

## AN INTRODUCTION TO BECKETT'S *DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLEING WOMEN*\*

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### I. *General Introduction*

Beckett wrote his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (hereafter *Dream*), in Paris in the summer of 1932, when he was twenty-six. He would not permit the publication of this earliest novel in his lifetime, though, at first, he had tried hard to publish it. The novel was to reach the public only in 1992, three years after his death.

In 1932, Beckett was still an unknown young man who had just started his literary career. While he was teaching English at the École Normale Supérieure from 1928 to 1930, he was able to breathe the atmosphere of the flourishing avant-garde movements of Paris, for which, we can well imagine, he had had a great longing in Dublin. Among other things, he got to know James Joyce who was then writing *Finnegans Wake* (still *Work in Progress* at that time). Beckett almost worshipped Joyce and was much influenced by him. Joyce in turn recognised this young compatriot's talent and valued his help in the composition of *Work in Progress*. Beckett published an essay, "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," in 1929, in which he explicated and defended the still unpopular *Work in Progress*. In the next year his prize-winning first poem, *Whoroscope*, came out. In 1931, he published a monograph, *Proust*. These and other minor writings were all he had published when he wrote *Dream*. After he found it unpublishable, he reshaped it into a collection of ten short stories which have the same hero Belacqua and are slightly more readable.<sup>1</sup> This collection, into which some parts of *Dream* were incorporated, was entitled *More Pricks Than Kicks* and published in 1934.

Joyce's influence on *Dream* is manifest. There are many obsolete or archaic words, many coinages and there is a good deal of wordplay. Foreign languages (especially Latin, French, German and Italian) abound and mix with English. Different styles are used: visionary (dream-like), realistic, archaic, or parodic style. Moreover, there is an almost overwhelming amount of literary allusion. The title itself parodies Tennyson's *A Dream of Fair Women*.<sup>2</sup> The epigraph is taken from the opening lines of Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, on which the poem of Tennyson is based. The text constantly refers to

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\* I am grateful to Dr. G. E. H. Hughes of Tokyo University for reading the draft and giving me advice.

<sup>1</sup> It seems that *Dream* was rejected by publishers both because it contains too many references to sex and because some parts of it are terribly unreadable.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Bryden suggests more than titular parallelism between Beckett's *Dream* and Henry Williamson's novel, *The Dream of Fair Women*, published in 1922 (21–22, et al.).

world literature from ancient myths and Homer to Gide or D'Annunzio. In this respect we could say Beckett outrageously and superficially imitate a common trend among modernists such as Joyce, Pound and Eliot. We can add another conspicuous feature though it is not necessarily Joycean. The narrator, who mocks the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel, irresponsibly plays with his own narrative and, as in *Tristram Shandy*, lays bare his devices frequently.

The story, which centres on Belacqua's love affairs, tends to be swallowed up by these experimental features. Belacqua falls in love with a voluptuous girl, the Smeraldina-Rima, and follows her from Dublin to Vienna. But he suffers from a split between the mind and the body, entailed by love. He can love her only in his own spiritual microcosm and cannot endure her carnality. After he spends some time away from her in Paris, he joins her and her family in Fulda, Germany, where they finally break up. Some thirty pages of interlude recapitulate and comment on the story. The latter half of the story is set in Dublin. Here Belacqua meets and loves another woman, the Alba, who seems to be more spiritual and intellectual, and in consequence more suitable to his disposition. But this love is not fruitful either. In the final scene (which is almost the same as "The Wet Night" in *More Pricks Than Kicks*), Belacqua comes back from a crazy party with the Alba and ends up walking out alone in the rain.

As Lawrence E. Harvey says, "Stripped to its essence, [*Dream*] is a discourse on love" (257). And as he shows, the necessity of the artist to escape from the body and human relations into a purely spiritual microcosm is here explored, as it is in the early poems. Undoubtedly, this is the most important topic as long as we concentrate on the story itself. But there are too many other elements in the novel to reduce it to a story of love and the artist. Above all it contains many interesting images and views which anticipate Beckett's later development. (In this sense it is more important than the artistically more refined *More Pricks Than Kicks*.) In this essay I want to focus on three such aspects of this multi-faceted novel. They are concerned with aesthetics of machinery, intermediacy and silence. I wish to elucidate these aspects and consider how they anticipate Beckett's later works.

