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A New Eco-logic : Rethinking Modern Identities through the Notions of Humility and Mastery in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett

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Introduction: A New Eco-logic: Rethinking Modern Identities through the Notions of Humility and Mastery in the Works of Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett

As Stephen M. Gardiner argues in *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*: "The dominant discourses about the nature of the climate threat are scientific and economic. But the deepest challenge is ethical. What matters most is what we do to protect those vulnerable to our actions and unable to hold us accountable, especially the global poor, future generations, and nonhuman nature" (Gardiner xii). Yet, little importance has been granted to thinking global ecological crises in the domain of soft sciences, for those crises are often seen as contemporary issues stemming from human technological activity – the answers to these crises are thus expected to be merely technological solutions to reduce the negative impact of modern technology. Such approaches to climate change and species extinction, I argue, severely and falsely reduce the role of human agency at the source of these crises, making them appear as a mere collateral damage of human progress, and thus, ignoring that human progress is not built up on mere chances, but also *choices* that are influenced by our social, economic, and cultural environments and ideologies. Reducing issues such as climate change and mass extinction to a mere collateral damage of the 20th-century rapid technological progress is taking human agency out of the equation; and as such, it is another form of reducing our responsibility *for* these issues, and *to* the future generations that will suffer the most from the consequences of climate change and species extinction.

Global issues such as climate change and mass extinction, I argue, should be viewed in their larger contexts, that is, they should not be reduced to being contemporary issues only; thinking about them should also involve ethical explorations of human agency on a large scale. In other words, this thesis is wondering about the choices that have led us towards global ecological crises, and asking why those choices were made in the first place. Through its ecocritical deconstructive approach, this dissertation looks for ecologically destructive patterns in the Western ideological, cultural, political, economic, and social landscapes via Elizabeth Bowen's and Samuel Beckett's selected literary works.

The dissertation links a deconstructive reading of Modernist identities to the current ecological crises, proposing, as its hypothesis, that the current global ecological crises stem from an ethics based on patriarchal, capitalist, and anthropocentric mastery, which has been embedded in many of our leading ideological, economic, socio-cultural and political

frameworks, making them incompatible with deep ecological concerns. An ethics based on capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery, I argue, is both at the origin of the current climate crisis and the acceleration of species extinction, and unable to offer pertinent, long-term solutions for dealing with those issues, as it is insensitive to vulnerability. Yet, vulnerability is the very core issue of these ecological crises, as the Earth's ecosystems and their many different inhabitants, us humans included, are becoming extremely vulnerable to the impact of human-caused climate change and the accelerating species extinction.

The aim of this thesis is to deconstruct the logic behind the identities built on patriarchal, capitalist, and anthropocentric mastery; and to build an ethics that breaks with such mastery. By deconstructing the ideas stemming from 17th-century rationalism, on which our modern identities and politico-economic systems have been built, this dissertation aims to offer a new eco-logic (or an ethics of humility) that would respond more responsibly to the needs of the vulnerable in the context of the human-caused global ecological crises in the 21st century, as well as more sustainable and ethically sound paths for dealing with climate change and mass extinction, to which the studied authors will serve as guides.

The dissertation will challenge the notion of *mastery* (understood as dominance and excellence) with the notion of *humility*, which comes from the Latin *humus*, referring to the uppermost part of the soil, and could be translated as "nearness to the ground, weakness, inferiority, poverty, modesty," but, I suggest, also as "earthly consciousness." The concepts of *humility* and *mastery* are studied through the selected analytical literary work of two important transnational authors: Elizabeth Dorothea Cole Bowen (1899–1973) and Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906–1989).

The current global ecological crises and 20th-century literature: a contradiction?

The sixth mass extinction, an ongoing human-caused extinction event happening during the present Holocene epoch, is spread across a much vaster timespan, and thus, does not have the same sense of recency as climate change, which makes studies on species extinction through non-contemporary literature probably less suspicious than studies on climate change. From the beginning of this project, it became clear to me that ecological investigations that involve literature, especially studies on climate change, are often automatically paired with (very) contemporary literature. One is expected to respond to the climate crisis through contemporary thought, as the climate crisis is seen as a contemporary issue – which, I argue, it

is not, because its causes cannot be reduced to measurable greenhouse gases only, for these too have a history and specific contexts from which they emerged.

We can observe a clear rise in the greenhouse gas levels since the end of the Second World War, whereas without human intervention, the planet would be going through a cooling period (NASA). This thesis explores closely the very context in which this rise in the greenhouse gas levels was created, starting with the selected authors' texts that were written right before the Second World War and extending to texts written in the late 20th century. Through literature, we can thus enter the world in which the 20th century climate crisis rapidly, and somewhat imperceptibly, developed into the crisis we know in 2021.

Next to philosophy and hard sciences, literature might first appear as a strange tool for thinking such phenomena; yet, literature is a great tool for thinking the strange, the abnormal, and the invisible. Timothy Clark reminds us of the claim of green criticism, which is that the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination and that literature, art, and criticism can be at the vanguard of finding new ways of imagining humanity's relation to the natural word (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 84). Or, as Timothy Morton puts it, "reading poetry won't save the planet. Sound science and progressive social policies will do that. But art can allow us to glimpse beings that exist beyond or between our normal categories" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 60). Climate change and mass extinction do not correspond to our normal categories and our range of perception.

Climate change is strange to us, it is also a stranger. As Jesse Oak Taylor explains it: "Weather is the stuff of direct experience; climate is, by definition, beyond it. Climate is an abstraction that we can never see, taste, or touch. Even the most sophisticated climate models can only correlate individual weather events and project them into a virtual medium. And yet on some level we do experience climate every time we correlate the weather with broader patterns" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 10). Those patterns are complex and are not limited to one area of study only:

> At issue are capitalist economics, growing population pressure, tropical deforestation, impoverishment, neo-colonialism, alongside such material factors such as levels of methane from thawing tundra in Siberia, rates of soil degradation in Africa, the varying reflectivity of clouds, as well as environmentally dubious cultural norms, such as those of patriarchy, and anthropocentric fantasies of control and sovereignty. Together, these and other phenomena create an obscure whole of further side effects, alarming and only partially intelligible, as known and unknown human agencies interact in badly understood ways with increasingly obtrusive human actions. Environmental degradation may become less a matter of even discernibly plural causes, and more the emergent effect of the combination of numerous interacting issues of a hybrid kind. (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 83)

The search for those complex, or even hybrid patterns of interacting issues in today's world should also include the search for the multiple origins of the crisis, which is at the core of this research project. In an era where belief-systems and social media hoaxes trump science and green social policies are fended off by the fears of reducing economic profits, fiction might indeed provide the necessary steps towards imagining and hearing what hard sciences have proven to be true, but also imagining these global ecological crises and their roots through an experience that is not ours, but can, in some sense, be borrowed from our elders, through literature.

As Bowen wrote in 1942: "England's past in art, as well as in history, has helped to build up her heroic To-day. It is natural to want our writers beside us as we face this new phase of human experience. And painters and writers, however long dead, however far back their place in actual time, remain, in their living art, our contemporaries. Their domain is always the domain of living men; it is to us, the living, that they are speaking now" (Bowen, *English Novelists* 7–8). The heroic today, or even day to day, is the point from which we perceive the vast global ecological issues, and on its own, it would constitute an extremely blunted viewpoint. The perception of changes in ecosystems, from a scientific viewpoint, depends on the availability of data on temperature rises, deforestation, pollution, species population numbers, etc. Perceiving those crises from our "regular" individual human viewpoint is also blunted, since we cannot have access to a wider range of data which "speaks" to us and our imagination. Regular people (the non-scientists), as I am, are much dependent on what we know to be true today: mostly, on what we perceive today and compare to what we can remember from our childhood – but these, in terms of climate change and the sixth mass extinction event, are very small time periods. The experience of climate change and the sixth mass extinction only become perceptible when we are able to look at a broader pattern or concatenation of changes that constitute a perceptible trace of climate change or species extinction. We cannot truly evaluate either of them without looking back at how things were before us. Literature can take us back in time in most compelling ways, connecting us to our collective traces from the past.

In a literal sense, reading fiction will not save the world, but it might provoke a profound change of attitude that will. To someone who has never seen or heard about the regent honeyeater or who lives in a region that is not quite visibly impacted by climate change, the news about the 1,5-degree tipping point or about the alarming decrease in the regent honeyeater populations might not mean much. Names and numbers alone, even if they are proven facts, do not translate well the urgency of the situation or the need for care. Literature, and art in

general, possess the unique ability to draw us in and make us care for what/whom we do not know personally. Changing attitudes and thought-patterns, that is, the inner worlds of readers, is what literature is capable of, and right now it seems it is people's beliefs and ways of thinking that require the most urgent attention, in order to make profound changes to the environments we have come to control.

As Jesse Oak Taylor argues, the novel, in particular, allows "a form of cognitive climate modeling, tacking back and forth between the immediate sense perception of the weather and abstract configurations of meteorology, culture, and discourse" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 10). He explains that the novel provides a formal structure that allows to conceive human beings as climatological agents incorporated into ecosystems rather than purely social entities such as nations, classes, or cultures, as it helps to reconcile the expansive timescale of evolution, climate, and geological change with those of human history and everyday life (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 10). Oak Taylor underlines that the novel is particularly "well suited to the challenges of modeling climate as both a historical and meteorological condition because its expansive scale and diffusive complexity intersect with the temporality of reading" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 14). The reading of a novel demands associating events in the plot, between several reading sessions, and thus, holding the narrative in suspension to detect the pattern of the plot, but also anticipating future events from the given information – in other words, the efforts of anticipating a quintessentially unpredictable future. That suspended and associative thinking involved in the reading of a novel is, as Jesse Oak Taylor suggests, necessary for modelling the experience of climate as an aggregation of atmospheric effects (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 14).

Timothy Clark, on the other hand, argues that the novel is "understood as a form which privileges the realm of personal human experience as the basic reality" (*The Value of Ecocriticism* 80–81) and points out that the changes happening in the course of climate change escape our ordinary human faculties. The novel, as such, would not be adapted to deal with the world of vast "unconformities" (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 80–81).

Novels are written from the realm of human perspective, for we have no other. It is the human (recognizable) realm that invites us in. As Bowen writes: "Willing though we are to be moved and held, none of us can be held by the unbelievable. Great novels have an inspired lifelikeness. They could have been true; they outrage no real-life law. […] The reality (for us) of the story is a matter of how much it has elicited from us. We enter in, and through this entering in know ourselves to be active. We cooperate" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 325). However, this cooperation, which involves active thinking-feeling, does not necessarily keep

within the bounds of the familiar only. Human experience often appears haunted by traces of other worlds, such as the traces of the inner and outer worlds of other species, but also the traces of the abnormal in familiar environments and ecosystems – helping us to "come to terms with the reality of the abnatural, of dwelling in a world that has slipped its moorings" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 12).

I will show that transnational Modernist writers Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett disturb our perception of the world. On the one hand, they were already part of the condition we now know to be climate change; as Oak Taylor points out, the works of Victorian and Modernist fiction "themselves are woven into the historical and cultural climate now vaporized in the atmosphere and imprinted in the polar ice caps that provide some of our strongest evidence of the composition of climates past" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 10). On the other hand, Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett make the reader experience the realm of personal human experience in a peculiar manner, through troubled language structures and shifting or constantly decomposing viewpoints, and thereby they "break" the novel as the realm of personal human experience, as the very "human" experience grows curiouser and curiouser and begins to question and challenge its ties with humanity. Both writers give the impression that one can no longer be made the master of the origin, story, and identity, because identities much like words and narratives are entangled in different social, textual, and environmental concatenations where change, though it might not be evident or even visible at all times, is always occurring (which, in other words, is the very principle at the core of deconstruction). So, the very experience of reading the novel (which, as Jesse Oak Taylor explains, demands the detection of multiple associations in the pattern of the plot and also the anticipations of the unpredictable future of the plot) is made open to further suspensions of meaning, thereby corresponding to the challenges of reading involved in reading species extinction and climate change, "this new reality of elusive agencies and distant or visible wrongs, happening at counter intuitive scales" (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 84).

Bowen and Beckett as transnational Modernists

Bowen's and Beckett's works have been compared to each other in terms of their willingness to challenge social structures, language structures, and the form of the novel itself by several well-known scholars, such as Maud Ellmann, Nicholas Royle, and Andrew Bennett. Their works, notably, Bennett's and Royle's *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel: Still Lives* (1995) and Ellmann's *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (2003) played

an instrumental role in bringing Bowen's fiction out of the shadow of other more preeminent Modernist authors, and more importantly, bringing out the shadows in Bowen's fiction, that is, underlining the oddness of her prose that ethically, stylistically, and psychologically challenge the novel as much as Beckett's fiction does.

Sinéad Mooney's "Unstable Compounds: Bowen's Beckettian Affinities" (2007) explores elements that unite Beckett's and Bowen's fiction: narrative oddities, frictions, gaps and elusiveness, but also paralysis and lack of presence, states of abeyance, deliberate narrative unpicking, actions repeatedly arrested or aborted. Patrick Wynn Moran's doctoral dissertation, *A World of Objects: Materiality and Aesthetics in Joyce, Bowen, and Beckett* (2009), brings together Beckett's and Bowen's works by contextualizing an object within each author's work: the toy in Bowen's and the forsaken object in Beckett's work. Through Joyce's, Beckett's, and Bowen's respective works, Moran explores Modernism's stylistic engagement with waste, obsessive cataloguing, projects of indefinite scope, creative tendencies to invent uses and misuses for things, the toy's potential to contest, invert, or reflect established ontological assumptions, the object's paradoxically determined indeterminacy, as well as one's dependence on objects.

Claire Seiler's recent book, *Midcentury Suspension: Literature and Feeling in the Wake of World War II* (2020), unites the two authors through the notion of midcentury suspension, which is used to explore the generalized postwar anxiety, keyed-up cold war suspense, arguing that waiting and deferral characterize the narrative mode, plot, and stylistic texture of Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* at least as thoroughly as they do the performance of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (Seiler, chap.3). Seiler shows that in the late 1940s both writers "were thinking about conditions and experiences of suspension, and in conversation with the midcentury present"; both Beckett's play and Bowen's novel "depict what characters do, think, feel, and say amid protracted uncertainty and without ends in view—in other words, what characters do in all but unrelieved middles" (Seiler, chap.3).

Nels Pearson's *Irish Cosmopolitanism: Location and Dislocation in James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, and Samuel Beckett* (2015) unites and compares Bowen's and Beckett's works in the context of the paradoxical notion of "Irish cosmopolitanism" that challenges the simple opposition between "national" and "global" approaches in literature through a more nuanced relationship between the two. His reading of Bowen's, Beckett's, and Joyce's works shows that the relationships between national and international, homeland and the world, cultural roots and universal humanity are intricately overlapping, tangled together from the outset, and difficult to prioritize. Irish expatriate Modernism; Pearson argues that genuine

egalitarian ideals of humanity must be global in scope and "yet also vigilant against imperialistic pretentions of universality, skeptical of generalizations about national feeling, and willing to forgo the teleology of global 'unity' in the process of understanding cultural particularity" (Pearson 1–2).

Following in the footsteps of Pearson's view on Irish cosmopolitanism, this thesis turns away from the efforts of trying to categorize these authors in terms of one nationality, which itself is a complicated matter. Bowen, born on 7 June 1899 at 15 Herbert Place, Dublin, and Beckett, born on 13 April 1906 at Cooldrinagh, Kerrymount Avenue, Foxrock, co. Dublin, are both Anglo-Irish, "a race within a race" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 174). As Bowen qualifies the Anglo-Irish writers in her autobiography: "[…] to most of the rest of the world we are semi-strangers, for whom existence has something of the trance-like quality of a spectacle. As beings, we are at once brilliant and limited; our unbeatables, up to now, accordingly, have been those who best profited from that: Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, Beckett" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 276).

As his biographer, James Knowlson, describes Beckett: "He was descended from middle-class, solidly protestant, Anglo-Irish stock" (Knowlson, "Beckett, Samuel Barclay"). According to Eoin O'Brien, Beckett was an "unambiguously Irish writer, but that he was also a 'true European' who belonged to the world'" (qtd. in Clare 41–41), and Rodney Sharkey argues that "any study which strives to view Beckett in an Irish context cuts its own throat if it chooses to ignore the formative effect that immersion in European art and culture had upon him. Beckett is primarily a European writer whose transformative experiences as an Irishman resulted in his extraordinary ability to create fiction that seeks out and exposes the moment of its own irreversible polarization" (Sharkey 1). Beckett's own words about his Irishness and its presence in his work grew infamous, as they showed his ambivalent feelings towards Ireland: "On Ireland, finally, it is utterly impossible for me to speak with moderation. I loathe that romanticism. And I had no need to drink at the magic fountain to be able to bear living outside it" (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 465). And yet, many references to Ireland and its scenery in his work have been pointed out by scholars, which make it clear that Beckett's fiction, much like Beckett himself, cannot be entirely divorced from Ireland. Similar ambivalence in Bowen's regard towards Ireland is underlined by Maud Ellmann:

> Sean O'Faolain, Bowen's sometime lover and perhaps her shrewdest critic, described her as 'heart-cloven and split-minded' with regard to her two nations. Another friend remembered her as 'Irish in England and English in Ireland.' When challenged, Bowen insisted on her standing as an Irish writer, yet she credited England with making her a novelist, the Irish genius having flourished in the theatre. Her loyalty to England strengthened during the war years, when she

> worked as an Air Raid Precautions (ARS) warden in London and revelled in the fellow-feeling of a city under siege, so different from the 'cut-off' life of the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Yet in the same period she defended the Irish policy of neutrality as ardently as she supported the British war effort. Victoria Glendinning, Bowen's biographer, notes that 'Elizabeth contradicted herself continually,' and it is evident that Bowen's contradictory relationship to her two nations was never resolved. In old age, she is reported to have snapped, with a vehemence that startled her friends: 'I *hate* Irelend.' (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 10)

Phyllis Lassner points out, neither English nor Irish, Bowen was

> the last heir of a 'big house', one of those country estates built in Ireland in the eighteenth century by members of the Protestant Ascendancy that was a source of power and prestige until civil war threatened its physical and political foundations. Unlike her patriarchal forebears, however, Bowen assumed responsibilities which afforded her little more than a vacation site ab the heartache of an economic burden. As a writer, she was also accustomed to not belonging. With her first publication in 1923, she resisted the intellectual headlines of Bloomsbury and conventions of the Galsworthy-Bennett tradition, preferring instead to read them and to learn, and to create a form of her own. Balancing the Anglo-Irish landed heritage and being a successful writer, she manoeuvred between worlds which usually did not meet. Her artistry reflects the tension of such balance in portraying people always on the edge of belonging anywhere. […] "In Hermione Lee's view, 'Elizabeth Bowen is an exceptional English novelist because she fuses two traditions – that of Anglo-Irish literature and history, and that of European modernism indebted to Flaubert and to James'. Victoria Glendinning has suggested that her "original inimitable voice' captures cultural dislocation and personal loss so pointedly and poignantly only because she is a transnational figure. (Lassner 142–43)

A great traveller and reader, Bowen places her fiction between Ireland, England, France, and Italy, claiming that an imagination such as hers is "most caught, most fired, most worked upon by the unfamiliar" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283). Beckett, who began writing in French after the war, had studied in Trinity College French, Italian, and English literature; his travels also led him to Nazi-Germany where he explored German literature and art as well as experienced the horrid side effects of the regime. Like Bowen, Beckett participated actively in the fight against Nazism; after the fall of France in June 1940, he became a liaison officer and translator, receiving and passing on messages from various agents, in a local resistance cell, Gloria SMH, which was in secret touch with London.

This thesis dissertation considers both authors mainly as transnational writers, which is not to underestimate or erase their links to Ireland, but rather to focus on the multiplicity of forces (which cannot be reduced to a single country and culture only) at play in their fiction, which renders these writers' gaze particularly interesting in terms of thinking about global ecological crises, since both writers are sensitive to marginal or liminal viewpoints.

Bowen and Beckett: ecocritical readings

At once a reminder and an analysis of the 20th century that witnessed whole new levels of human-caused destruction and the beginning of the human-caused climate change, this dissertation will show the importance of Elizabeth Bowen's and Samuel Beckett's selected works in thinking about climate change and species extinction, but also the importance of literary theory regarding the global climate crises. To my knowledge, a reading that, on the one hand, focuses on criticising capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery in/through Beckett's and Bowen's fiction, and, on the other hand, proposes an ethics based on humility, stemming from a reading of Samuel Beckett's and Elizabeth Bowen's works, has not yet been published, therefore, the thesis project should, in its small way, contribute to the various interpretations of the chosen authors' works and the links already established between them.

Although Bowen's and Beckett's fiction has not been thoroughly read and interpreted as a deconstructive force for criticizing an ethics based on mastery, the idea of "humility" is not foreign to Beckett studies, and in recent years, ecological approaches to Beckett's fiction have proliferated. In 2016, Jean-Michel Rabaté published his *Think, Pig!: Beckett at the Limit of the Human*, which includes a chapter that evolves around humility, "The Posthuman, or the Humility of the Earth: Beckett at the Limit of the Human," where Rabaté presents Beckett as "a thinker, writer, and practitioner of the posthuman" (Rabaté, *Think, Pig! Beckett at the Limit of the Human* 41). He connects Beckett's attacks on anthropomorphism, "in which he recognizes humanism pure and simple" (Rabaté, *Think, Pig! Beckett at the Limit of the Human* 46), to a wish to "craft a different writing capable of reaching a hard core whose model was the inorganic essence of the Earth" (Rabaté, *Think, Pig! Beckett at the Limit of the Human* 39). Rabaté writes: "Human and humus have become one in the eternal indifference of a revolving globe. Here is the root of the new humility one can discern in the later Joyce, a humility shared by Beckett who will find it extolled as the supreme virtue by his favorite philosopher, Arnold Geulincx. Humility does not mean moral abnegation or abasement but a reconciled sense that one will remain close to the Earth, an Earth that contains the ashes of all the dead along with the fertilizing humus for future plants" (Rabaté, *Think, Pig! Beckett at the Limit of the Human* 45). Rabaté's work also inspired a recent special issue, *Samuel Beckett and the Nonhuman / Samuel Beckett et le non-humain*, in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* (Volume 32, 2020: Issue 2) where Marc Farrant's article, "Earth, World, and the Human: Samuel Beckett and the Ethics of Climate Crisis" reads Beckett's works in terms of their relation to death as a means to think through our contemporary era of climate crisis, arguing, particularly through Beckett's short story "The End," that Beckett's singular aesthetics of human finitude can be a powerful resource for thinking the unthinkable, and that Beckett's writings produce a dynamic ethics

between world and earth, the global and the local, life and death. Farrant writes: "[…] Beckett teaches us that to learn how to live means to learn how to die, yet importantly this marks not merely an existential ethics but what Oliver terms an 'earthbound ethics'; an ethics that stems from the realization that 'even if we do not share a world, we do share a planet'" (Farrant 220–21). Another study that links Beckett's works to humility is yet to appear: *Eliot and Beckett's Low Modernism: Humility and Humiliation* (published on October 31st 2021, by Edinburgh UP) by Rick de Villiers. The recent scholarly interest in the ecological dimension of Beckett's work unites both Beckett's ability to think our connection to the earth and to other earthly creatures (notably, *Beckett and Animals*, published in 2013 by Cambridge UP, edited by Mary Bryden).

Bowen's fiction, which does not share quite the same stardom in the academic universe as Beckett's does, has led to fewer ecocritical readings. However, Thomas Dutoit's "& co-graphy" (*Oxford Literary review* 41:1, 2019), Sarah Wood's *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces* (Edinburgh UP, 2014), Sinéad Sturgeon's "A Greener Gothic: Environment and Extinction in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Demon Lover* (1945)" (*Éire-Ireland* 55: 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2020), and Thomas S. Davis's *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (Columbia University Press, 2015) all link Bowen's fiction to ecological reflections on extinction. Sarah Wood's book, *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces*, in particular, was one of the leading/reading instigators and inspirations for this project, especially in terms of its argument that masterful thinking has brought the planet into environmental crisis.

The selected corpus and the structure of the dissertation

This thesis dissertation considers Bowen's and Beckett's selected works as humble literature – literature that purposefully fails to seek mastery (excellence and domination) in the reading, writing, thinking progress, but becomes excellent in spite of it because of its acceptance of vulnerability and a certain humility in reading/writing/thinking, thereby redefining excellence in literature. Both Bowen and Beckett weave nonlinear plots in a beautifully broken language (or syntax of weakness), exposing both vulnerability on multiple scales as well as conveying our inescapable connectedness to each other and to the planet. The chosen texts expose the constant failure of mastery in our relationships to our language, animals, other humans and the Earth; they allow us to think about alterity and to develop an ethics of humility. Through a critique of human mastery, this thesis thinks about a humbler, a more earthly-conscious human being.

I have narrowed the main corpus down to novels and a few pieces of short fiction. The selection was made on the basis of their content, but also the selected works correspond to a specific timeframe, beginning with the Second World War and stretching into the late 20th century. The Second World War was chosen as a starting point, because its immensity and powers of destruction already represent an experience of unthinkable vulnerability and destruction on a whole new scale, and as such, it resembles the global ecological crises. The selected texts deal with destruction and destructive identities in the 20th century: times of war; times of ultra-nationalist identities; times of rapid and significant changes in lifestyles, industry and agriculture. They explore the moments in history when the Earth became extremely vulnerable to the human technological inventions (namely, nuclear bombs) which since have had the ability to destroy life on Earth, as well as our less *clearly* destructive forces, the traces of somewhat "regular" human activity, such as the increasing fossil fuel production/usage, extensive farming practices, deforestation, ocean pollution, etc.

In order to respect the time constrictions and the length of this thesis, I have chosen four novels and two pieces of short fiction from each author that meet the above-mentioned criteria. Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938) is the only novel that slightly precedes the Second World War, but its themes as well as its curious depiction of smog place it at the heart of this thesis project, despite the slight time-difference. The other three selected novels chosen from Bowen's oeuvre are *The Heat of the Day* (1949), *The Little Girls* (1964), and *Eva Trout* (1968). The four selected novels by Beckett are *Molloy* (English version 1955, the original French version 1951), *Malone Dies* (1956, *Malone meurt* in 1951), *The Unnamable* (1958, *L'innommable* in 1953), *How It Is* (1964, *Comment c'est* in 1961). To these, I have added two novellas from Beckett: *III Seen III Said* (1982) and *Worstward Ho* (1983) that were also published in a collection named *Nohow On* in 1989, along with *Company* (1980), which appears in several chapters but is not individually focused on. The four selected novels from Bowen's oeuvre are accompanied by two short stories: "Tears, Idle Tears" (1941) and "Mysterious Kôr" (1944). The dissertation does not aim at providing an exhaustive overview of Bowen's and Beckett's respective fiction, but instead focuses on a few selected prose pieces, thus benefitting at once from the transnational Modernist novel as well as from a shorter format. Free from the *longueurs* of the novel as well as from its conclusiveness, which, Bowen suggests, is often forced and false, the short fiction allows for "a degree of morality impossible in the novel"; "It can, while remaining rightly prosaic and circumstantial, give scene, action, event, character a poetic new actuality" (qtd. in Haule 207–08). The short vivid glimpses of Bowen's and Beckett's short stories and the more complex networks and the longer view that

their novels allow, in their own way, provide valuable material for a reflection on ethics in times of global ecological crises.

The dissertation is divided into three major parts: Vulnerable, Contaminated Homes: War, Identity, Extinction, and Climate Change; Concatenation; Thinking Process, Thinking Progress. Each part provides analyses of mastery in its various forms and contexts, focusing primarily on capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery, and offers alternative modes of reasoning through the notion of humility and its representations in Beckett's and Bowen's selected texts, eventually delivering a proposal containing elements of an ethics based on humility.

The first part, "Vulnerable, Contaminated Homes: War, Identity, Extinction, and Climate Change," explores the links between place and identity and underlines some of the traits of a destructive *oikos*-management that are not only restrained to the sphere of human homes, but also reflects on how this management of "human" environments affects natural environments as well as predicts how we will mismanage global ecological crises. It argues, through Bowen's and Beckett's writings, that the queries about places should not be separated from the queries about identity and explores how the seemingly neutral or conventional viewpoints can harbour forms of domination to which we might be insensitive. Deconstructive fiction such as Bowen's and Beckett's is sensitive to fluctuations within meaning, and (through their respective sensitivities belonging to a transnational writer) alert to oddities masked by habits or processes of normalization. This first part thus focuses on the necessity of reading the vulnerability of various lifeforms in the traps of (blindly) masterful *oikos*-management from a humbler viewpoint. It offers analyses of the difficulties in reading the unmasterable destructive traces we leave behind as well as caring about and for those who are impacted by the destruction of habitats.

The second part, "Concatenation," challenges binary categorizations (such as animal/human, companion/parasite, mind/body, emotion/intelligence, man/woman, native/stranger) through Bowen's and Beckett's strange deconstructive concatenations of meaning that reveal dormant mastery within our systems of thought. It explores the *logos* (word, speech, ground, reason, etc.) in the notion of *eco-logic*, through its links to human exceptionalism, humbling the latter via the dispersal of ideas of absolute otherness. The belief in the (absolute) otherness of the other allows to inflict mastery on some humans, non-human beings, and ecosystems by establishing a hierarchy based on such differences. By destabilizing the Cartesian mind-body separation, animal-human difference, and the companion-parasite gap, this part argues for a change of priorities, for placing ecological connections to the centre

of our system of reasoning (which means, re-evaluating the correlation between value and economic profit, the value of non-human beings and vulnerable human beings as well as their needs and rights). *Concatenation*, borrowed from Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*, is used as a metaphor for the event or practice of reading, writing, and thinking, but also as a concept that leads to more humble ways of relating the human species to the Earth and its many inhabitants – *concatenation* as connecting without mastery (domination over others). Concatenation as an "interdependent sequence" (*OED*) furthermore allows the reading concatenations as correlations between causes and effects and leads to thinking about the moral responsibilities inherent to human agency, which is at the core of the sixth mass extinction and the climate crisis.

The third part, "Thinking Process, Thinking Progress," explores several layers of power structures in the context of the 20th century, mainly: the power of men over women, the power of the Western nations over developing countries and their natural resources and ecosystems, and the power of humans over non-human animals and their shared environments. It focuses on reading the modes of mastery and violence that are not easily recognizable, offering an alternative to view them from the viewpoint of the vulnerable, and through the experience of readerly dispossession. Through the processes of thinking/writing/reading powerlessness and vulnerability, this part opens humility to its connotations as mortality, impotence, closeness to the ground, but also modesty and being earthly-conscious, that is, being conscious of the global consequences of human activity from which we cannot escape. By suggesting that an ethics based on mastery is not only the source of structural violence and slow violence that harm ecosystems, but is also insensitive to the vulnerability or destruction it paves the way for, this final part argues that an ethics of humility would make human technological progress a less destructive force for the future human and non-human generations.

Through these reflections on modes of mastery and on (personal, national, cultural, species-specific) identities based on the idea of mastery (domination and excellence), this dissertation argues that an ethics based on capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery is both the source of the current climate crisis and the acceleration of the processes of species extinction, while it is also unable to offer pertinent, long-term solutions for dealing with those issues; as an alternative, the dissertation suggests an eco-logic based on an ethics of humility.

PART ONE:

Vulnerable, Contaminated Homes: War, Identity, Extinction, and Climate Change

"Heal the world/Make it a better place/For you and for me, and the entire human race," as Michael Jackson's world-famous song "Heal the World" (1991) states the common thread of speeches (to come) about climate change and species extinction that rarely fail to plead for a better world for our children and their children's children. In many eco-friendly discourses or discourses about climate change, the planet is dubbed as our planet, *our* home (but "What about animals? / We've turned kingdoms to dust / What about elephants? / Have we lost their trust?", "Earth Song," 1995), and as such, it needs to be saved by us, humans, for our sake. However, what exactly does one intend to save if one sets out to save *their* home, *their* planet? The efforts to save the planet as *our home* run the danger of reinforcing the traits that have caused the problems one is trying to eliminate – namely climate change and mass extinction. *Home*, as both Bowen and Beckett show, is not innocent, and the queries about identity should be inseparable from the discourses about the places we call *our home*.

This first part, divided into two chapters: "The complex enmeshment of place and identity in Bowen's and Beckett's fiction" and "Humbling Hauntings: Contamination," attempts to read the complex relations of place and identity in Bowen's and Beckett's wartime and post-war works, arguing that since the physical world around us is seen as perpetually, and now, dramatically, changing, so should our ideas about places and the planet as *our* home. Also, the very notion of *home* should be carefully reconsidered and made "aware" of the vast changes of the physical world to which the notion of home must be adapted, in order to fend off the worst, as *home*'s links to standards based on patriarchal and human mastery that were prevalent in the Western world of the 20th century (that coincides with the Great Acceleration) are ill-equipped to deal with global crises such as climate change and mass extinction. Bowen's and Beckett's works are shown to provide valuable insight for thinking about global threats through the authors' experience, portrayal, and thinking of the Second World War and its aftermath.

The first part of Chapter 1 ("1.1 Rootedness, Dislocation, and Dissolution: Homes in Bowen's *The House in Paris*, *The Heat of the Day*, and *Eva Trout*") explores the importance of reading the link between place and identity, as our ideas about *home* are shown to affect the way we read places. Bowen's depiction of the very notion of identity as mutable, slippery, and dependent, rather than independent, fixed, and original, is explored as a tool for thinking *home* in terms of local and global contexts and forces. The contextualization of *home*, through impressions of rootedness, dislocation, and dissolution, allows the reader to perceive that some dominant traits, often perceived as proper to an idea of *home*, are indeed particular and peculiar,

and thus, cannot be read as being unquestionably universal, vital, or natural. Bowen's gaze on homes in fiction and outside fiction exemplifies that thinking about places (or even thinking about the planet Earth) as *our home* is a process that requires a careful examination of our identities as well as the identity of *home*. By exploring the links between patriarchy, cosmopolitanism, globalization, and the notion of home in Bowen's fiction, I will argue that our projects about ecology and climate change must be made sensitive to our biased view on places we call our home, for *home* is not innocent and free of the concepts and power structures we have burdened it with, just as we are not free, that is, independent from the effect homes (both conceptually and via our individual experience of a specific home) have on our identities. Therefore, applying the idea of unquestioned *home* on our approaches of the planetary crisis will be counter-productive, as our recent history of homemaking shows – the Western success of modernization of living dependent on globalization processes, is at the source of the climate crisis. Reading *home*, on a local and global scale, will be shown to be inseparable from the queries about identity.

Such queries are also shown to be central through my reading of Beckett's *Molloy* in the second part of Chapter 1 (1.2 Mollify: Identity, Place, and View in Beckett's *Molloy*). It observes the links between material space, politically, culturally, and economically determined space, and the notion of identity – the powerful's identity seen through the viewpoint of the lowly, powerless Molloy. His state of extreme vulnerability shows how physical existence structures the way one perceives one's habitat, but also prompts one to think about embodied knowledges through which invisible abuses of power can be detected. Molloy's humility, which is read as poverty but also as his relation to the literal earth and to his heightened sense of becoming part of that earth – his mortality, offers an embodied view on the complex entanglements of place and identity, but also on one's dependence on the others' ability to understand, accept, and value vulnerability. In this chapter, I will argue for the necessity of reading the porosity of identity and vulnerability of various lifeforms in order to build a humbler sense of personal and national identities that would be better adapted to the worsening conditions of climate change and extinction. Molloy, who inhabits ditches and forests, becomes a vessel for thinking ecological violence, as his vulnerability and the social injustice he suffers from in his natural environment, in his native region, reveal standards based on mastery upon which the common laws and also the regional mentality seem to be built; but as Beckett sets the Molloy country on an imaginary map, these standards are proper to no place in particular, and yet they strongly echo the tendencies that could be observed across the Western world. My reading of *Molloy* will argue that standards that value patriarchal and human mastery are ill-

equipped to deal with global crises such as climate change and mass extinction, as they build a sense of home that is only home for powerful humans and enforce their viewpoints through which many forms of existence are invisibilized and rendered homeless (literally and metaphorically). Instead, I suggest we ought to develop the skill to read vulnerability in order to build humbler personal, national, and species identities that would include the needs of different forms of vulnerable lives. Then perhaps ~~*our*~~ politically, culturally, and economically overdetermined material spaces would have a chance of still being habitats to vulnerable humans as well as a multitude of species.

In the first part of the second chapter (Chapter 2: Humbling Hauntings: Contamination), "1.3 Contamination: The Uncontrollable in Bowen's *The Little Girls*," I will explore how *The Little Girls* (1963) thinks uncontrollable destruction through depictions of fragility on multiple levels: mental as well as natural landscapes, in the context of both global wars and the nuclear threat after the Second World War which endangered not only the living, but also entire places, and possibly the planet Earth itself. My reading of the novel explores its treatment of the idea of mass extinction through the notion of contamination. Contamination that evokes multiple meanings: mingling, corruption, infection, pollution, as well as the idea of contact and touching, will serve as a term to illustrate the unmasterability of one's traces, the understanding of which is an antidote to our inflated sense of mastery on an individual level, as readers, but also on a species' level, as humans whose combined activities are the source of the ongoing mass extinction event. I will examine how Bowen's *The Little Girls* humbles both her characters and readers by deploying the uncontrollable, unmasterable forces of language that contaminate one's intentions with unintended meanings and consequences. The complex and somewhat unforeseeable forces of language in the novel that are shown to contaminate the characters' realities, and demonstrate that fighting against ecological catastrophes is not only about "taking action" but also require deconstructive analyses of the traces we leave behind as well as the concepts we use, such as "Nature." The second part will concentrate on underlining and undermining nostalgic depictions of Nature that are shown to be contaminated by the fragility of objects as well as by the nature of their reader. The ideas of Nature as inexhaustible, everlasting, are haunted by the very fragility of things on which the representation of the indestructible nature is inscribed. Places, over time, are shown to be fragile, while "pure" identities of human characters are shown to be messy, complex, and caught in the mesh of inevitable co-existence with various beings and places, and their mutual contaminations. The last part deals with the complexities of reading our individual as well as collective impact in

this mesh of co-existence, or what Bowen calls "an irrevocable thing" that poignantly addresses the current problems of estimating, reading, and understanding our individual as well as collective traces in the ongoing global destruction of habitats and their non-human and human inhabitants.

The second part of the second chapter, "1.4 Affected, Infected at Every Turn: Facing the Unknowable Worst in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and *Beckett's Worstward Ho*," continues to explore the problems of legibility of global events through the example of the Second World War that marked the beginning of the Great Acceleration, defined by first legible synchronous traces left in the stratigraphic record by nuclear tests as well as the scaling up of population growth, fossil fuel combustion, and urbanization which emerge as forces on a planetary scale, as explained by Jesse O. Taylor. I will argue that Bowen's thinking of the enmeshment of the individual and her time through the depiction of the events of the Second World War (the imagery of the worst) gives way to reading, thinking, and imagining our hardly legible collective destructive influence on the biosphere of the hyperobject we call the Earth. In the previous chapter, I argued for embodied knowledges, and against unlocalizable viewpoints (viewpoints from nowhere) that nevertheless hide agendas instead of not having any, through Bowen's and Beckett's depictions of homes that are neither universalizable nor neatly separable from wider, planetary, implications. In this part, I explore the necessity to think the enmeshment of the local home in global phenomena (such as the Second World War and the climate change). I also show how Bowen's depiction of the imminent unknowable danger challenges our perception of the real, urging us towards thinking about the unknown or the unknowable, and thereby, towards thinking about complex phenomena and humbler presences. Bowen's portrayal of the difficulties of perceiving global events meet the current challenges of thinking climate change and mass extinction, for they both entail imagining what is out of proportion to our faculties of knowing, thinking, and checking up. As Bowen shows through her fictional and non-fictional writings about Ireland's position in the Second World War, dealing with global phenomena, such as a global war's impact (but also, I argue, climate change), is not compatible with ideas of neutrality, as there is no *outside* of the war (and one cannot be outside of climate change). The environment of the imagined hermetic world which stays on itself by its inner force is not sustainable, for it cannot ignore the outer forces, which, as Bowen shows, are not properly "outside."

Being anywhere in Bowen's wartime fiction is shown to be an experience of more than local forces, and rather, an experience of complicated, dissolving boundaries that portray existence as co-existence through the heightened sensitivities of wartime. Death and

destruction on an unprecedented scale call for the mourning of the unknown. The reading and mourning of the unknown, and more precisely, the reading of the unknowability of the death to come, are shown to open an abyss in the perception of what is real, if the real is not what is known or what is here now. The real, apprehended from what is present, does not necessarily think the fragility of what hardly is, what only barely or no longer exists. Reading our destructive forces which have given rise to climate change and mass extinction, therefore, must involve thinking and reading the real through fragile presences and absences which literary writings such as Bowen's and Beckett's make possible. Bowen shows the necessity and the difficulty, of caring about/for the "insignificant" unknown, the little lives, elsewhere. Beckett's *Worstward Ho* responds to the difficulties of mourning the unknown but also the unknowable others. Beckett's *Worstward Ho,* through its deconstructive portrayal of "the worst," is shown to make its readers empathize with what cannot be known, revealing, thereby, not only our difficulties for caring for the unknown and mourning the unknown, but also a certain potential of the inventive language and fiction to enhance the reader's potential to feel for the unknowable, which opens up interesting paths towards more humble views on our species, our abilities, languages, philosophies – as well as *their* and *our* limits to describe and connect with non-human forms of existence and their disappearance.

Chapter 1: The Complex Enmeshment of Place and Identity in Bowen's and Beckett's Fiction

1.1 Rootedness, Dislocation, and Dissolution: Homes in Bowen's *The House in Paris*, *The Heat of the Day*, and *Eva Trout*

As Jocelyn Brooke writes, in Bowen's fiction one "invariably *sees* her characters before one hears them speak; they are so much a part of the landscape in which they have their being that one cannot imagine them, even for a moment, as existing in a different setting" (Brooke 6). The readers are shown the importance of the links between place and identity through the characters' impressions of rootedness and dislocation, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Bowen's depiction of identity as something mutable, slippery, and dependent, rather than independent, fixed, and original, becomes a tool for thinking *home* in terms of local and global contexts and forces; home is open (that is, vulnerable) to changes from the outside: wars, urbanization, globalization, as it is today vulnerable to climate change. Bowen writes in her autobiography: "Permanence, where it occurs, and it does occur, stands out the more strongly in an otherwise ephemeral world. Permanence is an attribute of recalled places" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 287). In the 20th-century world, structured by speed and hitherto unthinkable technological and ideological forces of mastery, the permanence of places appears as a nostalgic thought which has no stable ground to attach itself to. If in the 20th century, permanence was becoming a less and less potent device for thinking about places, should it be used in terms of thinking about identity?

Discourses on identity are often deeply embedded in the discourses on tradition and origin, the ways things have *always* been, that is, as far as one's memory can recall – it is memory (individual, collective or cultural) that holds a sweet spot for permanence in a world that is constantly changing. Though the stability of permanence might look appealing (and makes the discourses of those who too willingly offer such security at an incredibly low price very popular), the discrepancies between the changing habitat and the unwillingness to see identity as malleable and non-innocent are worrying, especially now when it has become one of the major obstacles to finding and accepting the solutions to climate change that demand profound reprioritizations and collective efforts. The desire to go on as one has always done, traditionally, as far as I or we can remember, is making us fail to adapt ourselves to the needs of our habitats, our shared homes.

Home is the word we use to designate multiple environments – houses, families, regions, nations, as well as the planet which our species has made overly connected and marked by the traces of our ambitious home-building. Bowen's depiction of home is double-sided, that is, home is something made, built, but home is also what moulds their makers' identity, what grounds it in the actual (current, real) landscape or environment, but also in various rooted ideals of what home is or should be, and who one should be in it. Some of those ideals are treated as unquestionably rooted, vital, natural, or even universal – and thus, they feel permanent, real. Bowen's view on *home* that combines the importance of cosmopolitan, global, as well as regional contexts, proposes an interesting gaze on automatic considerations of certain identities as self-evidently valid or natural. Through Bowen's conflicting and converging depictions of rootedness, dislocation, and dissolution, I will show that queries about identity should be inseparable from the discourses on the places we call our home – the kind of discourses that, as we face increasing damages of human induced climate change and mass extinction, we shall be having on a regular basis.

Bowen's friendly theoretical homes and frightening fictional homes

Elizabeth Bowen was the first woman to inherit Bowen's Court – a Big House near Kildorrery, County Cork, which has since been torn down by the new owner, and can today only be summoned through her writings and pictures. Though much like Beckett, Bowen was known to have expressed her frustration with Ireland, she also wrote in her autobiography: "If you begin in Ireland, Ireland remains the norm: like it or not" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 280). In "Home for Christmas," she wrote, in more general terms: "Home was our first world – it was at one time the world: we knew no other" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 138). *Home* is the notion that resurfaces in Bowen's essays as a place but also as a feeling: "Homes are much more than rooms and tables and chairs. Homes wait in our hearts till we can make them again" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 128–29).

Apart from this somewhat sentimental reading of *home*, Bowen also thinks *home* as a notion that lends itself to exploring dislocation, hospitality, and cosmopolitanism. In *The Death of the Heart*, for example, she defines *home* through the eyes of a cosmopolitan mother and daughter, Irene and Portia. Their wandering way of life is commented upon by the narrative voice: "It is not our exalted feelings, it is our sentiments that build the necessary home. The need to attach themselves makes wandering people strike roots in a day: whenever we unconsciously feel, we live" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 154). The surprising "we" from

the omniscient narrator seems to link Bowen herself to the global community of wandering people. Indeed, as she wrote to her friend Isaiah Berlin from the United States in 1933: "I should like to move constantly and live in many places. Be part of them, I mean, for a time. […] I must be a born foreigner" (Laurence, chap.4). At the end of her life, Bowen admitted having thriven "on the dislocations and […] the contrasts" which had made up so much of her life (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283). It is, thus, no wonder that her vision of home, in fiction as in non-fiction, should so often be seen from the viewpoint of a *kosmopolitēs* ("citizen of the world"). As she writes in an essay entitled "The Christmas Toast is 'Home!'" (December 1942):

> I like to think of my home as a thing of windows, not as a thing of doors. Doors, I mean, are meant to be shut, and when shut they are impenetrable. Windows, on the other hand, are there to admit light and refreshing air; I look out through them; they frame for me pictures of the outside, ever-changing world. I want my home, above all, to have an intense aliveness, to hold many books, to have room alike for old and for new friends. At the same time, it must not be restless: at the heart of all its aliveness it must keep a magnetic centre of stillness and peace. And to this let others have access, as well as me.
>
> One's home is one's castle – yes. But must this mean a castle defensively guarded, with drawbridge always raised? The castle (however tiny this may be) should show above all a confident graciousness. And the first of the graces is hospitality. War has taken away, for the time being, what we used to regard as the three essentials – safety, privacy, independence. But were these essentials really? For without them home still goes on; it triumphs; we can feel its undying value as never before. Outer changes, temporary deprivations, have left the core intact. Home, through these dark years, shows its unrivalled power to refresh and to rest us, to reassure and to cheer. (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 130–31)

The confident graciousness of hospitality that Bowen evokes in this wartime essay falls in line with her regard for the ideals of global democracy instead of the claustrophobic politics of separation and exclusivity of National Socialism. As Pearson underlines, Bowen lived in London, but travelled often to Paris, Rome, and New York from the late 1920s into the 1960s: "Having come from what she called 'a race of hybrids,' she was able to participate in a European culture of diplomatic displacement while also looking skeptically upon it, recognizing the ways in which its ideas about history, change, and worldliness were locally produced" (Pearson 84). Bowen's cosmopolitanism is a strange and appealing mixture between the importance of local and global forces that work upon one's identity as well as one's way of life. The localizable home is not to be disregarded, while it cannot ignore and turn away from the realities of "the ever-changing world," the "outside" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 130), which are, as Bowen seems to suggest, always already "framed" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 130) by a localized viewpoint, a viewpoint from a historically, culturally, and geographically localizable home. Bowen's view, it seems, is a complex hybrid between the

Kantian noble aspirations to think the world as a whole, and an acute awareness of one's being in a specific place in the world. Thus, for Bowen, *home* becomes "a thing of windows" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 130) – an open place from which one looks into the world and to which one welcomes the world (willingly or not). In other words, home can be a curious place of transfer and hospitality that nevertheless keeps a certain identity of its own, separable from that of its dwellers/owners. Home is the "core of the world, magnet to man" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 39) but, as Bowen enigmatically suggests, it "tends to dwell with its own ideas of us" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 137). As she writes in *A World of Love* (1955): "One does not go into the world and come home the same: isolation has altered its nature when one returns" (*A World of Love* 28).

While in theory Bowen's idea of home is a certain mix of rootedness and cosmopolitan openness, her fictional homes, often seen from the viewpoint of a stranger, are quite inhospitable. No house in Bowen's fiction is without an angle of its own. Generally, homes in Bowen's fiction have a sensible presence; they do not serve simply as ornaments or scenery but often give off the impression of being more alive than the characters that inhabit or traverse them, and as such, are character-like themselves.

For instance, in *The House in Paris*, Mme Fisher's residence in Paris is called possessive, aggressive, and fatal. An eleven-year-old English girl, Henrietta, who arrives at Mme Fisher's, feels that "the house was acting, nothing seemed to be natural; objects did not wait to be seen but came crowding in on her, each with what amounted to its aggressive cry" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 24), later adding: "I don't feel as if I was anywhere" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 29). The house is described as a supernatural museum that unravels a family history for the unsuspecting, accidental, "Alice-ish" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 36) Henrietta, who can but take in its "air darkening her lungs with every breath she took, the built-in tree in the court, the varying abnormalities of Mme Fisher and Leopold" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 49–50).

The mysterious Montefort in *A World of Love*, with its surprising obelisk and the door that "no longer knew hospitality" (Bowen, *A World of Love* 9) seems to lure characters into its darkest corners to revive its past dwellers by revealing unfound letters.[1] In *The Heat of the Day*,

[1] Bowen writes:

> From somewhere out behind Montefort, she [Jane] at one time imagined she heard a call – she unchained the gates and rode up the avenue. The house, nothing as she approached it but a black outline, was deserted – doors and windows open, but not a lamp lit. Neither glad nor sorry but mystified, and still with that inexplicable feeling of being summoned, she looked into all the rooms – remains of supper were on a table: having come in, had the others gone out again? She scarcely wondered. For her the house was great with something: she *had* been sent for, and in haste. Why? (…) She unbuckled straps, put the

Mount Morris – an Anglo-Irish Big House, is a sort of a museum for patriarchal rule that seems to generate houses like Wistaria Lodge (a nuthouse for the sane), said to be "powerhouse of nothingness, hive of lives in abeyance" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 203). Surrounded by "bewitched wood" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 110), Holme Dene, the Kelway's residence, seems to have a psyche of its own, having virtually ousted its traditional heir, Robert – a Nazi spy, from its premises.

The latter is a house where everyone seems to be under a constant gaze, an impression of surveillance that is not only psychological in nature, but also seems to be written into the Panopticon-like architecture of the building: "Upstairs, as elsewhere, it had been planned with a sort of playful circumlocution – corridors, archways, recesses, half-landings, ledges, niches, and balustrades combined to fuddle any sense of direction and check, as far as possible, progress from room to room" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 256). In Holme Dene, everybody is watched, and if not watched then heard (though it harbours "dead language," 252) by a taciturn tiny old lady – Muttkins, Robert's mother, seated in a strategic position, from which "she commanded all three windows, also the leaded squints in the inglenook" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 108). Robert's dead father is described as an unfortunate creature, overpowered by women and his house, Holme Dene, also known as "a man-eating house" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 257) where, it is said: "his fiction of dominance was, as he would have wished, preserved by his widow and his daughters" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 258). In Holme Dene, the idea of the lady of the house backfires into an eerie all-observant building, commanded by the mum matriarch Muttkins, known to be "practically able to read thoughts" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 186). Even the objects in the house seem to project her presence, thus, the windows have a "psychic sight" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 110) and nothing is "more psychic than Mrs. Kelway's tea table, with its china and eatables" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 114). Houses such as Holme Dene furthermore underline Bennett's and Royle's half-humorous claim that "Bowen's novels are like Jane Austen on drugs" (Bennett and Royle 16); however, it is through those peculiarities that Bowen's homes depict complex cultural and socio-political frameworks that female characters find hard to escape from. One of those contextual elements, placed at the heart of Bowen's traditional homes, is a certain patriarchal order within the "feminine" space that is home-life; this order is undermined by cosmopolitan

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lid back and began to draw out the inexhaustible muslin of the dress – out of it, having been wedged in somewhere, tumbled the packet of letters. They fell at her feet, having found her rather than she them. (Bowen, *A World of Love* 27)

ways of life. I will explore how female characters' attempts to either live within the framework of patriarchal tradition or venture outside of it are complicated by feelings of dislocation.

Dislocation

Holme Dene is presented as if its architecture itself was supposed to empower women while still restraining them to the property; Bowen writes that the house was "conceived to please and appease middle-class ladies" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 257) while insisting that Muttkins' "power came to an end at the white gate" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 110). And yet men in Holme Dene are not better off. We are told Mr Kelway could do nothing more than try to sell the house, in vain. It is said that "his sex had so lost caste that the very least it could do was to buy tolerance" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 257). His vulnerable position is the unexpected product of the patriarchal order that by suppressing women also sinks men; the latter start to feel dislocated in their own homes. The last man, Robert Kelway, is profoundly disappointed by paternal and patriotic homeland forces and seeks solace from the enemy lines. To him, the rooms in Holme Dene are "flock-packed with matter – repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges, and fibs" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 256).

Holme Dene where "mum is the word" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 113) expresses the inexpressible dead-ends of impossible conversations to which each character finds themselves being cornered in that house. Similar dead-ends also appear through houses in *Eva Trout*. As Lassner writes:

> (…) in its complex of images and metaphors the atmosphere of houses becomes an expressionistic device offering a simulation of her characters' experience. This is never more acute than in her last novel, *Eva Trout*, where the heroine, who has inherited untold millions, cannot buy, build, or make a home in which she feels comfortable and who cannot discover a language of self-expression. Her own aphasia and dispossession are mirrored in the character of her mute son whom she drags from one unsatisfactory place to another. About to depart on a face honeymoon, she abandons her son, a turn of plot which she has designed to restore of finish her character. But instead, Eva is finished off by her child. As he shoots her, their combined rage explodes in a place of transit. This no-place becomes an emblem of radical displacement and perhaps disgust Bowen feels about both domestic plots and romance as devices of forming female character. Clearly, for Bowen, domestic space has been no Eden for Eva or any other female character. (Lassner 162–63)

The idea of radical displacement, as it is evoked by Lassner, appears most striking in *Eva Trout* partly because of Eva's name that links her to the Biblical story of the first couple's exile from Paradise, which is directly linked to Eve's *faux pas*, her eating of the forbidden fruit. The Biblical backdrop awakens the suspicion that home is only safe when one sticks to a given

patriarchal rulebook – yet Bowen's women hardly ever do so. A domestic space that fails to offer a safe and fulfilling habitat for women is a pattern also to be recognized in Bowen's earlier novels.

The most striking example of radical displacement of women might be that of Cousin Nettie from Mount Morris, a patriarchal Anglo-Irish Big House, to Wistaria Lodge, a nut house for the sane, in *The Heat of the Day*. In *The Death of the Heart*, Irene and Mr. Quayne also escape into a flatlet near a train station, and later to Continental Europe, for their home cannot accommodate their love affair and its forbidden fruit: Portia. In *The House in Paris*, Karen who is having an affair with Max, also turns to places of transfer, later transferring her illegitimate son born of this affair over to a family in Italy. As Pearson explains, *The House in Paris* presents two worlds, the manifest and secure world of domestic centres in Paris and London, and the other potential and erratic, and fragmented world "comprised across a succession of islands, channel crossings, and coastal peripheries" (Pearson 91). If Bowen's characters seek out liminal places, they do so in order to allow for certain flexibility regarding their behaviour and sense of identity. Elements that do not fit the social restrictions of their home, find hospitable ground in places of transfer, such as the coastal towns of Boulogne and Hythe in Karen's case, or in cosmopolitan settings, such as Stella's hybrid flat in London in *The Heat of the Day*.

Stella is the dislocated "star" (as her name suggests) of the novel whose dislocation allows her to establish herself as as a complex individual not reduced to stereotypical roles only. While Zimmerman depicts the characters of *The Heat of the Day* as anxious, fragmented, and homeless subjects who are unable to belong (Zimmerman 46), which is especially true of the male characters in the novel,[2] I would add that when it comes to the female characters, Cousin Nettie and Stella in particular, their homes are seen as invalid or somewhat unreal homes. Nettie's home is a *home* in a clinical sense – yet, when Roderick visits Cousin Nettie, this home is shown as a sanctuary for those who need to escape from "real" homes. Characters such as Nettie are aware of the constraints that are imposed on them by their familiar home

[2] As Maud Ellmann writes:

> Although connecting all the dwelling-places in the novel, Harrison himself has no address: like a 'ghost or actor,' he goes 'into abeyance…between appearances.' When Stella asks him where he lives, he replies: 'There are always two or three places where I can turn in.' 'But …where do you keep your razor?' she persists. 'I have two or three razors.' (…) But the other men in Stella's life also lack a fixed abode. Her son Roderick is constantly in transit, even though Mount Morris, 'standing outside the war,' beckons him to a 'historic future'. Robert Kelway alternates between Holme Dene and Stella's flat, but he has other 'haunts' that he reputedly frequents between appearances; he also has a secret 'beat' that he retraces like a restless ghost, closely shadowed by his doppelganger Robert Harrison. (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 158)

environments, and those constraints are rendered even more visible by their movements from one (social) scene to another.

Pearson underlines Karen's voyage from Cork to Holyhead in *The House in Paris*, and her meeting with a single Irish woman. He writes: "Rife with innuendo, their discussion links Karen's Englishness and impending marriage with being 'settled' and the woman's Irishness and single status with being 'reckless and mad and bad'" (Pearson 91). If we link the characters' identity (which is embedded in the socio-cultural context of their home) to vague ideas of patriarchy, patriotism, and rootedness, it is evident that women have more to gain than men from a certain cosmopolitan elusiveness and fragmentation of boundaries. This is shown in *The Heat of the Day* through the character of Stella who has reached a time in her life when other ambitions than marriage and motherhood could be envisioned: "Roderick, at school, when this war began, was now in the Army – to her, the opportunity to make or break, to free herself of her house, to come to London to work had been not ungrateful" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 25).

The reader learns that Stella has involved herself as a spy in what is said to be "not unimportant work" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 26), and throughout the novel she is shown to occupy two boldly placed flats. The first one is a furnished top-floor professional flat meant for "doctors and dentists" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 23). Placed dangerously close to the Blitz-ridden sky, it is also a hybrid environment that, in other circumstances, might not welcome Stella. The rupture between her more traditional habitat (a family home) and role, as Roderick's mother, and this flat, is most efficiently shown through Stella's tradition-loving son: "In this flat, rooms had no names; there being only two, whichever you were not in was 'the other room'. Proceeding in what *he* saw as the drawing-room, Roderick, grasping the tray, stood looking round again" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 51). Roderick, whose "friends were all for the authoritarianism of home life (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 52)" is uprooted and adrift in the new space where the kitchen is only a tiny kitchenette where one cannot linger, rooms have no names and things no place. Everything in the apartment is a foreign graft without knowable roots and history – rented furniture. Roderick fears Stella's home-life will become "Liberty Hall" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 52), which, as a focal point for radical politics in Dublin prior to the Easter Rising in 1916 had become a symbol of defiance. So, not only does Stella's flat seem to be without customs, to Roderick this rented furniture and her mother surrounded by it begin to have a narrative of their own, to which he, her only son, is a stranger: "This did not look like home; but it looked like something – possibly a story" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 47). *Home* appears as a complex origin which is a source of safety and stability

for Roderick, but also entrenched in patriarchy, and therefore, not a safe space for women to establish a narrative of their own. Roderick's feeling of dislocation in his mother's flat in some ways resembles Robert's dislocation at Holme Dene – both having become places that also undermine patriarchal ownership and traditional roles for women by making men feel not fully in charge, "at home."

The rootedness of home, and in particular, its rootedness in a patriarchal order is contrasted with a complete uprootedness in Bowen's last novel, *Eva Trout*. Bowen's last heroine is homeless from the beginning. Eva Trout has no homelife to return to – the pattern had been swept away before her birth. It is said that she lived in hotels and in other people's homes, thereby becoming the epitome of what Bowen in "English Fiction at Mid-Century" called "the modern uneasiness – dislocation" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 322–23).

Eva was born into a broken home. Her mother took off with a paramour when Eva was an infant, and was killed in a plane crash, leaving the child in the care of her husband, Willy; she was said to have existed in "the shadow of Willy Trout's total attachment to Constantine" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 10), his lover. Willy's hands were also tied with international business:

> He took her to Mexico, where they were joined by Constantine; then, business calling him to the Far East, dropped her off with a Baptist missionary family in Hong Kong, reclaimed her, left her in San Francisco with some relations of his chiropodist's, caused her to be flown to him in New York, flew her from thence to Hamburg, where he picked her up later and asked her if she would like to become a kennel-maid, decided it might be better for her to go to Paris and was about to arrange things on those lines when she said she would like to go to an English boarding-school: one for girls. Two years having elapsed, his daughter was on the eve of being sixteen. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 55)

The boarding school set up in the mock-castle introduced on the very first pages of the novel, becomes the closest thing to a home Eva had ever experienced, but to others, such as Mrs. Stote, the school evokes a different meaning of "home" altogether: "School, my eye! This was a Home, if ever she saw one, and moreover a Home for afflicted children. Nothing said or done by the inmates, consequently, caused her to turn a hair. There you were, you took the rough with the smooth. This big Eva seemed no worse than a little dull—now, why had she had to be put away?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 51).

Eva's homelessness, we are told, "had left her with no capacity to be homesick—for, sick for where?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 47). Yet, her inability to be homesick could not be equated with the ability to feel at home everywhere. She is constantly shown to appear as if "attacked" by habitats, and she does not fit in anywhere. To feel nostalgia (from ancient Greek νόστος "return home" and αλγία "pain," hence, "homesickness," *OED*) implies having the memory of a home – a home to return to, even if only by the deceptive means of memory and feeling. The

concept alone here falls short. Knowing what home is, conceptually, cannot evoke homesickness, which is rooted in the experience of home.

Eva has no home to return to, as the closest family tie she has, Constantine, also lives in hotels – places of transfer. Eva's deaf-mute son, Jeremy, whom she adopted through black market is also made rootless: his past is unknown to Eva who has built up a dubious story to explain his existence that fails to convince others, leaving him to live in a bubble she has created for the pair of them. The Bonnards' advice to provide a stable home for Jeremy goes against all the elements of their previous wandering cosmopolitan life: "At the stage they perceived Jeremy to be reaching, the removal of any notion of dissolution from his immediate past had become essential. As to one thing, it was imperative that he be reassured; that being, that the (to him) home from which he'd been reft in London, under, as Eva had told them, panic-engendering conditions, had *not* in fact vanished into thin air" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 282). Upon the Bonnards' suggestion to provide stability for Jeremy, Eva tries to make a home for the two of them. However, this homemaking becomes theatrical, as she sets the home up in a hotel (by definition a non-permanent habitat) and is shown thinking: "Everything must be plausible, by tomorrow" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 284). Her suitcases become "a fallen city" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 284), a maquette of her cosmopolitan wandering way of life that now has to be assembled into a home. How to materialize home from what has been borrowed (even the budgerigars, we learn, had been borrowed from the porter's wife). How to materialize Jeremy's fictional past? As Pearson writes, Bowen's protagonists typically "face the problem of blending into the culture of transient modernity when they have neither patria nor a previous life of tradition against which to compare that transience" (Pearson 8).

Pearson's example concentrates on the story of the Italian-English-French-Jewish Leopold in *The House in Paris*. Both Leopold (age 9) and Henrietta (age 11) are introduced to the reader through their short stay at Mme Fisher's house in Paris. In a truly Bowenesque manner, the children are more or less parentless, left to their own devices to learn about the secrets of the grown-up world and their own origins. Leopold has been sent down to Paris from Italy where he lived with his adoptive parents, the Moodys, accompanied by a lengthy letter of instructions. He is in Paris to meet his birthmother, an English woman named Karen, now married, Forrestier. Henrietta, as she says it herself, "with cosmopolitan ease," is "just crossing Paris" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 28), accompanied by her plush toy monkey, Charles. She arrives in Paris to spend a day at the Fisher's household before being sent off to her grandmother, Patience Arbuthnot, for Henrietta's mother has passed away and her newly married older sister has left her father, Colonel Mountjoy, "helpless: it had seemed highly

natural that Mrs Arbuthnot should take Henrietta on" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 33). Much like Bowen's last orphaned protagonist, Eva, these children are left to their own devices, only to be muddied by adults' confusing and contradictory efforts to at once tell the truth and protect them from it. The subject Henrietta is asked to avoid at all cost, that of Leopold's origin, becomes their main subject of discussion. It also, as Pearson underlines, offers some insight into Bowen's thoughts on cosmopolitanism. He writes:

> When Leopold responds to Henrietta's query about the place he would most like to visit, he pinpoints the distinction between the uprooted traveler and the traveler not yet sure of his origin: "where can you go if nobody knows you're born?" To put this question—quintessentially Bowen in its connotative saturation—another way, how does one register destinations without a sense of beginning, or seek general without particular being?
>
> Indeed, the combination of mobility and placed autonomy is what the well-traveled child Leopold, whom "journeys [do not] upset," so viscerally yearns for: not a static home in which to be grounded, but a place to be *from*, an origin to render his movements meaningful. (Pearson 94–95)

Cosmopolitan rootlessness void of a sense of origin is also problematized further in *Eva Trout*. While Leopold's story of origin, as others recall it, could be retrieved in one form or another, Jeremy's remains a mystery upon which Eva builds a fictive story of origin. Eva's and Jeremy's uprootedness; the life lived in various hotels in America, in the visual world of cinema, pointing at Eva's as well as Jeremy's inclination towards the visible; is constantly contested as she returns to England. This return to the native territory (which, after all is not so native to Eva, who was raised by foreign nannies and travelled most of her life) is contaminated with other dangers which become evident in Constantine's plea: "Get him a father. Wouldn't you […] Can you never take root?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 188).

There is a particular image of rootedness that stems from Eva's visit to Paris where she has, upon Constantine's suggestion, found a doctor for Jeremy. It is a view on their house "with its white doves and weathered jalousies, bound round by a patriarchal wisteria" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 238). Eva goes from Constantine's patriarchal advice to take root (by finding a father to her son) to this house that is "bound round by a patriarchal wisteria" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 238), enforcing the idea that the "real" home is rooted in a patriarchal scheme of things.

Rootedness, as such, seems to be linked not only to a certain native territory, but also to its patriarchal undergrowth – its myths of traditional family structures and fixed gender roles, which Eva tries to escape from by replacing them with her fictive engagements. For her, to take root is to materialise the traditional patriarchal fiction: to *really* get married, settle down, reproduce, and take up the role of a wife and a biological mother.

It is interesting that Bowen chose none other than Constantine, a gay businessman who broke up Willy's sham of traditional marriage, to deliver that message, forcing Eva into the traditionally heteronormative role that he himself had refused. Eva's displacement in her native cultural/social environment is linked to Constantine's own uprootedness. He was rejected at least as much as he himself rejected this environment, living "*in vacuo*," in hotels, devoting much of his time to business in importation (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 41). Though Eva seems utterly alone, we nonetheless learn that aunts, uncles and cousins existed "but both sides of her family had violently quarrelled with Willy on account of Constantine, raising heaven and earth, writing insulting-denouncing letters and wielding threats, in efforts to get Eva from him, out of contamination range" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 210). These aunts and uncles appear at the end of the novel: Eva has invited them to send her off to her marriage/honeymoon, yet she then, in turn, rejects them:

> Mist-like phantoms, the aunts, uncles and cousins in passing by bent phantom eyes upon Eva. Cricket matches and flower shows. They suspected her of being who she was? – impossible to say. One signal only was wanted, one indication: she gave neither. One by one, she suffered them to evaporate. The last of the driblets of wilting flowers being no more, she then turned to Constantine. 'All they know about me is, that I am tall.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 296)

In *Eva Trout*, the clash between a patriarchal, traditional family model that corresponds to the ideas of rootedness, and a mobile, non-traditional family model, leaves Eva dislocated in between. Though Eva is welcomed by both her father's and her mother's family (one may assume, under the condition of being straight – which, as several readers have concluded, she is not), her loyalties lie with her father whose relationship with Constantine had been rejected by both families:

> After Willy's death, most of them had attempted to re-open relations with Eva, offering her a home, and so on. Consort with her father's enemies? Never. Yet, a pity. She had first been withheld from then forfeited her birthright of cricket matches and flower shows. Unaided, she was beset by the quandaries of the rootless rich, for whom each choice becomes a vagary… From afar, her study of happy families became what Iseult would have called 'consuming.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 210)

The situation Eva finds herself in; having to choose between the life of "the rootless rich" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 210) and the hospitality that is offered to her but not extended to her father and Constantine – and thus offered with a pinch of hostility, goes to show that the notion of home cannot be separated from discussions about identity. The troubling rootedness of the idea of home (a "real" home) in patriarchal power structures incites some female characters to seek home outside that rootedness: in cosmopolitan anonymous and hybrid spaces, in erratic changes of scenery, and in madness. Homelessness in those cases is a form of disconnection

from patriarchy and a divorce from a specific identity politics which Eva in her case dismissively reduces to "her birthright of cricket matches and flower shows" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 210).

Framing

The legibility of such homelessness, which is homelessness only by default (as the idea of "home" is burdened by expectations to be steady, to become a wife, and to find a father for one's son), is rendered possible through Bowen's careful *framing* of identity, which undermines efforts of reading certain identities as automatically more valid or natural than others. Nothing in *Eva Trout: Or the Changing Scenes* appears as a thing-in-itself, but always already a representation – something seen and to be seen. Thereby, the narrative casts a shadow over the possibility of reading identities as immobile, unchangeable, original – all we are given are mere representations or opinions, reflections across the page. The title, *Changing Scenes*, is itself the first announcement that we are about to enter not a place, but the place of representation (Greek *skene*, meaning tent or stage, *Chambers*). Whether one evokes Iseult's stillborn novels, Jeremy's "barely representational" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 209) sculpture of Eva's head, or Eva's trip to the National Portrait Gallery that she concluded by: "there was no 'real life'; no life was more real than this" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216) – the novel profoundly challenges easy identification – perception becomes also the question of *who* is perceiving *what*, *where*, *how,* and *why*.

The cosmopolitan Eve in the changing scenes of *Eva Trout* allows Bowen to explore the pre-existing conceptual borders on which identities are built and make us witness their dissolution. That is perhaps one of the reasons why so many readers feel utterly lost in *Eva Trout*, along with Eva Trout. In the novel, the experience of dissolution concerns the border between reality and fiction, and this dissolution is emerging through auro-visual technology (also in the larger sense, from *techne* "art" or "skill," *Chambers*). One of those border-dissolving instances is a phone call from Eva's former teacher, Iseult Smith, who, after having kidnapped Jeremy (rumoured to be fathered by the teacher's former husband), rings Eva up. Eva's reaction to the phone call is noteworthy: for a moment she is under the impression of dealing with an impersonator, or the dead, which perhaps is the ultimate form of impersonating, hijacking, haunting:

> Had this *been* Miss Smith, or was she dead and someone impersonating her? (For what reason: money?) X certainly had documented herself faultlessly: not a trick missed. But yet in another

> way she had fallen short, betraying an insufficient grasp of the character, its ins-and-outs. She had somehow falsified it. (…) A further possibility had occurred to her – the impersonator of Miss Smith had been Miss Smith, a deceased person purporting to be a living one. Not that she necessarily was in her coffin; no, she could well be walking around in Reading. ("Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off." You put a comma somewhere, then that made sense but was not so interesting.) But, she had given an impression of dissolution. (…) Or had all been a trick played by the wire? Alone with the voice, shut up with it, you are fooled by what can be its distortedness. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 212–13)

The dissolution of identity as something original, stable, is imagined through the idea of Miss Smith impersonating Miss Smith – an image that uproots the essence of being Miss Smith who is said to be dead but nevertheless "a deceased person purporting to be a living one" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 212). Bowen seems to suggest that in order to impersonate oneself, one must cease being oneself – make that corpse, that copy, and still be able to walk around in Reading. It furthermore suggests that one is never one, but always already the survivor of their past selves and also their future, and without those others one is nothing at all. Being (though *being* is perhaps not the right word but we have no other for such states of existence) the concatenation of those selves opens the possibility of reading which is the experience of impersonating: conjuring up enough past selves to have a sufficient representation of one's experience as oneself which also serves as the basis for reading others' experiences, but all those readings nevertheless are always already threatened by unavoidable misreadings, having "an insufficient grasp of the character, its ins-and-outs" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 212). The experience of reading, even if one is but reading oneself, is a profoundly literary experience that dissolves the essence of being as being here, being real.

Eva, reading Iseult's voice, warns us: "Alone with the voice, shut up with it, you are fooled by what can be its distortedness" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213).[3] As Bennett and Royle write, sentences are composed of "the concatenation of phonemic (or graphemic), spatial and other convulsions" and both reading and writing involve "intensive concatenation: concatenations of

[3] It reminds me of one of Bowen's own identity-forming blunders, partly due to the fact that Elizabeth's mother did not want to teach her to read (to avoid damaging her eyes), which made young Elizabeth be alone with her voice:

> I never looked up Sackville street without pleasure, for I was told it was the widest street in the world. Just as Phoenix Park, grey-green distance beyond the Zoo, was the largest park in the world. These superlatives pleased me only too much: my earliest pride of race was attached to them. And my most endemic pride in my own country was, for some years, founded on a mistake: my failing to have a nice ear for vowel sounds, and the Anglo-Irish slurred, hurried way of speaking, made me take the words 'Ireland' and 'island' to be synonymous. Thus, all other countries, quite surrounded by water took (it appeared) their generic name from ours. It seemed fine to live in a country that was a prototype. England, for instance, was 'an ireland' (or, a sub-Ireland) – an imitation. Then I learned that England was not even 'an ireland', having failed to detach herself from the flanks of Scotland and Wales. Vaguely, as a Unionist child, I conceived that our politeness to England must be a form of pity. (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 280)

events, people, faces, words, figures, and concatenations *between* these different elements" (Bennett and Royle 155). A comma, for instance, is a concatenation between two elements; it both ties and separates those elements. It is a pause, a breath taken or withheld, that by keeping your voice shut, shut up with the comma, alters meaning. Eva ponders: "'Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off.' You put a comma somewhere, then that made sense but was not so interesting" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213). This alteration also refers to a possible chance of graphemic distortedness in our reading that might occur here with "walking around in Reading" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213). To be walking around in reading is to imagine; to read is to imagine, which is precisely what we do in order to evoke Reading and Miss Smith in it.

The verb *imagine* descends from classical Latin *imāginãre, imāginārī* meaning "to form a mental image of, to represent to oneself in imagination, (of a mirror) to give an image of" (*OED*), from *imāgin-*, *imāgō*, meaning "image" (*OED*). For a seeing person, imagination is often first and foremost a visual experience as much as it is an experience open to all sorts of distortions and changes. A scene imagined is, in that sense, always already a changing scene. Our imagination is a concatenation of images, to which the novel adds its concatenations of fictions which will never be materialised. As Bennett and Royle write: "Novels are concatenations of […] multiplicitous fictions. Like movies, novels can only move by being still: both are constructed through the imperceptible interstices between frames, convulsions" (Bennett and Royle 155). "The novelist's relation to the novel is that of the director's relation to the film," Bowen writes in her "Notes on Writing a Novel" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 43). According to Bowen, writing a novel is much rooted in the cinematographic play of what is shown, what is made visible to characters and to the reader. None of those glimpses, or what Bowen has elsewhere called "verbal painting," are innocent images.[4]

Bowen's *Eva Trout*, in particular, is a study of framing in multiple senses of the word. To frame is to enclose in or as in a frame, to give structure to, shape, construct, or discipline (*OED*). *Frame* also evokes the literary processes of writing, thinking, imagining; to frame is "to devise, invent, fabricate (a rule, story, theory, etc.); to contrive (a plot, etc.); to put together, fashion, compose; to put into words, express; to formulate. To form or construct (a thought, a concept, an idea, etc.) in the mind; to conceive, imagine" (*OED*). Though its etymological

[4] As a child Elizabeth Bowen was dreaming of becoming an artist, and as young adult she attended the London County Council School of Art for two terms before she moved on to her other passion – writing. However, the traces of her first love, drawing, never left her art: "It seems to me that often when I write I am trying to make words do the work of line and colour. I have the painter's sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps the best) of my writing is verbal painting" (Glendinning 43), she said.

origins suggest benevolence (obsolete meaning: "to bestow or gain benefit or advantage," *OED*)[5] *to frame someone* or *to frame up* suggests sinister intent: "to concoct, fabricate, to fake, to conspire; to devise a scheme or plot with regard to someone" (*OED*). As a noun, *frame* used to refer to the universe, the heavens, the earth (*OED*) but also to the literary universe: "a literary composition" (*OED*).

Stills in *Eva Trout* seem to be purposefully piled up on pages from the beginning, and they are noticeably framed, that is, fabricated, shown in a certain way, by a certain seer, with certain agendas. The identities of objects presented through framing as well as the identities of those doing the presentation, are made to lose innocence in the eyes of the reader.

On the opening pages, the reader witnesses an outing, as Eva drives a carload of passengers (the Dancey family) to visit a castle. It is curious how the spectators inside the novel are shown the castle: "The four Dancey children, packed in the back seat, climbed over one another to see better (the view was *framed* by the Jaguar's left-hand windows)" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 3 emphasis mine). The castle is seen through a frame; it is also framed by Eva's incredulous fictions. Eva tells the Danceys this is the castle in which she would have had her honeymoon, when, in fact, there never was a honey to be mooned over. By doing so, Eva frames the mock castle, a folly, within her story, trying to condition the way the place and herself are seen and understood by the Dancey family. While Eva does most of the framing and framing up, she does not escape being framed herself.

Physically, she is said to be "big-framed" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 119), but she is also often seen through the eyes of other characters, thus, framed by their perceptions which assimilate her identity with irrationality and even folly. There is also a particular instance in which Eva appears literally framed by a threshold:

> Finally, she filled the door with herself in what was simply and plainly a cotton frock. Peonies were stamped over her, and a summer stand-in for the crocodile bag, plastic simulating white patent leather, was slung from her shoulder. All exposed parts of her were equally sunburned; her hair had bleached somewhat. Shod in red canvas beach shoes, she from toe to top was the local girl, enlarged – or could have been, but for being Eva. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 119)

Big-framed, wearing "red *canvas* beach shoes" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 119 emphasis mine) while appearing within the doorframe, Bowen makes Eva look like a *nearly* credible representation of a local girl to Iseult, the writer-figure of the novel. Eva is made to enter the

[5]*Frame* is formed similarly to "Old Frisian *framia* to further, advance, benefit, Middle Dutch *vrāmen* to be advantageous, profitable, or beneficial, to avail, Old Saxon *framōn* (only in the prefixed verb *giframōn* to accomplish; Middle Low German *vrāmen* to be advantageous or profitable, to further, advance, benefit), Old Icelandic *frama* to further, advance" (*OED*).

space that is marked by fiction-making, for the doorframe that frames Eva is Dickens's writing spot, Bleak House in Broadstairs, Kent.

On another plane, which is accessible to readers, Eva is framed (set up) by Bowen through the language that paints the first scene in the most shockingly artificial light, making Eva's stories unbelievable from the start. It also goes further in its pursuit of the artificial, as it makes visible the shift in our very experience of reading: the constant framing, forming, on both ends of the text (on writer's and reader's end) – illuminating that what we see is shown, presented, and what we envisage in this representation is framed, in its turn, by us. The literary space we enter is, thus, conceptually, always already a kind of a folly – an artefact for which we seek identity through framing. What we find on the first pages of *Eva Trout* is the frustration of not being given an object which we can believe in, but an artefact, a representation visibly framed as such:

> The castle, mirrored into the sheet of probably artificial water, did not look ancient. Nor did it look indigenous: though its setting was English, the pile resembled some Bavarian fantasy. Light-coloured, standing straight up out of the lake (there was no terrace) the façade showed with photographic distinctness in the now fading January afternoon. Its windows, many of which were balconied, one and all were made sightless by white shutters. Above the turreted roofline rose steep woods, sepia with winter: no smoke from any contorted chimney blurred the transparency of the trees. The only movement was in the foreground, where swans rippled the image cast on the water by zigzagging absently to and fro. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 11)

The non-castle, to which a non-trout drives a non-jaguar, is presented to us as having photographic value. What one expects to be a place is sensibly but a representation of a place. With "photographic distinctness," "sightless" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 11) white shutters, surrounded by sepia coloured woods, half-robotic swans, and little to no movement, the folly is reduced to an image on a sheet of paper, which is made even more evident by young Henry's wondering whether the castle has an inside at all (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 13), preceded by Mrs Dancey's inner monologue about Eva's potential lack of content. Here the linguistic nets become *not*s – Bowen's negative language; absence and negation are precisely the devices with which Bowen paints the folly. Nothing *is*, everything is "as though" – the folly is presented as a flicker of a place, a representation: "The inhospitable castle receded, already, into its ink-like woods, taking on a look of the immaterial – its reflection, even fainted out of the lake, over which was forming a frozen vapor. No pathos invested the scene. There was no afterglow – there had been no sun. And the swans were gone" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 15). The description even wipes out pathos from the potentially picturesque scene meant to awestrike the visitors and surprises the readers instead with this linguistic folly of absence and artifacts. Woods are

undermined as woods by being "ink-like"; the lake that is first said to contain "probably artificial water" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 11) is later almost evaporating off the page.

Images become literal later in the novel, after Iseult's phone call that gives Eva the impression of dissolution and she decides to visit the National Portrait Gallery, in order to find an answer to her question: "(…) what a slippery fish is identity; and what *is* it, besides a slippery fish?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213). She ends her journey with Alice-ish: "But, upstairs or down, they were all 'pictures'. Images. 'Nothing but a pack of cards?' – not quite, but nearly enough that to defeat Eva. She could no more – she retraced her way back to the foyer and sat down on an unfriendly bench. No, no getting through to them" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216).

Eva does not manage to get to the bottom of the notion of identity, but instead ends up at the "foyer," which is the entrance hall, but also, etymologically, the center. Foyer comes from classical Latin *focus*, meaning "hearth, fireplace" (*OED*). It also evokes a "point in geometry, focal point of a lens or mirror" (*OED*). Foyer is "home" in French. It is also an orphanage. Interestingly, Eva's journey to unravel the origin becomes the journey to the empty origin. What Eva had tried to find out – what identity is, ultimately, seems to have utterly escaped her. Everything has multiplied, complicated, as if done by mirrors, and then fallen flat, leaving her orphaned from the original meaning she sought after. Identity, Bowen seems to show, is never fully at home, graspable as a whole, and by unknown forces. There must be somebody looking in, and somebody/something to be looked at – none of them innocently casting a gaze, or yielding to the gaze of the other, as Eva's trip to the National Portrait Gallery demonstrates: "They were on show only. Lordlily suffering themselves to be portrayed, they'd presented a cool core of resistance even to the most penetrating artist. The most martial extroverts, even, nursed their mysteries. Each was his own affair, and he let you know it. Nothing was to be learned from them (if you expected learning that nothing *was* to be learned)" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216).

Dissolution

It seems that one is always already orphaned from one's identity as a whole, and yet we read ourselves and others. In *Eva Trout*, one's vision is distorted not only by the complexities inherent to reading (which is always already an act of framing), but also by the dissolution of borders between authenticity and artifact, presence and absence, local and global home, in the globalized technologically enhanced world.

While Eva's house, Cathay, appears like a body going through convulsions,[6] characters' bodies are, on several occasions, described as hollow, artificial, and mindless. As Bennett and Royle write:

> Characterological immobilities or absences of thought run through *Eva Trout:* Eric habitually returns to rooms, for example, 'as though not conscious' of having left them; and Eva's effect on Professor Holman includes symptoms such as atrophy, failure or inability to think, paralysis, abeyances, lacunae. Such absences or abeyances of thought also seem to mark the body as in some sense fictional because uninhabited. On a number of occasions in *Eva Trout,* the body becomes a simulacrum of the body, empty or artificially constructed: Iseult's movements, for example, 'were those of a marionette', she weeps and stays still, 'a carcase'; and when Eva is shaken by Eric her body moves like a rag doll. (Bennett and Royle 141)

Eva is seen by other characters as closed off. Eva's teacher, Iseult, calls her "a walking monument" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 96) while Henry, Eva's fake fiancé, makes a similar allusion while they visit the castle. Henry says Eva looks "like a statue" and even an "Iron Maiden" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 258) – a torture cabinet with a spike-covered hollow interior. To other characters, Eva appears as a shell of a person.

Constantine is perceived as hardly human after, one can but suppose, several plastic surgeries. Upon meeting him to discuss Eva's immediate fate, Iseult comments on Constantine's artificial youth, gazing back from his "almost anonymous" sagless immobile face that seemed "like alabaster or indeed plastic, not quite opaque" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 31). As Iseult suspects, this "unhaunted-looking" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 31) late-20th century Dorian Gray, with "a water-colourist's grey-blue" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 31) eyes, is also shadowed by "youth's most dreadful residuum: youthful cruelty" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 31). We are told: "Nothing authenticated him as a "living" being. A figure cut from some picture but now pasted on to a blank screen. To be with him was to be *in vacuo* also" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 40–41). The modified human with an unreadable face, leaves his fellows *in vacuo* – not knowing how to interpret or respond to a body that refuses the reading of its age and emotions. With such closed-off characters, Bowen's last novel sends us down to the eerie rabbit hole of the Uncanny Valley:

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[6] Cathay is said to be "a house of character" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 78); to its new inhabitant, the house recalls "a knocked about doll-house" with "dramatic rooms" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 80) while her "Wicked Guardian," Constantine, calls it "a *bois dormant*" that has "faded from human memory" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 103). Everything in Cathay seems to be out of order, giving off the impression of the house being a body of a large living organism. Its toilets give out "cataclysmic" roars (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 81), its tarnished tap, Bowen writes, "coughed twice then had a hemorrhage of dark rusted water" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 81). The simple act of ringing a doorbell is interpreted in terms of firing up bodily defenses: "The bell sounded angered—no doubt by the assumption, indeed Eva's, that like almost all else in Cathay it was out of order. In return Cathay, long untroubled, was appalled by the bell—the stygian service quarters, most affected, went on as though stung by a hornet. Elsewhere, the baronial woodwork crepitated; vibration made any electric candles left in their sockets between the antlers appear to flicker, as might the genuine kind" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 102).

> Glass-built stores, floor upon floor, were transparent ant-heaps; through their whirling doors gusted out renditions of sleigh bells. Stores cast slabs of synthetic daylight on to the sidewalks: not a soul was unseen. In or out, being buffeted bothered nobody: phlegmatic masses of people, flowing like lava, contrasted with the aerial agitation. The hundreds now in two-way procession exhibited not more than three makes of face, as though with regard to this city and its environs the invention of the Almighty had given out. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 139–40)

Eva Trout's world can give its readers a strange feeling about the world we, today's readers, have inherited. Its shifting scenes and turbulent homeless heroin fail to appease us. The novel repels nostalgic returns to the safe topography of home, rooted in our vision of the place in the past, imagined, as Bowen suggests, through fiction.[7] The world to which Eva is written down does not convey rootedness, and this goes beyond the eccentricity of her family[8] – the whole places have become, in some respects, global, hybrid, artificial. Home in *Eva Trout* can no longer be seen as a miniature clearly rooted and localizable world in itself. The effects of urbanization, globalization, and technological progress are shown to haunt the very idea of locality of a home through objects that override the originality of a local home. Such is, for instance, the case of floral air spray that superficially freshens and invades Anapoupolis' family apartment (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 146) or the mighty electronics Eva crowds her house with:

> Outstanding examples of everything auro-visual on the market this year, 1959, were ranged round the surprised walls: large-screen television set, sonorous-looking radio, radio-gramophone in a teak coffin, other gramophone with attendant stereo cabinets, 16-millimetre projector with screen ready, a recording instrument of B.B.C. proportions, not to be written off

[7] In "The Bend Back," Bowen writes: "[…] we cull the past from fiction rather than history, and that art, out of the very necessity to compose a picture, cannot but eliminate, edit – and so, falsify. […] As things are, the past is veiled from us by illusion – our own illusion. It is that which we seek. It is not the past but the idea of the past that draws us" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 57–58).

