point out, Beckett highlights the contrast between derisory reality and the romanticism of dreams.⁵⁶ I will now turn to this "unveiling" activity on the part of the two authors, examining it under six headings.

(i) Ridiculous Individuals

Swift had a particular gift for invective and never scrupled to deploy it, as in the case of Flimnap quoted above, within the framework of a more general satire. But he could also sometimes hound this or that person with a ferocity which went far beyond the needs of the moment. The critics Wotton and Bentley, who in his view had been guilty of gross lack of courtesy toward Temple on the occasion of the Ancients versus Moderns controversy, are attacked many times with such cunning spite that it still provokes a smile:

Oh, had those happy talents, misapplied to vain philosophy, been turned into their proper channels of dreams and visions, where distortion of mind and countenance are of such sovereign use, the base detracting world would not then have dared to report, that something is amiss, that his brain has undergone an unlucky shake⁵⁷

It is in *The Battle of the Books* that this Swiftian venom is deployed with least restraint, as in Swift's introduction of the reader to Bentley:

. . . a captain, whose name was Bentley, [was] the most deformed of all the Moderns; tall, but without shape or comeliness; large, but without strength or proportion. His armour was patched up of a thousand incoherent pieces, and the sound of it, as he marched, was loud and dry, like that made by the fall of a sheet of lead His helmet was of old rusty iron, but the vizard was brass, which, tainted by his breath, corrupted into copperas, nor wanted gall from the same fountain; so that, whenever provoked by anger or labour, an atramentous quality, of most malignant nature, was seen to distil from his lips.⁵⁸

Further on,⁵⁹ Bentley and Wotton are compared to “two mongrel curs” looking for prey to tear apart. Such sarcasm is frequently echoed in Beckett, who is equally adept at throwing mordant comments at his victims, as in the scene where Murphy goes for a job interview in response to a chandlers' advertisement for a “smart boy”:

“E ain’t smart,” said the chandler, “not by a long chork ’e ain’t.”

“Nor ‘e ain’t a boy,” said the chandler's semi-private convenience, “not to my mind ’e ain’t.”

“E don’t look rightly human to me,” said the chandlers' eldest waste product, “not rightly.”⁶⁰

In Swift, too, *A Short Portrait of Thomas Earl of Wharton* is more or less unique, so many well-honed sarcasms does it contain:

He goes constantly to prayers in the forms of his place, and will talk bawdy and blasphemy at the chapel door. He is a Presbyterian in politics, and an atheist in religion; but he chooses at present to whore with a Papist.

As for Wharton’s personal life, Swift relates the following:

He bears the gallantries of his lady with the indifference of a Stoic, and thinks them well recompensed by a return of children to support his family, without the fatigues of being a father.⁶¹

One thinks at once of Beckett’s Otto Olaf bboogs:

The horns of Otto Olaf sat easily upon him. He knew all there was to be known about Walter Draffin [Mrs. bboogs’s lover] and treated him with special consideration. Any man who saved him trouble, as Walter had for so many years, could rely on his esteem.⁶²

This Walter Draffin, wittily referred to as the “cuckoo” in the bboogs’s nest, is mocked by Beckett with even more finesse and almost as much verve as Wharton is ridiculed by Swift:

A plug of moustache covered at his nostrils like a frightened animal before its lair, at the least sign of danger it would scurry up into an antrum. He expelled his words with gentle discrimination, as a pastry-cook squirts icing upon a cake. He had a dirty mind, great assurance and ability towards women, and a cap for every joke, ancient and modern. He drank just a little in public for the sake of sociability, but made up for it in private.⁶³

If hypocrisy is Draffin's vice, other Beckettian characters are made to look ridiculous by virtue of their dullness and stupidity. Suffice it to mention in this connection the examples of “Bim” Clinch in *Murphy*, Gaber in *Molloy*, and, of course, Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*.

(ii) Pedantry and Conceit

It is well known that Swift had as much contempt for pure reason as for religious zeal; the Houyhnhnms represent his ideal of the *juste milieu*, of practical reason to which enlightened creatures naturally conform.⁶⁴ We saw above what seems to be the true purport of the *Trritical Essay*: for Swift, philosophy is never far removed from the foolish pedantry of Cornelius Scriblerius, who could have been the author of the treatise mentioned in *A Tale of a Tub*, a “histori-theo-physi-logical account of zeal,” a burlesque title in the same vein as the “Professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovoidology” in Beckett’s *More Pricks Than Kicks*.⁶⁵

Phoney erudition is again mocked at the end of the second section of *A Tale of a Tub*,⁶⁶ and in Beckett's *Watt*, Ernest Louit is writing a dissertation on *The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts*. In support of this thesis, Louit presents to the college committee an old peasant who, he claims (fraudulently, of course), can elicit the cube root of a six-figure number "in the short space of thirty-five or forty seconds."⁶⁷

Writers also provoke Swift and Beckett to raillery. Swift mocks their verbosity⁶⁸ and their vanity,⁶⁹ devoting a whole section of *A Tale of a Tub* to an ironical defence of Grub Street, while Beckett presents in the person of Walter Draffin the very type of the conceited maker of books.⁷⁰ Beckett's Mr. Spiro, of *Watt*, is the complete pedant: he thinks nothing of quoting at length, "for he was a man of leisure," from "Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Sanchez, Suarez, Henno, Soto, Diana, Concina and Dens" in response to an enquiry of a theological nature.⁷¹ But Beckett's most fully developed satirical indictment of the pretentious arrogance of intellectuals is to be found in the short story *A Wet Night*, where the dialogue sparkles fatuously, for out of their own mouths the participants condemn themselves as what we now call "professional pseuds."⁷²

(iii) Pride and Vanity

The most effective weapon used by Swift to make human beings more modest is the "animal myth," that is, the comparison between human creatures and beasts. The parallels thus established are always to the detriment of humankind: Swift takes the horse as the symbol of decency and perfect rationality; the Houyhnhms represent the ideal which humanity has always proposed for itself, and the Yahoos, hardly more hairy than the common run of men and women, stand for what humanity really is. This transfer of our rational element to horses and of our physical aspect to Yahoos is of incontestable ironic force, but Swift goes further. In a concession full of irony, Gulliver admits that pigs are a little dirtier than Yahoos, but he asserts that they are much pleasanter creatures.⁷³ Here, as elsewhere in Swift's work (as also in Beckett's), the ugliness of the flesh reflects the meanness of the spirit;⁷⁴ it is because horses are considered beautiful and monkeys ugly that Swift chooses them as symbols. With great deftness, he leads Gulliver to the realisation that the Yahoos, whom at first he took for the livestock of that country, are in reality nothing but degenerate human beings.⁷⁵ As Beckett's Pozzo says in a rather different context but with not dissimilar irony, Vladimir and Estragon are "of the same species" as himself . . . "Made in God's image!"⁷⁶ Everything that is said about humankind in *Gulliver's Travels* is said in order to break human pride, either through irony (Gulliver considers his situation at Brobdingnag hardly befitting the dignity of a human being⁷⁷), or through indignation (a man is bound to be worse than a Yahoo because the man prides himself on his reasonableness),⁷⁸ or through disgust (the Yahoo lives in a state of natural innocence and has never been led to practice the sexual perversions which Swift alleges people in our part of the world are so keen on).⁷⁹