## II. *Aesthetics of Machinery*

It is unlikely that Beckett was interested in the cult of machinery among the Futurists. But in *Dream*, we find interesting images of machinery which are worth consideration.

At the beginning of Chapter TWO (which is virtually the beginning of the entire novel since Chapter ONE occupies only half a page), we find Belacqua engaged in a strange activity. He has just bidden farewell to the Smeraldina-Rima who has left for Vienna, and remains sitting on the stanchion of the pier. Remembering her image, he repeatedly induces and checks his own tears:

He sat working himself up to the little gush of tears that would exonerate him. When he felt them coming he switched off his mind and let them settle. First the cautious gyring of her in his mind till it thudded and spun with the thought of her, then not a second too soon the violent voiding and blanking of his mind so that the gush was quelled, it was balked and driven back for a da capo. He found that the best way to turn over the piston in the first instance was to think of her béret that she had snatched

off to wave when the ship began to draw clear. (4)

Such phrases as "switched off" or "turn over the piston" clearly indicate that the whole process is imagined as mechanic. But soon the machine breaks down:

He sat hunched on the stanchion in the evening mizzle, forcing and foiling the ebullition in this curious way. . . . Until to his annoyance the fetish of her waving the béret . . . refused to work. He switched on as usual, after the throttling and expunction, and nothing happened. The cylinders of his mind abode serene. That was a nasty one for him if you like, a complete break down of the works like that. (5)

Immediately after he admits that there is "nothing to be done" like Estragon at the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*, he is seized with the sense that he is "cursed with an insubordinate mind" (5). In other words he wishes his mind could work like a machine as he pleased. He wishes that his emotions after parting from a girlfriend could be mechanically controlled. And obviously, this activity is also highly sexual. It is described as "the little teary ejaculation" (4) or "chamber-work of sublimation" (5). It can be regarded in some sense as a surrogate for masturbation. Here we find sexual matters are represented in terms of machinery in a way which reminds us of Marcel Duchamp's glasspainting, *The Bride Stripped Bare of Her Bachelors, Even*, for example.

Later in the novel, Belacqua is more explicitly presented as an onanist. Since he cannot bear the Smeraldina-Rima's menacing carnal presence, the best way for him is to masturbate with her image in mind. The narrator puts forward with comical timidity the proposition that "[l]ove demands narcissism" and takes pains to justify Belacqua (39). And Belacqua cannot be satisfied with the brothel because it spoils the image of the Smeraldina-Rima after all. The narrator explains what happens in his mind in the brothel:

The usual over, its purveyor null as before, there began the other outpour, streaming into the parched sanctuary, a gracious strength and virtue, a flow of bounty. Always and only after the usual and the purveyor of the usual, conditioned by them and flooding over them, over the garbage of the usual and the cabbage-stalks of sex, obliterating them, only then at the end, when it was time to rise and go, was dispensed the inward spilling. And not only over the garbage of the usual and the cabbage-stalks, but over the Smeraldina-Rima herself, over her impermeable oneness and her monopoly as his donator. (41)

This whole process is some lines later called "this demented hydraulic that was beyond control" (41). The word "hydraulic" indicates a mechanism operated by water. Here again, we detect the mechanisation of sexual matters. And as before, this mechanism is "demented" and "beyond control."

We may add one more example of mechanisation, though it is not sexual. As we shall see in the next chapter, Belacqua has a desire to go into his own spiritual sanctuary where he can feel perfectly happy. He tries to make this happen artificially but always fails. In other words, "he tried to mechanise what was a dispensation" (123). Mechanisation is doomed to failure here as well.

Among the Beckett critics, Hugh Kenner has been the keenest observer of the importance of machinery. In his old but still valid essay, "The Cartesian Centaur," he pays attention to the bicycles which appear in many of Beckett's works. He says that Beckett's ideal state

is represented by a man riding a bicycle. In this union of a man and a machine (the Cartesian Centaur), the body can work as a perfect machine independently of the mind. But in reality, the body in Beckett is always defective and disintegrating. The ideal remains an unachievable dream. Kenner shows how, in the course of the trilogy, this ideal of the Cartesian Centaur is dismembered. In *The Unnamable*, the bicycle and the body are gone, and the mind is left in the muddle of the endless self-referential language. The dream of mechanising the body is in this way doomed. Generally speaking, in Beckett's works, there is a notable tendency to reduce human behaviour to an abstract system which can be numbered, permuted or enumerated exhaustively (*Watt* is the best example). And Beckett's characters often have recourse to arithmetic when confronted with overall uncertainty. But this leads them nowhere. Molloy spends several pages considering methodically how to suck sixteen stones. But finally he throws away fifteen stones and the remaining one also soon disappears (*Molloy* 93–100).