[8] The Trout family conveys rootlessness and hybridity which, as Pearson shows, are associated with cosmopolitanism:

> […] to be 'international,' culturally migrant, or cosmopolitan has typically been associated with being ephemeral, with being up in the air, and with thinking of global space in terms of theoretical abstractions. Defenders of the emergent postcolonial nation-state such as Tim Brennan and Pheng Cheah have repeatedly, and justifiably, cautioned that ideals of 'migrancy' and 'hybridity' reflect a globalization from above that 'reviles modernist detachment' but sees national particulars through the 'ironic detachment [of a] cosmic, celebratory pessimism'. Their point is that cosmopolitanism, even in its new guises, takes a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of natural culture' while promoting a 'perennial immigration [and] rhetoric of wandering' – a 'cosmopolitan embrace [that amounts to] a flattening of influences…on the same plane of value. National, and culturally particular affiliation is figured as rootedness, as tangible and physical territory, while cosmopolitanism, an 'unsettling generality', is associated with and airy and intangible, merely conceptual sense of place." (Pearson 15)

Eva Trout, in particular, incorporates both hybridity and mobility. Though there are multiple references to Eva's hybridity as being hardly human, or a hermaphrodite (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 48); the most evident reference to hybridity is her name that refers to both the biblical first woman and to a fish – referring to contradictory stories of human evolution. The wealthy Trout family is vastly mobile, much like anadromous trout in the wild. Willy Trout is described as a businessman travelling internationally, which also made him, in a sense, doubly "airy and intangible" (Pearson 15) due to his absence in Eva's life, even before his untimely death. Eva herself is shown to be constantly in transit: "in incomplete control of a powerful bicycle" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 106), travelling internationally, or driving her Jaguar.

> as a tape recorder. Other importations: a superb typewriter shared a metal-legged table with a cash register worthy to be its mate; and an intercom, whose purposes seemed uncertain, had been installed. What looked like miles of flex matted the parquet. Electronics had driven the old guard, the Circe armchairs, into a huddle in the middle of the floor: some were covered in dustsheets and some not. Glaring in upon all this, the June sun took on the heightened voltage of studio lighting. All windows were shut. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 124–25)

All the gadgetry makes the very notion of presence as "being here now" obsolete, for what does it mean to be *here* in this auro-visual universe that projects images and voices from elsewhere? Through those machines, Cathay becomes the representation of what we now consider modern living where "everything auro-visual on the market" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 124), machines of various kind and power, dominate our sense of being at home, which becomes the experience of being multiple and being absent at once. In that respect, there is perhaps no better time to read *Eva Trout* than now, in the advanced stages of a global pandemic when our being at home is dominated by auro-visual technological devices.

Being at home in a globalized, tech-savvy world, is not the experience of rootedness, but rather an experience of dissolution of boundaries. It is not only the matter of national boundaries, which are already mostly conceptual: that is, they do not necessarily correspond to natural boundaries such as seashores or mountain ranges that not only virtually but also physically arrest movement and define natural communities (the fish that inhabit the English Channel do not wonder whether they are in France or in England). Crossing those natural boundaries, even in the form of bringing bats and pangolins out of their natural habitat into the heart of a bubbling city market, are signs and symptoms of urbanized, globalized ways of living.

Eva's wardrobe alone represents this ruinous border-crossing: "Then Eva walked out of the post office, looking *affairée*, larger than life in the frame of the humble door. She wore a Robin Hood hat and an ocelot coat and carried a mighty crocodile handbag" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 24). The outfit alone, complemented by a "long pheasant-feather [that] quivered like an antenna" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 24) and a metaphorical wildcat – her Jaguar, is a chimera composed of animals from different continents. Ocelots are native to the Americas, pheasants to Asia, and crocodiles live in the tropics in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Australia. With these corpses from all over the world, quite literally on her shoulders, Eva is made to appear "larger than life in the frame of the humble door" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 24). Natural borders become irrelevant in the globalized space which humans have made their oyster. As Connor writes: "When we say 'globalization', we mean that world is more and more, and perhaps more and more pinchingly becoming one world. But perhaps we also name this strange sense that

'the world' is becoming more palpable than the 'actual' places and regions in which we may have our being" (Connor 185).

What is the world/one world and how to read it? It is not only the intensification of border-crossings that morphs the life on Earth more sensibly into one connected earthball, but also a danger of standardization and synchronization that lurks within that idea of oneness of the world.[9] Bowen's mistrustful approach towards unquestioned perception of things, and towards oneness of identity, encourages readers to question if not the agenda, then at least the ambivalent forces of the idea of "one world" that globalization processes have underlined. The world can only appear to us as a representation, since from our singular human viewpoint, we cannot perceive the Earth and its ongoing processes as a whole, and we cannot perceive the humanity as a whole. Looking at the world (whatever the "world" means; the planet and its inhabitants or the sum of human communities) requires an onlooker (be it human, in plural or in singular, with or without man-made machines) that would not pretend to lose its/his/her/their bias, speak from the heavens or from some cosmopolitan void. As Pearson explains, what Bowen shared with cosmopolitan approaches influenced by postcolonial and transnational perspectives is

> the awareness that living and thinking 'beyond' the homeland begins with the understanding that 'home' is not easily understood in terms of fixed space and linear or sequential time, and that one's 'country' signifies incongruent and deferred associations between political sovereignty, shared territory, and historical or cultural identity. Therefore, it is not a candidate for something that one transcends or emerges or graduates from, even as one becomes separated from it. (Pearson 73)

Conclusion

Homes in Bowen's fiction are, as Pearson suggests, both psychically vital as well as contingent and volatile; they are "as dearly needed as they are forbidding, as resistant to completion as they are to negation" (Pearson 82). The slipperiness shown to be inherent to identity offers ways to challenge the idea of rootedness of a home in strictly regional or

[9] Connor turns to Michel Serres' account of building a technological masterworld where species inhabit different and noncommunicative Umwelts:

> 'If the ensemble of signals of all kinds is accessible as signs by the totality of living beings, our various devices tend to the reconstruction of this ensemble, like the sum of the habitats – our own, or each individual of our own – which each species carves out from its environment. Are we thus tending, at least asymptotically, towards a global reality, an integral of these spaces and times, the niches and durations of each species and by unifying them, to the beginning of integration?' (…) Serres proposes that we are some way advanced into the creation of what he calls a 'Biosom', which composes 'the complex, intersecting global spacetime of the ensemble of all living creatures of this world.'(Connor 185)

patriarchal ideals, but also it makes one suspicious of viewpoints from nowhere. Bowen's cosmopolitanism unites the importance of local and global forces in one's reading of *home*, through her inquisitive treatment of the notion of identity. Identity becomes a tool for thinking home in its complex economic, cultural, political, geographical, and ecological contexts, and this contextualisation itself allows the reader to perceive certain dominant traits proper to an idea of home as particular and peculiar instead of being unquestionably universal, vital, or natural.

Such, for instance, is shown to be the case with the patriarchal underbelly of Bowen's fictional homes that becomes visible and strange through her depiction of male characters' feeling of dislocation in anonymous and hybrid cosmopolitan spaces occupied by women or in houses taken over by women; as well as through female characters' trouble with making a home outside of the ideal of rooted patriarchal home be seen as a proper home – rendering such women virtually homeless. The legibility of such homelessness which is homelessness only by default, comes from Bowen's careful treatment of identity, seen not as something permanent, natural, and original, but rather as always already framed, moulded, changing and changeable, which undermines automatic considerations of certain identities as self-evidently valid or natural. Home's links to patriarchy thus can be made visible and reconsidered through such experience of reading identity.

Bowen as a transnational writer is sensitive to both cosmopolitan as well as global border-crossings – the accelerations of which can be most evidently caught in *Eva Trout*. Through Eva, a wealthy Westerner, the reader is shown that humans, certain groups more than others, have made themselves "at home" on a global scale. Being too much at home in a globalized, tech-savvy world, is not an experience of rootedness, but rather an experience of dissolution of boundaries that, today, we know, have led to disastrous consequences such as the decline and extinction of species and climate change. Bowen's careful approach towards universal, disembodied perception, and towards oneness of identity, encourages one to question if not the agenda, then at least the ambivalent forces of the idea of "one world" that globalization processes have underlined.

Having now explored the links between patriarchy and the notion of home, cosmopolitan visions of home, as well as the links between globalization and the notion of home in Bowen's fiction and non-fiction, it becomes evident that our projects about ecology and climate change must be made sensitive to our biased view on places we call our home, for *home* is not innocent and free of our concepts and power structures, just as we are not free, that is, independent from the effect homes (both conceptually and via our individual experience of

a specific home) have on our identities. Therefore, applying the idea of unquestioned home on our approaches of planetary ecological crises will be counter-productive, as our recent history of homemaking – the Western success of modernization of living dependent on globalization processes, is at the source of the climate crisis. As Bowen shows, reading home on a local and global scale is inseparable from the queries about identity. For such queries, we must come down, down to our bodies and down to earth – in such a humbled position, we find Beckett's vulnerable earthbound Molloy.

1.2 Mollify: Identity, Place, and View in Beckett's *Molloy*

To mollify is to make soft, to lessen the severity of, but also to appease, soothe. A certain need for gentleness within the very name of the novel, *Molloy*, accompanies the struggle of the extremely vulnerable narrator who, while still being of this world, claims that to decompose is to live too.

To decompose is to disintegrate, rot; but the word (from French *decomposer*, *dé-*+ *composer*, meaning "to compose," *OED*) also recalls the narrator's relation to words and language structures that fail him and that he fails to recall in the very act of storytelling; the latter, thus, becomes a decomposing narrative that describes another failure – Molloy's attempt to return to his origin, to his mother, to settle some matters with her for once and for all (yet we are not told which matters). Both the return to linguistic mastery as well as achieving a certain closure with his own origin, his mother, fail, making Molloy quite homeless, uprooted, in his language and in the world. Yet, Molloy's inabilities also set the stage for observing the links between material space, politically, culturally, and economically (over)determined space, and their relation to the notion of identity.

Molloy, as an extremely vulnerable man who fails to integrate himself into society and to understand and adapt to its standards, serves as a cracked mirror to those standards. What interests me in particular, is how Molloy's vulnerability challenges standards based on mastery, through his lack of autonomy (as he is not the master of his body, mind, language, or his circumstance) and failure to adhere to a sense of superiority of his gender and his species (as he no longer looks or lives like the master species/gender, but rather like an animal). I will show that the violence and dispossession that saturate Molloy's existence, also echo a certain ecological violence and dispossession portrayed in the novel. Molloy's humility – his utter poverty, but also closeness to the literal earth and to death, offers an embodied view on the complex entanglements of place and identity, in a world and through words that have stopped making sense; a view of a native stranger, whose survival depends on the others' ability to understand the need for acceptance of vulnerability in a M(m)an's world and beyond it. This reading of the first part of *Molloy* will advocate the porosity of identity in its multiple forms, and an understanding of vulnerability of lifeforms, upon which a humbler sense of personal and national identities could be built.

Soften

One is naturally prone to softening. To decompose is to soften; to rot until nothing else but the bits too hard to soften away in the immediate future remain, and they too, in time, soften. Softness is also to be feared as the antidote to the discourses on mastery and power according to which one lives in a hard, rough world. To those who believe in the roughness of the world only to be tamed by raw force and mastery, there is overly much tenderness in notions such as "soft;" therein one can find hints of vulnerability, or *worse*, femininity.[10] One of the most recent examples of discourses that seek to dispel empathy and encourage toxic masculinity as "the tough reality" of the rough world we inhabit could be found in the vocabulary of Donald Trump's supporters across the globe. Softness is presented as an antithesis to authority. The notions "crybaby" and "snowflake" have been frequently used against Trump's detractors. Janet McIntosh compares the similarity of those terms' usage to the language of Drill Instructors in the United States Marine Corps. She writes:

> In both cases, someone in the role of "ritual elder" uses language as a punitive and didactic cudgel to weed out the weak (whether literally, from the military, or more symbolically, from cultural citizenship/the nation) while signifying that the interlocutor needs to "grow up" or "man up" by attenuating their sensitivity to both suffering and linguistic meaning. The ideal citizen then has a calloused quality, in the model of military masculinity, ready to face harsh realities and to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others. (McIntosh 74)

Molloy, written after the Second World War, is in some ways rooted in Beckett's experience of the war and the rise of Nazi Germany and their anti-Jewish propaganda that Beckett had witnessed in the pre-war years during his stay in Germany. The Second World War also recalls the experience of ethnic cleansing, of "weeding out" unwanted minorities, most infamously practiced by the Nazi regime, to which Beckett gives his own example – that of Molloy. Beckett's nearly sexless, nearly forceless wandering Molloy is shown to be an easy prey for a law enforcement officer whose task seems to consist in cleansing public spaces of certain presences, presences such as Molloy's that portray irreparable vulnerability.

[10] Femininity is often even aesthetically linked to softness: the softness of one's features, voice, and manner of interacting with the world. Yet the softness that could be perceived as gentleness also borders on softness as vulnerability. In the context of "homework economy," as it is developed by Richard Gordon, which names jobs for women and mostly done by women, Donna Haraway evokes the link between vulnerability and feminisation (in her "A Cyborg Manifesto"). She writes: "To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labor force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and of the paid job that make a mockery of a limited workday; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 38–39). Within a patriarchal value-system, softness, it seems, vacillates between the aesthetic appeal of gentleness and its potential to be subdued, used, and abused.

Molloy explains that "there are not two laws […] one for the healthy, another for the sick, but one only to which all must bow, rich and poor, young and old, happy and sad" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 16). His inability to bow to the common law is shown in a segment where a sergeant finds him resting on his bicycle in a position that outperforms the regular fatigue of walkers: "[…] my arms on the handlebars, my head on my arms" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 16). His exhaustion, which is not that of mere passing weakness but that of infirmity is not soothed with attention or help, but it is instead kept in check by the law enforcement, that is, kept outside of the public view: "I felt the faces turning to look after us, calm faces and joyful faces, faces of men, of women and of children. I seemed to hear, at a certain moment, a distant music. I stopped, the better to listen. Go on, he said. Listen, I said. Get on, he said. I wasn't allowed to listen to the music" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 17).

The arrestation makes visible the efforts to invisibilize manifestations of suffering which set up "a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at the end of the day, and roll on the ground" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 20). Molloy, who is shown rolling on the ground later in the novel, cannot respond to the demands made in the unwritten laws of decency, and enforced by the sergeant whose unempathetic treatment of Molloy falls in line with the kind of callous military masculinity McIntosh evokes. Yet, it is interesting to see that the arrestation is undermined by what it tries to efface from these public grounds: Molloy's infirmity.

On the one hand, Molloy's inability to remember his name and address makes it difficult to prosecute him according to the law. On the other hand, it is Beckett's humorous plot that decorates the scene with ridicule, thereby minimising the demands made in the name of the law. As the sergeant asks for Molloy's identification papers, Molloy, in his confusion, provides a different kind of paper:

> Ah my papers. Now the only papers I carry with me are bits of newspaper, to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool. Oh I don't say I wipe myself every time I have a stool, no, but I like to be in a position to do so, if I have to. Nothing strange about that, it seems to me. In a panic I took this paper from my pocket and thrust it under his nose. The weather was fine. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 16)

Molloy's vulnerability – both his physical soft spots and his being a bit "soft" in the head, become a force in its own right, against which the forces of law enforcement are quite powerless. Molloy explains: "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. It is better to leave things to the police. I don't

know. If it is unlawful to be without papers, why did they not insist on my getting them. Because that costs money and I had none?" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 20).

Molloy's arrestation dwells in parallel with other conditions, those of the natural world – the outside weather, and those of his inner weather, both inciting hilarity, horror, or philosophical insight. The latter seems to be brought forth not by strength, courage, or joy, but by utter vulnerability: "[…] it is only since I have ceased to live that I think of these things and the other things. It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life, and that I judge it, as it is said that God will judge me, and with no less impertinence. To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don't torment me, but one sometimes forgets" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 21).

Decomposition becomes more than a merely biological notion; it seems to represent the very process of thinking in a language when one no longer considers language as a default mode of reasoning. What is visible with Molloy, is that becoming conscious of being vulnerable can alter one's relationship to language and meaning. Within Molloy's alive yet actively decomposing body with which he perceives his environment, language too is shown to rot – meanings decompose and words disappear: "I've forgotten how to spell too, and half the words" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 4). Yet, this gradual oblivion is also linked to a heightened sensitivity to sound:

> Yes, the words I heard, and heard distinctly, having quite a sensitive ear, were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning, and this is probably one of the reasons why conversation was unspeakably painful to me. And the words I uttered myself, and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of the intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect. And this is perhaps one of the reasons I was so untalkative, I mean this trouble I had in understanding not only what others said to me, but also what I said to them. It is true that in the end, by dint of patience, we made ourselves understood, but understood with regard to what, I ask of you, and to what purpose? And to the noises of nature too, and of the works of men, I reacted I think in my own way and without desire of enlightenment. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 45)

Molloy appears to be becoming the creature appreciative of pure sounds instead of pure reason, which puts him in a strange position of writing and thinking in spite of language rather than masterfully in or through language.[11] Visions and sounds, and above all, feelings, enter into play, making Molloy's reading of language, but also, his reading of the world around him, quite interesting. His regression from uttering words "with an effort of intelligence" to comparing

[11] Molloy's descriptions wander into the unknown, and beyond what he can say: "From there he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these selfsame hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of colour and then from other signs for which there are no words, nor even thoughts" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 5–6).

words to "the buzzing of an insect" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 45) at once effaces meaning as well as fills words with meaning that one cannot quite pin down. There is a spark of inventiveness in the softening or decomposition of meanings – a potential of reading something anew through the inability to read as one ought to. To Molloy, meaning becomes not lost (he is, after all, the narrator), but rather astray:

> To say I stumbled in impenetrable darkness, no, I cannot. I stumbled, but the darkness was not impenetrable. For there reigned a kind of blue gloom, more than sufficient for my visual needs. I was astonished this gloom was not green, rather than blue, but I saw it blue and perhaps it was. The red of the sun, mingling with the green of the leaves, gave a blue result, that is how I reasoned. But from time to time. From time to time. What tenderness in these little words, what savagery. But from time to time I came on a kind of cross-roads, you know, a star, or circus, of the kind to be found in even the most unexplored of forests. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 77)

Molloy's attempt to theorize colours he sees evokes issues with reading objects from our human viewpoint; it refers to numerous queries in communities of philosophers and physicists over physical bodies and their qualities that challenge our intuitive beliefs about objects and lights being coloured (colour being their physical quality). "The green of the leaves" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 77) that Molloy evokes, is, through a physicist's gaze, an interpretation of the reflective properties of the surface of the leaf and the light that illuminates it. Molloy expresses doubts about his visual sensation of colour: "I was astonished this gloom was not green, rather than blue, *but I saw it blue and perhaps it was*" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 77 emphasis mine), leaving us ponder what do we name when we point out the green of the leaves, the red of the sun, or the blue of the gloom?

Molloy's hesitant analysis of the "blue gloom" also feels like a double reference to an emotional state of the onlooker, egging us on to consider the importance of the perceiver. We know that from a purely physiological standpoint, our sight differs between individuals and between species. In the case of humans, and especially humans like Molloy whose bodily forces are already decomposing, the body of the perceiver is not the only element we ought to consider as an imperfect tool for perception – there is also language. "Blue" is not a mere indicator of colour; it is not innocent. As William Gass notes, while reading *Molloy*: "Beckett is a very blue man […]" (Gass 9), clearly not referring to Beckett's extra-terrestrial skin-color. He writes:

> […] a random set of meanings has softly gathered around the word the way lint collects. The mind does that. A single word, a single thought, a single thing, as Plato taught. We cover our concepts, like fish, with clouds of net. Cops and bobbies wear blue. We catch them and connect. Imagined origins reduce the sounds of clash and contradiction, as when one cries out blue murder in the street. There's the blue for baby boy, the blue of blue sky laws, blue for jeans,

> blue for hogs. The coal fish, a salmon, the glut-herring, a kind of trout, are said to have blue-backs and are named so in Yorkshire, Maryland, Virginia, Maine. (Gass 7)

"Blue" is a slippery fish. William Gass also suggests that blue is most suitable as the colour of our interior life: "Whether slick light sharp high bright thin quick sour new and cool or low deep sweet thick dark soft slow smooth heavy old and warm: blue moves easily among them all, and all profoundly qualify our states of feeling" (Gass 76). Molloy, who looks back on his life as a "long confused emotion" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 21), is also a blue man – a man living on the verge of a suicide; on the verge of the death that he cannot bring to give himself (if one thinks along the lines of the French expression "*se donner la mort*") and the vitality he can no longer reach. Stuck on his mindscape, in his blue gloom, he has developed an almost child-like interest towards words and their effect, something that Bowen also attaches to the mind of the writer.[12]

Molloy's instant affection towards "these little words" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 77) spills joy across the page, and yet there is no rational source for his fixation on "from time to time" but some sort of aesthetic pleasure that descends from we know not where. The idiom "from time to time" translates intervals. Meaning "once in a while," it breaks continuity as well as establishes it, for to do something once in a while is to repeat the action at intervals. Such a strange, broken up continuity that echoes in "from time to time" recalls the very narrative technique that is Molloy's, which consists in fragmentary recollections of stories and meanings – his nostalgic returns to subjects which he fails to pin down for once and for all.

"From time to time" also possesses some mollifying qualities: as a kind of reflective pause in the text, it evokes tenderness both through its repetitive sound as well as its imagery of rocking one from "time" to "time" – both words being identical, and yet, sending us elsewhere, for the first "time" is not the time of the second "time." While Molloy expresses his trouble with understanding people and understanding his own responses, he is strangely alert to those kinds of literary pauses, such as "from time to time." He is, one can see, not without a sense of style, as he manages to pick up on tenderness that is not systematically given through meaning, but also through rhythm or sound.

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[12] Bowen writes:

> The childishness is necessary, fundamental – it involves a perpetual, errant state of desire, wonder, and unexpected reflex. The writer, unlike his non-writing adult friend, has no predisposed outlook; he seldom observes deliberately. He sees what he did not intend to see; he remembers what he does not seem wholly possible. Inattentive learner in the schoolroom of life, he keeps some faculty free to *veer* and wonder. His is the roving eye. (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63)

That Molloy is not the master of his language is shown through his difficult interactions with others, such as Louse whose parrot Molloy claims to understand better than its owner, or the sergeant who asks for his name and papers. Yet, he is not insensitive to linguistic meaning. His increasing vulnerability that is not merely affecting his physical well-being but also his linguistic skills, challenges the language itself. It makes the text a (barely) living thing that seeks its limits and potential, perhaps indefinitely.

His notions, which, as he declares, "weren't notions like yours" but "all spasm, sweat and trembling, without an atom of common sense or lucidity" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 62–63) are tightly linked to bodily efforts and emotions which differentiate his language use from the discourses that aim for objectivity and rationality: as if meaning would systematically, obediently, transfer through words to the reader and be perceived in one way only. Molloy's state of vulnerability offers an insight into the ways in which one's physical existence structures one's sense of the world:

> And my eye too, the seeing one, must have been ill-connected with the spider, for I found it hard to name what was mirrored there, often quite distinctly. And without going so far as to say that I saw the world upside down (that would have been too easy) it is certain I saw it in a way inordinately formal, though I was far from being an aesthete, or an artist. And of my two eyes only one functioning more or less correctly, I misjudged the distance separating me from the other world, and often I stretched out my hand for what was far beyond my reach, and often I knocked against obstacles scarcely visible on the horizon. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 45)

Molloy's viewpoint is moulded by his bodily vulnerability; it is quite literally out of joint with its environment, leaving him stumbling against objects. His body lends itself to such misreadings, however, it is that same vulnerable body that also, by contrast, shows that the viewpoint of the powerful, the able-bodied, is easily considered a default mode of reading the world – as if the able-bodied did not misread, structure, affect what they read, as if they were not, in their turn, affected by the structures – bodily as well as mental, linguistic, cultural, political, etc., into which their existence had been planted. Molloy's vision is crooked, his head is "soft," and his mind is blue – he is not the perfect measure of reality; however, his particularities also call into question the neutrality of the able-bodied gaze.

As Donna Haraway explains in her 1988 essay entitled "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," all eyes are "active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific *ways* of seeing, that is, ways of life" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 583) – pointing at the embodied nature of all vision, as well as at the tendencies of effacement of such nature for the sake of "objectivity" or what she calls "the unmarked gaze" or again "the god trick". She writes: "This is the gaze that mythically

inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 581). Although Haraway's essay focuses on "the unmarked positions of Man and White" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 581), it kills the innocence of all vision: "Vision is *always* a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 585). Her concept of situated knowledges demands sensitivity towards power relations involved in the processes of knowledge production, and also language practices that would not allow language and bodies "into the bliss of organic symbiosis" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 579); instead, she writes: "Like 'poems,' which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 595).

Molloy's view, embodied in his position of the dispossessed underdog on the verge of death, in his utter vulnerability, allows Beckett to challenge the bliss of organic symbiosis between language and bodies. Molloy asks: "My life, my life, now I speak of it as of something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that?" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 31). Molloy who is biologically alive, yet outside the world, if one considers the world to be human society, experiences a state of vulnerable, hardly visible existence that challenges the frame of thinking imposed by his language. As Timothy Morton writes: "(…) language, and in particular grammar, is fossilized human thoughts" (Morton, *Humankind* 4), and, like humans themselves, language and grammar are not all-encompassing and objective tools. "I cannot speak the ecological subject, but this is exactly what I am required to do" (Morton, *Humankind* 4), Morton writes. Molloy, who labels himself "the last of [his] foul brood, neither man nor beast" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 15), perceives himself not only as someone fallen out of the world (if the world means society) but also fallen short of language through which he would be able to identify himself. Mimicking Morton here, I suggest that Molloy often finds himself at a point where he must speak about himself, but he cannot speak about himself, as he is required to do. His language does not, cannot, accommodate his state and his state of mind that veers into a grey area between living and dying, identity and its dispersal.

Identity, as its etymological origins suggest, is rooted in monotony, in "continual sameness" (*OED*), or simply put, it is rooted, while Molloy is not. He is subjected to continuous wandering and change, from bad to worse. Molloy's demands on language for a tense that could describe a life that is at the same time over and goes on could be compared to those of

others at the margins of society, as expressed by Haraway, in her "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (1985) where Haraway uses cyborg imagery to rethink tools such as language.

As she explains: "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 67). A cyborg does not have a stable holistic identity; a cyborg combines the organic body and that of a machine, and as such, it "skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 8). Instead, through cyborg imagery, "nature" and "culture" are reworked and "one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 9). Haraway's cyborg imagery undermines one's ability to form wholes from parts, "including those of polarity and hierarchical domination" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 9) as Haraway's cyborg does not look back on myths of origin: "The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 9). Cyborg imagery is shown to be wary of holism, words such as "affinity" and "connection" are relevant instead. Its power lies in the subversion of organic wholes and the certainty of what counts as "nature" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 11–12); ultimately the manifesto subverts "the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 57), and it offers an interesting view on the belief in perfect translatability, in "the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 57). Interestingly, Haraway says that "cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 57) struggling against the idea of perfect communication.

While Molloy insists on the necessity of stories ("What I need now is stories, it took me a long time to know that, and I'm not sure of it," Beckett 9) he also evokes language's inability to serve as a tool for perfect communication: "(…) you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (…) To restore silence is the role of objects" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 9). Molloy, already a cyborg,[13] perceives the other noise, a sort of pollution within meaning, that accompanies

[13] Haraway writes that both in imagination and in practice, machines can be prosthetic devices (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 60) which are not seen as something entirely foreign but rather like intimate components or friendly selves. She also underlines our heightened sense of connection to tools. She writes: "Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 61). Molloy is shown to depend

language and that cannot be silenced within the system itself. Or in other words, he says, "whatever I said it was never enough and always too much. Yes, I was never silent, whatever I said I was never silent" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 30). That finds affinity, not strangely, with Derrida's words in "Force and Signification": "*Parler me fait peur parce que ne disant jamais assez, je dis aussi toujours trop*" [Speaking frightens me, for by saying to little, I also say too much] (Derrida, *L' Écriture et La Différence* 18).

The "too much," or in more Derridean terms – the supplement, could also be seen as noise. Through the act of speaking – even if one does say very little, one also gives in to noise, perhaps twice, if one is speaking out loud. Noise, which is a term usually reserved for machines and animals, for they are often considered as "without language," describes a sound that somehow fails to please the ear of its listener. Etymologically "disturbance, tumult, quarrel, unrest, bother" (*OED*), noise also names interference in a signal or "meaningless" material, a sort of surplus. It could also be understood in visual terms, as degradation of digital imagery, producing random variation of brightness or colour in images, subtly or severely altering the legibility of the image, or in some cases, adding to the image by producing a certain "mood" that alters the sense of the image, adding the artistic value to the glimpse captured. Noise is not a mere bother nor is it entirely devoid of meaning. As much as it might be seen to "disturb" the production or transfer of meaning, noise can also, savagely, from time to time, reveal it. To perceive that other noise in language, or what Derrida calls the supplement, is to recognize the impossibility of undisturbed universality, perfect translatability; and also to be ready to be out of tune in a reading and writing process – for error and erring both are open to meaning. As Sarah Wood, who believes "failure, in a certain sense, to be essential rather than incidental to thinking" (Wood 36) writes: "Reading activates voice. Mallarmé found that Poe had added something to language rather than cleaning something extrinsic away from it. Writing is part of a world that is not to be transcended, a world that is, as Claire Colebrook puts it: 'contaminated – *literally* – and for this reason it might be better to remain among the pollutants that have marked and marred us'" (Wood 33). Failure and erring (also in the sense "wandering") are the default mode of Beckettian writing; and by advocating noise –

on his bicycle for travel; it is only when he can no longer locate it that he begins to crawl. He gains physical autonomy through his relation to the bike (that is, by losing his autonomy as a "pure/mere" human): "I managed somehow. Being ingenious. Thus we cleared these difficult straits, my bicycle and I, together" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 12). However, this becoming cyborg is not a merely utilitarian relation, but rather a complex one in which "mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 36): "Dear bicycle, I shall not call you bike, you were green, like so many of your generation, I don't know why. It is a pleasure to meet it again. To describe it at length would be a pleasure. It had a little red horn instead of the bell fashionable in your days. To blow this horn was for me a real pleasure, almost a vice" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 12).

interruption, error and erring of meaning, it is an effective tool against practices of "neutral vision" and its effect on the worlds which they mould.

The world

> I heard the shepherd whistle, and I saw him flourishing his crook, and the dog bustling about the herd, which but for him would no doubt have fallen into the canal. All that through a glittering dust, and soon through that mist too which rises in me every day and veils the world from me and veils me from myself. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 24–25)

What is "the world"? As Steven Connor points out: "The word 'world' in fact derives from a Germanic root *wer* = man, and *ald* = age, the primary signification therefore being 'the age of man'. World signifies, therefore, not a place, or environment, but a span of existence (the time of your life)" (Connor 185).

The *OED* points out two early uses of the word in Christian contexts. The first conveys the concept of post-classical Latin *saeculum* as the temporal world and its duration, the second the concept of post-classical Latin *mundus,* meaning the physical world and its inhabitants, while the French *monde* covers both concepts. "World" is a confusing concept, not only because of its ambiguous links to place and time, but also because of its anthropocentric tendencies. By "world," we tend to mean the human world, the human race, or as the *OED* puts it: "human existence; a period of this," and also specific groups of humans, for instance – the fashionable society, in French, *le beau monde*. "My world," which also echoes in the trilogy, refers to a person's sphere of interest, action, thought, or environment from a more subjective stance. In Judaeo-Christian contexts, the world also names earthly, sinful or temporal, mundane affairs, interests, pursuits, and concerns associated with human existence on earth (*OED*) while expressions such as "another world" or "better world" refer to unearthly afterlife (destined for "good" humans). While it cannot be properly separated from its human-centred and religious affiliations, "world" also signifies the globe, the material universe, the cosmos (*OED*) and can be used to describe non-human structures through reductive notions such as the animal world (the animal kingdom). "World," though it can be applied to nonhumans and the entire material universe, still has a strong whiff of anthropocentrism about it, making some ecological thinkers abandon the notion altogether.

It is Heidegger's work on the subject that has captured the interest as well as the scorn of many. His famous "triple thesis: 'the stone is worldless [*weltlos*]; the animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]; man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]'" (Agamben, *The Open* 51) relies on the work of a Baltic German biologist, Jakob von Uexküll. Uexküll, whose research focused mainly on

invertebrates, developed the notion of *Umwelt* that refers to environment-worlds, sort of bubbles in which different species live. These environment-worlds are constituted only by the elements that interest the animal; elements that Uexküll calls "carriers of significance" (Agamben, *The Open* 40). According to Uexküll, each animal dwells in their own world, in their own *Umwelt*, and is incapable of entering "'into relation with an object as such,' but only with its own carriers of significance," which creates a sort of reciprocal blindness between different animals through their perceptual worlds that are "absolutely uncommunicating" (Agamben, *The Open* 42).

In Heidegger's triple thesis, "the animal," meaning all species but mankind, is reduced to instinctive behaviour only, and the animal "fundamentally lacks the possibility of entering into relation with the being that it itself is [ref. to consciousness] or with beings other than itself" (Agamben, *The Open* 54). Because the animal is ceaselessly driven by its instincts, it finds itself suspended between itself and its environment. Stuck in the middle, Heidegger's animal cannot really access itself, know itself, and it cannot access fully the world: therefore, it is poor in world.

Comically enough, this seems to be the condition of all of Beckett's human narrators in the trilogy. Molloy's description of "a glittering dust" or "mist" which rises in him every day and veils the world from him and veils him from himself (Beckett, *Three Novels* 24–25) recapitulates the sort of double-sided seclusion Heidegger proposes for all non-human species. In the last book of the trilogy, the narrator is described as literally confined to a kind of environment world – a jar with a menu attached to it, in what seems to be a restaurant or shop:

> Once a week I was taken out of my receptacle, so that it might be emptied. This duty fell to the proprietress of the chop-house across the street (…). And before putting me back she took advantage of the circumstance that my mouth was accessible to stick into it a chunk of lights or a marrow-bone. And when snow fell she covered me with a tarpaulin still watertight in places. It was under its shelter, snug and dry, that I became acquainted with the boon of tears, while wondering to what I was indebted for it, not feeling moved. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 322)

Inside the jar, the unnamable narrator dwells in close proximity to the (one can imagine, Heidegger's) worldless stone which is eventually covered with sawdust: "For the woman, displeased at seeing me sink lower and lower, has raised me up by filling the bottom of my jar with sawdust which she changes every week, when she makes my toilet. It is softer than the stone, but less hygienic. And I had got used to the stone. Now I'm getting used to the sawdust. It's an occupation" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 325). Beckett's narrator resembles an animal held in captivity, confined to his see-through receptacle, and therefore exposed to the outside world, but unable to directly communicate with it. His connections to himself and others are

indeterminable, and, similarly to Molloy's mist or glittering dust, here it is darkness that veils the narrator from the world and from himself: "I shall not be alone, in the beginning. I am of course alone. Alone. That is soon said. Things have to be soon said. And how can one be sure, in such darkness? (Beckett, *Three Novels* 286).

Mark Nixon writes that at a dinner party in Dresden in 1937, Beckett was asked what he wanted to create most, to which he had replied "light in the monad" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 162). "Monad," a Leibnizian notion, borrowed from the Greek *μόνος*, meaning "alone," describes an indivisible, impenetrable simple unit of substance. According to Nixon, Beckett first encountered Leibnitzian monadology in 1929 via J. Lewis McIntyre's *Giordano Bruno* (1903) and read the *Monadology* in December 1933. Besides Beckett's question: 'What would Leibnitz say?' in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written in 1932 but published posthumously), Nixon notably points out references to monads such as "the 'large hollow sphere' that is Murphy's mind" and "Beckett's descriptions of the 'pads' at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat: 'The compartment was windowless, like a monad. … [Murphy] had never been able to imagine a more creditable representation of what he kept on calling, indefatigably, the little world'" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 162).

It is towards the little world, the inner world, that Beckett's writing turned in the thirties. In 1932, he wrote to MacGreevy that "the poetry he wanted to write would draw on his interior world and not be fashioned of extraneous material. Yet, the hopes to shelter the self from outer reality and make way for what Nixon calls "inner vision" faded because of "the failure of the eyelids to come down, the expression of emotion encumbered by outside forces" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 175).

While the prewar nomadic Beckett is fascinated with the idea of monadic writing that would draw on his interior world, the trilogy seems to express at once that desire as well as the impossibility to separate oneself from the outside world. Beckett's characters are both confined to their little worlds which they fail to understand while being at the mercy of the outside effects that they fail to understand, thereby showing that the walls between the inside (the little world) and the outside are porous yet the "nomansland" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 164) that separates the I/eye and the outside world or "space that intervenes between [the artist] and the world of objects" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 164) cannot be overcome from the inside either. Steven Connor writes: "Beckett is, as Heidegger alleged animals were, 'poor in world,' poor in the worldhood of 'the world'" (Connor 200). While Heidegger's man separates himself from other animals who are poor in world by being conscious of his mortality, for Beckett's narrators, death is always already deferred, abstract,

unreachable, and thereby their mortality, that is their utter vulnerability, humility or closeness to the earth, take the central stage.[14] Connor explains:

> Among the many unique accomplishments alleged by human beings of themselves is their capacity to grasp the inescapability of their own deaths. On the contrary, the great human sickness is infinitude, the incapacity to seize finitude seriously and sustainedly. It is not just that we do not take seriously the 'one day' of abstract death; it is that we find it almost impossibly hard to apprehend the limited and finite nature of the lives we live every day, the fact that we can live only the life we can live, in such a place, in such a world. (Connor 200)

The abstract notions such as the world in general as well as life and death are indefinitely deferred in the trilogy. As Malone from *Malone Dies* tells us: "No, the answer is no, I shall never get born and therefore never get dead, and a good job too. (…) But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 219). It somewhat falls in line with Beckett's comments about his own identity. When Hans Naumann asked Beckett whether it is right to try and find in his work a presence of Irish tradition, Beckett answered (17 February, 1954) that he loathed "that romanticism," and added: "But as for saying who I am, where I come from and what I am doing, all that is quite beyond me" (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 465). In the trilogy, both the outer world and the inner world of an individual are presented as porous and elusive, resisting

[14] In that respect, Beckett's approach to death resembles Maurice Blanchot's. Blanchot explains that the one who dies cannot witness his own death, because what belongs to him in the moment of dying is already a certain neutrality; "*une neutralité de l'absence où il n'est déjà plus lui-même*" (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 128). In the moment of dying, one is no longer there, no longer present to witness one's death; thus, according to the words of Epicurus, "*si tu es, la mort n'est pas; si elle est, tu n'es pas*" (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 125). The same separation seems to be proper to the positioning of the writer and his work: "*Nul qui a écrit l'œuvre, ne peut vivre, demeurer auprès d'elle*" (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 17). According to Blanchot, the writer is a part of the work, but what belongs to the writer is merely a book, while the work ignores him and casts him out:

> *L'écrivain appartient à l'œuvre, mais ce qui lui appartient, c'est seulement un livre, un amas muet de mots stériles, ce qu'il y a de plus insignifiant du monde. L'écrivain qui éprouve ce vide croit qu'un peu plus de travail, la chance d'instants favorables lui permettront, à lui seul, d'en finir. Il se remet donc à l'œuvre. Mais ce qu'il veut terminer à lui seul reste l'interminable, l'associe à un travail illusoire. Et l'œuvre, à la fin l'ignore, se referme sur son absence, dans l'affirmation impersonnelle, anonyme qu'elle est – et rien de plus*. (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 16)

Being cast outsde of his work, the author is not in complete control over his work, as well as the one committing suicide cannot take their own life, because the I (*le Je*) loses the signified in the very moment of dying. However, Blanchot does not completely deny one's relation to one's death (simply the nature of this relation as mastery), but rather sees death as something that dwells in us as an extreme secret power: "*L'homme meurt, cela n'est rien, mais l'homme est à partir de sa mort, il se lie fortement à sa mort, par un lien dont il est juge, il fait sa mort, il se fait mortel, et par là, se donne le pouvoir de faire et donne à ce qu'il fait son sens et sa vérité. La décision d'être sans être est cette possibilité même de la mort*" (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 118). Blanchot believes that one should strive towards being the shaper (*figurateur*) and the poet of one's death not its master: "*Il faut que ma mort me devienne toujours plus intérieure: qu'elle soit comme ma forme invisible, mon geste, le silence de mon secret le plus caché. J'ai quelque chose à faire pour la faire, elle doit être mon œuvre, mais cette œuvre est au-delà de moi, elle est cette partie de moi que ne n'éclaire pas, que je n'atteins pas et donc je ne suis pas maître*" (Blanchot, *L' Espace Littéraire* 160).

attempts to be pinned down and explained in a satisfactory manner. The abstract notion of the world as well as man's place in it, find no sure ground through narrators who fail to be rooted, at home, in their humanity. As Eric P. Levy writes:

> The old Humanist tradition that for 2500 years articulated the special virtues of the species and developed a wealth of metaphysical and theological views about the ultimate significance of human experience has disappeared. In its absence, human experience of course goes on, but no longer has any means of taking stock of itself. (…) the questioning in Beckett's fiction no longer concerns merely the objective pole of experience (i.e. the universe), but now addresses the very process of structuring experience into the poles of subject and object. As Malone puts it, quoting Democritus out of context, 'Nothing is more real than nothing.' Human experience is an experience of Nothing; the only reality it knows is the inability to interpret its own structure. (…) With Beckett, as throughout this tradition [the great enterprise of Western Humanism], the ultimate task of self-consciousness is to know oneself *qua* man; that is, to decipher in the contours of personal experience the trace of species in us all. Interpretations of this trace have never been constant, and more theological eras have seen it as rooted to an Absolute or participating God. For Beckett, the trace of species appears in the need to structure experience and fix the poles of self and world. The real Fall occurred not in Eden but in our [the 20th] century. After the accumulation of too much history, we have lost the innocence required to believe in any more explanations. The only certainties left are the falseness of all interpretive structures and the radical unintelligibility of human experience without them. (Levy 3–10)

The radical unintelligibility of human experience as such exasperates Beckett's narrators, but it also opens up possibilities of thinking whether human experience can be described through comparisons and categorisations based on beliefs of human superiority and radical differentiation from the worlds of other animals. As Molloy tells us: "What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not. But my ideas on this subject were always horribly confused, for my knowledge of men was scant and the meaning of being beyond me" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 35). It is also notable that Molloy defines himself as "neither man nor beast" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 14–15). Molloy's shadow (presumably a spy), Moran, claims to be "exiled in his manhood" but he is also strangely becoming aware of himself through the loss of certainty in his human and individual identity. He says: "Physically speaking it seemed to me I was now becoming rapidly unrecognizable. And when I passed my hands over my face, in a characteristic and now more than ever pardonable gesture, the face my hands felt was not my face any more, and the hands my face felt were my hands no longer" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 163–64). Yet, a couple of lines below, he admits he "had a sharper and clearer sense of [his] identity than ever before" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 164). This paradoxical recognition rooted in unrecognizability is also echoed later in *The Unnamable* where it reads: "Dear incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end. Nothing will remain of all the lies they have glutted me with" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 318).

Paradoxes as such build up unsteady grounds between credibility and implausibility; they send us beyond (Greek, *para*-) established opinions/thinking (*doxa*; from *dokein*, "to think") towards the erasure of established structures. In the trilogy, besides their hilarity, paradoxes shake the false interpretive structures that define man, and one's individual identity *qua* man, precisely by sending us toward the impossibility of thinking, with the obligation to think, toward the Beckettian: "(…) you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 407–08). As Sarah Wood writes: "Perhaps we have no choice but to proceed *through* this impossibility of being one thing, even when we live our lives as if it were otherwise – as if the differences in us could be assimilated, appropriated and identified" (Wood 36–37). The impossibility as well as the necessity of such assimilations, in order to express the who or what that needs to be identified in and through us, leads to thinking about the porosity of our concepts – concepts such as "human" or "world."

Porosity is not a complete effacement or disintegration, but it could be rather imagined as the state of being open to outside forces, and to communication. Porosity is travelling without moving. To think porosity is to think the communication or touching between inside and outside, that does not necessarily efface the concept, or the object that is considered to be porous. Beckett's trilogy opens up the human world through making the "world," as an anthropocentric concept, porous. Not only is there no sealed-up individual "my world," there is also no exclusively human world which is not already deeply porous. The Beckettian narrative "I" feels neither perfectly subjective nor universal; it is a repetitive vessel for expressing porous identities, and, unlike Heidegger's world-forming man, Beckett's narrators are unable to see, comprehend, conceptualize the world, and they are also unable to perceive their self-identities as one (whole).

As Haraway explains: "To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 60). Beckett's narrators are, reductively, the other: vulnerable outsiders, or, as they are often referred to – bums. They are the victims of domination, abuse, and discourses of mastery, as well as the perpetrators of violence and emanators of discourses of mastery. The task of the other is, as Haraway points out, "to mirror the self" (Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* 59), that is, the abstract idea of identity of the powerful. As much as Beckett's narrators blurt out known theories of mastery (over other animals, nature, etc.) they are also constantly faced with their inability to build a wholesome narrative for the humankind (the one that would not be burdened by doubts), a wholesome story of origin, on which they

could then plant their own identity, and consequently, return to such peaceful wholeness and understanding of the species and the self.

The narrators' identities are porous, but without the sense of understanding of this porosity – for identity cannot be read as one unshakable narrative but rather, as Sarah Wood suggests, through the impossibility of being one thing, or, perhaps through Haraway's cyborg imagery that subverts dichotomies instead of reenforcing them. Molloy, who defines himself through the impossibility of being either man or beast, and who is cut off from the world as well as from himself by the mist which rises in him every day (Beckett, *Three Novels* 24–25), cannot subdue his identity to binary concepts nor can he efface the "I" in his eye with which he reads the world around him. As such a narrator without mastery, he is embedded in his environment, his body, his circumstance – and his relation to place, as I shall show, is neither less complex than his relations to the world, to his species, and to himself – nor is it significantly less confusing.

Of the Molloy country

For Beckett's narrators, "'being' is always in fact compound or embedded, a hyphenated 'being-here', or a 'being-there'" (Connor 181); but as Pearson writes, "(…) the ambiguities of place and self are inseparable—a condition that stems not from the loss of a known ground, but from the inability to comprehend the present habitus *as* given (…). The narrator and characters are as distant from the abstract idea of "Ireland," of "the nation," from *within* their region as they would be by traveling outside of it" (Pearson 139).

The relation between one's identity and place, as well as the ambiguities of this relation portrayed in the trilogy, are perhaps most evidently put forward in the last book of the trilogy that, from the get-go, establishes connections between identity and place in the most theatrically unknowing manner possible: "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 285). The links here are undone as soon as they are established, and yet, we are told to go on: "Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 285), through the inability of having a narrator we can trust, and without somewhere we can comprehend or recognize. The unnameable narrator tells us:

> I who am here, who cannot speak, cannot think, and who must speak, and therefore perhaps think a little, cannot in relation only to me who am here, to here where I am, but can a little, sufficiently, I don't know how, unimportant, in relation to me who was elsewhere, who shall be elsewhere, and to those places where I was, where I shall be. But I have never been elsewhere, however uncertain the future. And the simplest therefore is to say that what I say,

> what I shall say, if I can, relates to the place where I am, to me who am there, in spite of my inability to think of these, or to speak of them, because of the compulsion I am under to speak of them, and therefore perhaps think of them a little. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 295)

Pearson's thesis, which I find very convincing, is that Beckett's narrators' sense of disorientation in the trilogy stems from their inability to comprehend their local region as geo-social abstraction (Pearson 125); thus, they are left with "the reality of living on an undeniably material, politically overdetermined ground and not being able to *find* a viable abstraction with which to comprehend it—a condition that is neither limited to a specific place nor historically disengaged" (Pearson 130–40). Beckett's own engagement with Ireland is described, by Robert Kiely, as "a mixture of intimacy and alienation," rooted in his Anglo-Irish background (Kiely 81).[15] He writes: "Despite his Anglo-Irish ancestry, Beckett's birth and education placed him in a culture deprived of its native tongue. The writer who occupies 'that peculiar no-man's-land of the space between languages' is, at once, a homeless postmodern and a familiar Irish figure" (Kiely 81). From this vantage point of homelessness and familiarity with places, Beckett effaces maps in his stories, which, as Kiely argues, sets him apart from his fellow expat-Irishman, Joyce, whose "*Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* provoked charts, skeleton keys, and interpretive outlines from the beginning" (Kiely 82).

The Molloy country (as it is referred to in the second part of the novel, by Moran, 128) appears as an ambiguous region that Molloy believes to have never left, and its limits, Molloy tells us, were unknown to him:

> But I felt they were far away. But this feeling was based on nothing serious, it was a simple feeling. For if my region had ended no further than my feet could carry me, surely I would have felt it changing slowly. For regions do not suddenly end, as far as I know, but gradually merge into one another. And I never noticed anything of the kind, but however far I went, and in no matter what direction, it was always the same sky, always the same earth, precisely, day after day and night after night. On the other hand, if it is true that regions gradually merge into one another, and this remains to be proved, then I may well have left mine many times, thinking I was still within it. But I preferred to abide by my simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall. And wheresoever you wander,

[15] Connor notably criticizes the efforts of "enforced repatriation that is being undertaken by those who seek to assert the essential regionality of Beckett's work – its 'Irishness', its 'Protestantism', and so on" that sometimes result in distorting Beckett back into ethnic intelligibility (Connor 187). In Ireland-centred conferences, I have witnessed similar efforts regarding Bowen who, to a greater extent than Beckett, was disregarded as an Irish writer because of her activities as a spy in Ireland. Both efforts, even though noble in their attempt to build up the bridges burnt down by other critics, run the danger of disregarding the particularity of their birth into the Anglo-Irish circles, as well as their great interest towards travel and dislocation – both as an experience as well as a concept, which is why I regard them rather as transnational writers. The latter label, as I perceive it, does not take away their Irishness, but instead adds to this Irishness, complicates it in manners that saturate their respective works with philosophical sensitivity as well as cultural insight.

> within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 60–61)

His inability to place the region on the map is contrasted with what Connor calls his "global or geomorphic awareness of the earth" (Connor 183) that is made visible when Molloy calculates the beginning of his journey according to the impact of the sun on the hemisphere:

> But before I leave this earthly paradise, suspended between the mountains and the sea, sheltered from certain winds and exposed to all that Auster vents, in the way of scents and languors, on this accursed country, it would ill become me not to mention the awful cries of the corncrakes that run in the corn, in the meadows, all the short summer night long, dinning their rattles. And this enables me, what is more, to know when that unreal journey began, the second last but one of a form fading among fading forms, and which I here declare without further ado to have begun in the second or third week of June, at the moment that is to say most painful of all when over what is called our hemisphere the sun is at its pitilessmost and the arctic radiance comes pissing on our midnights. It is then the corncrakes are heard. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 12–13)

Molloy's vague awareness of time and place is at once linked to his geomorphic awareness of the earth, but also to a close reading of his immediate and known natural environment in which he detects changes in light and sound. The corncrake that derives its name from onomatopoeic Latin *Crex crex*, whose "awful cries" enable Molloy to determine the beginning of his journey in time and in space (on a global scale), is an endangered species whose decline began in the mid-19th century and was only accelerated in the 50s when the majority of hay fields were changed to silage production. According to The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the decline was first noticeable in Britain (by the late 1930s the species was nearly absent in England, Southern Wales, and large parts of Scotland), Ireland, Fennoscandia and west-central Europe, and it spread through most of the European range of the species in the 1970s. The species' nesting ground were lost due to the mechanization of the agricultural systems and earlier cutting of the hay harvest, as well as investment in drainage schemes which allowed silage production to spread to many poorly drained areas in Scotland and Ireland (The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). The traces of the expansion of modern farming-grounds, which dispossessed the corncrake of its nesting grounds, are visible and audible in *Molloy*.

The Molloy country seems to be significantly marked by sheep and cows, and the fields made for their keeping, the shambles made for their killing. In fact, Molloy uses the shambles as a landmark to find his mother, whose address he fails to remember: "(…) from my mother's room, through the closed windows, I had heard, stilling her chatter, the bellowing of the cattle, that violent raucous tremulous bellowing not of the pastures but of the towns, their shambles and cattle-markets. Yes, after all, I had perhaps gone too far in saying that my mother lived

near the shambles, it could equally well have been the cattle-market, near which she lived" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 18). Molloy's awareness of the extent of the cattle-business escapes him on a critical note: "Good God, what a land of breeders, you see quadrupeds everywhere. And it's not over yet, there are still horses and goats, to mention only them, I feel them watching out for me, to get in my path" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 25). I do not argue that Beckett was necessarily aware of the steady disappearance of the corncrake that was already happening at the time; however, his lowly, earth-bound Molloy, who hardly has any feet to carry him, does notice the armies of quadrupeds for whom silage as well as hay are produced. Extensive cattle-farming, compared to which the nearly legless Molloy is worth nothing, is one of the causes of climate change (via greenhouse gas emissions) as well as deforestation (which, in its turn, enforces climate change), desertification and water-pollution (which also enforce climate change), as well as the habitation nesting grounds for wildlife, which results in the gradual disappearance of the "awful cry" of a corncrake.

In the novel, strangely, Molloy's narrative ends with an unreassuring silence: "I lapsed down to the bottom of the ditch. It must have been spring, a morning in spring. I thought I heard birds, skylarks perhaps. I had not heard a bird for a long time. How was it I had not heard any in the forest? Nor seen any. It had not seemed strange to me. Had I heard any at the seaside? Mews? I could not remember. I remembered the corncrakes" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 86). Benjamin Keatinge writes:

> These lines suggest that there is an ecological dimension to Beckett's 'topographical imaginary' which here is expressed by allusion to two of the most recognisable birds of the Irish countryside, the skylark and the corncrake, formerly extremely common in Ireland. What Seán Kennedy refers to as Beckett's "impulse to uncouple art from national context" sees him asserting an untamed topographical identity in place of the accoutrements of Irish national identity. In so doing, he shows a greater connection to the ecologies of "the Beckett country" than his otherwise desolate scenarios might at first suggest. (Keatinge 16)

Further signs of slow violence against untamed natural environments can be found in ditches where Molloy often lies. Ditches refer to drainage practices that make the land economically useful in one way or another. Molloy tells us that the region where he dwells is bordered by a swamp to be drained for human safety and economic profit:

> For between my town and the sea there was a kind of swamp which, as far back as I can remember, and some of my memories have their roots deep in the immediate past, there was always talk of draining, by means of canals I suppose, or of transforming into a vast port and docks, or into a city on piles for the workers, in a word of redeeming somehow or other. And with the same stone they would have killed the scandal, at the gates of their metropolis, of a stinking steaming swamp in which an incalculable number of human lives were yearly engulfed, the statistics escape me for the moment and doubtless always will, so complete is my

> indifference to this aspect of the question. It is true they actually began to work and that work is still going on in certain areas in the teeth of adversity, setbacks, epidemics and the apathy of the Public Works Department, far from me to deny it. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 70–71)

Keatinge points out the strange relationship Beckett's work has to the trappings of modernity through avoidance (using caves and chamber pots instead of electric circuits or sewers, for example) and, he says, "in this they overlook or obliquely satirise the nation-building, infrastructural projects initiated by the Irish Free State" (Keatinge 15). He suggests that the last pages of Molloy's narrative could be read as "a refusal to civilize or be incorporated into the ecologically destructive infrastructures of contemporary civilization" (Keatinge 15). Indeed, Molloy opposes the swamp to "their metropolis," thereby underlining the conflict between the desire of the world, that is, the people and the powers of the metropolis (also called "world city," *OED*), and the swamp with its own forces as well as weaknesses against the progress, which in ways resemble Molloy's vulnerability and resistance at the gates of "their metropolis" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 70). As Keatinge notes: "The failure at 'redeeming' the recalcitrant landscape of the 'Molloy country'; amounts to an ecological resistance to 'improvements', as robust as the resistance of Molloy himself to any civic identity" (Keatinge 15). Yet, Molloy's resistance to any civic identity, as I have argued above, is not a purely willing resistance, but a result of his inability to remember all the details required of him, as well as to identify himself as being one thing, since this oneness, as Haraway explains, is also characterised by being autonomous, powerful, and that Molloy is not. He depends on his bike, his environment, and the help from the world that refuses him, that expels him from public spaces into forests, ditches, and swamps, which can be reclaimed and remodelled in their turn.

Molloy's dependency on the human world is underlined by his dispossession of the public space. The region where Molloy roams is ambiguously referred to as "theirs," "at the gates of *their* metropolis" (which makes Moran's label of this region as Molloy country even more ironic), and at the end of Molloy's narrative, this ownership is extended to the entire planet: "Well, I suppose you have to try everything once, succour included, to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 86). Rather than an ecological warrior against the wheels of change, I see Molloy first and foremost as a deeply vulnerable creature who, through his vulnerability and homelessness, resembles the corncrake whose disappearance is profoundly linked to their inability to return to a home that is no more, that cannot be found. Molloy's return to his mother fuels the plot, yet it is never shown to happen (he does not know how he got to his mother's room, and he never reaches his mother). "With the clipped wings of necessity" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 23), Molloy embarks on the journey

towards his mother in spite of having forgotten the reasons behind it. As Molloy cannot remember the exact reasons for going towards his mother, the necessity for the journey seems instinctive rather than calculated – perhaps something like a domesticated bird's desire of flying south when the cold starts settling in.

The confusion and disorientation that Molloy's return evokes could be, as Pearson explains, linked to "Beckett's own deeply seated and unresolved feelings of unbelonging" (Pearson 108) but he also writes that Beckett's "unique expression of homelessness is neither Irish nor universal in nature, but an expression of the vague boundaries between colony and world and of the interminably multidirectional move between a minority origin and an ecumenical perspective" (Pearson 106). Pearson argues that oppositional models of nation and universe, concrete national past and abstract global present, fail to describe the experience of emerging from a history defined by decolonization, neo-colonialism, partitioned states, and contested historiography and language. Such a complex history, he argues, make notions such as "home" or "homeland" as elusive as the human subject; and therefore, the departure from home cannot be read as going from known into the unknown (Pearson 131–32). Pearson writes: "Especially in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, there is no 'formerly known' place, no prior world that used to make sense. Instead, dating to the earliest days any aging narrator can recall, there is only repetitive motion across, and cyclically renewed and frustrated efforts to set narratives within, a tangible, real, and affective ground that has *never been* comprehensible […]" (Pearson 132).

Molloy, like Moran, is inescapably on earth, on the tangible, real ground, but that ground is more than a surface even to Molloy. Though Molloy may not be able to read the politically overdetermined ground and bend himself to the will of the ruling structures, Pearson mentions "affective ground" (Pearson 132). Not only his mother, but also the region holds a psychological grasp on Molloy: "And yet I knew the town well, for I was born there and had never succeeded in putting between it and me more than ten or fifteen miles, such was its grasp on me, I don't know why" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 26). This kind of affective dependence, or sense of belonging without the right to ownership, is even more strikingly echoed in *The Unnamable* where the narrator is hardly human:

> Unfortunately I am afraid, as always, of going on. For to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been, of which I shall know nothing, being incapable of seeing, moving, thinking, speaking, but of which little by little, in spite of these handicaps, I shall begin to know something, just enough for it to turn out to be the same place as always, the same which seems made for me and does not want me, which I

> seem to want and do not want, take your choice, which spews me out or swallows me up, I'll never know, which is perhaps merely the inside of my distant skull where once I wandered, now am fixed, lost for tininess, or straining against the walls, with my head, my hands, my feet, my back, and ever murmuring my old stories, my old story, as if it were the first time. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 296–97)

Beckett's mobile characters roam, and it is that seemingly senseless wandering that first captures the readers' attention. Yet, as much as they wander in places, the places, in return, traverse them, haunt them – the latter becomes evident in moments of weakness or immobility. It is the characters' slow mollification – a form of paralysis (*OED*), that renders the imprint of places most visible; place is not a simple receptacle to be moulded by men, it is identity-forming: "For to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 296).

Molloy, much like many of Bowen's characters, is the product of a place. His being on earth is contrasted with his failure to be in the world, that is, to be a part of the 'big world' of the polis. Yet it is that failure to adapt himself to the rules of "their metropolis" or "their planet" (which keeps him homeless), that also draws Molloy closer to the tangible earth and its entanglements with its ecosystems, and with the corncrakes.

The ethics that could be retrieved from narrators such as Molloy, is dirtied by backward human notions of mastery, superiority and earthlessness; yet it is the failure to adapt Molloy's physical existence and viewpoint to such notions that creates an opening for thinking about more earthbound, humble, approaches – approaches that do not begin with a view from nowhere, but rather from a specific place and specific body which is made conscious of its limits and vulnerability. As Haraway writes:

> We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name. So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 582–83)

Haraway's situated knowledges demand the scientist to think power-sensitivity, human agency, partial sight, limited voice, accountability and responsibility for the production/translation of knowledge. Beckett's *Molloy* seems to create the need for such demands through the ecological demise of the Molloy country and its ecological subjects-actors, such as Molloy, corncrakes, and the swamp. Seeing how much Molloy and Beckett's other narrators are made by the places they inhabit and yet slowly destroyed by the violence of

the unthinking human progress of the state that fails to care about/for vulnerable lives, leads me to think that ecological discourses should be inseparable from discourses on identity.

Conclusion

The novel is set in a place that I would not be able to link to a specific country or region, though it does, at times, bear similarities to Ireland. The identity of the Molloy country, which feels both specific and utterly elusive, does not allow us to put the place on a map, but nevertheless provides opportunities for the readers to observe the links between material space, politically, culturally, and economically determined space, and the notion of the identity of the powerful, seen from the viewpoint of the powerless Molloy. Molloy's state of vulnerability offers an insight into the ways in which one's physical existence structures the view of the place they inhabit. The view from his failing body onto his native region is riddled with miscalculations, confusion, and a sense of dislocation – yet it is a sensibly embodied vision; a view from the earthbound, vulnerable body that is Molloy's and not a view from nowhere. Though Molloy's view is subjective and species specific, it can also be translated into wider concerns about invisible abuses of power. The reader is made to witness evident acts of violence as Molloy is arrested or contained, but also more subtle violence on natural environments and their less powerful inhabitants.

Molloy who is driven to ditches and forests – out of the public spaces, is subjected to ecological violence, yet, unlike the swamp or the corncrake, he mostly thinks in language and thinks language, which makes him an interesting vessel for thinking about the common threads between the violence he is subjected to and the violence done to natural environments and their non-human inhabitants. As he points out, "there are not two laws […] one for the healthy, another for the sick, but one only to which all must bow, rich and poor, young and old, happy and sad" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 16). Beckett's depiction of Molloy's vulnerability and the social injustice he suffers from in his natural environment, in his native region, poignantly points out certain standards based on mastery upon which the common laws and also the regional mentality seem to be built, but as Beckett sets the Molloy country on an imaginary map, these standards are proper to no place in particular, and yet they strongly echo the tendencies that could be observed across the Western world.

The novel potently depicts how little place there is for vulnerability in the world of the Molloy country – in the society for the strong and healthy, but also in the language that fails to express the levels of vulnerability such as Molloy's. Thinking vulnerability such as Molloy's

would give way to reading other forms of vulnerable existence, to which standards and notions focused on human mastery and human superiority (as a default mode) are blind. Thus, the novel's focus on Molloy's language is profoundly linked to questions of identity: of individual and group/national identity *qua* human, and as human history and philosophical insights into humanity have been largely defined and written by men: *qua* man. The pillars upon which ideas about human identity lie have been built by men, and as Haraway shows elsewhere, are thus not innocent or neutral. Beckett's writing about male vulnerability, vulnerability so strong that is expels characters from the caste of humans and of men, is therefore very interesting, as it shows that the male gaze is as comfortable with vulnerability as Dorian Gray was with his hidden portrait, and at the same time in dire need of understanding vulnerability in order to build humbler readings of personal, national, and species identity that would understand better the needs of other forms of vulnerable existences, for whom politically, culturally, and economically overdetermined material spaces would have a chance of still being homes to corncrakes, swamps, and Molloys.

One cannot fight for what one cannot perceive or understand, and not many will fight for someone or something that does not affect them in one way or another. Therefore, we must *soften the world of the Molloy countries* of the planet that is not ours only. Making vulnerable existences visible and important for the human world is only possible if vulnerability itself is not erased from our perception of ourselves, our nations, our species, and appropriated to the unknown and irrelevant land of "feminine" thought and feeling. Vulnerability has been the shared quality of humans (or the master species) and many other species since the World Wars, as Bowen shows in her *The Little Girls*.

Chapter 2: Humbling Hauntings: Contamination

1.3 Contamination: The Uncontrollable in Bowen's *The Little Girls*

> I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in. ("The Three Little Pigs")
>
> What are little girls made of?
> What are little girls made of?
> Sugar and spice
> And all things nice
> That's what little girls are made of ("What Are Little Boys Made Of?" a 19th century nursery rhyme)

Down to her very bones, as the old nursery rhyme insinuates, a little girl is expected to be "all things nice." Bowen's little girls, sharp and charming though they may be, are anything but. They collect bones. They plot to blow things up. They begin where sweet curiosity meets violence, and violence, in return, becomes the haunting Wolf that, as in the fairy tale "The Three Little Pigs," threatens to huff and puff and blow your house in.

The Little Girls (1963) thinks uncontrollable destruction, as it reveals fragility on multiple levels. Ending with the mental breakdown of Dinah Delacroix, the novel explores the fragility of mental landscapes as well as natural landscapes. *The Little Girls* seems to trace the complexities of living in the context of both world wars and the nuclear threat after the Second World War which endangered not only the living, but also objects, and possibly the planet Earth itself. These major (global) 20th century events and their aftermath contaminate life with not merely the idea of individual death, but a complete obliteration – a mass extinction.

My reading of *The Little Girls* will explore the novel through the notion of uncontrollable contamination that, I argue, renders the mastery over one's traces impossible. *Contamination* comes from Latin *contāmināre*, which means "to bring into contact, mingle, corrupt, defile" (*OED*) and thus evinces several negative connotations that seem to be bound together with the idea of "coming in contact with." The idea of touching hovers in the word ("*contāmen, -tāmin-* (for *contagmen*) contact, infection, pollution, < *con-* + *tag-* stem of *tangĕre* to touch, *OED*). *The Little Girls* is a story about getting in touch with people one has lost touch with, and about the uncontrollable after-effects of this metaphorical touching. While putting together a collection of people's personal items in view of a possible mass extinction, Dinah Delacroix (formerly known as Diana Piggott or Dicey), a woman in her early sixties, recalls a similar project that she had undertaken in the summer of 1914 with two friends, Sheila Artworth (Sheila Beaker or Sheikie) and Clare Burkin-Jones (Mumbo), when they were eleven.

They had buried a coffer with several objects, among which was a sealed letter written in a made-up unknown language and three mysterious objects, secretly chosen by each girl. The recollection of the precious conservation effort urges Dinah to find the friends she has not seen for fifty years, so that they could unbury the coffer now. This reunion unearths not only the past as the past, but also the unpredictable influences and multiple affects with which the present reading of the past contaminates their now. *The Little Girls* contaminates its characters but also its readers in most unpredictable ways, as we shall see.

First, I will examine how Bowen humbles both her characters and readers by deploying the uncontrollable, unmasterable affect of language that contaminates one's intentions. The second section will concentrate on underlining and undermining nostalgic depictions of Nature that are shown to be contaminated by the fragility of objects as well as by the nature of their reader. Last, I will explore what Bowen calls "an irrevocable thing" through the traces her characters intend to leave behind, which are contaminated by uncontrollable forces that render the characters' efforts of mastery nil.

"So blah": Giving nits and going nuts, or, the unintended consequences of language in *The Little Girls*

"Speech is what characters *do to each other*" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 41), Bowen writes in her "Notes on Writing a Novel" (1945); however, in *The Little Girls*, she also shows that speech is what characters do to themselves. One of the prime acts of violence, though visibly far less dangerous than the little girls' idea of blowing up a shed near Sheila's house with a supposed gelignite, is shown in a scene where Mumbo, the child Clare, is thinking about her failure in class and the other two, instead of comforting her, come up with the idea of suggesting she has nits. It is Dicey who is sent out, by Sheikie (Sheila), to utter the words to the sad solitary Clare. Things escalate to a fight, but in the end, it is not Mumbo, but the mocker herself who is contaminated by her own words which grow into an imaginary flea, pestering Dicey wherever she goes. We are told that a great flea "was active in many parts of her" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 130) in Sheikie's house, and later in the city: "Dicey, letting go of the flea, waved" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 136). This separation is only temporary, for after getting rid of the great flea she is "singled out by a sand flea" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 155). Dicey's

imaginary fleas exemplify the power of words to contaminate the speaker's intentions with other purposes, and with unknown consequences.[16]

Language, always already pregnant with meaning, has the power to contaminate its speakers with erring thoughts and recollections; it cunningly touches upon unintended meanings and associations. It may even bring about the touchy thought one has buried deep within. Indeed, it is an unintended speech-act that, against the hearer's and the speaker's will, evokes a memory from Dinah's past. During her brief stay in the cave where she, in her early sixties, is shown making an inventory of the objects she has carefully collected and intends to conserve for "the *far future*" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 10), Dinah has a revelation that she describes as being "far more than a memory" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 20), for it confuses now and then:

> […] It was two flashes. First one, a question. Second one, the answer. The first happened – would you remember? – down in the cave, when Mrs. Coral asked, 'Who's going to seal it up?' What made me so blah and go around in circles was, knowing I *had* heard that: but how, why, *when*? ... Then the second flash was, when Mrs. Coral and I saw the crooked swing. [Dinah]
> 'My dear girl, you see that swing every day.' [Frank]
> (…) 'At the school I went to, there was a crooked swing.' (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 21)

Touched by Mrs. Coral's words – not in the sense of being moved, but rather contaminated by an unthinking thought – something coming through to Dinah, but not arriving. She can feel the other association making its way through the already contextualized question (about the very cave she is in): "Who is going to seal it up?" and it is the waiting that leaves her powerless, that makes her "so blah" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 21). The thought that powers through, on its own accord, infects Dinah so completely it dissolves time and space: "(…) to remember something, all in a flash, so completely that it's not 'then' but 'now,' surely *is* a sensation, isn't it? I do know it's far, far more than a mere memory! One's right back into it, right in the middle. It's happening round one. Not only that, but it never has *not* been happening. It's – it's absorbing!" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 20).

The novel, written in three parts out of which the innermost (the second or the middle part) depicts the eponymous little girls as little girls and the other two parts the women who survived them, is brought to the fore as a strange flow in which past events are presented as

[16] To me as a reader, this hidden power of speech to counteract your purposes, recalls various formulations of an Estonian proverb: "*Kes teisele nime annab, see ise seda kannab*" (the person who names the other becomes the name's carrier) often used by children, to send the insult back to the person from whom it escaped. Here, Dicey's insult directly returns in an imaginative form, contaminating her to the point of physical unease, making others remark: "'Everything […] bites you, Dicey'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 130).

having never not been happening. Bowen's curious double negative (very Bowenesque) does not affirm the continuation of the past event into the present, but rather uncannily invites it into the present, through the very negation. That something *is* or *has been happening* is not quite the same as something that has never *not* been happening. There is an element of revelation in the latter that acts on perception, calling into question the onlooker's ability to perceive it. Dinah's memory does not come quite through, and when it does then it dissolves the real,[17] and by dissolving the real – now it can no longer be demarcated against the real – "it's absorbing!" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 20).

The readers too are made to feel those reality-dissolving absorbing powers, through Bowen's writing. Neil Corcoran suggests that Bowen's last novels, *The Little Girls* (1963) and *Eva Trout* (1968), are "notoriously difficult to attach in any unproblematic way to the remaining canon of her work" (Corcoran 78). He claims that by ending her engagement with Ireland, they give the feeling of "ending, as it were, nowhere at all" while also making way towards "the most unsettling kinds of further writing" (Corcoran 78). Corcoran finds it difficult to engage with *The Little Girls* as he had done with Bowen's earlier fiction. He describes *The Little Girls* as "a deeply flawed book, in which the restless flurry of plotting, both busy and banal, seems almost haplessly out of key with the haunting desolation of its theme" (Corcoran 7–8). Even though he finds himself "with nothing of interest to say about it" (Corcoran 8), Corcoran links the novel's Modernist experimentation to "the disciplines of abstinence which characterize the later prose of Samuel Beckett" (Corcoran 8).

Bowen's writing opens an abyss where one is made "so blah" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 21) along with Dinah. The reader is not aided to make sense of this disturbing contamination in and through words that dislocate characters and well as the reader. As Maud Ellmann points out, "[…] the externality of the narration makes it hard to know where Bowen stands. Rejecting personality as a 'claggy' thing, Bowen strives to present her trio of heroines entirely from the outside, revealing nothing of their 'inner weather.' (…) The reader, stranded by the author, finds it difficult to know which side to take" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 195–96). In *The Little Girls*, the reader loses her sense of overlordship, as the author refuses to provide the insight to the privileged reader who now, in her humbled condition, must "try thinking" (Bowen, *The*

[17] Another dissolution of the real happens when Dinah and her friends discover the coffer they buried many years before to be empty. Dinah then claims: "Nothing's real any more" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 208). Witnessing the empty coffer dissolves the reality of "now" through the dissolution of the past: "'And now,' the unhearing Dinah went on, 'the game's collapsed. We saw there was nothing *there*. So, where am I now?'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 209).

Little Girls 71). As Sarah Wood writes: "She [Bowen] cites and I read, and I don't know huff from puff. Sometimes I dream of being outside, solid wolf in mid-story, mangily aphoristic, on the side of bringing down the house and the master of the house. But the huff, a sort of exaggeration or inflating breath, rebuilds the edifice in a moment, like the resuscitation effect in anger, it brings me back" (Wood 35).

Many readers, it seems, are brought back, made blah by *The Little Girls*. *Blah* is nonsense, meaningless, dull or pretentious talk (*OED*). As an adjective, *blah* refers to pretentiousness and even madness (*OED*). Reading *The Little Girls* is similar to the experience of reading Beckett's later fiction, in the sense that it considerably deflates the reader ('s ego) who must go on reading while conscious of being made to feel "so blah" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 21), that is, pretentious, or even mad.

In the trilogy, Beckett's Molloy is also deflated, but in a more Beckettian manner:

> I can't help it, gas escapes from my fundament on the least pretext, it's hard not to mention it now and then, however great my distaste. One day I counted them. Three hundred and fifteen farts in nineteen hours, or an average of over sixteen farts an hour. After all it's not excessive. Four farts every fifteen minutes. It's nothing. Not even one fart every four minutes. It's unbelievable. Damn it, I hardly fart at all, I should never have mentioned it. Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 25–26)

Beckett's mathematics of flatulence not only literally measures dangerous methane that, along with other greenhouse gases produced in large quantities by human activity, the reader knows, has the ability to rewrite climate; it ridicules the puffed-up man whose reading is always already wrapped up in blinding self-importance. As Molloy concludes: "In any case this whole question of climate left me cold, I could stomach any mess" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 26). A similar "neverfailing toughness and impermeability" is attributed to *The Times Literary Supplement*: "Even farts made no impression on it" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 25). A snide remark at the set ways of literary writing, Beckett's comment also seems to underline the need for a writing that would reverse the never-failing toughness and impermeability and explore vulnerability and permeability instead. The blinding self-importance as well as grandiose ideas of self-reliance and mastery cannot be sustained in a world that is falling apart. The coating underneath Molloy's coat, made out of *The Times Literary Supplement*, must come off. Things must be allowed to penetrate the literary space and language, even at the expense of making us feel "so blah" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 21). Much like Beckett, Bowen allows that danger and vulnerability. Both inner and outer climate are shown to trouble her characters.

The changes to one's inner climate are shown in child-Clare, as she is said to be sitting alone "in the manner of Alexander Selkirk" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 89), a Scottish privateer

who was cast away on a desert island in the South Pacific Ocean and whose life there later inspired Defoe's most famous character, Robinson Crusoe. Bowen writes: "She [Clare] was – as Miss Ardingfay had noted but, not feeling up to a duel at that moment, had let pass, having reason to hope that the child might be pickled by foreign climes – full in the sun" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 89). Clare who is shown to be baking in the sun is also inwardly contaminated by "foreign climes" inherited from a previous failure of poetry reading. She is, in fact, contaminated by thought: "not sunk in thought but positively blown up with it, like a bullfrog" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 89).[18] The danger of being pickled by foreign climes, which hovers ever more decisively, more threateningly over the 21st-century reader, is here met with increasing pressures from within, leaving Clare's thick stiff hair springing about "nohow" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 89). This electrified inability, as Bowenesque as it is Beckettian, both glorifies and humbles her characters in their human condition, that is, always already up against foreign climes, inwardly and outwardly, that threaten to knock the wind out of them.

A literal deflation, that of lungs, is depicted in a goodbye scene that ends the middle part of the novel. The child-Dinah, to other children known as Dicey, is shown trying to catch up with Major Burkin-Jones who will perish in the first weeks of the war, and his daughter Clare, then known as Mumbo:

> The sobbing runner, desperate, could not shout. Too great the wind, too little her breath. Wasting seconds by halting, she tangled her arms up into signals and pointings – might not somebody see her from the encampment? Might not somebody see her and shout to Mumbo? Somebody saw, did shout – but did Mumbo hear? Not she. Nor was she seeing anything: on, on pig-headedly she was pegging. Now she was nearing the place where you climbed up.
>
> '*Mu-u-u-umb-O*!'
>
> Now she was at it. Now she *was* climbing up, scornfully hauling the tent-things after her. Now, on to her feet, she dragged the unfortunates across the grass of the wall's top, to hurl them (as though to perdition) ahead of her. And now?
>
> Alone in the middle of the empty sands wailed Dicey.
>
> 'Mum-BO-O-O!'
>
> The rough child, up there against the unkind sky, on the rough grass, glanced at and over the sands once. She threw a hand up into a rough, general wave. Then she leaped down on the land side of the sea wall. She had disappeared. (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 168–69)

"Too great the wind, too little her breath," the child Dinah is troubled both by the inner and outer climate, for her desperation and its consequential tears knock the wind out of her windpipe while the outer climate provides a wind that is "too great" (Bowen, *The Little Girls*

[18] Bullfrog, as an amphibian (from *ἀμφίβιος*, *amphíbios*, meaning "both kinds of life"), is a creature of two worlds, or perhaps, a creature of no worlds as it depends on both, thereby dissolving our human sense of separation between them, inherited from our own great inability to inhabit waters. Clare's turning into a bullfrog seems to be a fitting image of a power of the kind of thought that disintegrates one inwardly, forcing one to perceive things anew.

168). All is rough (rough child, rough grass, rough wave) and out of reach. Uncontrollably, the friend slips behind the landscape, away, and the First World War settles in, separating them for nearly fifty years. The language here too is slipping into strangely contaminated word-chains. Words are blowing off the page, into each other. Dicey (the child-Dinah/Diana) Piggott is blown into "pig-headed" "pegging" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 168) while "Mumbo" is blown to pieces. The remains, blowing in the wind, begin reconstituting other words and associations, like nits "in your brain, crawling round and round" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 89) with which Dicey and Sheila threatened to contaminate Mumbo.

Mumbo turns into "*Mu-u-u-umb-O*!" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 168) of which "M-O" is perhaps heard only, echoing the French "*mot*" (word) while underlining the little girl's inability to get the word out and across. The "M-O" quickly evolves into Mum-BO-O-O!" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 168), where "mum's the word," or "M-BO-O-O" since the smaller letters hover ghostly ("Boo") between louder sounds. The explosive "M-BO-O-O" can easily morph into "BOOOM!" thereby foreshadowing the unstoppable onslaught of the First World War.

The strange shared memory, which the second part of the novel seems to be, inhabits the present (part one and three) as an event that "never has *not* been happening" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 20), and invites the rereading of the fictional past as well as of the fictional present. The strange "you" that is made to climb up the hill interrupts the seemingly detached, omniscient narrative of the second part:

> The sobbing runner, desperate, could not shout. Too great the wind, too little her breath. Wasting seconds by halting, she tangled her arms up into signals and pointings – might not somebody see her from the encampment? Might not somebody see her and shout to Mumbo? Somebody saw, did shout – but did Mumbo hear? Not she. Nor was she seeing anything: on, on pig-headedly she was pegging. Now she was nearing the place where **you** climbed up.
>
> '*Mu-u-u-umb-O*!' (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 168)

It is no longer "she," "Mumbo" or "Clare," but "you." The surprising, indeterminate, and yet, one might imagine, dearer "you" changes the direction of the whole text which, up to this point, has been told as if from nowhere and to no one. The narrative, with a new force, right where the text dies down, recalls the trace of "you," which one misses (loses), and also misses dearly. The "you" is what marks the place ("the place where you climbed up," 168), the page, and what escapes identification. Whom is this narrative addressing, where, when?

The full ontological presence is also undermined through the novel's structure that is interrupted by the past events that, as we are told, have never not been happening, but also several scenes flirt with a more elusive, more complex idea of being and perceiving. At the end

of the novel, the grown-up Clare finds herself wondering: "Are not desires acts? One is where one would be. May we not, therefore, frequent each other, without the body, *not* only in dreams?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 305). As a child, Clare, considered the most intellectual child of the bunch, gets "an annihilated feeling" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 95), as she watches Dinah's mother read: "She was as oblivious of all parts of her person as she was of herself. As for her surroundings, they were nowhere. Feverel Cottage, the sofa, the time of day not merely did not exist for Mrs. Piggott, they did *not* exist" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 94). This utter dissolution of time and space around the reader is also shown as an inward dissolution of identity by Bennett and Royle:

> To read a novel is not only to speak with the dead, but also to speak the dead. Reading is a raising of our own dead voices. These voices, however, are unmasterable and do not belong to us. In reading, we are figured by prosopopoeia: we too make faces and our faces are made. We speak the words of 'still lives'. We confer a mask on a novel and on ourselves, we make our person and we are multiple and other. Reading is prosopopoeia, the dissolution of lives. (Bennett and Royle 156–57)

The Little Girls, where literal masks appear, is, as Bowen herself said, "a story about identity": It is about the *involuntary* element in behaviour: 'Chance, not choice'" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 194). The uncontrollable elements of behaviour hover threateningly over the plot, as each part of the novel is located in a moment in history where human activity's uncontrollable consequences are most effectively felt: when they have become global, at once here, but also beyond reach, beyond the ability to see, to retract, efface, and undo. The immensity of those vast unmasterable traces is underlined through Dinah's little plots that are also shown to be uncontrollable: she advertises five different notices, all playfully suggestive of some sort of grave secret misdemeanour, to catch the attention of her two childhood friends who, as a consequence, feel rather "blown upon" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 71). As Sarah Wood explains:

> Dinah, who never meant to cause trouble, is shocked by the phrase 'blown upon.' Something blows through *The Little Girls*: writing as what no one ever thought of. It doesn't dispense with individuality but neither is it afraid of lions, leopards, wolves, fires and falls. Dinah marvels at 'blown upon,' pauses over it. (…) Then Dinah repeats what the Wolf says to each Little Pig in turn: '"*I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down*" – Eh? That I never thought of.' She is appalled to see that her small-ads had innocently issued a kind of nuclear threat to her friends' adult lives. (Wood 15)

The impact of her ads, Dinah is made to see, cannot be contained and reduced to what Dinah had envisaged. Her small-ads contaminate, that is, touch but also threaten, her friends' as well as her own life, which we are later told, becomes "unstuck" from the place and people in it (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 285). Her words, she is made to see, have an unforeseeable force to

alter the realities of her friends' lives – both of which she knows nothing about, and thereby show her writing to be anything but passive, innocent or masterable (controllable).

The final event, Dinah's breakdown, is also an unintended consequence of words, namely, of Clare's insult: "*No* – Circe" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 256), with which she turns Dinah's advances down.[19] The event leaves Clare lurking around the house, seemingly feeling too guilty to come in. While Clare knows well the power of words to inflict injury ("one can injure feeling," she tells Dinah, 254), the novel ends with Clare's realization of the power of the unspoken word:

> Yes, it was terrible looking down into that empty box. I did not comfort you. Never have I comforted you. Forgive me.
>
> Clare decided that she had better, now, get back to the White Hart. Turning to go, she thought of her last sight of the sands, from the seawall: the wide sands and the running figure.
>
> 'Goodbye, Dicey,' she said – for now and for then. (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 306–07)

The end of the third part, thus, turns back to the final event of the middle part, on 23 July 1914, where the unspoken "goodbye" was left in the air. Mumbo, the "rough child" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 169) who, through her own observations, had learned that "[t]o be overcome [by feelings] is, to be got the better of" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 100), had avoided a more emotional goodbye, announced by the running, wailing figure (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 169) she knew to be Dicey. The child Clare, "each time, through inability to get away in time" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 100), had witnessed adults who "became 'overcome' – whether by heat, sea-sickness, vertigo, stage-fright or bad news. Of inferior calibre did she find them" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 100). Getting away from the emotional, always already a little too fey Dicey, with "a rough, general wave" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 169), she now sees, only

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[19] "– Mumbo, are you a Lesbian?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 254) Dinah asks Clare. The brief conversation that follows recalls a previous one in Clare's shop where Dinah goes on a rant about "the prefabricated feeling racket" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 214) at the centre of which she places love and sex which become "a put-up job" with complications "out of relation with Nature's purposes" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 214). Dinah reduces intimacy to a "a tremendous to-do" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 214) that occupies people while there is, she says, "So much more than there used to be to get one's hands on to. Outer space –" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 215). However, what she asks of Clare, eventually, is not the outer space, for she asks her to stay, while intrusively digging into Clare's inner space, asking about her sexuality and her affection for Dinah's mother, and possibly, for her, because when Clare confirms that she did once love Dinah's mother, but "once is enough" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 255) Dinah quickly points out her difference:

> 'I am also –' [Dinah]
>
> 'Well, what?' [Clare]
>
> 'I am also my father's child.' [Dinah] (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 255–66)

Her first sentence, cut short, sets up a suspense for a blunt revelation about her own sexual identity, which is both denied and suggested. Clare's "once is enough" is an offense: to have loved Mrs. Piggott (the "enchantress," 255) is to turn down loving the "enchantress's child" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 255), for they are reduced to being the same thing. By claiming that she is also her father's child, Dinah suggests that "once is not enough" does not apply here. The offer turns into offering Clare a new toothbrush, to which Clare replies: "*No* – Circe" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 256).

amplified the emotion by which Dicey had become 'overcome.' The uncomfortably nostalgic and whimsical Dinah, known to be easily overcome by imaginary flea bites and rendered so blah by word-affects, calls into question Clare's ideas of self-reliance (a self-made woman, Clare declared earlier: "*I* started, have a controlling interest in, buy for and operate MOPSIE PYE," 46). For, in order to care for someone or something who/that is overcome, contaminated to a breaking point, by forces stronger than expected, she must go beyond herself, that is read in the sense Bennett and Royle suggest, to think that fragility. "I did not comfort you. Never have I comforted you. Forgive me (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 307)" Clare says. Dinah's fragility, underlined by her mental breakdown, is what connects the readers with other instances of fragility in the novel, such as destruction on a global scale.[20]

Terrible natures, fragile china

As Thomas Dutoit writes, this novel's "specificity is also the way each time (1914, 1963), with their two cataclysms (…), synecdochalizes extimate destruction on a global scale ('then' as past or future) through the intimist portraitures of 'individual' experience ('now')" (Dutoit, "& Co-Graphy" 68–69). It is through this "individual" experience that Bowen invites us into the world of vast uncertainties. What is said to be individual experience is shown to be transferable. We become little girls. Not only *the* little girls, but little as we remember being, for there is much common ground to be found with those little girls, their fierceness and fragility. Bowen knows all too well the power of nostalgia and our desire to retrace our footsteps,[21] which acts as an interior steam-engine, taking us, all too willing passengers, back to previous selves, and at the same time, towards the thought of extinction, which ruins the possibility of a nostalgic return. Nostalgia has the tendency to erase the ugly and the dangerous, whereas Bowen invites it in.

Nostalgic returns in *The Little Girls* are contaminated with elements that unsettle one's experience, as, for instance, one's experience of a poem that is considered to be beautiful. The middle part features an in-class poetry reading where the intelligent child, Clare, is accused of

[20] *The Little Girls* is shadowed by the first unthinkable global destruction of things and whole places – the First World War which, in a way, like the global climate change, altered the physical, but also the mental landscapes. Dinah recalls her mother's death in the 1918 flu pandemic (the Spanish flu) not so much as the consequence of the infectious flu, but rather of utter disheartenment from the war: "That Spanish 'flu, that was like a war more. Why had people to live through that, then die then? Anyway, they had to. (…) It was very bad up there where we were, in those isolated places. Everywhere such awful dismay. There she was with nobody but me, doing what she could – so often, in vain. You can nurse sickness, but what can you do against dismay?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 235).