Beckett too attacks this human pride so fiercely decried by Swift,⁸⁰ but in a less direct fashion. It is from the mouths of his human rejects, who are quite innocent of vanity, that sarcasm and insults are hurled at self-satisfied people, such as the dirty-minded traveller who tells his unedifying life story to the

hero of "The Calmative,"⁸¹ or the people who are the butt of many an ironic comment on the part of Malone⁸² and the Unnamable.⁸³

The phenomenon of senility, for Beckett as for Swift, is a powerful argument against our pride, for nothing offers better proof of nature's lack of regard where we are concerned. To read the description of the Strulbrugs is to think of Malone dying:

My body is what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do
I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep down among them I feel nothing. It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh.⁸⁴

(iv) Physical Disgust; Excrement

The physicality of human beings provokes such powerful reactions of disgust in Swift and Beckett that no reader can long remain unaware of them. So I will not labour the point but will confine myself to a simple statement of the facts. For Beckett the body is nothing less than a "long madness":⁸⁵ "I inclined his young mind," says Moran of his son, "towards that most fruitful of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions."⁸⁶ In the mouth of the Unnamable, Beckett puts words tending to undermine our confidence in the flesh, above all in the heart which beats with never-failing constancy:

Asphyxia! I who was always the respiratory type, witness this thorax still mine I who murmured, each time I breathed in, Here comes more oxygen, and each time I breathed out, There go the impurities, the blood is bright red again.⁸⁷

As for Swift, his "horror of the body" is clearly shown in this passage about the Brobdingnag beggars:

There was a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my whole body. There was a fellow with a wen in his neck, larger than five wool-packs, and another with a couple of wooden legs, each about twenty foot high.⁸⁸

The act of feeding does not escape their disgust either: one thinks both of Gulliver, whose mouth the monkey in Brobdingnag stuffs with filth, and of Molloy, "bent double over a heap of muck, in the hope of finding something to disgust [him] for ever with eating."⁸⁹

As for the act of defecation, it is the subject of endless smutty jokes. Excrement is even for Swift a *passé-partout* image: he uses it as an insult on several occasions, for instance in expressions like "the excrements of his brain."⁹⁰ What we are confronted with here is the real scatological obsession lying at the heart of many passages, such as the comparison between English and Irish turds,⁹¹ or the details Gulliver offers us with such gusto about the ways in which he was able to relieve nature in Lilliput and Brobdingnag.⁹² Throughout Swift's so-called scatological poems, the subject of evacuated matter provokes cries of disgust mingled with fascinated interest. Similarly, in Beckett, Molloy, much given to dwelling on the anus, apologizes ironically "for having to revert to this lewd orifice, 'tis my muse will have it so."⁹³ But in Beckett the symbol of excrement is mostly used in the context of his general indictment of humanity:

The vilest acts had been committed on the ground and against the walls. The floor was strewn with excrements . . . , condoms and vomit. In a cowpad a heart had been traced, pierced by an arrow. And yet there was nothing to attract tourists.⁹⁴

However repulsive this sardonic description may be, it will readily be acknowledged that it does not express an unhealthy obsession with scatology, and indeed seems at some remove from the kind of Swiftian smuttiness revealed in lines such as these:

STREPHON who heard the fuming Rill
As from a mossy Cliff distill;
Cry'd out, ye Gods, what Sound is this?
Can *Chloe*, heav'nly *Chloe* [piss]?

and many others in the same vein.⁹⁵

(v) Sexuality

Beckett and Swift are entirely devoid of idealism where physical love is concerned. In Swift, sexuality is the domain in which humankind renders itself the most ridiculous, and eroticism is the source of all its aberrations: the *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* mischievously insinuates that all religious ecstasy boils down to the frankly carnal sensuality from which it derives and with which it always remains closely linked. The sexual act serves only to spread the pox, a disease which is something of a Swiftian obsession. If Beckett is free of that preoccupation, he nonetheless shares with Swift the feeling that humankind is never more ridiculous than in the act of love. One thinks at once of Swift when reading the grotesque account of the affair between Molloy and Edith or of that between Moll and Macmann,⁹⁶ for what are involved here are huge parodies aimed at getting us to laugh at the act that for D. H. Lawrence was the greatest mystery of existence. In the same destructive vein, Beckett places the accent on sexual incapacity (the Unnamable laughs at his own impotence)⁹⁷ and on masturbation as a symbol of the refusal to procreate.⁹⁸ So this Beckettian obsession needs to be examined in the context of his "hatred of life," where indeed we find that birth is considered a sort of death⁹⁹ and the family a hated encumbrance. The Unnamable imagines crushing his nearest if not dearest under his crutches:

I like to fancy, even if it is not true, that it was in mother's entrails I spent the last days of my long voyage, and set out on the next. No, I have no preference, Isolde's breast would have done just as well, or papa's private parts, or the heart of one of the little bastards.¹⁰⁰

In view of the fact that Vivian Mercier has so ably demonstrated the typically Irish character of this hatred of life,¹⁰¹ I will not dwell on the subject. There remains the question of lewdness in Swift and Beckett; there are passages in Swift which, while flaunting a marked degree of sexual disgust, betray a repressed fascination with sex. I am thinking of *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels*,¹⁰² where Swift takes a sly pleasure in dealing with the incongruities of sex. There is no such prurience in Beckett: from *More Pricks than Kicks*, in which Belacqua eschews the pleasures of the flesh, via *Murphy*, where Celia is portrayed as a sexual temptress, to the cruel parodies of coitus in *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, we find the same rejection of physical love. The reason for this is that the coupling of man and woman thwarts all

attempts at putting an end to life, the full stop of which Hamm dreams in *Endgame*, a play shot through with dark lyricism.

(vi) Woman

It is logical that Swift and Beckett, holding the opinions they do about procreation, hold women in low esteem. They are both, in fact, convinced misogynists, attacking, it need hardly be said, woman's physical aspect. Witness in Swift's *The Progress of Beauty* the disgusting sight of Celia rising from her bed:

Crackt Lips, foul Teeth, and gummy Eyes,
Poor Strephon, how he would blaspheme!

The Soot or Powder which was wont
To make her hair look black as Jet,
Falls from her Tresses on her Front
A mingled Mass of Dirt and Sweat.¹⁰³

Similarly, in regard to Beckett, we think of Molloy's mother:

A head always . . . veiled with hair, wrinkles, filth, slobber A head that darkened the air
Once I touched with my lips, vaguely, hastily, that little grey wizened pear. Pah.¹⁰⁴

We know from his last letter to Varina¹⁰⁵ that Swift could not stand the thought of dirt where the female body was concerned. He was even less able to accept the fact that a woman could experience physical desire: the Yahoo female who, driven by sexual craving, throws herself on Gulliver is a strikingly horrific image. In a similar vein, Swift tries to denigrate feminine beauty: look at any woman closely, or flay her alive, and you will see, he says, how ugly she is. Beckett does not perhaps share this obsession with female ugliness, but he is, if that be possible, even more outraged by women's enthusiasm for what he disdainfully calls "artificial respiration":¹⁰⁶ Of Miss Counihan he writes, "the only points at which [she] was vulnerable were her erogenous zones and her need for Murphy."¹⁰⁷ In the same way married love is seen as illusory, and Belacqua affects complete indifference to it.