We can say that these features in the later works are anticipated by the above-quoted examples in *Dream*. In those examples it seems that Belacqua wants to mechanise (or mechanically represent) the mind as well as the body. And where sex is concerned, he seems to feel an even greater need to mechanise what can never be mechanised. For Belacqua the spiritual onanist, Eros is something to be subdued and controlled. The most effective way is to mechanise it. The first example quoted above, in which Belacqua is absorbed in pseudo-masturbation, particularly, shows his attempt at such mechanisation and its inevitable failure.

### III. *Aesthetics of Intermediacy*

In "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," Beckett emphasises the dynamic gestural quality of Joyce's language, which breaks the conventional confines of the novel. In a famous section, he says:

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. . . . His writing is not *about* something: *it is that something itself*. . . . When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. . . . When the sense is dancing, the words dance. (*D* 27, emphasis original)

But when he takes H. C. Earwicker as an example, he brings in an important motif:

This inner elemental vitality and corruption of expression imparts a furious restlessness to the form, which is admirably suited to the purgatorial aspect of the work. There is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction, the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate. (*D* 29)

He connects this feature to Vico's theory of language, but what is interesting here is his mention of "the purgatorial aspect" and "the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate," which point towards Dante. What does Beckett mean by these phrases? The full explanation is given in the last paragraph of the essay. There he first contrasts Dante's Purgatory with Joyce's as follows:

In the one, [there is] absolute progression and a guaranteed consummation: in the other, flux—progression or retrogression; and an apparent consummation. In the

one movement is unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance: in the other movement is nondirectional—or multi-directional, and a step forward is, by definition, a step back. (*D* 33)

Then he goes on to the core of the matter:

In what sense, then, is Mr Joyce's work purgatorial? In the absolute absence of the Absolute. Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a flood of movement and vitality relieved by the conjunction of these two elements. There is a continuous purgatorial process at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved, and this achievement depends on the recurrent predomination of one of two broad qualities. (*D* 33)

In other words, Joyce's work is purgatorial in that it is devoid of the stasis and absoluteness which both Hell and Paradise have, and in consequence it is suspended in an unsettled intermediate state where multiple forces restlessly intersect.

It is not by accident that Beckett singles out and stresses this "purgatorial" and "intermediate" aspect of Joyce's work in connection with Dante.<sup>3</sup> For the young Beckett was preoccupied with similar Dantesque intermediate states. *Dream*, written three years after the Joyce essay, is full of descriptions of such intermediate states. Lawrence E. Harvey is right when he says in reference to the novel:

[W]hen Belacqua speaks of himself as a "dud mystic," he uses the image of an intermediate state somewhere between earth and heaven: "John" he said "of the Crossroads, Mr. Beckett. A borderman." . . . The line is significant, for a great number of the images used to describe the microcosm suggest an in-between state: limbo and purgatory, both conditions between the extremes of heaven and hell, and dusk, the time between day and night. (327)

In fact, dusk, dawn and twilight are so often evoked in *Dream* that the self-conscious narrator openly says, "[E]xtraordinary when we come to think of it the amount of tears and twilight in this book" (149). And as regards Limbo, he says in the same vein, "Limbo, to drag in that old veteran once again . . ." (189). But Limbo is particularly important among other in-between states. It is the first and highest circle in Dante's *Inferno*, where pagan celebrities including Virgil himself live peacefully. It is virtually a place between Heaven and Hell, and so is similar to Purgatory in its intermediateness, as Harvey suggests. And as we shall see later, the image of Limbo in *Dream* also represents an intermediate state between life and death, which continues to be an important motif in Beckett's entire oeuvre. Although such a state may not have the same restless dynamism that Beckett attributes to Joyce's Purgatory, it is probable that Beckett's incipient concern for the intermediate state in Joyce's work grew into the recurrent image of Limbo in *Dream*, and this in turn was to