[21] As Bowen writes in "The Bend Back": "As things are the past is veiled from us by illusion – our own illusion. It is that which we seek. It is not the past, but the idea of the past that draws us" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 58).

contaminating Wordsworth's "beautiful poem" with excessive nostalgia. The child is said to be reading it with "*too* much expression," instinctively assuming that Wordsworth was regretful "like some old, fat person saying, 'There *was* a time when I could jump over a ten-foot wall'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 80). Clare's nostalgic return to the past which is not hers (for she is a little girl) is judged, by the teacher, to be disproportionately inflated for no-one could make such a jump (as the teacher points out), and her reading is refused on the account of her "ruining that beautiful poem" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 81) by contaminating Wordsworth's poem with a regretful tone. Unyielding in her impression of Wordsworth as a nostalgic old man, the "rough child" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 169) is asked to pick another poem. "Having drawn a breath twice her size" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 81), child-Clare then bursts out the bubble reputation of a "fellow-rough" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 81) in Sir Francis Hastings Doyle's patriotic "The Private of the Buffs": a poem about a drunken, poor, reckless, rude, low-born and untaught captive who distinguishes himself among "his fellow-roughs" (81) by refusing to bow down to the Chinese, the price of which is his gruesome death. The death to come (for Clare is cut short again) becomes "the place of doom left vacant by Clare" into which Sheila is invited. Child-Clare, left on her own to tackle nostalgia and deadly masculine patriotic pride (both quite silly as they emanate from a little girl), makes Miss Kinmate ill-at-ease, while Sheila's pre-fabricated (by her mother) reading of a poem about fairies is well-received.

It is the "pure" child the teacher wants, with pre-fabricated vision and feelings, in which her nature, perhaps presumed to be pure, would reflect her own nostalgic vision of childhood innocence. Bowen's children constantly transgress those borders, by somewhat instinctively being pulled towards their own natures, as unpure, messy, and *meshy* as grown-ups', and contaminate adults' "beautiful poems" by revealing the tacky underbellies of their own nostalgic returns to pure N(n)ature.

The poem Clare reads, Wordworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," returns not only to the past, but to a certain Platonic system of pre-existence by which children are closer to knowledge ("Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep/Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,/That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,/Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, —/Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!" Wordsworth 111–115) and God ("who is our home," Wordsworth 66), and thus also the best seers. Bowen's Clare, who is absolutely fascinated by various representations of nature, painted on Dinah's mother's china, makes a revealing statement at the end of the novel when she gets another

glimpse of the china, and concludes the Romantic, capitalized, "Nature" to be her "terrible nature":

> She was looking into a fragile representation of a world of honour, which was to say unfailingness. The soldier's child also looked at the peaceful landscapes, the some grey some coloured scenery-motifs on cups and bowls. Within no one of those miniature planets was there anything tumultuous. Whereas Nature is *my* terrible nature, the exile thought. She looked with longing at the everlasting seashores, mountain peaks, bays and lakes, even at the castles, on the frail rounded sides of the cups and bowls. Never had she found them anywhere else. She had loved them because they were not for her. (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 306)

Having been exiled from Dinah's room, and from the pictures within which she, as a child, had felt she lived (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 93), the grown-up Clare revisits Wordsworth's feeling of exile, as an adult, from the world of ideals and from a certain perception of divinity in nature. The divine glory of nature with its profound links to the human nature becomes no longer recognizable to the grown-up Clare. The undisturbed little planets with everlasting seashores, mountain peaks, bays, lakes, and castles, Clare concludes, are not for her, but also, Clare points it out that "never had she found them anywhere else" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 306). It is not nature, the outdoors, that had thrilled Clare, a soldier's child, but a certain representation of "unfailingness" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 306), that is, inexhaustibility and infallibility, that could be linked to both the idea of nature and the idea of her human nature.

The thought of untumultuous, inexhaustible nature represented on the china is not only to be found anywhere else, but it is also threatened by the fragility of the object itself: "One saw, here, how china could break. One foresaw also how, one day or another, it must do so beyond repair" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 93). Nature, seen as inexhaustible, everlasting, is haunted by the very fragility of things on which the representation of the indestructible nature is inscribed. Places, over time, are shown to be fragile. As Dinah visits the Promenade she knew from her childhood, she makes a remark about its fragility: "'Places evaporate, don't they?' Dinah said, looking about her emptily. 'The poor harmless things'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 195).

An element of dissolution is also emphasized through the concept of "a whole thing" that is undermined by Clare. She says: "– To hell with the whole thing,[22] anyway! (…) There's no such thing as 'a whole thing'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 72). Clare's negation of "a whole thing" is interesting, for it precedes the unearthing of the coffer they sealed up nearly fifty years before, which will come up empty, an empty shell and no longer "a whole thing" as it was

[22] Here, "the whole thing" is, in fact, not a thing, but a situation: the incalculable after-effects of Dinah's inventive advertisements that sprung from her own nostalgic return to the past events, namely, her memory of having buried a coffer with her two childhood friends who, now grown up, cannot be unburied and found as they once were.

meant to be. It thinks the impossibility of a complete separation, a seclusion of a thing as a whole in itself. The thing-in-itself is nothing. It is not to assume that a thing is only something when it is seen or observed by someone (historically that someone is human), but rather that a thing is always already contaminated, touched, affected, and affecting. Dinah's affectionate, "The poor harmless things" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 195), already exemplifies a certain affect from the things that become dear, that have touched her and now call for her affection, but cannot be called back into existence by this affection alone. Things evaporate, that is, they morph, being themselves the trace of something else; things are contaminated, and they contaminate.

"We live in the world of unintended consequences," Timothy Clark echoes Ulrich Beck, explaining the complex, interconnected, and surprising networks of things which material ecocriticism interprets (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 114). One of the main figures of New Materialism, Jane Bennett, speaks of those networks through the concept of *assemblages*, describing "the way combinations of agents, some human, but many non-human, can work together to produce unexpected effects" through "*distributive* agency" (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 114–15).

In *The Little Girls*, Sheikie's dancing is described as a strange contamination that constitutes the dancer and the scenery as some sort of co-exist-dance: "This was going on further up the breakwater, where the structure heighted as it approached the wall. To and fro, backward then forward along the wood-bone, bone-dry, dry-slippery edge of the topmost board jaunted the airily balanced dancer – going away, returning, turning each turn into a nonchalant pirouette" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 162).

We are given the impression that the place makes the dancer as well as is made by the dancer. The jaunts (little pleasure excursions) of the dancer, on the upmost board of some structure, are brought to the reader through wandering words. *Bone* leaps from its connection to *wood* towards a brief union with *dry*, constituting *bone-dry*, and *dry* breaks the former tie to be with *slippery*, constituting *dry-slippery*. This ephemeral dance visibly breaks the immunity of a thing, turning our attention from wood, to bone, to processed wood – a board, that all appear in the same veering lines where nothing just is, but is becoming. Within Sheikie's nonchalant pirouettes, bones, wood, and strange dry-slippery conditions, return (haunt) under strange identities, "going away, returning, turning" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 162) with the "the airily balanced dancer," who, in her turn, is knocked off the board by a gust of wind. Something surprising happens to language that, through the continuous breaking down and building up,

shows the dance as a kind of co-exist-dance. Co-exist-dance like co-existence is contamination, a stranger's (perhaps strange) touch.

The latter is, as Timothy Morton explains it through the notion of *mesh*, the very condition of being. The *mesh*, as he defines it, is "the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 28):

> All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how lifeforms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen – the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 29)

As Thomas Dutoit notices, the word "mesh" already haunts Bowen's *The Little Girls* through the plastic mesh bag (repeated four times in the novel) that Mrs. Coral carries with her. However, "mesh" is, it its turn, haunted by a near-homonym: mess. The word is used by Sheila and Clare after Dinah's breakdown:

> 'What a mess,' said Sheila.
> 'Yes. Mistakes have histories, but no beginning – *like*, I suppose, history?' (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 299)

There being no such thing as a whole thing is what here is shown to unite mistakes and history – both of which do not lend themselves to immediate reading, right here, right now. Borrowing from Shakespeare's Macbeth who, Dinah recalls, had done "an irrevocable thing" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 271), Dinah wonders: "He did, at least, though, know what it was. Could one fear that one *had* done an irrevocable thing, without knowing exactly what it was?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 271). The discovery of inhabiting a complex, interconnected world is in Bowen's novel also linked to the realization of not knowing you have done, you might be doing, or you will do an irrevocable thing, without knowing exactly what it was. Mistakes have histories, but no beginning, not only because the beginning precedes us, like dinosaurs do, but because our own agencies are enmeshed in the mesh: we coexist without mastery, we outlive the present without being able to read our own traces, which do not belong to us (Dinah's own trace, the coffer they collectively buried, comes up an empty shell near her old school which itself is effaced, "shelled" "into thin air" during the Second World War, 76).

Bowen strikes at the heart of the issue of reading complex networks or assemblages of different types of forces by writing a sensitive (or perhaps, to some readers, all too sensitive) human character who is shown becoming aware of being irretrievably caught in such a mesh/ss. *The Little Girls* both evokes and hides the irrevocable thing that Dinah fears.

An irrevocable thing

What has Dinah done? Where did she mess up? She does not know. We do not know. An aftershock without an event. There is no kindly leading narrative voice to point out the event, but there are multiple leads. Bowen does not give anything away so easily. "Try thinking" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 71), little Wolf.

Ellmann evokes Dinah's mother's death, which was another terrible contamination (the Spanish Flu), writing that "Dinah, unable or unwilling to acknowledge loss, fossilizes any object that might ward it off, with the result that she has fossilised herself. If she does not age, it is because she has remained embalmed within the past" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 199). Yet, her interest in burying (in order to conserve) things predates the loss of her mother. As far as irrevocable things go, Dinah herself evokes the possible unintended extermination of a specimen of a "sub-species" (through a little girl's eyes) to which she may have contributed as a little girl – a little boy named Trevor.

First, the poor creature is attacked by the content of Dicey's glass, which is said to be "partially scalding Trevor, who made away on all fours to a safer rug" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 155). Later on, the child Dinah (Dicey) is seen chasing the boy into a drain-pipe, from which she never sees him emerge. What is done to Trevor remains hidden from the adults, for it is covered up with Dicey's explanation that she is "playing" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 160) when she is really playing with fire inside that pipe. While the child Clare is shown picking the remains of Trevor's spectacles off from underneath her sand-shoes, Dicey, all red-handed from the rusty-pipe, boasts: "I struck matches at him. (…) he doesn't like the *noise*, even! So he rushes away from that, even … So what *I* did's going to teach him not to be so superior another time, too, isn't it?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 161). The humiliation remains hidden inside that pipe, along with Trevor, but it also contaminates Dinah's consciousness: "'For years – years – I've been afraid that his whitened skeleton still was stuck up there in that drain-pipe. You know that dreadful Mistletoe Bough story?[23] (…) when, in 1940, Mr Churchill gave us that splendid, rousing talk about probably fighting on the beaches, do you know what my first reaction was? 'Now they'll blast open that drain-pipe, and there'll be Trevor'" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 288).

The thought of Trevor's death is ignited by Dicey's realization that there is a whole range of possibilities for one's actions to be amplified. She says: "And then the war came, showing one nothing was too bad to be true" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 288). The first global

[23] It is an old story about unintended consequences: a game of hide-and-seek goes terribly wrong when a new bride hides herself in a trunk and is unable to escape. Her locked-up corpse is discovered years later.

war event opens up in Dicey the thought that one lives in a world of unintended consequences where one's actions have chain-reactions, which are possibly destructive on an unthinkable scale and unreadable. One may have done an irrevocable thing and not know what it was.

There are two layers of the irrevocable in the novel. On the one hand, the readers are made to trace possible misdemeanours of those former little girls: Dinah's strange advertisements and their effect on others; Sheila is said to have "not exactly" killed her first husband, but the opposite suggestions hang heavy in the air; and Clare is presumed to be a lesbian.[24] On the other hand, through the tracing of those individual lives and their irrevocable twists and turns, we are also made to witness larger events and their collective effect: those events evoke irrevocable consequences. As Sarah Wood points out, *The Little Girls* is "a nuclear-age book" written in the early 60s "the time of the Bay of Pigs, the period when a policy of irrevocable mutual nuclear destruction took root in the imagination" (Wood 12).

Sarah Wood's and Thomas Dutoit's readings, in their respective ways, lay bare the novel's exploration of large-scale destruction, in particular, its obsession with anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic extinctions. As Dutoit writes:

> Explicitly about (human) extinction, *The Little Girls* teems with fauna, not to mention flora: moths, seals, rooks, frogs, robins, donkey, an omniscient sniff, snakes, jaguars, dinosaurs, frogs or bullfrogs, camels, ants, martlets, swallows, wolves, pigs, bees, pack of bats, the 'witless or disenchanted note of one or another bird', Labradors, Airedales, dog or sheep, *taupes*, 'strong [...] horses', 'wildest horses' or 'brave [...] lions', 'some animals [that] won't eat in front of their captors', bears, swans, the 'scatter of vertebrae of a large mammal', 'fleas', bloodhounds, Great Danes, mastiffs, terriers, rabbits, owl, 'all fish [that] are [supposedly] the same', caged animals ('how many hundreds of pairs of captive eyes watched?'), magpies, dead birds, sharks, starfishes, beetles, lynxes, mice, rhinoceroses. Bookended by coral, by Mrs Coral who appears in the first chapter explicitly as a commentator on extinction, and her granddaughter, i.e. Coralie who appears in the last chapter not only endowed with that 'omniscient sniff' (in Bowen's only novel without so-called omniscient narration) but also explicitly extracting extinct animals or driving endangered ones into extinction (including automobiles), *The Little Girls* surrounds all of its reflection upon extinction by the deep time of coral reefs on earth: coral dying has already been the harbinger of extinction, and coral is one revenant from extinction. (Dutoit, "& Co-Graphy" 69–70)

While Dinah insists on leaving posterity some clues of people's individual natures (personalities) through "expressive objects" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 11), Mrs. Coral suggests a more radical alternative scenario: "Should there *be* any posterity" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 11), which Frank later echoes, when he says: "We may all go with the same bang" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 13). The imagination of an anthropogenic extinction event, a nuclear war, is

[24] Homosexuality was decriminalized in the UK only in 1967, though that act did not address women.

what threatens Part 1 and 3, whereas the middle part ends with the beginning of the First World War.

"Dinah, don't be fey!" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 23), first Frank, and later Clare, tell her, which refers to her whimsical behaviour, but "fey" also means "fated to die, doomed to death" (*OED*). To an extent, the novel is about becoming aware of being fey, that is, fated to die. *The Little Girls* thinks the nearness of death as well as the legibility of fragile existence (that is, all which can perish in a flash) through the idea of contamination, of touching and being touched, by not only that which has hands.

Derrida playfully refers to the link between the "humanist axiomatics of metaphysics and the privilege of the hand [*main*], between humanism and what [he] call[s] 'hu*main*isme'" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 83).[25] He explains Heidegger's claim that "the animal has no hand, but merely prehensile paws, or claws, etc. whereas only *Dasein* supposedly has what can properly be called hands with which it salutes, gives, thinks, and acts (*handelt*). And thought itself, [Heidegger] says, is a *Handeln.* And there is no animal *Handeln*" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 83). Heidegger's reductive handless "the animal" (a term that regroups all nonhuman beings) who cannot act is also not mortal (though not immortal either), but rather perishable. In his essay "The Thing," Heidegger explains: "The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it" (Heidegger 176). In Bowen's fiction, life as well as death are much less mutually exclusive concepts, as the effect of each is borne upon the other. Animal deaths, especially in *The Little Girls*, are incredibly haunting. They touch the living, outwardly and inwardly, showing the touching-power of death. Human life cannot escape touching, being touched by and in touch with the death of other animals.[26]

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[25] Hu*main*isme is a term that is recurrent in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* where the term also gets an English translation – humanualism. He writes:

> Humans are the only beings who have this hand at their disposal; they alone can *touch*, in the strongest and strictest sense. Human beings touch more and touch better. The hand is properly human; touching is properly human: it is the same proposition. Without playing too much, we could call this Maine de Biran's 'humanualism' [*humainisme*] – involving the same teleological hierarchy and the same presuppositions about the animal; yielding the same knowledge, the same will, the same will to know, but frequently also the same obscurantism. (Derrida, *On Touching - Jean-Luc Nancy* 152–53)

[26] As Timothy Morton sees this enmeshment: "'Human' means me plus my nonhuman protheses and symbionts, such as my bacterial micobiome and my technological gadgets, an entity that cannot be determined in advance within a thin, rigid outline or rigidly demarcated from the symbiotic real. The human is what I call a 'hyperobject': a bundle of entities massively distributed in time and space that forms an entity in its own right, one that is impossible for humans to see or touch directly" (Morton, *Humankind* 40).

There is, for instance, the story of "a wood with a dead sheep in it" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 114) that recalls Bowen's own encounter with a dead sheep: "Its body hideously torn open, bowels gushing forth, blood rusting its clotted wool, flies walking about on its open eyes, it lay as though nested in the deep, springy grass edging the road" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 267). This sheep is transplanted into *The Little Girls*, still haunting.

The novel also contains a humorous episode depicting a Suffragette at a children's birthday party:

> To the aunt's look of avidity and intentness was added the aimful glitter of pince-nez. Worse, the woman, though clad as far as the neck in a way which seemed neither here nor there, had topped herself off with a largish black straw hat which, by the sticky look and still more the smell of it, had been lately touched up with hat-dye, known to be poison, and had upon it what could only be magpie's wings. The effect was not of poverty or bravura but, far more, that of both hat's and wearer's having been chemically reconstituted, and of that's having so acted on *her* as to send her out robbing a charnel hedge. For the wings were not sporty hat-ornament, but sheer dead bird – of which the child on the roller was subject to an overmastering horror. And living, even, a magpie is of ill omen. (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 108–09)

The aunt is depicted as if mad from the poisonous hat-dye that, Bowen writes, had "chemically reconstituted" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109) both the Suffragette and her hat. Bowen seems to be referring to poisonous substances such as mercury or arsenic with which various clothing items used to be treated.[27] Mercury, in particular, caused neurological issues more commonly known as the "mad hatter disease" (erethism) in hatmakers. Here, Bowen's satirical gaze seems to be deeply sympathetic with the dead magpie at the sight of which little Dicey is filled with "an overmastering horror" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109). The bird is not read as a mere decoration, but as a corpse, a "sheer dead bird" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109), and also, as a reminder of one's own mortal condition, an "ill omen" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109), in the face of the First World War that overshadows Olive's birthday party. It is interesting that Bowen satirically depicts this death as an act of madness, a chain-reaction of poison acting on the woman, sending her "out robbing a charnel hedge" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109) of its inhabitant, the magpie. This sheer dead bird also represents a long list of bird species threatened by extinction.

The early 20th-century women's hats were decorated with exotic feathers, wings, and sometimes even the whole bird (often smaller species, such as hummingbirds), and the growing

[27] As Little explains, the 19th century fashion was riddled with toxic chemicals, such as aniline dyes that caused sores and bladder cancer, but also arsenic-based dyes were used for diverse clothing items and decorations, which caused rashes for women who wore them. Men's hats were brushed with mercury until 1960 when they went out of style. (B. Little)

demand for such decorations drove some species to near extinction. Magpie appears on the list of birds being exterminated in Europe for the London and Continental feather markets in William T. Hornaday's 1913 book *Our Vanishing Wild Life: Its Extermination and Preservation* (119). He shares alarming numbers of birds being sold into fashion industry. Those practices threatened various bird species with extinction which knew no geographical bounds:

> London is now the head of the giant octopus of the 'feather trade' that has reached out its deadly tentacles into the most remote wildernesses of the earth, and steadily is drawing in the 'skins' and 'plumes' and 'quills' of the most beautiful and most interesting unprotected birds of the world. The extent of this cold-blooded industry, supported by vain and hard-hearted women, will presently be shown in detail. Paris is the great manufacturing center of feather trimming and ornaments, and the French people obstinately refuse to protect the birds from extermination, because their slaughter affords employment to a certain numbers of French factory operatives. (…) The reader will notice that it is the way of the millinery octopus to reach out to the uttermost ends of the earth, and take everything that it can use. From the trackless jungles of New Guinea, round the world both ways to the snow-capped peaks of the Andes, no unprotected bird is safe. The humming-birds of Brazil, the egrets of the world at large, the rare birds of paradise, the toucan, the eagle, the condor and the emu, all are being exterminated to swell the annual profits of the millinery trade. The case is far more serious than the world at large knows, or even suspects. (Hornaday 117)

Bowen, whose mastery lies in unsettling our perception of the familiar, shows the Suffragette's hat, though probably not uncommon, in a different light through the child's eyes. From the contagious smelly poisonous goo of the Suffragette's hat, the "sheer dead bird" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109) haunts the child with "an overmastering horror" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 109), while the text also communicates another message about the bird – that even a charnel hedge is not safe for the native magpie. Yet, this satirical portrait of a Suffragette should not be taken as some ultimate depiction of women's vain indifference towards animal suffering – something that does echo in Hornaday's writing. Bowen's depictions of women are far less one-sided.

In *The Heat of the Day*, the image of a dead bird is specifically linked to women's knowledge and intuitive observations of their surroundings, which are being violently altered by men more often than women. When the protagonist, Stella, enters Cousin Nettie's vacant drawing room in Mount Morris, the following reflection ensues:

> After all, was it not chiefly in this room and under this illusion that Cousin Nettie Morris – and who now knew how many more before her? – had been pressed back, hour by hour, by the hours themselves, into cloudland? (…) her kind knew no choices, made no decisions – or did they not? Everything spoke to them – the design in and out of which they drew their needles; the bird with its little claws drawn to its piteously smooth breast, dead; away in the woods the quickening strokes of the axes, then the fall of the tree; or the child upstairs crying out terrified in its sleep. No, knowledge was not to be kept from them, it sifted through to them, stole up behind them, reached them by intimations – they suspected what they refused to prove. (…)

> And though, seated together, hems of their skirts touching, each one of the ladies had not ceased in herself to reflect alone; their however candid and clear looks in each other's eyes were interchanged warnings; their conversation was a twinkling surface over their deep silence. Virtually they were never to speak at all – unless to the little bird lying big with death on the path, the child being comforted out of the nightmare without waking, the leaf plucked still quivering from the felled tree. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 174–75)

The violence of deforestation and the death of a bird, losing its native habitat, are all shown to be meticulously recorded and pondered over. The minutiae on the grid of the needlepoint canvas as well as the mesh-like existence in their respective environments are echoed through a particular sensitivity towards the "small" things: children, leaves, and a little dead bird "lying big with death" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 175). What makes the leaf big, that is, what makes it loom large for the reader here, is not its force, but precisely its vulnerability – the "quivering" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 175) that reenacts the felling of the tree as well as the very relatable shaking and shivering our bodies are capable of. Similarly, the little bird is made big not only by the natural processes of decomposition, but also by the mortal onlooker's perception of death.

The conversational chatter, often perceived as a feminine "talent," here is rendered secondary to women's "deep silence" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 175) that is shown to be the very beginning of thinking the non-anthropocentric importance (or to use a word out of Bowen's vocabulary – relevance) of "small" things – a child, a bird, a leaf. The deep silence is what upsets the anthropocentric value-grid, allowing a rereading of their relevance. What Bowen says about the novel's mission of establishing abstract truth ("The detective story makes towards concrete truth; the novel makes towards abstract truth, Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 46) she also links to the question of relevance.[28] She writes: "With the detective story, the question 'relevant to *what*?' can be answered by the intelligence. With the novel, the same question must constantly and in every context, be referred to the intuition. The intelligence, in a subsequent check over, may detect, but cannot itself put right, blunders, lapses, or false starts on the part of the intuition" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 46). Across this deep silence underlying women's conversations, one is made to read, intuitively, visual cues that here are made to speak louder than any explanatory lines. The fallen tree and the little bird "big with death" (Bowen, *The*

[28] What opens the possibility of rereading in language, as Derrida shows, is a certain vulnerable (non-present, not fixed) existence of meaning that he evokes in an essay "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?" where he makes a reference to his translation of a German word *Aufheben, Aufhebung*, a word that signifies at once to suppress and to elevate, by the noun *relève* and the verb *relever* which allowed him to retain "the double motif and the replacement that preserves what it denies or destroys, preserving what it causes to disappear" (Derrida, "'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?'" 196).

Heat of the Day 175) become the reader's nightmarish waking dream – after all, is dreaming not the very experience of reading?

In *The Little Girls*, we move from deep silence to deep time – the immense non-human history that has shaped the world as we know it. A dinosaur appears, cut out of a "heavily mutilated" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 181) nature magazine, from where "coloured birds" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 181) have already been removed:

> But Pamela, a minute or two later, came after her [Clare] down the haunted room, holding the dinosaur between finger and thumb. 'Would you like to see this? It's prehistoric.' 'My goodness, yes,' said Clare, looking at the dinosaur with sympathy. (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 294)

There is also Coralie, Mrs. Coral's granddaughter, whose name recalls coral, which, as Thomas Dutoit reminds us, is a "revenant from extinction" (Dutoit, "& Co-Graphy" 70) whose ancestors were on Earth long before dinosaurs (who were here long before humans). As Beckett's narrator in *How It Is* measures time on an extinction-ridden Earth, in the mud; life in the view of deep time consists in "vast stretch[es] of time" (repeated throughout the book), unimaginable stretches of time on a human scale, punctured by significant extinction events. Ursula K. Heise explains:

> The best known of the five mass extinction events known to science occurred 65 million years ago, when a meteorite hit Earth and led to the demise of the dinosaurs as well as 80 percent of the species then existing: this was not a consequence of bad genes but bad luck, as Raup emphasizes. Bad luck for the reptiles, that is—good luck, by contrast, for mammals, whose subsequent evolution, including that of homo sapiens, was enabled by the disaster (Heise 20–21).

The non-avian dinosaurs did not survive, but small air-borne dinosaurs fared better, and are known today as birds, such as Bowen's magpie. Those revenants from extinction (which we all are, in a way, as it is estimated that over 99 per cent of the species that have lived on Earth have gone extinct (Shubin 24), and we are, thus, the posterity) now face the sixth mass extinction[29] brought on by human mastery (domination) of the Earth (which, in other words is an utter lack of mastery, that is, lack of control over the uncontrollable effects of this

[29] Shubin evokes a recent analysis of background rates of extinction and extinction rates, conducted by Ehrlich G. Ceballos and others and published in 2015 in *Science Advances*, 1(5) under the title "Accelerated modern human–induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction." They came to the following troubling conclusion: "An estimate for continual background extinction rates, using historical records, is two mammal extinctions per 10,000 species per 100 years. Similar figures emerge for birds, amphibians, fish and reptiles. Comparing this background rate with actual species loss today reveals that species loss in recent years is elevated as much as 100 times relative to the background levels. Put another way, the species loss we are seeing today would have taken as much as 10,000 years to happen if humans were not present" (Shubin 29–30).

domination). Looking back at the vast stretches of time, the deep time, Neil Shubin warns us: "If the fossil record is any guide, even the most robust and successful species and ecosystems are, over geological time, fragile. That alone is a resonant notion as we evaluate our species' stewardship of the planet" (Shubin 31).

As the fossil record shows, even the most "successful" species (the most invasive) are fragile. We humans, as the most "successful"/invasive species, are as fragile as the once mighty dinosaurs in the fragilized world of our own making. Bowen's gaze on this fragilized world through what Thomas S. Davis calls "Bowen's extinct scene" offers interesting insight into reading the world in which human forces have become world-altering. Davis argues that "late modernism's outward turn figures everyday life as a scene where world-systemic distress attains legibility" as late modernist texts such as Bowen's "look to the everyday to explain a historical transformation in the structure of the world-system" (Davis 2). Davis turns to Bowen's 1941 story "In the Square" where he reads what he calls Bowen's *extinct scene*. He writes:

> Bowen's extinct scene, (…), is not just an evacuated, ravaged war zone; it is the place where we glimpse an uneasy coexistence of familiarity and disorientation, of everydayness and history. Those places, memories, things, and habits that ground experience and knowledge become unsettled and draw attention like a magnetic field. In their sustained attention to those disruptions of everyday life, Bowen's stories ask what the unsettled surfaces of the everyday might tell us about the less visible historical transformations. This is exactly why the story concludes with Magdela's question to Rupert: "Do you think we shall see great change?" The question is not if "great change" will occur, but if – and how – we shall see it. (Davis 2)

The question of legibility of change returns in *The Little Girls* where Bowen writes: "There is seldom anything convulsive about change. What is there is there; there comes to be something fictitious about what is not. At first glance, what had been the site of St Agatha's, grounds and building, looked like being impossible to determine – the coast road had somewhat altered in shape?" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 196). This is the site of a school Dinah, Sheila, and Clare had attended as little girls – the building itself, as Sheila explains, had been blown up in the Second World War, although the thought of its extinction precedes this global event: "St Agatha's being some way above beach level made it less likely, it was generally held, to be swept away during a storm: certainly nothing had happened yet, pleasurable though the excitement would have been" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 85). The no more little girls witness neither event. The destructive convulsion of a wave, or a bomb that did wipe out the entire building cannot be read from the scenery itself. "What is there is there; there comes to be something fictitious about what is not," (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 196) Bowen writes, pointing out the discrepancies of the individual experience of the now that is much dependent on a full ontological presence

(of what there is, now) which is ill-equipped to deal with extinction – for extinction, inversely, is the business of something *hardly* being there or not being there at all. It requires the reading of what hardly exists or does not exist, and as such, it must go beyond the present and what is present now and how the present produces our sense of "the real."

The sense of the real as what is present, what is presently perceivable, is put to test in the novel through two conservation projects: Dinah's conservation project in the heat of the Cold War, and the treasure trove the little girls buried before the First World War. Dinah's time-capsule intends to constitute a fuller image of herself and others, not to be "stuck together in one lump" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 10). Dinah explains how all sorts of "learned theories" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 10) are based on odd fragments of former lives: "one or two sad beads, or splinters of crockery (…) arrowheads, daggers, and dinged-in skulls" which, she claims, "give such a fractious, bad-tempered picture of life, I feel they must make one unfair to the vanished races" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 10). She asks people to bring twelve objects "which they couldn't have normally borne to part with" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 11). Those objects, a dozen per person, are what she calls "expressive objects" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 11) which would write history while conserving the idea of personality/individuality once their language as well as its speakers are all extinct, and the language would be unmeaningful for the new races.

Finding the first coffer she had buried with Clare and Sheila to be empty, however, taints her new project with uncertainty: what happens to the traces ("clues to reconstruct *us* from," 11) is uncontrollable. The identities she seeks to bury in a cave and lock up for many years to come, do not guarantee their readability, which is exactly what child Clare's letter, written in an unknown language (which Clare made up and wrote down in what is said to be blood) already hinted at, nearly 50 years ago:

> '"*We are dead, and all our fathers and mothers. You who find this, Take Care. These are our valuable treasures, and our fetters. They did not kill us, but could kill You. Here are Bones, too. You need not imagine that they are ours, but Watch Out. No wonder you are so puzzled. Truly Yours, the Buriers of This Box*."'
> Silence was followed by a voice, marvelling: 'That is what we said?'
> 'Yes.'
> '"Truly Yours." Are we truly theirs?'
> 'That's a mocking laugh.' (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 147)

The note Clare writes is doubly misleading, for, first, it is in a made-up language, and second, it feigns what it promises to offer: things such as "our fetters," which the reader knows to be a mere dog-chain, thus, dog's fetters. The other curious element is the endnote of their letter, the unreadable "Truly Yours" which first feigns the offer by being in a made-up

language, and then feigns what it offers: to be the truly yours, that is, benevolent towards the discoverer, for we are told it is but "a mocking laugh" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 147). The collection in the box does not offer itself to the posterity that had been imagined discovering it, which is rendered even more evident by them being the posterity who attempts to open up the coffer, only to discover that their own trickery has outwitted them, and now that they are the posterity they cannot read the message. What they had put in the ground is now irretrievable, and in some ways beyond effaceable for the buried things seem to have effaced themselves and are thus beyond their control.[30] The empty coffer leaves Dinah with what could be thought of as some sort of a frail mnemonic trace of what was there, that cannot present itself fully, for the lost objects cannot be perfectly recalled. There are no physical, present, "clues to reconstruct" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 11) the little girls from:

> Although Dinah finds herself erased from any now, she does say: '"But *you're* real, Mumbo,"' '"You were there before,"' therefore realising that what is left is what is real. Such realisation happens at Sheikie's *oikos*. Clare tells Dinah that she is 'at Sheikie's [home]' when Dinah asks where she now is. Yet Sheikie's home is not the home as Dinah conceives it. Sheikie's home is seen through Sheikie-vision, which is the *saw* or cutting of what one saw. Dinah had said to Sheila that her, Dinah's, house '*now*' 'has [run away], you see', and when Dinah says the experiment with extinction was just a game, she says again to Sheikie '"Now—you see?"' Yet to Dinah's notion of collapsed game, '"We saw there was nothing there,"' Sheikie expresses the knowledge of her vision: '"A game's a game," Sheila averred, glancing down her nose [|nôz|]'. Sheila's glance lets see what she knows |nôz|, the verity that she'll also express, right after Dinah realises that what is real (now) is always only to be apprehended from what is left (the then in the now), that she sees the house as that which is left or remains after a split. (Dutoit, "& Co-Graphy" 78–79)

Finding the coffer empty is the stone-cold shock of extinction, the experience of an irrevocable thing. The dependency on the presence of what is "real," what is here now, is furthermore underlined by Dinah's reaction to the announcement that a mason will come to seal up the cave where her collection lies: "Wall up my cave? Then where would my cave be? – Gone" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 230). The real, apprehended from what is present, does not

[30] The inability to control the meaning of concepts, to erase the unintended consequences of a word, is human, as Derrida argues in *The Beast and the Sovereign* where he writes:

> It is more a matter of wondering whether what one calls man has the right, for his own part, to attribute in all rigor to man, to attribute to himself, then, what he refuses to the animal, and whether he ever has a concept of it that is *pure, rigorous, indivisible, as such*. Thus, even supposing, *concesso non dato*, that the "animal" is incapable of effacing its traces, by what right should one concede this power to man, to the "subject of the signifier"? And especially from a psychoanalytic point of view? Any man may certainly be *conscious*, within a space of doxic phenomenality, of effacing his traces. But who will ever judge the efficacy of this gesture? (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 130–31)

Derrida, arguing against Lacan here, thinks the trace as what always effaces itself, and is thus, beyond our power to efface it.

necessarily think the fragility of what hardly is, what only barely or no longer exists.[31] To think extinction, therefore, must become the business of thinking and reading the real through fragile presences and absences which literary writings such as Bowen's make possible.

Conclusion

Dinah, whose name is a remnant of Alice's pet cat, enters the eerie Wonderland of our own making, where her rules of conservation no longer apply. Bowen writes in her autobiography about the 20th century's vast technological progress: "The twentieth century […] dawned on a world which already had cause to regard itself as completely modern, and congratulate itself thereupon. Enough was enough. Anything further, one felt, might annoy God" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 287). The threat from the nuclear technology that could destroy life on an unthinkable scale, haunts Bowen's writing with a thought of extinction that goes beyond the (heavenly) survival of humankind. The thought of extinction as the thought of a sheer dead species urges one to think of a more humble, perishable, perhaps even godforsaken man who, like a mighty dinosaur, is on his way to extinction that could be rediscovered or misread from the expressive objects he leaves behind. That is, if such objects remain. *The Little Girls* imagines they do not.

The Little Girls stages the world in which one is haunted by the suspicion of having done an irrevocable thing, individually or collectively, without knowing what it was. "The restless flurry of plotting, both busy and banal" which, as Corcoran writes, "seems haplessly out of key with the haunting desolation" of the book's theme (Corcoran 7–8) to me depicts our very human inability to deal with an irrevocable thing such as extinction. The irrevocable thing, as Bowen imagines it, is what escapes recognition. It is what you do not know that you do. It is haplessly out of key with your world as you perceive it. (Regarding the sixth mass extinction, its vast scale, most of our busy and banal plotting is out of key, and if not, not enough.) What

[31] One way to think about hardly existing is to consider species rarity that, as Pincelli Hull explains, is a signal of mass extinction: "The researchers note, that the modern ocean is full of ecological 'ghosts' – species that are now so rare that they no longer fill the ecological roles they did previously, when they were more abundant. Species rarity itself, rather than extinction, can lead to a cascade of changes within ecosystems, long before the species go extinct (…)" (Morton, *Humankind* 75–76). Thinking about extinction also seems to require the rethinking of being alive and being real, which is what Timothy Morton suggests when he writes that "all beings are better thought as undead, not as animate or inanimate" (Morton, *Humankind* 50), going against the idea of full vitality of the humankind against which everything and everybody else has been reduced to "mere lumps of extension" (Morton, *Humankind* 47), reductively called Mother Earth and "regarded as infinitesimally and infinitely malleable substances" (Morton, *Humankind* 46–47). He writes that the more we think ecological beings (that humans are, also), the more it makes sense to think of them as spectral: "We are both guests of each other, guests of the house, and the house is a guest of ourselves" (Morton, *Humankind* 93).

you do is unmasterably enmeshed with other forces, and becomes a trace one has individually no control over. It becomes extinction. It becomes climate change. *The Little Girls* calls for the realization that collectively we are the Big Bad Wolf, huffing and puffing, but we are also, individually, the Little Pigs, afraid of the uncontrollable strange wind that threatens to blow our world apart.

1.4 Affected, Infected at Every Turn: Facing the Unknowable Worst in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and Beckett's *Worstward Ho*

While Bowen's *The Little Girls* (1964) deals with the post Second World War world where technological innovations had gained unprecedented powers of destruction on a global scale, *The Heat of the Day* (1948), however, looks into the world at war that marked the beginning of what some call the Great Acceleration. As Jesse Oak Taylor explains, the end of the Second World War aligns with "the first nuclear tests that left a legible, globally synchronous trace in the stratigraphic record," yet he claims that the real force is "the scaling up of population growth, fossil fuel combustion, and urbanization known as the Great Acceleration" (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 38). While some trace the beginning of the Anthropocene to the Industrial Revolution, Oak Taylor, along the lines of Jan Zalasiewicz and his colleagues in the Anthropocene Working Group, concentrates on "a scalar shift in both size and intensity, a moment at which the vectors of carbon-based capitalism veered skyward" (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 38). All the accelerated processes of industrialization, fossil fuel use, and population growth pass a threshold in the mid-twentieth century by which "they emerge as forces at planetary scale" (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 38).

These emerging forces, out of scope for a mere man in the blinding mist of a vast global event, already haunt Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948). The novel links the fate of the text's protagonist to that of the historical space in which she lives. As Bennett and Royle write:

> […] Bowen identifies the twentieth century as 'a clear-sightedly helpless progress towards disaster' in which 'The fateful course of [Stella's] fatalistic century seemed more and more her own: together had she and it arrived at the testing extremities of their noonday'. This sense of the fatalistic or presciently disastrous may be seen to highlight the importance of the kind of different thinking of the political, and of identity, promoted by Bowen's texts. (Bennett and Royle 93)

The thinking of the enmeshment of the individual and her time, gives way to reimagining our blind involvement in our collective destructive influence on the biosphere of the hyperobject we call the Earth through the particular sensibility set off by the dimly perceived events of the Second World War, which paints, in Bowen's writing, the imagery of the worst. Through Bowen's fictional as well as non-fictional depictions of the worst (WW2) – her essays and reports, I will explore the necessity to think the enmeshment of the local home in global phenomena, such as the Second World War, which, as a global event, I argue, offers us valuable material for thinking about climate change. I will also explore how Bowen's depiction of the imminent unknowable danger challenges our perception of the real, urging us towards thinking

about the unknown or the unknowable, and thereby, towards thinking about complex phenomena and humbler presences – the kind of thinking that is very relevant to the ecological thought (as it is imagined by thinkers such as Timothy Morton). I will shadow Bowen's dimly lit depictions of the war (of the worst), which infect and affect their readers precisely with their curious half-presence or unknowability, with Beckett's invention of the language for the unthinkable worst in *Worstward Ho* (1983). I will show that both authors, through their experiences of the worst, translated into an inventive language, respond to the worst through their respective "resistance writing" that resonates with the urgency of the 21st century worst – climate change, and also offer alternative modes of thinking-feeling to deal with as well as prevent the losses (the worst*s*) to come.

Strange growths

Bowen's depictions of the Second World War are, as she herself has written, more "studies of climate, war-climate, and of the strange growths it raised" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 95). *The Heat of the Day* and Bowen's wartime stories do not depict the war action itself, but the war is omnipresent in the way some absences can be felt. The global war and its various effects haunt the novel as strange growths, not only in the sense "strange developments," but growths like cancerous cells are to the bare eye: "all out of proportion to our faculties of knowing, thinking, and checking up" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 96). Bowen's thoughts on the difficulties of perceiving events on a global scale meet the current challenges of thinking climate change and mass extinction, for they both entail thinking what is out of proportion to our faculties of knowing, thinking, and checking up.

It seems the events that deeply engage with human death on a large scale (a global war or a pandemic, as we in the course of 2020 have learned) underline the difficulties of thinking globally, or worse, the impossibility of thinking as a species. Bowen writes: "War's being global meant it ran off the edges of maps; it was uncontainable. What was being done, for instance, against the Japanese was heard of but never grasped in London" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 308). The war in Bowen's fiction, as the author herself writes, is seen or felt "more as a territory than as a page of history" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 95), yet the territory is not only geographical. The war is shown to cross, or even obliterate, all sorts of borders,[32] physical

[32] Maud Ellmann writes: "[…] *The Heat of the Day* examines how the bonds of passion, kinship, history, custom, class, heredity, and nationality are torn apart by the destruction of buildings and furniture. At the same time, the furniture of realism is shattered by the violence of Bowen's style: the author told Jocelyn Brooke that she intended the structure of the novel to resemble 'the convulsive shaking of a kaleidoscope, a kaleidoscope also of which the

or not, thereby becoming a strange territory: the one that cannot be mapped down, seen, or touched directly. It is perceived through the strange growths it raises, much as we perceive climate change through the reoccurring aberrations in the weather. When the rain keeps falling on our heads for a little while, the way it does on Gene Kelly in the 1952 musical *Singin' in the Rain*, climate change does not appear. Yet, it is harder to keep "laughing at the clouds so dark up above" when the rain's intensity and duration change, when it starts breaking apart solid things and abolishing our familiar sense of seasons. As Morton writes:

> Consider raindrops: you can feel them on your head—but you can't perceive the actual raindrop in itself. You only ever perceive your particular, anthropomorphic translation of the raindrops. Isn't this similar to the rift between weather, which I can feel falling on my head, and global climate, not the older idea of local patterns of weather, but the entire system? I can think and compute climate in this sense, but I can't directly see or touch it. The gap between phenomenon and thing yawns open, disturbing my sense of presence and being in the world. (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 11–12)

The head that receives the raindrop can but translate the raindrop according to the human scale, but, as Morton explains, "the raindrop itself is radically withdrawn" and the climate cannot be directly read from the drop (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 75–76). "The climate is not a 'space' or an 'environment,' just a *higher-dimensional object* that we don't see directly" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 75). It is what he calls a *hyperobject*: an object that is "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans"; viscous and non-local, that is, "any 'local manifestation' of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1), which is why thinking them is tricky.[33] Morton writes that locality is false immediacy (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 48) and explains that on a deep level there is no such thing as local, when we are thinking about hyperobjects: "The wet stuff falling on my head in Northern California in early 2011 could have been an effect of the tsunami churning up La Niña in the Pacific and dumping it on the

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inside reflector was cracked'" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 146). The "whole-sale destruction" of "man's surroundings, streets and houses, tables and chairs sent up, for him, their psychological worth" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 322–23), Bowen writes. The traces of such perception-altering psychological changes are visible in *The Heat of the Day*: "The wall between the living and the living became less solid as the wall between the living and the dead thinned" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92). This imagery of dissolution of boundaries is carried on also in Bowen's next novel, *A World of Love* (1955) where she writes: "[…] another war had peopled the world with another generation of the not-dead, overlapping and crowding the living's senses still more with that sense of unlived lives. Antonia and others younger were creatures of an impossible time, breathing in wronged air – air too empty or too full, one could not say which" (Bowen, *A World of Love* 45).

[33] Some of the other examples of a hyperobject:

> A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are 'hyper' in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not. (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1)

land, La Niña being a manifestation of global warming in any case" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 47).

Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* precedes yet joins that line of thinking through its depiction of the Second World War – a global event of an unprecedented scale ("all out of proportion to our faculties of knowing, thinking, and checking up," Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 96). The novel reads the war through the rain that falls on Stella's head: "In the sky there was a slow, stealthy massing of clouds: she walked hatless, and once or twice a drop—single, sinister, warmish—splashed on her forehead" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 126). The raindrop that is translated as "single, sinister, warmish" connects Stella to the idea of a large-scale war going on, elsewhere:

> She began to feel it was not the country but occupied Europe that was occupying London—suspicious listening, surreptitious movement and leaden hearts. The weather-quarter tonight was the conquered lands. The physical nearness of the Enemy—how few were the miles between the capital and the coast, between coast and coast!—became palpable. Tonight, the safety-curtain between the here and the there had lifted; the breath of danger and sorrow travelled over freely from shore to shore. The very tension overhead of the clouds nervously connected London with Paris—even, as at this same moment might a woman in that other city, she found some sort of comfort in asking herself how one could have expected to be happy? (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 126–27)

The feeling that the safety curtain had been lifted seems to be the very dissolution of the sense of location as here and there touch through the clouds that carry the "single, sinister, warmish" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 126) drop over from France to London. Like a bodily nervous system flaming up at the sign of danger, the sky is shown to be contaminated by clouds nervously connecting London to Continental Europe. Stella's reading of her immediate environment, which is a bodily experience, is contaminated by her knowledge of there being an elsewhere that in this war event, and against all effort to demarcate political and geographical borders, has become inseparable from the here and now. The experience of being here, or being anywhere, is haunted in the novel by the vast and elusive war-event, even in its perceptible absence, paving the way towards the treachery of thinking locally (only) about global phenomena. Thinking locally is shown to be not only short-sighted but impossible: a war of this magnitude, though it fails to be perceptible in all the places at all times, affects globally, and in that respect resembles the not always visible processes of climate change.

In the novel, the treachery of thinking locally is perhaps best described in the passage where the narrative voice unravels the conditions of Robert's and Stella's love which earlier had been described in terms of isolation. It is said that Robert is a "habitat" for Stella and for two years they had "possessed a hermetic world, which, like the ideal book about nothing,

stayed itself on itself by its inner force" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 90). This hermetic world is shown to be separated from the rest by a mere illusion, for Bowen writes: "No, there is no such thing as being alone together" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 195). The environment of the hermetic world which stays on itself by its inner force is not sustainable, for it cannot ignore the outer forces, which, as Bowen shows, are not properly "outside." What is felt to be local, near, manageable, is already inherently part of larger patterns, which, even if one only wishes to think locally, cannot be ignored.

Stella and Robert are said to be "the creatures of history" who have never been alone together in their love, for "their time sat in the third place at their table" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 194). Their time is shown to be inherent to their very being ("At no other [time] would they have been themselves; what had carried their world to its hour was in their bloodstreams," Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 195) and their being together: "The relation of people to one another is subject to the relation of each to time, to what is happening" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 195). As Maud Ellmann points out, Bowen makes the outside world perceptibly ooze into the lovers' hermetic bubble through sound:

> Noise obliterated the beginning of the lovers' story, and the noise is the form in which the time asserts itself throughout this novel: the shriek of sirens, the crash of bombs, the 'sting' of telephones, the striking of clocks, the peal of victory bells, and most memorable of all, the 'icelike tinkle of broken glass…swept up among the crisping leaves.' These noises burst through bolted doors and blacked-out windows, penetrating all enclosures in which lovers try to be alone together. This is a novel about leaks, about the porousness of architectural and psychic space, about the failure to keep secrets in, intruders out. (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 153)

The environmental impact (in the general sense of what is happening around one) is also inseparable from identity; it alters Londoners inwardly. Each turning away from the horror of what is happening around one seems to produce ghosts. Ghosts, which noticeably contaminate Bowen's wartime fiction, she says, "fill the vacuum for the uncertain 'I'" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 98); the "I" which in *The Heat of the Day* is shown to be constantly threatened by dissolution. The impossibility of being alone together, even in love, is denied, for: "To have turned away from everything to one face is to find oneself face to face with everything" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 195). The inward turn is shown to be unstoppably veering towards the "outside."

The turning away, which could be explored also as a metaphor for isolationism, backfires, because, there is no being outside of the world that is at war: "You did not know what you might not be tuning in to, you could not say what you might not be picking up—affected, infected you were at every turn" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 248). Stella's inward

turn, away from the world at war and towards one face only, Robert's, culminates with finding herself face to face with the enemy. Robert's being a Nazi spy opens up a whole other aspect of the war's ideological power struggles that birthed the war from which she had retrieved into this hermetic world of love in the first place. Her literal outward turn, her trip to Ireland to visit the estate which her son inherited from Cousin Francis, Mount Morris, depicts a larger inward turn: Ireland's decision to stand alone together by declaring neutrality.

Bowen's own views on this neutrality shape how Ireland is portrayed in *The Heat of the Day*. As Patricia Laurence explains, Bowen took a moral stance against fascism when she became a spy in Ireland for The British Ministry of Information under the guise of writing a book about her family history (*Bowen's Court*, 1942), which was interpreted as a betrayal in Ireland. As Laurence writes:

> In 1993, Frank Clifford and Jack Lane of the Aubane Historical Society of County Cork were the first to target Bowen's spying activities after Robert Fisk's 1979 revelations. The same exigency that drives Derrida to write things under erasure (*sous rature*)—to write a word and then cross it out but then print the word and the deletion—motivated Clifford and Lane in their treatment of Bowen in *The North Cork Anthology*. Though they included a few passages from *The Last September* in the anthology, a black line is drawn through her name in the table of contents to mark her exclusion. At the same time that she and her writing are present, she is denied status as a North Cork resident (though born in Cork) or even an Irish author, asserting that her themes and characters were drawn from English culture. (…) The Dublin media responded with outrage to Lane and Clifford's charges, and Fisk revealed that demonstrations surfaced in the 1999 centenary celebration of her birth at University College, Cork, where Clifford and Lane distributed some of her espionage reports in a pamphlet, *Notes on Eire: Reports to Winston Churchill, 1940–1942*; more reports followed in 2009. The contretemps persisted, and in 2007 a debate about Bowen's wartime activities surfaced again in the *Irish Examiner* as English and Irish writers and politicians took sides. (Laurence, chap.7)

However, it is worth noticing that Bowen's activities against the spread of fascism were not limited to her MOI activities in Ireland. After the war, she participated in influencing public opinion abroad. She was involved in the writing of the "London Letter" for the British Office of Information (1945-46), attended the Paris Peace Conference in July-August 1946, and she also became a part of the de-Nazification program in Germany in April 1946, providing recommendations for British books to be translated and published in Germany and Austria (Laurence, chap.7). In 1948-1949, she was a cultural ambassador, lecturer, and propagandist for the British Council in Eastern and Central Europe (Laurence, chap.7).

Her mission in Ireland was to "gauge public opinion of Irish neutrality" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 151), help to "spread the British point of view to the intellectuals, parliamentarians, clergy and people she met," and to produce reports that would help to determine effective propaganda strategies against German influence over Britain's (Laurence,

chap.7). However, her opinion of Ireland's neutrality seems far from a simplistic one-sided criticism, and through it show her own particular ties to Ireland as well as England, her being Anglo-Irish. From the viewpoint of the English, she writes in her report of November 1940 to the Foreign Office for Halifax's personal attention, "the childishness and obtuseness of this country cannot fail to be irritating," yet she also advises against any sort of threat from Britain towards Ireland's independence: "In the war of this size and this desperate gravity Britain may well feel that Irish susceptibilities should go to the wall. But it must be seen (and no doubt is seen) that any hint of violation of Eire may well be used to implement enemy propaganda and weaken the British case" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 151). In her 1941 essay, "Eire," Bowen also underlines that the decision of neutrality was "not wholly grounded on weakness," but was also Eire's first independent act and, as such, it had a "symbolic as well as moral significance" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 31): "While the rights of Eire's neutrality may be questioned, the conviction behind it must be believed" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 35). As Ellmann writes:

> Despite her commitment to the British war effort, Bowen lamented the presence of 'anti-Irish feeling' in England, and insisted that Ireland's neutrality – its 'first free self-assertion' – was 'positive, not merely negative': 'She has invested her self-respect in it. It is typical of her intense and narrow view of herself that she cannot see that her attitude must appear in England an affair of blindness, egotism, escapism or sheer funk.' (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 151)

Laurence also explains that Bowen urged for more tactful and fewer anti-Irish British radio broadcasts in Ireland (Laurence, chap.7). The British representations of Ireland's neutrality (as a "hostile" or even "inhuman" disregard for the importance and scale of "freedom's war") painted a picture of Ireland's indifference through the imagery of comfort. As Bowen explains: "The British popular press does not allow such pictures to lapse: the blaze of Dublin city lights (almost Broadway, after the darkness here) suggests an unfeeling ostentation, and hams, steaks and butter are given luscious prominence by journalists who, on flying visits to Dublin, failed to obtain the desired interviews" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 30).

In *The Heat of the Day*, when Stella, herself a secret agent for Britain, visits Ireland for the first time, she seems to be haunted by the image the British press had created. Bowen writes:

> Stella had assumed there to be no shortages of any kind in Eire. The exciting sensation of being outside war had concentrated itself round those fearless lights—though actually, yesterday night as her ship drew in, the most strong impression had been of prodigality: around the harbour water, uphill above it, the windows had not only showed and shone but blazed, seemed to blaze out phenomenally; while later, dazzling reflections in damp streets made Dublin seem to be in the throes of a carnival. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 167)

Yet, to her surprise, she is made to see that the neutral Ireland is also suffering from shortages, as she guesses from the Donovans' strange behaviour around candles which, she notices, "had

been burned already, and to unequal lengths" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 167). We are later told: "Up here in her bedroom, down there in the library, she was burning up light supplies for months ahead. Well on into the winter after Stella's departure the Donovan family went to bed in the dark" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 168).

Bowen's activities in Ireland gave her an insight about how the Second World War really made itself felt in Ireland. She writes: "Materially, neutral Eire in wartime is far from being the home of comfort and ease. Shortage and insecurity are felt everywhere. Any original fools' paradise is being rapidly broken up" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 34). As Laurence points out, Bowen's reports describe "the fragile economy; the lack of military resources and trained militia; shortages of tea, radio batteries, paper, and gas; censorship of newspapers and movies; fear of bombing and isolation" (Laurence, chap.7). The neutrality, though justified by Bowen as Eire's first independent act, is shown to be less of a breeze than its descriptions in the British press make it out to be. Bowen goes as far as to say that "Eire's immense sociability, her natural bent to the stranger makes this loss [of communication, it being "outside every circuit"] more vital than it might appear" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 32). Though Bowen was a spy for the British, it is hard not to notice the diplomatic skill of her reports that seems to mould itself sensitively to the reader's potential prejudice before turning the tables on this prejudice ever so smoothly. Sensitive to the way in which words affect people,[34] she seems to hold her reader on the balm of her hand. It is, therefore, no wonder that her reports were praised.[35]

In *The Heat of the Day*, the neutral Ireland depicted in the British press is shown to be suffering along with the rest of the world, and not only that: we also learn that Cousin Francis himself was involved with the British War Office. As Bowen writes elsewhere, the exodus of Irishmen, "across the Border or across the Channel," was being officially ignored, even though many did serve with the Army, Navy or Air Force (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 32). *The Heat of the Day* hints at the complexity of the situation in Ireland, and thereby defies simplistic depictions of its neutrality.

[34] It that regard, it should be mentioned that when Bowen joined the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, she recommended to include "verbal provocation" as a factor that could reduce murder to manslaughter (a suggestion that was accepted), noting that "the continuous mental torture is equally provocative" as a physical provocation. Laurence also mentions that "the Commission recommended the abolishment of capital punishment in 1952, but the death penalty for murder continued until 1965, and for treason, until 1998" (Laurence, chap.7).

[35] Laurence writes that Bowen's MOI reports were praised by the agency "for being observant, sane, well written and interesting" (Laurence, chap.7).

Caring about/for the unknown

Bowen's own realization of the impossibility of remaining absolutely neutral, in the sense of being outside of the war on a global scale, possibly began with the First World War. She wrote about May 1915, when London was for the first time bombed from the air: "'Hearing a clock strike, one morning, with more meaning than usual I stopped halfway up a grandstand to realize that time held war. The hour was more than my hour'" (Laurence, chap.6). Bowen's realization of being a creature of history also translates into that of her fictional characters. Bowen's wartime fiction, where being sensibly loosens its familiar ties to locality and presence, thinks existence as always already inherently a co-existence through both war experiences. The idea of being that could reduce itself to here and now is dissolved through the general ghostliness that haunts the scenery in *The Heat of the Day*.

The war-action, even in its absence, contaminates the peaceful opening scene in the middle of Regent's Park. An open-air concert taking place there, on the first Sunday of 1942, is haunted by shadows and leaves, which are "crepitating as though in the act of dying" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 7). Even the audience is perceived not as individuals, but rather as body parts "ranks of chairs and faces and hands" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 7) while on the stage "the musicians' grouped, black, seated bodies had fastened to them the faces and hands of ghosts" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 13–14). Bowen writes:

> Most of all the dead, from mortuaries, from under cataracts of rubble, made their anonymous presence—not as today's dead but as yesterday's living—felt through London. Uncounted, they continued to move in shoals through the city day, pervading everything to be seen or heard or felt with their torn-off senses, drawing on this tomorrow they had expected—for death cannot be so sudden as all that. Absent from the routine which had been life, they stamped upon that routine their absence […]. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 91–92).

"Life is the stamp of the dead" (Dutoit, "Ruins; or the Being of Time as History in Elizabeth Bowen's The Heat of the Day," para.6), as Thomas Dutoit writes about this passage, commenting on the strange present time in the London of *The Heat of the Day* that is largely constituted by what is seen and felt to be absent. Instead, as he writes,

> "All presence occurs as perception. The medium of perception are the dead, but not as 'today's dead'. Rather, vision, hearing, feeling occur in the milieu that is filled with 'yesterday's living'. Ruins are where perception is pervaded by the living of yesterday, the living from yesterday. Life today is seen, heard and felt through the life of yesterday that is, by definition, present in its absence" (Dutoit, "Ruins; or the Being of Time as History in Elizabeth Bowen's The Heat of the Day," para.6).

"That particular conjunction of life and death" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92) that haunts this wartime novel also recalls to my mind the sentence that shadows Derrida as he walks in Athens amongst ruins and new buildings: "*Nous nous devons à la mort*" (we owe ourselves to death), which suggests a debt (*nous sommes dus*) or a duty (*le devoir*) that precedes and institutes us, the living (Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes: Photographies de Jean-Francois Bonhomme* 54). A sense of debt and duty is experienced in the 1940s London of *The Heat of the Day*, in "the general rocking of London" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 90) of the Blitz where one's somewhat altered relation to death, now possibly imminent, begins to sculpt their relationship with the living: "The wall between the living and the living became less solid as the wall between the living and the dead thinned" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92). This thinning membrane between what is alive/present/real/important and unliving/haunting/unreal/unimportant gives rise to an ethical duty towards the faceless, nameless dead – which, metaphorically, could be seen as proper to the animal in the Heideggerian sense (that which cannot die but can only perish). The human existence, the border which the Heideggerian "animal" can barely reach, is here humbled to "the obstinacy of animals" with which homeless humans "retraced their steps to look for what was no longer there" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 91). The death and destruction on an unprecedented scale call for the mourning of the unknown, for the existence that, though it was, was not "real" to the one who did not think about it beforehand. As Bowen writes:

> These unknown dead reproached those left living not by their death, which might any night be shared, but by their unknownness, which could not be mended now. Who had the right to mourn them, not having cared that they had lived? So, among the crowds still eating, drinking, working, travelling, halting, there began to be an instinctive movement to break down indifference while there was still time. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92)

This reading and mourning of the unknown, and more precisely, the reading of the unknowability of the death to come which cannot be known, at least not from the mere human perspective given here, opens an abyss in the perception of what is real, if the real is not what is known or what is here now. Bowen's "unknownness" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92) of the dead and its ties to indifference cancel out mourning for what has been unknowably lost. The real, sensibly unreachable now, dwells outside what our own interest towards something makes real. Bowen seems to propose here that in order for something to become real to us, it must be made mournable, for: "Who had the right to mourn them, not having cared that they had lived?" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92). In this passage, people are learning to mourn each other's deaths *before* they come, just in case, and it is that mourning – mourning for what

has not yet been lost – that allows them to break down the indifference, to care for each other, in order to feel the right to mourn and be mourned.

The pre-emptive mourning subsides as the sense of imminent danger does:

> And it was now, when you no longer saw, heard, smelled war, that a deadening acclimatisation to it began to set in. The first generation of ruins, cleaned up, shored up, began to weather—in daylight they took their places as a norm of the scene; the dangerless nights of September two years later blotted them out. It was from this new insidious echoless propriety of ruins that you breathed in all that was most malarial. Reverses, losses, deadlocks now almost unnoticed bred one another; every day the news hammered one more nail into a consciousness which no longer resounded. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 92)

The torpor that sets in, as the bodily perception of imminent danger dies down ("when you no longer saw, heard, smelled war," 92) shows how the present and what is perceptibly present constitute our sense of the real. What is not perceptibly here now, already has a whiff of fictionality about it. This sense of the real, what we, consciously or not, count as real, comes very close to the issues of making the reality of something as complex as climate change feel real without coming face to face with the absolute breakdown of solid things – when it is too late. It might, as Bowen seems to suggest, be necessary to learn how to care about/for the unknown or even the perceptibly unknowable in order to care for it or mourn it, which would require going beyond our comfortable sense of real (what is here now). We know humans to be capable of caring about the unknown or the unknowable, since most religions are built upon the idea of something bigger than a mere man, on presences which do not appear as such. Yet, what Bowen shows here is the necessity and the difficulty, of caring about/for the "insignificant" unknown, the little lives, elsewhere. It is the humbler (the smaller, or what is deemed to be "less significant") unknown in its absence – small "non-cute" animals and insects burning up in flames in a forest fire, or unknown men being blown to pieces on another shore, that defines ecological thinking. It must think the small critter elsewhere, and also, in another time, in order to make it real, to mourn it, to care for it. It also must think my connection to what I cannot see here, or even understand (perhaps ever), for which there are perhaps no words. In other words, it must think my failure, first and foremost.

Bowen, being a novelist "primarily interested in the *behaviour* of her characters as it is affected by th[e] 'cracking' or 'heaving' of the ground upon which they so perilously exist" (Brooke 9), describes patterns of thinking and behaviour that are shown to be significantly moulded by people's respective environments. The effects of changing environments on human thought and behaviour are not only perceived, but also very peculiarly underlined by Bowen who, as Brooke claims, uses her artistic sensibility as "a kind of medium through which the

world can be apprehended more clearly and significantly, just as the features of a landscape will stand out more sharply when seen in a particular kind of light" (Brooke 5). Brooke then goes on to compare Bowen to E.M. Foster whose novels, he says, are often "similarly aware of the abyss beneath one's feet" (9). Yet while E. M. Foster recognizes the abyss and is even "prepared, on occasion, to dive into its depths and attempt to come terms with its inhabitants," Bowen's view is said to be more pessimistic (in that respect very much like Beckett's). Brooke writes: "She is concerned not so much to 'connect', as to display the tragic results of the connection which has failed to take place, or which has gone fatally wrong" (Brooke 9). This thinking of failure is where Bowen and Beckett could be seen holding hands through their respective writings.

The failure to say the worst: grafting the unworsenable language

> All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 101)

The thinking of failure, which is a prevalent theme in Beckett's post-war works, returns with a new-found force and fragility (simultaneously) in what has been called Beckett's final trilogy, *Nohow On* (1983), which is composed of *Company* (1980), *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), and *Worstward Ho* (1983). The latter was first entitled *Better Worse*, but eventually became *Worstward Ho*, "playing on the title of Webster and Dekker's play *Westward Hoe* (1607) and Charles Kingsley's better-known novel, *Westward Ho!* (1855)" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 593). As Knowlson underlines, Beckett's writing process was anything but easy: "'Struggling with impossible prose. English. With loathing'" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 595), Beckett complained to Alan Schneider in February 1982. The impossibility of this prose, as Shane Weller hints, was truly unraveled when Beckett tried to translate *Worstward Ho*, ultimately finding it possible to write but impossible to translate (Weller, "'Gnawing to Be Naught': Beckett and Pre-Socratic Nihilism" 325).

Worstward Ho is, in many ways, a nearly impossible prose also to those who attempt to read it. Both the scenery as well as Beckett's unworsenable language appear incredibly bare: "The lack of points of reference to a real world defeats the reader's expectation in the sense that he would normally assume to be able to be given enough clues, or means of orientation, to be able to extrapolate from them until a more or less complete or at least cohering world emerges" (Hisgen and van der Weel 244). *Worstward Ho* is disorienting; it sends us nowhere:

> A place. Where none. A time when try see. Try say. How small. How vast. How if not boundless bounded. Whence the dim. Not now. Know better now. Unknow better now. Know only no out of. No knowing how know only no out of. Into only. Hence another. Another place where none. Whither once whence no return. No. No place but the one. None but the one where none. Whence never once in. Somehow in. Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 104)

The text reads as a literary writing in the making where the imagination wanders and blunders as it fails or refuses to build up a stable scene, while announcing one's enmeshment in what one fails to describe: "Know only no out of. No knowing how know only no out of. Into only. Hence another. Another place where none" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 104). As such, this narrative with the possibility of going "into only" with "no out of" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 104) is a convincing articulation of enmeshment, echoing perhaps Beckett's earlier lines from *Endgame* where Hamm, a blind writer-figure surrounded by what appears to be an extinction-ridden outside world,[36] blurts out: "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (Beckett, *Endgame* 53). Beckett's people who are irretrievably enmeshed in their respective environments, utterly on earth, perfectly align with Timothy Morton's ecological thinking: "What if hyperobjects finally force us to realize the truth of the word *humiliation* itself, which means being brought low, being brought down to earth? (…) What ecological thought must do […] is unground the human by forcing it back onto the ground, which is to say, standing on a gigantic object called *Earth* inside a gigantic entity called *biosphere*" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 17–18). The enmeshment of a human being and the Earth in the context of *Endgame* is directly linked to a shared suffering, as Hamm's line is followed by his commentary on weather conditions as well as on the fragility of natural environments:

> It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather, for my lumbago.
> *(Pause. Violently.)*
> But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you? (Beckett, *Endgame* 53)

Endgame proposes a barren earth in which seeds do not come up ("If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. *(Violently.)* They'll never sprout!" Beckett, *Endgame* 13) and everybody goes hungry (or as Hamm puts it to Clov: "I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time," Beckett, *Endgame* 5). Such imagination of the

[36] As Angel-Perez and Poulain write, "[…] le nom de Hamm, homonyme de Ham (parfois orthographié Cham), le fils de Noé, qui permet de lire la pièce comme une extension de l'épisode du déluge : parodie d'arche de Noé, revisitée par le bunker ou l'abri antiatomique de notre ère, la tanière de Hamm et Clov préserve une humanité qui souhaiterait se perdre" (Angel-Perez and Poulain 120). They link the terrible conditions in *Endgame* to the Holocaust as well as to the Great Famine (1845-1850)(Angel-Perez and Poulain 86).

death of natural habitats, the roots of which are already visible in Beckett's first trilogy and find their shocking dimension in *How It Is*, lay the groundwork for the ultimate placelessness of *Worstward Ho*.

One might say that any literary space is technically "A place. Where none" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 104), which in *Worstward Ho* is rendered eerily evident by highly abstract and contradictory terms that avoid regular syntactic structures at all cost. If sentences can be seen as the building blocks of a literary space as scenery, what we have here is rubble, and not just any rubble, but a sort of ghostly residue, a mere ooze[37] that is the product of a the globalized Anthropocene-era world, from no one knows where: from a "[t]henceless thitherless there" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 104). As far as we know, most things come to us from a thenceless thitherless there. Similarly, *Worstward Ho*'s scenery as well as its strange language look like grafts with untraceable roots.

Although *Worstward Ho* is, as Steven Miller reminds us, one of Beckett's "closed space" narratives (S. Miller 120), "as the implicit boatman's call in its title would suggest, *Worstward Ho*'s shorthand actually supposes a "long view"—perhaps a very long view, a view that encompasses the entire globe. Rather than narrate events that occur in rapid succession, Beckett's language operates a hyperbolic contraction of vast stretches of time and space. He linguistically juxtaposes events that might either be incredibly close or hopelessly distant" (S. Miller 121). The scattered linguistic landscape of *Worstward Ho* could be said to think globally perhaps in the sense Jesse Oak Taylor suggests:

> 'Thinking globally' is not a project of extending our ideas to the bounds of the planet—they are already there. Rather, it is a project of modeling those planetary entanglements on a scale at which they can become present to us, from within. The extraplanetary vantage that would be adequate to the Anthropocene is, by definition, beyond us. We have to make do with what we have, here, today, inside this swirling ball of vapor, stone, and plastic we call home. (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 42)

Beckett's narrator has to make do with the little he has in terms of language and imagination, in order to communicate the experience of the worst, for which one does not have exact words. In *Endgame*, Clov notably tells Hamm: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean

[37] Words and this strange residue (ooze), which seems to be a blinding residue from/in words, is articulated in the following manner:

> Ooze back try worsen the blanks. Those then when nohow on. Unsay then all gone. Only nohow on. All not gone and nohow on. All there as now when somehow on. The dim. The void. The shades. Only words gone. Ooze gone. Till ooze again and on. Somehow ooze on. (…) Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on. Then all seen as only then. Undimmed. All undimmed what the words dim. All so seen unsaid. No ooze then. No trace on soft when from it ooze again. In it ooze again. Ooze alone for seen as seen with ooze. Dimmed. No ooze for seen undimmed. For when nohow on. No ooze for when ooze gone. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 122–24)

anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (Beckett, *Endgame* 44), whereas in *Worstward Ho*, language is being reinvented. *Worstward Ho* seems to be the very experience of trying to find an adequate expression of the worst, which calls for the necessity of dismantling the familiar structures of language, and the all too familiar words, but also, this invention makes reading it a real hardship.

As Ruud Hisgen and Adriaan van der Weel explain, "*Worstward Ho*'s language was not chosen to facilitate ease of comprehension on the part of the reader" (Hisgen and van der Weel 245). As they point out, Beckett's language in *Worstward Ho* contains unusual vocabulary, hardly any personal pronouns and indefinite articles; it plays with the active and passive forms of verbs and makes words transgress grammatical categories, making it into "an extremely hermetic text" (Hisgen and van der Weel 245).

What can we do with a hermetic text? How can we break into or break apart (that is, analyze) a text that protects itself from readerly mastery by taking away our sense of location as well as our sense of mastery over language? Where do we go from here? Shane Weller writes that, as early as in the 1930s, Beckett had developed a theory of art

> that would both respect and articulate a fundamental 'rupture of the lines of communication' between subject and object, as Beckett puts it in his August 1934 review of 'Recent Irish Poetry.' In contradistinction to what he dismissively terms the 'antiquarians,' Beckett's genuine artist is not only 'aware of' this rupture, but 'may state the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects.' (…) More generally, Beckett's conception of genuine art – as opposed to that art which, in a letter of 18 October 1932 to MacGreevy, he describes as '*facultative*' rather than 'a necessity' – will be an art that is produced by an obscure necessity or compulsion (an *il faut* or a 'you must,' as it is put in *The Unnamable*) that collides with the three impossibilities asserted by Gorgias, namely the impossibility of being, the impossibility of knowing, and the impossibility of communicating. As Beckett makes clear in the *Three Dialogues* (1949), however, genuine art, as he understands it, does not involve the overcoming of this triple impossibility. Rather, art is the very experience of those impossibilities. (Weller, "'Gnawing to Be Naught': Beckett and Pre-Socratic Nihilism" 321–22)

Worstward Ho powerfully enacts the triple impossibility of being, knowing, and communicating, as the nearly extinguished narrator tries to summon the indescribable scene with worsening words: "Still dim still on. So long as still dim still somehow on. Anyhow on. With worsening words. Worsening stare. For the nothing to be seen. At the nothing to be seen" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 115). As Sarah Wood writes: "Fiction, still more than philosophy, gives us an idea of what kind of thinking might be able to transform the determination of reality" (Wood 40), and here it seems to be the sort of humble reckoning with one's failure to see and say things which pushes one to try and say things otherwise, in order to think the unthinkable – which is precisely the sort of effort to think on a different scale Jesse Oak Taylor evokes; to

model the complicated phenomena "on a scale at which they can become present to us, from within" (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 42).

Although *Worstward Ho* is a difficult read because of its fragmented and yet still logically repetitive structure (which barely holds this linguistic folly together and yet invites us in, invites us to read on, nohow on); it contains a certain kind of poetic tenderness linked to suffering. I will not say "human" suffering, precisely because not all figures that appear in the text are necessarily human, but they are sensibly the reader's fellows:

> First back on to three. Not yet to try worsen. Simply be there again. There in that head in that head. Be it again. That head in that head. Clenched eyes clamped to it alone. Alone? No. Too. To it too. The sunken skull. The crippled hands. Clenched staring eyes. Clenched staring eyes clamped to clenched staring eyes. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 111)

The narrator is drafting not only a character, but what the character imagines or ill-sees: "that head in that head" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 111) which then becomes: "The sunken skull. The crippled hands. Clenched staring eyes. Clenched staring eyes clamped to clenched staring eyes" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 111), and then: "No hands. No face. Skull and stare alone. Scene and seer of all" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 112). Beckett's intense "lessification" of details also mollifies our certainties of imagining the imagined subject to be human, or even alive. What happens, happens inside the narrator's imagination; the imagination that fails to be an objective scene and seer of all, but can only dimly see, that is, ill see. Yet, what seems to ooze through the minimalistic abstractions of *Worstward Ho*, is suffering that looks for words to become describable. As Miller suggests:

> Although the category of the worst offers no concrete description of these horrors, it manifests and openly heeds the demand to speak at the exact point where the destructive acts have abandoned the openness of language. Within the space of this virtual tribunal, then, "the worst" is always already deemed the best word for the occasion—or, at least, the least worse word. A minimal word. A word instead of no word. Instead of eternal peace, we have the perpetual arraignment of horror. Instead of binding promises in language, we have unquestioned faith in the promise of language itself. (S. Miller 124–25)

The hint of some indescribable horror hovers over the text without giving the reader the opportunity to pin it down to a specific event. There is, however, a particular fragment that caught my attention, as it, to my mind, vividly paints the picture of anthropogenic acts of violence. Before the narrator imagines an ambiguous "[b]lack hole agape on all. Inletting all. Outletting all" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 127), there is a brief reference to "one dim black whole mid-foreskull" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 126) that seems to recall a gunshot wound. This image is a moment later accompanied by a fragmentary glimpse of an old woman walking amongst unnamed graves: "Nothing and yet a woman. Old and yet old. On unseen knees. Stooped as

loving memory some old gravestone stoop. In that old graveyard. Names gone and when to when. Stoop mute over the grave of none" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 127). The nameless graves which become the grave of none at once erase identity as well as generalize the phenomenon of death, but above all, to me, they recall certain experiences of the worst: mass graves that veil some of the most atrocious acts of anthropogenic violence. But where, when? The text does not say.

As Knowlson's accounts of Beckett's life show, he was very sensitive towards "such matters as the abuse of human rights, censorship, and attacks on individuals by a repressive political regime, his instinctive response was to ask what he could do to help. Mostly this involved making contributions (sometimes quite large ones) to fund-raising organisations and in giving regular support to Amnesty International" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 564). Like Bowen, Beckett was opposed to capital punishment (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 265) and sympathetic towards all types of suffering. As Knowlson notes: "Throughout the period from 1976 until his death thirteen years later, Beckett took a keen interest in all that was happening in Eastern Europe. He would do almost anything for those who had managed to get out of these countries or who had stayed behind only to be persecuted by the regime for their ideas or their writings" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 265), and he also took a stand against the policy of apartheid in South Africa, not allowing his plays to be performed in theatres that practiced racial segregation (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 561). This intolerance towards attempts of segregation falls in line with his earlier stand, much like Bowen's, against fascism, as a Resistance agent.

As Miller argues, the language of *Worstward Ho* is the language of war, despite the fact that war is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the text itself, because discourses on war often tell us less about war than paint a portrait of the worst (S. Miller 118–19). He explains:

> The entire world of war and violence (if not the world *tout court*) exists—we might say, echoing Mallarmé—to end up in a discourse on the worst. Worstward ho. War, as a result, is all we know of the worst. Despite the increasing scope and complexity of war in our world and the "richness" of its impact upon every sphere of ethical and political experience, war discourse represents the unrelenting impoverishment of the language of the worst and thereby, perhaps, of language itself. (…) From headline to headline, writer to writer, and region to region, journalism grounds the worst in the world, but the category never 'sticks' to the horrors that it names. No sooner is one event lifted to the status of the worst than another even worse arises to usurp its position. Worsts occur simultaneously in multiple places at once—each, in its context, legitimately called the worst. The staccato rhythm of *Worstward Ho* hops from failure to failure. (S. Miller 119–20)

It is suggested that Beckett was rereading Shakespeare's *King Lear* before writing *Worstward Ho*,[38] having annotated all the references to the worst in his copy of the book. As Miller points out, Edgar's lines in Act 4, are particularly interesting:

> Oh gods! Who is't can say 'I am the worst'? I am worse than e'er I was.
> (…)
> And worse I may be yet; the worst is not
> So long as we can say 'This is the worst.' (act 4, scene 1, lines 27–30)

Miller argues that "the worst is associated with the finitude of discourse and the failure of language that it entails" (S. Miller 135) as to "be worse (or better) than the worst is to be in a position from which one cannot say what one is. This is a position of abjection, not simply because it occupies a very low rung on the scale of malignity, but because it renders one incapable of speaking what God can see. To supplement this failure of language, one must confess it to God so that he might reveal himself in place of what cannot be spoken" (S. Miller 136). The judgement of the worst hinges upon the possibility of attaining a spatiotemporal position that is inaccessible to any mortal being. There is, however, also something comforting in naming, that is, always already misnaming, the worst. As long as one can say it, the worst is not. This recalls Beckett's earlier lines on the relationship between words and death/life, which

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[38] Anne Atik wrote in August 1983:

> S. a dit qu'il avait encore relu *Le Roi Lear*, « impossible à monter, fou, scènes et mots non représentables ». Désolé de n'avoir pu retenir plus tôt la réplique d'Edgar (ce qui était inexact, puisqu'il l'avait citée dans sa lettre à Jocelyn [Herbert (1 mai 1981)] après la mort de George Devine et à différentes occasions) : « Ils sont très importants. "Ce n'est pas encore la pire, tant que l'on peut dire : 'Ceci est le pire.'" » (Atik 149)

Mark Nixon traces the influence of those lines to Beckett's "Sottisier" notebook, 14v, March 1981, and he also links their influence to the *mirlitonnade* "ce qu'a de pis," recorded in the notebook in March 1977 and two others from November 1977 and April 1981:

> ce qu'a de pis
> le coeur connu
> la tête pu
> de pis se dire
> fais-le
> ressusciter
> le pis revient
> en pire ("Sottisier" notebook 5r, 31 March 1977)
>
> en face
> le pire
> jusqu'à
> ce qu'il fasse rire
> ("Sottisier" notebook 9v, 12 November 1977)
>
> fail fail till better
> founder ("Sottisier" notebook, 11 April 1981) (M. Nixon, "'The Remains of Trace': Intra- and Intertextual Transferences in Beckett's Mirlitonnades Manuscripts" 116–17)

Mark Nixon collects from Beckett's notebooks. The first version of those lines written in July 1977, ran as follows:

> mots mourant
> de male vie
> un dernier moment
> tenez-nous compagnie (M. Nixon, "'The Remains of Trace': Intra- and Intertextual Transferences in Beckett's Mirlitonnades Manuscripts" 118)

However, as Nixon notes, these lines went through changes a couple of days later, turning into:

> mots survivants
> de la vie
> encore un moment
> tenez-nous compagnie (M. Nixon, "'The Remains of Trace': Intra- and Intertextual Transferences in Beckett's Mirlitonnades Manuscripts" 118)

While pointing out that this revision "encapsulates, in microcosm, the tension between beginning and ending inherent in Beckett's late work, and replicates the spiraling, revivifying cycle of *Worstward Ho*" (M. Nixon, "'The Remains of Trace': Intra- and Intertextual Transferences in Beckett's Mirlitonnades Manuscripts" 118), Nixon wonders why Beckett chose the rather more hopeful "mots survivants" and "encore un moment" in his revised version. *Worstward Ho* is driven by contradictory movements, towards life as well as death, but also Beckett's evaluation of words as an insufficient means of communication is overshadowed by the sheer necessity of words to keep the narrator company. In a way, the narrator's attempts to find the worst word[39] are shadowed by the reassuring "presence" of words that keep him company, for to be completely at a loss for words might bring one to realize one is facing the absolute worst: "[…] the worst is not/So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'" This endless search for the expression of the worst (perhaps to fend it off with the word itself, categorize it in order to perceive it or ill perceive it) seems to resemble Bowen's thoughts on wartime writing, which she calls "resistance writing" against the complete annihilation by the war (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 97). She writes: "To survive, not physically, but spiritually,

[39] These attempts seem to be well encapsulated by the following lines:

> Worse less. By no stretch more. Worse for want of better less. Less best. No. Naught best. Best worse. No. Not best worse. Naught not best worse. Less best worse. No. Least. Least best worse. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least. Say that best worst. With leastening words say least best worse. For want of worser worst. Unlessenable least best worse. (…) So leastward on. So long as dim still. Dim undimmed. Or dimmed to dimmer still. To dimmost dim. Leastmost in dimmost dim. Utmost dim. Leastmost utmost dim. Unworsenable worst. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 118–19)

was essential. People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves – broken ornaments, odd shoes, torn scraps of the curtains that had hung in a room – from the wreckage. In the same way, they assembled and checked themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 97). Beckett's *Worstward Ho* could be seen as a form of resistance writing, in the way in which it collects unidentifiable scraps from some traumatic event(s), from some experience(s) of the worst – whose experience? – we do not know. Instead of isolating the particular, personal experience in which one can feel "the high-voltage current of the general" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 99), the way Bowen's wartime fiction does, *Worstward Ho* shoots for the general in which the reader can recognize the individual suffering – perhaps one's own, through one's own.

As the narrator tells us: "Add a –. Add? Never. Bow it down. Be it bowed down. Deep down. Head in hat gone. More back gone. Greatcoat cut off higher. Nothing from pelvis down. Nothing but bowed back. Topless baseless hindtrunk. Dim black. On unseen knees. In the dim void. Better worse so. Pending worse still" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 111). The narrative is drawing a body in the imagination that can only dimly see, ill see; the very process of bringing this figure forth calls for internalization. It is not the mere matter of seeing the body bowed down, kneeling on unseen knees, but becoming the ill-seen body, bowed down: "Be it bowed down. Deep down" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 111). Through those shifting, fragmented images, the text contaminates us with the experience of failure (to read, to see, to know), but it is also through that very failure that is connects its readers to a more complex experience of empathy – for suddenly we are left to empathize with what we do not know, cannot fully see and identify.

In that respect, Beckett's *Worstward Ho* responds to the difficulties of mourning the unknown or even unknowable others, underlined by the experience of the worst in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* – the war. In *The Heat of the Day*, people are shown to break down their indifference toward others, in order to mourn each other's deaths *before* they come; *Worstward Ho* makes its readers empathize with what cannot be known, revealing, thereby, not only our difficulties for caring for the unknown and mourning the unknown, but also certain potential of the inventive language and fiction to enhance the reader's potential to feel for the unknowable.

As Miller writes:

> What characterizes sciences like physics is their ability to elaborate a language that itself opens toward the worst; they begin with (and function as a permanent access to) the demand for a new idiom. With ordinary language, however, access to such a demand remains contingent upon the

> emergence of odd cases. Even then, the oddity of the case will likely escape us to the very extent that we rely exclusively on words to apprehend it. The oddity of the odd case is liable to appear *as such* only insofar as we find a way to see what cannot be said (e.g., we become curious, interested). (S. Miller 140)

Beckett's language in *Worstward Ho* breaks down the ordinary language, and thereby, as Miller suggests, fights against our failure to "recognize situations in which an idiom is demanded of us, to measure the failure of language, and thus the degree of our own irresponsibility" (S. Miller 140). Language, it seems, is both a gateway to empathy as well as to the death of empathy. It is the inventive fictional writing that holds the power to shake the ordinary language out of its stale structures, inviting us to feel and imagine without mastery.

Conclusion

Even though many discourses on climate change underline the value of taking action over "mere" words, we cannot deny that the way we, as humans, perceive and analyze the world around us is largely dependent on those "mere" words and concepts we have, somewhat unthinkingly, acquired. Words precede us, instruct us, they translate the phenomena around us, and also mould our sense of what is what. Any action, no matter how efficient in its promise to do things, cannot be separated from the necessity to unravel the particularities of the human gaze on the world which we simultaneously destroy and try to heal, and that gaze is enmeshed in what has, for a long time, proudly been called the defining feature of our kind – language. Bowen's and Beckett's writings of the worst offer alternative modes of reading complicated phenomena around us through their experiences of global issues and through inventive language. Their strange depictions of the worst, infect and affect the reader with a necessity to go beyond easily recognizable phenomena – what is visible here and now.

This is precisely the kind of thinking needed for the 21st-century reader who already lives globally (whether they know it or not), because their needs (for instance, the goods they consume) and traces have a global impact.[40] Our words and concepts act upon the world by

[40] As Jesse Oak Taylor explains:

> As Anthropos, we are globalized and ever globalizing, not simply in the sense that our actions have globalized impacts but also in our deployment of internal models to apprehend the planet of which we are a part. Taken together, these moments can all be read as points at which the entwinement of Earth and humanity veered into a new state of complexity, scope, acceleration, and intensity. The slow process of tectonic shifts and species drift was accelerated by caravels, the gradual compression of carbon into stone was vaporized with a vengeance, the absorption of solar energy by Earth's atmosphere was intensified by the hothouse of modernity—and through it all, the Anthropos expanded and adapted, ate, mined, fucked and extracted, killed, made merry, and laid waste to all it could survey. (Oak Taylor, "Globalize" 40)

moulding our views and actions, both of which are magnified by our sheer numbers that have turned us into an unstoppable global force.

Feeling and imagining without mastery is perhaps what we need to open the language, and with it, our collective imagination – for which literature is perhaps the most powerful source, to alternative modes of thinking about value, about what is real and what makes something or someone important. What is necessary for ecological thinking, is a profound analysis of "mere" words and concepts that unthinkingly instruct our value-systems as well as our imagination, wherein lies the power of inventive thinking. Beckett and Bowen are both sensitive to the impact of words, and their writings challenge binary categorizations, thereby uprooting the dormant worldviews inherent to language itself. In their hands, familiar words and notions are made to concatenate otherwise, and fall apart, as we shall see.

PART TWO:

Concatenation

Reading, writing, and even thinking involve a certain concatenation of words or images. In that sense, concatenation is at the heart of every thesis project, as it is in mine. However, not every concatenation (be it a text, a thought, or an event of reading or writing) invents and invites modes of eco-logical thinking. As Timothy Morton writes:

> There is something contemplative about the ecological thought. When you think about adaptation, it is like music that listens to itself. This form of awareness foreshadows a future society in which introversion and passivity have a key role to play. Perhaps the ecological art of the future will deal with passivity and weakness; with lowliness, not loftiness. (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 109)

The eco-logical dimension of Bowen's and Beckett's work consists in their exploration of loftiness and lowliness, mastery and humility. An eco-logical approach to be found in Bowen's and Beckett's later fiction begins with a critique of mastery. Mastery, meaning both domination and excellence, depends on the possibility of establishing stable comparisons, or, in other words, categories. The moment those comparisons become shaky and unruly concatenations, one can no longer master. Beckett and Bowen create unruly, shaky and shady textual concatenations where the possibility of establishing stable categories becomes very difficult. Therefore, one must, in order to go on, to read on (concatenate), let inconsistencies, doubts, and disorder speak. The literary space both Beckett and Bowen, in their respective ways, offer to the reader, is the one where we are made to concatenate in a deconstructive manner. Words and concepts do not chain well, that is, they strike outside of their usual contexts or binary confines, thereby uprooting thought-systems relying on such a guarded difference. In their texts, I listen to the word that is made to listen to itself, that is, words and concepts are faced with their erring meanings that the reader must contemplate.