In the moral domain, women inspire as much aversion as they do on the physical side. For Swift, the fair sex is frivolous, spiteful, temperamental, and spendthrift.¹⁰⁸ The stern *Letter to a Young Lady on the Occasion of Her Marriage* is dictated by a repugnance for woman as such: only she who can shed her femininity to become in all respects like a man will meet Swift's requirements. A similar misogyny surfaces in Beckett when Belaqua shows a marked preference for unthreatening women of more advanced years like Ruby Tough, Signora Ottolenghi, or his own aunt. Women in their full sexual maturity like Winnie, Lucy, Thelma and the big, voracious Austrian girl, Smeraldina, serve only to terrify him.¹⁰⁹ For we soon notice that it is always the women in Beckett's work who set their cap at men, rather than the other way round: Smeraldina "rapes" Belaqua,¹¹⁰ Celia seduces Murphy, as Lulu does the hero of *First Love*, and Moll makes all the running with Macmann in *Malone Dies*. Although comic, this trait nevertheless betrays a misogyny no less deep-rooted than Swift's, and a similar recoil from female sexuality. For if existence is absurd, if death alone is desirable, it is not surprising that the human creature responsible for the transmission of life should inspire such dread.

IV

I now turn from the obsessions of the two writers to a comparison of their literary methods. Here too the parallels are numerous and striking. I shall discuss this question under seven headings.

1. Narrative, Imagery, Myth, the Fantastic

Both writers are well aware of the power of fiction, and they take full advantage of it in their major works. To straightforward narrative is added the power of myth, and myth, according to Professor Pons, “is image and idea, its dual nature accounting both for its power to haunt us and for its hermeneutic value; Swift's thought is governed by the inner strength of imagery, and by myth nourished by ideas.”¹¹¹ I have examined the ideas of Swift and Beckett in the preceding section; I now want to study their use of imagery, for if they manage to achieve acceptance of these ideas, which are fairly repulsive on the whole, it must in large part be due to the power of their imagery to cast its spell over the reader.

In Swift's case one cannot fail to notice straightaway how skillfully the Gulliverian myth is constructed: we are convinced of the logical possibility of Lilliput and Brobdingnag because Gulliver, instead of presenting us with fantastic events from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator, is as much surprised by them as we are. He too has to adapt to these tiny people, and on his return from Brobdingnag is so used to living among giants that he mistakes the English for Lilliputians, whom he is in danger of crushing underfoot. Similarly, in the land of the Houyhnhms, he notices only cattle and horses at first and is impatient to make contact with the natives.

There is also mythic progression: to the king of Brobdingnag, Gulliver has only to explain the way things are done in Europe, for the monarch is after all a Yahoo and can understand shabby conduct, whereas his master Houyhnhnm lives in such a state of innocence that Gulliver has to explain human nature in great detail. Thus at one fell swoop, by means of this mythic procedure, the impact of the satire is greatly increased. Swift manages, for example, to make us feel, on the part of the master Houyhnhnm, an aversion for war as described by Gulliver, and thus achieves, through the power of the fable, a fundamental reversal of our values.

Beckett uses myth too. He persuades us in *Murphy* that our appraisal of madness is artificial; in *Watt*, he convinces us of the fragility of sensory experience; and in *Malone Dies*, he exposes the derisory nature of our confidence in the flesh and of our idealism with regard to love. Georges Bataille was the first to draw attention to this mythical quality in Beckett when he said that *Molloy* was a “monstrous myth, emerging from the sleep of reason,” and others have further developed his arguments.¹¹²

But myth, dark and insistent as it is, does not exclude pure fantasy; indeed it is here that the greater part of the humour of these writers resides. Many a detail in *Gulliver's Travels* and many an incident in Beckett's novels must, in the last analysis, be put down to the straightforward pleasure of telling a story. I am thinking of *The Battle of the Books*: a fantastic tale if ever there was one, this work transforms a controversy in which Swift took little interest into a hugely burlesque adventure where the incidents are described with a verve and imagination that transcend by quite a margin the requirements of the polemic. I am thinking too of Belacqua's wedding, recounted with a brio worthy of Sterne, and of Molloy's

harebrained schemes for the best use of his sucking-stones.

2. Parody and Burlesque

This love of the fantastic is closely linked to parody, which is a literary device of considerable importance in both Beckett and Swift. It is parodic humour, for example, that dictates to Swift the allegory of vestments in *A Tale of a Tub* and inspires the burlesque and implausible ramifications on “Æolism,” the name that Swift uses to designate the inspiration of the fanatics:

. . . into this barrel, upon solemn days, the priest enters, where, having before duly prepared himself by the methods already described, a secret funnel is also conveyed from his posteriors to the bottom of the barrel, which admits new supplies of inspiration, from a northern chink or cranny. Whereupon, you behold him swell immediately to the shape and size of his vessel. In this posture he disembogues whole tempests upon his auditory, as the spirit from beneath gives him utterance It is in this guise the sacred Æolist delivers his oracular belches to his panting disciples.¹¹³

The grave pseudo-scientific tone is the hallmark of this kind of humour. We encounter it again in the finicky precision with which Beckett introduces a list of hypotheses to explain an event,¹¹⁴ and, in a more general way, in the gravity with which the most striking absurdities are uttered, such as this recommendation for a product claiming to cure impotence:

Have you tried Bando, Mr Graves, said Arthur. A capsule, before and after meals, in a little warm milk, and again at night, before turning in. I had tried everything, and was thoroughly disgusted, when a friend spoke to me of Bando. Her husband was never without it, you understand. Try it, she said, and come back in five or six years. I tried it, Mr Graves, and it changed my whole outlook on life. From being a moody, listless, constipated man, covered with squames, shunned by my fellows, my breath fetid and my appetite depraved (for years I had eaten nothing but high fat rashers), I became, after four years of Bando, vivacious, restless, a popular nudist, regular in my daily health, almost a father and a lover of boiled potatoes. Bando. Spelt as pronounced.¹¹⁵

Here we have a good example of the use of tone discordant with substance. Much of the humour of this form of burlesque gravity resides in the exploitation of such discordance, which occurs very frequently in both Beckett and Swift, as in the following from Swift:

. . . I recommend to the perusal of the learned, certain discoveries [such as] as my *New Help for Smatterers, or the Art of being deep-learned and shallow-read; A Curious Invention about Mouse-Traps* . . . together with a most useful engine for catching of owls.¹¹⁶

We find the same comedy in the passage where Belacqua boasts to his fiancée Lucy about his experiences of *sursum corda* during which he actually indulges in voyeurism by spying on couples making love in the woods.¹¹⁷

The satire of the writer's calling, common to both authors, falls within this same domain of the burlesque: the expression “*Hiatus in MS*” and its variants, each accompanied by some grouping of asterisks inserted apparently at random in the text, occur many times in *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the*

Books and Beckett's *Watt*, with everywhere the same intention, that of mocking either literary creation or the pedantic nature of critical exegesis.¹¹⁸ In much the same vein are the appendix to *Watt*,¹¹⁹ the "explanatory" notes added to *A Tale of a Tub*, and the ridiculous light in which Swift and Beckett do not hesitate to present their characters. I am thinking of Gulliver docilely repeating the word "Yahoo" and thereby unwittingly designating himself as such,¹²⁰ and of Murphy, whose ashes, in defiance of his testamentary precautions, are "freely distributed over the floor" of a saloon bar before being "swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit."¹²¹