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Hill says that Beckett's interest in this purgatorial mode indicates his own rhetorical strategy which is characterised by oxymoron or chiasmus. He suggests that "this purgatorial concern for the instability of verbal contrasts and differences" could be called "indifference" or "the neuter". Then he says, "indifference, the neuter is that which is in-between positions of meaning, neither positive nor negative, constantly shifting and irreducible to either object or subject" (8-9). This view is important, but in this essay I want to concentrate on the theme of being between life and death, rather than on the rhetorical aspects.

be developed in his later works. In this chapter, I want to examine the image of Limbo and its associates in *Dream* and consider how Beckett's concern for the intermediate state flows into the later works.

The hero Belacqua is named after a lazy character who appears in Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (*The Purgatory*, Canto IV). Before he can start going up, Dante's Belacqua has to wait in Ante-Purgatory (which is outside the gate of Purgatory) as long as he lived on earth because he was so lazy that he repented his sins only when he was dying. Sitting indolently with his head between the knees, he looks just as lazy as he was on earth and asks what is the good of going up. As Beckett observes in his Joyce essay, Dante's Purgatory is unidirectional. But Belacqua in Ante-Purgatory keeps aloof from the teleological movement towards Paradise. In this sense he is suspended in an indefinite intermediate state, and that is no doubt why Beckett adopted his name for the hero of his first novel.<sup>4</sup> Beckett's Belacqua is, then, inscribed with intermediateness from the beginning. Probably, it is in this sense that Belacqua calls himself "[a] borderman" (186) in the passage Harvey quotes. But what is more important is that he has a peculiar desire to go into his own private sanctuary where he can experience extraordinary happiness, and that this ideal state is described as Limbo.

After Belacqua leaves his girlfriend, the Smeraldina-Rima, and cuts himself off from the outside world, he enjoys "a great period of beatitude." The narrator, who is always playful about his own narrative, is here unusually earnest:

He lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin, dead to the dark pangs of the sons of Adam, asking nothing of the insubordinate mind. He moved with the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. They moved gravely, men and women and children, neither sad nor joyful. They were dark, and they gave a dawn light to the darker place where they moved. . . .

If that is what is meant by going back into one's heart, could anything be better, in this world or the next? The mind, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a chapelle ardente, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off. The lids of the hard aching mind close, there is suddenly gloom in the mind; not sleep, not yet, nor dream, with its sweats and terrors, but a waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels; there is nothing of him left but the umbra of grave and womb where it is fitting that the spirits of his dead and his unborn should come abroad. (44-45)

In this beatitude, Belacqua is perfectly free from any annoying stimulation from his body, will or understanding, and can feel snug in his indolence. It should be noted that this "Limbo purged of desire" is intermediate in many ways. The "shades" with whom Belacqua moves are "neither sad nor joyful." They are dark but characteristically give "a dawn light." This state is thronged with "grey" angels. And what is more, Belacqua is in

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<sup>4</sup> Belacqua's posture resembles that of a foetus. This must be another reason he appealed to Beckett, who often shows a strong desire to return to the womb in his works.

"the umbra of grave and womb." This Limbo is then paradoxically a place before birth *and* after death. Here the distinction between life and death is blurred. This is both life and death, or neither life nor death. In the next paragraph, the narrator says, "[I]n the umbra, the tunnel, when the mind went wombtomb, then it was real thought and real living, living thought" (45). Beckett's coinage, "wombtomb," recurs throughout the novel when the narrator refers to Belacqua's ideal state.

In the middle of the novel, when the narrator reviews his story, he divides Belacqua into three beings.<sup>5</sup> He says, "A trine man! Centripetal, centrifugal and . . . not. Phoebus chasing Daphne, Narcissus flying from Echo and . . . neither" (120, the dots are original). His first being chases the Smeraldina-Rima, and his second flies from her. But the third, which is "not" or "neither," is identical with his ideal state, and the narrator repeats a similar description:

The third being was the dark gulf, when the glare of the will and the hammer-strokes of the brain doomed outside to take flight from its quarry were expunged, the Limbo and the wombtomb alive with the unanxious spirits of quiet cerebration, where there was no conflict of flight and flow and Eros was as null as Anteros and Night had no daughters. He was bogged in indolence, without identity, impervious alike to its pull and goad. (121)