One of the concepts that harbours and justifies domination, through a presumed difference and an established human superiority (excellence), is the animal-human difference. What is "animal" and what is "human" depend on the connection between those two notions, one giving the other its relevance. Yet, if the moment of comparison is suspended or threatened in the event or writing or reading, the fixed or absolute otherness of the other can no longer be a stable reference point. We have to latch on to something else then in order to concatenate, to read the concept otherwise. An inventive writing, such as Bowen's and Beckett's, presents those notions in terms of their complex connections and contradictory meanings.

In Chapter 1 ("Concatenation as *Différance*: Challenging the Identity of Humans through the Deconstruction of Animal-Human Opposition"), the idea of otherness will be

evoked as well as challenged. Following Derrida's belief that there is no absolute other,[41] I will concentrate on ways in which Beckett's and Bowen's later novels deconstruct the binary animal-human difference by illuminating the inconsistencies and contradictions at work within this binary opposition. The binary animal-human opposition will be examined not as a difference but as a *différance.* That relation-opposition will be shown as an uncanny chain, a concatenation that not only upholds differences but is open to the deferrals and transfers of meaning that reveal human identity to be unstable as well as dependent on those relations to others and otherness.

The word "concatenation," borrowed from Elizabeth Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout* (1968) will be at the centre of this part, serving as a metaphor for the event or practice of reading, writing, and more generally, thinking, but also as a concept that underlines a way of thinking connections without mastery, that is, not in terms of excellence and domination. The authority and the ethics of human mastery will be questioned and challenged through the notion of humility in Bowen's and Beckett's works. Being humble will not appear only as synonymous with "modest, unpretentious," but as something more intrinsic and inevitable, that is, being essentially vulnerable, being mortal, connected, and Earth-bound. Concatenation as connecting without mastery, will be shown to open up more humble ways of relating the human species to the Earth and its many inhabitants.

The first part of Chapter 1 ("2.1 Mastery as "Fatal Concatenation": Companions and Parasites in Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies*") will explore the difficulties of connecting to one's environment and to the earth in other terms than mastery, possession, and profitability. It will also question writing practices based on mastery that could be seen creating a vicious circle, a fatal concatenation, of suffering and disconnection, in *Malone Dies.* Those practices will be challenged by complex concatenations of the earth – its writing practices, through which Beckett seems to propose other connections to the earth, to humus, as well as to humility.

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[41] Derrida, arguing against Levinas's notion of the "infinitely other," demonstrates that relationality is already implicit in the idea of the other: "'The infinitely other,' he imagines Parmenides claiming, 'can be what it is only if it is other, that is, other than. Other than must be other than myself. Henceforth, it is no longer absolved of a relation to an ego. Therefore, it is no longer infinitely, absolutely other'" (Attridge 49). The logic that is based on binary oppositions presupposes the possibility of an absolute difference (that is not already a *différance*) which permits to overcome the relationality of "other than." Imagining the absolute difference is also implicit in racism (but also, through that same logic, in anthropocentrism") for it constructs the identity of the powerful through what Derrida calls "an invention of the other" that excludes the other in order to "tighten the circle of the same" (Derrida, "From Psyche: Invention of the Other" 336)."

In the second part of Chapter 1 ("2.2 Animals and *Logos* in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*") I will explore the ways in which Beckett denounces human mastery over other species by questioning anthropocentric requirements of excellence bestowed upon humankind, through his vulnerable characters and their complex relations to *logos*. *Logos* will be explored first as speech and reason, with its ties to 17th-century rationalism; then through its supplementary meaning – *logos* as "ground." While in Beckett's trilogy the animal-human opposition will be shown as a concatenation between species through the ways in which Beckett humbles the pillars of human superiority; ideas of human superiority will also be humbled in the following reading of Bowen's *The Death of Heart*, through Bowen's ambiguous uses of animal comparisons that evoke corporal concatenations between species.

In "2.3 Animals and Animality in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938)," I will investigate how Bowen challenges the animal-human opposition through the *corporal reality* (as it is underlined, within the fictional reality of the novel, through descriptions of characters' bodies) of her characters, linking their intelligence to their bodily existence – more precisely – to emotions. The Cartesian separation between body and intellect, animals and men, are shown to be undermined through the universality of emotions that interconnects bestialized human characters and superior human characters as well as non-human animals and human animals. Bowen's writing subverts the animal-human opposition by making characters read the bodies of other characters, evoking a mode of reading that is not exclusively human.

The second chapter, "Concatenation: Reading Responsibility for Others," will concentrate on concatenation as an "interdependent sequence" (*OED*) that gives way to thinking about correlations, and on the moral as well as innate responsibilities that emerge in those readings of concatenations as correlations between causes and effects. While the first chapter humbles human exceptionality (humans as masters of superior intelligence and language); the second chapter offers solutions to dealing with these now undermined relations. By offering more humble ways of relating oneself to language, in terms of becoming sensitive to multiple ways of reading texts as well as reading the world, this chapter will demonstrate how Bowen's and Beckett's later works give us the reasons as well as the tools for beginning to read the world without mastery. How to read without mastery? Why should one read without mastery?

The chapter begins with a case of reading an invisible correlation between air pollution in London and the socio-economic framework of Londoners, both made readable, imaginable

by a certain sensitivity, that of Portia, a marginalized character. "2.4 Passages: Reading before/for Responsibility in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*" responds to the challenge of the unreadability of climate change on a human scale. Portia's sense of dislocation challenges the way she, and through her, the reader, experiences a place, allowing the reader to perceive the strangeness within an otherwise common phenomenon – the invisible pollution in the air. Thereby, the novel creates a passage between the 1930s London and the world today, between reality and fiction, in the space of literature where we are made to perceive the blind geological force that we, humans, have become.

"2.5 Mastery without Responsibility in Beckett's *Molloy*" explores the logic of mastery behind a destructive force that humanity can summon as a whole from the viewpoint of one of its smaller particles: a simple working man, Jacques Moran. I will investigate ethical quandaries surrounding Moran's responsibility to and for his mysterious employer, Youdi, as well as his responsibility for his home and its human and non-human inhabitants. Both responsibilities, I will argue, are influenced by a logic of responsibility that is blunted by Moran's highly hierarchical vison of the world according to which one is responsible to and for someone with more power. I will also explore the mechanisms through which this upward looking sense of responsibility can be justified, chiefly, a certain reading of words and worlds that denies responsibility for one's reading, mistaking one's position of mastery for neutrality, and thereby failing to respond to a text or to the inner world or another being. The correlation between "responsibility" and "response" will be further explored in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout.*

"2.6 Concatenation: Responsibility in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*" focuses on its characters' attempts to escape having to answer for oneself, that is, to give answers (in one's name) to others, but also to "answer for" in a sense: to take responsibility for one's choices. The novel links the word "concatenation" to randomness, chanciness, and therefore to the lack of responsibility of human characters in desirable as well as undesirable situations. That idea of mere fortuity will be undermined by concatenations (here: correlations) that can be made between an effect and its cause, making the responsibility of human characters undeniable. However, the correlation between human-induced causes and their effects, will be shown to be both to some extent caused as well as rendered illegible by the characters' numbness as well as their inability to read the feelings of others, resulting in a destructive chain of misunderstanding. Losing one's insensitivity, that is, becoming vulnerable, will be shown to be the beginning of the ability to think a responsible response, for it opens the door to reading correlations in a concatenation we call language.

Chapter 1: Concatenation as *Différance*: Challenging the Identity of Humans through the Deconstruction of Animal-Human Opposition

2.1 Mastery as "Fatal Concatenation": Companions and Parasites in Samuel Beckett's *Malone Dies*

The notion of concatenation appears in Beckett's trilogy once, as a reference to "the fatal concatenation" of stages which have made Worm "what I [the nameless narrator] am" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 345). The fatal concatenation between the narrator and the character of Worm seems to recall the following imagery that implies an everlasting continuance of punishment (Isaiah 66: 24): "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*). The continuity between the feeble, nearly bodiless existence of the unnameable narrator and the earthy blind Worm is also tainted with the idea of endless suffering in the form of a torturous, circular existence where both life worth living as well as death seem out of reach. The characters of the trilogy, destined to a concatenation of endless becoming (transformations that are rather regressive than progressive), are also threatened by the looming degradation of their bodies and habitats.

Beckett wrote his trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* after WW2, at the end of which he was a volunteer for the Irish Red Cross Society, in a bombed-out city of Saint-Lô in France.[42] The sight of Saint-Lô where "even rubble was rubble" (Bair 342) haunts the fragile landscapes of his fiction. Evolving towards a life always less livable, the trilogy portrays an image of destruction and the loss of a habitable place. It is also a portrait of humbled narrators who wonder about their identity. The relation between the characters of the trilogy and the porous I that narrates in *The Unnamable* is not properly established in the trilogy. Characters' identities as humans become powerfully unstable and taunting. However, the very process of constructing a literary character and his connections to his social and natural environments, as well as his connection to the narrator, are shown in the previous novel – *Malone Dies*.

[42] *Molloy* (1951); English version (1955); *Malone meurt* (1951); *Malone Dies* (1956); *L'innommable* (1953); *The Unnamable* (1958).

How characters relate to each other and what makes it a "fatal concatenation" will be at the centre of my interest in reading *Malone Dies*. Its plot is reduced to Malone's physical inaction and inability as he awaits death, biding his time with inventing stories and describing the minutiae of his still life in a solitary room. *Malone Dies* is the middle novel, constituting the fleeting centre of the trilogy that puts forward the very process of writing and of imagining characters. In *Malone Dies*, fiction writing is based on the ideas of violence, humiliation, and domination of others. That is, Malone's writing could be seen for the most part as an effort to dominate others, even though his actual condition is that of extreme isolation and vulnerability. His writing practice could be seen as a vicious circle, or a fatal concatenation, that blindly consolidates the logic behind his own misery as an outcast and a social parasite.

I will show how the consolidation of the idea of mastery (meaning dominance and excellence) as a means of relating oneself to others and to one's environment is destructive in a socio-economic context as well as in an ecological context. I will explore the toxic logic, based on crude mastery, that the narrator, Malone, employs in the process of writing which could be viewed as the opposite of the ecological thinking Timothy Morton proposes when he writes:

> Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each other's environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman beings. Ecology has to do with you and me. (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 3)

In *Malone Dies*, living together in an ecologically (thus, also inherently socially – if we consider that human beings are each other's environment) sustainable and non-violent way is undermined by the failure to relate oneself to another being in a non-dominant manner. I will examine the relations between the narrator (Malone) and his characters as well as the characters and their social and natural environments through two notions: companions and parasites.

First, I will explore Malone's way of relating to his sole companions: objects and the creatures of his literary imagination, through the notion of "playing" that I will also contextualize in recent theory concerned with ecological thinking. I will show how Malone's playing, which is a metaphor for writing, is not compatible with ecological concepts of playing, because Malone's playing relies on the desire to dominate others and on the ideas of human exceptionalism.

Second, Malone's role as a writer will be examined through his desire to dominate and debase his literary creatures and through the relationships between his literary characters.

Third, I will consider Malone's literary creation, Macmann, and Malone himself in their socio-economic context as social parasites.

Finally, I will show Macmann's deconstruction of the notion he is himself concerned with – the notion of parasite.

Playing with things

In *Malone Dies*, the word "play" is used as a synonym for writing. At the beginning of the novel, when Malone sets himself a goal to do nothing but play from now on, two meanings of playing begin to haunt his declaration: first, the relational aspect of playing (playing *with* someone or something), and later, the dominative aspect of playing (deceiving, manipulating).

Malone seems to evoke the relational aspect of playing when he says:

> Now it is a game, I am going to play. I never knew how to play, till now. I longed to, but I knew it was impossible. And yet I often tried. I turned on all the lights, I took a good look all round, I began to play with what I saw. People and things ask nothing better than to play, certain animals too. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 173)

Playing in *Malone Dies*, at first, appears as a medium through which things, human animals, and some non-human animals connect, and thereby links up with recent theory developed around the notion of playing. Malone's statement: "People and things ask nothing better than to play, certain animals too" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 173) could be read along the lines of Allan Mitchell's concept of "play ecology" that rethinks playing as "an enlarged, ecstatic, immersive, and ecocentric orientation without recurring to mere human verve (childish or otherwise)" (Mitchell 351). In his essay, influenced by Nicholas Royle's book *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (2012), playing is shown to be the eternal rapport of interplay that undermines the idea of human autonomy: playing opens up "heteronomous zones of encounter where subjects and objects are in flux" (Mitchell 351). Mitchell's play ecology threatens our species' identity based on anthropocentrism with a crisis through a critique that exposes the involvement and mutual affects of subjects and objects (thus, recalling Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*).

Malone seems to evoke the agency of things that, as he says: "expect nothing better than to play" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 173) – yet this statement could also be read as anthropomorphism. It is therefore interesting to see how things in Malone's room affect what Malone calls "playing" – the act of writing. Malone's writing process is shown to be dependent on the interplay between Malone, an exercise book, and a little pencil. The writing process could be viewed from the angle of Jane Bennett's theory about the agency of non-human forms

in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) where Bennett argues that human agency itself is an assemblage of human and non-human powers. Applying this theory to Beckett's fiction can only be done semi-humorously, for Malone has hardly any powers to speak of – so, just by imagining this dying man, one feels no necessity to humble the idea of human powers.

The human body, Malone's, is not shown as a capable entity that can be clearly differentiated from its surroundings or something that possesses a remarkable acting-power on its environment. Bedridden and feeble, Malone is not a complete master of objects, but instead his own (very limited) actions depend on different external forces around him and on objects, particularly on a pencil and an exercise book. However, it is precisely this fragility of a cut-off, dying human that highlights the importance of things and how we are affected by non-human powers, and therefore could be a way to highlight Bennett's thesis in a quite theatrical, Beckettian, manner.

To exemplify this: if the pencil or the exercise book fell down, Malone could no longer write, for he is almost as immobile as the objects he manipulates. Retrieving a missing object can be done only through another object – his stick, that he uses for that purpose. Thus, writing is shown to be dependent on objects, which Beckett underlines through the narrator's vulnerability. When Malone's pencil goes missing, he spends forty-eight hours recovering it. Thus, the pencil that has escaped from Malone's feeble grasp due to nonhuman-forces at play – gravity, involves Malone in another interplay: chasing the pencil with a stick.

Though we are shown that the very act of writing is an interplay, as Malone's ability of writing depends on non-human objects, Malone does not concentrate on the ability of objects to affect him, but rather on his own authority as a narrator and on his superiority as a human. The latter can be observed in a rather humorous segment where Malone has lost his stick that he had used as an extension of his arm to move objects around. Malone says:

> I suppose the wisest thing now is to live it over again, meditate upon it and be edified. It is thus that man distinguishes himself from the ape and rises, from discovery to discovery, ever higher, towards the light. Now that I have lost my stick I realize what it is I have lost and all it meant to me. And thence ascend, painfully, to an understanding of the Stick, shorn of all its accidents, such as I had never dreamt of. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 247)

Malone evokes human superiority through the distinction made between apes and men who both can use sticks for different purposes, but Malone makes a reference to his human power to ponder over the meaning of the stick that leads him to "an understanding of the Stick" (247). Thereby, he places himself above the apes, as he evokes Plato's theory of forms, reductively and comically, as "an understanding of the Stick" (247). Malone's writing practice retains the

distinction between humans and non-humans not as a merely biological means of differentiating species, but as a way of establishing his domination over others. That necessity "to rise, from discovery to discovery, ever higher, towards the light" (247), is an important part of his effort to survive as a human in solitude, although he is already dehumanized and treated like a dying beast: separated and left alone to rot.

Malone's writing, which is only possible thanks to the pencil and the exercise book, could be seen as an effort to ensure an archive of his own existence that is threatened with erasure, first by Malone's seclusion from society, and then by his failing memory. Malone says: "At first I did not write, I just said the thing. Then I forgot what I had said. A minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 201). In this context, "to live really" evokes the importance of being seen and heard by others, or as Cousineau writes: "(…) The isolated self ("man alone") of its title, far from being an original foundation, is a by-product of its relationship with the larger human community in which it evolved" (Cousineau 91). Malone's attempt to "live really" by writing could be read as an effort to fight against the threat of erasure, yet the paradox of his effort to constitute a memory that would sustain his existence as a human (as belonging to a group of humans) is that his way of writing is consolidating the logic that has been the source of his own suffering. Cousineau points out that Malone responds to the violence that he has been the victim of in kind:

> Malone tells us at one point that 'when all is said and done there is nothing more like a step that ascends than a step that descends', and it would be difficult to imagine a more appropriate image for the symmetry between the exclusion that made Malone himself and the violence that he directs towards others. (…) Thus, in anticipation of his own death in the midst of the season reserved for sacrifice (and in a gesture that decisively distances himself from the figure of the crucified Christ), he calls down divine maledictions on the heads of his tormentors: 'let me say before I go any further that I forgive nobody. I wish them all an atrocious life and then the fires and ice of hell and in the execrable generations to come an honoured name'. (Cousineau 95)

Cruel play

Instead of approaching an ecological play founded on the eco-minded mutual becoming philosophies that some 21st century thinkers are concerned with,[43] Malone's writing quickly

[43] In recent theory, playing has become an important element of non-anthropocentric ecological thinking, especially in the field of ecomaterialism where the master narratives of human cultures are contested by a different model of environmental thinking that, as Oppermann writes, theorizes "the earth's human and other-than-human dwellers in terms of multiple becomings" (Oppermann 120–21). Those multiple becomings are what Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet* (2008) calls the "mortal fleshly knottings" (88) or "entangled assemblages of relatings knotted at many scales and times with other assemblages, organic and not" (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 88) and contrasts with the idea of "ultimate units of being" (88) that refer to a monadic existence of a unit (that Malone at first seems to be, being secluded into his room). She writes: "Individuals and kinds at whatever

turns into a way in which one could be played upon, that is, deceived. So, Malone's playing starts to signify a manner in which one could deceive and abuse others through the act of writing. As an author, Malone resembles a tyrant, reproducing the ways in which one could dominate others by any means of reduction – a game that is the very cornerstone of human exceptionalism, but works just as well as a means to dehumanize some humans or groups of humans. Indeed, this technique is mainly applied to other humans that Malone is quick to dehumanize and objectify:

> All went well at first, they all came to me, pleased that someone should want to play with them. If I said, Now I need a hunchback, immediately one came running, proud as punch of his fine hunch that was going to perform. It did not occur to him that I might have to ask him to undress. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 174)

"Play" here refers to literary imagination (McNaughton 93), but that literary imagination is used to abuse the imaginary hunchback. Malone's play intends to erase the agency of the other by means of dehumanization and objectification, so that he can establish an abusive power over them. Malone does that by asking the hunchback to undress: a demand that is humiliating and denotes already a possibility for further abuse. The humiliation of the hunchback who gets played upon by Malone, compares with the degrading enterprise of human zoos in which some humans or groups of humans are reduced to objects by the gaze of scientists and audience members.

Malone's literary imagination does not look for someone to play with, but someone that could be reduced to a mere object of his gaze, thereby validating himself as the master-onlooker. That is, of course, very far from his actual ability to dominate. Here only the desire to master someone, and thereby to feel powerful, speaks. It is also noticeable that Malone is obsessed with objects that he counts and recounts constantly, yet that desire of ownership is undermined by his lack of control over those objects as he keeps losing them. Malone's desire to have possessions, to be the master of objects that he constantly fusses about, escalates into the desire to objectify and possess other humans through his fiction, as has been shown by his cruel play with the hunchback.

This quick switch between the desire to possess an object and the desire to dominate other living beings through the act of objectification becomes clear after Malone has lost the

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scale of time and space are not autopoietic wholes; they are sticky dynamic openings and closures in finite, mortal, world-making, ontological play" (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 88).

stick with which he used to boss objects around and he imagines replacing the stick with a sex-slave instead:

> […] I might be able to catch one, a little girl for example, and half strangle her, three quarters, until she promises to give me my stick, give me soup, empty my pots, kiss me, fondle me, smile to me, give me my hat, stay with me, follow the hearse weeping into her handkerchief, that would be nice. I am such a good man, at bottom, such a good man, how is it nobody ever noticed it? A little girl would be into my barrow, she would undress before me, sleep beside me, have nobody but me, I would jam the bed against the door to prevent her running away, but then she would throw herself out of the window, when they got to know she was with me they would bring soup for two, I would teach her love and loathing, she would never forget me, I would die delighted, she would close my eyes and put a plug in my arse-hole, as per instructions. Easy, Malone, take it easy, you old whore. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 266)

The imagined little girl turns into an extension of his hands that would be even more effective than his stick. The girl's only purpose, as is imagined by Malone, would be to environ him in all the ways that would please him. Malone meticulously describes his taming methods by which he would suppress the will of the little girl and teach her the new ways: "I would teach her love and loathing, she would never forget me, I would die delighted, she would close my eyes and put a plug in my arse-hole, as per instructions" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 266). All this makes Malone the centre around which the imagined little slave's life would turn. The girl is imagined not as an individual in her own right, but as a subject that environs Malone, whose identity is threatened by an erasure: first, by being subjected to Malone's "lessons" – which is another way of overwriting her will. Second, she is supposed to carry on the memory of Malone, her master, her abuser. If generalized, this description recalls the grand narratives of history written from the conqueror's perspective, but also the description of a writer as a tyrant, as described by Maurice Blanchot.

Blanchot describes the classical author as a master who thinks he can rule over his work and master ("excel at") the language, an author whose search of the origin of his work ("*le point central*") is inward-bound, "*une anamnèse intériorisante* (*Erinnerung*)" (Blanchot, *Le Livre* 286). This internalization in literature is shown not as a means of finding some great general or personal irreversible truth, but as means of reducing art to the inner-world of the artist-master. According to Blanchot, some think they can save art by fencing it in, or internalizing it,[44] so that art would be a state of the soul. Blanchot writes:

> Everything happens as if artistic creation, as times exclude its importance by following impulses foreign to art, came closer to itself through a more demanding and profound view. Not prouder: it is the *Sturm und Drang* that thinks it exalts poetry by the myths of Prometheus and Muhammad; what is glorified then is not art but the creative artist, the powerful individual,

[44] Ref. to Eichendorff: "*Le poète est le cœur du monde*" (Blanchot, *Le Livre* 286).

> and each time the artist is preferred to the work, this preference, this exaltation of genius, signifies a degradation of art, a falling off confronting his own power, the search for compensatory dreams. (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 196)

To Blanchot, the writer is not so much the core or the *cœur* (heart or center) of his art, but rather a nostalgic figure who looks back at some (genetic or divine) power he seems to possess – his geniality.

The word "genius" comes from Latin, meaning "guardian spirit" or "deity" (*Chambers*). The image of a deity is evoked in a description where Malone announces: "In the old days I used to count, up to three hundred, four hundred, and with other things too, the showers, the bells, the chatter of the sparrows at dawn, or with nothing, for no reason, for the sake of counting, and then I divided, by sixty. That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 195). That description of Malone as being time and devouring the world might recall the mighty Greek god Kronos (same as *chronos*: a space of time) who is known for castrating his father and eating his children to establish and maintain his power.[45] Malone's literary imagination which leaves all sorts of ideas of violation and mutilation open in the text (asking the hunchback and the little girl to undress before him) depicts the dangers of a world where man is wolf to man (Hobbes, *Leviathan*).

In Malone's stories, the idea of violence constantly accompanies the notion of companionship. For instance, in the House of Saint John of God Macmann meets Moll, a tiny old woman, almost as fragile as he is. As their relationship begins, a sexual connotation of the word "companion" is developed through their efforts to "copulate as best they could" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 153). We are told that this relationship is what taught Macmann the meaning of companionship. It is said: "[…] on the long road to this what flutterings, alarms and bashful fumblings, of which only this, that they gave Macmann some insight into the meaning of the expression, Two is company" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 153). This company is of a curious nature, for whether Macmann receives from Moll love or abuse remains unclear because Macmann is there against his will and his feelings towards Moll fluctuate between love and repulsion (which recalls Malone's promise to teach the little girl love and loathing). That strange companionship is soon ended by Moll's death and replaced by another companionship where harassment becomes obvious. The new companion, a brute named Lemuel, announces that his parents were probably Aryan. As he first comes in, the etymological origin of the word

[45] Malone's restless and mindless counting of time and of things recalls another story of isolation: that of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, whose obsessive counting, measuring, and calendar-keeping echo in Malone, and are furthermore ridiculed as they have no results or significance, because Malone, like Robinson, has been cast outside of the society in which their significance is produced.

"companion" (from Latin *companio*, literally meaning "food-sharer"; from *cum panis*, "with bread," *Chambers*) is evoked. Lemuel is not *cum panis*, "with bread," but instead carries porridge. He says to Macmann: "Here is your porridge. Eat while it is boiling" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 259). That very sentence could be taken as a metaphor for companionship in *Malone Dies*: a kind of companionship where sharing is not caring.

The food that is served with the element of abuse is also present in the description of Malone and the little girl sharing a meal: "they would bring soup for two" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 266) and at Lambert's house:

> Alone with his daughter Lambert sat watching her. She was crouched before the range, in an attitude of dejection. He told her to eat and she began to eat the remains of the rabbit, out of the pot, with a spoon. But it is hard to look steadily for any length of time at a fellow-creature, even when you are resolved to, and suddenly Lambert saw his daughter at another place and otherwise engaged than in bringing the spoon up from the pot into her mouth and down from her mouth into the pot again. And yet he could have sworn that he had not taken his eyes off her. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 209–10)

Right before that segment we are told that Mr Lambert would have gladly slept with his daughter. Beckett writes: "But she was still young. Incest then was in the air" (*Three Novels* 209). No one is there to save the daughter, for Lambert's son also would not mind an intercourse with his sister, and Mrs Lambert (Mr Lambert's cousin) at this point has altogether given up caring. Such companions are not kind, but dangerous ones.

Beckett plays with different possibilities of using power to inflict abuse over those who are dependent on the care their companions could offer them. Food-sharing in *Malone Dies* is used to emphasize social and economic power structures in a family environment, such as between Lambert and his daughter, but also outside that structure. In the case of Macmann, we are shown that the reception of care itself is conditioned by one's ability to offer something in return and is shown as a trade-like relationship between fellows. Through Macmann, Beckett explores the dangers of the capitalist value system that is based on one's utility to production and productivity as it leaves behind those who do not fit the conditions of such trade. Those misfits become social parasites.

Becoming a parasite

A parasite is the opposite of a fellow man. The word "fellow" has economic connotations. It comes from early Scandinavian languages (runic (Denmark) *filaga, felaka,* meaning partner; runic (Sweden) *felaga*, *felaha*, meaning partner; Old Icelandic *félagi*, *OED*) and it means: "business partner, trading partner, shareholder, companion, comrade, and

spouse" (*OED*). "Fellow" refers to diverse links between people within and across communities that are based on trade: economic partnerships such as trading partners, business partners, shareholders; as well as political and socio-economic networks: comrades, spouses, and companions.

A parasite is the opposite of a partner, someone who obtains goods from their host without giving much (if anything) in return. The word "parasite" comes from Latin *parasītus*, meaning "a person who lives at another's expense," from ancient Greek *παράσιτος*, "a person who eats at the table of another" (*OED*). Parasitism evokes the idea of dislocation and dispossession. This metaphorical figure of eating at the table of another suggests that a person exists (or more precisely: eats) in a space that they have no claim on. Thus, it refers to a marginal position where one is never properly *at home*, but instead in a grey area between inclusion and exclusion.

Malone's Macmann dwells in that grey area. As a citizen, if he is one, Macmann is not a useful and willing wheel in the socio-economic machinery, but rather a clog in the system, who is unwilling and incapable of work. It is also shown that Macmann's body cannot produce the expected labour.

Michel Foucault explains that one's labour is an ability, "a machine which cannot be separated from the worker himself […]" (*The Birth of Biopolitics*, 224) and it makes a stream of incomes possible. Foucault compares the classical economic man to the economic man in neo-liberalism where he becomes no longer a mere partner of exchange, but "an entrepreneur of himself" (226): "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (226). Such demands of entrepreneurship: being in charge of one's skills, cannot be met by Macmann. Macmann is not an entrepreneur of his skills, because he is not the "master of his movements" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 236) and he is "happier sitting than standing and lying down than sitting, so that he sat and lay down at the least pretext…" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 236). The demands on Macmann's body and mind are mocked by the descriptions of his labours as an agricultural worker and as a street cleaner.

As an agricultural worker, Macmann is given the task of weeding, yet his weeding practices are, to say the least, counterproductive. Instead of plucking out the unwanted plants, Macmann leaves behind a ravaged earth where none of the plants have survived. Three possible reasons for his destructive behaviour are presented to the reader: his absent-mindedness, urge to destroy, and confusion. What could be added to that is also his utter lack of mastery over his movements ("so little was he master of his movements" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 238)). Instead

of the careful green fingers of a gardener, Macmann's hands work like the mechanical limbs of a mad machine – an automat that is not productive, but destructive.

As a streetcleaner, his work is described as causing more harm than benefits for the "tax payer" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237):

> (…) at the end of the day, throughout the sector consigned to him, one could see the peels of oranges and bananas, cigarette-butts, unspeakable scraps of paper, dogs' and horses' excrement and other muck, carefully concentrated all along the sidewalk or distributed on the crown of the street, as though in order to inspire the greatest possible disgust in the passers-by or provoke the greatest possible number of accidents, some fatal, by means of the slip. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237)

Macmann is a failed man of enterprise, to use Foulcault's words, because he cannot sustain himself or use his body and skills for the benefit of society. It is said of Macmann that "he never received any gifts of cash, or very seldom, and very paltry, which would not have mattered if he had been able to earn, in the sweat of his brow or by making use of his intelligence" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 236–37). The difference between those capable of sustaining themselves through labour – the tax payers, and Macmann is increased by the depiction of Macmann not only as useless, but as a possible danger to the society. His day's work is presented as done "as though in order to inspire the greatest possible disgust in the passers-by or provoke the greatest possible number of accidents, some fatal, by means of the slip" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237). It is interesting to see how Macmann's inability to earn his living quickly begins to bear an undertone of the current biological definition of the word parasite: an organism that obtains nutrients at the expense of the host organism, which it may directly or indirectly harm (*OED*).

Yet, Macmann is not an especially violent man, but simply a useless man to his socio-economic environment. He is dependent on others: an organism that obtains nutrients at the expense of the host organism – figuratively, society. Through Macmann, it is shown how one's utility within the socio-economic machine quickly begins to determine one's value as a living being, as Macmann's inability to earn a living is linked to the very notion of having the right to live in the following segment:

> And without knowing exactly what his sin was he felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life, for the living. And no doubt he would have wondered if it was really necessary to be guilty in order to be punished […] And it was often in fear and trembling that he suffered, saying, This will cost me dear. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 233)

Macmann's existence is haunted by an uncanny sense of having done something wrong, not knowing what it is. To Macmann, there seems to be no atonement because his very existence

is caught in this impossible yet inescapable cycle of atonement that he calls living (that "was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement," 233). I argue that Macmann's suspected sin is not directly linked to the idea of original sin, but rather to Macmann's lack of financial success that in itself could have a religious significance, as was famously shown by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).[46] To Macmann, life itself is indebted to this mysterious wrongdoing that he cannot decipher, that he can only feel burdening him.

Macmann's words: "as if there could be anything but life, for the living" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 233) seem to doubt his ability to belong to himself only and not be bothered by other possible demands on his life. Giorgio Agamben explains that the Greeks used 2 words for the word "life": "*zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 1). Macmann's life cannot be reduced to the biological fact of living, *zoē,* as he is also categorized and included in mechanisms and calculations within his community, of his state (what Foucault calls biopolitics). The problem is that for Macmann, there is no possibility of earning a living, of being his entrepreneur – there is only the continuing physical existence that is haunted by the demands that he can neither understand nor meet.

Macmann's way of life that mainly consists in "senseless" wandering is under threat. As he crawls on the earth, listening to "the distant roar of the earth drinking" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 233) (consuming, eating at someone's table?), the idea of undeserved punishment is evoked. This passage illuminates what will later be explained as Macmann's eco-logical thinking, but also it foreshadows Macmann's future imprisonment and its violence which calls to mind the imprisonment of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Macmann is admitted to the House of Saint John of God that, as James Little writes, is essentially carceral, not therapeutic confinement. This is the first time we see that Macmann's freedom is bound to his ability to be a useful and productive particle of society, and since he is incapable of that, his freedom is sabotaged. James Little compares Macmann's situation with the Foucauldian concepts of disciplining of the body:

> The hospitalisation of Macmann could be seen as supporting Foucault's argument that modern psychiatric practice is at base a means of incarcerating the abnormal in society, especially given that Macmann is 'found' by the narrator in a derelict state occupying a park bench. However,

[46] According to Weber, within the protestant ethics one's financial success was interpreted as a sign of salvation. This led to belief in success as a path to salvation: so that one's work was not only an activity one pursued, but a calling from God, and that hard work would bring great rewards. According to that logic, someone like Macmann, who does not possess any financial signs of being chosen for salvation, is damned.

> within this carceral institution, there is a complete absence of what Foucault terms the 'political tactic[s]' of incarceration. As against Nishi Chawla's claim that the politics of Beckett's writing involves a Foucauldian disciplining of the body, there is no sense that Macmann is being trained by the rules of the institution he inhabits. Foucault sees the task of various institutions within the 'carceral archipelago', which includes prisons, asylums and charitable institutions, as one of rendering its inmates 'docile and useful'. Macmann is anything but docile; his chances of being useful after his incarceration would appear to be nil. He therefore does not fit the picture as a victim of the soft coercion of modern disciplinary punishment. (J. Little)

Indeed, The House of Saint John of God does not seem to have any sort of clear disciplinary structure, instead, its inner-workings appear even eerier. Macmann is subjected to senseless violence administered by Lemuel who takes pride in declaring he is of Aryan descent and bears the name of the colonial narrator Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The symbolic Aryan Lemuel is an irresponsible and mindless everyman that makes mass violence possible yet will not be long remembered, and will disappear into the large numbers of the workforce.

The House of Saint John of God is more of a prototype of a concentration camp than an actual effort of normalization to render its inmates docile and useful. It seems to serve no other purpose than to confine, punish, and hide or erase Macmann – to get him off that park bench for which the taxpayers paid. Such a confinement unites Macmann with the writer figure Malone who is also rendered invisible by being enclosed in a room where he has no direct relations to the outside world. Yet, Malone's invisibility in this confinement is double. On the one hand, he is physically secluded in this room, and thus made invisible to the outside world. On the other hand, he also becomes socially invisible to the people within this house. Macmann, in the House of Saint John of God, is perceived by the people who work there: he is spoken to or spoken at and abused. Malone, on the other hand, is not spoken to or heard by the people who take care of him. There is no effort to communicate with him.

First, we are told that an old woman comes in and brings food, takes away the waste, but no further exchange happens between them. There is no significant companionship or effort to communicate between this woman and Malone. Later those comings and goings of food and waste become much more ghostly and Malone stops seeing his "caretakers" altogether. Malone seems to have become invisible to those who occupy the house he is in, not because he cannot physically be seen, but because he is being ignored, which is another form of violence, since this rejection dehumanizes Malone. He becomes socially invisible.

Guillaume le Blanc explains social invisibility through Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952) where a black man experiences rejection and invisibility in a shared space. Le Blanc writes:

> *[…] il est un être humain « de chair et de sang » mais « on ne souhaite pas le voir ». Les Blancs ne souhaitent pas le voir comme homme noir et ainsi finissent par ne plus le voir du tout. Leurs regards le traversent en permanence sans s'attacher à lui. Pour expliquer comment il est devenu invisible, le narrateur fait référence à l'œil intérieur de ceux qui déploient une disposition (intérieure) leur permettant de ne pas voir. Cette disposition intérieure est pensée comme donnant corps à l'humiliation raciste sur laquelle bute le narrateur. Cette instauration raciste de l'invisibilité, qui naturalise en retour les formes hégémoniques de la visibilité, rejette les femmes et les hommes rendus invisibles du côté des dominés, de ceux qui sont déconsidérés a priori et auxquels est refusée toute possibilité de participation à la commune Humanité, toute possibilité de faire œuvre : c'est l'invisibilité qui, dans le cas précis, crée les conditions de l'absence d'œuvre. À force d'être rendu invisible, ce que fait l'homme invisible non seulement ne compte plus mais s'absente de tout patrimoine, n'est même plus retenu dans le filet de l'agir humain.* (le Blanc, *L'invisibilité Sociale* 32)

In Malone's case, it is not the colour of his skin that makes the onlooker's inner eye erase the sight of him, ignore him, and thereby refuses him the possibility to act, to work, and to belong. No particular social or racial difference between Malone and others is given – the readers, like Malone, cannot see the people who inhabit the house. The only onlooker who is identified, is a woman almost as old and feeble as Malone. These mysterious other inhabitants are referred to as "the living" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 212). Malone says: "The doors banging, the steps on the stairs, the noises in the street, have not enlightened me, on this subject. All I know is that the living are there, above me and beneath me" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 212). As a dying man, Malone evokes an extremely uncomfortable subject which is the ultimate danger of erasure, disconnection, inaction and the inescapable future of all living beings – death.

Le Blanc explains that the social invisibility of the black man reinforces hegemonic forms of visibility, that of the white man. Malone's invisibility, on the other hand, could be seen as a way to reinforce the difference between the living and the dead, ignoring as it does, the confusing in-between stage Malone is in – dying. While Macmann, crawling in the rain, is wondering "if there could be anything but life, for the living" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 233), Malone shows that a vulnerable existence, that is, a life devoid of full vitality and the socioeconomic capacity to "*faire oeuvre*," becomes invisible. A life that is not a life for the living, but a life for the dying becomes a parasitic marginal existence.

Macmann's ecological thought

The logic that rejects those humans deemed not fully living, not fully potent and accepted particles of their socio-economic environments is linked to the way some other, non-human, species are categorized. That is what Macmann shows by reconsidering the notion he is himself concerned with – "parasite." The notion of parasite is evoked in the description of

Macmann's agricultural labours, in the passage where his unusual practice of weeding is described:

> But when given the job of weeding a plot of young carrots for example, at the rate of threepence or even sixpence an hour, it often happened that he tore them all up, through absent-mindedness, or carried away by I know not what irresistible urge that came over him at the sight of vegetables, and even of flowers, and literally blinded him to his true interests, the urge to make a clean sweep and have nothing before his eyes but a patch of brown earth rid of its parasites, it was often more than he could resist. Or without going so far as that, suddenly all swam before his eyes, he could no longer distinguish the plants destined for the embellishment of the home or the nutrition of man and beast from the weeds which are said to serve no useful purpose (…) (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237)

Even though Macmann momentarily cannot distinguish between parasites and non-parasites, he significantly recalls the main feature of a parasite: the lack of socio-economic value. Parasites are defined by their uselessness for humans, whereas vegetables have a useful purpose. That is, some vegetables and flowers have economic or aesthetic interests for human consumption: "the embellishment of the home or the nutrition of man and beast" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237) whereas, he recalls, weeds "are said to serve no useful purpose" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237). That is, no useful purpose for humans. This logic places humans, human needs and values at the centre of this categorization of plants into useful plants and weeds that here are shown to live without earning their right to live, without making profit – like Macmann himself. On the subject, Timothy Morton writes:

> Human economic relations are taken to be the 'Decider' that makes things real, that constructs a meaningful reality. Everything else gets to be the same kind of thing, protestations aside: the blank screen for the projection of these relations. Ironically, capitalism for Marx ensures that what these relations produce are relations between commodities that then determine relations between humans. Trees may not have agency, but cans[47] of soup and hedge funds have plenty (…)." (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 39)

The value of weeds is determined by their economic worth, not ecological relations between weeds and their environment. The human economic relations rely on the idea of ownership and domination: not only the idea that the land can be owned, but the idea that humankind has a superior right to the land. This idea is anchored in the Judeo-Christian theological framework according to which humankind is the sub-master of everything while being outranked only by God. Genesis 1:26 reads: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over

[47] Strangely, the cans (of soup, maybe) appear in Beckett's *How It Is*, where the narrator crawls in the mud, holding on to a coal-sack filled with cans.

the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*).

On the one hand, since man is given dominion over all the earth, land itself becomes a metaphorical table men dominate and fight over, and at which some are declared parasites. To think of it, if humankind is the master of all animals and the owner, or the sub-owner, of all land then all other species appear as parasites not in the biological sense of the word, but rather like creatures humankind allows to eat at their table.

On the other hand, the absolute difference between humans (the god-like chosen ones) and other animals (all beasts) that promotes the sense that one has the right to mastery (given by God) cannot be secured because that absolute difference is threatened by strong similarities between humans and other species. The prehistoric character Worm, "less than a beast" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 351), runs a risk of becoming a human character not through evolution, but by forceful creation: "For if they could make a small hole for the eye, then bigger ones for the arms, they can make one bigger still for the transit of Worm, from darkness to light" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 351). Yet the evolution or the concatenation of stages of development which have made Worm "what I am" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 345) cannot be overwritten. The Beckettian man cannot rid himself of his animality and dwell in the light of anthropocentric reason and God only, for Beckettian men are earthly.

Beckett's Macmann, who often crawls on the earth, quite perfectly fits the image of the biblical "creeping thing that creeps on the earth." It is said that Macmann "was by temperament more reptile than bird" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 236). Macmann does not appear as having "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*): he is the creeping thing to be dominated by other men. That happens at the end of the novel where Macmann is dominated and manhandled by Lemuel who claims to be an Aryan: *the* human. Next to him, Macmann is made to appear less than human – a parasite.

The word parasite comes from the Greek: *para*-, meaning "beside," and *sītos*, meaning "grain" (*OED*). If compared to the Parable of Weeds, Macmann is not the biblical son of the kingdom, referred to as wheat, but rather a tare, a weed. He is not the spiritual child of Jesus Christ, but a bad seed: not from the heavens, but from the earth (where Satan is rumoured to dwell). Composed of the Gaelic "*mac*," meaning "son," and the German "(*der*) *Mann*" for "man"; Macmann's name is symbolically linked to his identity as a human: as the son of mankind. Yet, this son of man is quite detached from the Cartesian rationality of the superior

human mind. Malone describes Macmann as "rather of the earth earthy and ill-fitted for pure reason" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 236). It is from this humble viewpoint – being close to the earth, crawling, earthy and ill-fitted for Cartesian pure reason, that Macmann draws his own conclusions on parasitism.

He knows that the weeds "are said to have no useful purpose" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237), yet he speculates that they "must have their usefulness too, for the earth to favour them so, such as squitch beloved of dogs and from which man too in his turn has succeeded in extracting a brew, and the hoe fell from his hands" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237). Macmann makes a considerable shift in the logic of thinking about the soil: he disregards, for a moment, the solely anthropocentric relations to the earth by thinking about the value of "squitch" (quitch grass) *for dogs*. The earth becomes no longer a mere physical resource to be manipulated for profit but a complex decider with non-human agency.

This is the kind of ecological thinking, coming from Macmann, that decentres the needs of humankind and our monopoly on consciousness, and shows the earth as a thinking complex that has the ability to favour some plants instead of others, thereby undermining human agendas. Through our multiple traces: constructions, deforestation practices, pollution, etc., mankind has proved to be very capable of rewriting the soil. Yet we are shown that the earth too can write (concatenate) its history. The earth's writing practices, its complex concatenations, challenge Malone's own writing practices that could be seen creating a vicious circle, a fatal concatenation, of suffering. Through Malone's literary character, Macmann, his writing makes an unexpected turn towards humus and humility.

Macmann looks at his labour of uprooting parasites from the viewpoint of a being of the ground and not the heavens, wondering why the earth would favour the growth of what we consider to be parasites. That favouritism questions also the very nature of a parasite. What makes a plant a parasite depends on the judge and on the context in which a plant is judged. Parasitism is not some absolute feature that survives all contexts. Here the anthropocentric economical context is replaced by the ecological context in which weeds are not necessarily harmful. Not all relationships between weeds and vegetables, crop, and flowers can be defined by the binary "one is bad, the other is good" logic. The relationships between weeds and consumable (by humans) plants are often also symbiotic as well as the relationship between the earth and weeds.

John Walker, an award-winning British gardening and environment writer, explains that weeds "act like a kind of living 'plaster' whenever soil is exposed" (Walker). According to him; bare soil is a vulnerable soil, void of earthworms and exposed to harmful sunlight that

damages millions of microscopic soil organisms. He compares the "bare, neat-looking soil" to "open wounds" (Walker), and insists on the ability of weeds to improve the quality of the soil (humus). Walker writes:

> Their roots bind the soil together, helping to improve its structure and create a more stable environment in which soil life can flourish. Those weeds with a deep taproot (…) draw up plant nutrients from deeper in the ground, making them available to plants growing near the soil surface. Above ground, the stems of weeds help trap fallen leaves and other organic matter, which break down into the soil or are dragged underground by earthworms. And when the weeds themselves finally die (…) both the leafy tops and the roots decompose into valuable humus. (Walker)

Macmann's thinking that weeds "must have their usefulness too, for the earth to favour them so" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 237) is a valuable effort to think beyond human economic interest, humbling the importance of human agenda. Such thinking turns out to serve human interests too, for as Walker confirms: weeds actually have the ability to improve the soil and therefore secure the food on our tables in the long run too. A more humble, non-anthropocentric, view of the humus pays off.

However, the problem that arises in the novel is the inability to see such connections – the concatenation between oneself and the earth, in other terms than possession and profitability. As a young man, Macmann, then known as Sapo (recalling *homo sapiens*), failed to notice the earth and his connection to it. To him it was rather a ground to walk on. Malone describes Sapo:

> […] with his pale eyes he stared down at the earth, blind to its beauty, and to its utility, and to the little wild many-coloured flowers happy among the crops and weeds. But these stations were short-lived, for he was still young. And of a sudden he is off again, on his wanderings, passing from light to shadow, from shadow to light, unheedingly. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 200)

Beckett describes Sapo who is so much absorbed by his motion, his ability to move, to accelerate: by his own power, that he hardly ever stops to notice the earth's many associations: to beauty, utility, or ecosystems. Sapo fails to contextualize the earth economically: for he is blind to its utility; aesthetically: for he is blind to its beauty, and ecologically: for he does not notice the coexistence of wild-flowers, crops and weeds.

Conclusion

Sapo, the young and mighty *homo sapiens* is completely detached from his surroundings, just accelerating through life. Towards what? Towards nowhere in particular: he sees no connections, as will later also be shown to be the case of Eva Trout in Elizabeth

Bowen's *Eva Trout or Changing Scenes* (1969). A saunterer who is *sans terre*, who owns no land, Macmann thinks about his connection to the earth only when he is forced to face the earth, that is, when he becomes weak and dependent, yet treated as a parasite.

This coming to terms with one's vulnerability is narrated by Malone who has become invisible to society but is also quite blind to different relations into which he is engulfed as a living being, human, companion, and a narrator. His inability to engage in an ecological play that would rethink his connection to humans, things, and animals in other terms than mindlessly reinforcing a form of thinking based on domination and human exceptionalism consolidates the logic behind his own misery as an outcast, a social parasite. Malone is not shown by Beckett as a virtuous sufferer, but rather a human caught in a fatal concatenation of domination and misery in which he plays both parts, being at once the figure of the colonizer/master (like Robinson Crusoe) and the dominated, the stranger (like Friday). He keeps reproducing the same old myths of exceptionalism that deny him his human status, and occasionally has some glimpses of other modes of reasoning into which his fiction-writing briefly takes him (of which Bowen writes in *The Death of the Heart*: "to write is always to a rave a little" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 7)) – such as Macmann's rereading of weeds. Those discursions into other modes of thinking, not based on the desire to dominate mindlessly, show that the fatal circular concatenation of suffering based on relating to others via mastery (while also being the victim of such treatment) is not an unchanging pattern. Even in this seemingly closed circle of thinking that alternates between suffering and thinking about harming others, Malone's writing raves a little, making his concatenation of words and sentences an uncanny pattern in which contradictory modes of thinking emerge.

While Malone suggests a direction of further detachment, "from discovery to discovery, ever higher, towards the light" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 247), the trilogy also questions the figure of the Enlightenment (the age of *human* Reason) together with the ethical injustices against the non-human animals who are debased and dispossessed through anthropocentrism justified with human exceptionalism. These narratives, through their form and content, depict vulnerable human beings that cannot uphold the solid and noncontradictory identity of human beings as exceptional creatures who are clearly separable from the concatenation of things and beings among which and through which they evolve.

2.2 Animals and *Logos* in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*

> I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169)

The idea of human exceptionalism becomes unreachable and unbearable to Beckett's narrators who struggle to keep their theories safe, their perception fully reliable, and their narratives structured into a stable, coherent utterance. Those vulnerable narrators are not the masters of the natural or the literary environment. The trilogy purposefully fails to produce universal knowledge through a potent and coherent human narrator as the master of such a prized system, and thereby fractures the idea of human exceptionalism.

I will explore the ways in which Beckett denounces human mastery over other species and the planet by questioning the anthropocentric requirements of excellence bestowed upon humankind (mostly fictions of superiority in terms of speech, intelligence, and erect carriage) through Beckett's vulnerable humans and their complex relations to *logos*. *Logos* will be explored first as speech and reason, with its ties to 17th-century rationalism; then through its supplementary meaning – *logos* as "ground."

Unsanctifying logos as speech and reason

The relation that Beckett's vulnerable narrators have with *logos* as speech and reason is overshadowed by the mental and physical vulnerability of narrators which allows the reader to experience and reconsider relations between knowledge and mastery. Beckett's trilogy, to some extent, inspires Maurice Blanchot's quest to find in a literary work "the place where language is still a relationship without power, a language of naked relation, foreign to all mastery and all servitude, a language that speaks only to whoever does not speak in order to possess and have power, to know and have, to become master and to master oneself" (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 33)[48]. The trilogy decidedly moves towards questioning the relations

[48] I am suggesting that Blanchot's search for a literary work where language is a relationship without power leads him to Beckett's writing as the prime example. He writes:

> By directing us, through serious thought, toward what he called the zero degree of writing, Roland Barthes perhaps also designated the moment when literature might be grasped. But the fact is that at that point it would be not only a bland, absent, and neutral writing, it would be the very experience of 'neutrality,' which one never hears, for when neutrality speaks, only one who imposes silence on it prepares the conditions for its hearing, and yet what there is to hear is this neutral speech; what has always been said cannot stop being said and cannot be heard, a torment we get a presentiment of in the pages of Samuel Beckett. (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 209)

between human mastery, language, and knowledge. In the trilogy, Beckett turns his back on "intellectually complex patterns of ideas and images" that could be found in his prose and poetry of the 1930s (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 320). Knowlson writes: "Beckett was rejecting the Joycean principle that knowing more was a way of creatively understanding the world and controlling it" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 320).

The refusal to write according to the credo that knowing more is a way to creatively understand the world also reflects his defiance to write without profoundly questioning literature and rationalist philosophy. As Derrida points out, this challenging and questioning of literature could be seen as specific to many 20th-century Modernist writers (Derrida and Attridge 261).[49] However, Beckett's trilogy stands out because it almost dissolves the boundaries of literary writing by challenging the relationship between language and mastery. Through its fragmented textual structures, Beckett's trilogy approaches what Roland Barthes calls the zero degree of writing. According to Blanchot, Beckett's trilogy gives one a presentiment of neutral speech: "what has always been said cannot stop being said and cannot be heard" (Blanchot 2003, 209), and to Derrida, Beckett's writing is already so deconstructive that to respond to it by extracting a couple of significant words or lines (as he had done with other Modernist works) became impossible for him (Derrida and Attridge 280). The chaotic multiverse of meanings and truths that open the reader up to paradoxical and daring wondering and wandering in Beckett's trilogy is the very idea behind deconstruction.

As Aurélien Barrau explains, deconstruction is not about demolition, reconstruction or reaching back towards some fundamental origin, but instead a sort of opening oneself up to a continuity and copresence or haunting of meanings without imposing a certain order (Barrau and Nancy 89). Beckett's deconstructive trilogy undermines the Western tendencies to (somewhat reductively) categorize and reach towards a unified system of knowledge on everything on Earth and beyond. Indeed, such a need to organize and hierarchize the world was briefly criticized by Beckett in a comment made to Axel Kaun in 1937. Beckett stated he is

[49] Derrida notes in « *Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature* » :

> *Ces textes-là furent tous à leur manière des textes qui n'étaient plus simplement, plus seulement littéraires. Mais les questions inquiètes au sujet de la littérature, ils ne les posent pas seulement, ils ne leur donnent pas seulement une forme théorique, philosophique ou sociologique, comme chez Sartre, par exemple. Leur questionnement se liait encore à l'acte d'une performativité littéraire et d'une performativité critique, voire en crise.* (Derrida and Attridge 262)

neither interested in a unification of the historical chaos nor in the clarification of the individual chaos (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 228).[50]

In the trilogy, his disinterest towards the clarification of chaos, could also be understood in other terms than promoting disorder, for chaos also refers to the formless state of primordial matter, and to a chasm: a division, an opening (*OED*). Beckett's trilogy could be seen as creating openings (boring holes) in the established systems of knowledge and modes of reasoning, thereby encouraging the reader to doubt some categorizations, such as the reductive animal-human difference.

Beckett shows how the Cartesian rationality that promotes such a binary opposition is largely based on anthropocentric simplification, that is, a *misunderstanding* of other species. The misunderstanding is rooted in what Derrida calls logocentrism. Derrida points out that Western philosophical systems are founded on logocentrism which is "first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*: this is the thesis, position, or presupposition maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Levinas and Lacan" (Derrida, "The Animal" 396). In the trilogy, Beckett not only challenges the presumed inability for animals to have *logos*, but he also raises questions about the sanctified status of human language. Beckett writes there is something "paralyzingly holy"[51] about language, and this holiness must be challenged: "As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 172).

One way of challenging the "paralyzingly holy" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 52–53) status of words is through a species capable of mimicking human languages – namely, parrots. Beckett despised the artists' "itch to animise" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 158), yet parrots allow him to avoid anthropomorphizing his animal characters to the fullest. Instead,

[50] Because those remarks were made during his trip to prewar Nazi Germany, Nixon proposes that this comment is also Beckett's refusal to reconcile "the 'historical chaos' with any notion of 'Germanic destiny'" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 178). As a learned person, Beckett did not lack knowledge or appetite for theory, but his trip to Hitler's Germany was perhaps the perfect time to discover the "incoherence of times and men and places" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 178) and his own inability to write anything universal or coherent in a place where history was being written and rewritten by dangerously narrow propaganda narratives that produced historical and biological "knowledge" about one's superiority and right to dominance.

[51] Beckett asks: "*Steckt etwas lähmend Heiliges in der Unnatur des Wortes, was zu den Elementen der anderen Künste nicht gehört*?" which could be translated as: is there something paralyzingly holy in the unnatural/artificial nature of the word that is not found in the elements of the other arts? (Beckett, *Disjecta* 52–53)

Beckett manages to show the reader that those feisty birds defy their human captors by using and abusing their most praised tool – language. This corresponds to Beckett's mission to unsanctify language:

> 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. […] 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. (Beckett, *Disjecta* 172, italics mine)

Parrots in the trilogy offer the perfect opportunity, first, to mock language through the dissonance between the linguistic means and their use, but also to undermine the presumed human monopoly on consciousness. In *Molloy*, a pet parrot responds to her owner's (Louse) fancies of repeating "Pretty Polly" with unexpected brass, crying out loud: "Fuck the son of a bitch" or "Putain de merde!" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 33), thereby undermining the owner's idea of a parrot as a mere repetitive machine. The dissonance between the message of the human owner and the bird's response ridicules the owner's mastery over the bird. The given name Polly (that also recalls Robinson Crusoe's bird Poll) is mocked through its ineffectiveness to refer to this Poll/y only (as it is a common name for parrots). The fictive bird is made to rebel against the violence of naming by undermining the human-given identity (as a parrot named Polly which in French could be heard as *poli*, meaning "polite") with rudeness.

In *Malone Dies*, the second parrot, also named Polly, uses language as well as dramatic silence to refuse the task given by the owner, Jackson, who, like Louse, tries in vain to put words into Polly's mouth (or in this case rather into her beak), but the parrot refuses this exercise at a perfectly humorous moment. Jackson wants Polly to repeat: *Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu* ("nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses"), but the parrot pronounces the first three words only, "*Nihil in intellectu*" ("nothing in the intellect") (Beckett, *Three Novels* 211), which are left suspended and thus poignantly mock the feelings of superiority of the bird's master. Beckett writes:

> These first three words the bird managed well enough, but the celebrated restriction was too much for it, all you heard was a series of squawks. This annoyed Jackson, who kept nagging at it to begin all over again. Then Polly flew into a rage and retreated to a corner of its cage. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 211–12)

The actions, attitudes and sounds of the parrot refer to a certain unwillingness on Polly's part. As Mary Bryden writes: "The parrot does not simply dry up. (…) it makes a bilingual utterance, translating the expected phrase into 'a series of squawks'. In so doing, it has

performed a minimum sample of the imposed human sentence, but has also succeeded in asserting the existence and validity of its own native tongue" (Bryden 7–8). This disobedience is rendered even more noticeable by Beckett's choice of words. A squawk figuratively also means "a protest" (*OED*) which also might be read in the body language of the parrot who "flew into a rage and retreated to a corner of its cage" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 211–12). Thus, Jackson's lesson to Polly is undermined by Polly's choice not to do what parrots are known for – repeating, and the human ideas about reason are denounced by Polly's words: nothing in the intellect.

Giving lines to nonhuman animals that can mimic human speech is a perfect opportunity for Beckett to unsanctify language as something proper to humankind. However, Beckett's human narrators who are, as Beckett himself said, "spiritually precarious" and "falling to bits" (Graver and Federman 148), are the main unsanctifiers of human language and intellect since they are shown to be limited in what they can know, experience, and express.

Mastery over one's environment and objective knowledge

One such narrator is Malone in *Malone Dies* whose position recalls Plato's allegory of the cave. Like Plato's cavemen, Malone dwells in a monad-like environment. His connection to the world outside the cell, and to other living beings, is only established very faintly: by the sounds that seep into his room in small quantities. Despite being the narrator, he is not the all-seeing eye, the all-hearing ear, and the all-knowing mind. Malone speaks from the darkness of his room, and above all – from a position of impotence, immobility, and solitude. He knows that "his" room is linked to a much larger world he has no access to, as he says: "All hangs together, I am in chains. Unfortunately I do not know quite what floor I am on, perhaps I am only on the mezzanine. The doors banging, the steps on the stairs, the noises in the street, have not enlightened me, on this subject" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 212). Fettered thus in a small cell, Malone evokes Plato's allegory of the cave where chained prisoners access the world and the objects in it only through the shadows projected on the wall until one of them escapes and discovers the outside world. Unlike the prisoner in Plato's allegory, Beckett's Malone, "man alone," never escapes the cave, but instead only fabricates fictions from the darkness of his room.

The efforts of mastering objective knowledge are also ridiculed in the trilogy when the narrator of *The Unnamable* claims: "[…] they [humans] build up hypotheses that collapse on top of one another, it's human, a lobster couldn't do it" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 365–66). The

given proof of human superiority: "a lobster couldn't do it," first underlines and then *undermines* anthropocentric ideas about cognition.

Building up hypotheses that collapse on top of each other is not a victory, it is rather a statement that despite our appetite for a fixated infallible knowledge, human beings are fallible and constrained not only by personal limitations, but also by their limitations as a species. The disbelief in the absolute superiority of human systems of thought was famously evoked by an American philosopher, Thomas Nagel. Nagel believes that human body, mind, and language do not permit us to master all kinds of knowledge. His essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" concludes: "[…] there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language" (Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" 441). To Nagel, human intelligence should not be considered as a measure of intelligence and it does not necessarily ensure intellectual superiority or some sort of cosmically objective viewpoint. As some ethologists have proved: intelligence is much more complicated than that. For instance, octopuses "think outside the box," Frans de Waal writes,

> Each octopus has nearly two thousand suckers, every single one equipped with its own ganglion with half a million neurons. That amounts to a lot of neurons on top of a 65-million neuron brain. In addition, it has a chain of ganglia along its arms. The brain connects with all these "mini-brains," which are also joined among themselves. Instead of a single central command, as in our species, the cephalopod nervous system is more like the Internet: there is extensive local control. (…) Instead of turning the study of cognition into a contest, we should avoid putting apples next to oranges. The octopus's senses and anatomy, including its decentralized nervous system, make it unparalleled. (de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough* 248)

The Unnamable's "a lobster couldn't do it" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 365–66) is a very good example of putting apples next to oranges in order to prove human exceptionalism that in Beckett's hand is turned into subtle ridicule when the human accomplishments are equated with failure: *collapsing* hypotheses.

These collapsing hypotheses might refer to significant discoveries in Western history that Jacques Derrida points out as three traumas of humanity: the Copernican, the Darwinian, and the Freudian (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 131). They depict the decentralization of man in terms of his habitat, origins, and consciousness, making mankind look less special and more fragile. Derrida specifically evokes "the panic that Freud talks about: wounded reaction" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 131) to the second trauma concerning the discovery of evolution, which in Beckett's trilogy resurfaces from time to time (as traumas do) with a new force through some of his characters who try to reduce other species to Cartesian machines (without intellect and a viewpoint of their own), as it was shown through human

interactions with parrots. However, this urge backfires as narrators begin to lose their faith in the ability of their language to guard and communicate one's singular viewpoint.

Mastery over one's language and through language

The *Unnamable*'s narrator writes: "I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 342). Beckett shows how his human narrators and characters are engulfed in a language that has begun to feel impersonal and compulsive. The multiplicity of voices in language cancels out the full mastery of the will of the narrator. As Eric P. Levy writes about *The Unnamable*'s narrator:

> Words are all the narrator has, but, having them, he loses himself; for which ones belong to him alone without dragging in the beliefs and associations of strangers? Each word, borrowed from the community of men, compromises the isolation of which he tries to speak and, by translating the purity of an experience uniquely his own into the coarser terms of a public language, subverts the very purpose of narration. Far from overcoming this impasse, the narrator is everywhere limited and embittered by it: 'Is there a single word of mine in all I say?' (Levy 58–59)

The rationalists' dreams of mastery of pure reason are replaced by what Levy calls Beckett's "pure narrators" (Levy 6) who are comparable to the image of parrots as repetitive machines – that is, they embody our anthropocentric fictions about parrots.[52]

Beckett's human characters are trying to find their voice within their language: a language that in principle is shared and thus cannot be made theirs. As Jacques Derrida puts it: "I only have one language; it is not mine" (Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other* 1). Their individual will gets lost in the myriad voices of their language which they cannot control. In *The Unnamable*, Beckett writes: "But I don't say anything, I don't know anything, these voices are not mine, nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me," (Beckett, *Three Novels* 341) referring to a certain otherness in language which makes his voice a copy or a composite copy, thereby preventing a complete appropriation of his voice. As Blanchot notices:

> *The Unnamable* is precisely experience lived under threat of the impersonal, the approach of a neutral speech that speaks itself alone, that goes through the one who hears it, that is without

[52] Brigitte Le Juez writes that Beckett "used to be spelt 'Bec*quet*', meaning little beak, 'le bec'" (Le Juez 213), perhaps that of a parrot, "un perro*quet*." The word "parrot," on the other hand, refers to humankind, as it comes from French proper name *Perrot*, variant of *Pierrot* (*OED*). The latter recalls a staple character of pantomime and Commedia dell'Arte: Pierrot, a sad yet comic figure or everyman.

> intimacy, excludes any intimacy, one that cannot be silenced, for it is the incessant, the interminable.
>
> Who is speaking here, then? Is it 'the author'? But what can this tide designate, if in any case the one writing is already no longer Beckett but the demand that led him outside of himself, dispossessed him and let go of him, gave him over to the outside, making him a nameless being, the Unnamable, a being without being who can neither live nor die, cannot cease or begin, the empty place in which the listlessness of an empty speech speaks, one that with great difficulty regains a porous and agonizing I. (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 213)

The philosophical concern with language and the survival of the self within the shared language is one of the many elements that powerfully unites the works of Samuel Beckett and Maurice Blanchot.[53] Blanchot argues that language can also be linked to our fear of vulnerability as mortals. Blanchot specialist, Timothy Clark explains that as one cannot control one's birth or death, language could be seen as replacing that inability by allowing us to create "a space of permanence where truth, even if it should perish, may be restored to life" (Clark, "A Green Blanchot: Impossible?" 130). Language can be seen as a work of "establishing a secure reign" (Clark, "A Green Blanchot: Impossible?" 130), of overcoming our mortality by investing in ghosts, in ghostly concepts and ideas that through language outlive mortal man (and yet, as Blanchot suggests, cannot be absolutely mastered by mortals). Beckett's trilogy refers to the downside of such means of survival. Beckett shows that our language consists in a dangerous detachment from things, from matter, from the ground, and our thinking is limited to this important language-world instead, while our natural habitat perishes. Molloy writes:

> Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 27)

Molloy points at a dissonance between objects and words, going as far as the planet Earth itself, which, according to him, is foully named. The mocking attitude that Beckett was

[53] Their works are also bound by mutual appreciation. From the letters exchanged between G. Duhuit and Beckett, it appears that Beckett was trying to translate some of Blanchot's texts into English (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 220, 232). Also, Beckett's *Molloy* was admitted to the *Prix des Critiques* in 1951 where Blanchot was one of the judges, defending the book unreservedly. In one of the letters to Lindon, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil writes: "To have been defended by a man like Blanchot will have been the main thing for Beckett, whatever the outcome" (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 254). Beckett himself shows his appreciation of Blanchot's reading of his trilogy in a letter (1954) to Mr Suhrkamp who was asking Beckett's advice about main reviews and articles about his work, to which Beckett responded: "But the big thing, for me, is the recent piece by Maurice Blanchot on *L'Innommable*, in the *NRF* (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 442). Beckett was referring to the article I have evoked in my analysis: « *Où Maintenant ? Qui maintenant* ? » which appeared also in Blanchot's *The Book to Come*.

looking for: “a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words” (Beckett, *Disjecta* 172), takes a more philosophical turn here when Molloy distances objects from “their” names and thereby makes language appear hollow (“thingless names”), cold (“the icy words”), and haunted (“the sonata of the dead”). Such a haunted language also detaches itself from the one who speaks it, denying him the ability to reign over it and thereby undermines the dream of establishing a secure reign. What reigns in language somehow is felt to be out of reach for the mere man. The Beckettian narrator, tormented by the constant flux of words, which is not under his control, undermines the figure of the writer/thinker: thoughts become automatisms governed by words and voices full of otherness. A human narrator becomes: “[…] a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, […] in a word like a beast, in one of their words, like such a beast […]” (Beckett, *Three Novels* 380). Trapped in language that is not his (“in one of *their* words,” 380), a narrator no longer seems like a master, not even distinctly human, but rather a humbler creature, an animal in disguise: dragging around a heavy carapace of fictions about humanity.

Indeed, as Shane Weller reminds us, it is *of* such an animal and *to* such an animal that Beckett writes: “‘(…) as if there were a little animal inside one’s head, for which one tried to find a voice; to which one tries to give a voice’” (Weller, “Forms of Weakness: Animalisation in Kafka and Beckett” 20).

Logos as ground

This little voiceless animal within a human head is at the core of Beckett’s vulnerable writing, that is, the trilogy’s fractured textual soil (syntax and plot), its vulnerable characters and environments. Such vulnerable writing stems from the realization of Beckett’s own lack of humility that was pointed out by his psychoanalyst. Mark Nixon indicates that Wilfred Bion’s psychotherapy focused on “Beckett’s acrimonious comments on fellow (usually Irish) artists, as a problem which needed addressing” (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett’s German Diaries* 52). Beckett had turned to Bion because for a long time he had been struggling with worsening anxiety attacks that by now had begun to take a toll on his heart. In 1935, he revealed in a letter to Tom MacGreevy what he thinks is the principal cause of his anxiety attacks:

> ‘The misery and solitude and apathy and the sneers were the elements of an *index of superiority* and guaranteed the feeling of *arrogant ‘otherness*,’ which seemed right and natural and as little morbid as the ways in which it was not so much expressed as implied and reserved and kept available for a possible utterance in the future. It was not until that way of living, or rather

> negation of living, developed such terrifying physical symptoms that it could no longer be pursued, that I became aware of anything morbid in myself' (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 173, italics mine).

The trilogy embodies Beckett's own struggle with humility as well as that of the Western man in general. On the one hand, the characters' degrading physical conditions in the trilogy are an echo of Beckett's own coming to terms with his false feelings of superiority through his declining health. He was not able to go on with "the feeling of arrogant 'otherness,' which seemed right and natural'" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 173). His heart, quite literally, could not take it anymore.

On the other hand, aggravating physical symptoms in the trilogy take on a larger signification, concerning mankind and its feeling of superiority over a large variety of species and the planet itself. The importance of Beckett's trilogy to the 21st-century reader might just lie in the realization that today it is no longer a matter of a single struggling heart but the struggling hearth (home) of all living – the planet Earth. Now humankind, as an author of its suffering, must come to terms with their species' humility (from Latin *humilis* "low," from *humus* "the ground"): that is, humankind must become more modest in terms of demarcating itself within ecosystems, but also recognize their nearness to and dependence on the ground (*humus*).

Next to the impoverishment of the powers of *logos* as anthropocentric speech and reason, Beckett seems to propose a humbler view of *logos*: *logos* as ground – which is one of its meanings, yet only metaphorically linked to the earth (*γαῖα, γῆ*). *Logos* is often translated as "word, speech, reason, plea, law etc.," and in that line "ground" appears as "reasoning" or "reason" and loses its link to the literal ground or earth, which nonetheless seems to come haunting *logos* in the trilogy.

The link between logos as the literal ground was also established by Heidegger, but in a different light. Daniel O. Dahlstrom points out that in a lecture course given in 1955-56, published as *The Principle of Reason* (*Der Satz vom Grund*), Heidegger "regards the unrestricted pursuit of reasons and grounds (*Grund*) as a threat, a threat to another sort of ground (*Boden*), the soil that is allegedly vital to human flourishing" (Wippel 126). Dahlstrom also mentions that Heidegger's use of the term *Boden* "reverberates with its checkered past use (by him and others) in National Socialist rhetoric" (Wippel 126). Beckett who was well aware of such rhetoric (having spent time in Hitler's Germany) and thoroughly disgusted by it, presents the soil's necessity to men from a humbler viewpoint: from the viewpoint of the dispossessed and the vulnerable. Beckett's characters who roam on the earth in the trilogy

cannot be reduced to the National Socialist *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) rhetoric that links German land to Aryan blood and this strange symbiosis to the idea of the right to possess the land which was contrasted with the imagery of a wandering, uprooted, city-dweller Jew. Beckett's narrators are dispossessed, wandering creatures. In the trilogy, the characters' link, or nearness, to the ground is not based on some natural right to possess and make a "good" use of the land. Instead, their link to the ground is most often felt and thought through their vulnerability. The ground which is vital to human flourishing (according to Heidegger) appears in Beckett's trilogy only through a certain humiliation or humbling of Beckett's human characters.

The main characters are earth-bound in the most humorous sense of the word "humble": held down by merciless gravity, some limp, some crawl, some are bedridden. By rendering his human characters humble, that is: lowly, poor, vulnerable and literally close to earth – crawling, Beckett fractures the illusion of self-sufficiency and human exceptionalism which is also a form of *arrogant otherness*, such as Beckett had unknowingly encouraged within himself. Forced to reckon with being on earth and earthly through their vulnerability, Beckett's characters start to lose ground in their identity as humans. For instance, their physical degradation affects one of the "superior" qualities of humankind: the upright position. Molloy uses his bicycle as a support at first, yet, like Moran, he ends up crawling. Macmann is shown to crawl in the mud and Malone has lost his ability to move around. In *The Unnamable*, an extremely feeble creature appears: handless, one-legged, posted naked on a sawdust in a jar with "little blue mirrors" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 325) (similar to those in bird cages), like a disfigured little bird. Next to that feeble narrator, Beckett populates the trilogy with hens and parrots whose mere presence testifies against the human monopoly over walking on two feet.

Pure humans

The animal-human difference is also undermined through Beckett's choice of proper names. On the one hand, the narrator of *The Unnamable* claims: "Nothing doing without proper names" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 331), evoking the necessity of proper names in a language. On the other hand, we are also made to question what Blanchot calls "the decisive violence" of language that dominates and hierarchizes beings according to the dialectics of the dominant and the dominated. Blanchot writes:

> Language, in the world, above all is power. Whoever speaks is powerful and violent. To name is that violence that distances what is named in order to possess it in the useful form of a name.

> To name is enough to make man into this troublesome and shocking strangeness that has to trouble other living beings, even up to those solitary gods who are said to be mute. To name has been given only to a being capable of not being, capable of making this nothingness a power and this power the decisive violence that opens nature, dominates it and compels it. That is how language projects us into the dialectics of the master and the slave with which we are obsessed. (Blanchot, *The Book* 32-33)

Blanchot insists on the violence of domination that language inflicts upon non-human beings and what he calls nature. Clark writes that Blanchot's understanding of nature is a reaction against "pseudo-agrarian elements in Heidegger's work" and the affirmation of "a kind of anti-essentialist nomadism, refusing all forms of nostalgia and insidious notions of 'rootedness'" (Clark, "A Green Blanchot: Impossible?" 121) which is also the cornerstone (or rather the rolling stone, for the sake of keeping the visual correctness of such a metaphor) of Beckett's trilogy. Beckett's narrator in *The Unnamable* who is said to be "worn out by the rudiments" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 331) challenges the dialectics of the dominant and the dominated by questioning learned formulas: "Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal. I couldn't. Always talking about mammals, in this menagerie. Frankly, between ourselves, what the hell could it matter to pupil Mahood, that man was this rather than that?" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 331).

In the name of Mahood inevitably resonates the word "manhood" which is opposed to the least human-like lifeform, Worm, who was named Worm because the narrator felt he did not have much choice (Beckett, *Three Novels* 331). Such a lack of choice seems to come from the learned rudiments: the binary oppositions language relies on. The narrator wonders:

> Who make me say that I can't be Worm, the inexpugnable. Who make me say that I am he perhaps, as they are. Who make me say that since I can't be he I must be he. That since I couldn't be Mahood, as I might have been, I must be Worm, as I cannot be. But is it still they who say that when I have failed to be Worm I'll be Mahood, automatically, on the rebound? (Beckett, *Three Novels* 341)

The narrator is faced with being unfit for either classification: "That since I couldn't be Mahood, as I might have been, I must be Worm, *as I cannot be*" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 341, italics mine); and from this viewpoint, from the impossibility of being either Worm or Mahood, the text begins to fracture the binary animal-human opposition. His refusal of the automatism according to which he is either Worm or Mahood undermines the idea that opposing identities are neatly separable from each other.

Such a neat separation between binary opposites as a means of constructing an identity is challenged by Derrida who argues against Levinas's notion of the "infinitely other." Derrida demonstrates that relationality is already implicit in the idea of the other: "'The infinitely

other,' he imagines Parmenides arguing, 'can be what it is only if it is other, that is, other than. Other than must be other than myself. Henceforth, it is no longer absolved of a relation to an ego. Therefore, it is no longer infinitely, absolutely other'" (Attridge 49). The logic that is based on binary oppositions presupposes the possibility of an absolute difference (that is not already a *différance*) which permits to overcome the relationality of "other than."

The impossibility of such a task regarding the separation of humankind from other animals is further developed in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* where Derrida wonders about man as he is defined by Descartes – the one who thinks, doubts, or as Beckett puts it in the trilogy – the man "whom they have reduced to reason" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 331). In his rereading of the famous "*je pense donc je suis*," Derrida lets himself be carried away by the possibility of misreading that the French language offers. He replaces the verb *être* (to be) by *suivre* (to follow), which in the third person sounds the same. Beckett's mocking attitude toward the Cartesian anthropocentric rationality involves a more literal following (of an imaginary line):

> Descartes imagines (…) a man lost in a forest going in a straight line as the best method of escaping from it. But Molloy, on his crutches, goes around in circles, because he thinks that, with his particular disabilities, this is his best chance of approximating to movement in a straight line. So, in a scene of wild comedy, Molloy moves on towards his mother 'blindly, in the dark', going on from doubt to even greater doubt. (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 339)

In his daring misreading of Descartes, Derrida arrives at: *l'animal que donc je suis* that could be read as "the animal that therefore I am/follow," by replacing the egocentric and anthropocentric *je* (I) with the word "animal." "The animal that therefore I follow" is a possible reference to the gradual evolution of species that humankind is the product of.

The trilogy also shows characters as products of evolution: animals that follow other animals in a complex web of evolution. Through proper names, the trilogy links *logos* to the blurred margin between the binary opposites: the human and the animal. Beckett produces a concatenation of reappearing elements in some characters' names that seem related to each other (**Ma**lone, **Ma**hood, **Ma**cmann, **Mo**lloy **Mo**ran, and **Wo**rm. The letter W in Worm also looks like a reversed M: the same letter from a different viewpoint). Among these, Molloy seems to recall mollusks, Mahood manhood, and Worm refers to the assumed opposite of manhood or mankind – the animal, a creature of the earth. They can neither fully appropriate the qualities of being a human being nor can they be totally cast out from their species. From this marginal, lowly, literally close to earth position, Beckett's characters undermine the binary animal-human opposition, inviting the reader to reconsider the superiority of the Western Man-

Master over his own and other species and his right to mastery. Beckett writes in *Malone Dies*: "[…] he [Macmann] was rather of the earth earthy and ill-fitted for pure reason […] And to tell the truth he was by temperament more reptile than bird […]" (235-236). The trilogy undoes the idea of an accessible pure reason on the basis that there are no pure humans.

Beckett's vulnerable characters who fail to be the masters of a purely rational mind and an autonomous and erect body, become the very proof against human exceptionality based on those features. Instead, humans are shown to be similar to a variety of species. Their dependence on other species and the earth is illuminated by vulnerability which becomes the common ground of all living, that is, all that can perish.

Towards humbler viewpoints

Along with the growing physical vulnerability of Beckett's narrators, the literal viewpoint changes: they perceive earth not from above (from a house or a skyscraper) but from the ground. Down there, their sensory apparatuses are tuned to read their surroundings, trying, to the best of their (ever declining) ability, to perceive the world around them. Their inability to see it all, or to feel to be perceiving something fully, could be contrasted with the view famously described by Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Nature."

For Emerson, connecting oneself to the ground, perceiving nature whilst standing on the bare ground, is a humbling experience. He writes: "Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (Emerson 13). He evokes humility through the image of humus: "the bare ground" as well as through the loss of egotism, of self-effacement: "I am nothing. I see all." However, that effacement is only apparent, for Emerson did not dissolve into his surroundings nor did he get lost in the next sentence where "I," the seer, is well preserved. This desire to acquire an all-seeing eye that still can be safely installed into the subjective "I" is then upgraded to universality, to God. Whether such a motion leads to becoming humble or becoming more masterful than before can be debated: will a man who connects to the bare ground in such a way become a half-god who uses humility only as a disguise to gain creative freedom over his environment or will he become a humble particle of a larger divine system? What does it mean to be humble?

Interested in the notion of humility, in 1935 Beckett studied Geulincx's *Ethica,* in which humility is divided into inspection of oneself, and contempt of oneself. Mark Nixon writes that

"Beckett removed the origin of the self-effacement, the 'contempt for self', as deriving from the human worthlessness before God, in order to arrive at the 'self-referring quietism'" (Nixon 55-56).[54] Beckett's self-referring quietism, developed before writing the trilogy, was later criticized by none other than Beckett himself, for it fuelled Beckett's tendency to seclude himself and seek abundance within himself. Beckett concluded that his initial reading of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* had twisted those texts

> into a programme of self-sufficiency: An abject self-referring quietism indeed . . . but the only kind that I, who seem never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the supernatural, could elicit from the text, and then only by means of a substitution of terms very different from the one you propose. I mean that I replaced the plenitude that he calls 'God', not by 'goodness', but by a pleroma only to be sought among my own feathers or entrails. (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 51)

Seeking the plenitude of God from one's own "feathers and entrails" precisely is the danger of Emerson's logic of relating oneself to nature. His "poetical sense of nature" (Emerson 10) where "nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Emerson 14) is anthropomorphizing at its best, for under the guise of unification (God, nature, man) and humility it also carefully sustains the hierarchy between man and nature: "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (Emerson 13). Man's nature, reduced to beauty (reduced to goodness) now shines through only in the prettiest landscapes, separating itself from the darker and gloomier parts of nature that simply reflect man's moods. In that manner, human nature is separated from and placed above nature while nature is reduced to a mere mirror of our emotions.

Beckett's vulnerable wanderers sometimes encounter a different perspective from the ground that does not mould the natural landscape into one's emotional landscape. For instance, Molloy's little reportage of men, landscape, and cows, as it was perceived from a ditch and dismembered by his failing memory, reduces man's world into "my little world" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 11) instead of spreading it all over the landscape:

> Or he might have gone back to the town by another way too far away for me to hear its sounds, or by little paths through the fields, crushing the silent grass, pounding the silent ground. And so at last I came out of that distant night, divided between the murmurs of my little world, its dutiful confusions, and those so different (so different?) of all that between two suns abides and passes away. Never once a human voice. But the cows, when the peasants passed, crying in vain to be milked. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 11)

[54] In the trilogy, the removal of the heavenly father is humorously shown through the quietist prayer, borrowed from Jean de La Bruyère's satirical *Dialogues sur le quiétisme* (1699) (Wimbush): "[…] the pretty quietist Pater, Our Father who art no more in heaven than on earth or in hell, I neither want nor desire that thy name be hallowed, thou knowest best what suits thee" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 161).

Suddenly, as we read, we share Molloy's view from the ground that calculates the impact of a human foot, "crushing" and "pounding" – a destructive footstep that for the 21st-century reader has become ever more alarmingly connoted as a symbol of human caused climate change (a carbon footprint). The murmurs of Molloy's little world are compared to "those so different," but as soon as this remarkable difference is evoked it is questioned: so different? The fact that the voices of cows, trying to get the attention of people they know, are evoked right after doubting there is a great difference between Molloy's little world and others seems to communicate a profound doubt about the complete difference of the inner-worlds of those who are unlike Molloy, such as the cows Molloy evokes, without precisely hierarchizing that difference.

The sort of view Molloy portrays, from the ground, echoes humility that is more similar to a form of humility Thomas Nagel envisions:

> (…) the recognition that you are no more important than you are, and that the fact that something is of importance to you, or that it would be good or bad if you did or suffered something, is a fact of purely local significance. (…) Humility falls between nihilistic detachment and blind self-importance. It doesn't require reflection on the cosmic arbitrariness of the sense of taste every time you eat a hamburger. But we can try to avoid the familiar excesses of envy, vanity, conceit, competitiveness, and pride – including pride in our culture, in our nation, and in the achievements of humanity as a species. The human race has a strong disposition to adore itself, in spite of its record. But it is possible to live a complete life of the kind one has been given without overvaluing it hopelessly. (Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* 222)

Beckett's characters do not depict a powerful human race, but rather vulnerable dependent and impotent humans who cannot sustain the pride in the achievements of humanity as a species, who through their vulnerability are forced to look at the worlds around them from somewhere between nihilistic detachment and blind self-importance, often struggling to do so. Humility is not given to them through some fixed hierarchy involving god; it is constantly rediscovered by the suffering vulnerable narrators as they reconsider their links to the environment and their language. Molloy, who is said to "dwell somewhere between the mud and the scum" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 10) and who declares himself "the last of [his] foul brood, neither man nor beast" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 15) has developed a skill that Blanchot esteems to be "the place of power and the principle of true mastery" (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 33) – listening. It is through listening, "this disinherited, subordinate, and secondary side" (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 32–33), that Molloy discovers his belonging to the ecosystem in which a social parasite like him, an outsider to the social order, is an integral part of the ecological mix, since "There

is a little of everything, apparently, in nature, and freaks are common" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 10). Molloy tells us:

> And that night there was no question of moon, nor any other light, but it was a night of *listening*, a night given to the faint soughing and sighing stirring at night in little pleasure gardens, the shy sabbath of leaves and petals and the air that eddies there as it does not in other places, where there is less constraint, and as it does not during the day, when there is more vigilance, and then something else that is not clear, being neither the air nor what it moves, perhaps the far unchanging noise the earth makes and which other noises cover, but not for long. For they do not account for that noise you hear when you really listen, when all seems hushed. And there was another noise, that of my life become the life of this garden as it rode the earth of deeps and wildernesses. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 44, italics mine)

Beckett's trilogy invites the reader to rethink the notion of *logos*, so that it would consider the actual ground and our attachment to it; and to build a reason that is conscious of the earth. Not only is Molloy's life seen by him as becoming one with the life of the garden (and not the center of the garden), but the earth itself is shown to have a sound which is separate from Molloy's voice or that of other men, and cannot be cancelled out by other voices, only covered by them. Now that anyone can freely listen to the sounds of Earth or the Sun recorded by NASA, Molloy's night of listening could be experienced from a different perspective, from high above the ground. Yet with Molloy we stay close to the ground and perhaps more down-to-earth, for we are shown that by suspending the human noise, one can begin to discover that everything *speaks*, not only to us, for us, and in our name, but in spite of us.

Conclusion

Beckett's approach to human superiority and the morbidity that lies therein consists in pushing language as well as certain norms of literary writing to their limits, as is common to Modernist writers. Yet Beckett destructures language and plot, and humbles his characters in ways no Modernist had done before. His is a deliberate act of boring holes in language and humiliating it, so that its complexity, interrelations and lack of innocence appear. Similar discomposure also happens to the plot and the identity of his human or non-human characters. What stands out from these ruins is the ever more faltering faith in the power of *logos* as an anthropocentric speech and reason.

The superiority of the Western Man-Master is undermined first by his inability to produce infallible objective knowledge and to have a voice in his language; second, by the characters' physical suffering that brings them closer to the earth. The change of perspective that allows them to observe prevalent learned ideas about animal-human difference ("the

rudiments," Beckett, *Three Novels* 331) from down here, triggers an opposing recognition that a man is inherently humble in the following sense: vulnerable and earthly, much like other living beings.

Beckett's trilogy, both in form and content, precedes yet perfectly illuminates suggestions from a contemporary philosopher, Timothy Morton, who writes: "Politics in the wake of the ecological thought must begin with the Copernican 'humiliations' – coming closer to the actual dirt beneath our feet, the actuality of Earth. The ecological thought has no storyline" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 125). Beckett unites a Modernist literary uprooting and boring holes in textual and ideological foundations with the literal tearing up of the earth that sooner or later will leave us in tears – weeping for the destruction that cannot be undone, as Moran quickly discovers:

> My hands were full of grass and earth that I had torn up unwittingly, was still tearing up. I was literally uprooting. I desisted, yes, the second I realized what I had done, what I was doing, such a nasty thing, I desisted from it, I opened my hands, they were soon empty. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 158–59)

2.3 Animals and Animality in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*

> Humans may be "animals," but "animals" aren't "animals." (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 62)

While in Beckett's trilogy the animal-human opposition is challenged through the humbling effects of boring holes in the human language and rationality – the pillars of human superiority; Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938), seems to draw attention to the way in which animal comparisons can be made to serve and betray the animal-human opposition. Despite its urban setting in London in the 1930s, the novel is filled with animal imagery, to which a couple of rare glimpses of non-human characters are added. Mostly, animals appear as tropes for what is considered the animality in humans – often, a repressed side of human characters which, like most repressions, resurges in a hidden form.

My analysis will focus, first, on the figures of animality that are used to humiliate another human being, such as the protagonist of the novel, Portia Quayne. Portia, an orphaned teenager who has been sent to live with her half-brother, Thomas, and his wife, Anna, in their London home,

destabilizes the lives of the wealthy pair, as her very presence irritates Anna who underlines Portia's unconventional origin from a love affair between Mr Quayne and a woman named Irene. Anna calls her "the child of an aberration, the child of a panic" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 274) while also comparing Portia to Charles Edward Louis Philip Casimir Stuart (known as the Young Pretender), the last serious Stuart claimant to the British throne. She says that Portia "has inherited everything: she marches about this house like the Race itself. They rally as if she were the Young Pretender (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 274)." The spite that Anna feels for Portia finds an expression in various animal comparisons that she uses to undermine Portia's status amongst the Quaynes. These figures of animality become mere tools utilized with the purpose of accentuating one's difference from and superiority over another person. However, Bowen's novel also shows how these metaphorical references to animality backfire and fail to accentuate one's utter difference and superiority *only*, because the animal-human opposition is itself merely metaphorical. It alludes to the misguided idea, especially striking in the novel's Western Christian cultural context, that a human identity can be constructed and consolidated through its opposition to animality. This opposition ignores the scientific findings that show complex concatenations between species.