Under this same heading of the burlesque we should note also exuberant banter, denoting a gift for, and delight in, pure comedy, which led Swift to create the character of Bickerstaff, or draw up the list of "Treatises wrote by the same Author" that appears at the head of *A Tale of a Tub*, or devise the tale's very subtitle, "*Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind.*" The same humour appears in Beckett's *Watt* as the bogus research trip undertaken by Mr Louit¹²² and the blasphemous jokes that are so reminiscent of those in *A Tale of a Tub*.¹²³

Burlesque can degenerate into farce, another element to be found in both writers: in *More Pricks than Kicks*, for instance, the spiteful Una laughs so loud at Belacqua's expense that her bodice splits, and in *Watt* the amatory difficulties of Watt and Mrs Gorman border on farce.¹²⁴ In Swift the elements of farce (I am thinking particularly of Lord Peter trying to pass his bread off as good mutton) are subordinated to the satirical or parodic purpose he has in mind, so I will not labour the point.

Finally, let us note the use for satirical ends of bathos, that is, the movement from an elevated to a burlesque tone, as indicated by a marked fall on the words italicized in the following examples from Swift:

Beef comprehends in it the quintessence of partridge, and quail, and venison, and pheasant, and plum *pudding, and custard*¹²⁵

. . . a great kingdom kept in awe for over a year in daily dread of utter destruction, not by a powerful invader at the head of twenty thousand men, not by a plague or a famine . . . but by one single, diminutive, insignificant *mechanic*¹²⁶

. . . the great usefulness of his sublime discoveries upon the subject of *flies and spittle*¹²⁷

And compare similar examples of bathos in Beckett:

. . . proffered all pure and open to the long joys of being himself, like *a basin to a vomit*¹²⁸

. . . there was that strange light which follows a day of persistent rain, when the sun comes out and the sky clears too late to be of any use. The earth makes a sound as of sighs and the last drops fall from the emptied cloudless sky. 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.¹²⁹

3. Oxymoron and Metaphor

There is a close resemblance between the use of oxymoron and the use of bathos. Oxymoron takes advantage of an obvious contradiction that soon fades to allow an ironic comparison to be made.¹³⁰ This device finds its best use in enumeration, as in these examples from Swift:

. . . here were no gibbers, censors, . . . *attorneys*, bawds, . . . *politicians*, *wits*, . . . *controvertists* .

. . . I am not the least provoked at the sight of a *lawyer*, a pickpocket, a *colonel*, a fool, a *lord*, a gamester, a *politician*, a whoremaster, a *physician*, an evidence, a suborner, an *attorney*, a traitor . .

. . .¹³¹

I have italicized the terms for the respectable people who are mocked by being bundled together with others who are much less so. In Beckett we find similar groupings:

. . . *the aesthetes* and the impotent were far away.¹³²

But oxymoron can equally well involve a whole phrase, or even a whole passage, in order to reinforce the satirical intention, as in Swift:

. . . the *laborious* eloquence of his style¹³³

. . . two young gentlemen of real hopes, bright wit, and profound judgement, who upon a thorough examination of causes and effects, and by the mere force of natural abilities, *without the least tincture of learning* . . . made a discovery, that there was no God¹³⁴

Beckett uses a similar oxymoronic construction in the passage in which Molloy has just finished telling the revolting story of his couplings with Edith:

What I do know for certain is that I never sought to repeat the experience, having I suppose the *intuition* that it had been *unique and perfect*, of its kind, *achieved and inimitable*, and that it behooved me to *preserve its memory*, pure of all *pastiche*, in my heart, even if it meant my resorting from time to time to the alleged joys of so-called self-abuse.¹³⁵

Metaphor and analogy are at the opposite pole from oxymoron. Swift can handle metaphor with great skill (remember the famous passage about the phoney scholars),¹³⁶ and Beckett shows similar virtuosity in his choice of analogies:

A kiss from Wylie was like a breve tied, in a long slow amorous phrase, over bars' times its equivalent in demi-semiquavers. Miss Counihan had never enjoyed anything quite so much as this slow-motion osmosis of love's spittle.¹³⁷

4. Intensity and Aggression

Beckett and Swift can both use virulent language on occasion, when, for instance, they want to make one of their victims detestable. Swift takes full advantage of what Professor Quintana has called his "emotional savageness,"¹³⁸ as in the following passage:

The goddess [Criticism] herself had claws like a cat; her head, and ears, and voice, resembled those of an ass; her teeth fallen out before, her eyes turned inward, as if she looked only upon herself; her diet was the overflowing of her own gall; her spleen was so large, as to stand prominent, like a dug of the first rate; nor wanted excrescencies in form of teats, at which a crew of ugly monsters were greedily sucking; and, what is wonderful to conceive, the bulk of spleen increased faster than the sucking could diminish it.¹³⁹

Beckettian examples of this use of virulent language are not lacking. *The Unnamable* contains numerous

instances, but a striking example occurs in Arsene's tirade in *Watt*:

. . . when you cease to want, then life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it.¹⁴⁰

5. Irony

I turn now to the study of irony, which is at once the most typical and the most complex of the literary devices employed by both Swift and Beckett. It is well known that Swift boasted of having invented irony,¹⁴¹ and Beckett uses it in so many ways and with such skill that he shows himself to be a worthy inheritor of his predecessor's talents.

Beckett's irony can manifest itself in a single word, since, like Voltaire, he is past master in the art of biting remarks:

Come come. Fate is rancorous, but not to that extent.¹⁴²

They gave me courses on love, on intelligence, most precious, most precious. They also taught me to count, and even to reason Some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it I use it still, to scratch my arse with.¹⁴³

Well, I suppose you have to try everything once, succour included, to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet.¹⁴⁴

Swift, on the other hand, is more comfortable with longer passages in which the barbs of his satire are unleashed at the end of a slow and patient preparation. One thinks of the famous eulogy of folly, which ends with these words:

This is the sublime and refined point of felicity, called the possession of being well deceived; the serene peaceful state, of being a fool among knaves.¹⁴⁵

This particular quality is found in all Swift's justly-renowned ironical writings. There is no need for me to dwell on this aspect, since the subject has been so well explored by Professor Pons and Dr. Leavis, who have lucidly brought out what the former calls Swift's "implacable humorous logic."¹⁴⁶

Pace Karl Miller,¹⁴⁷ Beckett displays the same talent in the domain of prolonged irony. The story of the love affair between Molloy and Edith, to which I have already referred, is a perfect, fully achieved piece of satire, starting with "[W]omen? Oh well, I may as well confess it now, yes, I once rubbed up against one," and ending with a very Swiftian trait a couple of pages further on: "I would have preferred it seems to me an orifice less arid and roomy [than hers], that would have given me a higher opinion of love it seems to me. However. Twixt finger and thumb 'tis heaven in comparison."¹⁴⁸ One thinks too of the episode where Malone watches a couple making love in a room across the way with slowly growing realization as to what is taking place. The view brings this observation:

It is all very pretty and strange, this big complicated shape made up of more than one

The savage blow of this passage is delivered only with the final words:

Is it possible they have finished already? They have loved each other standing, like dogs.¹⁴⁹

6. Masks

Swift makes extensive use of masks to obtain his ironic effects. He creates several: Gulliver, Bickerstaff, Wagstaff, and many others. There are, broadly speaking, three ways a mask can be used in ironical writing. First, the protagonist, in praising what the author seeks to mock, joins those who are the butt of the satire (for example, in Swift, Gulliver, wishing he could command “the language of Demosthenes and Cicero” in order to be able to sing the praises of his dear native land to the king of Brobdingnag, and, in Beckett, Moran taking naive pleasure in asserting his paternal authority). Or, second, the protagonist is neutral and merely relays the facts without comment, thus allowing the satire to stem from his very neutrality (for example, Gulliver among the inventors in the academy of Lagado). Or, finally, the protagonist attacks directly the vices and follies that the author has in his or her sights (for example, Gulliver on his return from the land of the Houyhnhnms). Of the three, the most important is the neutral mask, in which a character presents all the prosecution evidence without drawing any of the obvious conclusions;¹⁵⁰ it is the art of proffering enormities without betraying any personal bias. Examples of this use of irony are very numerous in Swift:

And he proposed farther, that by employing spiders, the charge of dying silks should be wholly saved, whereof I was fully convinced when he showed me a vast number of flies most beautifully coloured, wherewith he fed his spiders, assuring us, that the webs would take a tincture from them¹⁵¹

A similar use of the neutral mask can be found in Beckett where Molloy, who thinks he is going to be beaten up, describes his interrogation at the police station:

I am full of fear, I have gone in fear all my life, in fear of blows. Insults, abuse, these I can easily bear, but I could never get used to blows. It's strange. Even spits still pain me. But they have only to be a little gentle, I mean refrain from hitting me, and I seldom fail to give satisfaction.¹⁵²

Of note too is the “Mark Antony” mask in which the character affects to praise what he is in reality condemning:

If I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who corrected me only on points of detail instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the manner of the great English schools¹⁵³

The full irony of this passage is perceived only when one recalls that Beckett's secondary school, Portora Royal, modelled itself on Harrow, Rugby, Winchester and the other great English so-called “public” (in reality private) schools. A good example of the “Mark Antony” mask in Swift is Dryden’s purported “confidence” to him:

[Dryden] has often said to me in confidence, that the world would have never suspected him to be so great a poet, if he had not assured them so frequently in his prefaces, that it was impossible they could either doubt or forget it. Perhaps it may be so.¹⁵⁴

Just as Swift has several *personae*, Beckett adopts, in turn, the point of view of Belaqua, Murphy, Watt, and Molloy; with Malone he wonders “how such creatures are possible,”¹⁵⁵ and in the person of the Unnamable, he refuses the identity which people seek to impose upon him.¹⁵⁶ Beckett's characters, like

their Swiftian counterparts, are first and foremost fictional constructs operating in a universe of myth, but they are also masks adopted by their creators the better to examine, comment upon, and satirize human beings and the human condition. The complex issue of masks must always be borne in mind; if I insist upon it, it is because too many critics still confuse Beckett with his characters. To do so is to forget that Samuel Beckett is a satirical writer in the tradition of Swift, and that, as the heir to Swiftian methods, he demands from us as subtle an awareness of nuance as does his prestigious ancestor.

7. Caricature and Contrast

Ultimately the ironic mask turns into caricature: the writer presents it to us as such and leaves it up to us to work out how much truth it contains. Deliberate exaggeration in the service of more effective denunciation is the Swiftian method in *A Modest Proposal*, in the story of Jack and of the Æolists, and in the extravagant caricature of the modern pedant.¹⁵⁷ In Beckett there is no more horrifying caricature than that of the amorous exchanges between the senile lovers Moll and Macmann:

With the passing of the years we have become scarcely less hideous than even our best favoured contemporaries and you, in particular, have kept your hair. And thanks to our having never served, never understood, we are not without freshness and innocence, it seems to me. Moral, for us at last it is the season of love, let us make the most of it, there are pears that only ripen in December.¹⁵⁸

There is, finally, a form of irony that resides in the contrast between image and reality. Swift takes full advantage of it: the rosy notion that Gulliver entertains of the Struldbrugs is brought up sharply against the ghastly reality. Beckett is equally aware of the humorous and ironic potential of this procedure: Lucy discovers that her dear Belacqua, whom she has considered to be decent, honourable, and a “university man” to boot, is nothing but a disgusting voyeur, and Murphy, who believed he had found kindred souls amongst the insane, has to acknowledge in the end that fellow-feeling of that kind is quite alien to them.

V

In the course of this study I have examined in some detail the parallels which can be discerned between Swift's writings and those of Samuel Beckett. In this last section I want to look from a different angle at a theme the importance of which I have already noted, and at another theme which I have not had occasion to mention up till now.

First, then, the theme of the mask. I remarked in the previous section that the protagonist was at one and the same time a fictional construct and a mask behind which his creator speaks, the better to attain the latter's satirical purpose. The character's monologue reflects, on the one hand, his own personality (Molloy is a sadist and Gulliver a jingoist), thereby exposing a certain weakness or folly as a representative trait of the human race. On the other hand, such speakers' words highlight - sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously - the folly or wickedness of other characters (Molloy enables us to see Edith's vice and the brutality of the police). But Beckett's attitude toward his protagonist is not the same as Swift's; he reveals a clear bias in favour of his creature by accepting him as he is and presenting him to us with some indulgence. His method, in a word, as Mr. Curtis has noted,¹⁵⁹ is to liken his hero to himself and by implication to the reader. Swift, by contrast, holds himself aloof from his protagonist and likens him to the human beings whom he (Swift) is chastising (on return from his last voyage Gulliver hates himself almost as much as he hates his fellow men and women). The difference is only fully perceptible after a comparative analysis has been made of the complete writings of the two authors: it then becomes clear that, whereas in the case of Swift, we are left with the sour aftertaste of his contemptuous hatred, Beckett expresses his compassion for the loathsome being who is, after all, according to him, the truest part of ourselves, this Molloy, "this horrible shape, swaying painfully on its crutches," who, as Georges Bataille agrees, "is the truth with which we are diseased, the ineluctable abyss that will lure and then engulf our human display: oblivion and impotence."¹⁶⁰

In this disparity of attitudes an important difference between Beckett and Swift emerges: Swift looks down on human beings from a lofty height and with a degree of impatience, like Jupiter in his poem about the last judgement,¹⁶¹ whereas Beckett prefers viewing the world from the dunghill on which his hero lies stretched out under a cold sky.¹⁶²

The second theme I want to look at in this concluding section is that of the voyage of discovery, which is the subject of *Gulliver's Travels* and, in a rather different guise, of *Molloy*. Moran, the character who addresses the reader in the second part of *Molloy*, gets an order from Youdi (God?) conveyed by Gaber (Gabriel?)¹⁶³ to go in search of Molloy, whom he fails to locate but whom he starts to resemble up to the point of merging with him, so that Moran accomplishes his mission by becoming the person who at the outset was his prey. Moran's return to civilization after a painful journey recalls Gulliver's homecoming after his sojourn in the land of the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver becomes aware of a dual contrast: a physical contrast first of all, as after his other voyages, and then a moral contrast of having left a country where reason and virtue reign supreme and returning to his own, where vice and extravagance are everywhere the order of the day. On his return Moran suffers a similar shock: his once-esteemed parish priest now repels him, his

bees are dead, his house is derelict, and - like Gulliver, who cannot stand the company of any creatures other than the degenerate Houyhnhnms of his stables - Moran declares:

I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more . . . My birds had not been killed. They were wild birds. And yet quite trusting. I recognised them and they seemed to recognise me I tried to understand their language better. Without having recourse to mine. They were the longest, loveliest days of all the year. I lived in the garden.¹⁶⁴

Striking though the parallels are, the differences are no less significant. The Beckettian journey, unlike Gulliver's travels, is a search for one's true being, a search conducted without change of place. Dominant in Beckett's thinking is the theme of the quest for self, which occurs, as noted above, in *Molloy* and which recurs in the *Texts for Nothing* and *The Unnamable*. But Swift's Gulliver, when all is said and done, is essentially a dissatisfied traveller perpetually in search of the elixir, which he will find only in the land of the Houyhnhnms, that will be able to rid him of all his pride as a "lord of creation."¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, both he and Moran are led to reject their humanity and embrace a starker but more authentic existence. In this way the theme of the journey, although with significant differences, becomes in both Beckett and Swift a further means of expressing their disenchantment with human nature.

I have kept for the end of this study the question of the direct influence exerted on Beckett by Jonathan Swift. A passage in *Murphy* is very interesting in this regard:

Bom gave up. When the fool supports the knave the good man may fold his hands Oh, monster of humanity and enlightenment, despairing of a world in which the only natural allies are the fools and knaves, a mankind sterile with self-complicity, admire Bom feeling dimly for once what you feel acutely so often, Pilate's hands rustling in his mind. Thus Bom released Ticklepenny and delivered Murphy to his folly.¹⁶⁶

Here, without doubt, Beckett invokes the author of the *Digression Concerning Madness*, who, as we saw above, speaks with such irony of the peaceable situation of the fool among knaves. Although there is in Beckett thinly-veiled approval of the fool (here Murphy himself) that is not to be found in Swift, it is nonetheless clear that Beckett delights in alluding here to his great literary ancestor. It is an awareness of this filiation that explains the many references to Swift and his *oeuvre* that are to be found scattered throughout Beckett's writings, the earlier works especially.¹⁶⁷

To agree that this deliberate allusion points to a genuine example of literary influence is to recognize without question the existence of close affinities between the two men. It was probably at Trinity College that Beckett discovered the writings of Jonathan Swift, when his own *oeuvre* was

still in an embryonic state. Sharing the same Protestant background, the same gift for ironic humour, the same pessimism about life, the same unease about the flesh, it was natural that Beckett should find in the “monster of humanity and enlightenment” a master and an idol. In response to the particular circumstances in which Beckett later found himself (exile, war, occupation), his work evolved in ways different from Swift's, thus acquiring a character that at first sight recalls only distantly the style of his predecessor but which, deep down, closely echoes his message. I have attempted in this study to enumerate and analyze the various aspects of the resemblance, and I want further to suggest that everything I have said points to the existence of a profound influence on Beckett by Swift. In the last analysis, though, this study has no pretension other than to serve as a point of departure for the reflections of my readers, who will wish to make their minds up for themselves on the question. My hope is that the elements that I have tried to bring together in this essay will assist them in reaching conclusions of their own.

John Fletcher (1962) (Translated in 2002 from the original French by the author)¹⁶⁸

Endnotes

1. See Hugh Kenner, “Cartesian Centaur,” *Perspective* 11 (1959): 132-41; Walter A. Strauss, “Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Tramps,” *Comparative Literature* 11 (1959): 250-61; Ruby Cohn, “Note on Beckett, Dante and Geulincx,” *Comparative Literature* 12 (1960): 93-94; and Melvin J. Friedman, “The Novels of Beckett: An Amalgam of Proust and Joyce,” *Comparative Literature* 12 (1960): 47-58.

2. See Maurice Nadeau, “Samuel Beckett et le droit au silence,” *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 75 (January 1952): 1273-1282; Anthony Curtis, “Mood of the Month—IV,” *London Magazine* no. 5 (May 1958): 60-65 (hereafter abbreviated as Curtis); and Jean-Jacques Mayoux, “Samuel Beckett et L'univers Parodique” in *Vivants piliers, le roman anglo-saxon et les symboles*, Lettres nouvelles 6 (Paris: Julliard, 1960): 271-91, see p.287 (hereafter abbreviated as Mayoux).

3. Beckett was familiar with Swift's writings, as he told me in an interview in 1961. Moreover, *The Drapier's Letters* (Temple Scott, VII) was on the syllabus of the Honor Course in Modern Literature at Trinity College in 1926 (see *Dublin University Calendar*, 1925-1926 [109-115]); and there are numerous quotations from Swift in his own works (see note 167 below).

4. Both in my original article in French and in this translation, the relevant volumes of the Temple Scott edition of Swift's prose are used: *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*. Edited by Temple Scott, with a “Biographical Introduction” by W. E. H. Lecky, 12 vols. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897-1925). *A Tale of a Tub and Other Early Works*, vol. I; *Writings on Religion and the Church*, vols. III-IV; *Historical and Political Tracts—English*, vol. V; *The Drapier's Letters*, vol. VI; *Historical and Political Tracts—Irish*, vol. VII; *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. G. R. Dennis, vol. VIII. (hereafter quoted by title of specific work and volume number).

For Swift's poetry, the following source is used: *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*. Edited by Harold Williams, 2nd ed. 3 vols. (1937: Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). *Miscellaneous Poems, 1724-1736*, vol. II.

For Beckett's works the following editions are used:
Dream of Fair to Middling Women (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1992)
More Pricks than Kicks (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970)
Murphy (London: Routledge, 1938)
Watt (Paris: Olympia Press, 1953)
Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable (London: John Calder, 1959)
No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose, 1945-1966 (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967)
Waiting for Godot (London: Faber & Faber, 1965).

5. According to Mr. Beckett, the family is of Huguenot origin. It is, of course, Protestant. Beckett's father and elder brother were quantity surveyors.

6. Émile Pons, *Swift: les années de jeunesse et le "Conte du tonneau,"* Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, fasc. 26 (Strasbourg: 1925), 169 (hereafter abbreviated as Pons).

7. See José Axelrad's introduction to his French translation of *Gulliver's Travels*, entitled *Voyages dans plusieurs pays fort éloignés du monde, en quatre parties, Chefs-d'oeuvre étrangers* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1960).

8. See, for example, Beckett's authorial comment, "For an Irish girl Miss Counihan was quite exceptionally anthropoid" (*Murphy*, 118).

9. Pons, 173.

10. Beckett knows where to find shelter in London if one has no money (*Murphy*, 127); also the heroes of "The End" and the eighth "Text for Nothing" are beggars (both in *No's Knife*, 43-67 and 107-111); and Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* are homeless tramps.

11. Pons, 389.

12. *Murphy*, 177-8.