But unfortunately, this ideal state of "the Limbo and the wombtomb" cannot be reached easily. The narrator says, "He is sorry it does not happen more often, that he does not go under more often" (121). Belacqua tries hard to make it happen artificially, but he always fails. The narrator conclusively says:

It was impossible to switch off the inward glare, willfully to suppress the bureaucratic mind. It was stupid to imagine that he could be organised as Limbo and wombtomb, worse than stupid. When he tried to mechanise what was a dispensation he was guilty of a no less abominable confusion than when he tried to plunge through himself to a cloud, when, for his sorrow, he tried to do that. (123)

Later in the novel, the "dispensation" suddenly comes to him in a way reminiscent of Proust's involuntary memory, which Beckett had eagerly discussed in *Proust*.<sup>6</sup>

Suddenly there was no clot of moon there, no moon of any kind or description. It was the miracle, our old friend that whale of a miracle, taking him down from his pangs, sheathing him in the cerements of clarity. It was the descent and the enwombing, assumption upside down, tête-bêche, into the greyness, the dim press of disaffected angels. It was at last the hush and indolence of Limbo in his mind prodded and chiv-

<sup>5</sup> This reminds us of the way Murphy's mind is divided into three in the sixth chapter of *Murphy*. But the contents are different.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg, who emphasises the difference between *Dream* and Proust's novel, goes too far when he says this experience is "the very antithesis" of the Proustian involuntary memory (206). He confuses two different kinds of mystical experiences. The other one, which happens after Belacqua knows Nemo's death, is certainly anti-Proustian in that it leaves Belacqua "a void space and spacious nothing" (*Dream* 185). But Belacqua says he has not experienced it since his first communion of many years ago. In this sense it should be separated from the experience of Limbo and "wombtomb," which has recently occurred (*Dream* 43-46). The example of the Limbo experience quoted here can be safely likened to the Proustian miracle in its suddenness and blissfulness.

vied into taking thought, lounging against the will-pricks. It was the mercy of salve on the prurigo of living, dousing the cock-robin of living. In a word in fact he was suddenly up to the eyes in his dear slush. (181–82)

Here again, the description of Belacqua's bliss is saturated with the same images used before: notably, Limbo along with the coincidence of "enwombing" and "assumption" which equals "wombtomb."

In this way the recurrent image of Limbo, which represents Belacqua's inaccessible ideal state, always entails the image of "wombtomb" and suggests a blurring of the distinction between life and death. Beckett's later works often present such a state of "wombtomb." Molloy, for example, is writing his story in his mother's room which is suggestive of the womb; but at the same time he implies he is already dead when he says:

But it is only since I have ceased to live that I think of these and the other things. It is the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life . . . (*Molloy* 32)

Malone imagines himself as a foetus and says, "I am being given . . . birth to into death" (*Malone Dies* 114). But he also says:

There is naturally another possibility that does not escape me . . . and that is that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not. Perhaps I expired in the forest, or even earlier. (*Malone Dies* 45)

Again in *Texts for Nothing* the narrator says, "[H]ere are my tomb and mother . . . I'm dead and getting born, without having ended, helpless to begin, that's my life" (*Collected Shorter Prose* 101). In all these examples the narrators are placed in an ambiguous space which is both prenatal and postmortem: in a word, "wombtomb." Both in the later novels and plays this ambiguity plays an important role in creating the curious temporality of "already" and "not yet."<sup>7</sup> But there is one important difference we should note. In *Dream*, Limbo and "wombtomb" represent something out of Belacqua's reach. In later works, however, the narrators or characters seem to be always already there and struggling. None of the later narrators seem to be experiencing any beatitude. They are rather questioning themselves laboriously in the face of overwhelming uncertainty. Lawrence E. Harvey is correct when he says of Beckett's development after *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*, "The inner world expands, pushing back the encroaching frontiers of social existence until finally it becomes a place to live and write in" (347). Limbo and "wombtomb" are no longer an ideal state but a place of painful exploration. After *Dream*, Beckett tried with more introspective intensity to go into that inaccessible sanctuary, until in the late 1940s his creative energy burst out from the innermost core and the masterpieces including the trilogy and *Waiting for Godot* became possible.

<sup>7</sup> Analysing *Molloy*, Thomas Trezise considers Molloy as "both the 'already' and 'not yet' of the first person" (52). We might say this ambiguity extends to the temporality of Beckett's works in general.