Bowen who once attended a school situated in the former home of Charles Darwin (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* xxi) seems to view the idea of a fixed human identity as a mere fiction. In her autobiography, she writes: "[…] a main trait of human nature is its amorphousness, the amorphousness of the drifting and flopping jellyfish in a cloudy tide" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 295). This seems to be another way of saying (but also *showing*, by evoking the mental image of a jellyfish within "human nature") that human identity is not neatly separable from the wide concatenation of species that have populated the Earth. Identity is instead something changing and not completely graspable: "a slippery fish," (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213) as Bowen writes in her last novel, *Eva Trout*, which more evidently links the genesis of humankind to the sea, and not the Garden of Eden. In *The Death of the Heart*, animal comparisons play with the contradictions at the heart of the animal-human divide: all humans are animals too, or, conversely, not even animals are animals.[55]

I will explore how Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* challenges the opposition between animals and humans, and animality and humanity, by underlining undeniable connections between species through the *corporal reality* of her characters (which sounds oxymoronic because characters are fictional, and thus, bodyless). Characters' attempts to establish their superiority over others by opposing themselves to animality will be undermined through their corporal existence within the narrative which is brought to the fore by descriptions of their bodies and bodily reactions.

First, I will show how characters' emotions are linked to animality and corporality, but also to female gender roles and stereotypes, and thereby they become dreaded, for both categories are undervalued within the novel's patriarchal English society. However, I will also show how Bowen's descriptions underline the unavoidability and the importance of emotions. By being unavoidable, the universality of emotions treacherously interconnects all characters, thereby undermining the animalisation of humans who show emotion as well as the objectification of non-human species. Last, I will show how Bowen's writing subverts the

[55] The concepts such as "the animal" or "animals" are how our species access and organise the information about a large variety of species from an anthropocentric viewpoint. Timothy Morton writes:

> Correlationism means that there are things in themselves (as Kant would put it), but that they aren't 'realized' until they are correlated by a correlator (…). The correlatee requires a correlator to make it real: sure, things exist in some inaccessible sense, but things aren't strictly real until they have been accessed by a correlator. For Kant, the correlator is what he calls the transcendental subject. This subject tends to be found hovering invisibly behind the heads of only one entity in the actually existing universe – the human being. (Morton, *Humankind* 7)

The concepts such as "the animal/animals" and "man/humans" are only made real by human correlators. Is it anything for a jellyfish to be an animal? Or, is there anything like an animal in itself if we cancel out the human correlator?

animal-human opposition by making characters read the bodies of other characters, evoking a mode of reading that is not exclusively human.

Emotions and animality

The opening chapter combines two modes of reading: the reading of textual passages (Portia's diary) and non-textual passages. It begins with a concatenation of non-textual passages that the reader is made to "hear" and "see." The first movement, that of swans in the water, follows the cracking of the ice in the pond of Regent's Park. This allows passages, "channels of dark water," where swans can swim in "slow indignation" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 3). The silent passage of these birds is followed by steps that "rang on the bridges, and along the black walks" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 3). Those ringing steps are made to precede and announce the movement of the approaching bodies of Anna Quayne and her writer friend, St Quentin, who are then revealed to be standing on yet another passage – "a footbridge between an island and the mainland" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 3). This rather cinematographic introduction that plays with stillness and movement also uses the wintry scenery of frigid trees, pallid terraces, and a calm frozen park to emphasize the subtle emotional agitation beneath the apparent tranquillity of those two walkers who "in the intense cold (…) had chosen to make this long summerlike pause" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 3). The slow indignation of swans mentioned earlier is quickly overshadowed by Anna's indignation as she explains to her writer friend, St Quentin, that she has secretly read Portia's diary. "I've seldom been more upset," she says to St Quentin before claiming: "In ways, she [Portia] is more like an animal" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4).

Being "like an animal" here does not refer to one's similarities with a large variety of species we have categorized as animals; it is a metaphor that masks undesirable human qualities Anna perceives in Portia. In this example, "animal" refers to the absence of full humanity in Portia, as she is seen by Anna. Anna's use of the word "animal" relies on the idea that all other species are inferior to humans, and thus, suggesting one's likeness to this inferior concept (animal) is belittling. Though Anna's insult is directed indirectly at Portia, who is not there to hear it, its violence towards its unintended signified – a large variety of species classified as animals, is equally poignant. After all, the unintended signified of the word "animal"– the swans swimming in "slow indignation" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 3), are there. Anna's belittling use of the word "animal" aims at what is not present – Portia, while misrepresenting the animals that are present – the swans who have nothing to do with Portia and her behaviour.

This falls in line with Derrida's thoughts about the difference between idiomatic expressions and fables about wolves and real wolves. Derrida begins his seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, with the expression *à pas de loup* (meaning "stealthy as a wolf," quietly and cautiously). He observes "the silent operation of the word *pas*" which refers to the step of the wolf, but also to the adverb of negation – *pas*, thus playfully implying "*il n'y a pas de loup* [there is no wolf]" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 5). As Derrida writes: "Wolves in nature as we say, real wolves, are the same on this side or the other side of the Pyrenees or the Alps; but the figures of the wolf belong to cultures, nations, languages, myths, fables, fantasies, histories" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 4–5). In the expression *à pas de loup*, he explains, "there is only a word, a spoken word, a fable, a fable-wolf, a fabulous animal, or even a fantasy" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 5).

The absence of what is named, the wolf in Derrida's case, or, as will be shown, the swan in *The Death of the Heart,* is made evident by Bowen in the following extract where the swan-like St Quentin and a real swan are made to face each other. Bowen writes: "Drumming with stiff, gloved fingers on the bridge rail, he frowned down at a swan till it vanished under the bridge. His eyes, like the swan's, were set rather near in" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 8). The disappearance of this swan emphasizes the difference between the real swan and the figure of the swan, announcing multiple animal comparisons to come that are used to communicate a certain half-hidden side of a human character.

The fabulous figure of the wolf, according to Derrida, "like a metonymic substitute or supplement, would come both to announce and conceal, to manifest and mask" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 5–6). Derrida also links it to the black velvet mask, called *loup*, which women used to wear at masked balls, and which "allowed them to see sovereignly without being seen, to identify without being identified" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 6). In the novel, claims such as "she's more like an animal" (4); "what a little monster she must be" (8); "[Major] Brutt is a brute" (103) are used to reinforce the otherness of the other by identifying them as animals. That sort of identification comes from a position of power. The concept of "humanity" which has strong connotations linked to benevolence, intelligence, and superiority can be used as the Derridean *loup* (a mask). One's humanity as such, can be exposed to others, as a representation of oneself; it can be figuratively worn as a mask that allows one to categorize others as well as hide the egocentric and anthropocentric foundations behind its label of excellence. In contrast, animality becomes a tool to humiliate some humans by threatening them precisely with the loss of humanity.

This is paradoxical, because this belittlement consists in threatening one with a more honest perception of humanity – humanity that is not reduced to benevolence or rationality and presented in opposition to animality. Such a reductive image of humanity and humankind refers to a particularly Western vision of animality that links all non-human animals and some non-Western people to wilderness.

As a Dutch American ethologist, Frans de Waal, writes:

> Traditionally, animals are depicted as slaves of their emotions. It all goes back to the dichotomy of animals as "wild" and humans as "civilized." Being wild implies being undisciplined, crazy even, without holding back. Being civilized, in contrast, refers to exercising the well-mannered restraint that humans are capable of under favorable circumstances. This dichotomy lurks behind almost every debate about what makes us human, so much so that whenever humans behave badly, we call them "animals"" (de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough* 222).

According de Waal's understanding, wilderness is not only the opposite of domestication, but it also refers to the idea that humanity is not proper to all humans but is instead reduced to certain behaviours and cultural origins. Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands" (1899) famously evokes the moral sense of duty of the White Man to humanize (that is, "civilize" according to certain cultural and economic standards) people who are considered to be wild. As the poem steadily invents the savage, it also gives a curious perception of the imagined White Man as someone able to control his "animal" side i.e., his emotions. Kipling writes:

> Take up the White Man's burden –
> In patience to abide
> To veil the threat of terror
> And check the show of pride; (Kipling 111)

The White Man in the poem appears as an image of patience, wisdom, and hard work, whereas the colonized are made to look childish, devilish, and sullen. Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* seems to put forth a perceptible restraint on expressing one's emotions in a Western context – in London. In her novel, the invention of the savage is directly connected to the animal-human opposition in which animals are described as lacking mastery over their emotions. Such characters as the teenage Portia,[56] the nostalgic character Major Brutt (brute) or Irene, who misbehave or who are *too emotional*, are bestialized.

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[56] Eddie tells Portia she "she has a completely lunatic set of values" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 313) going as far as to claim there is "some sense missing" (313) in her, whereas at the end of the book, St Quentin, a voice less paranoid and hysterical than Eddie's, makes an opposing comment about Portia's ability to perceive, saying:

> 'Not that there is, really, one neat unhaunted man. I swear that each of us keeps, battened down inside himself, a sort of lunatic giant – impossible socially, but full-scale – and that it's the knockings and

When describing Portia's mother, Irene, Anna evokes the link between emotions and animality. She calls Irene "a scrap of a widow" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 14), and ridicules her appearance that is seemingly too emotional and unkempt – too wild. As she says to St Quentin, Irene was "ever so plucky, just back from China, with damp little hands, a husky voice, and defective tear-ducts that gave her eyes always rather a swimmy look. She had a prostrated way of looking up at you, and that fluffy, bird's-nesty hair that hairpins get lost in" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 14). Bowen's wordplay, going from the adjective "plucky" (14) (from the verb "to pluck") to Irene's "bird's-nesty" (14) hair, vividly acts out Anna's attempt to muddy Irene's reputation, to tear Irene into "scraps," (14) and make her appear as "a scrap of a widow" (14) – a sort of a strange stranger ("just back from China," 14) whose strangeness Anna emphasizes by making her appear wild, that is, emotional and animal-like.

Irene, with her teary eyes, fluffy hair, and plucky attitude is the opposite of the seemingly cold, calculated, and sophisticated Anna who in many ways is the guardian of social standards that directly borrow from the Western tradition of separating civilization from wilderness (untamed nature and non-westernized people). Although she is English, Irene, the traveller with wild hair and watery eyes who seemingly has little respect for the sanctity of marriage (Irene had an affair with Thomas's father that resulted in the birth of Portia), is a savage in the sense that she has not abided by the social rules Anna still holds dear. Irene's emotional appearance is disturbing to Anna, because it reflects the decisions Irene made that take one's desires into consideration. It seems that Anna did not choose her husband, Thomas, merely out of love, but the stable businessman was a safer option than, or even the opposite of, Anna's previous partner. Anna's attack on Irene's memory seems to be fuelled by the necessity to suppress her own, carefully buried, feelings. The reasons for such a reaction might lie in Anna's own heartbreak in her past relationship with another avian-sounding character, Mr Pidgeon, but also in her social environment where her gender and its perception already links her to emotion in an unflattering manner – by suggesting a certain lack in intellectual abilities and authority.

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batterings we sometimes hear in each other that keeps our intercourse from utter banality. Portia hears these the whole time; in fact she hears nothing else.' (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 345)

Portia's diary records the "knockings and batterings" (345), the sounds of the heart that metaphorically represent the emotions kept at bay.

Women, emotions, and animality

The separation between reason and emotion is, too often, represented as a gender difference that links emotions to femininity and intelligence to masculinity. One of Bowen's most prominent literary influences, Virginia Woolf, powerfully underlined and undermined such a divide in her famous essay, *A Room of One's Own*, that was published in 1929 – nine years prior to Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*. Woolf examines Coleridge's statement that a great mind is androgynous, claiming:

> Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought. (…) Coleridge certainly did not mean, when he said that a great mind is androgynous, that it is a mind that has any special sympathy with women; a mind that takes up their cause or devotes itself to their interpretation. Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind. He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. (Woolf 148)

Whereas Woolf articulates the necessity of emotions in order to create a powerful work of art, Bowen's Anna seems to be sensitive to the stereotypical vision of women as emotional and men as rational in her semi-literary social environment. Anna is not a writer, but a woman constantly surrounded by male characters (in fact, the only women we meet in her presence are servants and the teenage Portia – none of whom have a status similar to hers). The male characters who most often surround her: Thomas (a successful businessman), Eddie (an eager social climber), and St Quentin (a known author), are all ambitious. One way to establish herself among those men, in a man's world, is to separate herself from the teenage Portia. Anna claims: "You said, if I were Portia. Naturally, that's impossible: she and I are hardly the same sex" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 348). "She and I are hardly the same sex" is not a reference to their biological differences, but to gender roles and stereotypes. In order not to fall into the same trap and risk being endlessly feminized/infantilized into someone overly emotional, and thereby reduced to bestiality, Anna has to monitor her behaviour. The danger of showing genuine emotions looms large at the beginning of the novel where Anna's statement that Portia is rather like an animal is quickly turned against her: indeed, she is accompanied by a male author, St Quentin, and judged by his gaze which perceives her as another bird-like figure.

To St Quentin, Anna's "smoothness of contour, her placid derisive smile, her way of drawing her chin in when she did smile, often made him think of a sardonic bland white duck" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4). This comparison could be understood as a judgement since,

on the next page, it is followed by Anna's awareness of being judged, in her turn, by St Quentin: "She could feel St Quentin looking, but took no notice: she detected the touch of malice in his pity for women" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 5). The blandness of a now duck-like Anna is emphasized a couple of pages later by the narrator's comparison between St Quentin and a swan: "His eyes, like the swan's, were set rather near in" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 8).

The characters' likeness with birds recalls Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling" and its central themes: the judgement of others and transformation. They both echo in *The Death of the Heart*, a Bildungsroman depicting Portia's passage from childhood to adulthood and the suffering this entry into the grown-up world of London's elite entails. However, it is not only Portia's suffering which is at the heart of the novel, but at this very precise moment, as Anna stands on the footbridge with St Quentin, "beyond acting" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 5), an emotion quietly breaks loose from behind the screen she has put up for St Quentin.

> But there seemed no doubt at this moment that, beyond acting, she was really put out: her chin was tucked inside her big fur collar, and under the fur cap she wore peaked forward her forehead was wrinkled up. She was looking down unhappily at her muff, with her fine blonde lashes cast on her cheek; now and then a hand came out of her muff and she dabbed at the tip of her nose with a handkerchief. She could feel St Quentin looking, but took no notice: she detected the touch of malice in his pity for women. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4–5)

Bowen's allusion to Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" also seems to refer to a certain vulnerability lurking behind Anna's social display of womanhood: it is hidden behind a sardonic, excessive display of emotion through which she "wrote herself down like this, obligingly, to suit him, with a touch of friendly insolence" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4). Anna is shown to adapt herself to a specific image of womanhood, to "concert exactly with the view he [St Quentin] took of her sex" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4). Yet, her real heartbreak cannot be found in this visible abundance of emotion which is fake, and therefore, safe. It is not the theatrical display of emotion that Anna tries to shy away from, Bowen shows, but the raw unmasterable emotion that St Quentin detects in her involuntary bodily expression: the downcast lashes, her tucked in chin, and wrinkled forehead. It is her body that intervenes and breaks off her social display of womanhood.[57]

[57] Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* challenges the rationalist body-mind opposition through those instances where bodies cannot be ignored or controlled. Yet this attention to one's bodily existence might also be inherited, to some extent at least, from Virginia Woolf whose work Bowen greatly admired. As Christine Reynier writes:

> For Woolf, rather than being opposed to each other, these notions [dichotomies such as good and bad, the moral and immoral, the beautiful and the ugly, the mind and the body] are complementary or interconnected: 'Literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a

The novel shows that the other mask which allows Anna to see sovereignly, from the position of mastery, is in fact a certain numbness, or the death of the heart. Emotions are too dangerously linked to what the writer figure of the novel, St Quentin calls: "a sort of lunatic giant – impossible socially, but full-scale" that lives "battened down" inside each human (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 345). The novel revolves around repressing that lunatic giant within – one's emotions, to fit the Western rationalist representations of humans that insist on the separation between intelligence and emotions, mind and body. The fabulous beastly figure – a lunatic giant, not a proper animal and yet not a man, refers to humans' own, too narrow, definitions of humanity. By showing animality not as the opposite of humanity but as humanity's unaccounted for surplus that undermines the animal-human difference, Bowen forces her readers to seriously consider the contradictions upon which human identity as the opposite of animality lies. Those contradictions bubble up on the pages in Portia's diary, and reveal human identity as well as one's personal identity to be far less constant and masterable than Anna might have realized.

As St Quentin claims: "to write is always to a rave a little," (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 7) meaning that writing is always open to unexpected supplements or haunting: "Nothing arrives on paper as it started, and so much arrives that never started at all," (7) St Quentin says. This is shown to be true also for Anna's bodily writing, that is, her efforts to act, to acquire an outline by "writing herself down" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4) to suit her spectator's gaze. What the novel shows, however, is that Anna is not always as in control of "writing herself down" (4) as she would like to be. Anna's version of Anna is consequently haunted by a version of herself that Portia, the animal, has written down in her diary. That discovery triggers multiple ghosts, multiple Annas: Anna as a motherless child, Anna as she went through miscarriages or as she had her heart broken by Pidgeon.

Bowen says about Andersen's fairy tales that they "introduce emotion – and thereby break one of the fairy tale's primitive, rigid laws. It is impossible to read a Hans Andersen story without risking heartbreak" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 293–94). In *The Death of the Heart*, Anna's and Portia's mutual readings and rereadings of each other are the source of a heartbreak as they open up wounds that have never healed.[58] Anna, the sardonic bland duck,

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sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and…is null, negligible, and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes.' (Reynier 141)

[58] Suppressing one's emotions could be seen as a cultural trait in England, which has been condemned by writers such as Ford Maddox and E.M. Foster, providing a fertile ground for satire. However, for Bowen the suppression of one's most overwhelming emotions is also linked to a personal traumatic experience – that of losing her mother as a teenager. Victoria Glendinning writes that towards the end of Bowen's mother's illness, she had been sent to stay with aunt Hilary who was told not to talk to Elizabeth about her mother. Elizabeth was never taken to say

full of judgement towards Portia and Major Brutt, is also shown as a vulnerable creature, a kind of abandoned ugly duckling, when Portia discovers a drawing of Anna at the age of 12, holding a kitten: "She saw the kitten hugged to the breast in a contraction of unknowing sorrow" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 228). This version of Anna, in many ways similar to the orphaned Portia, begins to reshape Portia's own vision of Anna while her reading Portia's diary is shown to introduce emotion and thereby evoke suppressed memories in Anna. The diary and the drawing become places of transfer between these visibly opposed characters.

Reading Portia's diary, Anna can travel back to the kind of sensitivity and vulnerability specific to teenage years that she no longer remembered. Anna is described as "already half way through a woman's checked, puzzled life, a life to which the intelligence only gives a further distorted pattern. With Anna, feeling was by now unwilling, but she had more resonance. Memory enlarged and enlarged inside her an echoing, not often visited cave" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 135). Anna is painted as a picture of intelligence and complexity, but Bowen does not praise such an unfeeling intelligence either, for her intelligence is said to give her "a further distorted pattern" (135). We are told that Anna could not remember her teenage years until "a sensation touched her" (135). It becomes clear that Anna's ability to remember is directly linked to her bodily ability to feel. By making such a link, Bowen undermines the binary opposition between body and mind. She shows that the most treasured human trait, our intelligence, is in fact disabled without one's emotional, that is, bodily, response.[59]

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goodbye to her mother. The suppression of mourning, imposed by adults, showed side effects at night when her sobbing was witnessed by another child, and through her stammer which would always take over her speech while pronouncing the word "mother" (Glendinning 27–28). Bowen also comments on this suppression in her autobiography. She writes: "Since my mother's death, in September, I had worn mourning, of the euphemistic kind permitted for children (…). *Now*, and so soon, was I to be shorn of that. 'My black' was the last I had of my mother. *That* gone, there would be nothing, so far as I knew, ever again. For I could not remember her, think of her, speak of her or suffer to hear her spoken of" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 289–90). The forcefully watered-down rite of mourning deemed appropriate for children dwarfs the mourning process and the violence of this suppression echoes in several texts, including the short story "The Visitor" where a young boy, Roger, is similarly shown to wait for his mother's death while being separated from her. In *The Death of the Heart,* Portia's sorrow is shown to be suppressed by Anna:

> Portia arrived as black as a little crow, in heavy Swiss mourning chosen by her aunt – back from the East in time to take charge of things. Anna explained at once that mourning not only did not bring the dead back but did nobody good. She got a cheque from Thomas, took Portia shopping round London and bought her frocks, hats, coats, blue, grey, red, jaunty, and trim. Matchett, unpacking these when they came home, said: 'You have put her in colours, madam?'
> 'She need not look like an orphan: it's bad for her.'
> Matchett only folded her lips. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 41)

[59] The connection between emotions and intelligence has been established elsewhere. Frans de Waal writes that the dualistic view that separates the mind and the body has also created a divide between emotions and intelligence. De Waal explains that it has not been easy to talk about emotions and research emotions, because of the Western tendency to prefer the mind to the body. The mind is noble and strong – all that the vulnerable, mortal, body is not. Such a logic shows contempt towards the body and towards emotions, that are bodily states. De Waal

The mind-body dichotomy is emphasized by Bowen in an extract where both Anna and Portia are walking in Regent's Park at the same time, separately. Bowen points out the different ways in which they experience the walk in the park. Children or half-children like Portia are described as "true but not resounding instruments" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 135). Bowen writes: "Their senses are tuned to the earth, like the senses of animals; they feel, but without conflict or pain" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 135). Portia's liminality as a semi-child is not glorified as some angelic age of innocence or source of premature wisdom, it is, however, linked to intuition and to a heightened sensitivity to the changes and contrasts in her environment, which is accentuated by the way Portia moves. Her presence is visibly physical and interactive, she almost runs "with her joy in her own charge, like a child bowling a hoop" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 136) whereas Anna is said to passively "watch the dogs coursing in the empty heart of the park" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 136).

Anna's pensive physical passivity, as she watches the dogs run, perfectly encapsulates narrow definitions of humans such as: "any living or extinct member of the family Hominidae characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage,"[60] whereas the running dogs, reduced to their physicality, send us back to the following definition of animality: "Any of numerous multicellular eukaryotic organisms of the kingdom Metazoa (or Animalia) that ingest food rather than manufacturing it themselves and are usually able to move about during at least part of their life cycle."[61]

The passivity or unwillingness to acknowledge and deal with physicality (because it has been linked to animality, and thus, to inferiority) is depicted by Bowen through the panic of adult Londoners who are unwillingly affected by physical stimuli from their natural environment:

> Atoms of light quiver between the branches of stretching-up black trees. It is in this unearthly first hour of spring twilight that earth's almost agonized livingness is most felt. This hour is so dreadful to some people that they hurry indoors and turn on the lights – they are pursued by the scent of violets sold on the kerb (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 135).

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claims that this divide between emotions and cognition is untrue: emotions and intelligence are intertwined (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 111–12). To show that, he borrows from António Damásio's research in the area of neurosciences. Damásio studied the connection between intelligence and emotions, notably via a patient called Elliot whose tumor had wounded the frontal lobe tissue in his brain. Through various tests, Damásio showed that the absence of emotions is linked to his inability to make a decision, concluding that emotions play an important role in our intellect. (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 259)

[60] "human." WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. 2003-2008. Princeton University, Clipart.com, Farlex Inc. 19 Jun. 2019 https://www.thefreedictionary.com/human

[61] "animal." American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. 2011. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company 19 Jun. 2019 https://www.thefreedictionary.com/animal

This escape from the springtime vivacity of the urban nature in London that scares people to the secure embrace of the human-built *oikos* and its cold electric lights humorously depicts a certain unwillingness to perceive what Bowen calls "earth's almost agonized livingness" (135). It seems to refer to the sudden promise of budding plants, renewal, and reproduction, but this livingness perhaps also correlates too evidently with the characters' own "beastly" desires. As Derrida puts it: "Sexual desire is the beast in man, the most boisterous and most avid, the most voracious beast" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 86).

That "beast" is what originated Portia. Maud Ellmann writes:

> But why was she called Portia? Is it because Portia is the 'portion' meted out to the descendants of old Quayne, the fallen father? 'Portion' is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'that which is allotted to a person by providence; lot, destiny, fate.' Portia is a portion in the further sense that she is part of a dissected whole, a floating fragment of the past washed up into the present. And Portia is above all portable: she is that which is passed on, from hotel to hotel, from deathbed to deathbed, much as her diary is passed on from reader to reader. (Ellmann 137)

Portia's name incites wordplays, as Ellmann shows, between "Portia," "portability," and "portion" (which is not an etymological origin of "Portia"). The latter is also a reference to Shakespeare's famously quick-witted Portia and the pound of flesh (a portion) in *The Merchant of Venice.* The portable Portia represents a pound of flesh (the famous "pound of flesh" echoes also in the second part of *The Death of the Heart*, entitled "The Flesh"), a punishment for her father's forbidden desire, which had forced him to stay in what Anna calls "dream wood" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 16).

Though "wood" might, at first sight, refer to trees, it is a notion devoid of real trees. It refers to human natures and family trees instead. "Dream wood" represents a life outside the restrictions of English society, referring to feelings and desires abolished from home and from a respectable English family tree.

The contrast between a real wood and a dream wood is made evident by Bowen when she places Eddie and Portia in a wood and in a dream wood at once, by which they become quite immune to the experience of being in a wood, but instead are wrapped up in their own heads and desires, in a dream wood where they feel drowned as though they were in the sea (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 239) then rising "to the top of life like bubbles" (239). The wood itself becomes a mere excuse for privacy. Human nature with its forbidden desires is shown to outweigh the experience of being in a wood. As such, the notion of "dream wood" points at desires and behaviours that are entirely human yet cannot be fully accepted as such.

A dream wood is where Mr Quayne secretly met Portia's mother and engendered Portia.[62] It refers to a certain "wilderness" of human behaviour that is contrasted with what is considered to be a more civilized behaviour (that is, behaviour that corresponds to certain social norms), and thus, "dream wood" already represents human nature and its different (hidden) facets.[63] A dignified behaviour is that which veers away from this "animality," constructing the latter as its opposite.

An animal feeling

The link between desire, emotion, and animality cannot be sustained in opposition to humanity. Even though characters can be seen to animalize strong emotions and desires, the universality of such things among the living undermines the effort to separate the idea of humanity from those notions. The ability to feel is human but is also shown to be more than human.[64]

Sentience as a universal feature echoes in the following extract where Portia and her friend, Lilian, are walking in the city after Portia has learned that Eddie and Anna had both read her diary.

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[62] "He [Mr Quayne, Thomas's father] had got knit up with Irene in a sort of a dream wood, but the last thing he wanted was to stay in that wood for ever. In his waking life he liked to be plain and solid; to be plain and solid was to be married to Mrs Quayne" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 16).

[63] My vision of "dream wood" corresponds to desires for which an allowance is made perhaps when one *only* dreams, when one is hardly awake, hardly conscious, hardly human. The incompatibility of such desires with characters' social environment and its demands on them are shown by Anna's commentary that reduces Portia to a child of "an aberration, the child of a panic, the child of an old chap's pitiful sexuality" (274). Mr Quayne's sexuality as well as Portia's sexuality (after all, she is only a teenager and a woman) are both embarrassingly uncomfortable subjects, to be swept under a rug, or, into a dream wood. Bennett's and Royle's reading of this notion shows that the diminutive effect of "dream wood" hides a much larger issue of trying to cleanse one's identity from its complexity. "Dream wood" is shown as a vessel for multiplicity that haunts the possibility of self-identity and individuality based on the idea of a neatly traceable origin. They write:

> 'Dream wood', we suggest, would designate a space which haunts every romantic or social relation, including every form of auto-affection. 'Dream wood' concerns a preoriginary fictionality, a fundamental dislocation of experience; it marks a dreamlike displacement of the self and an opening onto the phantasmagoric multiplicity of otherness. (…) Dream wood is more precisely atopian, to be traced in a past which was never present and in the very opening of the future. As a dream would, dream wood articulates the logic of still lives and of the death of the heart. In other words it is the pattern of what is not our own, the admitting of the unadmitted, the memory work of blurs and seams, being in amber, being 'dead nuts', disseminated within the presence of the present, within the instant of living, the moment of a heartbeat. It is in these terms that *The Death of the Heart,* like Bowen's other novels, adumbrates another ethics, another thinking of the social and political, an ethics and a thinking neither governed by nor reducible to a logic of presence or identity, of mastery or possession. (Bennett and Royle 76)

[64] Frans de Waal explains that emotions are both biological and essential. He does not think one emotion is more fundamental than other or reserved to humans only. Because emotions are linked to the body and mammals' bodies are fundamentally similar, he does not think it logical to automatically assume that other mammals do not possess the same emotions as humans do. (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 212)

> When they came to the crossing, Lilian gripped Portia's bare arm in a gloved hand: through the kid glove a sedative animal feeling went up to Portia's elbow and made the joint untense. She pulled back to notice a wedding carpet up the steps of All Souls', Langham Place – like a girl who has finished the convulsions of drowning she floated, dead, to the sunny surface again. She bobbed in Lilian's wake between the buses with the gaseous lightness of a little corpse. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 298)

The elements of the city (the crossing; a wedding carpet up the steps of All Souls', Langham Place; buses) are intertwined with what seems to be an image from the literary imagination: the drowned corpse of young Ophelia from *Hamlet*. Here the body not only looms large, but it is shown through a screen of feeling. The scenery has been internalised. Everything that happens, is shown to happen through Portia's emotional landscape that has transformed her perception of her bodily existence which gives us, the readers, a visual translation of what is happening to Portia after Lilian touched her arm. This unthinking touch that is transmitted through someone else's skin – through the kid glove (made from goatskin), unknowingly postpones a crisis: "through the kid glove a sedative animal feeling went up to Portia's elbow and made the joint untense" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 298). The accumulating feeling in Portia dies down, giving her the impression of "the gaseous lightness of a little corpse" (298). The power of Lilian's touch, which is the touch of someone else's skin (a goat's), is described in most interesting terms as "a sedative animal feeling" (298) which seems to speak for something universal and bodily – a sort of comfort to be found, without words, in others, through others.

There are several hints in the novel that refer to animals as sentient beings able to engage with their surroundings and other beings in a meaningful way. Those hints appear in various descriptions of people and their reactions, connecting the notions "animal" and "human." For instance, Thomas's disappointment is linked to the body language of an animal: "His voice trailed off – slumped in his chair, across the fire from Portia, he sat slowly turning his head with an uneasy baited look, like an animal being offered something it does not like" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 30). Here, the comparison to "an animal" is not used to humiliate Thomas by pointing out his inferior status, but rather to relate the two images that resemble each other. It is a sudden recognition of the stranger (who is not so strange after all) within Thomas.

Another, perhaps more striking comparison takes place after Portia comes home and is received by Matchett (*the* housekeeper) whose short-worded welcome gives Portia no choice but to observe Matchett's body language: "Portia, her hat pushed back from her forehead, stood askance under the light; she and Matchett blinked; there followed one of those pauses in which

animals, face to face, appear to communicate" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 20). The parallel drawn here by the narrative voice does not seem belittling; it presents a moment of recognizing and pointing out observable similarities between humans and non-human species.

Bowen's rather careful expression of her sensitivity to the gaze of non-human animals is also interesting. We are only told what *appears* to happen. This is not uncommon in Bowen's texts, often riddled with humble doubt, expressed through words such as *as though*, *as if*, *seem*, *appear.* While Beckett's trilogy humbles his narrators through constant contradictory statements that undercut their theses of human superiority, Bowen plays with the imagery and the tone of the narration.

Despite the evident play with the overlapping imagery of animals and humans in the novel, Bowen seems to be wary of anthropomorphism. The novel already incorporates the fundamental knowledge that animals have the ability to feel emotions, but in a rather careful manner. [65] All non-metaphorical non-humans in the novel are only seen from the outside, briefly. They are not reduced to objects, but are shown as sentient beings, however, the specifics of their inner worlds remain untold. That differentiates Bowen's rather careful approach to non-human animals from more adventurous attempts, such as Virginia Woolf's *Flush: A Biography* (1933) that depicts the life of a pet-dog, interestingly, showing sensitivity to the dog's acute sense of smell and sound.

When talking about the limits of a prose narrative to go beyond the realm of human experience, Timothy Clark considers anthropomorphism a helpful but unstable trope that ascribes "to some non-humans the human equivalent dignity of full consciousness, emotion, and even personhood, but [is] doing so at the risk of obliterating the singularity of very different modes of life and communication" (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 81). This obliteration of singularity is the danger of a prose narrative, as it tries to imagine a non-human experience.

Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* does not attempt to penetrate the mind of a non-human animal, and it does not fall into the trap of what Frans de Waal calls *anthropodenial*: the automatic rejection of humanlike traits in other animals or animal-like traits in us (de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough* 25). Non-human animals are not treated as automata. For instance, in

[65] To this day, it is a subject of debate that only quite recently has begun to seriously challenge human exceptionality through the scientific study of emotions in mammals, notably in the work of Jaak Panksepp that showed how the scientific study of emotions in non-human species can teach us about emotions in humans. Jaak Panksepp, nicknamed "rat tickler," is a pioneer in the domain of affective neuroscience. He began to work on emotions in non-human animals in the sixties when the very idea of studying emotions in non-human animals was frowned upon. Having spent half a century studying in what he calls was "a lonely field" he concludes in his 2013 TED-talk that we cannot penetrate the cognitive mind of animals – their complicated thoughts, but neuroscience can penetrate feelings scientifically. (Panksepp)

an extract that contemplates Thomas's cruelty, the words "a pet animal's will" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 101) appear. Bowen writes: "The most stubbornly or darkly drawn-in man has moments when he likes to impose himself, to emerge and be a bully. The diversion of a raindrop from its course down the pane, the frustration of a pet animal's will in some small way all at once become imperative, if the nature is to fulfil itself" (*The Death of the Heart* 101). While the pet animal is said to have a will, Thomas in this comparison is shown as a human capable of cruelty; it is in his nature ("if the nature us to fulfil itself") which is not reduced to benevolence only.

The reduction of humanity to benevolence and kindness[66] and human emotions to mild and respectable emotions only is satirised especially through the figure of Mrs Quayne, Thomas's mother, whose response to finding out about her husband's affair was met with a show of overflowing benevolence towards the new child and her parents, so that her husband was said to have fallen "*morally* in love with his wife all over again" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 17). Mrs Quayne's saintly behaviour is satirised by Matchett's sly comments that accompany the retelling of Mrs Quayne's incredible sacrifice of giving up her husband so gracefully:

> (…) she kept picking snowdrops, and now and then she'd keep stopping and looking up. She felt the Almighty watching, I daresay. None of that garden was out of sight of the windows – you could always see Mr Quayne, while he was working, just as if he had been a little boy. Then she came back in and she did the snowdrops, in a Chinese bowl she set store by – oh, she did set store by that bowl, till one of the girls broke it. (She came to me with the bits of it in her hand, smiling away she was. "Another little bit of life gone, Matchett," she said. But she never spoke a cross word to the girl – oh no, she liked herself far too well.) (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 78–79)

Mrs Quayne's pure benevolence is undermined by Matchett's comment that Mrs Quayne liked herself too well to be angry with anybody. Her benevolence seems to be fuelled by her desire to live up to the standard that corresponds to a moral high ground on a cosmic scale – the God himself is watching. Mrs Quayne, whose first name the reader never learns, curiously becomes less attractive to her fellow humans. We learn that Thomas preferred his father (despite his mischief) and Matchett seemed to prefer Mrs Quayne's furniture,[67] along with which she was

[66] The word "humanity" comes from French *humanité*, from Latin *humanitas*. It refers to the quality of being humane, to kindness and benevolence (*OED*). Curiously, *Trésor de la langue Française informatisé* also defines humanity as "*bonté, bienveillance de l'homme pour ses semblables*" (*TLFi*), reducing humanity's kindness to kindness towards fellows only, or figuratively towards itself. *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (1330-1500) distinctively excludes cruelty from its definition of humanity: "*Attitude de compréhension, de bienveillance, comportement qui exclut la cruauté, la dureté*" (*DMF*).

[67] A conversation between Portia and Matchett:

'But what made you come here?'

transferred over to Thomas's and Anna's house in London. Matchett says: "No, she'd never lift her voice and she always had a kind word. But I couldn't care for her: she had no nature" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 79).

Matchett's comment that unnatural living runs in the family (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 85) refers to a tendency to replace all inconvenient emotions with niceties and avoidance, reducing one's complex human nature to unnatural living. By showing that the naturalised image of human nature as pure benevolence can also be deemed to be unnatural, the novel excavates the cultural and linguistic processes of identity-production that rely on the notion of something "natural" or "or original" as much as they rely on the creation the "unnatural." The nature or the origin that plays a role in any identification is constantly challenged in the novel; it is shown that the process of thinking about identity cannot rely on binary oppositions, but instead these oppositions are inscribed onto Bowen's khôraesque literary landscape that does not naturalize concepts. Susan Osborn notably underlines the destabilizing irregularities in Bowen's language, form, and content that create the feeling that her narratives can never be accommodated in a final settlement (Osborn 189). She writes: "While reading them and after reading them we exist in a purgatorial kind of understanding, aware of the presence of significance and of a certain kind of formal integrity but not always able to decipher a specific code that would allow us to close our interpretations" (Osborn 189).

Bowen's literary landscape, the passages one reads, become a passage also in the following sense: a marginal place (the place of fiction, of unreality), a place of transfer that calls for a constant and continuous grafting and reconfiguration of identities. As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle write,

> *The Death of the Heart* suggests that it is not (and never was) tenable to conceive the human simply in opposition to the animal: human identity is necessarily fractured by forms of an ahuman otherness, inhabited by lacunary forces and effects. Bowen's work suggests that there is nothing essentially human about meaning; there is no meaning which is not traced, and divided from itself in advance, by a logic of non-humanizable otherness. What might conventionally be described as the animal metaphors in *The Death of the Heart* have a doubling force which puts the human necessarily beside itself, displaced and animated differently by conjunction with the putatively animal and by the deflationary economy of laughter. (Bennett and Royle 66)

'It seemed to me proper. I hadn't the heart, either, to let that furniture go: I wouldn't have known myself. It was that that kept me at Mrs Quayne's. I was sorry to leave those marbles I'd got so nice, but those had to stop and I put them out of my mind.' (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 85)

Bowen's satirical gaze upon human benevolence as human nature does not allow her readers to buy into deeply polarized representations of humanity and animality. Instead, a concatenation between species is evoked by the cinematographic style of the narrative, inviting perception. One way the novel invites the reader's perception is by making us read non-linguistic passages ("passage," from Latin *passus*, meaning "step") – the significant steps of various characters that show "there is nothing essentially human about meaning" (Bennett and Royle 66).

Steps

The characters' steps in *The Death of the Heart* are more than just indications of movement. They are treated as a non-material trace of a character, to be translated and archived by a witness. This translation of invisible passages – steps, shows one's ability to read, as all animals do, the movements of bodies around us – to read even the invisible body, with one's senses and without language in the anthropocentric sense, that is, human language, and to interpret the intentions behind movement. Through such readings of bodies' movements in space, *The Death of the Heart* activates the readers' senses.

Indeed, as Bowen wrote in her "Notes on Writing a Novel" (1945): "The ideal way of presenting character is to invite perception" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 37). Bowen's way of inviting the reader's perception consists in rendering her characters palpably physical: "They must be not only see-able (visualizable); they must be to be felt. Power to give physical reality is probably the matter of the extent and nature of the novelist's physical sensibility, or susceptibility" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 38). Bowen's characters' self-expression in *The Death of the Heart* is not only limited to their linguistic abilities. Instead, their personality, reactions, emotions, and intentions are also made to speak through the (voluntary or involuntary) movements of their bodies. While Samuel Beckett, in his later works (such as *The Unnamable* or *How It Is*), summons the endless and torturous speech that takes the upper hand over one's diminishing and ever more immobile body (not to mention his play *Not I* where only a mouth amidst absolute darkness remains), making one desperately long for the safe materiality of the body over the voice; the movements of bodies in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* loom over speech, and thereby undermine our focus on verbal language from an entirely different angle. In this novel, Bowen invites the reader's perception by making us follow the voluntary or involuntary movements of characters' bodies through the multiple steps taken, heard, and interpreted in the novel.

For instance, we are shown how Portia reads Thomas's non-verbal protest against Anna from Thomas's steps: "After Portia had shut her door, she heard the reluctant step of Thomas turn, across the landing, into his dressing-room: he had got to put on a white tie" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 62). Thomas's reluctance has not been voiced, but instead his very pattern of walking, to which Portia must be accustomed by now, has changed, and Portia can read the irregularity in the non-linguistic passage that his steps write down across the landing.

Another notable reading of steps is done by Mrs Heccomb (a character who used to be Anna's nanny) who constantly observes the steps of her "step-children" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 140), Daphne and Dickie. Dickie who is portrayed as a virile man and said to be "like clockwork" (157) is also constantly heard acting out his role around the house, so often that when Portia arrives, Mrs Heccomb decides to dim down his constant displays of virile self-importance:

> Mrs Heccomb must have stayed up to keep Dickie quiet. His *no-nonsense step* had grown loud on the esplanade. Through the floor, Mrs Heccomb was to be heard hush-hushing as Dickie crashed open the glass door. Then he rolled an armchair round and kicked the fire: it sounded like a giant loose in the lounge. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 156)

The other *step*-child, Daphne, a librarian not fond of reading, is described by her forcefully quiet work mode in "the tomb-like hush of Smoot's library," "dealing out hated books" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 151). The transformation of the quiet Daphne into an extraverted young woman is shown through her loud "homecoming step" in response to which "Mrs Heccomb had learned to draw a shutter over her nerves" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 151). The hardly tolerable noise of steps in the wacky Waikiki (that despite being a beach house sounds like a body with organs, digesting and rumbling – the pipes roaring whenever someone takes a shower) is contrasted with more discreet steps at Windsor Terrace that correlate with a more discreet demeanour of its inhabitants. Portia also notices the difference between how Dickie and Thomas inhabit houses:

> The plunging manner in which he [Dickie] bathed and dressed had been, before this, heard all over the house: he had left behind in the bathroom the clean, rather babyish smell of shaving soap. At Windsor Terrace, with its many floors and extended plumbing, the intimate life of Thomas was not noticeable. But here Dickie made himself felt as a powerful organism. With a look past Portia that said that nothing should alter his habits, he now rose, withdrew from the breakfast table, and locked himself in somewhere behind the chenille curtain. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 156–57)

In this extract, no verbal messages have been exchanged between Portia and Dickie. Dickie's manly-man's attitude is communicated through his body language. He is shown to enact a certain virile power through his constant comings and goings. The performative nature of his

passages is rendered more evident here by his disappearance behind the chenille (from French *chenille*, meaning "caterpillar" – a symbol of change) curtain. Yet Dickie's assertion and expansion of power over the house through his non-apologetic noise pollution are ridiculed by the "rather babyish smell of shaving soap" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 156) he leaves behind.

The intolerably noisy steps of Mrs Heccomb's stepchildren are contrasted with the discreet steps of a matriarchal figure at Windsor Terrace, Matchett (a respected housekeeper, inherited along with Thomas's mother's furniture). Bowen writes: "On the middle floors of the house, where she worked and the Quaynes lived, her step on the parquet or on the staircase was at the same time ominous and discreet" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 21). Matchett's limited authority in the house could be read from that ominous and discreet step, heard by Portia, but also from the way she inhabits space at Windsor Terrace. Matchett is said to live next to the box room, across from the shared space other servants occupied, and she is also the main occupant of "a slit of a sitting-room" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 21). She is shown to be separated from other servants and her passages through common areas are shown to affect all servants. Bowen writes: "Boiling her own kettles on her gas ring, she joined the kitchen party only for dinner: if the basement door happened to be left open, you could hear the fun break out when she had withdrawn again" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 21). The silence that welcomes her presence and the excitement that breaks out after her departure depict Matchett's influence on others through an observation of non-linguistic proof. Through her physical presence, Matchett demands respect without using any words.

Such absences of long and elaborate dialogues in the novel make room for a different mode of reading – the reading of the unsaid or the inexpressible that nevertheless is transmitted to the reader by making them sensitive to *how* situations and interactions are experienced by characters and how they affect them. This mode of reading, the reading of movement and bodies shared by all human and nonhuman animals through their respective senses, allows us to enter the novel's environment more fully (with our respectively dull human senses now heightened). Therein lies the power of Bowen's pen that so cunningly draws us in. As Timothy Clark writes: "The stronger our sense of immersion in a narrative, of human empathy with the action and characters, then the more likely it is to enhance our understanding of how others think" (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 79).

Conclusion

By bringing her characters as well as her readers closer to their bodily existence on the earth, the novel challenges dualisms (animals-humans, the human-the animal, men and beasts etc.) that are used to build up a simplified idea of human identity as the opposite of "the animal." Bowen's novel shows how labels such as "animals" and "humans" overflow and cross out the boundaries that are supposed to separate those notions, thereby revealing the complex and contradictory elements that make up our own complex nature as a species always already concatenated to what we have named "animals" and "animality."

As I have shown, Bowen's characters use animalization as a tool do dehumanize, humiliate, and dominate over some human characters. This is only possible because notions such as animals, the animal or animality can easily be translated as metaphors for inferiority, especially in terms of our intellect that is opposed to bodily functions such as emotions. Anna's experience of reading Portia's diary shows an existing and necessary passage between memory and emotions, mind and body, while Bowen's style reveals a concatenation between species by evoking a different mode of reading. The novel invites the reader's perception by making us read non-linguistic passages – the steps and the movements of bodies. By following the voluntary or involuntary movements of characters' bodies through the multiple steps taken, heard, and interpreted in the novel, the reader too is made conscious of her own bodily existence in the world, and the complex patterns of non-verbal communication humans constantly participate in. This kind of tracing of patterns is also used in Portia's diary that records the traces of Londoners' lives that the readers of the 21st century still struggle to erase – carbon footprints.

Chapter 2: Concatenation: Reading Responsibility for Others

2.4 Passages: Reading before/for Responsibility in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*

> All of her [Elizabeth Bowen's] novels and short stories have an oddly *transformed air* – something there for recognition also hides itself and is only partially suggested, and we often have the sense when reading her work of seeing or hearing something that is not manifestly there, something oscillating between the formed and the perceived that cannot always be accounted for by reason or an appeal to the logical coherence of a theory. (Osborn 187; italics mine)

As I read Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938) in 2019, after a recent fire at a French chemical plant in the city of Rouen, the "oddly transformed air" (Osborn 187) of the novel aligns with the increasing oddities and worries about the physical air in my lungs and in the streets. What has happened to the imperceptible air which I fail to read here and now as I breathe it, I cannot tell unless the air becomes strange, unless the transformed air (appearance) of air has been evoked. For a plain non-scientific reader, such as I am, air seems to signify only when it is odd; when the uncanniness, a sudden strangeness of air, has been perceptibly underlined.

The reading of what escapes our bodily human sensory apparatus is, as Timothy Clark writes, a matter of scale and "scalar literacy" (*The Value of Ecocriticism* 84). Clark explores the Anthropocene as a kind of a passage, an emergent threshold that "names a necessarily vague but insidious border at which what used to be clear human goods begin to flip over into sources of degradation and environmental harm" (*Ecocriticism on the Edge* 46). By viewing the Anthropocene[68] through the concept of *threshold*, which in other words is a passage, Clark shows the potential of this concept to uproot and reconsider the modes of thinking and practices that, though they might have been adequate once, have become destructive.

This reading of *The Death of the Heart* concentrates particularly on the difficulties of reading one of the most complicated phenomena of the Anthropocene – anthropogenic climate change, through the reading of *air* in its manifold forms. The notion of *passage* (while naming the fragments under study), also comes to describe the two powerful forces of the literary

[68] Though the coiners of the term dated the Anthropocene from the industrial revolution and others have considered that extensive agriculture and forest-clearing thousands of years ago marked its beginning, Clark suggests that the term applies mostly to "the 'Great Acceleration' since 1945 in which human impacts on the entire biosphere have achieved an unprecedented and arguably dangerous intensity" (Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge* 1).

writing of a transnational Modernist author, Elizabeth Bowen: the ability to decipherer identity (from Latin *identitas, idem* meaning "same,"[69] *OED*) as a passage rather than something immutable; and through that first deconstruction of the notion of identity, illuminate other elusive phenomena, such as London's polluted air. The latter phenomenon is directly related to climate change, which, I argue, is less of a change and more of a passage, in the sense that it does not give itself willingly to our human senses, and is thus hard to read. It is like reading air.

Bowen was a reader and writer of airs, for, as Walter Sullivan writes, Bowen was "a novelist of manners" (144). In *The Death of the Heart*, she combines the reading of social airs: the Londoners', Thomas and Anna Quayne, patterns of social behaviour, and the reading of London's air that, the readers will learn, is ill.

As Maud Ellmann writes: "*The Death of the Heart* is the story of the Quaynes' ethical awakening: their realisation of responsibility to Portia, to the past, and to the dead" (*Elizabeth Bowen* 130). I would only add to this statement that the novel is also concerned with the death to come; it bears witness to the elusive traces of destructive human activity for which the readers of today must take responsibility. The novel creates a passage, a threshold between now and then, between reality and fiction, in the space of literature where one is made sensitive to the traces that are otherwise unreadable. It makes visible the traces of what is now called climate change through a character's diary that is written from a specifically marginal position, from the sensitive territory between adulthood and childhood, and from the viewpoint of a half-stranger.

I will show how the smog that the character of Portia perceives in London's air is paired with the errors she perceives in Anna's and Thomas's lifestyle and reasoning, egging the readers on towards what Timothy Clark calls "scalar literacy" (*The Value of Ecocriticism* 84), the reading of what does not fully present itself in the present, the reading of *air*.

Air, materialized in stone or wood

Born from a love aff*air* that broke up the marriage of Thomas Quayne's parents, Portia Quayne first emerges as an embarrassing passage,[70] a story, from the history of the Quayne

[69] The word "identity" comes from *identitas*, meaning "quality of being the same (4th cent.), condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else (8th cent. in a British source), fact of being the same (from 12th cent. in British sources), continual sameness, lack of variety, monotony (from 12th cent. in British sources; 14th cent. in a continental source)" (*OED*). Thus, it evokes an impression of fixity.

[70] This story is what lays the groundwork for Portia's marginalisation. Anna says Portia was born into "one of those muddles without a scrap of dignity" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 13). Yet her archivization of Portia's

family, and then as a person only passing through, for her cohabitation with Thomas and his wife Anna in their London home is supposed to be temporary. The moment the half-foreign Portia crosses the threshold of the Quayne's household, evoking a memory of the family history she is part of but not a witness to, her presence becomes a trigger. On the one hand, her being there illuminates the identity of the Quayne's household and its inhabitants, by making the family history and patterns of behaviour resurface. On the other hand, her strangeness also challenges the fixity of their identities, revealing a certain instability at the very core of the notion of identity. Some sort of metamorphosis, a passage within that one cannot escape, is inherent to being, as Martin de la Soudière suggests, echoing Juraj Herz's film *Passage*. The concept of passage (more so than the notion of change that concentrates on a result), he suggests, evokes the idea of renewal, mutation, and metamorphosis (de la Soudière 9). Such instability, or "the amorphousness of the drifting and flopping jellyfish" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 295), as Bowen describes it, is what characterizes identity. Identity is what is constructed but at the same time that which survives those constructions, those fixations (or "little deaths" as de la Soudière writes), which it cannot sustain, for they become an impasse (10), a still life for a life that must go on, evolve.

Bowen underlines her characters' attempts at mastery through their denial of identity as a passage. Their efforts to petrify their identities as well as those of others into familiar patterns, through the processes of normalisation and marginalisation, are shown to fail, as identity seems to always already extend itself towards the uninvited, the unforeseeable, the seemingly other (that by this very same extension becomes more familiar). Portia is the strange yet undeniable extension no one saw coming.

Being a particle of the extended family, Portia integrates the Quaynes' household as a half-stranger – a half-sister that was accidentally planted within the "proper" sociocultural network and order of the Quayne family. Her unconventional conception did not follow the traditional concatenation of social rites (engagement, marriage, having children) through which one's social identity is consolidated, yet Portia's identity cannot be reduced to absolute otherness in terms of her nationality, social class or family-ties, because she is English and a Quayne. Through her stay (just a passage) in Windsor Terrace, the novel explores and undermines the opposition between two ways of living: the marginalized life Portia's parents

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conception is neither objective nor innocent. As Derrida shows, the process of archivization cannot be separated from the idea of mastery. He writes that "the archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" 17). The word "archive," from Greek *arkhē,* Derrida reminds us, "names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*" (Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" 9).

lived roaming Continental Europe that is depicted through flashbacks in Portia's mind, and thus, in a way, hangs in the air; and the "proper" English way of life that Anna and Thomas embody that has been materialized in patterns one is made to follow in Windsor Terrace.

The social constructions within Windsor Terrace are referred to, by Eddie, as "a perfect web" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 103). Containing furniture as well as a housekeeper (Matchett) from Thomas's childhood home, Windsor Terrace refers to a certain materialisation and sacralisation of manners (airs) of living: to *oikonomia*, or the laws of a house. The novel is packed with images of patterns (puzzles, *moirés*, texts) which recall the haunting socio-cultural structure of Windsor Terrace, or what Alfred McDowell calls "the master-pattern of the world" (7–8) around Portia.

Through Mr Quayne (Thomas' and Portia's father), Windsor Terrace is portrayed as the "normal" environment. "Normal" is the very word used to describe Windsor Terrace by old Mr Quayne who felt his daughter, Portia, "had grown up exiled not only from her own country but from normal, cheerful family life" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 11). Thus, the identity of Windsor Terrace and the lifestyle it represents is presented as a norm to which Portia's business is to adapt herself, that is, erase her difference. Her failure to make herself disappear, to unwrite the conditions of her birth and its implications to which she could not bear witness, destines her to fail this integration into a household that does not seek to extend its hospitality to otherness.

This "normal" environment is an exclusive world of wealthy adults that instead of offering a "cheerful family life" that Mr Quayne dreamt of, protect their privacy and sense of superiority over people like Portia. Portia's strangeness within this socio-cultural framework is communicated through various animal comparisons: "a little crow," "a kitten that expects to be drowned," "an excellent lamb," "a wild creature just old enough to dread humans," "a bird astray in a room," "a demented kitten," "an animal," and "a little monster" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 41, 39, 309, 319, 221, 3, 8). Etymologically, "Portia" is shadowed by the figure of a pig, from Latin *porcus* ("pig"), yet she is animalized because she does not respond to the social norms at Windsor Terrace, that reduce her parents' way of life and her origins to piggishness, to a lack of order. According to Anna, Portia, "the child of an aberration, the child of a panic, the child of an old chap's pitiful sexuality" had been "conceived among lost hairpins and snapshots of doggies in a Notting Hill Gate flatlet" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 274). Anna's mention of Notting Hill Gate, historically a place where a tollgate used to be, locates Portia's conception at a *lieu de passage*, a crossing point or a threshold. The very idea of this

flatlet (not even a flat) hovers outside the dignified living, rooted in houses like Windsor Terrace, that do not give passage to strangers.

The inhospitality, or even hostility, of Windsor Terrace is portrayed by the Quaynes' demand for privacy, the house being "surrounded by an electric fence – friends who did not first telephone did not come" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 92). Unpredictable visitors such as Major Brutt, we are told, "had been eliminated; they simply did not occur" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 92).

The danger of this house becoming something of a *lieu de passage* for visitors, against which various measures have been put in place, veils a more profound worry about the effects of hospitality on one's identity. As Derrida explains:

> It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of "make yourself at home" but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am. There is almost an axiom of self-limitation or self-contradiction in the law of hospitality. As a reaffirmation of mastery and being oneself in one's own home, from the outset hospitality limits itself at its very beginning, it remains forever on the threshold of itself (…), it governs the threshold – and hence it forbids in some way even what it seems to allow to cross the threshold to pass across it. It becomes the threshold. (Derrida, "Hospitality" 14)

Derrida makes the link between "the being-at-home of my home" and "the being-itself of what I am" (the rules of the house and one's identity) evident through the process of welcoming which is, at the same time, shown to be the process of negation of the stranger's identity. Hospitality beyond hospitality (without the self-contradiction Derrida speaks of) would imply coming to terms with the possibility of mutation or metamorphosis that lurks in the notion of passage. As Derek Attridge summarizes it, hospitality towards the other begins with " a willingness not just to accept the other into one's own domain, but to change that domain, perhaps radically, in order to make the other welcome" (Attridge 49–50).

Portia's presence in Windsor Terrace itself becomes not only a passage in a spatio-temporal sense (for she is not there to stay), but also it evokes the forces of metamorphosis of that passage, and their effect on the world's perception of Anna's and Thomas's identity as well as her own:

> They had passed on the same stairs, grasped the same door handles, listened to the strokes of the same clocks. Behind the doors at Windsor Terrace, they had heard each other's voices, like the continuous murmur inside the whorls of a shell. She had breathed smoke from their lungs in every room she went into, and seen their names on letters each time she went through the hall. When she went out, she was asked how her brother and sister were. To the outside world, she smelled of Thomas and Anna. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 164)

These passages from room to room, have tied them together through the forced co-existence (Thomas and Anna "having been by blood obliged to open their door," 164) where continuous intrusions into each other's privacy, touching each other without touching, enmeshing ears, lungs, and skin of each body through the same air, have ruined the impermeability of a fixed identity. This co-existence has begun signifying something else. That is, to the outside world, they have become entangled.

The physical site of this contamination of identity – namely, Portia's room, is disturbing to Anna who has decorated it. Against Anna's best efforts to make it pretty (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 4), Portia's room has been turned into a sort of animal habitat which includes arrangements of tiny wooden bears, that only Matchett, a housekeeper and archiver of the Quayne family and its furniture, recognizes as something other than a mess. With its tea sipping little wooden bears, the room takes on a symbolical value, becoming a mockery of Anna's dignified patterns of living (as humans are replaced by bears) as well as an antidote to the order of Windsor Terrace. The command of the normalizing *oikos* is undercut visually by Portia's metaphorical piggishness, her untidiness that cannot be eradicated from the house.

Through this clashing pattern that materializes Portia's presence and identity in the house even in her absence, the novel underlines the superimposed norms of Windsor Terrace, materialized in stone or wood,[71] which have the power to control by "comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and exclusion" (Foucault 185), like institutions such as prisons and schools described by Foucault. Through "the master-pattern of the world" (McDowell 7–8) around Portia at Windsor Terrace, in comparison to which the otherness of Portia's way of life is formed, Bowen shows that home is not less innocent and can also be used as a means of marginalization. However, marginality itself cannot be reduced to vulnerability and passivity only.

Secret passages: writing from the margins

The notion of marginality is often used to refer to inferiority and impuissance, "marginal" signifies: "subsidiary, on the edge of a society or social unit" (*OED*), "small and unimportant or insignificant" (*Chambers*). As such, marginality demands also the talk of the

[71] As Derrida says and Bowen shows, habitats construct and instruct their inhabitants before those inhabitants become the masters and possessors of their house (Derrida, "Point de Folie - Maintenant l'architecture" 65). According to Derrida, even modern architecture retains nostalgia for "an always-hierarchising nostalgia: architecture will materialise the hierarchy in stone or wood (*hyle*); it is a hyletics of the sacred (*hieros*) and the principle (*archè*), an archi-hieratics" (Derrida, "Point de Folie - Maintenant l'architecture" 69).

other, someone that is not on the edge, but central and significant. Yet marginality could also be imagined as a border that is a passage between the two, and thus, not only what separates and upholds oppositions, but also an in-betweenness from where rigid oppositions and their rule can begin to be questioned. Portia, as the "port" in her name playfully suggests ("port" from Latin "*portus*," meaning "harbour, haven, mouth of a river" or "recess of the mountains" (*OED*); "a mountain pass and a gate, a door, basically, therefore, a passage" (Partridge), finds herself at the margin of two lifestyles (that of her parents and that of Anna and Thomas), but also between childhood and adulthood.

In an essay entitled "On Not Rising to the Occasion" (1956), Bowen writes that "the child dithers somewhere round the margin" and often must enter a stage with "a thousand-and-one rules" without clear instructions (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 67). Portia is shown in a similar situation where she needs to pass, not only from one room to the next, but also in and out of the world of adults:

> Getting up from the stool carefully, Portia returned her cup and plate to the tray. Then, holding herself so erect that she quivered, taking long soft steps on the balls of her feet, and at the same time with an orphaned unostentation, she started making towards the door. She moved crabwise, as though the others were royalty, never quite turning her back on them – and they, waiting for her to be quite gone, watched. She wore a dark wool dress, in Anna's excellent taste, buttoned from throat to hem and belted with heavy leather. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 27)

Dressed by Anna, Portia is left to navigate (moving *at a passage*, crabwise, textwise[72]) the complex socio-cultural pattern of Windsor Terrace under the piercing gaze of adults, "the accustomed actors" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 67). The marginal Portia, a half-stranger and a half-child, is burdened by the expectation to respond to adults such as Anna in a certain way: to behave well, that is, "never to be conspicuous" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 67). Yet her efforts to appear less conspicuous – "taking long soft steps on the balls of her feet" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 27), and treating adults as if they were royalty make her appear even more noticeable and out of place.

Metaphorically, her place as a half-stranger is the very condition of being always already *almost* out of place, for she constitutes the very margin that both ties together and separates her parents' exile and Anna's and Thomas's life in London. A marginal existence, the being inside and outside at once, as Guillaume le Blanc shows, is a life always threatened by social invisibility, voicelessness, and the inability to take action in a different manner, that

[72] That image also echoes in one of her essays, "Modern Girlhood." Bowen writes: "The young English girl fidgets and gangles her way through society, in which she is conscious of having no place. She comes in round doors sideways, bashfully, like a crab" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 340).

is, without miming the powerful in order to escape the domination (le Blanc, *Dedans, Dehors: La Condition d'étranger* 101–02, 107, 127). Portia's attempt here to be a "good stranger," to fit in and fade out of the room, is haunted by the contradictory force of her writing that questions the order she here feigns to incorporate.

Her soft steps are read by St Quentin and Anna whose perception is charged with the knowledge of her far less humble passages – her diary where all adults have been observed, archived, and judged.[73] "With an orphaned unostentation" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 27), a deserted lack of pretention, perhaps not quite the renewed pretention yet, Portia's steps do not simply dither somewhere around the margin. Anna who has secretly read this diary already suspects that Portia, an "excellent lamb" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 304), walking "on the balls of her feet" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 27), might instead be a wolf in sheep's clothing (in a "dark wool dress," 27), approaching, *à pas de loup*, in order to blow Anna's house in.[74]

Portia's dangerousness consists in her audacity to observe and record her observations from her marginal position, thereby transgressing the threshold of a certain humility expected of children: obedience and conformity to the order set by adults. A child, like an animal, is not supposed to "talk back," that is, question this order – which becomes an apple of discord when the child becomes a teenager. Finding the courage to question the order set by adults is the very rite of passage of teenage years which Bowen observes in *The Death of the Heart* through Portia who refuses to be written off as a hidden and shameful passage in her family's history.

Her diary, written to oneself, to please oneself, is a form of writing that releases Portia from the obligation to please Anna and other adults and allows her to observe without the constraint of having to conform to an already dictated vision.[75] Her secret passages are outrageous, because by the act of writing, she is reversing the dialectics of the dominant (the seer) and the dominated (the one being seen) which, as Derrida puts it, has, for a long time, been the relation between humans and animals (Derrida, "The Animal" 382–83) as well as

[73] Maud Ellmann comments on the apparent naivety of Portia's writing: "Every sentence could be read as an indictment, although the diarist presents herself as an impersonal reporter of the facts. Yet there is style, even guile, lurking in this faux-naivety: 'they wished I was not there,' for instance, is an imputation masquerading as a neutral observation" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 129).

[74] Bowen's later novel, *The Little Girls* more evidently recalls the fable of *The Three Little Pigs*: "You huffed and you puffed and you blew my house down" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 270).

[75] As St Quentin points out to Anna, a diary is "bound to be enormously written up," written to oneself and under solitary circumstances: "upstairs, late, overwrought, alone …" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 7). He observes: "The obligation to write it is all in one's own eye" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 7).

between powerful humans and animalized humans.[76] Suddenly, Portia, the exiled bastard who has for years been wrapped up in others' stories about her, secretly and indirectly returns the gaze. Thereby, she destabilizes those who have reserved for themselves the right to observe and judge others (such as the animalized Major Brutt and Irene). To make matters worse, she somewhat innocently allows Eddie, her crush, to read those passages, thereby opening those secret archives to the public eye. Portia's diary makes the group of powerful Londoners aware of the violence of their gaze, by turning them into the objects being seen, analysed, and denuded.

Her observations come from the life that has known dislocations only, for her home has been a kind of a mosaic of different countries and houses, which puts her on the margin of several territories. This condition is similar to Bowen's own experience as a writer: "I have thriven, accordingly, on the changes and chances, the dislocations and (as I have said) the contrasts which have made up so much of my life. That might be why 'my' world (my world as a writer) is something of a mosaic" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283).

Portia's position as a half-outsider and a teenager is not only what allows her marginalization, but also gives her a liminal viewpoint which becomes a fertile soil for reflection. As de la Soudière suggests, we need a place to think alterity, and liminal places, thresholds, encourage such thinking (16). While *passage*, from Latin *passus* (meaning "step"), evokes movement, a threshold names and gives place to that movement, by, in its name, calling for the passage to come: threshold descends from Old English *þerscold*, Old Norse *þreskjǫldr*, in which "thresh-" means "to tread, trample" (*OED*). The very condition of thinking seems to rely on giving place (your body, or in the act of writing, the body of a page or a book) to what in one form or another started elsewhere (a word learned – always already from others, a passage read, etc.) and is only passing through. This giving place to passages to come is what Derrida evokes in the experience of alterity in thinking. He writes: "For me, the first way to turn speech over, in a situation that is first of all mine, consists of recognizing by giving passage to a woman's voice or to women's voices that are *already there* in a certain way at the origin of speech or of my speech" (Derrida, "Passages - from Traumatism to Promise" 394). In *The Death of the Heart*, Portia is similarly shown to host what she imagines is her mother's voice

[76] Derrida investigates this parallel more fully in his lecture series *The Beast and the Sovereign* where he writes: "The worst, the cruellest, the most human violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular, who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows (…)" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 108).

or perspective from a threshold of a classroom filled with girls, which enables her to think the difference between the two worlds she has inhabited:

> Sins cut boldly up through every class in society, but mere misdemeanours show a certain level in life. So now, not only diligence, or caution, kept the girls' smooth heads bent, and made them not glance again at Irene's child. Irene herself – knowing that nine out of ten things you do direct from the heart are the wrong thing, and that she was not capable of doing anything better – would not have dared to cross the threshold of this room. For a moment, Portia felt herself stand with her mother in the doorway, looking at all this in here with a wild askance shrinking eye. The gilt-scrolled paper, the dome, the bishop's chair, the girls' smooth heads must have been fixed here always, where they safely belonged – while she and Irene, shady, had been skidding about in an out-of-season nowhere of railway stations and rocks, filing off wet third-class decks of lake steamers, choking over the bones of *loups de mer*, giggling into eiderdowns that smelled of the person-before-last. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 56)

Portia is entering a space where one's value is judged by one's air, for misdemeanours, we are told, reveal one's level in life, that is, their place in society. In that classroom, one's air must be meticulously controlled for this is a world where "nine out of ten things you do direct from the heart are the wrong thing" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 56). While being "Irene's child" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 56), Portia perceives that she herself is not completely like Irene, for she will enter the room Irene would not have dared to enter. Her ability to perceive this room with "a wild askance shrinking eye" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 56) stems from her marginal position from which she can recognize differences by giving passage to a different viewpoint, by feeling "herself stand with her mother in the doorway" Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 115).

The characters who are in transit, literally moving or who are dislocated, are typical in Bowen's work and an element the writer herself has commented upon: "An arrival, even into another room, is an event to be registered in some way. When they extend their environment, strike outward, invade the unknown, travel, what goes on in them is magnified and enhanced: impacts are sharper, there is more objectivity. But then, is this not so with all persons, living or fictional?" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 286). Having lived outside the bounds of English life, Portia has the advantage of noticing what others might not perceive. Her liminality, as she extends her environment, gives her the power to decipher and deconstruct the normalized way of life at Windsor Terrace in opposition to which her life with her parents is bestialized.

Although she was sent to Windsor Terrace because her father believed that ordinary life went on for Thomas and Anna, Portia makes a contrary statement saying: "there is no ordinary life" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 325). By claiming that there is no ordinary life, no normal way of living, Portia threatens the authority of norms and the power of

normalization, for if there is no ordinary life, all life, including that going on in Windsor Terrace, might be extraordinary, that is, not necessarily "remarkable or excellent," but *extraōrdinārius*, meaning: "outside (the usual) order" (*OED*). When life is always already out of ordinary, other, the very notion of otherness becomes irrelevant, since there is nothing certain to measure it against. In the absence of ordinary life, Anna's and Thomas's life becomes a fiction of normality, a mere desire of fixity of home and *oikonomia*. As de la Soudière gives passage to Michel de Certeau's voice which gives passage to Michel Foucault's voice: the very fixation of identity in a rigid order is the figure of death. As De Certeau writes: "L'identité fige le geste de penser. Elle rend hommage à un ordre. *Penser*, au contraire*, c'est passer*; c'est interroger cet ordre, s'étonner qu'il soit là..." (de la Soudière 11).

By doubting the norm set by Anna's and Thomas's lifestyle through Portia's liminal perspective, the novel opens a possibility for a profound reflection about larger implications of the desire for a fixed identity, such as its implications for anthropogenic climate change that is fuelled both by our discomfort with the idea of change (especially in the perception of our own identity) as well as by an inability to read climate change, which, I argue, would require recognizing the traces of destructive living.

Traces in the air

The Death of the Heart was published in 1938, briefly before the Second World War broke loose and triggered the significant acceleration in the production of energy, crops, and meat that jumpstarted a rapid increase of CO2 levels in the atmosphere. The novel cannot know the extent of its consequences but seems to already comment on the destructive forces of progress. The pre-war London where the novel is set was already known for its polluted air[77] that, to the 21st-century reader, has become a reference to climate change which already haunts the air/era of the novel.

[77] The traces of smoke and fog (known under the portmanteau "smog") already present themselves in Victorian and Edwardian literature. As Jesse Oak Taylor explains, at the end of the nineteenth century, London was the largest city that had ever existed as well as "a novel ecosystem, a manufactured environment in which every scrap of ground and breath of air bore traces of human action." As such, Victorian London became "ground zero for both 'the end of nature' heralded by global climate change and the aesthetic encounter with that passing" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 1–2). He also points out that London's pollution was different from that of industrialized cities such as Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham, for London's smog was the product of population growth, emanating from domestic hearths and kitchen fires. This goal-burning, he explains, was a sign of consumption, linked to "the ever-rising appetites of a rapidly growing social organism and inextricable from the bourgeois standard of living, to which those flooding the metropolis to seek their fortunes aspired" (Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture* 2–3).

In “A Way of Life,” an essay published in December 1947, in the light of the postwar economic crisis and fuel crisis, Bowen underlines the unsustainability of an outdated model of living. She writes: “No, we did not re-architect our houses while we could, although their coming impossibility foreshadowed itself as early as World War I. (Did we take some oblique pride in their very unmodernity?)” (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 390). She explains: “It seems symbolic that in our houses, even, we are hampered, and being drained of our needed energies, by an outmoded plan: the average middle and upper-class British home was built for, and remains the expression of, an order, a *material* way of living, now gone for good. Segregation of children; work by servants; importation of ton upon ton of coal” (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 390).

In *The Death of the Heart*, coal seems to be burnt at full speed. The readers are shown that Windsor Terrace is partially heated by “the electric fire” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 28, 29,30), Thomas’s books are “electric cleaned” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 166), and their privacy is sustained by “an electric fence” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 92) – a phone. We are told that at Portia’s school “at the end of the afternoon, in winter, a blue-black glazed blind was run across from a roller to cover the skylight, when the electric lights had been turned on” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 53). Portia, who is said to disturb other students by looking at the domed skylight (that “told the state of the weather, went leaden with fog, crepitated when it was raining, or dropped a great square glare on to the table when the sun shone,” 53) is brought down to earth, “at face-and-table level,” by the teacher’s sarcastic remark: “Are we here to look at the sky?” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 53). Thinking is called for, however, it does not target London’s air. The coal retrieved from the depths of the earth is in the air, invading lungs and writing stains on windows, yet it is so evasive and “normal” that only the pen of a half-stranger – Portia’s pen, seems to record its oddity.

Portia writes: “When I woke my window was like a brown stone, and I could hardly see the rest of the room. The whole house was just like that, it was not like night but like air being ill” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 122). Her first sight of smog is met with a sense of danger and of somewhat childish curiosity, as Matchett takes her to school through the thick fog which, to Portia, feels: “just like an adventure” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 122), followed by a day at Miss Paullie’s that “felt more like a holiday” with “lights on all day” (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 122). The contemporary reader understands all too well the irony of Portia’s excitement about this excessive use of electric light that fuels the poisonous smog outside that Portia is cautioned not to swallow by speaking (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 122–23). The element of naivety that accompanies Portia’s first experience of this

strange phenomenon in hindsight manifestly depicts the lack of seriousness towards the matter, resulting in The Great Smog of London in 1952 that extinguished thousands of people and many more uncounted lives.

The fog is quickly forgotten by others and the perception of the fog is facetiously wrapped up in silly mysticism and self-importance by Anna. Portia writes: "She said that whenever there was a fog she always felt it was something that she had done, but she did not seem to mean this seriously" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 123). Only Portia seems to pay attention to the traces that this fog has left behind. She writes: "It has left a brown stain" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 123). Portia's half-outsider's sensitivity makes her quite a detective. She notices: "The forest is full of blackish air like London, the trees do not look the same in it" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 130), while Anna who sits in the car, reading "a detective story" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 130), is blind to the polluted air in the wood.

The fog that comes and goes, seems hardly a menace for Londoners like Anna and Thomas, for it is, after all, a typical phenomenon in England. One perceives it partially, fleetingly. As Timothy Clark writes about the difficulty of perceiving climate change:

> We experience phenomena at a (mostly) fairly stable and consistent speed – too slow and our perception would give us an almost static world in which nothing happened – too fast, and everything would blur into indistinctness. We understand distance, height, and breadth in terms of the given dimensionality of our embodied existence. A particular human scale is inherent to the intelligibility of the Earth around us. (Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge* 29–30)

This blindness is the very human condition regarding vast and complicated events such as climate change. *Change*, from Anglo-Norman *chaunge*, Old French, Middle French *change*, evokes the "action of giving and receiving reciprocally," the idea of exchange or replacement (*OED*). There is a suggestion of receiving something, even if it is only the very perception of difference that one receives. Yet, climate change does not necessarily meet our senses in that way, it does not come across as a perceptible change, but rather as a more *uncanny* passage (which also has become a symbol of climate change, the carbon footprint – a footprint one cannot see with a bare eye). As Freud writes: "The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is in some ways the species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely')" (134), for it is "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). This lurking frightening otherness within what is familiar describes the challenges involved also in the perception of climate change in our familiar environments. To perceive, as Portia does, that the air is ill, one needs to challenge the human scale, which, I will suggest, could be done through becoming sensitive to a certain *différance* that is in the air. By

différance, Derrida refers to difference and deferral of the signified: to a certain haunting plurality and even contradiction in a word that fails to present itself in the present, at all times.

To put the fog Portia perceives into Derrida's terms, the pollution in the fog is an evasive supplementary signified that cannot be observed in the present, for it does not present itself in the present separately from the fog and it is hidden again, when the fog disappears. However, Portia manages to record the visible trace of pollution in the air before it disappears again: "a brown stain" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 123) left behind by the fog. That brown stain is not capable of representing the event that preceeded it, the expansive coal burning that goes unwitnessed in its globality. In that sense, the brown stain that is left, but only barely and not for long, recalls Derrida's concept of the cinder which is what "remains after a material has burned" but also "a trope that comes to take the place of everything that disappears without leaving an identifiable trace" (Derrida, "Passages - from Traumatism to Promise" 391). As Derrida explains, the body of which the cinder is the trace has totally disappeared, it is non-identifiable to the point that forgetting itself is forgotten, making it "the trace or step (…) of what at the same time inscribes the vestige and carries it off" (Derrida, "Passages - from Traumatism to Promise" 391). Similarly, of the carbon footprint of Londoners' lives, a fickle stain remains, only for a moment, inscribing the vestige of a much greater trouble and carrying it off.

The main question, that of being able to read the passage one cannot properly bear witness to, becomes the central issue of reading climate change that in its totality cannot be easily recognized from a mere stain on the window. Attridge writes that to read responsibly means "to trust in the unpredictability of reading, its openness to the future" (180). He evokes a certain readerly hospitality, that is – "a readiness to have one's purposes reshaped by the work to which one is responding" (Attridge 113). Thus, reading seems to demand the willingness to *be reread* in the very process of reading, which is what the character of Eddie seems to both recognize and fear as the power proper to art. He does not want to see himself being written about in Portia's diary, and thus, he warns Portia: "I hate writing; I hate art – there's always *something else* there. I won't have you choosing words about me" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 115; italics mine). Eddie, like Anna and Thomas, is afraid of the *différance* at the core of his identity, acted out through his social airs, which cannot be made immutable, for one's identity is always already open to the others' perception, and thus, lends itself to the haunted experience of reading that threatens to contradict how one wishes to be perceived. Reading and writing, Bowen shows, do not lend themselves to Eddie's desire for fixity. Bowen writes:

> No presence could be less insistent than hers. He [Eddie] treated her like an element (air, for instance) or a condition (darkness): these touch one with their equality and lightness where one could endure no human touch. He could look right through her, without a flicker of seeing, without being made shamefully conscious of the vacuum there must be in his eyes. (Bowen, *The Death* 211)

Eddie fails to read the menace of London's air, but also the menace in Portia's air (appearance) of child-like innocence. He only accepts a certain form of Portia, a certain naivety of youth that *he* perceives (without being made "conscious of the vacuum there must be in his eyes," 211). Thus, he commands: "You must never show any sign of change" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 234), which is an impossible request for a teenager defined by changes. Such narrowness of vision and the comfort Eddie finds in a reduced system of identification clashes with the elusive presence of fog in the novel. The fog is nothing to Eddie who is only interested in mastering how he is perceived – his social airs. This very desire for mastery makes him unable to read Portia as well as London's air, while Portia's reading of Londoners' airs as well as London's air, from her liminal viewpoint, manages to reveal oddities in both.

Bowen also shows there is something distinctive about the writer's ability to perceive elusive phenomena: a sense of dislocation and a child-like sensitivity. She writes:

> The childishness is necessary, fundamental – it involves a perpetual, errant state of desire, wonder, and unexpected reflex. The writer, unlike his non-writing adult friend, has no predisposed outlook; he seldom observes deliberately. He sees what he did not intend to see; he remembers what he does not seem wholly possible. Inattentive learner in the schoolroom of life, he keeps some faculty free to *veer* and wonder. His is the *roving eye*. (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63; italics mine)

The combination of the kind of sensitivity that keeps some faculty free to veer and wonder, united with child-like intuition and inattentiveness "in the schoolroom of life" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63) echo in Portia's schoolroom experience as well as in her "wild askance shrinking eye" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 53). Through this "perpetual, errant state of desire, wonder, and unexpected reflex" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63), Bowen's novel proposes an alternative gaze on the world of her time.

The roving eye Bowen evokes, possesses certain elements of humility: of not knowing, of not being able to plan ahead (control, master), but also suggests a roving "I". Bowen's writing self seems vulnerable in her environment, and through this vulnerability, open to almost anything that might make itself known. She writes that "writers do not find subjects: subjects find them" in a "state of open susceptibility" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63). This becoming responsive, without mastery, to the unknown (not yet here, fully perceived or perceivable, or even thinkable) is the beginning of thinking. Derrida explains that according to the Western

philosophical tradition, questioning is "the essential act of philosophy, of thought, that is to say, the piety of thinking" (Derrida, "Hospitality" 12). He writes: "But before the question, if one can speak of a before that is neither chronological nor logical, in order for there to be a question there must first of all be an acquiescence, a 'yes.' In order to ask, there must first be a certain 'yes.' This is what Heidegger called *Zusage*, which is more originary than the question" (Derrida, "Hospitality" 12).

Bowen's concept of the "state of open susceptibility" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63) seems to demand the same sort of acquiescence from a writer. The act of writing, as Bowen sees it, is not the matter of approaching a subject from the viewpoint of mastery. The writer is to enter "a perpetual, errant state of desire, wonder, and unexpected reflex" without a "predisposed outlook" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63) in order to host the unexpected. The roving eye/I of the writer, open to all sort of veering and wondering, seems to offer a different kind of sensitivity towards one's environment, capable of veering, that is, turning away from a usual direction or pattern.

"Veering" is used by Nicholas Royle as a "pivot for thinking about literature and its relation to the world" (Royle, *Veering* 1). In *Veering: A theory of Literature*, that begins with a quotation from Bowen's short story "Mysterious Kôr," "veering" is theorized as non-anthropocentric, digressive, variable, kinetic and dynamic, literal and figurative, aesthetically pleasing or not. Royle explains that as the French verb *virer*, meaning "to turn, to turn around" is deposited at the core of the word environment," "veering" offers a new understanding of the term "environment" itself (*Veering* 2). "Veer ecology" explores "how language is changing in response to what has happened and what is happening but also how language can innovate and invent, alter or start differently – to change how people think and feel, and what they do" (Cohen and Duckert 471). The latter is also what Bowen's writing is capable of. Royle, while holding the page down with Bowen's "old house," (Royle, *Veering* 123) a stone from Bowen's court, writes: "Bowen invites us to think about telepathy and literature, telepathy in literature, the telepathy of literature. Novelistic narration is an eerie weave of thought-reading and feeling-sharing, shifting about within and through one body or point of view and another, never at home, never properly 'in place'" (*Veering* 126).

The Death of the Heart dislocates its readers. We, the readers, become concatenated to a variety of others who are not quite here, and not quite others. For a moment, we feel ourselves stand with Portia in the doorway, looking at *air* 'with a wild askance shrinking eye' (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 53). That is the experience of empathy, *Einfühlung*, meaning 'to feel with' (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 123) – it is the threshold of thinking about responsibility.

Conclusion

Through what Timothy Clark calls 'scalar literacy' (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 84), reading what does not fully present itself in the present, *The Death of the Heart* challenges the way one experiences a place – wherein lies the power of certain literary writings to expand, question, and alter our perception of phenomena. The novel that stems from Bowen's experience of London in the 1930s challenges the notion of identity that cannot be reduced to immutability, but is instead a passage open to all sorts of visitations (which is the experience of empathy, but also the experience of reading). Through Portia's observations, the novel seems to sensitize its readers to the forces of change within the notion of identity that, once discovered, open us up to a different mode of reading, which is precisely what is needed in order to think climate change.

Through the brown stain archived in Portia's diary, the evasive, hardly perceptible pollution resurfaces and haunts the 21st-century reader who has a different perspective on smog and its irreparable damage. Portia's diary becomes a shaky shared ground, a passage, between other characters and Portia, but also, between the novel and its contemporary readers, constituting a gateway between reality and fiction, but also a temporal passage between the 20th century and the 21st century that makes the invisible concatenation of pollution visible.

Veering with Bowen, as a transformative experience of reading, outwits 'the personal human experience as the basic reality' (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 80–81) considered to be proper to novelistic writing. Reading Bowen's fiction might make one feel and think in an extraordinary form. That is, not necessarily 'remarkable or excellent', but *extraōrdinārius*, meaning: outside order, outside command. As Susan Osborn points out, Bowen's novels have 'an oddly transformed air – something there for recognition also hides itself and is only partially suggested, and we often have the sense when reading her work of seeing or hearing something that is not manifestly there, something oscillating between the formed and the perceived' (Osborn 187). Bowen's fiction hosts liminal territories of thought and feeling where the glimpse of the uncanny, of something seen anew, deforms-reforms the eye/I of the reader.

2.5 Mastery without Responsibility in Beckett's *Molloy*

Beckett's trilogy's first book, *Molloy* (1951/1955), is a novel about veering and veerers. It recalls two men's journeys that could be described as constant dislocations, for it is never quite clear where they are or where they are going. As Mark Nixon points out, Molloy's "symbolic epic journey is unmasked as circularity without purpose" (M. Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries* 97). Obscure destinations such as the room of Molloy's mother's or, for Moran, Molloy's location, are met under unclear circumstances or not at all. Molloy reaches his mother's room, but does not know how, and Moran never finds Molloy.

Their geographical locations (ridiculously named Turdy, Bally and Hole) remain ambiguous, which adds to the reader's frustration regarding Moran's mission of tracing Molloy who exists outside the law. On several occasions, Moran evokes going to "Molloy country" but then explains: "I mean that narrow region whose administrative limits he had never crossed and presumably never would, either because he was forbidden to, or because he had no wish to, or of course because of some extraordinary fortuitous conjunction of circumstances" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 128). It is made clear that Moran is chasing a person without identity in the eyes of the law, who resides, as far as we are told, in the north of where Moran is. On top of all that imprecision that seems to make Moran's task impossible, Beckett also gradually deprives him of physical strength and of his fellows' help.

Contrary to the homeless characters of Beckett's trilogy who are already stranded in the wild, in the streets, in others' homes or in strange institutions, Moran has a home that he can call his own: a house, a son, a housekeeper/cook Martha, Father Ambrose, neighbours, and pets – most of which or whom he must leave behind in order to fulfil his work responsibilities. This segment will take a particular interest in ethical quandaries surrounding Moran's responsibility to and for his mysterious employer, Youdi, as well as his responsibility for his home and its inhabitants. My reading of Moran's predicament concentrates on an idea of responsibility that is blunted by his highly hierarchical vision of the world according to which one is responsible to and for someone with more power. I will also explore the mechanisms through which this upward-looking sense of responsibility can be justified, namely, a certain reading of words and worlds that denies responsibility for one's reading, mistaking one's position of mastery for neutrality.

Double trouble: the responsibility *to* and *for* someone

Derek Attridge distinguishes between two kinds of responsibility: responsibility *to* the other and responsibility *for* the other. He writes: "There is a sense in which I am responsible to the other – the other calls me to account, I answer to it as best I can" (Attridge 172). Both Gaber, Youdi's messenger, and Moran, his agent, are responsible to Youdi in that sense. The entire second half of *Molloy* is presented as a report of a mission that begins with Gaber's announcement of Moran's task to track down a man named Molloy. The narrative is, in other words, Moran's answer to the one who called him to account for the failed mission. Being responsible *to* the other implies a duty, but also a certain hierarchy. The latter is bitterly evoked by Moran:

> I am still obeying orders, if you like, but no longer out of fear. No, I am still afraid, but simply from force of habit. And the voice I listen to needs no Gaber to make it heard. For it is within me and exhorts me to continue to the end the faithful servant I have always been, of a cause that is not mine, and patiently fulfil in all its bitterness my calamitous part, as it was my will, when I had a will, that others should. And this with hatred in my heart, and scorn, of my master and his designs. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 126)

Moran's sense of responsibility to Youdi is presented as a habit stemming from "the force of habit" (126) of being afraid. The internalized voice (which, we are told, needs no messenger) establishes the sense of responsibility towards Youdi that could be said to be unthinking. To be a "faithful servant" (126) to someone else's cause is perhaps the same thing as to have "corpse fidelity" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110), an absolute fidelity, to their cause that becomes a dead fidelity to one's own will, as one is carrying out someone else's cause. Being utterly responsible to someone, to the point of giving up on one's own desires, comes close to being responsible for the other. Derek Attridge explains that "being responsible for the other involves assuming the other's needs (if only the need to exist), affirming it, sustaining it, being prepared to give up my own wants and satisfactions for the sake of the other" (Attridge 172). Moran's example brings those two definitions together, for by being utterly responsible to Youdi (answerable to him) Moran becomes also responsible for him: assuming his needs, affirming and sustaining them to his own detriment ("with hatred in my heart, and scorn, of my master and his designs," 126). However, this responsibility to Youdi, to his work, is complicated by other responsibilities Moran has as a father and a house owner.