13. For the information on Swift, see Lecky's "Biographical Introduction," I, lxxxvii; for Beckett's reference, see *Murphy*, 46; for the biblical passage, see Job 3:3: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived."

14. "I do not think life is of much value but health is worth everything" (*The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. David Nichol Smith [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935], 143).

15. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 61-62.

16. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 200.

17. Beckett's title *More Pricks than Kicks* is obviously as parodic as that of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. The first draft of *More Pricks than Kicks* was called *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and mocked the writings of Henry Williamson, author of *Tarka the Otter: his Joyful Water-Life and Death in the Country of Two Rivers* (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927). Williamson had published a novel entitled *Dream of Fair Women, a Tale of Youth after the Great War* (London: W. Collins Sons, 1924) as the third part of what was finally his four part collection, *The Flax of Dream: A Novel in Four Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936). Beckett evidently took pleasure in ridiculing the pretentiousness of Williamson's titles.

18. Pons, 109. Beckett too read widely: in fifteen pages (160-175) picked at random from *More Pricks than Kicks* writers as different as Horace, Hardy and Donne are mentioned and/or quoted.

19. "His attack is levelled at pride . . . pride intellectual, moral, political, personal, physical" (David Nichol Smith, *Essays by Divers Hands: Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*. Vol. XV [London: H. Milford, Oxford UP, 1935], 45 (hereafter abbreviated as Nichol Smith).

20. J. Middleton Murry, *Jonathan Swift, a Critical Biography* (London: Cape, 1954), 53 (hereafter abbreviated as Murry).

21. Murry, 133. Nichol Smith is not quite of the same opinion: "Swift was a definitely religious man with an overmastering sense of the weakness of human nature"(46).

22. "To Swift Christianity was greater than any of the churches" (Nichol Smith, 36).

23. There is no evidence that Swift was a sceptic where primitive Christianity was concerned: see his distinction between the "primitive way of inspiration and that which is practiced in the present age" (*A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, I, 196) and "real Christianity, such as used in primitive times" and the "nominal Christianity" of "our present schemes of wealth and power" (*An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity . . . May . . . be Attended by Some Inconveniencies*, III, 6-7).

24. ". . . his contempt for public opinion, fanaticism, and his loathing of theological revellers . . ." (Pons, 165).

25. ". . . the church of which Swift became a faithful servant, largely through filial piety and feeling of caste" (Pons, 348).

26. For an attack upon free thinkers, see *An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity . . . May . . . be Attended by Some Inconveniencies* (III, 5-19), and *Letter of Advice to a Young Poet* (XI, 91-111); upon Roman Catholics, the story of Peter; and upon sectarians, the story of Jack, both in *A Tale of a Tub* (I, 3-151). Also upon sectarians, see *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (I, 191-210).

27. See Pons: ". . . the striking total absence of the divine . . . he deliberately restricts his vision to the most temporal of horizons" (375-6), and F. R. Leavis speaks of a "complete incapacity even to guess what religious feeling might be" ("The Irony of Swift," *Determinations*:

Critical Essays [London: Chatto & Windus, 1934], 104; hereafter abbreviated as Leavis.)

28. It is not surprising that Beckett, an intellectual brought up as a Protestant, should be drawn to the complexities of a religion which Joyce called, in a famous phrase, “an absurdity which is logical and coherent.”

29. *Molloy*, 167; see too Moran's scruples over taking the eucharist after drinking lager, *Molloy*, 97, and the question of the rat who eats of a consecrated wafer, *Watt*, 28.

30. Terms used by Mayoux, 271.

31. Pons, 352.

32. *Thoughts on Religion*, III, 308.

33. “Violent zeal for truth hath an hundred to one odds to be either petulancy, ambition, or pride,” *Ibid.*, 307.

34. *Critical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind*, I, 289-96.

35. Ricardo Quintana, *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* (1936: reprinted with additional notes and bibliography, London: Methuen, 1953), 73 (hereafter abbreviated as Quintana).

36. *Waiting for Godot*, 42-45; *Molloy*, 91.

37. *Watt*, 74.

38. See on page 316 Vivian Mercier's phrase “The life-hating aspect of the Irish grotesque,” in “Samuel Beckett and the Sheela-na-gig,” *Kenyon Review* 23 (1961): 299-324 (hereafter abbreviated as Mercier).

39. “The *Reason* by which they are governed is really a desire for death.” George Orwell, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1957), 135; and William Alfred Eddy, *Gulliver's Travels, a Critical Study* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1923), 190-1.

40. Mayoux, 272.

41. See *Metaphysica vera* in the Jan Pieter Nicolas Land edition of the philosophical works of Geulincx (Van de hooft-deuchden; de eerste tucht-verhandeling, door Arnout Geulincx, herdruk bezorgd door J. P. N. Land [The Hague: J. E. Buschmann, 1893], II, 155).

42. *Murphy*, 8 and 179.

43. *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, I, 210.

44. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 214.

45. *Ibid.*, 273-4.

46. Ibid., 268.

47. Ibid., 74-5.

48. *Molloy*, 24.

49. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 99.

50. "The End" in *No's Knife*, 61-2.

51. *Malone Dies*, 230-1.

52. "He felt as though he had been sprayed from head to foot by human civet and would never again be clean" (*More Pricks than Kicks*, 61).

53. In *Watt*, Lady McCann throws a stone at Watt (32), and the railwaymen empty a bucket of slops over him (241), referring to him coarsely as "the long wet dream with the hat and bags" (246).

54. *Molloy*, 66-7.

55. Pons, 395.

56. See, for example, the *Times Literary Supplement* (28 March 1958), 168.

57. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 117.

58. *The Battle of the Books*, I, 182.

59. Ibid., 183-4.

60. *Murphy*, 77.

61. *A Short Character of Thomas Earl of Wharton*, V, 9-10.

62. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 131.

63. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 130- 1.

64. See for example *A Digression Concerning Madness*: "The more [a man] shapes his understanding by the pattern of human learning, the less he is inclined to form parties, after his particular notions, because that instructs him in his private infirmities. . ." (Temple Scott, I, 118).

65. See *A Tale of a Tub*, (Temple Scott, I, 98) and *More Pricks than Kicks* (71), an obvious pun on "bullshit" and the Trinity College Dublin professorship of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology.

66. "For, night being the universal mother of things, wise philosophers hold all writings to

be fruitful in the proportion they are dark; and therefore, the true illuminated . . . have met with such numberless commentators, whose scholastic midwifery hath delivered them of meanings, that the authors themselves perhaps never conceived" (*A Tale of a Tub*, I, 128).

67. *Watt*, 171 and 188.

68. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 102.

69. *Ibid.*, I, 90.

70. In *More Pricks than Kicks* (153) Walter Draffin is named as the author of a work that has been in progress "for the last ten or fifteen years" called *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the title, of course, of Beckett's own first novel (at the time unpublished, see n. 17 above).

71. *Watt*, 27-9.

72. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 53-88. Beckett here anticipates, by some decades, the "Pseuds Corner" column in the British satirical magazine *Private Eye*.

73. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 274.

74. *Pons*, 281.

75. "My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal, a perfect human figure" (*Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 238).

76. *Waiting for Godot*, 23.

77. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 144.

78. *Ibid.*, 256.

79. "Those unnatural appetites so common among us" (*Ibid.*, 275).