#### IV. *Aesthetics of Silence*

In "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce," when Beckett discusses the gestural corporeality of the words in *Finnegans Wake*, he says, "Mr Joyce has desophisticated language. And it is worth while remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. It is abstracted to death" (*D* 28). It is evident that Beckett admired Joyce's attitude towards language. As we noted in the first chapter, there are many traces of Joyce's influence on *Dream*. Although his verbal experiments are only modest compared with Joyce's in *Finnegans Wake*, we can at least say that Beckett, in the wake of *Finnegans Wake*, tried to "desophisticate" English by using wordplay or foreign languages. But we should not overemphasise Joyce's influence in this respect because we can find a uniquely Beckettian attitude towards language already emerging in *Dream*.

The narrator of *Dream* shows from the beginning an irresponsible stance towards his own narrative and often intervenes in it playfully. In this sense, he already anticipates the narrators of the later novels (the trilogy in particular), who all question and subvert the conventional relation between narrator and narrative. After presenting the first few scenes, he expresses his hope about his novel, referring to an ancient Chinese tale. He wants his characters to be like the twelve notes (liū-liū) in the old Chinese musical scale, and to be fixed to their own places. He says:

If all our characters were like that—liū-liū-minded—we could write a little book that would be purely melodic, think how nice that would be, linear, a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect, a one-figured telephony that would be a pleasure to hear. (Which is more or less, if we may say so, what one gets from one's favourite novelist.) (10)

But this hope is, as we might expect, always beyond reach. Beckett's aesthetics, which defends Joyce's "non-directional" or "multi-directional" Purgatory, cannot be in accord with the conventional "one-figured telephony." Predictably, in the middle of the novel, the narrator admits that the whole business has gone wrong because Belacqua, expected to put all the characters ("the treacherous liūs and liūs") in order, has failed to do so. He says:

Just one, only one, tuning-fork charlatan to move among the notes and size 'em up and steady 'em down and chain 'em together. . . . We picked Belacqua for the job, and now we find that he is not able for it. (125-26)

Some pages later he says even more explicitly, "The only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity" (133). In these statements the narrator seems to be deploring his characters' disorderly behaviour and the ensuing lack of unity in his novel. But it is important not to be deceived by his gestures. If the characters were really obedient to his wishes, his novel would have been just as conventional as those novels by Balzac which he criticises in the following way:

To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its

least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. (119–20)

The narrator, then, approves the tendency to disorganisation while pretending to deplore it. In fact, when the narrator makes Belacqua hopefully conceive of a book of his own, the same disintegrating impetus is presented as positively important. The imaginary book of Belacqua, which seems to mirror *Dream* itself in this sense,<sup>8</sup> merits consideration because it contains uniquely Beckettian elements. The narrator's criticism of the conventionalities of the nineteenth-century novel (the teleological plot or the author's omnipotence) was far from new in the 1930s, when we think of the various experiments of modernist writers; but Belacqua's vision announces what will later become crucial in Beckett's art: silence.<sup>9</sup> Belacqua says:

The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement. . . . I shall state silences more competently than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo. (138)

And this aesthetics of silence is inseparable from the tendency to disintegration which the narrator virtually approves despite his deploring gestures. Belacqua goes on to say:

I think now . . . of the dehiscing, the dynamic *décousu*, of a Rembrandt, the implication lurking behind the pictorial pretext threatening to invade pigment and oscuro; I think of the *Selbstbildnis*, in the toque and the golden chain, of his portrait of his brother, of the cute little Saint Matthew angel . . . in all of which canvases . . . I have discerned a disfaction, a *désuni*, an *Ungebund*, a *flottement*, a *tremblement*, a tremor, a tremolo, a disaggregating, a disintegrating, an efflorescence, a breaking down and multiplication of tissue, the corrosive ground-swell of Art. . . . I think of Beethoven [*sic*] . . . I think of his earlier compositions where into the body of the musical statement he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, *flottements*, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of continuity have abdicated

<sup>8</sup> There is further evidence for this mirroring. When the narrator imagines what will happen if he fails to keep his characters to their places, he says:

We call the whole performance off, we call the book off, it tails off in a horrid manner. The whole fabric comes unstitched, it goes *ungebunden*, the wistful fabric. The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons. (113)

As we shall see soon, this image is echoed in Belacqua's vision of his own book.