Even though Moran says he is a "creature of his house, of his garden, of his few poor possessions" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 109), he is also the master of this house. Therein lies a

certain responsibility for its multiple inhabitants, human or not, to whom Moran refers as his, as he is leaving the house:

> I offered my face to the black mass of fragrant vegetation that was mine and with which I could do *as I pleased and never be gainsaid*. It was full of songbirds, their heads under their wings, fearing nothing, for they knew me. *My* trees, *my* bushes, *my* flowerbeds, *my* tiny lawns, I used to think I loved them. If I sometimes cut a branch, a flower, it was solely for their good, that they might increase in strength and happiness. And I never did it without a pang. Indeed if the truth were known, I did not do it at all, I got Christy to do it. I grew no vegetables. Not far off was the hen-house. When I said I had turkeys, and so on, I lied. All I had was a few hens. *My* grey hen was there, not on the perch with the others, but on the ground, in a corner, in the dust, at the mercy of the rats. The cock no longer sought her out to tread her angrily. The day was at hand, if she did not take a turn for the better, when the other hens would join forces and tear her to pieces, with their beaks and claws. All was silent. I have an extremely sensitive ear. Yet I have no ear for music. I could just hear that adorable murmur of tiny feet, of quivering feathers and feeble, smothered clucking that hen-houses make at night and that dies down long before dawn. How often I had listened to it, entranced, in the evening, saying, Tomorrow I am free. And so I turned again a last time towards *my little all*, before I left it, in the hope of keeping it. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 122–23, emphasis mine)

The abundance of possessive pronouns and determiners[78] underlines Moran's position as a master of this house which is furthermore highlighted by his freedom to act upon all that grows or inhabits *his* land. The words "I could do as I pleased and never be gainsaid" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 122) speak of unlimited power over this land and its inhabitants. Not only is he the one who has the power to act, but the power to impart tasks to others ("I got Christy to do it," 122) – exactly how Youdi could be seen transmitting his missions to Moran. This is a concatenation of responsibilities that follows the lines of an established hierarchy, according to which one's responsibility to someone also already establishes the grounds of one's responsibility for that someone. In other words, the idea of responsibility in such a concatenation of powers is to look up, to be made responsible for the one above you, that is, to accommodate the desires and needs of the one looking down, calling you to account.

The consequences of this ever upward-looking responsibility already echo in this passage, and at the back of Moran's mind, in the image of the grey hen he is about to leave behind in order to fulfil Youdi's mission, although she is "on the ground, in a corner, in the dust, at the mercy of the rats" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 122). Moran abandons his pets, as Youdi

[78] The "my" that also produces an effect of care, the Romantic "my," is haunted by the idea of ownership. Beckett does not use such language lightly, as was evidenced by his response in 1982 to Steven Connor who had written an essay on animals in Beckett's work (Beckett's animals). Connor pointed out the very first line of Beckett's response which read: "'Thank you for 'my' animals, read with interest,' alluding to the title of Connor's essay (Connor 59). These two little quotation marks, fencing in the now suspicious "my," trigger a necessity to read non-human animals in Beckett's work with a particular sensitivity towards a dialectic of mastery, lurking in our everyday language – in words such as "my."

would soon leave him behind, to his own devices. This pattern will continue, as I will show by examining the relationship between Moran and his son which is largely challenged by somewhat contradictory forces: Moran's need to be loved by his son, and his fear of losing his superior position over him by which Moran would become irrelevant, for if one's relevance depends on one's ability to dominate others, losing that power over his son would mean that his son would no longer need to be responsible to him and for him.

Moran's need to be loved by his son is expressed in rather violent terms as he imagines a world where he could chain his son to himself "in such a way as to prevent him from ever shaking [him] off again" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 124). This particularly violent imagery is preceded by a passage which shows another thread of thought where his role as a master of his offspring is replaced with a different one:

> My son floundered behind me, bumping into the trees. He did not know how to find his way in the dark. He was still young, the words of reproach died on my lips. I stopped. Take my hand, I said. I might have said, Give me your hand. I said, Take my hand. Strange. But the path was too narrow for us to walk abreast. So I put my hand behind me and my son grasped it, gratefully I fancied. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 122)

The unthinking "take my hand" (122) feels odd to Moran who is in the habit of ordering his son around. While "give me your hand" (122) could be read as an order, there is something sensibly kinder in "take my hand" (122) – an offer of help, a hint of willingness to guess and meet the needs of another being. These words, uttered instinctively, speak of a responsibility Moran is not willing to take on. His words outsmart his ideology.

Mastery without responsibility

The most constant element of Moran's relationship with his son seems to be his insistence on his dominance as a father. For instance, he claims: "Cold comfort that is, to feel superior to one's son, and hardly sufficient to calm the remorse of having begotten him" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 98). Another direct reference to a specific hierarchy Moran means to upkeep is made when he is already on the road with his son and has begun to lose his mobility which forces him to rely on his son's help:

> And I believed I was capable, more than that, I knew I was capable, with a little practice, of learning to pedal with one leg. And then I would resume my rightful place, I mean in the van. And my son would follow me. And then the scandal would cease of my son's defying me, and going left when I told him right, or right when I told him left, or straight on when I told him right or left as he had been doing of late, more and more frequently. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 155)

Between Moran and his son, mastery without responsibility *for* the one who depends on you becomes a destructive, and eventually, self-destructive force. Responsible to and for Youdi only, Moran fails to be responsible first for his son, then for his animals, because he is utterly caught up in the dialectic of mastery that consists in being responsible to and for higher forces, fighting their fights. As long as he sustains the impression of physical autonomy, that is, being able-bodied, and being able to use the force of his body to intimidate and dominate his son, he does not account for his responsibility for those who depend on him.

The latter is shown most vividly when his son falls ill right before their departure and Moran has to decide between his responsibility, as a father, for his son and the worker's responsibility to/for his mysterious employer, Youdi. Instead of deciding to take care of the son who, in his own words, he has deemed to be inferior to himself, Moran tries to reason why he is not responsible for anything that might happen to his son, thereby choosing work responsibilities over the needs of his son and his responsibility as a parent to meet them.

First, Moran transfers his responsibility as a father to what he calls "a providential hindrance," or in the French version "*un beau cas de force majeure*," for which he "could not be held responsible" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 113; Beckett, *Molloy* 162). Fearing to overstep his commitment to Youdi, Moran concludes: "I was not going to expose myself to thunderbolts which might be fatal, simply because my son had the gripes. If he fell seriously ill on the way, it would be another matter" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 113). However, even that ethical insight is quickly rethought: "I reflected with bitter satisfaction that if my son lay down and died by the wayside, it would be none of my doing. To every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117).

Moran tries to wipe his conscience clean from his responsibility for his son, first, by transferring responsibility for his son's sudden illness to a "*force majeure*" (Beckett, *Molloy* 162) that is beyond his willpower and ability to act; and second, by abolishing his responsibility as a parent for his son, saying: "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117). Thus, a couple of hours later, he drags the young teen out of his bed, despite his illness and resistance.

The idea "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117), resurfaces later in the novel, when Moran is thinking about his bees. He says: "But away from the hive, and busily at work, the bees did not dance. Here their watchword seemed to be, Every man for himself, assuming bees to be capable of such notions" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 162). Angela Moorjani's reading links this passage to Spinoza's idea of egotistical virtue. Moorjaani writes that "even in her nurturing role, the bee is looking after her own needs, and rightly so,

as the preservation of her being depends on the well-being of the hive" (Moorjani 171). She also evokes Mandeville's opposite idea: "[…] that the success of a society, whether for bees or humans, hinges on the self-interest of its inhabitants" (Moorjani 171).

These anthropomorphic parallels between bees and humans that think personal and collective responsibility through self-interest backfire in Moran's case. His belief, "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117), does not lead to the wellbeing of his home or to some wider benefit for society. Instead, Moran becomes an outcast, and as such, more and more like Molloy. As he falls ill instead of his son, the latter, who has become his own master, leaves Moran when he is at his weakest. After all, he only replicates the schema his father has been following all this time, that of self-reliance and responsibility to and for the powerful.

Moran becomes nothing but an image of a poor worker bee (presumably as human as Spinoza's and Mandeville's bees), abandoned by Youdi who only emits orders but no help, by Gaber, who transfers orders but would not think about their content and context, and by young Moran, strong enough to move up in the food chain of Moran's household. Now at the bottom of the barrel, there is no one to take responsibility for him. The concatenation of responsibility that always looks up, that only seeks to respect one's responsibility to the person in charge, and to fulfil one's responsibility for them, is shown to be perilous. Alone, Moran has no other option than to assume responsibility for himself, dragging himself, with as little might as Beckett had allotted to him in the end, towards home, making an arduous "bee-line" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 167). His bee-line is an earthly voyage, void of all efficiency and vigour; as such, it stains the image of all economic bee-metaphors, for Moran resembles rather a dying animal, crawling back to the hive:

> Bent double, my free hand pressed to my belly, I advanced, and every now and then I let a roar, of triumph and distress. Certain mosses I consumed must have disagreed with me. If I once made up my mind not to keep the hangman waiting, the bloody flux itself would not stop me, I would get there on all fours shitting out my entrails and chanting maledictions. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 160)

By rendering Moran humbler in the etymological sense: "close to earth," literally: bound to the ground, unable to walk, Beckett fractures Moran's illusion of being able to get by, by thinking "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117).

Responsibility for corpses

Upon his arrival back home, Moran must deal with the consequences of having left in the first place. These consequences began haunting him even before he left his home in the form of a feeling of responsibility (that he eventually ignored). Right after he had concluded, "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117), he was also visited by the following feeling: "There is something in this house tying my hands. A man like me cannot forget, in his evasions, what it is he evades" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117).

With a force of its own, a scene enters my reading from Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* that reminds the reader of one's responsibility for leaving home, through the photos of Robert Kelway (also on a mission, but as a Nazi spy) on the wall of his childhood home. Bowen writes: "The frame with the regimental crest held a picture of what was at the best abeyance – at the worst, there came out of it a warning to the bottom of her heart [Stella's] that no return can ever make restitution for the going away. You may imitate but cannot renew safety" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 159).

Moran's return plays out a certain rejection. The first discovery upon his arrival is a denial of access at the gate: his key would not turn. This unexpected halt at the gates of his domain (that he earlier had declared to have complete power over) alludes to the changes that have taken place in his absence, without his authority and in spite of it. To gain access to his garden, he rams his way into the home that would no longer accept him kindly, despite the heavy set of keys he has been carrying around.

His second discovery is that of his dead bees. Moran tells us:

> I went towards my hives. They were there, as I feared. I lifted the top off one and laid it on the ground. It was a little roof, with a sharp ridge, and steep overhanging slopes. I put my hand in the hive, moved it among the empty trays, felt along the bottom. It encountered, in a corner, a dry light ball. It crumbled under my fingers. They had clustered together for a little warmth, to try and sleep. I took out a handful. It was too dark to see, I put it in my pocket. It weighed nothing. They had been left out all winter, their honey taken away, without sugar. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 168)

The bees' individual or collective efforts have not been enough to fight off the human hand that eagerly sought to maximise its owner's happiness in a complicated web of actions and transactions, regulated by the invisible hand, as Adam Smith would have it. The invisible hand, be it God or mere profit, does not care for the bees (that have now in the 21st century been driven to the verge of extinction by the same logic of self-interest).

After seeing the familiar bodies turn to dust, Moran refuses to check on his hens, presuming the consequences of his departure: more dead bodies. That refusal is similar to an extract based on Beckett's own boyhood experience that appears in his later fiction, *Company*, where the narrator recalls putting a hedgehog in an old hatbox with some worms to improve the animal's life (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 41). The next morning, he is pestered by "a suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 24). The narrator avoids returning to the box. Beckett writes in *Company*: "You have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 24). However, it is not only the fear of finding a dead body that keeps the narrator from returning to the hatbox, but also his feeling of responsibility for the death of the hedgehog: the realization "that rather than do as you did you had better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 24).

The child depicted in *Company* is not ill-intentioned. For him, building a home (for a hedgehog who looks, to him, homeless) must be an image of safety, an attempt to take care of the other without fully understanding the violence and the inherent responsibility for the other created by this act of domestication, as he offers (or rather imposes) his idea of a *domus* (Latin "house") to the hedgehog who has no other choice than to accept his "hospitality." Thus, the idea domestication starts off as a naive effort of hospitality, with the narrator "glowing at the thought of what a fortunate hedgehog it was to have crossed your [his] path as it did" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 24).

Moran's story similarly echoes the violence of domestication and the responsibility that the act of domestication creates. Moran's responsibility is partly inherited; after all, his species has tamed and modified other species to fulfil its own needs and to make profit, thereby creating a dependence for care and the ethical responsibility to take responsibility for the dependency that has been created. However, Moran's responsibility extends particularly towards these hens and bees that he calls his own, thus, he is also individually responsible for their care.

Jean-Michel Rabaté writes: "Moran comes home to find that his pets are all dead, that the bees and the hens all died because they had been 'deserted' by him" (Rabaté, "'Think, Pig!': Beckett's Animal Philosophies" 123). Moran implies that other humans were involved in the demise of those animals, but he does not hold fully responsible. His coming to terms with *his* responsibility for those bees and hens is revealed through the switches between the active and passive voice used in the narrative:

> "They [the bees] had been left out all winter, their honey taken away, without sugar. Yes, now I may make an end. I did not go to the hen-house. My hens were dead too, I knew they were dead. They had not been killed in the same way, except the grey one perhaps,[79] that was the only difference. *My* bees, *my* hens, *I* had deserted them (Beckett, *Three Novels* 168, emphasis mine).

This "I" becomes the only identifiable culprit in these killings, implying Moran's cruelty towards his animals, without reducing violence to direct physical violence.

The last pages of *Molloy* introduce a Moran who no longer goes to church or pays his bills, but instead has moved into his garden. "I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169), he says and makes an effort instead to understand the language of hens without having recourse to his (169). The hens, it comes out, had not been killed, but had become wild.

About the hens who had survived, he writes: "I recognized them and they seemed to recognize me. But one never knows" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169). The not knowing or unknowing also manifests itself earlier when Moran concludes his lengthy observations of the dance of bees as "something [he] can study all [his] life, and never understand" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 163). Moran's bird and bee reading could be seen as a more humble reading of others that must make peace with uncertainty and fallibility; a reading that implies one's lack of total mastery over one's knowledge about others.

Moran's detailed description of complicated figures and hums of bees,[80] to which he first tried to ascribe significance in his human language,[81] are, in the end, juxtaposed with the parallel between man and God to whom, Moran says: "I had been taught to ascribe my angers, fears, desires, and even my body" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 164). Moran's statement: "And I would never do my bees the wrong I had done my God," seems to be a stand against the anthropomorphism that he struggles to escape, being a man "exiled in his manhood" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 163).

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[79] Earlier in the novel we learn that the grey hen is the feeble one, described as "not on the perch with the others, but on the ground, in a corner, in the dust, at the mercy of the rats" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 122) and endangered by others. He talks about different ways of killing, alluding to the possibility that his hens were killed for food, with the exception of the grey hen who was very weak to begin with and might have died after he left.

[80] His description of bees recalls the discoveries of an Austrian ethologist and Nobel laureate Karl von Frisch about the language of bees (the waggle dance). As Angela Moorjani explains, "Beckett's interest in animal cognition in the 1930s, when he came across Wolfgang Köhler's *The Mentality of Apes* of 1925, along with his curiosity about science and increasing contempt for anthropocentrism, led us to expect that he was aware of von Frisch's well-published discoveries and the controversies they stirred up" (Moorjani 166–67).

[81] "But the outgoing bees danced too. It was no doubt their way of saying, I understand, or, Don't worry about me. But away from the hive, and busily at work, the bees did not dance. Here their watchword seemed to be, Every man for himself, assuming bees to be capable of such notions" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 162–63).

What seems to happen to Moran is a sort of process of unlearning in order to read. On the last page, he says he now hears a voice telling him things while not using the words that "Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169). As Sarah Wood writes: "Being the creature of the dialect of the tribe can get you caught up in the dialectic. What to do? Mallarmé reminds us of the possibility of reading before we know what to think. It's as easy as that, as long as we are not too afraid of being wrong" (Wood 28–29).

Reading before one knows what to think requires the willingness to be ill equipped, *mal armé*; doubting words, concepts and theories, as well as the worldviews they convey. Indeed, Moran comments on his skill of deciphering this voice within, saying: "I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169). I read it not as a statement which suggests a path towards irresponsibility and absolute apathy towards learning and discovery, but rather as a methodological approach to reading and writing without mastery, that is, reading and writing not as if one knew already what needs to be beheld, what truths need to be recognized or demonstrated.[82] This attempt to read or write, or even think, while possibly being "all wrong" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 169) is, I argue, the very movement of creative writing that lends itself to the possibilities outside of an established order. As Derrida reminds us, literature allows one to say anything,[83] to trespass the borders of what one cannot say elsewhere than in the space of literature, which can protect this power to say anything in any way one chooses, by evoking the nature of literature – its fictitiousness, the promise that you will be told a lie. This promise also echoes in the last lines of *Molloy*, as Moran writes: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 170).

Those words lead us back to the beginning of Moran's narrative that starts with: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. All is sleeping" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 87), inviting the reader to reconsider the narrative and its purposes, that is, everything

[82] This kind of reading and writing corresponds to Bowen's notion of "state of open susceptibility" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63) that refers to the writer's state of vulnerability in her/his environment. Bowen writes that "writers do not find subjects: subjects find them" in a "state of open susceptibility" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63). The act of writing, as Bowen sees it, is not the matter of approaching a subject from the viewpoint of mastery. The writer is to enter "a perpetual, errant state of desire, wonder, and unexpected reflex" without a "predisposed outlook" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 63) in order to host the unexpected.

[83] "L'espace de la littérature n'est pas seulement celui d'une *fiction* instituée mais aussi une *institution fictive* qui permet en principe tout dire. Tout dire, c'est sans doute rassembler en traduisant toutes les figures l'une dans l'autre, totaliser en formalisant, mais tout dire c'est aussi franchir les interdits. C'est *s'affranchir* – et dans tous les champs où la loi peut faire la loi. La loi de la littérature tend, en principe, à défier ou à lever la loi. Elle donne donc à penser l'essence de la loi dans l'expérience du « tout à dire ». C'est une institution qui tend à déborder l'institution" (Derrida and Attridge 256).

that can be said and done in the space of literature under the guise of a mere story. That "mere" story also opens up the literary space for everything that can be experienced otherwise there. According to Attridge, a literary invention is recognized when a reformulation of existing norms has been experienced by the reader as "an event which opens new possibilities of meaning and feeling" (Attridge 84).

Rabaté points out two parallel operations regarding Moran who tries to understand wild hens: first, what he calls "animal thinking" entails "a ruining of the old anthropopseudological machine," and second, "a thinking-dreaming from the outside" which, Rabaté says, is "another name for writing" (Rabaté, "'Think, Pig!': Beckett's Animal Philosophies" 123). The experience of the old anthropopseudological machine, I argue, is shown differently in the space of literature, to the reader who is not a hen but a mere man, through Moran's own experience of the violence of the use of language which fails to address him, recognize him. Moran, as I will show, experiences first-hand the violence of a reading with mastery, a reading that feigns mastery over the text and its interpretations, thereby making language into an order instead of a means of communication and a tool for thinking and evoking feeling, which will be explored through Moran's interactions with Gaber.

"Corpse fidelity": reading with mastery

Gaber and Moran are linked to each other through work responsibilities, based on reading, receiving, interpreting, and following orders. Before receiving a mission to track Molloy down, Jacques Moran appears as the most common of common men, living a quiet life in a village:

> All was still. Not a breath. From my neighbours' chimneys the smoke rose straight and blue. None but tranquil sounds, the clicking of mallet and ball, a rake on pebbles, a distant lawn-mower, the bell of my beloved church. And birds of course, blackbird and thrush, their song sadly dying, vanquished by the heat, and leaving dawn's high boughs for the bushes' gloom. Contentedly I inhaled the scent of my lemon-verbena. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 88)

Rhythmed by mass attendances, Moran's quiet life is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger named Gaber. He announces to Moran his new mission while also alluding to Moran's responsibility *to* Youdi, their employer who, as Gaber claims, wants Moran, specifically, to complete this task (Beckett, *Three Novels* 102). The amnesiac messenger, a satirical figure whose name bears resemblance to Gabriel, an archangel, shows no respect for Moran's quiet life, into which he enters ruthlessly, his enormous feet crushing Moran's daisies (Beckett, *Three Novels* 88). Yet, as Moran later claims, he is not brutal (Beckett, *Three Novels* 158).

What is striking about Gaber is the strange lacuna between his seeming lack of bad intentions and the overtones of violence of the scenes in which he appears. As will be shown further on, a similar phenomenon is also produced by the character of Eva in Bowen's *Eva Trout*.

Asja Szafraniec compares Gaber's function to the doorkeeper in Kafka's "Before the Law,"[84] claiming that Gaber's function "is to stand in the opening of the unique door of responsibility 'meant only for you'" (Szafraniec 173). What interests me is the ethical position of Gaber's function that is comparable to that of the doorkeeper in Kafka's parable; as well as Moran's role, comparable to the country man's. Like Gaber, deemed to be not brutal (Beckett, *Three Novels* 158), Kafka's doorkeeper is said to have a "kind nature" (Kafka 163). When Moran falls down after Gaber pushed him away from him (it is said that it was not his intention to make him fall), Gaber wants to help him up, and like Kafka's doorman, Gaber also bends down to Moran and speaks louder when he cannot hear him. Both, it could be argued, are not clearly violent or ill-intentioned, yet they are absolutely fettered, body and mind, to their responsibility to some superior scheme which they do not seem to question. There is something sensibly cruel about Gaber's cold fulfilment of his function, as he disregards Moran's suffering.

Gaber's amnesia, that only hits him when he is working, comes across as a satirical representation of a working man who, being bound to his service, would forget the doubts and the complexities involved in all endeavours of reading (of a text as well as of its recipient), and put him in the position of apparent neutrality of a messenger: as if the text could read itself, erasing his responsibility for the text and its recipient in the event of reading.

Beckett's wartime life must have given him more than enough examples of such attachments to duty that are at once filled with a sense of responsibility (to some superior force or to the idea of work itself), yet severely lacking in responsibility (for the other, and for one's reading). For instance, when Beckett was hiding in the South of France, he witnessed how a Jewish man who had offered him employment, Marcel Lob, was threatened with being deported to a concentration camp. Lob escaped this near death sentence thanks to his wife who had managed to obtain a certificate proving her family's ties to the Catholic Church, which happened to be a sufficient proof that Marcel Lob was married to an Aryan woman (Knowlson,

[84] It tells the story of a man from the countryside who comes to the door that constitutes an access to the law, but in front of the door is a doorkeeper who claims that he cannot let the man in immediately. The man waits in the hope of a future access, knowing that behind that doorkeeper are others, more powerful doorkeepers to whose authority he must surrender anyway, until his final hour has come and he asks the doorkeeper: "Everyone aspires to the law,[…] so how is it that in all these years no one except me has demanded admittance?" to which the doorkeeper answers: "No one else could be admitted here; this door was meant only for you. Now I am going to shut it" (Kafka 162).

Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett 305–06). Knowlson writes: "Beckett followed with fascinated horror the workings of a bureaucracy that could spare or condemn a human being because he or she could or could not produce a certificate of baptism" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 305–06).

In *Molloy*, the bureaucratic machine is shown from a different light. The ideology and the agenda of Youdi's project are entirely hidden, as Youdi himself is. This configuration draws the reader's attention away from large and powerful bodies (infested with whichever ideologies and agendas might lie there – all invisible to us) to their smallest particle – the common man, the so-called worker bee. Since the larger body to which they are bound by duty is not visible, the worker's responsibility is underlined instead.

Gaber appears twice in the novel: first, to announce to Moran his mission to find Molloy, and later, to send Moran back home. After his first appearance, Moran comments on Gaber's inability to understand the messages he transmits. His manner of reading seems mechanical, and yet this quality of automatic translation from a secret code to words is briefly interrupted by moments of quickly ejaculated demonstrations of mastery over the meaning of the content of Youdi's message. Gaber's disconnection from the text and his demonstrations of mastery lead me to explore the manners in which Gaber's sense of responsibility to his employer Youdi overshadows his responsibility for *his* reading of the texts he transmits, and for Moran who receives his transmissions.

Moran's description of Gaber's reading exhibits a subtle violent form of reading that veers blindly, that is, a reading which is not conscious of its inescapable divergence from the text, but takes one's interpretation to be automatically identical to what the writer of the message had intended, thus releasing the reader from all responsibility. To suppose that a text could assume full responsibility for itself in the event of reading or that the responsibility could belong to its writer only is to believe in the absolute neutrality of the reader.[85] Such an attempt at effacing the reader's responsibility is somewhat comically depicted through the character of Gaber and his "corpse fidelity" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110) to the letter of Youdi's messages. Moran tells us:

[85] That would require assuming that Gaber is capable of transmitting the absolute responsibility to Youdi, the writer of those messages who is not there, or to the text, that cannot take responsibility for itself. What Elizabeth Bowen writes about the necessity of a place in fiction could also be evoked concerning the process of reading: "Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283). The body and the mind that reads, is also a locale, and it is coloured, among other things, by one's idioculture that Derek Attridge defines as "the totality of the cultural codes constituting a subject, at a given time, as an overdetermined, self-contradictory system that manifests itself materially in a host of ways" (Attridge 30).

> Gaber understood nothing about the messages he carried. Reflecting on them he arrived at the most extravagantly false conclusions. Yes, it was not enough for him to understand nothing about them, he had also to believe he understood everything about them. This was not all. His memory was so bad that his messages had no existence in his head, but only in his notebook. He had only to close his notebook to become, a moment later, perfectly innocent as to its contents. And when I say that he reflected on his messages and drew conclusions from them, it was not as we would have reflected on them, you and I, the book closed and probably the eyes too, but little by little as he read. And when he raised his head and indulged in his commentaries, it was without losing a second, for if he had lost a second he would have forgotten everything, both text and gloss. I have often wondered if the messengers were not compelled to undergo a surgical operation, to induce in them such a degree of amnesia. But I think not. For otherwise their memory was good enough. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 101–02)

Gaber's "most extravagantly false conclusions" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 101) seem to be the product of a reading practice in which one believes he is capable of concluding in a totalizing manner: "he had also to believe he understood everything about them" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 101–02). Moran comments on Gaber's inability to veer from the text, to close the book and reflect on its contents, which becomes more of a treason to meaning than following the concatenation of Youdi's words closely. Even though this passage could be read as a satirical representation of a working man, it also underlines a necessary veering, a turning away, in the event of reading that makes reflection possible. This turning away, played out in the imagery of closing the pages of a book and closing one's eyes, is perhaps the very condition for approaching what has been said, the condition for making sense of the message.

As Elizabeth Bowen asks in her 1950 essay "The Bend Back": "Can one really envisage that which one has not (in one form or another) known?" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 59). Can Beckett's amnesiac messenger envisage what Youdi's messages insinuate?

Reading, and reflecting (from Latin *reflectere*, meaning "to bend back, to turn round, to retrace one's steps, turn back, to turn away (the face, gaze), to turn back, reverse," *OED*) on what one reads, seems to require at first an inward turn to touch some sort of experience (in one form or another) within us, which means that one can, paradoxically, only approach a text by first turning away from it.

Such an inward turn is shown by Moran whose thinking process leads him to claim that this "inside," the self who has experienced or known things, is a haunted unit. Moran says: "How little one is at one with oneself, good God. I who prided myself on being a sensible man, cold as crystal and as free from spurious depth" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 108). Reflecting on his mission, Moran says he is "haunted and possessed by chimeras" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 109) that Solveig Hudhomme links to the processes of imagination as well as more directly to

imagining Molloy as a kind of mythical creature (200).[86] What I would like to underline is the link between reading and imagining which seems severed in Gaber's reading, yet emphasized in Moran's perception of Youdi's message which depicts the sort of reading that must turn inward in order to face Youdi's message.

Moran imagines Molloy: "Now, a prisoner, he hurled himself at I know not what narrow confines, and now, hunted, he sought refuge near the centre. He panted. He had only to rise up within me for me to be filled with panting" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 108). Molloy appears to Moran internally, empathetically, showing that the inward space through which one reads and imagines is already concatenated to confusing complex feelings of otherness. As Robert Harvey writes: "(…) Beckett shows through his work a conviction that we are grounded in empathy, an innate need to go beyond ourselves empathetically even in the absence of another" (136). It is precisely by turning away from the real thing (be it a text or a person, right here and right now) that one begins to read, that is, let oneself be haunted by those strange half-strangers within – the chimeras Moran evokes.

The first vision of Molloy that is lived through, empathetically, by Moran, is confronted with other Molloys, that is, other readings of Molloy that Moran tries to imagine and apprehend. Unlike Gaber, Moran cannot conclude quite so easily; he cannot believe he understands everything about Youdi's messages about Molloy. He tries to narrow things down mathematically, by counting; only to realize his scientific approach has too many variables:

> The fact was there were three, no, four Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of same, Gaber's and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me. To these I would add Youdi's were it not for Gaber's corpse fidelity to the letter of his messages. Bad reasoning. For could it seriously be supposed that Youdi had confided to Gaber all he knew, or thought he knew (all one to Youdi) about his protégé? Assuredly not. He had only revealed what he deemed of relevance for the prompt and proper execution of his orders. I will therefore add a fifth Molloy, that of Youdi. But would not this fifth Molloy necessarily coincide with the fourth, the real one as the saying is, him dogged by his shadow? I would have given a lot to know. There were others too, of course. But let us leave it at that, if you don't mind, the party is big enough. And let us not meddle either with the question as to how far these five Molloys were constant and how far subject to variation. For there was this about Youdi, that he changed his mind with great facility. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110)

Those readings of Molloy, chimeras shadowing the character of Molloy, are shown to be fluctuating. The assertive "the fact was" (110) of the first sentence is immediately humbled by the doubtful "three, no, four Molloys" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110). Nothing conclusive can be demonstrated here, other than the very impossibility of a totalizing conclusion. The readings

[86] "Even in open country he seemed to be crashing through jungle. He did not so much walk as charge. In spite of this he advanced but slowly. He swayed, to and fro, like a bear" (Beckett 108).

of Molloy's identity remain open, for, as Moran tells us, "there were others too" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110); thereby, the narrative makes the reader sensitive to the process of reading itself, marked by doubt, subjectivity, and complexity.

Moran's very ability to think Molloy as a subject, opened up to a plurality of fluctuating subjective viewpoints, clashes with Gaber's "corpse fidelity" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110) to the letter of Youdi's messages. The bizarre wording is rendered even stranger by the discovery that in the French version, the image of the body/dead body cannot be found and in the place of "corpse fidelity" we can find "*l'exactitude prodigieuse*" (tremendous accuracy).

In the French version, the line goes: "*J'y ajouterais celui de Youdi, n'était l'exactitude prodigieuse de Gaber pour tout ce qui touchait à ses commissions*" (Beckett, *Molloy* 158). In one of the earlier translation copies, it reads: "To these I would add that[87] Youdi's were it not for Gaber's prodigious exactitude in everything connected with his missions" (Beckett, *Molloy: A Digital Genetic Edition* 29r).[88]

Beckett's curious addition, "corpse fidelity to the letter of his messages," changes the focus from missions to the text and reading, which does not necessarily mean that Gaber always carries out his missions as meticulously as he should. His missions, after all, depend on his ability to read. What are we, as readers, to make of Gaber's "corpse fidelity" to the *letter* of Youdi's messages (no longer a simple commission, as in the French version)? To follow something to the letter is to do exactly what you have been told, yet what does it mean to have "corpse fidelity" to the letter of someone's messages?

I will try to illuminate this curious translation through Moran's and Gaber's second encounter that takes place in a wood, after Moran has been abandoned by his son and left nearly motionless because his knees had given out. The conversation that follows is made particularly strange by the way Gaber blindly recites his notebook to answer Moran who is in a desperate state:

> He [Gaber] was sitting on a tree-stump, half asleep. Well Moran, he said. You recognize me? I said. He took out and opened his notebook, licked his finger, turned over the pages till he came to the right page, raised it towards his eyes which at the same time he lowered towards it. I can see nothing, he said. (…) Would you have a match? he said. I did not recognize this far-off voice. Or a torch, he said. He must have seen from my face that I possessed nothing of a luminous nature. He took a small electric torch from his pocket and shone it on his page. He read, Moran, Jacques, home, instanter. He put out his torch, closed his notebook on his finger and looked at me. I can't walk, I said. What? he said. I'm sick, I can't move, I said. I can't hear a word you say, he said. I cried to him that I could not move, that I was sick, that I should have

[87] The mistake exists in this translation copy.
[88] The editors refer to Patrick Bowles' note that accompanied this revised translation, stating: "I have inserted his corrections, where he [SB] has not inserted them himself" (Syracuse University, Grove Press Records, box 98).

> to be carried, that my son had abandoned me, that I could bear no more. He examined me laboriously from head to foot. I executed a few steps leaning on my umbrella to prove to him I could not walk. He opened his notebook again, shone the torch on his page, studied it at length and said, Moran, home, instanter. He closed his notebook, put it back in his pocket, put his lamp back in his pocket, stood up, drew his hands over his chest and announced he was dying of thirst. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157)

Gaber's answer to Moran's question: "You recognize me?" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157) is met with a strange reaction as if the task of recognition is to be performed by the notebook itself.

Asja Szafraniec reads the utterance "Moran, Jacques, home, instanter" (157) as Youdi's order to be fulfilled in the future but also as "an automatic token of recognition" (Szafraniec 173), an automatic response to Moran's question.

What interests me is precisely this automaticity in Gaber's response, as if the text itself ("Moran, Jacques, home, instanter,"157) could recognize Moran who is standing in front of Gaber. If one were to question the letters of Youdi's message and the words they have formed, the message could also be calling out for Moran's son whose name is also Jacques Moran. The very automaticity of Gaber's response makes a response impossible. Gaber's cold repetition of the same information falls flat on Moran's plead. In fact, if anything, the slightly truncated line (for the second time he does not say "Moran, Jacques" but simply "Moran") diminishes the effect of recognition.

Though Gaber is said to be looking at Moran "laboriously from head to foot" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157) before he underperforms Youdi's line for the second time, Moran is not convinced by this response, and asks for the third time:

> Do you recognize me? I cried. Do I recognize you? he said. He reflected. I knew what he was doing, he was searching for the phrase most apt to wound me. Ah Moran, he said, what a man! I was staggering with weakness. If I had dropped dead at his feet he would have said, Ah poor old Moran, that's him all over. It was getting darker and darker. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157–58)

This time, Gaber's exclamation, "What a man!" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157) feels utterly out of place considering Moran's pitiful state (as he was becoming less like one), and also very generic. Moran imagines that Gaber's recognition of him and the state he is in would only come when it is no longer possible or truly relevant, when he is dead and thus no longer himself: "If I had dropped dead at his feet he would have said, Ah poor old Moran, that's him all over. /*Je serais décédé à ses pieds qu'il aurait dit, Ah ce vieux Moran, toujours le même*" (Beckett, *Molloy* 244; Beckett, *Three Novels* 157–58). Both versions have ambiguous

meanings that fill the scene with dark humour. Indeed, we are told "it was getting darker and darker" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157–58).

The French "*toujours le même*" (Beckett, *Molloy* 244) would deny Moran's death by equating it to his life. Here perhaps lies a certain "corpse fidelity to the letter" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 110) if one were to read Moran merely as a character, as a name without an inside or an insight. If one were to read like Gaber, not reflecting on content like "you and I, the book closed and probably the eyes too" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 101), then a word would be a word, and a body would be a body – their inner life and its fluctuations would not matter. A word would be a still, a mere corpse with a fixed signified that offers itself to the reader exactly as it is, as it has always been. You read your word, and you know – no questions asked. Gaber's reading of Youdi's messages as well as their receiver, Moran, is a reading that is blind to *différance*, to any sort of hauntedness in the meaning of a word or in the identity that is linked to Moran's body. Yet, Moran tells us he is dealing with "great inward metamorphoses" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 157) as is his narrative.

The English "that's him all over" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 158) at once seems to recognize that this is Moran through and through while also playing with the idea of death – Moran is over, dead. The fallen corpse which Gaber would finally agree to read (the moment Moran's identity is compromised by his death) would be no longer seeking recognition in the eyes of his fellow, and indeed, it could be read with utter indifference to its former inner life filled with contradictions, complexities, and metamorphoses. As such, this corpse would be a perfect subject one could read with mastery, without the fear of being contradicted, and without doubts of being wrong – a mere body, a Cartesian animal, a corpse.

Conclusion

Moran's storyline offers quite an autopsy into the matter of responsibility in its manifold forms and associations, many of which can concern a single individual at once. As Moran is faced with being responsible to and for someone with more power, he nonetheless cannot escape his responsibility for those who seem to have no power over him.

As a novel that grew out of Beckett's experience of WW2 in France and his pre-war years in Germany, *Molloy* echoes a sense of responsibility that extends towards dehumanized humans, but also towards non-human animals. Even in the ranks of the Maquis, a rural guerrilla band of French Resistance fighters, an uncalled-for cruelty towards a lamb was more than Beckett could stomach. Knowlson writes: "One day, while with the Maquis, his hair literally

stood on end with horror as he watched his colleagues savagely clubbing a lamb to death" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 307). In another wartime episode, he was remembered, tall and lean as he was, leaping across the field to rescue a rat about to be slaughtered (Knowlson 307). That sensitivity towards suffering echoes in *Molloy*, and awakens the reader's sense of responsibility towards bees and hens.

One's sense of responsibility with respect to the most dissimilar beings, like hens or bees, is the beginning of ethics, according to Derrida.[89] By evoking such a sense of responsibility, quite undecipherable to a mere man like Moran, "exiled in his manhood" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 163) from such knowledge, Beckett undermines the idea of responsibility based on egocentric and anthropocentric mastery. An upward looking sense of responsibility only to and for the one with power (perhaps in the hope of moving up in the world) is shown to be destructive, as are certain methods of reading rooted in the naïve, unyielding fidelity to words and their power to transmit. Words or a text cannot take responsibility[90] for themselves and their after-effects, they can trigger responsibility, sustain it, hide it, reveal it in the mind of the reader, who is called upon to respond to the text, to reflect, "the book closed and probably the eyes too" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 101).

The correlation between "responsibility" and "response" will be further explored in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*.

[89] "A principle of ethics or more radically of justice, in the most difficult sense, which I have attempted to oppose to right, to distinguish from right, is perhaps the obligation that engages my responsibility with respect to the most dissimilar [*le plus dissemblable*, the least 'fellow'-like], the entirely other, precisely, the monstrously other, the unrecognizable other. The 'unrecognizable' [*méconnaissable*], I shall say in a somewhat elliptical way, is the beginning of ethics, of the Law, and not of the human. So long as there is reorganizability and fellow, ethics is dormant. It is sleeping a dogmatic slumber. So long as it remains human, among men, ethics remains dogmatic, narcissistic, and not yet thinking. Not even thinking the human that it talks so much about" (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 108).

[90] Another way of emphasizing that lack of responsibility would be for me to evoke a concatenation of word lovers and their unrequited care for words by quoting Sarah Wood quoting Jacques Derrida quoting Jean Genet saying, "the words don't give a fuck" (Wood 64).

2.6 Concatenation: Responsibility in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*

> Come April, you and I turn Eva loose on the world. Restraint ended, further control impossible. At large, with not an idea. That fabulous wealth – she, who has never owned anything but a Jaguar! At liberty. When one thinks, you know, it's unthinkable! Rack and ruin – " (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 36)

Elizabeth Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout or Changing Scenes* (1968), "doomed to crash in the fast line of postmodernism" according to some critics (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 203),[91] is not only a risky piece of writing, but also a writing about risk. In mathematics, "risk" is the chance of harm or loss, to be calculated in order to make the unavoidable voidable. To Eva Trout, the eponymous protagonist of the novel and the heiress of a colossal fortune, such calculations of risk even in the most general sense, including all sorts of reflection about potential harm, do not seem to occur. To other characters, Eva appears unthinking. Her twenty-fifth birthday is feared by both her former teacher, Iseult Arble (formerly, Smith), and her absentee guardian, Constantine, who contemplate the risk of Eva's financial freedom which might end in "rack and ruin" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 36). Indeed, trouble seems to follow Eva's each move. She breaks up the Arbles' marriage by insinuating she is expecting a child of her former teacher's husband, Mr Arble. She then purchases a child on the black market, presumably causing irreparable damage to people involved in the child's life, but also to the child who, by accident or not, shoots Eva dead at the end of the novel.

"Ethically perhaps you're a Typhoid Mary" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 197), Henry tells her, referring to an Irish-American cook who infected multiple families with typhoid fever even after multiple explanations and instructions had been given to her about her medical condition. He also ties Eva to one of Robert Browning's literary characters, Pippa from *Pippa Passes* (1841), as her opposite:

> '(…) you leave few lives unscathed. Or at least, unchanged. You don't know a rather long poem called Pippa Passes? (…) This girl only had to pass by (though as a matter of fact, she did more than that, she sang away at some length under people's windows) to leave behind the most dynamic results. In a way you're a sort of Pippa – though in reverse.'
> 'I don't sing,' said Eva mistrustfully.

[91] Walter Sullivan's article, for instance, categorizes Bowen's work, and *Eva Trout* in it, in the following manner:

> At the end of her career Elizabeth Bowen's work was in a state of decline. Like a baseball pitcher who starts aiming for the plate, Miss Bowen in her closing years was trying to achieve by main force the drama and ambiguity and profundity that accrued naturally to her work in her finest days. *A World of Love* was a shadow, an anemic imitation of the best of her novels, and *The Little Girls* and *Eva Trout* were tours de force which did not succeed. (Sullivan 142)

> 'No; and you don't have an improving effect. Pippa diverted people from lust and villainy, and exactly one or the other of those two things, or both sometimes, do rather seem to spring up where you set foot.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 196–97)

However, Henry also points out Eva's lack of intention to cause harm, for unlike Pippa who "marked people down in advance" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 196), Eva is said to be artless (196) and somewhat unaware of her own effect on people. As Henry concludes: "[She rolls] round like some blind indefectible planet. *Sauve qui peut* those who are in [her] course" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 196).

Maud Ellmann also underlines the "chanciness of *Eva Trout*" (212) and the lack of premeditation behind Eva's actions: "[…] the trouble leaks from her, like fall-out from an atomic bomb" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 212). In Ellmann's words, "Bowen is devising a new kind of novel for an age in which intention is irrelevant, an age in which the world can be destroyed by an accident. In these circumstances the novel can no longer rely on plot and character, for both imply a logic of cause-and-effect in which events proceed according to intelligible laws to a predictable conclusion" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 212). Yet, a certain chain reaction is brought to the fore on the final pages of the novel, where Constantine pronounces the word "concatenation," which is otherwise missing from *Eva Trout*'s and Eva Trout's vocabulary. Eva's final question: "What is concatenation?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301) is left in the air, as the corpse of the heroine, pierced by a bullet, hits the ground.

As readers, we are left with no clear explanations regarding that fatal shot. We are only given a keyword – concatenation. In Constantine's speech to the bridal pair, Eva and Henry, the word "concatenation" is made to refer to randomness, chanciness, and therefore linked to the non-agency of a human character, which is, in its turn, challenged by the overall economy of the novel – the plot that reveals a certain inescapable correlation between a character and the concatenation of circumstances they find themselves in. That correlation is furthermore complicated by certain inabilities of the agent, namely, Eva's inability to read and respond to texts as well as people around her. I will argue that in *Eva Trout*, Bowen explores irresponsibility and its consequences through the characters' failures to read and respond responsibly to each other. The characters' attempts at avoiding each other will be explored in correlation with their reluctance of having to answer for oneself, that is, to give answers (in one's name) to others, but also to "answer for" in the sense of taking responsibility for one's choices.

Chance: the survival of the chanciest

The inability to read people and to respond to them, to answer for oneself, is evoked by Eva when she visits the National Portrait Gallery where she tries to decipher the notion of identity through art.[92] There she is faced with the impossibility of reading not only the pictures on the wall, but also the reactions and intentions of other characters:

> […] there is no hope of keeping a check on people; you cannot know what they do, or why they do it. Situations alter for no knowable reason – as though a game continued while you were away from the board or have left the table. See what had taken place during Eva's absence: lovers became indifferent to each other, enemies friends or at least confederates. One plot unravelled, another knitting. Realignments, out-of-character overtures, fresh fancies budding from hoary boughs. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216)

Eva's failure to read portraits in the gallery and the intentions of other characters is followed by her sudden inability to read the infrastructure of London: "[…] the car, trapped in tightening networks it did not recognize, began to convey to Eva its own first exasperation and then terror. So, *she* became trapped, in them and in it. She ran it into an alley that said NO ENTRY, stopped, snatched the keys out and made her escape. Though there was, actually, none" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 223).

The novel's full title, *Eva Trout Or Changing Scenes*, seems to hint at Eva's movements that trigger and vitalize the plot, yet those movements are always motivated by one desire – to escape. Though Eva escapes literally, to a house named Cathay, to the States, to France, from one hotel to the next; Eva's other mode of escape is making up stories: of her fictitious engagement to a mystery man and of her marriage to another, of sex she never had, of a pregnancy she never endured, and of a romantic false-honeymoon to come (with Henry). These stories all have consequences, but the consequences cannot be read by Eva, to whom "situations alter for no knowable reason" and one cannot know what others do, or why they do it (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216). So, she tries to escape the situations she finds herself in.

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[92] Eva is shown trying to read identities after her son had been kidnapped by Iseult. She receives a phone call from Iseult Arble with whom she has lost touch over her suggestive comments regarding Iseult's husband, years ago, that resulted in a separation. From this call, Eva gets "an impression of dissolution" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213) which ignites the necessity in Eva to define the notion of identity: "Anyhow, what a slippery fish is identity; and what *is* it, besides a slippery fish?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213).

This sudden need to read identity seems to stem from the necessity to read Iseult, and to figure out how to cope with Iseult's unexpected intervention in the life that she has fabricated for herself. Throughout the novel, the reader has been shown that Eva has trouble reading the people around her, but also reading stories. For instance, we are told that "during the hours when he [Jeremy, Eva's son] was at the Bonnards', she pored over French novels, unselectively bought by her, the better to acquaint herself with the language to be his first. Their vocabulary she was able to master, but not their content" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 239).

This survival-escape mode, fuelled (often quite literally, for Eva is shown to be in an airplane and driving off in her Jaguar) by Eva's massive fortune, finds its conclusion in Constantine's final speech, all built up on the idea of fortuity:

> The future, as we know, will resemble the past in being the result, largely, of a concatenation of circumstances. Many of our best moments, as well as our worst, are fortuitus. (Let's hope that only the best moments await this bridal pair.) I do not say there is no method of human madness. Our affections could not, I suppose, survive – as they do – were they entirely divorced from reason, though the tie is often rather tenuous one. Well, bless you, Eva; and bless you, Henry! I regret the wholly secular nature of this occasion, but father Clavering-Haight could not be with us. Let this sunshine we stand in be a good omen! Things may break well for you; that has been known to happen. Er – life stretches ahead. May a favourable concatenation of circumstances… No, here I become a trifle tied up, I think. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301)

As Constantine tries to make a speech about the ups and downs of life, without the help of his lover,[93] father Clavering-Haight, who is a better wordsmith, Constantine's line of thought becomes "a trifle tied up" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301). His effort to concatenate (from Latin *concatenare*, *concatenatum*, from *con-* "together" + *catenare* "to chain," *Chambers*) reason, love, and chance into a good-bye speech results in a strange suggestion that rational thinking applies to the matters of the heart: "Our affections could not, I suppose, survive – as they do – were they entirely divorced from reason" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301), whereas the best and worst moments of life are fortuitous. The bizarre concatenation of circumstances, void of correlations between agency and circumstance, is haunted by another concatenation left to be acted out in the reader's imagination and triggered by the language Bowen uses to describe the scene. As often in Bowen's fiction, language feels haunted – a glimpse of something else is given to the mind's eye, the reader's imagination. Here, Bowen creates an imagery of cutting and tying up, disintegration and integration.

The imagery of cutting begins with Eva's "extraordinary tears" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 300), homonymous with the verb "tear," meaning "to pull or rip something apart by force" (*Chambers*). Her rare tears are torn up in that sense – "not a torrent from the eyes, but one, two, three, four tears, hesitating surprised to be where it was, then wandering down" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 299). Henry's own separation from his family's opinion in the light of his decision to

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[93] This relationship is brilliantly shown through a wordplay as Jeremy's drink, called the Orange *Crush*, which is served right before Constantine says that his new friend is a young Anglican priest:

> 'The fact is, Eva, my, er, angle on many things has been a good deal altered. My, er, values have been reorganised, since I last saw you. The result of a friendship.'
> 'Oh.'
> The Orange Crush came, Jeremy sank his nose in it.
> "Yes. Tony," expatiated Constantine, with evident inner pleasure in the sound of the syllables, "is Tony Clavering-Haight, a young East-End priest. Anglican, naturally." (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 190)

truly attach himself to Eva, to take off with her, is communicated in the following imagery. He says he has "burned [*his*] boats" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 300), evoking the imagery of dissolution of ties to elsewhere, and wishes they had a compartment of [their] own" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 300) – cut off from other travellers. Jeremy's play is expressed by Mrs Caliber as "cutting capers" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301) while Constantine suggests Eva and Henry "had better cut the adieux short" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301) before he makes "parting remarks" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301) speculating that "things may break well" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301); and, finally, Constantine becomes "a trifle tied up" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301). This double imagery of disintegration and integration becomes the verge of the novel where the word "concatenation" is made visible to the reader as well as taken away. Since no further explanations are given, one can, from here on, only reflect. That is, look back and think.

My first reflection is concerned with the mere chanciness of Constantine's speech that contradicts Bowen's comment to her cousin Audrey, that Eva "had it coming to her" (Glendinning 257), which implies a sense of correlation between Eva's circumstances and Eva herself. A businessman, Constantine tries to summarize life as a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, a chain of good or bad luck. This utter negation of responsibility for a correlation (a cause-and-effect logic) is challenged by the last, and the most shocking, event of the novel: Eva being shot by her son. This shot, by a child reared on American cinema, in "a visual universe" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 207) that Eva had created for the two of them in the New World, appears ambiguous. Even in the visual world of movies, the plot dominates. Causes and their effects are as readable on the screen as they would be in a text. Can Jeremy's shot be just a random concatenation of events, a mere unthinking bad luck?

Eva's last words, "What is 'concatenation'?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301), are also left for the reader to ponder. Yet we know that Eva did not leave life to chance: she made up many events of her life that then gave rise to the circumstances she, and those in contact with her, found themselves in. Her fictions constructed others' realities, as they did her own. The character whose life was perhaps affected the most is her stolen (adopted from a black market) son. Motherhood is something Eva bought and decides to give up as soon as Jeremy starts acquiring language and begins disconnecting himself from the bubble world Eva had created for the two of them. Though Eva is shown to be using those fictive (eventually acted-out) scenarios, for her own escape out of the complexities and demands she cannot respond to otherwise, planning to abandon Jeremy to the care of the Bonnards, might be the cruellest, the nearly-unthinkable act, for a child. The idea of such abandonment taps into our own worst childhood fears, and is also echoed earlier in the novel through Eva's roommate at the strange

school made up of children "bribed into coming [there] by distracted parents" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 46). The eleven-year-old Elsinore, "a fairy-like little near-albino" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 49), is said to write and rewrite the same long letter "denouncing her mother, deriding her step-father, and praising love" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 49), before she is caught trying to commit suicide. Eva, as a child herself, does make a connection between Elsinore's behaviour and its cause, for when a school employee refers to the unconscious Elsinore as "this unhealthy child, who also was trying to go to bed with a Japanese boy" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 53), Eva says: "She wants her mother, I think" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 53). Nobody hears her, for she too is one of the abandoned children of distracted parents, kept in the mock-castle.

The pattern of abandonment and its profound effects are thus developed from the beginning and are subtly revisited in the final scene that is not only the scene of (mock) union between Eva and Henry, but also the scene of abandonment[94] – as the reader knows, Jeremy will be left with the Bonnards, perhaps for good. Is it then truly unfathomable that a child could replicate an unthinkable act with another?

In *Eva Trout*, as Victoria Glendinning sees it, "there is no longer a cracked crust over the surface of life. People say and do extreme things" (Glendinning 257). Sensitivity is replaced with what I could only think of describing as a survival mode. The most evident survival mode is Eva Trout's that consists in escaping having to answer for herself and answer to the stories about her. As Eva tells Mr Bonnard, a doctor charged with working on Jeremy, Eva's son: "I continue going away, but I am awaited" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 249).

There is a striking scene at Cathay, a house Eva secretly bought to escape Constantine's and Iseult's influence, which combines the desire to escape with a certain insensibility of her own emotions. Iseult's husband, Eric, sent over by his wife, and kept over by Eva, is witnessed by Constantine who has had yet another row with Eva because she accuses him of things she

[94] Earlier Eva tells Mrs Bonnard that Jeremy must go back with her to France. While Mrs Bonnard explains to Eva that such a course of action might inflict a great blow and undo the entire good of Jeremy's visit to see Eva, she responds: "This *is*, as you say, a 'visit'. As I can now see clearly, for me and Jeremy there will be in the future nothing but these; and *they*, Madame Bonnard, will well content him. So, I think he should see *I* see he is free of me; and what better way than this to show him?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 288). This declaration shows Eva's intention to abandon her parenthood by reducing it to mere visitations, but it also draws the reader's attention to the visual communication Eva and Jeremy have established. Bennett and Royle underline that the boy is presented as a "a telepathic reader, an intrusive or transgressive reader not only of lips, but of minds" (Bennett and Royle 143). The harm is not inflicted through words, but instead through actions and through acting one's message out. This is relevant because Jeremy is seen to be acting, running "like a boy on the screen" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 301) towards Eva. A moment before the fatal shot, he is shown to be putting a show up for the audience: "The boy executed a pirouette. Everybody laughed. He drew in the firearm, looking about with a certain air of design. A child's ballet enactment of a *crime passionnel*? Or a boy model, advertising something: 'Little Lord XXX will shoot up the train, if he isn't given – ?'"(Bowen, *Eva Trout* 299).

remembers from the past (that Constantine accredits to her madness and lack of intelligence). Eva's reaction to this heated situation is utter numbness:

> Going over to Eva, he [Eric] struck her, with titanic joviality, on the shoulder, a blow that could have felled an ox. 'So long! Take care of yourself! It's been nice seeing you! He got himself from the room.
>
> Constantine followed – having intoned: 'Then, April?'
>
> Both were gone – as unforeseeably, barbarously, as they'd both come. Not a trace left but for damage to Eva's frame, and, still there on its table, the wrapped bottle. *She* now yawned: so dismissive a yawn that it distended her rib-cage to cracking point, just not dislocating her jaw by the grace of heaven. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 114)

The violence of the scene is outstanding, though the language all parties use is perfectly polite. Eric, having realized how his napping at Eva's house after a long drive could be portrayed, is subtly violent – already reacting to the plot to come, for Eva will insinuate that Eric is the father of her son (although a sexual intercourse never happened). Eva herself seems completely numb to Eric's reaction and Constantine's provocations. Feeling, if there is any, has gone underground, and may be only reflected in the violence of her disfiguring yawn. That dismissive yawn, fending off an emotional reaction, is accompanied by another action: she double-locks the door, concluding that "a barricade should have been added, had that been possible" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 114).

Though Eva's numbness is often underlined, other characters are also shown to build barricades against feeling. For instance, Iseult comments that Constantine could be imagined shedding "now and then a crocodile tear" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 95) only. The inability to feel is also expressed by Iseult herself. After her divorce from Eric, she returns to their former home to see if she "*could* feel," concluding, "I can't, I'm cleared. I'm as dead as a doornail" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 235).

Henry, Eva's second pretend fiancé, lashes out against having to feel, as Eva asks him if he could ever love her. He escapes Eva's advances, by denouncing all feeling:

> 'I wonder,' said he, 'whether, in spite of all I was telling you this morning, you *can* conceive what a state I am in and how chaotic it is. *Feel*? – I refuse to; that would be the last straw! There's too much of everything, yet nothing. Is it the world, or what? Everything's hanging over one. The expectations one's bound to disappoint. The dread of misfiring. The knowing there's something one can't stave off. The Bomb is the least. Look what's got to happen to us if we do live, look at the results! Living is brutalising: just look at everybody! We shan't simply toughen, Eva, we shall grossen. We shall be rotten by compromises. We shall laugh belly-laughs.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 262)

Henry's boycott of feeling in an era where the end of the world seems near is a response to the pressures that have become too much to handle: "Everything's hanging over one" (Bowen, *Eva*

Trout 262). Written during the Cold War, after the significant Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, Bowen's *Eva Trout* incorporates all the most unthinkable risks of modern technology paired with expectations of how one ought to live, despite the fact that life has become fragile. Henry is aware of various socio-economic aspirations for someone like Eva. He says: "You ought to make a tremendous marriage. A dynastic one" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 261), for he knows what is expected of someone with such "horrible money" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 261).[95] He points it out to Eva that their marriage would look absurd because of his youth and Eva's money. As Philip Lassner writes, Bowen's female characters' "passion for selfhood seems constrained and constructed by a traditional plot which resists social and literary reform" (Lassner 157). The passion for selfhood is also constrained for Henry who, in terms of his youth and the lack of socio-economic power, could be perceived as not "man enough" for Eva. The belly-laughs would be directed at him too.

Another compromise that makes one feel quite wretched, involves a literal survival, that of Eva's roommate, Elsinor, who tries to walk into a lake and is saved. The boy who pulls Elsinore out of the water describes the incident not as a moral choice, but as a reflex:

> 'She knew what she was doing, but did I? A reflex. It was disgusting. What fundamentally am I, a Boy Scout? (…) Look what I've possibly done to her – she *may* live, you know! Look what she's done to me, though; jumping me into this. *Her* decision was rational, tiresome little thing. Look at her, Ophelia's illegit.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 54)

The boy's feeling of injustice comes from his impression of being almost hijacked by Elsinore's decision, "jumping him" (54) into this situation. His responsibility for Elsinore is not represented as a moral decision to take care of the other, founded on some fundamental or personal rule of ethics, but rather as a bodily intervention.

That is exactly the kind of empathy Frans de Waal evokes when he observes various reactions to similar crisis situations across a large variety of mammals (humans included) who jump into action, even if that means risking or losing their own lives. De Waal explains this behaviour through the notion of empathy which he understands as a more universal, immediate, and neutral experience than sympathy that has been linked to moral calculations (notably by Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*). Empathy, as he sees it, is the ability to translate someone else's experience into a personal experience of a certain emotion, like

[95] After all, that seems to be the life she was prepared for, given that her father had not worried much about her education. After the experiment to set up a mixed-school had failed, it was Eva who, two years later, asked for more education (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 55).

distress, for instance (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 152).[96] De Waal writes that most immediate rushes to the rescue, such as the one imagined by Bowen here, are a reaction to stress signals, such as the prototypical reaction of mammalians towards their offspring in danger, but this reaction extends towards other species as well, that is, it is not proper to a certain human ethics (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 146).

This kind of "unthinking" ethical act – to reach out for another person, to save a life, where one does not feel they were given a chance to truly decide, evokes a negative reaction in the saviour in *Eva Trout*: "A reflex. It was disgusting. What fundamentally am I, a Boy Scout?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 54). Yet it also makes one question what else is going on in the process of thinking for the other in a situation where one has to be responsible for the other first and then think this responsibility later. As the boy says, quite shockingly, "Look what I've possibly done to her – she *may* live, you know!" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 54), insinuating that this rescue might be against Elsinore's will, in which case it might not have been an unambiguously good deed after all.

De Waal argues that the pleasure of the company of others and their wellbeing is not a result of a moral code, but proper to our biological aspect (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 146). Thus, our responsibility for others might be something far more complex than a calculated moral choice, something to be taught and learned. It might already be linked to an emotional contagion, a concatenation that precedes language (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 160–63) and connects one to others. The kind of responsibility that manifests itself in a situation such as the boy's where he saves Elsinore, is directly linked to responsiveness. However, while this responsiveness is shown to be biological, it is far from being a simple automatism, a reflex – as de Waal argues, otherwise people and other animals would be mindlessly exterminating themselves by not being able to adapt themselves to what is happening in their immediate environment. According to de Waal, a reading that allows such responsiveness is only possible through emotions. Emotions are "intelligent instincts" (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 258) that

[96] As such, empathy does not necessarily have a positive connotation like sympathy, for the ability to experience (via emotional contagion) someone else's emotional reaction can be also used to take advantage of the other (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 135). Empathy is also more immediate than sympathy. It can push an individual into an immediate response – as was tested, on rats, by Inbal Ben-Ami Bartal at the University of Chicago (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 152). She separated rats, allowing one to perceive the distress of the other who was trapped in a transparent enclosure. The rat who was free was given a choice between liberating his/her companion or getting his/her favourite food. The rats chose to set their fellows free. However, their emotional contagion that had "jumped them" into action was truly proved when the rats were given anxiolytics (anti-anxiety medication) – after which they chose food and were no longer affected by their trapped companions (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 152–54).

play an important part in decision making in a constantly changing environment; they prepare the organism for an appropriate response (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 113). Therefore, emotions are what, to a great extent, help to determine a responsible response.

Thus, it is not insignificant that Eva's apparent lack of feeling seems to surpass the other characters' insensibility. On several occasions we are told that Eva is unable to weep. Eva's inability to express emotion makes her appear closed-off, unreadable, to other characters.

Choice

To others, Eva appears inhumane, almost non-human. It is revealed in a striking way through a bust created by Jeremy, Eva's deaf-mute son:

> This was the first view of it; she had not sat to him. It was a large knob, barely representational – only he had gouged with his two thumbs deep, deep into the slimed clay, making eye sockets go, almost, right through the cranium. Out of their dark had exuded such non-humanity that Eva had not known where to turn. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 209)

Céline Magot interprets this artwork as a revelation of Eva's "true nature – which is her 'non-humanity'" (Magot, para.8), comparing the bust to "the revelation of Dorian Gray's abhorrent soul" (Magot, para.8). She writes: "Eva is indeed a monster, 'the monstrous heiress,' a moral and social monster in the sense that she is a misfit whose behaviour causes not only incomprehension but also disaster around her. Jeremy thus shows what should not be shown – the loathsome face of the monster" (Magot, para.8). This is not quite the view I share, for as I read, I feel I am also made aware of Eva's vulnerability and struggle to cope with the world for which she has always already been too odd. As I read, my heart goes out to Eva.

She is said to be "big-framed" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 119) and "left unfinished" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 47). When she was young, other children asked her: "Trout, are you a hermaphrodite?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 48). We are later told: "'Girl' never fitted Eva. Her so-called sex bored and mortified her; she dragged it about her like a ball-and-chain" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 271). Eva, one is shown, cannot fit in anywhere. When Constantine (who himself lives as a gay man) suggests Eva should find a father to Jeremy, in order to give purpose to her life (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 188), Eva turns down this nearly Biblical ideology of her own incompleteness as a person with: "Again you are trying to frighten me. I should have stayed in America" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 188). She who carries, in her name, the legacy of incompleteness and a certain "natural" pull towards evil as the "true" nature of all women, is constantly confronted with the constrictions of this ancient fiction – the Bible. It seems that some of her

own fictions have been created to offer other characters an alternative version, so that life, as one *can* live it, can be sustained. After all, fiancés, adultery, and bastard children are only to be expected of a devilish lass. Literature knows this character all too well.

The expectations for Eva to fail at being a woman prey on her. Doctor Bonnard tells Eva: "The way one is envisaged by other people – what easier way is there of envisaging oneself?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 248). He explains to Eva that one is "so much made by" (248) others' opinions: "It is so hard not to comply with it, not to fall in with it – not to be overcome by it in the very battle one has against it" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 248). The last line is interesting, because what Doctor Bonnard suggests is what has happened to Eva: her fictions that, I argue, have been created to avoid having to respond to the others' expectations have also become her reality, demanding more fictions to escape the reality she has created. As Victoria Glendinning points out: "There is one major conceptual shift in *Eva Trout*, and that is that instead of responding and reacting to situations, as most Elizabeth's heroines do, Eva creates the situations herself" (Glendinning 257). She is trapped in an endless concatenation where she is not only trying to escape the situation she is in, but also, to some extent, causes the circumstances she is desperately trying to escape. Constantine's suggestion that life can be explained through a concatenation of circumstances as fortuitous events is undermined by the statement Doctor Bonnard makes to Eva, saying: "Choice – choice of those who are to surround one, choice of the most likely to see it rightly – is the only escape" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 248). Choice and not chance, he tells Eva, is the only escape out of circumstances that one finds oneself in.

The other element Doctor Bonnard puts forward to Eva is the suggestion that not every character's reading of Eva, transmitted to the reader, is a responsible reading. The danger of being misread, and of misreading, echoes here also for the reader who has seen Eva through the eyes and the talk of other characters, making me question the reliability of their gaze – for, as Bowen insinuates here through Doctor Bonnard, it is never a pure gaze. Bowen's characters are fallible.

Eva is said to be "tacitly hysterical" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 40), unthinking,[97] unstable, and out of control.[98] Her intelligence and sanity are always under attack. We are told that "high

[97] "Is she thinking? Mrs. Dancey thought not. Monolithic, Eva's attitude was. It was not, somehow, the attitude of a thinking person" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 4–5).

[98] The irregularity of Eva's behaviour is communicated to Eva by Constantine, to whom echoes of how Eva had been perceived by an agent who sold her a house reached through Iseult:

> 'He [the agent] disclosed, under pressure from Mrs. Arble, that a violent outbreak had caused him to flee the premises, into which you then barricaded yourself, as violently; that a messenger subsequently sent out by him with a kettle had turned tail, leaving the kettle to its fate, on being grimaced at 'hideously'

scholastic standards not only did not alarm her, she was fervently for them – latitude being allowed her on the grounds of her being partly foreign (this no one queried) and partly handicapped: in what particular or for what reason she was to be taken to be the latter was not gone into" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 61). Eva's handicap, or as Valerie O'Brien reads it – cognitive atypicality (O'Brien 75), is also shown to have the power to make others feel insecure in their own way of living and thinking. That is perhaps best shown in the case of two intellectual figures: Iseult Smith/Arble, her former teacher, and Professor Holman, a Descartes scholar Eva meets on her flight to the States. The latter writes a letter to her, reflecting on the chances of this meeting (both mathematical and divine) and of his letter ever reaching her in a hotel. All fortuity of this letter ever reaching her is killed off by Eva herself who calls the hotel, cancelling her reservation.

Eva's impression on the professor is not that of an unthinking person. He writes: "Your eyes – Mrs. Trout, it is true to say – rested upon me when I returned the apple. I felt contemplated. Your gaze gives size to what is contained within it: I was" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 133). The truncated: "I was" echoing the "I think, therefore I am," is linked to the *feeling* of being contemplated. Being no longer feels like a logical deduction by a thinking subject, but is linked to a feeling of being read by another, without words. This Cartesian nightmare, one's *being* being enmeshed within a nonverbal feeling – defined by another subject, is brought on by none other than Eva who has the non-verbal power to make the Cartesian professor feel at odds with Descartes.

Another similar occasion is narrated by Eva herself when she explains to Father Clavering-Haight her perspective on what went wrong between her former teacher Iseult and herself. She says:

> 'First I was glad to be in their house [Iseult's and Eric's house where she stayed for a while] – I even looked on it as a home. As you know, I had Constantine put me there. Only then I saw that she hated me, hated the work she had feared to finish. And I WAS that work, who had hoped so much – how should I not hate her? She saw. Twice over, she could not abide me there. I became a witness. How she had cast away everything, *she had seen me see*.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 204, emphasis mine)

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from a window, and that no further sort or kind of communication has been had from you since; though sallies into Broadstairs, in incomplete control of a powerful bicycle, have been reported. Not the least of this unfortunate agent's fears are, that you may blow Cathay up by tampering with, er, intricate gas appliances, or burn the place down—he scented pyromania in your excitability when he struck matches. Nor, Mrs. Arble inferred from a less-than-hint, was that the only mania he scented.—One does not know,' Constantine said distastefully. 'In short, his impression was…instability.' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 105–06)

What Eva refers to by "she [Iseult] had cast away everything" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 204) is that Iseult had given up her academic career, as well as teaching Eva, in order to marry Eric. By so doing, Iseult fails Eva as a teacher, but also as a role model. Eva's observation – "she [Iseult] had seen [Eva] see" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 204), not only goes to prove that Eva is not as unthinking as she is made out to be by Constantine and Iseult, but also betrays a profound unease about Iseult's choice.[99]

Eva does not appear to me as a pure monster, but a monster in the sense Timothy Morton gives it: "A monster is something *seen* by someone (from the Latin *monstrare*, meaning to show). Monstrosity is in the eye of the beholder" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 65–66). Her "monstrosity" or atypicality also becomes a strange mirror to others that reflects their own inconsistencies, oddities, and choices. What could be considered Eva's "monstrosity" also forces me, as a reader, to think what makes typicality typical, and also, what links this typicality to the idea of responsibility in the novel, and conversely, what links Eva's atypicality to irresponsibility in the eyes of other characters.

Unable to talk and be understood

The etymological origins of the word "responsible" indicate a relation to the obsolete French *responsible*, from Latin *respōns-*, past-participle stem of *respondēre*, meaning "respond, answer to" (*OED*). Thus, being responsible already presents itself as an exchange of a sort.[100] If being responsible involves a correspondence or the ability to respond to the needs of another being, irresponsibility cannot be reduced to mere recklessness only, but could also be explored as a certain kind of illiteracy in Eva's case. I will show how Eva's failure

[99] Iseult's choice to marry Eric instead of pursuing an academic career refers not only to Eva's inability therefore to have Iseult for herself, but also echoes her own yearning for what Iseult is "throwing away": a life of an intellectual, an education. Eva, who has this voracious desire to learn, but limited ways of doing that, harbours a profound sadness for being kept from this opportunity, first by her father's inconsideration in that regard, but also by her own peculiarities. Her yearning for these opportunities could be read from her trip to see Henry at Cambridge:

> Now, like an executioner, he [Henry] would be consigning her to the train. Then, turning back again into his world of learning, emptying her of hope. Here in this Cambridge taxi, haunted by May Week lovers but more by the many intellects it had carried, Eva was set upon by the swamping, isolating misery of the savage. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 199)

Eva, *la bête*, here stands only on the threshold so many intellectuals had crossed, unable to do the same.

[100] Derrida also thinks responsibility in terms of a correspondence that makes responsibility undeniable and impossible at once: "Before answering, responding for oneself, and *for* that purpose, in order to do so, one must respond, answer to the other, about the other, *for* the other, not in his place as if in the place of another 'proper self,' but *for* him" (Derrida, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" 137).

to react and respond to typical linguistic structures and to the meanings they produce, makes others perceive her as irresponsible.

There is something machine-like about her use of language that does not detect nuance, and thus, fails to respond to others. Bowen writes:

> The five co-existors with Eva in the white dormitory did what they could to put her into the picture. Guidance was offered, in sentences beginning, "I shouldn't—" or "I don't think if I were you—". Having done their utmost, they then went on as though (which they would have preferred) she were not there: not by them, for that reason, was it brought home to Eva, the monstrous heiress, that she was unable to speak—talk, be understood, converse. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 62)

The others' perception of Eva is shown to be constantly affected by Eva's insensitivity towards words and multiple concatenations in which they are usually made to dwell. Eva's classmates detect and employ the necessary nuances ("'I shouldn't' or 'if I were you,'" 62) in their language, knowing that these can make or break friendships, by differentiating more authoritative orders from kinder manners of mastery: suggestions. The reaction of Eva's peers to her insensitivity to those nuances shows that communication largely depends on such sensitivity. Emotions exist outside of language (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 160), as de Waal argues; however, through Eva, Bowen seems to explore the dependence of language use on sensitivity.

Eva's language and reactions often seem to misfire. Since Eva cannot react to the subtleties of those regular concatenations, she is unable to respond to the requests, queries, and needs of her peers. Iseult, the first teacher who has ever taken an interest in Eva, points out Eva's insensitivity to regular syntactic and semantic relations (that is, concatenations), through the example of her use of "however" in the following sentence: "I am very heavy, however" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 64). Eva's "however" offers the promise of a follow-up and denies it at the same time, thereby constructing a false passage. In visual terms, this mock-conjunction recalls the false doors seen in the castle bought by Eva's father and made into a school that quickly became a dead end. Is that her own way of translating her past environment, its strange architecture, into the hopeless syntax of her sentence? The context of her sentence, preceded by a suggestion that Iseult is dragging her out from the bottom of a lake, connects Eva metaphorically to Elsinore's drowning at Eva's first school – where Iseult was not. Iseult does not know the castle and Eva's personal experience that here seems to construct her syntax. Iseult knows the proper (meaning grammatically correct) ways of using "however." Thus, she responds: "Oh, it's pompous, it's unnatural-sounding, it's wooden, it's deadly, it's hopeless, it's shutting-off – the way *you* use it! It's misbegotten!" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 64).

The word "misbegotten" refers to illegitimacy and used to be employed to talk about children born out of a normative socio-cultural framework. Eva's bastard "however" is born in contradiction with the established patterns (syntax) in which the common usage occurs. The "however," added to the margin of Eva's sentence ("I am very heavy, however," 64), stands out in this environment in an irritating way, because it ignores and threatens the habitual patterns of speech that Iseult has taken upon herself to teach Eva. Yet, those patterns do not seem to rub off on the student.

Iseult defines thinking as concatenation. She tells Eva her thoughts do not connect yet, suggesting: "try joining things together: this, then that, then the other. That's thinking; at least, that's beginning to think" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 61). Iseult's method, joining things together, is supposed to lead to a revelation of some sort, to finding something out or shedding light on something, or coming to a conclusion, "rightly or wrongly" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 120). Valerie O'Brien writes:

> Iseult's attitude toward thinking affirms the Cartesian *Cogito*, endorsing the idea that thought engenders being. Early in the novel, she muses, 'To think or not to think—?', revising Hamlet's famous query to privilege thinking over being. Along these lines, the novel implicitly connects Eva's seeming inability to think neurotypically to her perceived incompleteness as a person. (O'Brien 79)

Indeed, Eva tells father Clavering-Haight she had never been, but was beginning to be before Iseult "sent [her] back again – to be nothing" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 203) when she married Eric and abandoned her career as a teacher. Thinking, therefore, is shown to give access to the full dignity of being. However, Iseult's ideas on cognition are challenged by Eva when Iseult comes to visit her in Cathay, a house filled with all sorts of machines and gadgets:

> "My computer will be going into the dining-room."
> "Oh really, Eva, how *can* you need a computer!"
> "It thinks," said the girl, looking aggrieved. "That is what you used to tell me to do."
> "When," asked Iseult, mastering herself, "will it be arriving?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 125)

Eva's comment, made years after Iseult's attempts to correct Eva's "outlandish, cement-like conversational style" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 10) and her way of thinking, is all but innocent; it jars on Iseult's nerves, as it reduces Iseult's elaborate efforts to teach Eva how to think to machine-like automatisms. It is Iseult's thinking that now appears to be hollow, and not even properly human – something a computer could do.

Lying in the dark

Thinking is shown to be more complicated and far more uncanny than the simplified "try joining things together" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 61) in order to conclude – for things do not seem to stick together: contradictions arise, images dissolve. Such a disintegration tortures Eva Trout when she is ill, lying in bed. Then her thinking, as perhaps all thinking, inevitably, uncontrollably, moves towards disintegration – towards renewal, instability, loss; as well as towards integration. Bowen writes:

> Time, inside Eva's mind, lay about like various pieces of a fragmented picture. She remembered, that is to say, disjectedly. To reassemble the picture was impossible; too many of the pieces were lost, lacking. Yet, some of the pieces there were would group into patterns – patterns at least. Each pattern had a predominant colour; and each probably *had* meaning, though that she did not seek. Occupationally, this pattern-arriving-at was absorbing, as is a kindergarten game, and, like such a game, made sense in a way. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 42)

This mobile, fragmented, messy concatenation of patterns – thoughts, as they appear visually to Eva, allude to Bowen's own battle with language and expression. The sentence: "She remembered, that is to say, disjectedly" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 42) structurally acts out the knotted disintegration described in the passage. Yet this is not only symptomatic of Eva's thinking, but also an element of Bowen's style of writing which is incredibly sensitive to the common uses as well as the possibilities of abusing language. Ellmann writes:

> The resulting contortions have been criticized even by Bowen's admirers, and prompted Virginia Woolf to quip: 'I feel like you're somebody trying to throw a lasso with a knotted rope.' Frequently accused of imitating Henry James, whose syntax she admitted to finding infectious – 'like a rash' – Bowen achieves a knottedness distinct from his, a style that dramatises, in her own peculiar way, the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings. Her contemporary Samuel Beckett, also Anglo-Irish by descent, described the modern artist's plight as one of having 'nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, together with the obligation to express.' Bowen also seems to feel obligated to express the resistance of nothing to expression. Yet to express nothing is to coerce it into language, and Bowen's twisted sentences (like the stammer she developed in reaction to her father's breakdown) suggest a sense of guilt about the act of writing as a violation against the inarticulate. (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 11–12)

The inarticulate looms large, as Eva lies, half-ill, on her bed, in the dark. Iseult's idea of thinking as shedding light on a subject is reversed, visually, by Eva's lying in the dark – a sort of feverish submersion into a semi-subconscious disarray. Iseult tries to shed light on the mystery that is Eva Trout, rightly or wrongly, by attempting to write a book about her – some kind of psychological excavation.[101] However, this effort is met with failure, for Iseult admits

[101] This failure of a profound psychological reading, done from a purely intellectual perspective which seems to be Iseult's, also might recall Bowen's own experience with psychoanalysis. Ellmann writes: "Bowen's lover

to Constantine, Eva's former guardian, that the book "was born dead" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 253). Iseult's miserable book that never was, is another figure of the inarticulate. There is something about Eva's identity that cannot be made viable within the framework of a full ontological presence that Iseult seems to be looking for. Eva's question which sounds more like a statement: "You are dragging me up from the bottom of a lake, Miss Smith?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 64) preludes the kind of work Iseult as a writer is doing. Yet Eva's identity is never fully present. Instead, she is described as someone who "had been left unfinished" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 47), which is a trait that correlates with the very notion of identity that remains ungraspable in its totality – "a slippery fish" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 213) that cannot be dragged out of the lake. As Timothy Morton writes: "Our intimacy with other beings is full of ambiguity and darkness. Strange strangers flow and dissimulate. If we edit out the ambiguity and darkness, we achieve nothing but aggression" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 100).

Perhaps thinking simply cannot be dragged, comprehensively, into our language, the present, and under the microscope. Thinking appears to be ephemeral and unmasterable, and deeply enmeshed with emotions. As Sarah Wood writes:

> Thinking doesn't necessarily come across. It is not telepathic communication and it is not the direct experience of the presence of what preoccupies it. Thought's risky attempt to act upon or to reach a direct object directs attention to thought itself as a possible *failure to be*. In this sense the success of thinking is to keep missing what it aims at, not as one misses a target – once and for all – more in the way that one misses a person. This repetitious surprising thinking feeling – braver, more negative and more affirmative than nostalgia or mourning – drives Bowen's fiction. Fictional thinking would be the relation to *ananke* as the absence of a loved one. (Wood 42)

Thinking as a failure to be, to be missing (yearning for) someone or something is represented in the segment where Eva lies "abed with her heavy cold" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 42), in utter vulnerability, which evokes a feeling, and then a voice in the dark – a narrative voice. Bowen writes:

> The tide of the day turned, against it and her; down once again on her came the enormous sadness which had no origin that she knew of. She cowered away from it under tangled blankets.
> What are you doing, Eva, lying in the dark?
> Lying in the dark.
> Supposing somebody came in softly, saying, 'How is my darling?' (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 44)

Charles Ritchie reports in his diary of 1941 that Bowen was consulting a psychoanalyst about her lifelong stammer. 'So far it seems to me that she has told him nothing while he has told her the story of his life. This hardly surprises me,' Ritchie comments" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 4–5).

This feeling of sadness has no known origin to Eva. However, it is triggered by a shock she receives from the transistor radio that was "angrily ice-cold, colder than anger" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 44). Transistor radios have transistors: "active components of integrated circuits, or 'microchips,' which often contain billions of these minuscule devices etched into their shiny surfaces. Deeply embedded in almost everything electronic, transistors have become the nerve cells of the Information Age" (Riordan). The touch from this particular "nerve cell" of the Information Age, evokes the memory of a touch somewhere else, but where?

It is a memory of a "darling" – a very sick child (42), and a voice saying "How is my darling?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 42). Searching "through her store of broken pieces of time" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 42) Eva cannot remember who that was, coming through the door towards Elsinore who had withdrawn into coma (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 52). It is the narrative voice that then takes us to Eva's first school and her experience of Elsinore's illness. Her illness had created for Eva a strong sense of connection for that uncared for other, the complete opposite of the apparently insensitive Eva who, we are told, was not affected by other children (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 48):

> Though set in the middle of the castle, whose unreal noises could be heard, the place was as though levitated to a topmost turret. What made Eva visualize this as a marriage chamber? As its climate intensified, all grew tender. To repose a hand on the blanket covering Elsinore was to know in the palm of the hand a primitive tremor – imagining the beating of that other heart, she had a passionately solicitous sense of this other presence. Nothing forbad love. This deathly yet living stillness, together, of two beings, this unapartness, came to be the requital of all longing. An endless feeling of destiny filled the room. (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 54)

We have a glimpse of another side of Eva who, in the presence of utter vulnerability, that is, near death, is responding to such vulnerability in a place where sickness had not been envisaged (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 52). The cold touch she had received from the modern "nerve cell," the transistor, perhaps also recalls a strict ban from a Hungarian lady working in the castle. Eva had been told: "*You* must not touch her, Eva: you understand?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 53). Yet, it is by Eva's hand that Elsinore, years later, recognizes Eva who reacts in the following manner:

> All swam, curdled, thinned, thickened, was blotted out. Her jaw *had* weight, for she felt it drop. Silence roared in her ears; cold-hot-cold tightened her forehead. In exterior space, there was someone saying: 'She is not sick, is she?'
>
> *The tower room in the castle, the piteous breathing. The blinded window, the banished lake. The dayless and nightless watches, the tent of cobwebs. The hand on the blanket, the beseeching answering beating heart. The dark: the unseen distance, the known nearness. Love: the here and the now and the nothing-but. The step on the stairs. Don't take her away, DON'T take her away. She is all I am. We are all there is.*

> *Haven't you heard what's going to be? No. Not, but I know what was. A door opening, how is my darling? Right – then TAKE her away, take your dead bird. You wretch, you mother I never had.* (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 142)

The "cold-hot-cold" on her forehead now echoes the transistor's "gleam like a forehead's" and its "angrily ice-cold, colder than anger" (Bowen 44) touch that puts Eva in touch with her own, half-forgotten, feelings of anger, love, and sorrow. In these moments of unexpected vulnerability (sickness and a shocking chance meeting with Elsinore whom she had thought to be dead) Eva is made to enter an emotional contagion (from Latin *contāgiōn-em* a touching, contact, *OED*) with her past selves, and across from them, with others. This is not a mere matter of a returning feeling, but also a matter of thinking and remembering, or, as Morton suggests: "Thinking itself is touching and being touched, not a guarantee of full metaphysical presence, but a disorienting flicker that haunts me or pleasures me or hurts me, and so on" (Morton, *Humankind* 112). "The repetitious surprising thinking feeling" that, as Sarah Wood writes, "drives Bowen's fiction" (Wood 42) is also shown to master Eva. Quite literally, thoughts are depicted hitching a ride in Eva whenever she is caught off-guard: "Stopped at an intersection, she lost her armour, mindless speed – a waiting thought leaped on her" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 154). Losing that armor of insensitivity, becoming vulnerable, is what seems to allow thinking, and more importantly, thinking responsibility.

The unexpected reencounter with Elsinore that also revives the memory of caring for her (or rather more than simply caring: "*Love: the here and the now and the nothing-but*," 142) leaves Eva at the crossroads, literally and metaphorically, having to choose between turning back to ask for Elsinore's contact information, without which she would be unable to find her, and rushing back to the hotel, where a call awaits her, closing the deal with child snatchers who would be providing Jeremy. Meeting Elsinore in the city was a pure chance, a coincidence of circumstances, yet, at this crossroad, Eva is making a choice to go and retrieve Jeremy. There is a strange, a slightly twisted but not unfeeling, sense of responsibility in her decision that no longer seeks to escape only but extends towards an unknown other – Jeremy. She thinks: "I could miss him, I could lose him. I could fail him by never knowing [about the time and place of the exchange] so never coming" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 154). This answer to the Jeremy who is yet to become, to appear, is also an attempt to answer for, that is, take responsibility for the infant she has put into that situation in the first place: "I could fail him" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 154). A thought that leaped on her, much like her sudden, unexpected tears at the end of the

novel,[102] render readable the unknowing sorrow that constructs Eva's "armour" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 154), her insensitivity, but also holds the potential for thinking responsibility.

Conclusion

It is hard to see Eva as solely irresponsible, callous, and dumb, for the layered, fast-paced plot in which Bowen unravels her, bit by bit, gives off contradicting images. The concatenation of Eva's unexpected tears, preceded by Henry's announcement that he will be truly joining her and not only faking taking the train with Eva in order to get married abroad, can kill the "monster" in the eyes of the one who reads, but it does not defuse the concatenation of events that Eva's fictions have set up.

The utter negation of cause-and-effect logic in Constantine's speech that attempts to summarize life as a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, a chain of good or bad luck, is challenged by multiple possible causes and effects depicted in the novel. Eva's fictions (her lies) about Eric offend and humiliate Iseult who, as a revenge (a consequence of this offence) plants a real gun on Jeremy, leading up to the fatal shooting. Eva's virtual abandonment of Jeremy, as she reduces her parenthood to visitations only and uses this goodbye to act out the rupture, could be seen as a potential cause for pointing the gun at Eva, of killing or at least visually playing out the response to the harm being done. Eva's stories that trigger multiple effects, could be seen, in their turn, as a consequence of other characters' stories about Eva's monstrosity (that have created the necessity to lie for Eva) which are largely based on not only Eva's inability to deal with language, but also on others' inability to read her atypicality and its sources: her inability to process emotions.[103] The characters' numbness, and their inability to read their own emotions as well as those of others, results in a destructive chain of misunderstanding. Losing one's insensitivity, that is, becoming vulnerable, is shown as the

[102] Her feelings are rendered visible at the end of the novel when they are shown in a concatenation of tears: "Something took place: a bewildering, brilliant, blurring filling up, swimming and brimming over; then, not a torrent from the eyes but one, two, three, four tears, each hesitating, surprised to be where it was, then wandering down. The speediest splashed on to the diamond brooch. 'Look what is *happening* to me!' exulted Eva" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 299–300).

[103] Eva's predicament in some ways reflects Bowen's own brief time of "stupidity" that puzzled her teachers and classmates when she was thirteen. She writes in her autobiography: "Now the bright child gave place to the dunce girl. When every Monday morning, after school prayers, Miss English read out to the assembled school the form-orders of the preceding week, I came out bottom or bottom-but-one of mine. (…) One or two of the mistresses took against me, saying I sulked. My defection did me little harm with the girls, one of whom said, 'But you must be clever in *some* way'" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 292). She accredits her stupidity to denied sorrow after her mother's passing.

beginning of the ability to think a responsible response, for it opens the door for reading correlations in a concatenation that is language.

Eva's exceptional tears coincide with an imagery of cutting that echoes earlier images of dissolution of Eva's thoughts. Thinking becomes no longer the matter of simple picking and joining things together; it is also profoundly constituted by sensitivity and the forces of dissolution. The force of dissolution is sensibly integrated in Bowen's, but also Beckett's, writing. Eva's "lying in the dark" among her knotted disintegrating thoughts, resembles the position of Beckett's narrator in *Company*, considered to be his most autobiographical text. Beckett writes:

> A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.
>
> To the one on his back in the dark. This he can tell by the pressure of his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again. Only a small part of what is said can be verified. As for example when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the truth of what is said. But by far greater part of what is said cannot be verified. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 5)

Eva's position, as well of that of Beckett's nameless narrator, lying in the dark, evokes the position of a Modernist writer who does not look upon the world from the viewpoint of mastery, but rather from a more vulnerable position, from the impression of creating fiction in the dark. The kind of thinking and writing that emerges from this darkness is not that of joining things together in order to shed light on the matter, and to conclude. Rather than going towards the light, the making-rational, there is an effort to go towards a metaphorical darkness, towards utter sensitivity-inducing vulnerability and unknowing – towards the states of non-mastery that let come a different feeling-thinking. Thinking and writing both become destructive-reconstructive tearing apart of the picture that must be seen anew.

PART THREE:

Thinking Process, Thinking Progress

Tears are profoundly relevant to this third and final part that focuses, on the one hand, on Bowen's and Beckett's disruptive use of language and the structure of their writings, and how those textual choral tears or gaps reveal and challenge structural violence, slow violence, and ruthless mastery in/through the processes of writing and reading that disable both the writer's as well as the reader's sense of mastery, allowing such mastery to be perceived as well as evaluated from a humbler position, that of the one who is dispossessed. On the other hand, *tears* as signs of human suffering, lead me also to investigate the ideological, psychological, as well as species-specific biases that stand against reading, recognizing, and responding to suffering, cruelty, structural and slow violence. In a nutshell, this chapter reflects on an eco-logic that would make human technological progress a less destructive force on a global scale, for the future human and non-human generations, through the disrupted, troubled reading process.