80. "When I behold a lump of deformity, and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with *pride*, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience, neither shall I ever be able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together" (*Ibid.*, 307).

81. *No's Knife*, 37-40.

82. For example: "It is thus that man distinguishes himself from the ape and rises, from discovery to discovery, ever higher, towards the light" (*Malone Dies*, 255).

83. For example: "Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal" (*The Unnamable*, 340).

84. See *Malone Dies*, 186-7. Compare with this description the Struldbrugs' losing their teeth, hair, appetite, and sense of taste, and never enjoying any diminution in the virulence of their many illnesses.

85. *Molloy*, 56.
86. *Ibid.*, 118.
87. *The Unnamable*, 335; see also *Molloy*, 140-1.
88. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 115.
89. *Ibid.*, 125, and *Molloy*, 57.
90. *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, I, 203.
91. See p. 270 of *An Examination of Certain Abuses, Corruptions and Enormities in the City of Dublin*, VII, 265-82.
92. See *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 28 and 96. Beckett must have remembered the first passage when he wrote, "I did not want to dirty my nest! And yet it sometimes happened, and even more and more often. . . . To contrive a little kingdom, in the midst of the universal muck, then shit on it, ah that was me all over" ("The End," in *No's Knife*, 65).
93. *Molloy*, 79.
94. "The End," in *No's Knife*, 56.
95. "Strephon and Chloe" and "The Lady's Dressing Room," *Swift's Poems*, II, 589 and 528-29.
96. Compare Swift's dictum that "no wise man ever married from the dictates of reason" (*Thoughts on Religion*, III, 309) with Beckett's assigning to Watt a view of marriage as "cloistered fornication" (*Watt*, 216).
97. "At my age, to start manstuprating again, it would be indecent. And fruitless" (*The Unnamable*, 335).
98. Moran, who only mentions his wife's name once (*Molloy*, 174), and who feels little affection for his son, is an enthusiastic masturbator.
99. See *Watt*, 15, 41, 216; *Molloy*, 16, 19; and *Malone Dies*, 190, 226, 285.
100. *The Unnamable*, 326.
101. Mercier, 316.
102. For example, "certain mysteries not to be named, giving occasion for those happy epithets of *turgidus* and *inflatus*, applied either to the *emittent or recipient* organs" (*A Tale of a Tub*, I, 107); see also the bawdy play on "ears" (*Ibid.*, 138); and the erotic image of "a girl of sixteen [who] would sometimes set me astride upon one of her nipples" (*Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 120-1).

103. *Swift's Poems*, "The Progress of Beauty," I, 226.
104. *Molloy*, 19.
105. Murry, 70.
106. *Murphy*, 203.
107. *Murphy*, 126-7.
108. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 171, 264, 275; "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind," *Swift's Poems*, II, 415-8; and many a pamphlet on the Irish economy which, according to Swift, suffered from women's vanity and extravagance.
109. Significant in this connection is the coarse, misogynistic quatrain quoted on p. 81 of *More Pricks than Kicks*, the burden of which is that all women are whores.
110. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 18.
111. Pons, 395-6.
112. Georges Bataille, "Le Silence de Molloy," *Critique* 7 (15 May, 1951): 387-96 (hereafter abbreviated as Bataille); see also Bernard Pingaud, "Molloy," *Esprit* 9 (1951), 423-25; and Edith Kern, "Moran-Molloy: The Hero as Author," *Perspective* 11 (1959), 183-92.
113. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 109-10.
114. For example: "In support of this monstrous assumption he assembled the following considerations . . ." (*Watt*, 132). And see "It was towards this fourth hypothesis that in all modesty I leaned" (*Molloy*, 84).
115. *Watt*, 170.
116. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 93. See also, for a perfect example of the false note, *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (I, 191 ff.).
117. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 115.
118. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 52 and 118; *Watt*, 164 and 236.
119. *Watt*, 247n.
120. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 235.
121. *Murphy*, 275.
122. *Watt*, 171 ff.

123. Compare *Watt*, 27ff. with *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 85-6.
124. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 138; *Watt*, 141.
125. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 85; italics mine, here and throughout this section.
126. *The Drapier's Letters*, VI, 38.
127. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 92 (the subject is Wotton).
128. *Watt*, 41.
129. "The End," in *No's Knife*, 46.
130. This question has been touched on by John Holloway in his article on Swift's satire, "The Well-Filled Dish: Swift's Satire," *Hudson Review* 9 (1956): 20-37 (hereafter abbreviated as Holloway).
131. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 288 and 307; see also *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 80.
132. *More Pricks than Kicks*, 44.
133. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 92 (Wotton again).
134. *An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity . . . May . . . be Attended by Some Inconveniences*, III, 7.
135. *Molloy*, 58-9.
136. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 103.
137. *Murphy*, 117-8.
138. "It is through disgust that Swift habitually attains his most forcible effects" (Quintana, 93 and 83).
139. *The Battle of the Books*, I, 175.
140. *Watt*, 44.
141. "Irony . . . / Which I was born to introduce" ("Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," *Swift's Poems*, II, 555).
142. *Molloy*, 81.
143. *The Unnamable*, 300.
144. *Molloy*, 91.

145. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 121.
146. Pons, 349n and 396; Leavis and Holloway *passim*.
147. "Beckett hasn't the means of control which art is supposed to need." See pp. 60-61 of Karl Miller's "Beckett's Voices," *Encounter* 13 (1959): 59-61.
148. *Molloy*, 58.
149. *Malone Dies*, 238-9.
150. James Runcieman Sutherland, *English Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958), 97; see also William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954), *passim*.
151. *Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 188; see also *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 77.
152. *Molloy*, 22.
153. *Molloy*, 25.
154. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 94.
155. *Malone Dies*, 199.
156. *The Unnamable*, 380.
157. *A Tale of a Tub*, I, 91-2.
158. *Malone Dies*, p. 263.
159. Curtis, 60-65.
160. Bataille, 387-96.
161. "The Day of Judgement," *Swift's Poems*, II, 579.
162. "The End," *No's Knife*, 52.
163. I am grateful to the late Professor Dupont, my Ph.D. supervisor, for this suggestion among many others.
164. *Molloy*, 176.
165. *The Unnamable*, 318.
166. *Murphy*, 170.

167. The following references are examples of Beckett's frequent habit of alluding to Swift: *More Pricks than Kicks*: 38, Swift and Stella; 62, "poets and politicians" (*Tale of a Tub*, I, 124); 93, "sunbeams . . . cucumbers" (*Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 186); 109, "King of Brobdingnag"; 181, "Struldbrug"; 205, Swift and Irish women; 213, "a tub"; 240, "uneasy load" (*Gulliver's Travels*, VIII, 28); *Murphy*: 139, "Lilliputian wine." Note also that during his madness Swift obsessively repeated, "I am what I am" (Murry, 484). Beckett quotes this phrase in *More Pricks than Kicks*, 231, and in *Molloy*, 81.

168. Originally published as "Samuel Beckett et Jonathan Swift: vers une étude comparée," *Littérature X: Annales publiées par la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse*, 11(1962), 81-117. For their invaluable help and encouragement in the preparation of this translation I am particularly grateful to Laura Barge and to Frederik N. Smith and Jane B. Smith.

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