<sup>9</sup> There are other important passages where silence is mentioned. Belacqua says:

“. . . I was speaking of something of which you have and can have no knowledge, the incoherent continuum as expressed by, say, Rimbaud and Beethoven. Their names occur to me. The terms of whose statements serve merely to delimit the reality of insane areas of silence, whose audibilities are no more than punctuation in a statement of silences. . . .” (102)

Elsewhere he also says:

For me . . . the real one thing is to be found in the relation: the dumb-bell's bar, the silence between my eyes, between you and me, all the silences between you and me. (27–28)

This passage is interesting because it suggests a relation between the aesthetics of intermediacy and that of silence.

their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons; and then vespertine compositions eaten away with terrible silence . . .  
(138–39)

In these vehement remarks, silence is considered to be a violent, menacing force which invades and disintegrates the tissue of painting or music. And Belacqua seems to be planning to create a literary equivalent of Rembrandt's paintings or Beethoven's music by "stating silences" with words. The evidence that this is not a frivolous daydream can be found in a German letter Beckett wrote to Axel Kaun in 1937. In the letter Beckett gives his artistic creed with striking plainness. Extending Belacqua's ideas, he says:

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. . . . Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. Or is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting? . . . Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence? (*D* 171–72)<sup>10</sup>

Here, Beckett uses the same imagery of painting and music menaced by lurking silence. But he is much more irritated than Belacqua by the fact that literature cannot "state silences" like the other arts. He wants to exert violence on language and fiercely disintegrate the verbal tissue with the menacing silence. It is evident that Belacqua's conception was reformulated into this articulate manifesto five years later. And we can say that Beckett remained loyal to his early project, developing his art in line with it in his later years.

In the same letter Beckett also says:

Of course, for the time being we must be satisfied with little. At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All. (*D* 172)

This paradoxical strategy of mocking the word by the word is actually put into practice in his later works. For example, the tedious repetitions of simple phrases and sentences in *Watt* suggest that Beckett is trying to abuse and "mock" language. In the fierce verbal flow of *The Unnamable*, he makes language run endlessly in a vicious circle in search of the unattainable silence. The narrator of *The Unnamable* says, "The search for the means

<sup>10</sup> The translation is Martin Esslin's.

to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue" (15). This epitomises the paradox of the novel. Language is condemned to be futilely self-referential, and its representational function is humiliatingly blocked. The empty dialogue between Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* does not lead to anything and enormous silence looms between the words. In the works after the 1960s, which tend to be shorter, the presentation of words becomes more delicate and static, and the weight of silence (or pause) increases accordingly. There is no manifest violence to language as in *Watt* or *The Unnamable*, but we can see more clearly how silence invades language. Gilles Deleuze, in *L'Épuisé*, analyses the four late T.V. pieces precisely in terms of the early project announced in the German letter.<sup>11</sup>

In this way the early Beckett's (still intuitive) inclination towards silence is developed into a crucial motif in his mature works. In order for this to be possible, Beckett first had to escape from Joyce's influence and to find his own voice. *Dream* is obviously influenced by Joyce, but at least in the passages where the aesthetics of silence is advocated, we can say that Beckett is already deviating away from Joyce and approaching his own ground. Five years later he became so confident of himself that he could criticise Joyce in the German letter. After talking about his own project, he says, "With such a program, in my opinion, the latest work of Joyce has nothing whatever to do. There it seems rather to be a matter of an apotheosis of the word" (*D* 172). To Beckett, who tried to attack language in search of silence, Joyce seemed to be revelling too much in the manipulation of words without any doubt about the power of language.<sup>12</sup> When we read *Dream*, we should not forget that even in this earliest novel we can find the seeds of Beckett's independent development beneath the surface of the Joycean influence.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, as regards the concept of "langue III," with which Deleuze analyses the four T. V. pieces, he says, "Elle reste en rapport avec le langage, mais se dresse ou se tend dans ses trous, ses écarts ou ses silences" (Beckett, *Quad* 79).

<sup>12</sup> Beckett says of Joyce in a later interview in 1956:

With Joyce the difference is that he is a superb manipulator of material—perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. . . . The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. (Graver and Federman 148)

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