"Chapter 1: Vulnerable Writing: Dispossession and Possession" focuses on the form and language of Bowen's and Beckett's writings that lay bare the forces of dispossession within writing and thinking, thereby offering a humbler view on our mastery over reading, writing, thinking, and knowing. It is not to say that Beckett and Bowen are completely *without* mastery, or that the way they write takes no mastery at all. The particularity of their writing, I argue, is that they have chosen to present their skill in a way that reveals the underlying, and somewhat passive- automatic, forms of violence and mastery that otherwise would not lend themselves to evaluation. By breaking the "ordinary" language, and the recognizably solid and linear plot, Bowen's and Beckett's fiction reveals forces of more subtle and invasive forms of domination and violence, what Johan Galtung called in the late sixties "structural violence" – the violence (such as caused by war, speciesism, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, elitism, nationalism, etc.) that is not direct, its limits (such as the beginning) are not easily definable, and it does not have an identifiable "actor," it is not necessarily done to the human body, but, potentially to the human psyche, or to other species altogether.

In "3.1 Humbled Masters in Cracked Structures: Dispossession within Possession in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*" Bowen's meticulously deconstructive use of words, and the rhizomatic structure of the novel, break with patriarchal mastery. Patriarchal mastery is humbled in its hold over inheritance, language, story, history, and literature notably through the notion of "possession" which is shown to harbour the forces of dispossession, as the possessor becomes the possessed in the sense of being haunted by his patriarchal forbears and their vision. Breaking down the seeming uniformity of words' relation to meaning is also shown to interfere with the ability to master, as one is incapable of securing a fixed and

unambiguous, not already haunted, message. Such inability to reign over meaning undermines discourses such as Robert Kelway's admiration for Hitler's Germany, but also the influence of the English patriotic political propaganda on the historical narrative, and the patriarchal discourses on women's role in society.

The patriarchal dream of masterful oneness of a narrative, which could be used to assert one's authority/power, without the threat of it being undermined, is shown to be impossible, as stories in *The Heat of the Day* explode into a disseminating multiplicity of interacting narratives that haunt and undermine official or dominant storylines. Dispossession as an underlying force within any attempt of mastery, becomes, I argue, a very literary tool of Modernist writing, providing ethical insight into mastery that does not think ethically; and that through a writing process that is sensitive to the forces of dispossession inherent to language and writing, such as Bowen's. Bowen's writing, much like Beckett's, is open to the experience of dispossession – of letting go of the more conventional language, and, inevitably, being deprived of the authority this literary language possesses. Through this disobedience and disloyalty to the tradition of solid narratives of the male-dominated space of literature, Bowen's strange grammar, rhizomatic plot, and silently torn up social contracts lead us, the readers, towards "a vital writing," the kind of writing that requires sympathy, which is to be obtained through the disloyalty to what is most familiar, through the refusal of (literary) mastery (excellence and domination) that does not question its form, motives, and consequences.

"3.2 Choral Tears: The Forces of Dispossession in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*" further emphasizes as well as complicates this "sympathy" with the unfamiliar through the reading and writing of tears. Tears, understood both as gaps but also as manifestations of human emotions, notably suffering, will be viewed as forces of dispossession and also as devices proper to Modernist writing.

Both bodily as well as textual *tears* in *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* will be shown as experiences of dispossession on multiple levels. First, Beckett's literature in tears is explored as a humbling force of the Western literary tradition as well as the Western philosophical tradition, as it breaks down the idea of autonomy, through which claims of superiority and mastery could be made. Texts in tears, such as *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*, complicate the secondary role of literature, rooted in mimetics and unreality, as the extremely porous "inside" of those texts cannot be rendered autonomous – pure fiction. Vigorous attempts to reduce fiction to pure fictionality only end up in the death of imagination; fiction such as Beckett's texts in tears underscores the sense that our imagination is fallible and dependent, pure fiction is nothing, and fiction has a philosophical force of its own. I show that

Beckett's torn up literary texts become a choraesque medium where, by taking away the reader's comfort of being "inside" fiction, literary forces at once call for outside forces (language, knowledge, experience, history, philosophy, etc.) and suspend them, thus, demanding the reader to rethink the automatic assumptions made in the reading-thinking process. Such assumptions are humbled, in particular, through the processes of writing, reading, and thinking suffering.

Tears that appear in *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* are perceived as sites of ambiguity, anthropocentrism, and dispossession. Tears, like words, are open to *différance*, in a sense that suffering, even one's own, is not strictly masterable and readable; it does not give itself to reading and writing willingly, and in that sense, it becomes a choral tear: the tear one receives, produces, but does not necessarily possess, that is – own, understand, control. The difficulties of reading signs of human suffering, such as reading tears, are shown to humble the reader's expectation of being able to read suffering. Tears, as they appear in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, intentionally divide the readers' thoughts into a number of impossibilities, leaving us at once with and without, thereby posing quite a challenge to our ability to think "sympathy," if sympathy is based on the experience of the suffering we are able to recognize in ourselves, and ergo, in others. The danger of misreading, and the threat of subtle and direct violence that might follow, is even more acute when we are dealing with reading non-human suffering. As it "fails" to have an anthropomorphic image of suffering – tears, the reasons to have "sympathy" for beings/things without tears, can easily be lost to us, and, worst, intentionally invisibilized.

The second chapter, "Ethical Progress: Becoming Sensitive to Suffering and Slow Violence" deals more closely with this invisible and invisibilized suffering and violence. The first half of the chapter, "Why You Should Start Breaking Your Heart: Suffering in/through Beckett's and Bowen's Fiction," focuses mainly on the psychological as well as ideological obstacles to recognizing and valuing suffering as an ethical rationale for an eco-logic. The second half, "A Vast Imbrication of Flesh": Technological Progress as Ecological and Ethical Regress in Bowen's 'Mysterious Kôr' and Beckett's *How It Is*" investigates the potential of ethical corruption in an eco-logic that is concerned with the present and presence only, using the example of the 20th century technological progress, as it is depicted in Bowen's and Beckett's fiction.

"3.3 Why You Should Start Breaking Your Heart: Suffering in/through Beckett's and Bowen's Fiction" explores the socio-cultural environment's influence on how suffering and its

manifestations are perceived, and inversely, not perceived. Bowen's and Beckett's respective insights into the matter of suffering lead me to read, in Beckett's trilogy, the suffering of non-human species, which is often invisible to human eyes and also prey to processes of invisibilization and further violence, as well as adults' and children's suffering in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* and "Tears, Idle Tears," which reveals psychological mechanisms and well as ethical shortcomings in the sympathy that rests on the ideals of patriarchal anthropocentric mastery.

Through those readings, this first half of the second chapter will question the effectiveness of using suffering as an ethical rationale for animal rights. I will argue that the effectiveness of using suffering as a reason for the fair treatment of non-human beings (that means, seriously calculating the effect climate change has on various species, stopping the ongoing mass extinction) depends on our ability to adapt ourselves to an ethics which is *not* based on anthropocentric, patriarchal mastery, for the latter is insensitive to the value of thinking suffering, as it values strength. Breaking with Adam Smith's ideas on sympathy, a new eco-logic, which I propose through the reading of Bowen's and Beckett's work, advocates for the dismantlement of anthropocentric patriarchal mastery, and for emotional vulnerability, for "necessary sorrow" as a basis for a new sympathetic thinking where suffering is not seen through a patriarchal lens as humiliation, but instead as shared humility. The ethics or eco-logic focused on vulnerability (a corporal form of humility or "closeness to earth," morality), emotional vulnerability (among which is the ability to recognize, empathize, and respond to one's own and others' suffering), and humility ("modesty," which could also translate as the ability not inflate the importance of one's suffering and happiness clearly above others), allows to undermine atrophied systems of thought and prioritize ethical discourses on understanding/misunderstanding suffering when organizing the ways we, the master species, inhabit the earth and our societies.

"3.4 A Vast Imbrication of Flesh": Technological Progress as Ecological and Ethical Regress in Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and Beckett's *How It Is*" explores this curious predicament of being a master species through the lens of responsibility that implies reading the manifestations, the causes, the nuances, and the range of suffering caused by anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of thought which rely on domination and exploitation, and that through the depiction of the technological progress of the 20th century. Through Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and Beckett's *How It Is*, I argue that an ethics that must respond to issues as complex as climate change cannot completely disengage itself from the past, that is, from the responsibility for the past emissions, exploitation of

resources, destruction of habitats, etc., but also from the analyses of past ideologies and ethical failures that led us to human induced global ecological disasters, such as the current climate change and mass extinction. An ethics that focuses on the present and presence does not think history and history's impact on the future, and thus, it fails to think responsibility in terms of manmade global ecological crises, such as climate change and mass extinction, which are not the problems of the present only – their causes as well as consequences do not limit themselves to the present, and their manifestations do not limit themselves to presence (to what/who is here now). Through my reading of Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and its depiction of the impact of war damage on the human psyche that takes shelter in a fictional present, I will argue that thinking in terms of the present and presence is incompatible with thinking about complex manmade global issues with vast implications that spread across generations, as such a narrow vision runs the risk of ethical corruption.

The problems of ethical corruption are further explored through Beckett's *How It Is*, where the "ethics of 'equal' suffering" leads me to argue against the kind of mastery that fails to recognize the ethical obligations not only regarding our past actions, but also the global impact of our actions, reducing ethical concerns to the current and local concerns only. Such an ethics is ill-adapted to deal with manmade global ecological issues, as it is comfortably numb to the range of the impact of ruthless mastery and its consequences across time and space. The progress based on mindless, profit-driven mastery over the earth and its resources, animals, and humans, that thinks in terms of local immediate economic profit, does not understand or care for the interconnectivity of species, things, communities, and actions. We cannot rely on such an ethics to think for the future generations any more than we can rely on it offering fair treatment to those (human or not) who are not here, who are out of sight, or who do not yet exist. Therefore, an earthly-conscious eco-logic cannot limit itself to the present and presence, to the here and now, but instead must find ground in discourses and actions that turn away from ruthless mastery and a technological progress based on domination and exploitation, it must turn towards thinking influence and impact through a humbler ethics that is more earthly conscious – aware of and sensitive to the global impact of human activity on a vast time-scale (not only calculating the current impact), but also more modest, i.e. not turning knowledge to one (group/nation/species)'s advantage only.

Chapter 1: Vulnerable Writing: Dispossession and Possession

3.1 Humbled Masters in Cracked Structures: Dispossession within Possession in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*

> I know of no other novelist whose syntax assumes the primary task of both concealing and revealing the cracks that fissure our emotional composure. (Potter 13–14)

Bowen's wartime London with its broken buildings and fractured social structure has already inspired several feminist readings of *The Heat of the Day* (1948). Notably, Emma Zimmerman writes about a "late modernist portrait of the fractured domestic landscape of 1940s London" (Zimmerman 42); and Kristine A. Miller about Bowen's unsafe homes and bourgeois feminism (K. A. Miller 138–58). Following in the footsteps of these attentive readers, I will trace the cracks that appear in the glass ceiling[104] of 1940s Britain, but also the cracks that occur in Bowen's writing. Her language, that Bowen herself has called "verbal painting" (Glendinning 43), mimics the London of the Blitz.[105] *The Heat of the Day* becomes a deliberately broken system where words and sentences victoriously fail to refer to just one thing, without being compromised. Like Alice's language in the realm of the mad in Wonderland, Bowen's "good English" grows *curiouser* and *curiouser* during the madness of the Blitz. The play with several and sometimes contradictory meanings of a word turns into a deliberate cracking (meaning "deciphering" and "revealing") of words as will be seen with the notion of possession. "Possession," which, according to the *OED*, refers to "ownership, mastery, domination, control, power," etc., is shown to harbour a form of dispossession through one of its other meanings – "domination or control of a person by a demon or spirit" (*OED*). Focusing on the spectral otherness that haunts Bowen's language, and particularly the notion of possession, I will examine how the novel undermines patriarchal domination over inheritance, language, story, history, and literature.

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[104] A metaphor for an invisible obstacle that keeps certain groups, typically women, from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy. Here used as the patriarchal reduction of women to certain roles; patriarchal domination over women.

[105] While Sarah Wood dedicates a whole chapter to the nuclear rhetoric of Bowen's *The Little Girls* in her *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces*, several readers have compared Bowen's use of words with the use of warfare in *The Heat of the Day.* Dawn Potter notices that in *The Heat of the Day*, "a single word might seem to have the implications of an atom bomb" (13). Maud Ellmann writes that Bowen's "notoriously twisted syntax" "spares no effort to avoid a 'direct hit'" (166). Phyllis Lassner calls Bowen's language in the novel "an undecipherable noise" (127) with a potential to become "an absolute weapon of destruction" (129).

Master, testament, ghost: “he may care”

The most evident trouble around the notion of possession concerns an actual possession – a big house in Ireland called Mount Morris, and Cousin Francis’s written testament which names a new landlord for it. Seemingly it is a familiar scenario about sustaining patriarchal social structures through a legal text that empowers men. As Bowen writes: “A man of faith has always a son somewhere” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 175). However, instead of strengthening patriarchal ties, the effect of the testament is shown to be uncanny. The bliss of owning a house is undermined by the ghostly undertone of the notion of possession, that is, being inhabited by a ghost. Through Francis’s testament, Bowen evokes the ambiguity of a patriarchal legal text, but also the master’s inability to possess property without being himself possessed (therefore, dispossessed of his power). In the case of Mount Morris, patriarchal mastery is doubly undermined: first, by the ambiguity of Cousin Francis’s testament, secondly, by the ghostly presence it imposes upon the new master.

In the first half of the novel, Cousin Francis bequeaths his Irish estate, Mount Morris, to a stranger – a distant young English relative, Roderick, “*in the hope that he may care in his own way to carry on the old tradition*” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 87). The transfer of Francis’s idea of patriarchal mastery in Mount Morris is threatened by the haunted language of his testament, particularly the use of *may* which, among other things, suggests probability. Once transferred to Roderick, Francis’s *may* becomes a *maybe*. Unsure about the meaning of Francis’s sentence, Roderick adds commas to it, asking: “Did he mean, care in my own way, or, carry on the old tradition in my own way?” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 88).

It was precisely such confusion that Francis had tried to avoid by employing legal language and a formula meant to be clear without the use of commas (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 87). Francis wanted to protect his will from supplementary meanings, but fails. Indeed, according to Derrida, such a thing is impossible: “Every term, every germ depends at every moment on its place and is entrained, like all the parts of a machine, into an ordered series of displacements, slips, transformations, and recurrences that cut out or add a member in every proposition that has gone before” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 300). The transferred testament is open to transformations in the act of reading and writing, for the language of the testament cannot be reduced to the patriarchal dream of fixity of the origin that Francis shared with Roderick: “It was a matter of continuing – but what, what? As to that, there ought to be a mindless knowledge locked up in rocks, in the stayers-on” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 312). Yet, a mindless knowledge of the *patriarchive* – Francis’s will, cannot be petrified: “[…] the

structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent 'in the flesh,' neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father […]" (Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" 54).

Roderick is nostalgic about the patriarchal order, traditions, and Cousin Francis (whom, paradoxically, he never met), as is fatherless Leopold in *The House in Paris* (1926). Leopold is fascinated with history, particularly by kings and conquerors – great patriarchal figures. Unimpressed by Shelley, whom he would rather see unborn (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 204), he puts kings above all, and Italy above France, for "it has got a king still" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 30). When he gets his hands on Henrietta's magazine, the world of fathers is what appeals to him: "He pored over the photographs of statesmen and battleships, the drawings of frank girls, butlers, sports cars and oak-beamed rooms. The funny stories and pictures brought him to a full stop" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 39). Also, when Ray tells Leopold his mother is staying at Versailles, Leopold's question is about a *pater* instead: "Where the king lived?" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 222).

History and stories, the way Leopold has learned about them, is revealed in a patronizingly ridiculous-sounding letter from his adoptive parents that claims: "We do not consider him ripe for direct sex education yet, though my husband is working towards this through botany and mythology. When the revelation regarding himself must come, what better prototypes could he find than the Greek and other heroes, we feel" (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 41). Hence history, for him, is composed of mythical father figures, unattainable role models that he is supposed to relate to, and does, concluding Rome has been built for him:

> The city became the image of his ambition, communicating its pride to him so violently and immediately that antiquity went for nothing: the hills and columns seemed to be made for himself. To have been born became to be on the scale of emperors and popes, to be conspicuous everywhere, like the startling Vittorio Emmanuele monument. He was, in fact, full of the bastard's pride […] (Bowen, *The House in Paris* 34)

Leopold's and Roderick's loyalty could be compared to the generalized Freudian idea of *deferred obedience* – obedience to the authority of the father-figure in his absence. This deferred loyalty meets the document in which meanings are deferred, generating an involuntary disobedience through a more general trouble in the act of reading and writing.

Bowen's writing is very sensitive to the inescapable excess that haunts every use of language. This excess also makes it difficult to communicate one thing only, to give a direct order that could not be voluntarily or involuntarily jeopardized. Language cannot be reduced

to “a mindless knowledge locked up in rocks” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 312). Instead, by trying to do so, Roderick is involved in an involuntary patricide, in the name of the father.

First, Roderick’s reading of the testament threatens to overwrite the Irish patriarchal mastery in Mount Morris. Then, as a gesture of loyalty, he promises to name his future son Francis. This means that not only is Roderick unknowingly threatening to change the Irish patriarchal tradition of Mount Morris to the English patriarchal tradition, but he is also threatening to erase what Francis’s name stands for, by reproducing another, possibly quite English, Francis. Cousin Francis is, therefore, dispossessed of his agenda, his name; and the patrilineal inheritance is shown as counter effective as it not only threatens the memory of the father, but also compromises his relations to his symbolic fathers – his patriotism. In other words, Cousin Francis cracks the patriarchal glass ceiling from the inside, with its own tools (the testament), against his wish. As Cousin Francis cannot reduce his testament to “a mindless knowledge locked up in rocks” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 312), he is sentenced to be dispossessed of his memory, his name, and his patriotism by his own sentence that suggests Roderick “*may care in his own way to carry on the old tradition*” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 72).

The same word, “may,” also suggests: “I allow,” turning Cousin Francis’s sentence into an order. Living under the patriarchal “happy assumption of the power to author the continuing story he has inherited” (Chessman 70), Roderick first fails to notice the ambiguity of Cousin Francis’s sentence that is nevertheless decrypted by Francis’s dispossessed wife, Cousin Nettie. Nettie questions the authority of Roderick’s decision to move to Mount Morris by saying: “Oh, but my cousin decided that for you” (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 213). As an embroiderer, she has an eye for patterns, allowing her to point out the patriarchal pattern in which Roderick has been reduced to being a vessel of patriarchal mastery: a *signifier* instead of a *signified*. This is furthermore accentuated by another connoisseur of patterns – a knitter named Muttkins who, upon hearing Roderick mentioned, asks: “What do you mean by ‘Roderick’?” (109), instead of a more appropriate question: *who is Roderick*? The name no longer seems to refer to Roderick, but beyond Roderick, missing the obvious signified, and going beyond it. In his name, the meaning veers, pointing schizophrenically to all the male characters and the patriarchal tie that binds them visibly: through the single letter “r” that crops up in almost all the names of the male characters – Robert Kelway, Robert Harrison, Robertson, Roderick Rodney, Christopher Robin, Francis, Fred, Victor, Thomas Victor.

Like possessions in the novel, the letter “r” too is passed on from a man to a man. As a sound with an Irish pronunciation, it could be misunderstood for the word “our”: a marker of

belonging or a marker of ownership, or "are," from the verb "be." "Be," in the present continuous, turns into "being" which is also a noun for "a living person or thing." Thus, one would arrive at *the being that owns*, *our* Roderick – the last heir. However, while Roderick is the last living male heir that Cousin Francis could find, the tradition of patrilineal inheritance is not only reduced to him, he is also reduced to being a habitat, a vessel of patriarchal mastery.

This is furthermore highlighted by an actual vessel – Roderick's boat in Mount Morris. The decay of patriarchal mastery is shown through multiple sinking boats: an image of the plunging Titanic in Cousin Nettie's old drawing room; the feeble rescue boats in Dunkirk; and a sunken boat in Mount Morris that was pulled out of the river by Roderick, only to discover that she is decayed (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 313). Roderick is responsible for the restoration of the decaying tradition of patriarchal mastery. He is also a vessel for a net of cousin-forefathers. Therefore, he is not only a possessor, but also possessed: a subject to a will left by Cousin Francis to "*carry on the old tradition*" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 72). The testament thus turns into an eerie volition of a ghost of Cousin Francis, whose "actual death returned him to life again" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 67). The will of a ghost puts into question the extent to which a master can possess ("own, control, master, be potent, be powerful") while being possessed by a ghost that is, in its turn, his master. Thus, the possession of Mount Morris could be seen as dispossessing the new master of his freedom by the uncanny half-presence of his ghostly forbears.[106] At the end of the novel, young Roderick also begins to feel that in Mount Morris *more is*:

> […] he had come in full of the outdoors, which welled up in him when, having put out the lamp, he laid down his head on the old man's pillow. Forms, having made themselves known through no particular sense, forms whose existence he was not to doubt again, loomed and dwelled within him. […] he saw that what worked most on the world, on him, were the inner wills of the dead. Death could not estimate what it left behind it. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 313)

[106] In her essay "The Big House" (1940), Bowen evokes a feeling of obligation, to the dead, to carry on certain traditions in big houses. She writes: "The infinite ghosts of the past, of the dead who lived here and pursued this same routine of life in these walls add something, a sort of order, a reason for living, to every minute and hour. This is the order, the form of life, the tradition to which big house people still sacrifice so much" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 28–29). However, Bowen ends the essay on a note that challenges the tendency, to some degree, as she reflects on the future of the big house. She concludes:

> The big house has much to learn – and it must learn if it is to survive at all. But it also has much to give. The young who are taking on those big houses, who accept the burden and continue the struggle are not content, either, to live 'just for the house'. The young cannot afford to be stupid – they expect the houses they keep alive to inherit, in a changed world and under changed conditions, the good life for which they were first built. The good in the new can add to, not destroy, the good in the old. (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 30)

Language, story, history: "a terrific dust"

A similar failure to master without being mastered appears in the absence of an inheritance – in the case of a British Nazi spy, Robert Kelway, who has little to no prospects of becoming a master of his father's estate, since it is governed by his emasculating mother. While the young Roderick fails to decipher a testament, Robert who is fascinated with Hitler's discourse of an especially eerie patriarchal order, battles with the mastery of language itself. Phyllis Lassner suggests that Kelway is imperilled by "his particular use of language he inherits from his patriarchal forbears. He interprets the abstractions which serve as hallmarks of any cultural order as absolute ends themselves, so that the language of broad philosophical flexibility becomes an absolute weapon of destruction" (129). The reduction of language to absolute ends by Robert refers to the patriarchal desire to possess language, to establish oneness in language, story, and history, that is, to give the patriarchal power the same lack of ambiguity.[107] In other words, Robert needs language to be locked up in rocks, fixated, obedient, but is frustrated to see that language fails to fall in line with his agenda. Words make him look guilty instead, so he wishes to erase what words such as "betrayal" stand for by equating them with absence of meaning: "Myself, even, I have needed to immunize myself against them; I tell you I have only at last done that by saying them to myself over and over till it became absolutely certain they mean nothing. What they once meant is gone" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 268).

However, Robert is not immune to words. The repetitive "myself" gets lost in his language that is always already shared and does not obey a singular user's desires. Thus, his victory over words is short-lived, for he admits that words such as betrayal are still capable of raising "a terrific dust" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 268) in his mind, proving that the

[107] As Derrida writes about the master's inability to possess "his" language:

> For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and *naturally*, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate [*dire*] this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as 'his own.' That is his belief; he wishes to make others share it through the use of force or cunning; he wants to make others believe it, as they do a miracle, through rhetoric, the school, or the army. (…) there is no natural property of language, language gives rise only to appropriative madness, to jealousy without appropriation. Language speaks this jealousy; it is nothing but jealousy unleashed. It takes its revenge at the heart of the law. The law that, moreover, language itself is, apart from also being mad. Mad about itself. Raving mad. (Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other* 23–24)

meanings he crossed out are susceptible to return. His language escapes his patriarchal reductions and it cannot be possessed ("owned, mastered") because it is haunted by other meanings and interpretations of words that destabilize the very idea of a fixed origin. In that perspective, his rhetorical question to Stella, his lover: "Don't you understand that all that language is dead currency?" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 268), could be understood in two manners. First, as a reference to words such as "betrayal" that he wants to discredit, erase, so that those words become a dead currency: without value. Second, his sentence seems to turn against him through the double meaning of "currency" – which also means "a flow." Paired up with the imagery of a failed erasure and "a terrific dust" language can still raise in his mind, "dead currency" seems to make a statement about the nature of language: the disloyalty of words to communicate one thing only, to obey the authority of a clear origin that produces unchanged copies. The origin itself is a ruin, "a terrific dust." Thus, against his will, his language could be seen as dead currency, as a flow of dust, of something which is crossed out, a ruin, yet haunting – the very definition Derrida gives of the trace in *Dissemination* as composed of diverging copies of copies.

This treachery of language leads to a larger trouble: Robert's desire to remodel his past. Robert can neither master nor escape his language just as he cannot control or escape the manifold history of the space he occupies: the London of the Second World War where "their time sat in the third place at their table. They [Robert and Stella] were the creatures of history (…)" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 194). In both cases, Robert is a part of a larger trace in which he is confronted with otherness that simply cannot be erased.

This divergence is anti-mastery, the very condition that prevents Kelway from mastering language or even recognizing in his language his own trace, his footprint. In her essay "Calico Windows," Bowen writes about the otherness of one's trace in London: "So many footprints are in the dust that you lose track of your own; you lose track of yourself" (*People, Places, Things* 184), which in the novel is brought up by the writer figure, Cousin Nettie: "We are so mixed up by this time that it's a wonder we are anything at all" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 207). Similar humbling blindness appears in Michel de Certeau's text about the circulation of people in the streets of New York City. De Certeau claims that by walking people "'write' without being able to read it" (de Certeau 93), composing a story that has neither authors nor spectators in which each body is illegible. According to de Certeau, this composite trace is the story that in relation to its representations, "remains daily and indefinitely other" (de Certeau 93). In other words, history cannot be possessed (owned, mastered) by

anyone and it cannot be reduced to a single separate story, for the trace of history (which is composite) is never entirely legible to anyone.

The blindness to the multiplicity of stories in history, and the incapacity to recognize the impossibility of creating a single separate narrative of history is shown through Robert Kelway. Working for the enemy, Robert argues: "It bred my father out of me, gave me a new heredity" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 273). However, the attempt he makes at replacing his English roots with Hitler's conception of the Aryan *Herrenvolk* ("master race") amounts to an utter failure, leaving him possessed ("haunted") by an English spy, Harrison, instead. Rather than a separate character, Harrison, whose mission is to shadow Robert, could be seen not only as a character in its own right, but also as Robert Kelway's double, his unshakable repressed opposition within. Harrison (also named Robert), is constantly confused with Kelway, to a point that even Stella wonders whether they are a separate person. Thus, by trying to escape his past and his heredity, Kelway only succeeds in producing more ghosts. Ultimately, there is no escape from oneself. As Thomas Dutoit writes: "There is no pure immunity in Bowen because the outside is always the inside of the inside" (Dutoit, "Ruins; or the Being of Time as History in Elizabeth Bowen's The Heat of the Day" 86), referring to the importance of the psyche in Bowen's fiction.

Kelway's desire to rewrite his story using Hitler's dreams of mastery of Europe, derives from a certain traumatic entrapment and dispossession by his mother. In a way, Robert is a desperate producer-product of patriarchy who unconsciously feeds the source of his own misery. He suffers from the side-effects of patriarchy: notably, from his mother, Muttkins, who has established an eerie grasp over the family's home, a Gothic "man-eating house" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 257) called Holme Dene, where Robert's presence and ownership has been reduced to a room full of "fictions of boyishness" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 116). Robert is dispossessed as a narrator: his story is publicly staged in Holme Dene by his mother and sister through the carefully arranged décor of his old room: an altar of pictures, "glass cases of coins, birds' eggs, fossils, and butterflies" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 116), placed "where they must meet the eye" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 116). Even the symbolic remains of his story or history (as he knows it) are wiped out: the room is "dustless" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 177). Robert is, therefore, dispossessed of himself: "Each time I come back again into it I'm hit in the face by the feeling that I don't exist – that I not only am but never have been" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 177). It is this cruel dispossession of identity that makes Robert wish for a strong patriarchal order, without realizing that establishing an order of that kind through Hitler is counter effective to his own dispossession by his mother – for the patriarchal

submission of women has produced the mother-monster Muttkins. Her seemingly supernatural powers over the house are generated by the lack of her influence beyond "the white gate" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 110). Robert becomes an advocate of patriarchy as well as its victim by trying to establish a patriarchal oneness in language, in his story, and in history.[108] What is left of these in the novel instead is a terrific dust that cannot be possessed ("owned, mastered"), for it is haunted by otherness.

Stories against history

The structure of the novel itself is haunted, composed of multiple stories that are connected to each other and yet also contradicting each other. Bowen's plot is "a diction. Action of language, language of action" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 35), and therefore it is dependent on various interlocutors. *The Heat of the Day* does not have a singular dominant storyline; it constitutes a net of stories emerging from Bowen's world as a writer which, according to the author, is already a mosaic (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283). While Jessica Gildersleeve argues that "*The Heat of the Day* works as a trembling narrative of the modern world" (Gildersleeve 211), I would suggest it is rather a narrative that, having trembled, has exploded into a disseminating multiplicity of interacting stories that haunt and undermine official or dominant storylines. Bowen's cracked narratives witness the complexity of a story that is always already undermined by its other narrators, and thus, cannot be possessed without being haunted.

This is made visible first through the narratives handed out by newspapers that do not fit the multiplicity of realities their readers are faced with. Such is the case of Louie Lewis. While her husband is in India, Louie shares her bed with a woman, chases after men in a park, and has a child out of wedlock. She does not correspond to the waiting lasses and mothers the official war-time narratives stage. To fit in, Louie deciphers newspaper articles *very* creatively – so that they seem to include and validate her choices, thereby undermining the intended messages and the authority of these narratives: "[…] every morning and evening she [Louie] was praised. Even the Russians were apparently not as dissatisfied with her as she had feared; there was Stalingrad going on holding out, but here was she in the forefront of the industrial war drive. As for the Americans now in London, they were stupefied by admiration for her

[108] His looming failure of establishing patriarchal mastery is even written down to his disobeying, vulnerable, body – he limps (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 125), thus, each step he takes is a tiny fall announcing a greater peril. "A latter-day Icarus" (Christensen 165), Kelway ends up mysteriously falling to death from Stella's rooftop.

character" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 125). By involuntarily empowering the eccentric Louie, patriotic propaganda undermines what it means to establish: patriotic unity, loyalty, the control over women's sexuality and social roles.

The other prominent undoing of official narratives is Robert Kelway's version of the Dunkirk evacuation that in Britain was publicly praised as almost a victory. In May 1940, Kelway was one of the British soldiers miserably trapped on the beach in Dunkirk, France, waiting to be rescued from the approaching German army that was held back by Hitler's halt order. In his version of this historical event, there is no trace of pride for the Dunkirk spirit of brave soldiers and the captains of civilian ships that helped with evacuation; according to him they were nothing but an "army of freedom queuing up to be taken off by pleasure boats" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 272).

Both Louie Lewis and Robert Kelway undermine official storylines. Through these characters, Bowen evokes the fictionality of history-writing that fails to include the multitude of stories of the powerless; fabricating history from the vanquisher's singular perspective. In "The Bend Back," she writes: "Raw history, in its implications, is unnerving; and, even so, it only chronicles the survivors" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 57). Against it, *The Heat of the Day* shows a continuous rereading and retelling of history that haunt official storylines and dispossess them of their power. Through the multiplicity of stories that do not fit the constraints of the official ink, Bowen rethinks the position of the dispossessed. The same process is shown regarding the established family histories that appear to be always under the threat of erasure by divergent perspectives.

Enter the mad

The most surprising perspective is provided by the ghostly Cousin Nettie, who is perhaps the most dispossessed character of the novel. In fact, she is hardly in the novel (marginalized) and at the same time, paradoxically, comes into view at the heart of it, that is, in the middle of the novel. A curious reminder of Charlotte Brontë's madwoman in the attic, she dwells in a secluded nuthouse called Wistaria Lodge ("wisdom," "hysteria," and "logic" paradoxically linger in the name). Because Nettie is staying in Wistaria Lodge, one is made to assume she is deprived of reason, and therefore, of all authority, for as another female character who has often been reduced to folly, Eva Trout, reminds us: "What the dead said sometimes is later listened to; but to what the mad have to say, who would ever listen?" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 110). While Cousin Francis's death has added to his importance among the living, by

connecting him to Roderick and Stella through his inheritance; Cousin Nettie's supposed madness, however, has erased her from the social scene altogether.

Yet, when Roderick wonders down the rabbit hole, to Wistaria Lodge; he is met with a slightly deranged-looking Mrs Tringsby (in charge) and a surprisingly sane Cousin Nettie, which begs the question: how did Cousin Nettie end up in this secluded place?

Renee C. Hoogland's reading portrays Nettie as a closeted lesbian; she writes: "Anticipating the uncontrollable strength of her own disruptive desires, Nettie had 'disengaged' herself from the sociosymbolic order altogether" (180). However, there seems to be no clear evidence of her homosexuality in the text, other than her wish to end the marriage which, she felt, was unnatural. Nettie tells Roderick that "nature hated us [Cousin Francis and Cousin Nettie]" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 217) which Lorna Wilkinson reads as Bowen's critique of marriage and motherhood as "natural" ideals for women and as a reference to the Fisher King stories that "centre upon themes of infertility, maiming and physical restriction" (11). Wilkinson explains that Nettie appears to be "socially ostracized for her childlessness, frozen in what Harriet S. Chessman has pronounced 'a static and nonsignificant world,' without descendants" (Wilkinson 11).

The only traces of children, and those are very peculiar indeed, can be found on the walls of Nettie's room. Curiously, the underlying violence of those photographs incites Roderick to guess that "only their neutralizing prettiness could have got these pictures past Mrs or at any rate Dr Tringsby's eye" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 210). Those postcards of unrelated children are anything but nostalgic or glorifying towards children, instead they show a certain destructive innocence, as the children are shown to be "engaged innocently in some act of destruction – depetalling daisies, puffing at dandelion clocks, trampling primrose woods, rioting round in fragile feathered grown-up hats, intercepting fairies in full flight, or knocking down apples from the bough" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 210). Rather than being suggestions of her own failure to have a child (if there ever was a failure to be spoken of, for it might have been a choice), these pictures seem to refer to a common theme in Bowen's fiction – destructive innocence.

In *The Death of the Heart*, Bowen writes: "The innocent are so few that two of them seldom meet – when they do meet, their victims lie strewn all round" (112); adding elsewhere: "It is not only our fate but our business to lose innocence, and once we have lost that it is futile to attempt a picnic in eden" (Bowen, *Collected Impressions* 265). Unlike Bowen's young characters such as Portia in *The Death of the Heart* or Roderick in *The Heat of the Day* whose journeys towards such loss of innocence are progressively played out, Nettie has left hers

behind. Instead, she is the one to curb Roderick's innocent views about his parents' marriage and Cousin Francis's legacy.

The path to her own disillusionment surfaces in bits and pieces, as she is having a kind of a picnic in the odd Eden that the Tringsbys have created, far from the rest of the world that is being torn apart by the Second World War. Though it remains unclear if she ever even wanted children or if she was in fact, as Hoogland suggests, a closeted homosexual escaping from the "artificially enforced design of the heterosexual matrix" (Hoogland 180); Nettie does refer quite clearly to one issue in her former marriage, which she voices when she tells Roderick: "(…) he [Cousin Francis] was my cousin you know. There should have never never been any other story" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 208).

With the double negative, Nettie brushes her cousin aside, again, out of the picture. It does not seem to be only a matter of rejecting ideals for women such as wifehood and motherhood, but also rejecting the incestuous union which Cousin Francis had initiated ("what he had wanted [Nettie] to be was his wife," Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 217). Nettie tells Roderick: "Nature hated us; that was a most dangerous position to build a house in – once the fields noticed me with him, the harvests began failing; so I took to going nowhere but up and down stairs, till I met with my own ghost" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 217). According to Lorna Wilkinson's reading, it is Nettie's childlessness that is implicit in the imagery of withering harvests. She writes: "By failing to have a child, she [Nettie] has, it seems, gone against nature itself" (Wilkinson 11). However, Nettie's firm disapproval of this union might be instead a reference to its incestuous nature which is felt to be unnatural by Nettie.

In a postwar short story, also set in Ireland, entitled "A Day in the Dark" (1956) Bowen explores another pair of closely related characters, an uncle and his teenage niece, contaminated by an incestuous infatuation, playing "house together on the margin of a passion which was impossible" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 878). It is precisely the feeling of naturalness of the nature of their relationship that becomes spoilt by Mrs Banderry's suggestive commentary. The teenager, named Barbie, tells us: "He was my mother's brother, but I had not known him when I was a child. Of his manhood I had had no warning. Naturally growing into love I was, like the grass growing into hay on his uncut lawns. There was not a danger till she [Mrs Banderry] spoke" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 876). Similarly, Cousin Nettie, now rather in the role of Mrs Banderry, not only played house with Cousin Francis, but had also started building a marriage at Mount Morris, which, she then discovered, became "the most dangerous position to build a house in" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 217). Strangely no one but Cousin Nettie points out the peculiarity of it being a cousin marriage. Cousin Nettie, in

whose gaze Roderick detects a certain "apprehension of strangeness" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 207), and an impossibility to "look at the surface only, to see nothing more than she should" (207); seems to be the only one to react to the oddity of their circumstance.

While Barbie in "A Day in the Dark" discovers convention to be a safeguard of her incestuous feelings,[109] for Cousin Nettie, conventions became a trap. She tells Roderick she could not escape the convention of marriage by living in hotels: "(…) they said in that case I ought not to go on living in hotels, even quietly, even private ones. If I was well enough to be in the hotels, then I was well enough to go back to Mount Morris" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 213). Nettie's claustrophobic "going nowhere but up and down stairs, till [she] met with [her] own ghost" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 217) speaks of impossibility to find a conventional escape, for there is none.[110] So, she finds a way to break away from the conventions that safeguard this union, by feigning madness:

> There had not been a touch of hysteria about this; on the contrary, it had been a policy – Hamlet had got away with it; why should not she? But there had been doubts about Hamlet, Roderick understood; and as for Cousin Nettie, could anybody who voluntarily espoused Wistaria Lodge be *quite* normal? She carried with her – in her property with him, in her entire manner – the lasting dignity of a world in which it was impossible to say, 'Oh, come off it!' (…) The sidelong glitter of reason, the uncanny hint of sanity about this afternoon's conversation at once frenzied Roderick and seduced him. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 215)

To Roderick, Cousin Nettie appears not only as *not* mad, but, in ways, contagiously charming. While "madness" such as Eva Trout's (as it was perceived by other characters) harbours certain vulnerabilities, such as her inability to deal with emotions and read certain nuances in language; Cousin Nettie's insanity is presented as an elaborate scheme to write herself out of Mount Morris's and Cousin Francis's history, precisely, out of *his* story.

Though Nettie tells Roderick: "All my cousins make decisions; I have been used to that all my life (…) I expect, as you are my cousin, *you* make decisions?" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 213); Bowen's language gives us another impression, which is: to be in Nettie's presence is to know where one's powers of mastery end. A subtle yet unyielding defence against

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[109] "All thought well of his hospitality to me. Convention was our safeguard: could one have stronger?" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 878).

[110] The underlying darkness of "A Day in the Dark" truly creeps in when Barbie's decision to take the bus instead of meeting her uncle ends in failure. She misses the bus "carrying passengers [she] was not among to the scene of safety" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 880) and the story ends with her uncle's touch on her elbow, reminding her to get into the car. Incestuous relationships are also evoked in Bowen's autobiography where she writes:

> My mother's family, the Colley's, had had misgivings as to her marriage to Henry Bowen, on the ground that the Bowens of Bowen's Court, County Cork, were rumoured to have an uncertain mental heredity. My paternal grandfather, Robert, had died in the throes of a violent mania brought on by a continuous quarrel with his heir (Henry); and there had been other cases of instability, due, it was understood, to first-cousin marriages back through the Bowen pedigree (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 269).

dispossession reigns over her presence. The sentence: "She carried with her the lasting dignity of a world in which it was impossible to say, 'Oh, come off it!'" is interrupted by the following comment: "in *her property* with him, in her entire manner" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 215). The young soldier, marching into Nettie's still life with all his plans and grand gestures towards the dead Cousin Francis's legacy, is neutralized by Nettie's manner, said to be her own property, of being. Her repetitive, quite theatrical, "forgetfulness" when it comes to Roderick's name, reduces the young lad to being just another brick in the wall. "Am I really to call you Roderick?" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 313), she asks him, cunningly assimilating him with all her male cousins who had once been young and full of elaborate ideas for the estate and pathos for their forefathers, much like Roderick.

She, who has somewhat willingly dispossessed herself of her status as Mrs Morris, and of reason, is in a position where nothing much can be expected from her or taken away from her. So, when Roderick tells Nettie that "something has got to become of everybody" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 214), she cleverly strikes back with: "Nothing has become of me: here I am and you can't make any stories out of that" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 214). In Wistaria Lodge, we are told that:

> her own existence could be felt condensing round her in pure drops; inside this closed window was such a silence as the world would probably never hear again (…) *Here* was nothing to trouble her but the possibility of being within reach: seated on the sofa with her back to what she had ascertained to be nothing, Cousin Nettie was well placed. (Bowen, *The Heat* 215)

Like Beckett's narrator in *The Unnamable*, sealed in a jar, fermenting in his own juice, Cousin Nettie can no longer be put on a map, for she is preserved in a room in the middle of nowhere. In Wistaria Lodge the reader might sense what Bennett and Royle call "systematic dissolution of temporality" (Bennett and Royle 42). We are told that outside Nettie's window "sky and earth at last exhaustedly met – there was no impact, no mystery, no horizon, simply a nothing more" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 206). Not "nothing more," but "a nothing more" seems to give place to a "timeless colourless afternoon" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 206) where the self-appointed mental institution comes to light as a "powerhouse of nothingness, hive of lives in abeyance" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 203). The nowhere of this nothingness is intensified by Wistaria Lodge being cut off from the major war event and Mrs Tringsby's efforts to reduce communication to having light chats, "*never*, of course, of the past" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 205).

In this colorless, timeless place that can afford to invent this abeyance only under the pretext of its inhabitants being divorced from reason; Cousin Nettie escapes Mount Morris's

influence. Against the apparent nothingness of this place, Mount Morris is said to have always been "*something*" and, as Cousin Nettie claims, "that always has been the trouble" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 216). Mount Morris has always already been marked, quite like Cousin Nettie herself, by a patriarchal will. As Cousin Nettie says: "All my cousins make decisions; I have been used to that all my life. First they looked at one thing, then they looked at the other. It was only for me that there was nothing to do but what I did" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 213).

Nettie, a "*malade imaginaire*" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 215), incorporates Bowen's own much-quoted idea from her unfinished autobiography about the importance of the place in her writing, "Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 283). Nettie uses the force of her new location to undo, as a writer would, the relevance of the character she is expected to play: the wife of Cousin Francis.

Cousin Nettie and the much younger Eva Trout are similar in this way at least – they are shown to disobey the storyline imposed by their superiors by escaping the ground on which such rules apply, namely their properties, and also a certain stamp of sanity which gives way to freedom as well as limits it. Unlike Eva Trout who did in fact get away with living in hotels, on neutral grounds provided by her vast fortune, Cousin Nettie's escape from the social scene that marked her as the wife of Cousin Francis, is only possible by feigning madness which breaks the social contract holding her responsible to her given significance as the wife of Cousin Francis. In the presence of Mount Morris, Cousin Nettie could not have escaped being Mrs Morris, married to the house as well as to the cousin who owns it.

As Lily Robert-Foley writes: "The house, which is both female mind and body, lives in ambiguous real estate: it is both the 'woman's sphere', yet men's property," linking this issue with ownership to the exclusion of women from a literary tradition. She writes: "In the masculine model, perceptions of reality, and reality itself are fixed and unitary: this way and therefore not the other. And because of this originary process of exclusion, female ways of knowing are occluded, refused and sent to a liminal message board of haunted writing" (Robert-Foley, sec.Other Rooms)

Said to be someone for whom it is impossible to look at the surface only (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 207), Nettie seems to always be looking at alternative patterns, while analysing and exposing the existing patterns in the histories of other characters as well as her own

history.[111] Indeed, when the reader first meets Nettie, she is working on a canvas with a "machine-stamped" design that was "very possibly not of her choosing" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 206). This pre-established pattern, probably imposed by Mrs Tringsby, however, is overwritten by Nettie's own additions, such as the purple rose she is making. She says: "Nobody believes me, but I could lead you to the very place in the garden and show you the bush. There is only one; it's not my fault if there are no others in the world (…)" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 216). Nettie's woolwork, her "ugly embroidery" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 208), as seen through Roderick's eyes, also represents the odd elements that fail to be represented in patriarchal narratives. It embraces oddness and otherness, for: "Life, in other words, was always *other* than it appeared to be; despite our best attempts to marshal it into knowable patterns (…)" (Smyth 124). Cousin Nettie, a passive aggressive rebel, quietly uproots patriarchal structures, in order to make room for otherness; for a purple rose – even if there is only one in this world; and for herself – even if she were the only woman to turn down a rich cousin-husband. Being a "net-tie," that is, a strange set of signifiers already, or the grafted and unidentifiable "net," "nette," "ette," "tte" – broken off from women's names, she represents the untold stories by women as well as the fragmented network-structure of the novel.

Net-tie

Through Cousin Nettie, a new kind of writer-figure appears. A writer without mastery, and without a pen, the marginal Cousin Nettie is instead the connoisseur of grids, for she is a full-time embroiderer as well as symbolically a "net-tie"– representing Bowen's own cracked Blitz-writing.

Nettie's "ugly" canvas could be compared to Bowen's language, which, as she wrote to her editor, Daniel George, in 1948, is purposefully made to be odd. She said: "In some cases I *want* the rhythm to jerk or jar – to an extent, even, which may displease the reader" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 166). Like's Bowen's unusual or awkward syntax, which, as Bowen said, seems to express something (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 166); Nettie's "ugly" embroidery, also seeks to *signify otherwise* rather than please the onlookers by following more conventional

[111] As Jocelyn Brooke reminds us:

> Miss Bowen has herself spoken (…) of her fascination with the 'surface' of life – not so much for its own sake, as for the dangerous sense which it gives of existing upon a thin crust beneath which lurks bottomless abyss. The crust is, too often, liable to crack – and, says Miss Bowen, 'the more the surface seems to heave or threaten to crack, the more its actual pattern fascinates me'. (Brooke 9)

patterns to the letter. After all, Nettie's embroidery thinks the unlikely purple rose placed within the conventional pattern.

She also makes the reader notice the cracks in the stories and characterizations, the lines and ligaments that tie the novel together, thereby destroying our tunnel-vision and sense of mastery over the text as well as our reading of characters. Stories and identities grow more complex, and thus, defy our efforts to read them and feel reassured by our knowledge. With Nettie, we are to read under the assumption that we might never be right, and that perhaps we are better off for it.

"What is to become of us wrong ones if there's to be nobody who is right?" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 208), Nettie asks, challenging the binary way of thinking the world that has forced her choose between going insane or feigning insanity, in order to fend it off. Folly, like fiction, holds the power to break contracts. In that sense, the grounds on which such madness is feigned, are perhaps most similar to the ground on which literary writing takes root most significantly – the freedom to be in the wrong, to tear down the preconceived concepts, grammatical structures, and social contracts, in order to perceive something anew, in those ruins. Nettie, literally scissors in her hands, echoes Bowen's own writing practices, as they were described by Charles Ritchie's diary entry from the 3rd of March 1942:

> Elizabeth was discussing her method of writing the other night. She says that when she is writing a scene for the first time she always throws in all the descriptive words that come to her mind. She overdoes the situation, puts in everything which will heighten the effect she wants to get, like, as she says, someone doing clay modelling, who smacks on handfuls of clay before beginning to cut away and doing fine modelling. Then afterwards she cuts down and discards and whittles away. (Ritchie 137)

This whittling away of the superfluous resembles Beckett's methods which eventually became rooted in "impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 319). As Beckett stated in his letter to Axel Kaun in 1937:

> 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 at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask. Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. (Beckett, *Disjecta* 171–72)

Such hole-boring that unites Bowen's and Beckett's works has been already remarked on by some Bowen scholars (notably Bennett, Royle, Ellmann, and Mooney). Mooney, in particular, writes that Bowen's characteristic style has been often criticized. Her "intractable opacity and a willful disordering of English syntax," she writes, "have tended to be seen as symptoms of 'feminine preoccupation with technique,'" while they have attracted none of the opprobrium in Beckett scholarship (Mooney 239).

I know neither what is feminine about one's preoccupation with technique nor that preoccupation with technique is proper to women writers in particular (which invites one to think that men just get by with a God-given genius[112] for writing), and it seems that women writers, no matter how brilliant or innovative they are, often appear as if in the back of the classroom, always already *still* learning, that is, copying, what their male counterparts are innovating. Bennett's and Royle's analysis of Bowen's oeuvre underlines the ingenuity of her writing, proposing that "Bowen's novels figure a dissolution of the novel as such" (Bennett and Royle xix), evoking the multiple resonances of *dissolution*: "loosening, fading away, breaking up, unsolving" (Bennett and Royle xvii).

This dissolution, though visible on the level of the plot itself, starts with the breaking up or loosening of language, or, as Harriet S. Chessman puts it: with the desire "of another narrative form" (70). Focusing on Bowen's female characters, she divides them into two: those with language and those who are silent or inarticulate and often become the objects of narration. Of the latter lot, she writes:

> It is the function of the female characters outside the dominant discourse to undercut their alter egos' movement into language and story by pointing to the arbitrariness and inadequacy of these phenomena. It is precisely because of this deconstructive function that these figures are dealt with so ambivalently, by both the primary narrators and the storytelling characters: 'Is she a snake or a rabbit?' as Anna says of Portia. These figures outside discourse, in their potential manifestation as 'snakes,' haunt the garden that writers, among others, cherish. Resisting stories, and resisting language, they uncover the scandal at the heart of authorship itself. In Edward Said's terms, they are occupied with molestation; they expose the shaky and fictive ground that writing rests on. And they suggest, as well, what might have been left out of 'writing' as it has been. (Chessman 74)

[112] In *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie: les secrets de l'archive*, Derrida unravels a versatile set of relations in which the word *genius* dwells. He writes:

> Ce nom « génie », on le sait trop, il gêne. Certes. Depuis longtemps. On a souvent raison d'y suspecter une abdication obscurantiste devant les gènes, justement, une concession à la génétique de l'*ingenium* ou, pire, un innéisme créationniste, en en mot, dans le langage d'un autre temps, la complicité de quelque naturalisme biologisant et d'une théologie de l'inspiration extatique. (…) La singularité historique, sémantique, et pragmatique de ce nom, c'est donc qu'on l'a toujours réservé au masculin comme au singulier. On n'a jamais, que je sache, reconnu, au féminin, *les* génies d'une femme. (Derrida, *Genèses* 11–13)

Bowen's inarticulate characters, often women, resemble in their utter trouble with language Beckett's narrators, who are mostly men. I do wonder if there is an unthinking assumption that a female character's trouble with language is somehow *less shocking* than that of Beckett's male characters who are also painfully coercing their thoughts into language, which, they feel, is not their own. Bowen's and Beckett's characters' shared uneasiness with the tool that has been closely linked to the notion *human*, that gives one the dignity of *man*kind – language, is also perhaps haunted by an old presumption, which is still strong, that women are not on equal footing with men when it comes to intelligence, which is, in its Cartesian fashion, also linked to language. Yet, I argue that the Bowenesque molestation (that Chessman evokes) of narratives, language, and of authorship itself, through her female characters, is comparable to Beckett's desire to unsanctify language, to "contribute to its falling into disrepute" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 172), and rid literature of its "old lazy ways" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 172), mostly through his male narrators. As Mooney explains:

> Observant Bowen criticism needs to recognize that any adequate response to Bowen involves a reading that is alert to her work's disunities and incoherences, and recognizes the importance of such instabilities within her narratives, which not only resist but also deploy norms in order to resist them. Bowen's readers, more so than Beckett's readers, are continually aware of the temptation to convert her fictions back into a more familiar form, to attempt to reconcile the ways in which they are visibly at odds with themselves as narratives, to smooth the roughness of narrative surfaces. However, it is precisely the lack of epistemological certainty that is the point. (Mooney 242)

Those disunities and incoherences appear on the level of the language as well in stories told in *The Heat of the Day* where no story is final. The identity of the novel itself is plural. As Bennett and Royle write: "Spy story, love story, ghost story: *The Heat of the Day* gathers all these together. And yet, threading in and out, it constantly transpires to have pulled out, gone away, lost its head, buried and sealed itself, elsewhere" (Bennett and Royle 85). The disunities and incoherences are in some ways less perceptible, that is, more uncanny, than in Beckett's novels where those incoherences are made visible through the narrator's interior monologue. The Beckettian method is announced at the beginning of *The Unnamamble*, where the narrator asks: "What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 285).

The affirmations and negations in Bowen's fiction work more slowly. They are deeply weaved into the plot itself, they make up the plot: "There are only stories, only conversations, knitted together or grafted onto others: there is no metanarrative, no metaconversation, that exists outside the knitting and knotting of sheer kink" (Bennett and Royle 87). The words

"sheer kink" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 136) which are uttered by Robert Harrison in the novel, are described by Bennett and Royle in terms that connect to Cousin Nettie's craft: *sheer* as "a very thin fabric" or, as an adjective, "bright, thin, pure, mere, downright, vertical or very nearly"; whereas *kink* refers to "a short twist or curl in a rope, thread, hair, wire, or the like, at which it is bent upon itself" but also "a mental twist: a crick: a whim: an imperfection" (Bennett and Royle 86). The connection between *knitting* and *writing* was also established in Bowen's last novel, *Eva Trout*, where she writes: "One plot unravelled, another knitting. Realignments, out-of-character overtures, fresh fancies budding from hoary boughs" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216). Bowen's knitted stories, much like her knotted syntax, construct a mesh where, to quote Stella from the novel (about to repeat Cousin Nettie's past in her way, in the future, by marrying a cousin of a cousin): "prospects have alternatives" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 322); and to quote Eva: "(…) there is no hope of keeping a check on people; you cannot know what they do, or why they do it. Situations alter for no knowable reason – as though a game continued while you were away from the board or have left the table" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 216).

The alternatives and the unknowables both make the novel. One is left, in this fiction as in real life, without mastery. *The Heat of the Day* is a novel of net-ties. Similar to Nettie's crazy grids, the structure of the novel resembles Nicholas Royle's idea of "a space of quilted thinking" (Royle, *Quilt* 159) that requires reckoning with all the meanings of the word, associations and sounds: "with all it covers and uncovers, as well as its distance from a world of simple surfaces and depths, concealment or revelation" (Royle, *Quilt* 159). It also resembles Deleuze's and Guattari's idea of a rhizome-structured text, that is, an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying network without a beginning and an end, but with "a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills" (Deleuze and Guattari 21); a map-like structure that is "always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 21). As Bennett and Royle explain, in *The Heat of the Day* "there are only lines to go on, lines which nevertheless in their very knotting up, or in their very extremities, turn up something different, lead elsewhere. As Harrison puts it, in the context of what Stella calls his line of business: 'Go right out on one thing ... and immediately something else opens up'" (Bennett and Royle 88). Such unexpected lines of flight that compose as well as deconstruct Bowen's writing, make it a rhizomatic literature that, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, moves between things, establishes a certain logic as well as overthrows ontology, foundations, beginnings and ends, and instead of establishing a more linear structure, on the contrary, picks up speed in the middle that, since

all has become "a stream without beginning or end" (Deleuze and Guattari 25), can hardly be called "middle" anymore.

In the middle (of the book), as the reader knows, is Cousin Nettie, who is at the same time, paradoxically, at the furthest margin of the novel: barely in it and barely localizable. "Much absorbed in the woolwork" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 203) and "having nothing but nothing behind her back" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 206), Nettie is the symbolic ghostly double of the writer, dispossessed of the outside world.

Cousin Nettie holds stories without being part of them, and like the Moirai, she weaves threads, not threads of life, but storylines, as the reader is shown in chapter eleven, when Roderick visits her. From Nettie, he extracts a storyline, an otherwise unknown connection between Roderick's father and his secret lover, and by doing so, discredits Stella's story of her divorce and the history he knew to be his father's. This opens a whole new chain of reasoning, changing the relationship between Roderick and his mother, who can no longer be perceived as a culprit. Roderick, now dispossessed of what he considered to be *his* history or pre-history, has to reread himself backwards.

Nettie, whose stories are transferred to her woolwork, is also shown to be involved in a process of rereading:

> It had been to be seen, all along the line, how she charged herself with keeping the conversation within bounds. Once more she picked up her woolwork, with a conventional sigh – though this time only to turn the canvas from front to back, to examine her stitches closely, then hold out the whole at arm's length for a look in which showed absolute disconnection, as though the secret or charm of the continuity had been lost now, and she for one did not care. But no, she dare not afford *that* – she at once set out, with stork's beak scissors, sedulously to snip off straggles of wool from the rough side. But the scissors, out of some impish volition of their own, kept returning to peck, pick, hover destructively over the finished part. (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 209)

Nettie's unverbalized, rather than non-verbalized, thoughts are held within the bounds of decency and reduced to "a *conventional* sigh" (209, emphasis mine). Something, instead, happens to the woolwork which Nettie, for a moment, extends away from herself "for a look in which showed absolute disconnection" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 209). The work, now seen anew, calls for changes, for a destruction out of "impish volition" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 209), for in her "absolute disconnection" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 209) from the work, she has seen something anew in the familiar pattern.

Every story in *The Heat of the Day* is open to the danger of deconstructive rereading, for every story appears in a mobile decentralized net-tie of stories, and thus, is haunted and influenced by its ties to other perspectives and storylines. To master or possess a story, thus,

becomes impossible. Nettie's brief presence paints the picture of a Modernist author who is not in the position of mastery but dispossessed of her story. Crafting her plots by *cracking* ("breaking, revealing, and deciphering") and *grafting* ("transplanting") dictions, she no longer authors her stories from the position of mastery, but rather as a weaver of nets, being herself "much absorbed in the woolwork" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 203). Nettie's embroidery is not only a metaphor for the writings of the dispossessed, but perhaps a hint that the very process of writing for an author such as Bowen is the experience of dispossession – of letting go of the more conventional language, and inevitably, being deprived of the authority this literary language possesses.

Maurice Blanchot (from his position as a Modernist author himself) divides writers in two vast groups. First, those who do not question the institution of literature, who betray all the peculiarities they perceive in their language by adopting a certain way of writing that belongs to the domain of mastery and of masters (aristocrats).[113] Blanchot explains that a form of rationality in literature that produces and preaches truths believed to be "beyond the person" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 27) (the writer) and "beyond time" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 27) is simply an attempt to reduce truth to an order within aristocratic society – to the truth of masters, the truth of the powerful. According to Blanchot, this reduction makes literature not only a guardian of the "glorious solitude of reason" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 27) but an enclosure – an institution that separates itself from the multiplicity of ways of writing the world. Blanchot claims that up to the 19th century, a writer's mission was to "write well," meaning, to participate in rituals that impose a certain knowable pattern to the work: "to write is to enter a *templum* that imposes on us, independently of the language that is ours by right of birth and by physical destiny, a certain number of uses, an implicit religion, a rumor that changes beforehand all that we can say, that charges it with intentions that are all the more effective since they are not avowed" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 206). He proposes that "to write is first of all to want to destroy the temple before building it," it is to "refuse to pass over the threshold, to refuse to 'write'" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 206).

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[113] Blanchot in his *The Space of Literature* describes a classic as someone who:

> sacrifices within himself the idiom which is proper to him, but he does so in order to give voice to the universal. The calm of a regular form, the certainty of a language free from idiosyncrasy, where impersonal generality speaks, secures him a relation with truth -- with truth which is beyond the person and purports to be beyond time. Then literature has the glorious solitude of reason, that rarefied life at the heart of the whole which would require resolution and courage if this reason were not in fact the stability of an ordered aristocratic society; that is, the noble satisfaction of a part of society which concentrates the whole within itself by isolating itself well above what sustains it. (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 27)

The writer-knitter Cousin Nettie seems to follow Blanchot's daring quest quite literally by crossing no holy thresholds and by refusing to write (to anyone: even her message to her dead husband was fabricated by others).

As Maud Ellmann notices: "Like Beckett's Murphy, another refugee from the 'descendancy,' she [Nettie] dreams of nothing more enticing than a padded cell; like Mr Endon [end/on], Murphy's lunatic chess partner, who manoeuvres all his pieces back to their original position on the board, Nettie represents the end of history, the terminus of the narrative" (Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen* 162). Yet, paradoxically, Cousin Nettie's desire for all stories to be over and for herself to be out of them, also coincides with her powerful entrance into the novel. This curious entrance, which is also a refusal to enter the literary space of stories, paints the very threshold dilemma Blanchot observes in Modernist authors.

There is also a molestation of the institution of literature, of Blanchot's metaphorical temple, in Bowen's last novel, *Eva Trout*. The link between Eva's fictions and literature as an institution (also constituted on the promise of telling lies) is made when Eva visits Charles Dickens's house, that Bowen herself had visited on several occasions (Glendinning 259). While Iseult goes on about the extraordinariness of being in the house of the literary genius himself, treating the place and the objects within it with an utmost sacramental respect, Eva bluntly declares that she sometimes comes here and sits in the chair that is forbidden for visitors. She boast: "One can untie the cord, then tie it again" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 120). The tying and untying that recalls the writing process itself, come across to Iseult as disrespectful. This Goldilocks does not respect the rules of the house, the rules of the host. She transgresses. In that sense, she also becomes the image of the Modernist author – metaphorically disrupting the institutional rites of literature that, as Maurice Blanchot explains, imply a sense of mastery over one's language and obedience to a set framework of uses. Eva, who is clearly without mastery over language and quite unmasterable, disrupts this space and the rules that Iseult holds dear (she is treating Dickens's house as if it were a temple). Iseult who shadows Dickens as well as other great writers would never sit in Dickens' chair. Eva's brutish disregard of traditions both underlines certain traditions in literary writing (that has been dominated by men) as well as the necessity to challenge those traditions, which calls for disloyalty.

Both Nettie's and Eva's disobedience and disloyalty to the most familiar traditions are necessary for what Bowen calls "a vital writing." According to her, a vital writing requires sympathy that is to be obtained by being disloyal to what is most familiar (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 60), but also disloyal to the established ways of writing literature.

In *The Heat of the Day*, literary writing becomes a thinking literature, a writing that is never fully at home, a writing dwelling outside any patriarchal law of *oikos*, outside the temple, a writing that cannot be possessed or mastered, but is open to alterations and rereading. *The Heat of the Day* is not "a ramifying plot" (Corcoran 168) where stories grow roots and complicated branches, but rather a plot without a trunk, a rhizome-like text where each version of the story, each reading of the word or a story not only completes or complicates the "original" story, but challenges and decentralizes it. The novel constitutes an expanding crazy net-tie of stories where marginal characters also appear as if central and all remains to be cracked ("deciphered, revealed, broken") again and again. The novel rethinks the rites of writing as well as the right to write through a fragmented narrative that embraces a plurality of voices and ghosts, and thereby opens a space for thinking about otherness within the familiar. Such a destabilizing thinking is proper to characters such as Eva Trout and Cousin Nettie, to Bowen's *oeuvre* in general, and always already on the verge and under the threat of being perceived as improper ("unsuitable, indecorous, abnormal, incorrect").

Conclusion

Through Bowen's meticulously deconstructive use of words ("possession," chiefly) and the structure of the novel, *The Heat of the Day* paves (or rather cracks) the way for thinking about otherness in language, in history, in literature, and in society.

Patriarchal mastery is humbled in its hold over inheritance, language, story, history, and literature, through the uncanny notion of possession in various ways, most evidently, by pointing out the ghost of the old owner of Mount Morris that interferes with the new master's capacity to master. The possessor becomes the possessed in the sense of being haunted, but also in the sense of being a habitat – a vessel for patriarchal mastery. Due to the constant deferral of the meaning of a word, language fails to fall in line with the patriarchal dream of possessing language. Thus, the idea of patrilineal inheritance in the novel is shown to fail through the testament that is incapable of assuring a fixed, not already haunted, message.

The Heat of the Day destabilizes and decentralizes patriarchal rule within language, history and literature. The incapacity to possess language, story or history, without being haunted, and thereby dispossessed, is shown though the character of Robert Kelway, while Cousin Nettie promotes thinking about a modernist author and a new disseminating plot: a network, a net-tie –"a diction. Action of language, language of action" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 35), where multiple stories are deciphered and transplanted. Bowen's way of writing goes

against adapting literature to certain patriarchal structures only, against fixed hierarchies. It is the building of literature outside Blanchot's temple, upon the ruins of the tradition of solid narratives of the male-dominated space of literature; across borders; a literature where the master-writer is disillusioned about their mastery, humbled and humbling.

Dispossession within possession is shown as a necessary condition for Modernist writing. Rather than constituting an unquestioning mastery of language, Bowen's work is profoundly affected by her sensitivity toward the forces of dispossession inherent to language and writing, whereby she challenges the form of the novel as such. The cracks in the novel, much like the tears in Cousin Nettie's canvas, become the embodiment of (to echo once more Bennett's and Royle's view) the dissolution of the novel.

3.2 Choral Tears: The Forces of Dispossession in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, every modern Indo-European language of Western Europe except English derives its verb for *to write* from Latin *scrībere.* The French language has *écrire,* in Spanish the word is *escribir,* in Portuguese *escrever,* in Catalan *escriure,* in Italian *scrivere,* in Irish *scríobh,* in Scottish Gaelic *sgrìobh,* in Welsh *ysgrifennu,* in Breton *skriva,* in Icelandic *skrifa,* in Danish and Norwegian *skrive,* in Swedish *skriva,* in German *schreiben*, and in Dutch *schrijven.* The Latin *scrībere* has several meanings among which are "to scratch, grave, engrave, and draw," but in some texts also "to embroider."[114]

The link between writing and embroidering is evident in Bowen's work, notably through characters such as Cousin Nettie (net-tie), an embroiderer inclined to tear holes into her woolwork. However, Beckett also establishes links between writing and woolwork. The unnameable narrator writes: "Worm cannot note. Can Mahood note? That's it, weave, weave. Yes, it is the characteristic, among others, of Mahood to note, even if he does not always succeed in doing so, certain things, perhaps I should say all things, so as to turn them to account, for his governance" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 333). Similarly, the work of interlacing, grid-making, web spinning is also, immediately, given to the contradictory forces of tearing up and unweaving. Maud Ellmann writes: "As weaving depends on unweaving, so artworks could be said to depend on ratworks, on the counterforces of unbinding, undermining, deconstruction built into the creative process" (Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism* 28). Exploring Modernist writings through the imagery of nets and networks that give way to thinking interconnection, infiltration, invasion, uncontrollability, dependency, but also affinity with others or other forces that dispossess the writer of the idea of full autonomy, even in writing, Ellman notes: "[…] Joyce, like Beckett, conceives of rats as saboteurs of writing, but Joyce abhors them whereas Beckett sympathizes with them, which is symptomatic of these writers' differences as modernists. For Joyce aims to fatten the library of Western culture, whereas Beckett aims to thin it, gnaw it down" (Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism* 31). The gnawing that, as Ellmann points out, appears as "a final silence when the last rats will abandon the sinking ship of

[114]"Stat. S. 1, 3, 9: "*quae Attalicis variata per artem Aulaeis scribuntur acu*," i. e. *are embroidered*, Sil. 14, 660."
From *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879.
http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=scribo.

language" in *Watt*, where the gnawing and scurrying of the final rats is heard (Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism* 28), is comparable to the tears (/tɛə(r)z/) that appear in *The Unnamable* (1953/ trans. 1958) and *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981/ trans. 1982).

I argue that in Beckett's later fiction, tears, heard both as gaps but also as the queerly significant drops escaping from human eyes, are particular forces of dispossession. Such dispossession, or what I will call "choral tears" in Beckett's writing, is proper to Modernist writing, however, tears (/tɛə(r)z/) are also rooted in the etymology of writing, as writing comes from "Old English *wrîtan,* from the Old Frisian *wrîta* (to score, write), Old Saxon *wrîtan* (to cut, write), (Middle Low German *wrîten*), Old High German *rîzan*, meaning: tear, draw (Middle High German *rîzen*, German *reissen*) (*OED*). German still retains this meaning in its cognate verb *reissen*, "to tear."

The following analysis will explore the author's and the reader's experience of dispossession in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Beckett's texts in tears will first be examined as a means for divorcing literature from its subordinate position to philosophy, through Derrida's interpretations of chora and what he calls "literature." Beckett's later fiction, seen as choral tears for its syntactic porosity and semantic ambiguity, will also be shown to challenge the writing and reading of suffering through tears (/tɪə(r)z/) in *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*.

Humbler angles through dispossession: philosophy and "literature"

Reading Beckett's later work is an experience of dispossession, of which *The Unnamable* is perhaps the beginning of a complete experience of readerly dispossession. While *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* are riddled with paradoxes, offer a confusing plot, and introduce us to the narrators' busy plotting, *The Unnamable* begins with the promise of narrating through "aporia pure and simple" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 285). An aporia is right away demonstrated through the idea of going on via aporia and the narrator's affirmation that he does not know what "aporia" is, which constitutes a logical impasse, an aporia, that he then unknowingly suspends, as he goes on speaking anyway, building up the narrative as a passage of possible within the impossible, which is then briefly linked to ephectics:

> Can one be ephectic otherwise than unawares? I don't know. With the yesses and noes it is different, they will come back to me as I go along and how, like a bird, to shit on them all without exception. The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I

> forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 185–286)

Ephectics connect thinking to the idea of suspension of judgement (*épochè*, "state of doubt") which in Phyrro's hands gains the objective of reaching a state of inner peace, but in Beckett's fiction gives way to inventing a language for the experience of suffering of which one must speak, even if it means saying the impossible: what cannot be put to words, and yet cannot be silenced. To this narrative of suffering, the unnamable narrator gives nearly human subjects through "a few puppets" that he plans to tear up: "Then I'll scatter them, to the winds, if I can" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 286). What the readers are to expect from the novel's opening lines is perhaps its sheer unreadability, an impasse; a promise of miswriting and misreading, and yet we read on, perhaps hoping to masterfully make sense of this strangely charming poetic gloom that invites us, rejects us, haunts us.

As a reader, I am eager to understand suffering, and yet, I am not given an easy, willing, subject. Along with the unnamable narrator, I am dispossessed of my eager empathic urge to feel for the other, as the other turns over, hides his face, is torn up, turns to dust, as the text refuses my willing empathy that has no place to turn to other than to observe itself in the mirror:

> All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. But I just said I have spoken of me, am speaking of me. I don't care a curse what I just said. It is now I shall speak of me, for the first time. I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. Let them be gone now, them and all the others, those I have used and those I have not used, give me back the pains I lent them and vanish, from my life, my memory, my terrors and shames. There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 297–98)

The unnamable narrator turns away from comparing his pain to that of others. Turning to himself now, of whom, he says, he knows nothing (Beckett, *Three Novels* 298) and to "this black" of which he claims to know nothing either, "except that it is black, and empty" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 298). This black mirror, a rather strange *tabula rasa*, in front of which the unnamable narrator makes us imagine him, in some ways embodies the place of the Modernist author for whom a certain dispossession of both literary and philosophical traditions is a necessary condition for writing. But this dispossession is also what dispossesses, in its turn, the writer of habitual ways of thinking and writing, leaving him without the means to write.

Maurice Blanchot links such dispossession to Mallarmé's approach to writing that consists in tearing down of the superfluous text in order to arrive at what Mallarmé calls the

Absolute Darkness,[115] which also induces a state of heightened sensibility and vulnerability.[116] This tearing down of the superfluous, which reaches its extreme practice in *The Unnamable* and Beckett's later fiction, leads to the dispossession of the author's and the reader's authority, their sense of mastery over the work, as what is left on the grid after the work of elimination is not masterable either – perhaps so much so that it is hardly a novel, hardly literature: "[…] *c'est à ce dernier travail que je tiens le plus, quoiqu'il m'ait mis dans de sales draps. J'essaie de m'en sortir. Mais je ne m'en sors pas. Je ne sais pas si ça pourra faire un livre. Ce sera peut-être un temps pour rien*" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 104).

Beckett's tearing down of the superfluous, or boring holes into language, leads him towards the ends of literature, but also, on the contrary, towards literature, as such writing "outside" literature will redefine its borders. Beckett's "need to be ill-equipped" (Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Vol. 2* 464), that is, *mal armé*, which led him to abandon his mother tongue and write in French, gives way to a writing that I cannot think of any other way of describing than choral tears.

***

In *Chora L Works*, Derrida writes:

> Chora is a bit of fiction, it has no reference. A reference is s[ometh]ing real, about which you can tell a story. It is not a myth. The text on which I have been working deals with the problem of myth[… t]he opposition between *logos* and *muthos*; chora is neither the object of a logos nor the object of a muthos. It is a fiction, since it has no reference, but it is not a story. It is not an organized story with a beginning and an end. (Derrida and Eisenman 11)[117]

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[115] Blanchot writes:

> Rappelons seulement la déclaration de 1867 à [Eugène] Lefébure : « Je [Mallarmé] n'ai créé mon œuvre que par élimination, et toute vérité acquise ne naissait que de la perte d'une impression qui, ayant étincelé, s'était consumée et me permettait, grâce à ses ténèbres dégagées, d'avancer plus profondément dans la sensation des Ténèbres Absolues. La Destruction fut ma Béatrice » (Blanchot, *Le Livre* 329).

[116] In the same letter, Mallarmé writes:

> […] tout cela n'a pas été trouvé par le développement normal de mes facultés, mais par la voie pécheresse et hâtive, satanique et *facile* de la Destruction de moi, produisant non la force, mais une sensibilité, qui, fatalement, m'a conduit là. Je n'ai, personnellement, aucun mérite ; et c'est même pour éviter ce remords (d'avoir désobéi à la lenteur des lois naturelles) que j'aime à me réfugier dans l'impersonnalité — qui me semble une consécration. Toutefois, *en me sondant*, voici ce que je crois. « Je ne pense pas que mon cerveau s'éteigne avant l'accomplissement de l'Œuvre, car, ayant eu la force de concevoir, et ayant celle de recevoir maintenant la conception, (de la comprendre), il est probable qu'il a celle de la réaliser. Mais c'est mon corps qui est *totalement épuisé*. Après quelques jours de tension spirituelle dans un appartement, je me congèle et me mire dans le diamant de cette glace, — jusqu'à une agonie : puis, quand je veux me revivifier au soleil de la terre, il me fond — il me montre la profonde désagrégation de mon être physique, et je sens mon épuisement complet. (Mallarmé)

[117] The book has deliberate holes in it which is why the text has mysterious gaps/tears in it that swallow some words, making us try to fill the gaps, with no certainty.

Chora comes from Plato's *Timaeus* where Plato is explaining the birth of the *cosmos* ("arrangement: the world as arranged, organized"); it appears as something besides the *eidos*, eternal and unchanging, and the sensible world, the latter being the copy of the former (Derrida and Eisenman 9). Derrida explains that though *chora*, in Greek, refers to "place" in different senses ("place in general, the residence, the habitation, the place where we live, the country"); what Plato names chora has something to do with *interval*: "it is what you open to 'give' place to things, or when you open something for things to take place" (Derrida and Eisenman 9). Chora is said to have maternal overtones (a womb, matrix, mother, nurse) which is why the French tend to speak of *her* (*la khôra*), but Derrida avoids grouping *khôra* as masculine or feminine, simply *khôra* (Derrida, *Khôra* 29–30) – insisting that *khôra* is beyond the restrictions of language and cultural contexts, beyond the beginning of the beginning (Derrida, *Khôra* 96). Derrida writes: "Chora is irreducible to everything that gives Plato's philosophy coherence. It is a kind of hybrid being; a kind of being that we can only think of in dreaming. Chora is not exactly the void, though it looks as if it were void, and it's not temporal in the sense of a sensible world" (Derrida and Eisenman 10). He describes chora as a receptacle or a third element/genre (*triton genos*) that is beyond all categorical oppositions (Derrida, *Khôra* 91) – a non-place (Derrida, *Khôra* 55) that receives, gives place, but does not own anything (Derrida, *Khôra* 36); it has been interpreted by various people, but does not *have* any interpretations. Chora is an impossible surface, exterior to all interpretations and exterior to the print it receives:

> Chora receives everything or gives place to everything, yet Plato insists that in fact it has to be a virgin place, and that it has to be totally foreign, totally exterior to anything that it receives. Since it is absolutely blank, everything that is printed on it is auto[matic]ally effaced. It remains foreign to the ink it receives; so, in a sense, it does not receive anything – it does not receive what [it rec]eives nor does it give what it gives. Everything inscribed in it erases itself immediately, while remaining in it. It is thus an impossible surface – it is not even [a surf]ace, because it has no depth. (Derrida and Eisenman 10)

Derrida shows that "since chora is irreducible to the two positions, the sensible and the intelligible, which have dominated the entire tradition of Western thought, it is irreducible to all the values to which we are accustomed – values of origin, anthropomorphism and so on" (Derrida and Eisenman 10), which makes it a curious challenge for the Western philosophy. It is inside the Western philosophical tradition and irreducible to it; chora disrupts this tradition from within (Derrida and Eisenman 10).

Similarly to such choral forces, *The Unnamable* disrupts the Western literary tradition from within. Beckett's choral tears as the writing that refuses to be a story with a beginning and an end, but rather becomes an endless story of the unnamable narrator's attempt to erase

all origins, all beginnings, which cannot be found (and thus can neither be erased nor established). The novel disables the values of origin through its structural peculiarities that dispossess the author as well as the reader of securing a single reading of the text and the concepts it might hold. For precisely, the textual tears that are both visible and invisible – as Beckett's ravaged syntax turns into an unending sentence where the ends of sentences are withheld, left up to the reader – perceptibly holds, suspends, withholds meaning instead of possessing it. No safe transmission of meaning is guaranteed – not to say that it has ever been guaranteed, but here this dispossession becomes painfully perceptible. Much like Bowen's Eva Trout, Beckett's unnameable narrator is not a master of language. He fails to possess stories and fails to escape them; as Paul Stewart explains, he "repeatedly yearns for 'the calm that precedes life', a return to a pre-existent state from which he cannot be expelled" (Stewart 173). However, there is no being outside the stories for the unnamable narrator, as there is no "being" inside the stories, if *being* coincides with the ideas of full presence, consciousness, and autonomy.

Choraesque in its rejection of being in possession of knowledge, voice, being, as well as in being a receiver, a blind container of what it rejects, *The Unnamable* turns away from traditional ways of storytelling, relation to language, and the search for the truth. *The Unnamable*'s rejection of being and of place (origin) turns it into a sort of impossible surface for the Western literary tradition, making it hardly literature, something that as Derrida shows is an angle from which both philosophy and literature can be humbled. Philosophy, as Rodolphe Gasché explains, gains its superiority from its desire to control and eliminate the opacity of its signifier:

> The specificity of philosophy and literature alike rests on this systematic curtailment of the signifier. Consequently, reading is in essence always a transcendental reading in search of the signified. Derrida writes of 'the entire history of texts, and within it the history of literary forms in the West,' that it 'has almost always and almost everywhere, according to some fashions and across very diverse ages, lent itself to this *transcendental* reading, in that search for the signified'. (Gasché 256)

He writes that the interpretation of mimesis as subject to truth, which claims the priority and precedence of the imitated over imitation, subjects literature to a status of metaphoric secondariness, as literature can then be shown to have no specificity of its own and is reducible to its signified (its message, the truth it expresses) (Gasché 256). Literary writing that has subjugated itself "to the constraints of the concept and to the ethos of philosophy" could be seen as speaking in the voice of philosophy, as its "mere proxy, stillborn" (Gasché 256). The

effect of literary writing that started with Mallarmé's work, Derrida shows, is that of undermining this order:

> Literature, or what was called literature up to the nineteenth century, does not undermine philosophy through its content or through an empirical excess of writing on the page. Rather, if the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition of both literature and philosophy stems from literary or poetic writing's destruction of 'the transcendental authority and dominant category of the *episteme*: being', then this vacillation could have been achieved only through its 'generalized putting-in-quotation marks of literature, of the so-called literary text'. In other words, it is by suspending its *being* as literature that literature becomes capable of challenging philosophy's dominant categorization. Literature puts itself between quotation marks by opening itself to the absolute loss of its meaning, whether of content or of form. Literature becomes a radical interrogation of philosophy, and of most past literature as well, not only by refusing its foundation in a preceding and prior being of meaning but also by disclaiming any formal essence as concerns its substance of expression. Therefore, Derrida must regard the use of the term *literature* for that sort of literary writing with suspicion, since it 'subjects the concept to belles-lettres, to the arts, to poetry, to rhetoric, and to philosophy'. He must write 'literature' or 'literary' between quotation marks precisely because the new practice of this sort of writing 'supposes a break with what has tied the history of the literary arts to the history of metaphysics'. 'Literature' thus acquires a subversive function with regard to philosophy and the literature under its dominion, not by restoring its specificity at any cost but, precisely, by recognizing that it can effect such a subversion only by hardly being literature. 'Literature' (is) almost no literature. It appears, then, that the disruptive and subversive effects of 'literature' are directed not against logocentric philosophy alone but against literature as well, to the extent that the latter submits to philosophy's demands. (Gasché 258–59)

"Literature's" effect as "almost no literature" is therefore not that of giving literature a complete authenticity and autonomy as literature, but rather an effect of forming an angle with both philosophy and literature that would limit both discourses "whose authority is marked by this margin and thus dependent on it" (Gasché 260). Such a margin or angle is humbling to both, as it undermines the sovereign powers of both; it unsettles their pretensions to authority and autonomy and "'grounds' them in what they do not control" (Gasché 260). This angle, Gasché explains, is what Derrida calls "general text," which is not reducible to a writing on the page (as neither philosophy nor literature must necessarily be written) (Gasché 260).

As Jeffrey Thomas Nealon explains, Derrida's general text could be thought rather in terms of

> a realm of mediation, something of a phenomenological life-world, the 'given' network or chain that makes discourse – in the broad sense of the word as a place where things are mediated – possible but at the same time makes it impossible for the discourse to arrive at any ontologically determinable destination, any merely singular telos. With his notion of general text, Derrida works out the consequences of 'the apocalyptic structure of language,' in which nothing outside the differential network, the general text, can guarantee meaning or arrest the chain of referrals. There is, in this sense, no extra-text, no term that can rule, organize, or regulate the system from without the system, precisely because the supposed master term must constitute itself *within* this network of referrals by referring always to something other than itself. There is no simple outside or beyond this closure. (Nealon 82–83)

As Gasché writes, Derrida's provocative claim, "there is no extra-text," should not be understood as "all is text," instead, it refers to the impossibility of something outside the text to act as "a last reason, assume a *fulfilling function (Erfüllungsfunktion)* of the textual referrals" (Gasché 281). Derrida could have also written "there is no inside of the text," as any text is characterized by structures of referral and the text has no identity or self with which to coincide in a completely autonomous manner: "Though the text necessarily refers to itself, this movement never comes to completion. In addition, all self-referral, as shown in 'The Double Session,' is grafted on a structurally endless referral to other determinate texts, thus making all textual self-reflexivity *ultimately* impossible" (Gasché 281). The general text is not a text that is closed upon itself in such a manner that its limits would demarcate an inside from an outside; instead "the general text is rather that border itself, from which the assignment of insides and outsides takes place, as well as where this distinction ultimately collapses" (Gasché 280). As Nealon explains, Derrida's thought is conditioned by the Second World War's horrors, "always under the shadow of an apocalypse without revelation"; rather than being conditioned by living, it is about living on (Derrida's "Living On: Border Lines," 1979), which is not the same thing nor is it its opposite:

> Here we see most clearly the 'worldly' aspect of Derrida's thought; it is concerned not simply with texts and their internal workings, but it grows out of the *postmodern* consciousness: a consciousness of being a survivor, a consciousness of living on rather than simply living or dying, of living on in the undecided – of not closing off possibility (difference) merely for the sake of actuality (sameness). Living on in the postmodern is living beyond (which is to say *between*, as there is no simple beyond) the oppositions or hierarchies that have allowed and validated the horrors of the twentieth century. (Nealon 83)

What Nealon names "postmodern" refers to "the specificity of the hesitation or negotiation between text (in all its complex Derridean associations) and reading at the space of metaphysical closure, where both the possibility and the ends of reading and writing are radically unsure" (Nealon 85). Beckett's and Bowen's later fiction that could be placed at the end of Modernism, as its margin or the dissolution of the novel, grew out of the consciousness (though this is not the right word) of the 20th century horrors that remain incomprehensible (thus, not conscious), indigestible – an apocalypse without revelation, or choral tears (/tɛə(r)z) across the page. The impoverished textual structure in *The Unnamable* that works toward suspending meaning and judgement rather than establishing any sort of final conclusion or reason, tears down our sense of full consciousness through our failure of reading as understanding, mastering the text. Beckett's narratives that borrow from the Western

philosophical and literary tradition, and at the same time tear apart all such grafts, become the experience of living on in the undecided.

There is perhaps no perfect narrative for such living on which must account for the past and decide *better* for the future; Beckett's later fiction suspends the narratives that have allowed and validated the horrors of the twentieth century through the narrative structure that takes away the reader's comfort of being "inside" fiction. In *The Unnamable*, the inside is made into the refusal of being, reduced to an unknowing subject in the dark, to a porous language. In such conditions, the reader becomes ever more reliant on the outside in his/her effort to make sense of the porous inside. Beckett's final trilogy could be seen as a kind of response to the "'inextricable situation' that *The Unnamable* landed him in, namely, that at the end of that book 'there's complete disintegration. No 'I', no 'have', no 'being'. No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on'" (Read 111).

Imagination at wit's end: choral tears

When the habitual narrative structures are made to fall apart, and our usual ways of reading words and environments (which are largely dependent on vision, as I have argued before) are withdrawn, our "[i]magination at wit's end spreads its sad wings" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 65). *Ill Seen Ill Said*, as Miller shows, afflicts both seeing and saying:

> The ill of the first is inseparably the ill of the second in accordance with what Blanchot calls the "optical exigency" of the Western tradition that subordinates thought to the metaphor of vision (and thereby makes saying dependent upon the said, the signifier dependent upon the signified). If the said should correspond to the seen, a disturbance of seeing will necessarily upset the relation between saying and the said. On the other hand, the title can also be understood in exactly the opposite sense: it posits an absolute homology between the seen and the said, a homology that appears with reference to their common object, the "ill." The French version of this title, *Mal vu mal dit*, makes the necessity for this other reading even clearer, because *mal* functions at once as an adverb—meaning "ill" or "badly"—and as a substantive noun— meaning "evil." Indeed, the homology is underscored by the suggestion of a temporal coincidence between the seen and the said; rather than the one being the consequence of the other, the two belong to the same instant. Between them, a linguistic prudence that speaks at the speed of sight. (S. Miller 133)

In *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981/82), Beckett burdens the text with such puns, gaps, and ambiguities that the reading process becomes afflicted by choral tears (gaps) in our perception – that is, one can no longer rely on words, or images they evoke, as words become charged with forces of dispossession in Beckett's poetically ravaged sentence structures. As Knowlson notes: "This meticulously woven tapestry of words is best read as an exquisite prose poem" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 588).

Ill Seen Ill Said depicts the comings and goings – mere glimpses seen, that is, ill seen, of an old woman who lives alone in a cabin in the middle of moors threatened by erosion. Stones, above all, are shown to gain ground, and amongst stones, twelve figures stand out. As Knowlson notes, the enigmatic group of twelve indistinct figures recall Apostles or the signs of the Zodiac (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 588) or, as Masaki Kondo suggests, the woman is positioned "at the centre of a dial surrounded by twelve figures which seem to indicate directions, the hours, and the houses of the heavens" (Kondo 77) (and in that vein, perhaps also months of the year). Yet the significance of those twelve figures is never explained. As Knowlson writes, it also remains unclear if the dark woman is a ghost, a memory or a fiction, or a mixture of all three (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 588). Ill seen ill said, the woman is never given to the reader – given to be beheld as such, to be understood, classified; she is neither a clear metaphor nor a clear fictional replica of the real thing. Knowlson notes that this text is most often seen as a wholly imagined construct. Yet, despite the text's seeming remoteness from Beckett's life, recognizable elements tear apart the illusion of pure fiction: "Standing stones echoing the cromlechs located in the countryside near Foxrock; visits to the tomb by this 'old so dying woman' recalling the dedicated care that his mother lavished on his father's grave; familiar objects from Beckett's childhood, like the buttonhook hanging from a nail; a groove in the flagstone at the woman's front door like the one worn by Beckett's wheelbarrow in the step of his shed at Ussy" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 588–89). The "longed-for eyes" of the woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said* also recall Beckett's comments on seeing his mother's deterioration from Parkinson's disease: "I gaze into the eyes of my mother, never so blue, so stupefied, so heart-rending – the eyes of an issueless childhood, that of old age … these are the first eyes I think I truly see. I do not need to see others; there is enough there to make one love and weep" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 333). The narrator writes: "The lids occult the longed-for eyes. Time will tell them washen blue. Where tears perhaps not for nothing. Unimaginable tears of old" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 71).

These tears from the past dispossess the readers of the "pure" construct, as the construct already looks outside of its bounds, into the experience that is not its own. The text cannot be reduced to the experience that is purely fictional. The very attempt to abandon fiction to pure fictionality only ends up in utter impoverishment: the death of imagination, the death of fiction. As David Read writes:

> […] the old woman continually evades the staring eye of flesh by disappearing into the ensuing dark. In her absence, the artist is forced to fall back on his inner eye: 'Riveted to some detail of the desert the eye fills with tears. Imagination at wit's end spreads its sad wings'. When the old woman disappears from view, the eye uses familiar objects, such as her chair, to conjure her: 'Here if she eats here she sits to eat. The eye closes in the dark and sees her in the end'. Past experience is used, as in *Company*, to confirm present existence. Imagination is merely exhausting its resources. (Read 119)

The entire narrative is wrapped up in the ongoing frustration of becoming short of resources. The mind's eye can but renew the little resources it has, in order to go on, to see on: "Such – such fiasco that folly takes a hand. Such bits and scraps. Seen no matter how and said as seen. Dread of black. Of white. Of void. Let her vanish. And the rest. For good. And the sun. Last rays. And the moon. And Venus. Nothing left but black sky. White earth. Or inversely. No more sky or earth" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 75). The bits and scraps, or, seen otherwise – tears (/tɛə(r)z/), cannot be made into mere figments of the mind's eye only, even though the narrative voice declares: "Be shut of it all. On to the next. Next figment. Close it for good this filthy eye of flesh" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 74). The bits and scraps that come into the view in one's imagination can neither be entirely divorced from "the real" nor can they be declared the real. It reads: "Such the confusion now between real and – how say its contrary? No matter. That old tandem. Such now the confusion between them once so twain. And such the farrago from eye to the mind. For it to make what sad sense it may. No matter now. Such equal liars both. Real and – how ill say its contrary? The counter-poison" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 82). The counter-poison, which could be seen as fiction, becomes not only a medium from where the real can be questioned, but the forces of fiction, namely, its ability to imagine, are also shown to be fallible and dependent. Pure fiction is nothing. Literature is neither given an unquestionable upper hand nor is it made irrelevant, made into the unreal, as what is evoked by the mind's eye is neither "the real" nor a pure figment:

> Already all confusion. Things and imaginings. As of always. Confusion amounting to nothing. Despite precautions. If only she could be pure figment. Unalloyed. This old so dying woman. So dead. In the madhouse of the skull and nowhere else. Where no more precautions to be taken. No precautions possible. Cooped up there with the rest. Hovel and stones. The lot. And the eye. How simple all then. If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor by any shift to be. Gently, gently. On. Careful. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 67)

Ill Seen Ill Said challenges the border between the real and the unreal, the inside of the fiction and the outside of fiction, as neither is strictly separable from the other: "The mind betrays the treacherous eyes and the treacherous word their treacheries" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 88). Throughout the narrative, strange tears, that is, fragments, interfere with our tendencies to weave the text into a comprehensible, autonomous whole – words such as *on*, *careful*, and

gently, gently. These words are repeated throughout the text and their effect is ambiguous, as there is no telling whom they address, and yet one cannot ignore their influence on the reading process. As the narrator is unidentifiable (neither clearly external nor internal to the story) yet not all-knowing and powerful, but rather much aware of the limits of his/her vision and words; these warning tears in the text seem to reach out, outside the text, to the reader in a particular way (like Charlotte Brontë's sudden, gentle, "reader," in *Jane Eyre*, but more ambiguously). The "care" in "careful" both soothes and calls to think with care about what precedes the uttered warning or is left unseen, unsaid:

> The cabin. Its situation. Careful. On. At the inexistent centre of a formless place. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 58)
>
> Unshepherded they stray as they list. Flowers? Careful. Alone the odd crocus still at lambing time. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 59)
>
> Close it for good this filthy eye of flesh. What forbids? Careful. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 74)
>
> And then? Careful. Have her sit? Lie? Kneel? She too vacillates. Till in the end the back and forth prevails. Sends her wavering north and south from wall to wall. In the kindly dark. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 87–88)

The "careful" that feels as the narrator's note to himself/herself constitutes a strange gap in the narration through which the reader too seems to be asked to unimagine/reimagine what their imagination has built up in the reading process. Our imagination is not allowed to settle, instead, we are constantly challenged to see again, think again, ever so carefully, gently: "And what lambs. No trace of frolic. White splotches in the grass. Aloof from the unheeding ewes. Still. Then a moment straying. Then still again. To think there is still life in this age. Gently gently" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 60).

The lambs that "a moor would have allowed" appear "for their whiteness" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 60) and other obscure reason as soon as they are made to disappear, then imagined again. Who strays at the end of this segment is left unclear, as lambs turn into white splotches in the grass and someone becomes aloof from the unheeding ewes – perhaps our own gaze that now will have to see, inwardly, anew, as the narrative turns from this picturesque landscape towards the old woman and her still life. "To think there is still life in this age" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 60), with a "gently, gently" in its tail, becomes a kind of choral dispossession where we receive what we cannot keep: to think there is as yet life in this (old) age/to think there is still life (painting) in this era/ to think there is still life (as a form of living) in this era… To this confusion, more is added later when the narrative voice turns to describing the old woman again: "No shock were she already dead. As of course she is. But in the meantime more

convenient not. Still living then she lies hidden" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 83). The "still living" as "living on" has a strange after effect of stillness attached to it – that of the corpse the previous sentences have conjured up and then merged into the imagination of living on, which becomes charged with hidden sorrows – those other choral tears (/tɪə(r)z/) or "unknowing sorrow" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 228).

As Knowlson recalls: "In the final months of his life, Beckett's feelings of love for his mother and remorse at having, as he saw it, let her down so frequently, struck me as still intense, almost volcanic. It was virtually the only 'no-go' area in our conversations. Whenever the subject arose, it was clear that it was too painful, even unbearable, for him to discuss" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 589–90). Knowlson envisages the possibility that *Ill Seen Ill Said* might express Beckett's "sense of real and imagined loss – real for his mother, imagined for his wife. At such depths of the psyche, how can there after all be any real certainty?" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 590).

Beckett's later fiction is haunted by such volcanic forces that, in a Bowenesque manner, dwell in the half-light, barely beneath the surface where they are nearly bearable: "What calm then. And what storm. Beneath the weeds' mock calm" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 74). As Knowlson writes: "The widely acknowledged power of much of his writing, particularly in the late work, comes from the fact that emotions are strictly contained but never totally abandoned. […] as you read late Beckett, you may find yourself suddenly and unaccountably moved to tears" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 590).

* * *

Tears in *The Unnamable* appear as signs of continuance of the past sufferings in the present ("ancient tears," 368), as signs of embodied experience ("blood and tears and skin and bones," 372), but also as sites of ambiguity ("perhaps it's tears of mirth," 354), anthropocentrism, and dispossession. In "I myself am exceptionally given to the tear" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 367), "tear" seems to refer to the unnamable narrator's fragility, his being helplessly prone to the "wear and tear" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 370) of time and conditions that reign in wherever he (is)/persists, but is also haunted by a hint of emotional vulnerability. To be "exceptionally given to the tear" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 367), I argue, is also an expression of dispossession – one's being exceptionally given to the tear /tɪə(r)/, to the experience of dispossession by the force of suffering and its ambiguous language. Much like words, tears are open to *différance*. One is not in possession of suffering, in a sense that suffering, even one's

own, is not strictly masterable; it does not give itself to reading and writing willingly, and in that sense, it becomes a choral tear: the tear one receives, produces, but does not necessarily possess, that is – own, understand, control. Although a tear is individually, singularly shed each time, tearing up is a shared experience: others are able to do it under various circumstances. Tears are also a visual experience: *something* is made visible to others as one tears up, and thus, given to reading while also retrieved from reading. After all, what does one mean by tears?

In *Texts for Nothing* (1950–1952), originally written in French, tears appear in a strange symbiosis with words:

> I weep too without interruption. It's an unbroken flow of words and tears. With no pause for reflection. But I speak softer, every year a little softer. Perhaps. Slower too, every year a little slower. Perhaps. It is hard for me to judge. If so the pauses would be longer, between the words, the sentences, the syllables, the tears, I confuse them, words and tears, my words are my tears, my eyes my mouth. (Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*)

The words that are the narrator's tears, the eyes that are the narrators mouth, can also be heard as a confusion between them all: my words are my tears, my eyes, my mouth, as the verb "be" is omitted, silenced, in "my eyes, my mouth." Words are all Beckett's narrators have, to transmit what the mouth can say, ill say, about the tears, which are ill seen.

The tears are not deciphered from the inside either: the unnamable narrator offers no clear reading of his tears. Instead, the tears appear as if not his own, nor are they attached to a particular reason:

> No, I have always been sitting here, at this selfsame spot, my hands on my knees, gazing before me like a great horn-owl in an aviary. The tears stream down my cheeks from my unblinking eyes. What makes me weep so? From time to time. There is nothing saddening here. Perhaps it is liquefied brain. Past happiness in any case has clean gone from my memory, assuming it was ever there. If I accomplish other natural functions it is unawares. Nothing ever troubles me. And yet I am troubled. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 287)

Tears without origin haunt the unnnamble narrator like thoughts are shown to haunt Bowen's Eva Trout. Divorced from the source of his trouble, the unnamable weeps, as if ahead of (his) pain or behind it. That lag is what, as Blanchot shows, also defines Antonin Artaud's thinking-writing process:

> He [Artaud] knows, with the profundity that the experience of pain gives him, that to think is not to have thoughts, and that the thoughts that he has only make him feel that he has not 'yet *begun* to think.' That is the grave torment into which he returns. It is as if he has touched, despite himself and by a pathetic mistake, whence his cries come, the point at which thinking is always unable to think: it 'uncan' [*impouvoir*], to use his word, which is like the essential part of his thinking, but which makes it an extremely painful lack, a failing that immediately shines from this center and, consuming the physical substance of what he thinks, divides itself on all levels into a number of particular impossibilities. (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 36)

The coming thought that tears itself up, into a number of particular impossibilities, leads Blanchot to wonder about the link between suffering and thinking:

> […] the act of thinking can only be deeply shocking; what is to be thought about is in thought that which turns away from it and inexhaustibly exhausts itself in it; suffering and thinking are secretly linked, for if suffering, when it becomes extreme, is such that it destroys the capacity to suffer, always destroying ahead of itself, in time, the time when suffering could be grasped again and ended, it is perhaps the same with thought. Strange connections. Might it be that extreme thought and extreme suffering open onto the same horizon? Might suffering be, finally, thinking? (Blanchot, *The Book to Come* 40)

Suffering, as an experience of dispossession is also evoked in Bowen's description of war in "London, 1940": "Now and then everything rips across; a detonation rattles remaining windows. The R.E. 'suicide squad' detonate, somewhere in the hinterland of this park, bombs dug up elsewhere. We have no feeling to spare" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 25). Beckett's postwar writing/thinking that moves like trauma, always destroying ahead of itself, also moves towards what it threatens to erase: "Molloy and the others came to me [Beckett] the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* 319). As Beckett's bed-bound narrator Malone in *Malone Dies* declares: "I pause to record that I feel in extraordinary form. Delirium perhaps" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 250).

The extraordinary form of feeling-thinking does not necessarily give itself to writing nor does it obey what one considers to be rational. "*We have to learn how to survive* […] *while we learn to write*," Gildersleeve reminds us of lines from Bowen whose writing she sees as "an example of the inextricability of the twentieth-century literature, suffering, and bearing witness" (Gildersleeve 2). Beckett's later writing gives into the struggle of suffering, bearing witness, and learning how to write (how to unwrite) so entirely that it also seems to demand for a new reader.

As the narrator asks in *Company*: "Might not the hearer be improved? Made more companionable if not downright human. Mentally perhaps there is room for enlivenment. An attempt at reflexion at least. At recall. At speech even. Conation of some kind however feeble. A trace of emotion. Signs of distress. A sense of failure. Without loss of character. Delicate ground" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 22). The hearer, another construct for the narrator lying in the dark, first named H, is suddenly unnamed: "Then let him not be named H. Let him be again as he was. The hearer. Unnamable. You" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 25). The unnamable "you" that is at once a generic "you" in the text, and potentially referring to the author in the past (since the text contains many elements from Beckett's life), now also, and with more force, reaches out

to the reader – always already an unnamable potential hearer to come, reader as "the future of the text" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 80). Now that imagined hearer, the one with "so few occasions to feel. So inapt to feel" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 25), is made to feel, as Bowen would have it, "blown upon" (Bowen, *The Little Girls* 71). Feeling, though often seen as though secondary to thinking, is what we – humans defined by our humanity, pride ourselves in (when it suits us), and thus to be told one is inapt to feel is another form of humiliation/humbling ("loss of character," 22) after which I must read tears, with "a sense of failure" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 22).

The tears in *Ill Seen Ill Said* are made open to the ambiguous complexities of feeling and meaning, to the forces of what Derrida calls *différance*. Tears, as they appear in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, intentionally divide the readers' thoughts into a number of impossibilities, leaving us at once with and without:

> Riveted to some detail of the desert the eye fills with tears. Imagination at wit's end spreads its sad wings. Gone she hears one night the sea as if afar. Plucks up her long skirt to make better haste and discovers her boots and stockings to the calf. Tears. Last example the flagstone before her door that by dint by dint her little weight has grooved. Tears.
>
> Before left for the stockings the boots have time to be ill buttoned. Weeping over as weeping will see now the buttonhook larger than life. Of tarnished silver pisciform it hangs by its hook from the nail. It trembles faintly without cease. As if without cease the earth faintly quaked. The oval handle is wrought to a semblance of scales. The shank a little bent leads up to hook the eye so far still dry. A lifetime of hooking has lessened its curvature. (Beckett, *Nohow On* 65)

Tears here appear as rents or gaps, as tears from weeping, and as mere metaphors for suffering: "the eye so far still dry" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 65). The text itself is torn apart, into abstract sentences that lose its human subject and yet recall her, leaving us with ambiguous tears, but without any final way of reading them. As Alan Singer observes: "Tears are 'made apparent' analogically, as sad wings of imagination, the water of the sea, rents in stockings, and perhaps even the water that grooves the stone in the manner of the human step" (A. Singer 93). Beckett curiously juxtaposes the remains or the hints of human suffering and the wear and tear of the material world: one can imagine tears in her stockings, the lessened curvature of the hook, the dinted flagstone that her reoccurring steps, "her little weight" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 65), has grooved, or, as Singer imagines, has also been altered by water, the presence of which haunts the narrative as a mere imagined sound: "Gone she hears one night the sea as if afar" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 65).

The narrative is exceptionally given to tears: to rips, drops, weeping; as well as to their erasure. The ambiguous sentence: "Weeping over as weeping will see now the buttonhook

larger than life," cannot be read one way only, as the sentence is open to readings that cancel each other out. "Weeping will ~~see n~~ow" recalls "weeping willow," but also possibly "weeping will"; the sea from the first paragraph becomes "see now"; the end of weeping ("weeping over") is haunted by the reading of "weeping over as weeping" which could be understood as "weeping, as such, is over; sadness has changed its form of expression or become hidden." As the subject of the sentence seems to be missing, the "weeping over as weeping" now hovers as the potential subject itself, as "Weeping over as weeping [that kind of tearless suffering] will see now the buttonhook larger than life" – and yet nothing in this sentence allows the reader to permanently settle that reading, or any other for that matter:

> Though there was enough of Joyce the punster left in Beckett to enjoy the impoverishment of "weeping willow" in "weeping will," the energy in this sentence is syntactical. It lies in the opposing tugs of "will see" and "will, see." "Will see," if it could work syntactically, would become an implicit "she will see," and the sentence would resolve into a narrative in the third person (e.g., no longer weeping, she will now see the buttonhook). But this would make the tautological "weeping over as weeping will" as the modifier (e.g., weeping at an end as weeping always does come to an end, see now the buttonhook). But then who is addressed? Who is being asked to see? There are three possibilities – the reader, the narrator, the woman – each of which is curiously encumbered. If it is the reader, then it is the reader who has been in tears and thus unable to see the buttonhook until finished weeping. Likewise for the narrator, who is also by this construction addressing himself. If the woman, then the narrator is no longer describing her and her actions but giving her directions as well.
>
> In my view, all of those options are meant to apply, by abusing our hard-earned evolutionary capabilities this way, forestalling any imposed clarity, Beckett makes us feel what happens when the borders separating the imagined, the real, the seen, the said, and the seer are not just erased but erased *and* maintained. (Porter Abbott, "Garden Paths and Ineffable Effects: Abandoning Representation in Literature and Film" 214)

Through Beckett's fragmented and pun-ridden textual structure, the simultaneous movement towards erasure and reception/keeping unsettles our sense of mastery in reading, showing that the very sense of mastery in reading is linked to specific patterns through which sentences and sense are constructed. Those patterns of reading are not necessarily restricted to linguistic reading, but also to the difficulties inherent to reading and imagining suffering: "The long white hair stares in a fan. Above and about the impassive face. Stares as if shocked still by some ancient horror. Or by its continuance. Or by another. That leaves the face stone-cold. Silence at the eye of the scream" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 73). The silence at the eye of the scream and the stone-cold face in the novella, where stones gain ground all around on the eroded moors, evoke tearless suffering which could be further explored as the writing/reading of trauma, but also as the ecological thought that thinks beyond the tears as the signifiers of human suffering (which, as Beckett shows, are not safe from misreading, the failure to be ill seen, ill said).

Tears are such a human experience, the one we pride ourselves in, as it visibly binds us to the common thread of the much talked-about ability to suffer which, as many have argued, is a shared experience with other animals. Even though, as I have shown through Beckett's texts, human tears are not simply given to reading, the real challenge is to read suffering where tears are absent – the experience of ultimate choral tears – tears that we do not know that we are given to see, a crying from which the tears are missing.

Conclusion

Reading tears in *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* is an experience of dispossession on multiple levels. Dispossession is shown as a humbling force in Beckett's *literature in tears* that disrupts the Western literary tradition as well as the Western philosophical tradition from within, by forming an angle from which neither is shown to be fully autonomous. By rendering the relationship between the signifier and the signified perceptibly ambiguous, texts such as *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*, complicate the secondary role of literature rooted in mimetics and unreality (it is, after all, fiction), as the extremely porous "inside" of those texts cannot be rendered autonomous – pure fiction. Instead, any attempt to reduce fiction to pure fictionality and autonomous readability in those texts only ends up in the death of imagination, the death of fiction. Beckett's torn up literary texts become a choraesque medium where, by taking away the reader's comfort of being "inside" fiction, literary forces at once call for outside forces (language, knowledge, experience, history, philosophy, etc.) and suspend them, thus, dispossessing the readers of mastery as well as allowing, or even demanding, reflection on ways in which dispossession haunts us, our words, our decisions and reading; reading that is even outside language.

Tears (/tɪə(r)z/) that appear in Beckett's porous, highly fragmented, contradictory, ambiguous textual structures that unsettle our sense of mastery in reading – choral tears (/tɛə(r)z/) – are shown to be forces of dispossession in their own right. Similarly to the reading of words, the reading of tears in Beckett's *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* becomes an experience of dispossession as neither the narrator nor the reader can quite make sense of tears – and yet, we cannot rid them of meaning, as the tears so forcefully and blindly echo in, through us. Much like the unnameable author, those texts are "exceptionally given to the tear" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 367), as the tear withdraws as soon as it is uttered. Beckett's tears do not come across, and thereby they humble our sense of mastery in reading human experience, that of

suffering, but also extend thinking about suffering beyond its anthropomorphic manifestations, towards “life without tears, as it is wept” (Beckett, *Three Novels* 27).

Chapter 2: Ethical Progress: Becoming Sensitive to Suffering and Slow Violence

3.3 Why You Should Start Breaking Your Heart: Suffering in/through Beckett's and Bowen's Fiction

> Quiet, Moran, quiet. No emotion, please. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 127)
>
> Why do you want to start breaking your heart? (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 83)

One powerful connector between Bowen's and Beckett's late fiction is their interest in suffering and various ways in which it manifests and hides itself. As Kleinberg-Levin notes, Beckett's later fiction where he is experimenting with "lessness" possesses an almost overwhelming emotional power which Kleinberg-Levin links to Adorno's remark, in *Aesthetic Theory*: "Authentic art knows the expression of the expressionless: a weeping from which the tears are missing" (qtd. in Kleinberg-Levin 263). Such weeping not only lays the ground for thinking the complexity of human suffering and its manifestations, but also opens up thinking about suffering of non-human species, which is often invisible to human eyes and also prey to processes of invisibilization.

I will explore Bowen's and Beckett's respective insights into the matter of suffering which has many times before been used as the ethical reason for fair treatment of living beings, by advocates for human rights as well as animal rights. Yet, the effectiveness of using suffering as an ethical rationale for animal rights depends on the ethical framework into which it can be planted, and I will argue that the framework that is based on the ethics of anthropocentric, patriarchal mastery is insensitive to the value of thinking suffering, and thus, thinking suffering without profoundly changing that framework is not fruitful. In other words – the techniques of CO2 retrieval and reduction we come up with or the species we try to save through capture and artificial reproduction will not replace the need for a profound change in the ethical framework that moulds our way of life that is at the source of climate change and species extinction, and thus, at the source of suffering for many. Timothy Morton's ecological thought advocates for a weak non-theistic holism where wholes are not greater than the sums of their parts, but rather, like in Gestalt psychology, wholes are different than their parts, or what he calls "subscendence" – the whole being less than the sum of its parts. The strong holistic vision does

not value individual suffering, neither does it necessarily value the suffering and the potential extinction of an entire species. As Morton writes:

> […] if 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' is true, it does not really matter if those parts get replaced. We will still have our lovable whole intact. Say the whole is biosphere and say the part, which we very much imagine as a component because of the holism, is a polar bear. Never mind. They will go extinct and another lifeform will simply have to evolve to take their place. This kind of thought might not be so good for ecological ethics and politics. (Morton, *Humankind* 105).

Such a strong holism, as I see it, is rooted in an ethics of anthropocentric patriarchal mastery – the type of domination that, at its core, contents itself with the survival of the fittest, and thus does not reflect on the responsibilities for the other, inherent to mastery. As it values strength, suffering, seen as a weakness, simply does not have enough decisive power in this ethical framework. A new eco-logic, which I propose through the reading of Bowen's and Beckett's work, advocates for the dismantlement of anthropocentric patriarchal mastery, and for "necessary sorrow" as a basis for a new sympathetic thinking where suffering is not seen through a patriarchal lens as a humiliation, but instead as a shared humility.

I will show, through my reading of Beckett's trilogy's animal-human relations, that *sympathy*, as it is imagined by Adam Smith, and shown by Beckett's Big Lambert, neither thinks nor values the suffering of non-human species unless it can reach beyond its patriarchal, anthropocentric, and capitalist biases – beyond the self-interest, human-interest, and the fear/ rejection of vulnerability.

Secondly, I will explore through my reading of Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* and "Tears, Idle Tears" our apathy towards suffering, which, I will show, is, partly socially constructed by patriarchal and capitalist modes of thinking; but also, to an extent, a psychological response – a sort of self-preservation, which Bowen's texts both explore and criticize, as Bowen explains that cruelty starts with the refusal to feel.

My reading of Bowen's and Beckett's texts is both an effort to argue for emotional vulnerability as a core of a new eco-logics, but it is also an experience of letting Beckett and Bowen break my heart a little through their respective poetic and philosophical renderings of animal and human suffering – which, I also argue, is the very literary eco-force in their writing. What comes across is more than words. It is a feeling. It is suffering – an empathetic suffering that seems to look also for a new theory of moral sentiments.

On the universality of suffering in Beckett's trilogy

My reading of Beckett's later work is haunted by both witnessing suffering and wondering about our ability/inability to read and deal with suffering. "Know happiness" (Beckett, *Nohow On* 97), the last words of *Beckett's Ill Seen Ill Said*, echo Beckett's stance on human condition which is, above all, concerned with its earthly, bodily existence of which suffering is an unshakable side effect. As Stewart explains, even the most reduced life in the trilogy is open to suffering: "No matter how minimal the figure the Unnamable momentarily adopts, the fictional process will generate embodied suffering and a world, no matter how sparse, in which to place it" (Stewart 172). Suffering that functions in the novel "as a sure sign of life, no matter how reduced" (Stewart 166–67) is universally linked to living, and to all living beings, without being necessarily reduced to humans only, and thereby it aligns with the reflections of philosophers such as Peter Singer on the universality of suffering.

Singer recalls in his trail-blazing *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (1975) Jeremy Bentham's argument made in 1789: "(…) a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (qtd. in P. Singer 7). Following in the footsteps of Bentham's reasoning, Singer argues that animals' ability to feel pain, and not their intelligence, should be the basis for their fair treatment. He shows that our denial of the suffering human activities cause to beings of other species has often been justified on the grounds of animal-human difference, or what he calls speciesism, which he also compares to justifications of racism: "If the experimenter claims that the experiment is important enough to justify inflicting suffering on animals, why is it not important enough to justify inflicting suffering on humans at the same mental level? What difference is there between the two? Only that one is a member of our species and the other is not? But to reveal that difference is to reveal a bias no more defensible than racism or any other form of arbitrary discrimination" (P. Singer 83). "Speciesism," he writes, "allows researchers to regard the animals they experiment on as items of equipment, laboratory tools rather than living, suffering creatures" (P. Singer 69); however, our cruelty towards non-human animals extends far beyond laboratories, as we have domesticated, slaughtered, cross-bred and otherwise exploited non-human animals for centuries.

Beckett's work is perceptibly alert to the systematized, normalized suffering humans cause to other species, and critical of the contradiction within the notion of the humanity of

humans, which relies on the supposed inherent ability for compassion and benevolence, in other words – all what we call *humane* feelings or behaviour.

As the unnameable narrator, who is reduced to living in exceedingly inhumane conditions, tells us: "The fact is I trouble no one, except possibly that category of hypersensitive persons for whom the least thing is an occasion for scandal and indignation. But even here the risk is negligible, such people avoiding the neighbourhood for fear of being overcome at the sight of the cattle, fat and fresh from their pastures, trooping towards the *humane killer*" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 321 emphasis mine). Beckett's "humane killer" underlines the hypocrisy in our representations of human benevolence. We have often reserved being humane (that is, kind, benevolent) to ourselves, in name as well as in theory – those flattering mirrors can be found in literature, art, philosophy, psychology, as well as in hard sciences; though in practice, such labels seem inadequate, as we are accountable for causing the most horrible suffering, now on a planetary scale.

Though there can be benevolence in ending a life, ending suffering, Beckett's killers are not "humane" in that sense, for the slaughter houses Beckett refers to offer no dignity in death. That is why they need to be out of sight, out of mind for "that category of hypersensitive persons for whom the least thing is an occasion for scandal and indignation" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 321), which, in the end, very well describes the entire industrialized farming system where suffering is kept out of the consumer's view. The common consumer *is* the "category of hypersensitive persons for whom the least thing is an occasion for scandal and indignation" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 321), for whom happy cows and hens must be drawn onto milk and egg containers; for whom the meat has to be made pink with nitrites, not to recall the biological processes of rotting flesh, which would ruin one's appetite.

As Kleinberg-Levin writes, "Beckett's affections and sympathies, and, correspondingly, his distress and outrage over acts of cruelty extend, in fact, beyond the human—to the animals we abuse and kill. In one of Beckett's earliest short stories, *Dante and the Lobster* (1932), he shows great sympathy even for the lobsters that are sacrificed for our feasts, dropped alive into pots of boiling water" (Kleinberg-Levin 209). In the trilogy, both the occasional mistreatment as well as wider, accelerating processes of systematic violence against non-human species appear; the latter consists not only in pushing some species toward extinction, but also creating and sustaining life in inhumane circumstances, for slaughter.

As Derrida explains, the mistreatment of animals, which has been intensifying, accelerating, now goes far beyond the animal sacrifices in the Bible or of ancient Greece, beyond traditional forms of hunting, fishing, domestication, training and exploitation of animal

energy: “It is all too evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic *forms of knowledge* and the always inseparable *techniques* of intervention with the respect to their object, the transformation of the actual object, its milieu, its world, namely, the living animal” (Derrida, “The Animal” 394). Derrida writes about the unprecedented proportions of the subjection of the animal:

> No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves, in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence that some would compare to the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one’s breath away). One should neither abuse the figure of genocide nor consider it explained away. For it gets more complicated here: the annihilation of certain species is indeed in process, but it is occurring through the organization and exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival, in conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous, outside of every supposed norm of a life proper to animals that are thus exterminated by means of their continued existence or even their overpopulation. As if, for example, instead of throwing people into ovens or gas chambers (let’s say Nazi) doctors and genetics decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation or extermination by gas or by fire. In the same abattoirs. (Derrida, “The Animal” 395)

Singer furthermore exemplifies the parallel between the research conducted on non-human animals all over the world and the medical research conducted under the Nazi regime in Germany using Jewish, Russian, and Polish prisoners, through the dispassionate language used in lectures at medical academies:

> The parallels between this attitude and that of experimenters today towards animals are striking. Then, as now, these events were written up in dispassionate scientific jargon. The following paragraph is taken from a report by a Nazi scientist of an experiment on a human being, placed in a decompression chamber:
>
> After five minutes spasms appeared; between the sixth and tenth minute respiration increased in frequency, the TP [test person] losing consciousness. From the eleventh to the thirteenth minute respiration slowed down to three inhalations per minute, only to cease entirely at the end of that period…. About half an hour after breathing ceased, an autopsy was begun.
>
> Decompression chamber experimentation did not stop with the defeat of the Nazis. It shifted to non-human animals. At the University of Newcastle on Tyne, in England, for instance, scientists used pigs. The pigs were subjected to up to eighty-one periods of decompression over a period of nine months. All suffered attacks of decompression sickness, and some died from these attacks. The example illustrates only too well what the great Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer has written: ‘In their behavior towards creatures, all men [are] Nazis.’ (P. Singer 83–84)

The dispassionate scientific jargon that dissimulates suffering here, by reducing the human subject to an abstract “TP” (much like the philosophical jargon, which Derrida underlined and

criticized, that reduced a large variety of species to a generic "the animal"), accentuates the importance of language and its power to neutralize ethical inquiries in the name of pure science. The scientific language that is made "neutral" here is the language that dissociates itself from any ethical view on the situation it describes, under the guise of pure medical research. It is a good example of how hard sciences can also become insufferably hard-hearted when they are divorced from the ethical inquires that often belong to the "soft" sciences.

Literary language, though, without a doubt, more ambiguous, offers, through its very ambiguity, the chance for the subject to rebel against their subjection. It can give the "TP" or any non-human animal an inside and an insight, no matter how ambiguous or unreadable, and thereby help to put into perspective the violence that is supressed by "neutral" dispassionate descriptions that pretend to separate ambiguity, doubt, and most of all "emotion" from the scientific thinking process as if it were the intellect's opposite, and thus inadequate and separable from thinking altogether. Literary texts do not always know where they are going when they carry animals at their hearts, but this not-knowing is hardly ever a complete effacement of their subject's inner life and suffering.

The use of non-human animals for the benefit of humans, whether in medicine, science, or farming industry, can be made more comfortable through the neutralisation of language used to describe the various processes in which non-human animals are involved. Beckett's fiction does not offer that comfort to its readers. As Kleinberg-Levin writes, in Beckett's trilogy slaughtered animals are remembered with unreserved sympathy, through vivid images of such violence that "erupt into the narrative again and again, each time catching us off guard and compelling our attention. It is impossible not to read these disruptive evocations, which by their repetition insist on our thought, as intensely passionate protests against a society that requires indefensible cruelty" (Kleinberg-Levin 209–10).

One of such instances concerns the rearing techniques and the slaughter of pigs by Big Lambert in *Malone Dies* where his efforts of pig-rearing are juxtaposed with two other narratives evoking seclusion and solitude, whereby humans and non-humans appear in a narrative chain of solitudes where suffering seems to lose its subject and become universally felt.

The description of Lambert's pigs (who are condemned to a life of seclusion in a room without daylight and fresh air, conditions that resemble those used in intensive animal farming, otherwise known as factory faming, that seeks to maximize production and minimize cost with little regard to the well-being of animals) is interrupted by a sudden monologue by Malone, before returning to the narrative telling us about Sapo's solitude:

> Strange to say this gift that Lambert possessed when it came to sticking pigs seemed of no help to him when it came to rearing them, and it was seldom his own exceeded nine stone. Clapped into a tiny sty on the day of its arrival, in the month of April, it remained there until the day of its death, on Christmas Eve. For Lambert persisted in dreading for his pigs, though every passing year proved him wrong, the thinning effects of exercise. Daylight and fresh air he dreaded for them too. And it was finally a weak pig, blind and lean, that he laid on its back in the box, having tied its legs, and killed, indignantly but without haste, upbraiding it the while for its ingratitude, at the top of his voice. For he could not or would not understand that the pig was not to blame, but he himself, who had coddled it unduly. And he persisted in his error.
>
> Dead world, airless, waterless. That's it, reminisce. Here and there, in the bed of a crater, the shadow of a withered lichen. And nights of three hundred hours. Dearest of lights, wan, pitted, least fatuous of lights. That's it, babble. How long can it have lasted? Five minutes? Ten minutes? Yes, no more, not much more. But my sliver of sky is silvery with it yet. In the old days I used to count, up to three hundred, four hundred, and with other things too, the showers, the bells, the chatter of the sparrows at dawn, or with nothing, for no reason, for the sake of counting, and then I divided, by sixty. That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world. Not now, any more. A man changes. As he gets on.
>
> In the filthy kitchen, with its earth floor, Sapo had his place, by the window. Big Lambert and his son left their work, came and shook his hand, then went away, leaving him with the mother and the daughter. But they too had their work, they too went away and left him, alone. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 195–96)

Malone who is not (or no longer) subjected to direct corporal violence, suffers from his seclusion that is an act of violence itself for our social species. The narrative bleeds with pigs in the tiny dark airless sty, then suffocates with Malone's big pig empathy, and ends in Sapo's idle solitude – not yet conscious of the full extent of suffering seclusion can create. Their worlds of solitude meet in the sentence "dead world, airless, waterless," which paints the picture of the pigs' reduced world, as much as it recalls Malone's still life, or the hint of young Sapo's (Sapo's name recalling *Homo sapiens*) solitudes to come, weaving a certain across-species affinity in suffering, or the potential for suffering, between them all.

This affinity with pigs, metaphorical or not, also reaches the last book. There the unnameable narrator, who is living in a receptacle in the manner of a half-forgotten pet, is called "a nasty old pig" by the proprietress of the chop-house across the street. Yet, we also learn that what seems to attract the caretaker is a certain affinity with the creature: "Without perhaps having exactly won her heart it was clear I did not leave her indifferent" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 322).

Beckett's trilogy underlines suffering's potential of striking a common chord in us, inciting one to show sympathy for the other. While sympathy could be understood as an affinity between certain beings, the Greek root of the word also refers directly to suffering: "sympathy" comes from late Latin *sympathia*, from Greek *συμπάθεια* , from *συμπαθής* meaning "having a fellow feeling," from *σύν* SYM- *prefix* + *παθ-*, root of *πάθος* meaning "suffering, feeling" (*πάσχειν* meaning "to suffer")(*OED*). Unlike empathy that, as de Waal explains, is

more of a bodily reaction to the suffering of others, sympathy has a sense of morality linked to it – it thinks socially.

Adam Smith's reflections on sympathy concentrate on our inability to experience what other men feel, which leads us to "imagine what we ourselves should feel in the like situation": "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were, into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (Smith 9). Yet, Smith's theory of moral sentiments also includes an imaginary impartial spectator within, representing a typical disinterested person, whose sympathy and approval one seeks by adapting one's emotions to a level at which the impartial spectator could sympathize with them, and one's behaviour to the expected standards which, through constant observation and adaptation (with the help of our individual spectators within), build up a common morality. Sympathy, as such, is thus socially built – and also closed within that same circle where one is to imagine others' ghostly judgements before expecting sympathy from others or extending sympathy to someone. How does such sympathy imagine suffering that one cannot quite imagine in his own image or in the image of the impartial spectator? The impartial spectator's enmeshment in the attitudes and interest of the society it inhabits seems to also curb its freedom from that society's biases. How can such sympathy extend beyond the specific human society in which one lives, and more generally, beyond the human?

Beckett's Big Lambert offers an example of an impartial spectator "gone bad" – an impartial spectator reduced to pure self-interest, wrapped in a rhetoric of heroism, through which Big Lambert reads his own actions towards the mule he saves from slaughter:

> Louis began to talk. He seemed in good spirits. The mule, in his opinion, had died of old age. He had bought it, two years before, on its way to the slaughter-house. So he could not complain. After the transaction the owner of the mule predicted that it would drop down dead at the first ploughing. But Lambert was a connoisseur of mules. In the case of mules it is the eye that counts, the rest is unimportant. So he looked the mule full in the eye, at the gates of the slaughter-house, and saw it could still be made to serve. And the mule returned his gaze, in the yard of the slaughter-house. As Lambert unfolded his story the slaughter-house loomed larger and larger. Thus the site of the transaction shifted gradually from the road that led to the slaughter-house to the gates of the slaughter-house and thence to the yard itself. Yet a little while and he would have contended for the mule with the knacker. The look in his eye, he said, was like a prayer to me to take him. It was covered with sores, but in the case of mules one should never let oneself be deterred by senile sores. Someone said, He's done ten miles already, you'll never get him home, he'll drop down dead on the road. I thought I might screw six months out of him, said Lambert, and I screwed two years. All the time he told this story he kept his eyes fixed on his son. There they sat, the table between them, in the gloom, one

> speaking, the other listening, and far removed, the one from what he said, the other from what he heard, and far from each other. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 206)

Much in like fishermen's tales in which the fish grows larger every time the story is retold, Big Lambert's role as the saviour grows ever more impressive: "As Lambert unfolded his story the slaughter-house loomed larger and larger. Thus the site of the transaction shifted gradually from the road that led to the slaughter-house to the gates of the slaughter-house and thence to the yard itself. Yet a little while and he would have contended for the mule with the knacker" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 206). By increasing the imminence of the mule's death, Louis increases the importance of his action of saving the mule, which he tops off with a supposed prayer from the mule to take him. Unlike Cartesian minds that see animals as mere machines, Big Lambert, significantly, acknowledges that the mule is endowed with a will of his own. In that aspect, he recalls, not only in name, Balzac's boy genius in *Louis Lambert* (1832) who, drawn to philosophy and mysticism, creates "Treatise on the Will" in school, later to be followed by a series of statements on the will, which, though not denied to animals, is greater in men.[118] Beckett's Big Lambert says it is the eye that counts, not because of its physical properties (for he claims physical properties do not matter: "in the case of mules one should never let oneself be deterred by senile sores," 206), but because he knows there is a beyond – the eye is not only seen, but also seeing; he knows that there, beyond the physicality of an eyeball, lies an "I," a living, thinking being that he will willingly save, but only in order to run him to the ground: "So he looked the mule full in the eye, at the gates of the slaughter-house, and saw it could still be made to serve. And the mule returned his gaze, in the yard of the slaughter-house. […] I thought I might screw six months out of him, said Lambert, and I screwed two years" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 206).

Lambert's reading of the mule, which he takes for a communication, is a cruel reduction of the mule's will into his own desires reflecting back from the mule's eye. The only sympathy he has is with the image of a hero, the role that he identifies with, in his story of the mule's rescue. Such an inward turning sympathy is stale and impotent, it can neither reach beyond human nor beyond his self-interest. Sympathy for the mule being nil, other sympathies also seem utterly reduced to solitudes that are uncommunicating: "All the time he told this story he kept his eyes fixed on his son [out burying the mule]. There they [Lambert and Sapo] sat, the table between them, in the gloom, one speaking, the other listening, and far removed, the one

[118] "The Will is a fluid inherent in every creature endowed with motion. Hence the innumerable forms assumed by the Animal, the results of its combinations with that Substance. The Animal's instincts are the product of the coercion of the environment in which it develops. Hence its variety. […] In Man the Will becomes a power peculiar to him, and exceeding in intensity that of any other species."

from what he said, the other from what he heard, and far from each other" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 206).

Interestingly, in the trilogy, Beckett does not excuse human cruelty with the lack of knowledge about the universality of suffering. This universality simply seems not to matter much to characters – it often fails to induce sympathy towards others, unless one is already suffering (that is, suffering is no longer a potential ability to suffer, but a more profound, debilitating vulnerability, such as Molloy's, and eventually Moran's suffering). Suffering, though it is the common ground between human and non-human animals, also holds the potential of opening the door for misreading and subjection. In an anthropocentric framework of mastery, suffering can be trivialized or hidden by the decider (those in the position of mastery), which is ever more simple if the suffering does not take the human form. As the unnameable narrator complains: "They are too hard to please, they ask too much. They want me to have a pain in the neck, irrefragable proof of animation, while listening to talk of the heavens. […] You must howl, do you hear, otherwise it proves nothing" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 347).

Yet, not all suffering has tears and a voice – most non-human suffering does not come in an anthropomorphic form in which it could be witnessed, and then argued it *must* be recognized. The vast majority of suffering, as long as it is not made human, remains invisible – a choral gap, a choral tear, in our perception, something there that is not accessible. As the unnameable narrator speaks about Worm: "The rascal, he's getting humanized, he's going to lose if he doesn't watch out, if he doesn't take care, and with what could he take care, with what could he form the faintest conception of the condition they are decoying him into, with their ears, their eyes, their tears and a brainpan where anything may happen" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 353). This humanization is then explained as a necessary condition: "[…] they describe him thus, without knowing, thus because they need him thus" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 353). If suffering can only be understood in a truly anthropomorphic and anthropocentric manner, it runs the danger of being universalized without nuance, where it can easily be overlooked, or purposefully denied and plastered over with anthropocentric sympathy, as seen with Big Lambert, that might extend the suffering instead of reducing it. Suffering, perceived as a shared vulnerability, is also shown as a danger instead of a basis of understanding and compassion. The unnamable narrator says:

> The poor bastards. They could clap an artificial anus in the hollow of my hand and still I wouldn't be there, alive with their life, not far short of a man, just barely a man, sufficiently a man to have hopes one day of being one, my avatars behind me. And yet sometimes it seems

> to me I am there, among the incriminated scenes, tottering under the attributes peculiar to the lords of creation, dumb with howling to be put out of my misery, and all round me the spinach blue rustling with satisfaction. Yes, more than once I almost took myself for the other, all but suffered after his fashion, the space of an instant. Then they uncorked the champagne. One of us at last! Green with anguish! A real little terrestrial! Choking in the chlorophyll! Hugging the slaughter-house walls! Paltry priests of the irrepressible ephemeral, how they must hate me. Come, my lambkin, join in our gambols, it's soon over, you'll see, just time to frolic with a lambkinette, that's jam. Love, there's a carrot never fails […]. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 309–10)

As Stewart explains: "Rather than accepting relation based on a shared suffering, no matter to what degree, the Unnamable denies such an identification through an assertion of difference. This refusal to give assent might, as Anthony Uhlmann has argued, be 'one way in which […] processes of subjection and enslavement might be resisted'" (Stewart 171). Becoming a "real little terrestrial" opens the possibility of being subjected to violence and unfair suffering, as such suffering is trivialized through its universality. As Derrida writes: "Being able to suffer is no longer a power, it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish" (Derrida, "The Animal" 396). Suffering, Derrida explains, changes the logic humans use to differentiate themselves from other species, which has been based on *having* some power that others do not possess: language and intellect, mainly. Suffering is not a superpower as such, but rather it implies a certain passivity, a not-being-able, a vulnerability. This shared ability to suffer, or, to put it otherwise – inability not to suffer, strongly ties one to the possibility of being subjected to suffering. The sympathy with the suffering of others, then, also links us to our own vulnerability, our inability not to suffer, but also to certain cruelty, the possibility to take advantage of this shared vulnerability. Suffering, as a shared nonpower, is incompatible with mastery in a sense that it cannot be indefinitely postponed or escaped – there is no final way of mastering suffering; and yet, suffering is also open to cruelty that many frameworks of mastery can utilise for their own benefit. In a framework of patriarchal mastery that values ability/power/force and ways in which one's abilities could be used for progress through domination and control, suffering does not have much value, as it is not a proper ability in that framework of mind, but a vulnerability. For one is to *see* value in suffering and *value* suffering (through concrete decisions, laws, and techniques that enforce the reduction of suffering) the whole ethics of patriarchal mastery based on domination/dominance/force/insensitivity must change. Our apathy towards animal suffering is perhaps not so natural as all that, but also, at

least to some extent, socially constructed – a kind of a death sleep into which patriarchal and capitalist modes of thinking have lulled us.

"Was I sleeping while others suffered? Am I sleeping now?" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 58) Beckett's Vladimir asks himself.

Necessary sorrow: suffering as the experience of humiliation in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* and "Tears, Idle Tears"

Are we sleeping? Deep down, and at least to some extent, we know about the suffering we cause to non-human animals as a master species, though one is perhaps not conscious of that suffering as one is eating a nice meal, trying on a new face cream, or wrapping oneself in a soft cashmere sweater. Yet, even from the corner of the eye, we have seen that strange pug, his teary round eyes sticking out of his skull like a cartoon-character's, struggling to catch a breath through his phantom snout; or a clip of geese being tube-fed to expand their livers; or images of calves crying out for their mothers, unduly taken away; or a glimpse of a zombiesque Norwegian farm salmon in its murky waters; or the footage of steel boxes where gigantic pigs stand, barely able to move, anxiously gnawing the bars; or the motionless turtles, whales, and seals – trapped in large nets, unable to surface for a breath of air; or the goodbyes to the last northern white rhino. The traces of animal suffering are hard to escape, for they haunt us not only in our daily lives (potentially far from farms and research centres), but also in literature, visual art, and media. Suddenly, the 21st century teenagers are asking us to curb carbon emissions, bury the fur coats, and worry about where our food comes from. Where did my breakfast eggs come from – do I know, or more importantly, do I *want* to know?

The knowing unearths suffering – acknowledging the suffering of the other also leads to suffering in the place of the other through empathy, and to suffering from the guilt for having known, or at least suspected, all along. It is a lot to take in, which makes the other option – not acknowledging the initial suffering, rather appealing. Bowen is incredibly attuned to the ways in which our denial of certain emotions influences our patterns of thinking, especially, the patterns of thinking about suffering:

> To remember can be at times no more than a cold duty, for we remember only in the limited way that is bearable. We observe small rites, but we defend ourselves against that terrible memory that is stronger than will. We defend ourselves from the rooms, the scenes, the objects that make for hallucination, that make the senses start up and fasten upon a ghost. We desert those who desert us; we cannot afford to suffer; we must live how we can. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 163)

The denial of suffering, as Bowen writes it, is more similar to effects of trauma than to any conscious decision. As Gildersleeve writes: "*The Death of the Heart* suggests that to allow a part of the self to atrophy, to become numb, to go to sleep, is the only way one can go on living after trauma. (…) Atrophy, in this text, comes to imply an inability to cope with the traumatic event and integrate it into conscious thought" (Gildersleeve 72). Suffering, as a trans-species experience, links us to others through empathy. Witnessing suffering, whether that of human or non-human animals, can be traumatic itself, and it does not need to be a direct experience either. Even the mere representation of suffering may evoke all the bodily reactions of empathy and the strange stranger's suffering within – a kind of unknowing sorrow. One cannot quite know to whom it belongs. As Bowen's teenage Portia stares at the mere representation, a picture of a now rather severe and cold adult Anna as a preteen, we are told: "She saw the kitten hugged to the breast in a contraction of unknowing sorrow" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 228). Strangely not "unknown" but "unknowing," the sorrow becomes an active element in its own denial – a kind of traumatic suffering in Anna that Portia reads through her own experience of sorrow. In many ways, the young Portia is a counter force to the adults in the story, who, as Bowen explains, are atrophied:

> I've heard [*The Death of the Heart*], for instance, called a tragedy of adolescence. I never thought of it that way when I wrote it and I must say I still don't see it in that way now. The one adolescent character in it, the young girl Portia seems to me to be less tragic than the others. She at least, has a hope, and she hasn't atrophied. The book is really a study, it might be presumptuous of me to call it a tragedy of atrophy, not of death so much as of death sleep. (qtd. in Gildersleeve 71)

The adults in the novel, burnt by past traumas and suffering, are shown to deflect suffering, not only that of their own, but also that of others. At the end of the novel when Portia runs away to another cruelly treated character, Major Brutt, the adults responsible for her, Thomas and Anna, are forced to think about how Portia feels in order to determine their course of action to retrieve her. The thinking process is orchestrated by Anna's writer friend, St Quentin, who responds to Anna's claim that if "one thought what everyone felt, one would go mad. It does not do to think of what people feel" with: "in this case we may have to. That is, if you are anxious to get her home" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 342–43). St Quentin also turns down Anna's suggestion that one would not know what others felt even if they wanted to, by pointing out that they are all not so badly placed to read how Portia might feel: "I am a novelist; you, Anna, have read her diary; Thomas is her brother – they can't be quite unlike. However much we may hate to, there's no reason, now we have got to face it, why we should not see more or less what her position is – or, I mean more, see things from her position …" (Bowen, *The Death of the*

Heart 343). Yet, in the end, instead of facing Portia and dealing with the situation, which, as St Quentin points out, also implies dealing with how they all feel, the adults try to outsmart the teen and Major Brutt, by sending the housekeeper Matchett, who is left in the dark about the situation, to fetch Portia. As Portia's half-brother, Thomas, puts it: "Anna and I live the only way we can, and it quite likely may not stand up to examination" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 344). Drawing the curtains, because he feels people are watching, Thomas is no more interested than Anna in having "a girl as thorough as that about" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 344), digging under the surface of the fences they have put up, poking at the kind of living they are comfortable with, which is the living that steers away from scratching surfaces and asking about how people really feel. Yet, as Bowen writes in "The Virtue of Optimism" (1953): "To ignore, deny or underrate suffering is to insult the sufferer; thus one drives away confidence" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 402). Thus, by sending Matchett to fetch Portia, they do not respond to what they see as Portia's scheme to see if they "do the right thing" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 338), but instead further distance themselves from any emotional response. That sort of abstention from feeling, as Bowen writes elsewhere commenting on Joyce's writings, is an act of cruelty:

> […] Joyce the man kept, as I understand, this gentleness with the people he loved. In the foreign countries he was to live in, his home life was dear to him. But as a writer he was, too, to develop that wayward and jeering cruelty that is either the inverse of pity or a reaction against it – cruelty that is a rigid abstention from feeling of any kind. It is never brutality: it is too full of nerves. I do not say we are often cruel, but when we are, is it not like this? (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 242)

Bowen does not reduce cruelty to violence, it is far more subtle than that – cruelty starts with the refusal to feel, or perhaps, as shown in the following extract, with the gentle suggestion not to get upset, not to break your heart:

> 'Now then,' said Matchett sharply, 'don't you get upset.'
>
> Portia had unconsciously pushed, while she spoke, at the knee under Matchett's apron, as though she were trying to push away a wall. Nothing, in fact, moved. Letting her hand fall back on to her face in the dark, she gave an instinctive shiver that shook the bed. She ground the back of her hand into her mouth – the abandoned movement was cautious, checked by awe at some monstrous approach. She began to weep, shedding tears humbly, without protest, without at all full feeling, like a child actress mesmerized for a part. She might have been miming sorrow – in fact, this immediate, this obedient prostration of her whole being was meant to hold off the worst, the full of grief, that might sweep her away. Now, by crossing her arms tightly across her chest, as though to weight herself down with them, she seemed to cling at least to her safe bed. Any intimations of Fate, like a step heard on the stairs, makes some natures want to crouch in the safe dark. Her tears were like a flag lowered at once: she felt herself to be undefendable.
>
> The movement of her shoulders on the pillow could be heard; her shiver came through the bed to Matchett's body. Matchett's eyes pried down at her through the dark; inexorably

> listening to Portia's unhappy breaths she seemed to wait until her pity was glutted. Then – 'Why goodness,' she said softly. 'Why do you want to start breaking your heart? (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 83)

Portia's suffering that follows, unstoppably, Matchett's suggestion not to get upset, also resembles the sudden throes of sorrow of a merely 7-year-old boy, Frederick, in "Tears, Idle Tears" (1941) in the middle of Regent's Park where he is walking with his mother, causing the latter to be ashamed of such a son, whom she briefly escapes by leaving him stare at a duck. The boy, we are told, "never cried like this when he was alone" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 537):

> His own incontinence in the matter of tears was as shocking to him, as bowing-down, as annulling, as it could be to her. He never knew what happened – a cold, black pit with no bottom opened inside himself; a red-hot bellwire jagged up through him from the pit of his frozen belly to the caves of his eyes. Then the hot, gummy rush of tears, the convulsion of his features, the terrible, square grin he felt his mouth take all made him his own shameful and squalid enemy. Despair howled round his inside like a wind, and through his streaming eyes he saw everything quake. Anyone's being there – and most of all his mother – drove this catastrophe on him. (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 537)

The sudden crying (which makes his mother deny him the initially planned trip to the zoo, express her disappointment as well as that of her dead husband, and openly disqualify the child of her company) is what repels whom it desperately calls out to: "Crying made him so abject, so outcast from other people that he went on crying out of despair. […] No wonder everyone was repelled. There is something about an abject person that rouses cruelty in the kindest breast" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 537). Bowen's children, still open to the pangs of sorrow from which they suffer, are also subjected to the views the grown-up world takes on sorrow. The expressions of suffering, even human suffering, as the omniscient narrator of *The Death of the Heart* argues in a lengthy monologue, bring one down in the world. Claiming that "the most individual sorrow has a stupefying universality" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 300), Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* probes into the idea of the universality of suffering, while suffering, which is what we share with other humans and non-humans, is also something we do not want to share – not because we value it as dearly as we value our ideas of our intelligence, but because there is something lowly about suffering:

> There is no doubt that sorrow brings one down in the world. The aristocratic privilege of silence belongs, you soon find out, to only the happy state – or, at least, to the state when pain keeps within bounds. With its accession to full power, feeling becomes subversive and violent: the proud part of the nature is battered down. Then, those people who flock to the scenes of accidents, who love most of all to dwell on deaths or childbirths or on the sick-bed from which restraint has gone smell what is in the air and are on the spot at once, pressing close with a sort of charnel good will. You may first learn you are doomed by seeing those vultures in the sky.

> Yet perhaps they are not vultures; they are Elijah's ravens. They bring with them the sense that the most individual sorrow has a stupefying universality. In them, human nature makes felt its clumsy wisdom, its efficacy, its infallible ready reckoning, its low level from which there is no further drop. Accidents become human property: only a muffish dread of living, a dread of the universal in our natures, makes us make these claims for 'the privacy of grief'. In naïver, humbler, nobler societies, the sufferer becomes public property; the scene of any disaster soon loses its isolated flush. The proper comment on grief, the comment that returns it to poetry, comes not in the right word, the faultless perceptive silence, but from the chorus of vulgar unsought friends – friends who are strangers to the taste and the mind. (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 299–300)

Suffering seems to be both the experience of humiliation and humility, already etymologically bound together by their Latin root, *humus* (*OED*). In its extreme, that is, when suffering can no longer be concealed, kept within bounds, suffering consists also in losing one's mastery over one's emotion, body, and one's immediate effect on the world (the people), while the happy state keeps the "aristocratic privilege of silence" over one's inner weather. The pride that is given to one's ability to control and carefully measure emotion, especially what is seen as negative emotion, is what is valued in the world (the world being the 20th century English society where Bowen's characters appear), and thus, what adds to one's value as a member of this world. Beckett's bear-like teary Molloys and Bowen's weepy children and teens never fully live up to these standards. While in *The Death of the Heart*, grown-ups like Thomas and Anna, guard their pride by keeping their pain within bounds, in "Tears, Idle Tears" it is the widowed mother who is congratulated for her control and bravery after her pilot husband's crash, even during the two days leading up to his death when the chaplain and the doctor "had given thanks there were women like this" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 539). Her pride for her own bravery as well as her shame for her son's emotional transparency, his unmastered expression of sorrow without a visible cause, fall in line with Adam Smith's ideas of mastery over one's sorrow which, as he explains in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), induces sympathy in others.

Smith explains that we readily sympathize with others' joy, which is a pleasant emotion, whenever we are not prejudiced by envy, but, he writes, our: "[…] grief is painful, and the mind, even when it is our own misfortune, naturally resists and recoils from it. We would endeavour either not to conceive it at all, or to shake it off as soon as we have conceived it" (Smith 42). He explains that we only truly sympathize with the suffering of others when it is extreme: "Our sympathy […] with deep distress, is very strong and very sincere. It is unnecessary to give an instance. We weep even at the feigned representation of a tragedy" (Smith 43). Interestingly, Smith argues, this compassion is even stronger when the person who is suffering can master their sorrow: "The man who, under greatest calamities, can command

his sorrow, seems worthy of the highest admiration; but he who, in the fulness of prosperity, can in the same manner master his joy, seems hardly to deserve any praise" (Smith 45). Mrs Dickinson, in "Tears, Idle Tears," is proud of her mastery of sorrow and thoroughly disturbed by her 7-year-old son's inability to master his, so much so that she writes to the Mother's Advice Column: "I am a widow; young, good tempered, and my friends all tell me that I have great control. But my little boy –" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 536).

To Smith, other people's joy is generally more easily accessible than other people's sorrow that, he says, "falls much more short of the violence of what is naturally felt by the person principally concerned" (Smith 45), which makes the sufferer's effort to silence their own emotions, to appear to be closer to the spectators' emotions, nearly superhuman:

> We feel what an immense effort is requisite to silence those violent emotions which naturally agitate and distract those in his situation. We are amazed to find that he can command himself so entirely. His firmness, at the same time, perfectly coincides with our insensibility. He makes no demand upon us for that more exquisite degree of sensibility which we find, and which we are mortified to find, that we do not possess. There is the most perfect correspondence between his sentiments and ours, and on that account the most perfect propriety in his behaviour. It is a propriety too, which, from our experience of the usual weakness of human nature, we could not reasonably have expected he should maintain. We wonder with surprise and astonishment at that strength of mind which is capable of so noble and generous an effort. (Smith 47–48)

This element of heroism in the suppression of sorrow is also described in Bowen's short story where the mother's denial of sorrow becomes, as Smith predicts, rather an accelerating force of other people's sympathy, at first. Smith writes: "We are more apt to weep and shed tears for such as, in this manner, seem to feel nothing for themselves, than for those who give way to all the weakness of sorrow" (Smith 48), and indeed, Bowen's description of the moment Mrs Dickinson loses her husband, aligns with Smith's ideas:

> When Toppy finally died the other woman had put the unflinching widow into a taxi and driven back with her to the Dickinson's bungalow. She kept saying: 'Cry, dear, cry; you'd feel better.' She made tea and clattered about, repeating: 'Don't mind me, darling: just have a big cry.' The strain became so great that tears streamed down her own face. Mrs Dickinson looked past her palely, with a polite smile. (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 539)

Mrs Dickinson becomes the kind of woman men admired and wanted to marry, "but courage had given her a new intractable kind of virgin pride: she loved it too much; she could never surrender it" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 540). The pride that Mrs Dickinson takes in the great mastery over her sorrow ties her so strongly to the half of the community, principally to men, for we are told "Mrs Dickinson's making so few demands on pity soon rather alienated her women friends, but men liked her better for it" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 539). Such a pride also echoes in Smith's reasoning: "To feel that he is capable of so noble and generous

an effort, to feel that in his dreadful situation he can still act as he would desire to act, animates and transports him with joy, and enables him to support that triumphant gaiety which seems to exult in the victory he thus gains over his misfortunes" (Smith 49). Bowen's story, however, seems to show the eerie side of such triumphant bravery which, as Smith himself briefly points out, is rooted in turning away from sorrow:

> He is obliged, as much as possible, to turn away his eyes from whatever is either naturally terrible or disagreeable in his situation. Too serious an attention to those circumstances, he fears, might make so violent an impression upon him, that he could no longer keep within bounds of moderation, or render himself the object of the complete sympathy and approbation of spectators. He fixes his thoughts, therefore, upon those only which are agreeable, the applause and admiration which he is about to deserve by the heroic magnanimity of his behaviour. (Smith 49)

This turning away from one's sorrow, in Bowen's story, becomes a more general turning away from all sorrow – a more eerie turn whereby the mother no longer only heroically hides her pain to put others at ease, but starts eradicating the sorrow of her son. Her "making a man of Frederick" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538) aligns with Smith's comments on weakness and effeminacy of sorrow:

> […] it is painful to go along with grief, and we always enter into it with reluctance. When we attend to the representation of a tragedy, we struggle against that sympathetic sorrow which the entertainment inspires as long as we can, and we give way to it at last only when we can no longer avoid it: we even then endeavour to cover our concern from the company. If we shed any tears, we carefully conceal them, and are afraid, lest the spectators, not entering into this excessive tenderness, should regard it as effeminacy and weakness. (Smith 46)

The Smithian man, looking for/at the spectator outside and within himself, is also a man in a sense that it is hard to see the persistent general, generalized "he" in the text as an innocent signifier for "a human." This manliness, however, as Bowen shows, is not proper to men: patriarchal refusals of emotion and weakness in general, and "a muffish dread of living, a dread of the universal in our natures" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 300), is proper to the patriarchal spectator within – to the patriarchal ghost we have created and who is terrified of softness and vulnerability. Women, as much as men, can be haunted by that spectre. Bowen's Smithian Mrs Dickinson is not only haunted by the patriarchal spectator within, she also evokes all sort of spectators, even in their absence, to shame her son's tears, and to build that ghost up in him too – to make a man out of him. This technique is undermined by Bowen's descriptions of the park.

The mother's exclamation, predicting Frederick's tears: "Frederick, you *can't* – in the middle of Regent's Park!" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 536), is followed by the description

of the quivering "diaphanous willows whose weeping was not shocking" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 536); the mother's 'You really haven't got to be such a *baby*!' uttered in "fearful mortification" is followed by the narrator's comment: "Her tone attracted the notice of several people, who might otherwise have thought he was having something taken out of the eye" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 536). Then she moves on to evoking a ghost, using the boy's dead father to try and shame his tears back into his skull: "He used to be so proud of you. He and I used to look forward to what you'd be like when you were a big boy. One of the last things he ever said was: 'Frederick will take care of you.' You almost make me glad he's not here now" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538). The violence of these words is once again underlined by the narrator's comment: "She was one of those women who have an unfailing sense of what not to say, and say it: despair, perversity or stubborn virtue must actuate them. She had a horror, also, of the abnormal and had to hit out at it before it could hit at her" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538). Her final threat: "Everybody's looking at you, you know" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538) is followed by evoking her own ghostly spectator within: "No, I am really ashamed of you" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538) upon which Frederick is left to stare at a duck until he stops making the noise that, we are told, was not *really* a noise worthy of such mention. Now, turning away from the army of potential spectators condemning his unexplained sorrow, Frederick meets a different gaze that seems to unsee the shame his mother's witnesses evoke: "Drawing choppy breaths, he stood still and looked at the duck that sat folded into a sleek white cypher on the green, grassy margin of the lake. When it rolled one eye open over the curve, something unseeing in its expression calmed him. His mother walked away under the gay tree-shadows; her step quickened lightly, the tip of her fox fur swung" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 538). Not blind, but *un*seeing, the duck's indifference to human shame, perhaps much like Derrida's cat's, reaches out to Frederick who responds with gentleness – a gentle touch:

> He forgot his focus on grief and forgot his mother, but saw with joy a quivering bough of willow that, drooping into his gaze under his swollen eyelids, looked as pure and strong as something after the Flood. His thought clutched at the willow, weak and wrecked but happy. He knew he was now qualified to walk after his mother, but without feeling either guilty or recalcitrant did not wish to do so. He stepped over the rail – no park keeper being at hand to stop him, and, tenderly and respectfully, attempted to touch the white duck's tail. Without a blink, with automatic uncoyness, the duck slid away from Frederick into the lake. Its lovely white-china body balanced on the green glass water as it propelled itself gently round the curve of the bank. Frederick saw with a passion of observation its shadowy, webbed feet lazily striking out. (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 540)

Yet, it is significant to mention that Frederick tells a different story to his mother. He boastfully claims to have nearly caught a duck, if only he had had salt for its tail. This hunter's tale, crafted for the huntress of a mother who is wearing a fox fur, is then, once more undermined by the narrators note: "Years later, Frederick could still remember, with ease, pleasure and with a sense of lonely shame being gone, that calm, white duck swimming off round the bank" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories*), which is void of the enthusiastic duck-catching frenzy Frederick feigns for his mother, who is so offended by Frederick's tears. Yet, the tears, in an eerie twist, seem to be for her – that is, in her place, and out of compassion.

The only time the reader witnesses the mother's grief is when the mother comes back from the hospital and briefly leaves her company to go cry in the presence of Frederick, then but a two-year-old baby: "Mrs Dickinson knelt asleep, her profile pressed to the blanket, one arm crooked over the baby's form. Under his mother's arm, as still as an image, Frederick lay wide awake, not making a sound. In a conjunction with a certain look in his eyes, the baby's silence gave the two women the horrors. The servant said to the friend: 'You would think he knew'" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 539). It seems that Frederick, not yet possessed by the patriarchal spectator within, is reacting to the sorrow the mother is holding back, making Frederick's tears virtually hers. This empathic tear-travel is furthermore underlined by Mrs Dickinson's friend's "thought of a poem of Tennyson's she had learnt as a child" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 539), "Tears, Idle Tears," that evoke the inexplicable forces of suffering: "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,/Tears from the depth of some divine despair/Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,/In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,/And thinking of the days that are no more." "Derrida, like Tennyson," Sarah Wood writes, "was a 'child about whom people used to say 'he cries for nothing''. Are tears the beginning of thinking – " (Wood 194).

Frederick's tears turn into thinking, as a real human spectator, made out of flesh and blood, manifests herself, saying she knew "another boy who cries like you, but he's older. He knots himself up and bellows" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 541). The girl, who "looked at Frederick as though she were meeting an artist who had just done a turn" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 541) explains that her friend never gave her a reason for his crying, other than: "What's the reason not to?" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 542). The girl's own conclusion that it was "as though he saw something. […] It's as if he knew about something he'd better not" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 542), from which she deduces her advice to Frederick to: "[…] snap out of that, if you can, before you are George's age. It does you no good. It's all the way you see things" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 542). Yet, the narrator's

comment underlines the necessity of such sorrow, such empathic seeing across choral tears: "The eyes of George and Frederick seemed to her to be wounds, in the world's surface, through which its inner, terrible unassuageable, necessary sorrow constantly bled away and constantly welled up" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 542). The *necessary* sorrow that holds gentle touches for ducks, tears for those unable to cry, and the potential for non-anthropocentric ethical thought towards suffering, unsullied by patriarchal ghosts praising insensitive strength, is the stuff eco-friendly futures can be built on. As Sarah Wood writes of such sorrow:

> It may concern the fate of nations, it may concern the geomorphic changes wrought by man and their unforeseen and irreversible destructive effects, but it will bring together the course of history, or the disappearing future, at a particular juncture for a particular human being with their own adventure, someone in whom many currents meet, each with a way of imagining their future, with their own children, actual and spiritual children. We weep. We don't know why, perhaps we are suffering from reminiscences, from something we have repressed coming out from inside, or something more absolutely forgotten, we really don't know, it's tears, idle tears, they do no work, no work of mourning, 'I know not what they mean' but it's then, with the secretion from the depths, that we are in the domain of communicable experience. Without words, or across them, an experience from somewhere else in us. (Wood 194)

Conclusion

To get to the choral tears, or across them, towards understanding others' suffering,[119] perhaps we should indeed ask ourselves, as Bowen's crying grown-up man does, why should we not cry (seeing what we see, knowing what we know)? If the refusal to feel is the very beginning of cruelty, should we start breaking our hearts? What do we have to lose?

If our dread is, as Beckett's unnameable narrator and Bowen's grown-ups in *The Death of the Heart* show, rooted not only in the sheer pain of empathic suffering, but also in the ways in which suffering and sympathy with suffering, seen as weakness, could be used against us, then we must ask why weakness has such an effect. Suffering, as a universal ability, or inability not to suffer, unites humans to the realm of all living – yet the significance of that connection is undermined by what Bowen calls "a muffish dread of living, a dread of the universal in our

[119] As Morton writes:

> The notion of (smooth, complete) world as such is also broken. There is no way to put it back together, because the very concept of smooth functioning, just happening without things sticking out, is anthropocentrically scaled. Worlds are not like that. This means that we have transformed our idea of world. World precisely *is* tattered, perforated patchwork quilt that doesn't quite start and stop with a definite horizon – temporal as well as spatial horizons are equally full of holes and blurry, by the way. In turn this means we can *share* worlds. Our human world is shared with all kinds of other tattered, broken worlds. The world of spiders, the world of tigers, the world of bacteria. Wittgenstein was wrong: we *can* understand lions – at least to some extent. This isn't because we condescendingly expand our world, but because our world is perforated – we don't quite understand *ourselves*, either. We can understand tigers and ourselves modally: we can share worlds 20 percent, or 60 percent. Sharing doesn't have to be all or nothing. (Morton, *Humankind* 92–93)

natures" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 300). The myths of the uniqueness of mankind, which cannot be entirely separated from other myths of uniqueness of a single nation, race, or gender, lay the groundwork of an ethics that is based on mastery and domination through claiming a difference, and such an ethics is bound to see "ability" in terms of "potential for dominance," in one way or another. Turning towards seeing value in suffering would require a profound shift in that entire ethics based on such ideas of mastery. Suffering does not have to be an experience of humiliation only, but rather an experience of thinking humility – of willingness not to satisfy the patriarchal spectators within by repressing one's feelings, but grounding this ability to feel into the possibility of reading the suffering of others the best we can, even if this requires breaking one's heart or crossing boundaries. As Bowen writes: "The proper comment on grief, the comment that returns it to poetry, comes not in the right word, the faultless perceptive silence, but from the chorus of vulgar unsought friends – friends who are strangers to the taste and the mind" (Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* 300). Our vulgar unsought friends, strangers to the taste and mind – perhaps also Bowen's ducks and kittens, or Beckett's mules and pigs, should not be ignored because of our muffish dread of living which cannot recognize suffering as a worthy ability; instead, the ethical discourses on understanding/misunderstanding suffering should be prioritized when organizing the ways we, the master species, inhabit the earth and our societies.

Accepting our necessary sorrow, an experience from somewhere else in us, for the state of the planet, for the state of the biosphere, for the state of a disappearing species, or even for the single suffering pig, is in itself an act of rebellion against atrophied systems of thought, the internalized anthropocentric and patriarchal ghosts and institutions and governments that still make them live on. Literature, such as Beckett's and Bowen's, with eyes like the wounds at the world's surface, bleeds away and wells up the necessary sorrow that breaks our hearts but also makes this heartbreak a force, a fuel on which a new eco-logic runs.

3.4 "A Vast Imbrication of Flesh": Technological Progress as Ecological and Ethical Regress in Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and Beckett's *How It Is*

> […] I'm calm calmer you think you're calm and you're not in the lowest depths and you're on the edge (Beckett, *How It Is* 15)
>
> "I should not mind what you did, so long as you never said, 'What's next?'" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 824)

That we are a master species cannot be denied, as we have, collectively, become a geological force able to alter the Earth's climate despite ourselves. However, our peculiar position as a master species should no longer rely on an ethics of ruthless mastery – if we are to change our ways. A new eco-logic requires a break with the old anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of thought that rely on domination and exploitation – but as any worthy break-up, it should also provide material for an analysis of the previous relationship, for we need to know what we are breaking away from, in order to build a different ethical bond with the Earth and its human and non-human inhabitants.

An ethics that must respond to climate change cannot completely disengage itself from the past, that is, from the responsibility for the past emissions, exploitation of resources, destruction of habitats, etc., but also from the analyses of past ideologies and ethical failures that led us to human-induced global ecological disasters, such as the current climate change and mass extinction. As Timothy Morton suggests, "the present has not served ecology well" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 93). He writes that "hyperobjects themselves prevent us from being presentist" and what we need is "*ecology without the present*" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 92). By that, he also means ecology without "*ecomimesis*: stop thinking, go out into Nature, turn off your irony" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 92).

Beckett and Bowen do not take us into Nature; instead, Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and Beckett's *How It Is* take us to the kind of eerie unending fictional present that annuls the habitable future. In "Mysterious Kôr," the fictional present is created as a psychological defence against the fragility of life in the disenchanted, Blitz-struck London. Reading Bowen's depiction of war damage and its effect on the human psyche, notably, how the fictional present is used as a defence mechanism, I will argue that thinking about complex manmade global issues (such as the Second World War, but also climate change and mass extinction), with vast implications that spread across generations, should not be reduced to being the matter of the present and presence, as such a narrow vision runs the risk of ethical corruption. The problems

of ethical corruption will then be further explored in Beckett's *How It Is*, where the slow and violent progression of characters is read as a metaphor for mastery via the technological progress of the 20th century and its wider-known and imagined consequences. Beckett's "ethics of 'equal' suffering" in the novel will lead me to argue against the kind of mastery that fails to recognize the ethical obligations regarding our past actions, reducing ethics to the present and presence, to the current and local concerns only. Such mastery, I argue, is unethical and ill-adapted to dealing with manmade global ecological issues, as it does not think of what type of environment the currently vulnerable humans and nonhumans and the future generations will be growing up to.

"Growing up to what?": Bowen's frail world in "Mysterious Kôr"

Bowen's wartime short story, "Mysterious Kôr" (1944), is set in a strange fragile moonlit London of the Blitz where we discover three young people: two girls cohabiting in a small flat with paper-thin walls, and a soldier, who is dating one of them. The readers find the pair, Pepita and Arthur, wandering the empty streets, looking for a place where they could be alone together, as the (omni)presence of Pepita's roommate in the flat would make any intimacy between the couple impossible. Although the streets are nearly empty, their apparent calm is upset by Bowen's language that haunts the scenery with images of destruction and extinction, threatening to leave the youth with "not a niche left to stand in" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 821). As such, the story, set in the framework of Second World War city life, resembles and contributes to global and intergenerational ethical dilemmas of the 21st century in the context of climate change and mass extinction.

The London that Bowen's readers discover is described as being "the moon's capital – shallow, cratered, extinct" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 820). The intense moonlight lays bare every nook and cranny of the city, making all life vulnerable to a potential bomb-attack, as nothing remains hidden:

> The soaring new flats and the crouching old shops and houses looked equally brittle under the moon, which blazed in windows that looked its way. The futility of the black-out became laughable: from the sky, presumably, you could see every slate in the roofs, every whited kerb, every contour of the naked winter flowerbeds in the park; and the lake, with its shining twists and tree-darkened islands would be a landmark for miles, yes, miles, overhead. (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 821)

However, the vulnerability is shown to be psychological, for we are told "The Germans no longer came by the full moon" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 821), and yet "the buildings

strained with battened-down human life, but not a beam, not a voice, not a note from radio escaped" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 821). The abnormality of this seeming calm is signalled through the "unmeaning performance of changing colour" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 821) of traffic lights and the street's "look of survival" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 834), while the imagination of destruction is acted out through the two sets of steps *dying* in opposite directions and the disappearance of "a trickle of people," "as though dissolved in the streets by some white acid" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 822).

In such a London, and precisely against such a London, Pepita evokes Kôr, an indestructible city that, she claims, is "altogether different; it's very strong; there is not a crack in it anywhere for a weed to crow in; the corners of stones and the monuments might have been cut yesterday, and the stairs and arches are built to support themselves" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 823). As Jeslyn Medoff describes it: "The vision to which Pepita so tenaciously clings, her fantasy city, is as sort of spiritual bomb shelter, a place for the soul to seek safety when there is literally no refuge for the body" (Medoff 78). Kôr becomes an impenetrable fortress against invasion, but it also lends itself to the imagination of a "good life," against the war's many shortages. Kôr offers illimited resources – the kind of bottomless well capitalism has dreamed up for itself here on earth, despite its limited resources.

Pepita's imagination strikes roots in the tangible traffic lights, left without meaning now, which she rebaptizes as inexhaustible gases: "[…] they bored through to them and lit them as they came up; by changing colour they show the changing of minutes; in Kôr there is no sort of other time" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 824). This inexhaustible gas is later shadowed by the actual gas Callie, Pepita's flat mate, had regretfully wasted while preparing beverages that nevertheless grew cold while she was waiting for the couple's arrival.

The "weird moonlight over bomb-pitted London" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 129–30) that gives rise to Pepita's Kôr-vision, is the opposite of the "darkness of the nights of six years (darkness which transformed a capital city into a network of inscrutable canyons)" in which, Bowen writes, "one developed new bare alert senses, with their own savage warnings and notations" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 99). Bowen also explains that the wartime search for indestructible landmarks in a destructible world led to the production of "small worlds-within-worlds of hallucination – in most cases, saving hallucination" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 97). These "resistance-fantasies" or "little dear saving illusory worlds" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 97), as Bowen calls them, took form in her short stories: "The short story, as I see it to be, allows for what is crazy about humanity: obstinacies, inordinate heroisms, 'immortal longings'" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 130).

"Mysterious Kôr," being one of Bowen's "disjected snapshots – snapshots taken from close-up, too close up, in the *mêlée* of a battle" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 99),[120] gives in to such immortal longings. Every character appears to be caught up in their own saving hallucination which becomes a habitat in the absence of safety and normalcy. Callie who suggests Pepita should keep cheerful because she has Arthur is herself using the prospect of their love as her resistance-fantasy; her naivety and utter "love for love" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 834) makes her "the guardian of that ideality for which Pepita was constantly lost to view" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 826). Pepita's and Arthur's love is described as "a collision in the dark" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 830), and it is made clear that "she had not been, and still sometimes was not his type" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 830), which reduces their love to one of the peculiar war-born relationships, such as Robert's and Stella's in *The Heat of the Day*, which, under other circumstances, would not have seen the light of day. As Arthur puts it: "How are any of us to know how things could have been? They forget war's not just only war; it's years out of people's lives that they've never had before and won't have again" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 832–33).

"Mysterious Kôr" is hardly the love story it might seem to be at first glance (which is, after all, not surprising to Bowen's readers), as it produces this imaginary city for the couple that has no other place to call their own. Pepita's Kôr, of which, we are told, "Arthur had been the source" or "the password" but not "the end" or "the answer" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 834), goes towards deeper worries about total destruction. As Arthur notices, this resistance-fantasy might really get "in you and you can't laugh it off" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 833). His misogynistic comment: "I thought girls thought about people" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 823), that reduces women's imaginations to worries about human (love) relations only, brings the lovers' conversation to an awkward twist: "Think about people? How can anyone think about people if they've got any heart? I don't know how other girls manage: I always think about Kôr" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 824). After being reminded of Arthur's importance, by Arthur, Pepita quickly includes him to the core of her Kôr-story; however, Arthur's eviction from the centre is further emphasized by the final sentence which reduces

[120] The actual battle does not appear in Bowen's stories. As Jeslyn Medoff writes:

> A chronicler of life during the bombing, Bowen recorder the emotional and psychological tenor of a city under siege. She was specially qualified for this task, working as an ARP warden and narrowly missing death when her Regent's Park home was bombed. But the 'action' of wartime London, people scurrying to bomb shelters, corpses lying in the streets, children dying in the night, is not the stuff of Bowen's fictional documentary. Instead her war manifest itself in strained social encounters, in changing mores, in the dreams and memories of shattered psyches. (Medoff 73)

him to a password only; we are told: "[…] it is to Kôr's finality that she turned" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 834).

Though Pepita's imagination is moulded by London, her Kôr is everything London is not: an impenetrable fortress with endless resources and without history. Pepita makes Kôr out to be "a completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 822) and she also ignores Rider Haggard's 1887 adventure novel *She* and Andrew Lang's poem "She." From there, she only borrows the name for her imaginary city: "[…] I just got the name. I knew that must be the right name; it's like a cry" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 823). Though Arthur sarcastically compares "Kôr" to the cry of a crow, a bird infamously unknown for its musicality, Pepita's Kôr (that Callie mistakes for "core") stems from the desire to undo the core "successes" of her civilization; she wants a world where some rocks are left unturned, some lands unexplored (and unexploited, as these notions historically go together):

> [the poem] was written some time ago, at that time when they thought they had got everything taped, because the whole world had been explored, even the middle of Africa. Every thing and place had been found and marked on some map; so what wasn't marked on any map couldn't be there at all. So *they* thought: that was why he wrote the poem. '*The world is disenchanted*,' it goes on. That was what set me off hating civilization. (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 823)

Pepita's frustration with civilization echoes Bowen's, when, at the age of twelve, she too was disenchanted and depressed "by what seemed the sheer uniformity of the human lot" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 246–47). Bowen's own preadolescent discontentment with the bleakness of the civilized world that reduced the Earth's secrets to pre-existing knowledge and maps, is transformed in "Mysterious Kôr" into a hallucination of an indestructible place that defies the knowledge of her civilization by being there after all, despite not being marked on a map.

Pepita's relation to Kôr is a romance in its own right, a romance with the lost future and the loss of future. Pepita's refusal of counting time in Kôr, and her refusal of history in Kôr ("a completely forsaken city, as high as cliffs and as white as bones, with no history," 822), whereby she divorces the place from the hated civilization (and its knowledge) that has brought London to its current ruin, place it in a curious dead present without the past and the future. When Arthur wonders about calculating time in Kôr with the help of the sun and the moon, Pepita's answer is future-cancelling: "I should not mind what you did, so long as you never said, 'What's next?'" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 824). Pepita's formulation strangely unlinks Arthur's (present/past) action from the future; in other words, she is saying: I do not mind what you do/did, just do not tell me to think the future in light of your actions. By

cancelling history and history's impact on the future, Pepita creates the present where you do not have to think: what is next?

In a way, Pepita's Kôr is the war's inverted version of "mindfulness;" it replaces the idea of being "fully" present in the moment with being "fully" present in a fiction, for how present can you be in a place of great uncertainty, in a city that threatens to crumble? The presentism in Pepita's Kôr is an anxiety-reducing outlet/escape that makes living is a warzone bearable, and in some ways, it resembles the approaches to manmade ecological crises that ask us to get away from the city and technology, go into Nature and be present or even at one with Nature (whatever that is). However, neither of those approaches focus on the crises at hand, which are overwhelmingly complex, rooted in the past and extending into the future. There is no real escape from the effects of war for Pepita, as there is no escape for us from the vast and complex manifestations and consequences of climate change. Focusing ecological thinking on the present and the importance of presence is as useful as bonding with an orange in the eye of a hurricane.[121]

Thinking about climate change and climate action cannot be the matter of the present and presence only, for climate change is not only about today and who is here today: its causes as well as its consequences are spread across time and generations, many of which are no longer here to answer for their past emissions. Making climate change the matter of the present and presence runs the risk of ethical corruption.

As Stephen M. Gardiner explains through his metaphor of the perfect moral storm, climate action can be hampered through several ethical dilemmas, or "storms," as he calls them, which can be mutually reinforcing. He points out three primary "storms": "In the global storm, the main threat is that the rich will take unjust advantage of the poor. In the intergenerational storm, it is that earlier generations will do the same to later generations. In the ecological "storm", the kick the dog scenario suggests the further exploitation of nonhuman nature by humanity" (Gardiner 304). The combination of those three elements make up the perfect moral storm where the risk of ethical corruption becomes severe: "In the perfect moral storm, the threat is acute, even potentially fatal, because of the severe nature of some of the asymmetries

[121] The idea of bonding with an orange is not a simple snarky comment on presentism, it stems from a seminar I attended in 2018, which focused on ecology and ecopsychology, where the participants were asked to hold, smell, and touch an orange – in other words, be fully present to/with the orange, and say the very first word that came to their minds. "Happiness, warmth, Christmas, tree, summer…" were among the popular choices, so, it should not come as a surprise that heads turned in sheer horror when it was my turn to birth a word and I had chosen "death." Death did not sit well with full presence; neither did explanations (for we were not asked to explain, we were quick vessels for orange-thinking), but this poor fruit, a foreigner as I am, was a sheer reminder of elsewhere: of the road (and carbon emissions) it took to get here, of the chain of actions and consequences, some disastrous, our mortal fleshes, so different from one another, are part of.

of power and because those who are damaged by them — the poor, future generations, animals, and the rest of nature — are poorly placed to defend themselves against it" (Gardiner 304).

What is next for them?

Bowen's lines, looking back at her twelve-year-old self, announce the necessity of breaking up with book-children and entering into the real world (where "thunder clouds were to burst in 1914," Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 246): "I began to feel it was time we were growing up. Growing up to what?" (Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree* 246). Growing up into the "reality" of a bleak utilitarian world where everything is mapped and tamed by civilization is a blow in the face in-itself to any young wondering mind. Yet, growing up in, and into a severely destabilized world, into the heart of the storm with no power to pull the break on the next forthcoming catastrophe, is the ultimate fragility current and future (human and nonhuman) generations face. What are we asking future generations, human or not, to be growing up to?

As the older generations have an asymmetric power over the prospects of future generations, but not vice versa, "the growing up" becomes more than an individual endeavour. "Growing up to what?" entails both a reflection on the ethics of the mould are we are building for the identity of the future humans as moral agents (what are we leaving behind in in terms of " wisdom," if you will – for we are a social species, constantly learning from each other), and the reflection on what sort of environment are we are leaving behind as the habitat of future human and non-human generations.

Pepita's vision of the future is dark: "This war shows we've by no means come to the end. If you can blow whole places out of existence, you can blow whole places into it. I don't see why not. They say we can't say what's come out since the bombing started. By the time we've come to the end, Kôr may be the one city left: the abiding city. I should laugh" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 823). Pepita excavates Kôr, the ghost city, from the rubble of the war, on the ashes of all other cities, and perhaps all other lifeforms as the ultimate survivor of this large-scale destruction, and she tops it off with ironic laughter – laughter in the place of tears.

The ethics of "equal" suffering in Beckett's *How It Is*

There is, strangely, no laugher, no urge for laugher in me, in Beckett's last long prose text, *How It Is* (1964), originally *Comment c'est* (1961). Gary Adelman compares it to "a medieval wall painting of the Last Judgement, but one which bears witness to the absence of

redemption" (Adelman 82), Raymond Federman sees it as "an experiment in willful artistic failure: the rejection of reality" (Federman 461):

> What is this language which unravels and repeats the same set of expressions for 177 pages of punctuationless prose presented in a series of almost unrelated paragraphs (poetic stanzas?) of a most illogical syntax? Where is this unrealistic universe? Where, *in our experience*, is this world of endless dimensions, of darkness and mud, where only a few incongruous objects are still identifiable: a can opener, a cord, a sack full of sardine and tuna fish cans? (Federman 460 emphasis mine)

All of Beckett's later fiction seeks the most efficient ways of self-mutilation and erasure, with wilful artistic failure in mind, and yet none of it, it seems to me, can be quite reduced to the rejection of reality, or to "a masochistic expression of the futility of the creative act, or for that matter of all human actions" (Federman 461). Beckett's later fiction can all too easily be read as a series of abstractions and as absurd because of its many wilful contradictions and linguistic peculiarities, but to remove his fiction from any connection to reality and coherence (despite its strange form and language), or to reduce it to the mere replica of the artist's torturous writing process, is to deny it any serious ethical value and relevance in the world outside fiction. Through its muddy wordscape, both in form and content, *How It Is* offers pertinent reflections on the destruction of the environment (evoking, precisely, the kind of environment we cannot recall "in our experience") and ethical corruption.

Set in a vast dark field filled with mud and nothing else, the unpunctuated textual field of the novel resembles the muddy scenery: both are without a breach or fissure. Yet this seeming uniformity communicates great irregularities: we are steeped into a destroyed environment through a language that drastically breaks with literary traditions. "*Commencez*!" as the French title suggests. How can we? Like the eroded earth of the novel, earth no longer held together by roots, *Comment c'est*/*How It Is* is linguistically an odd patchwork of grafts: transplanted words/images in the mud. The novel's fragile environment seems to bear dramatic traces of technological progress, but it also defies the very possibility of such progress, for there is not much left to exploit, nothing could be grown or made into something else there. The eerie atmosphere of the novel feels like a Beckettian post-mortem of a bleak utilitarian world of endless unthinking human progress, and, as such, it speaks (particularly) to the 21st imagination of a full-scale ecological catastrophe, it speaks to our fears that the world we are leaving behind is no longer habitable.

In *How It Is*, technological progress only appears indirectly. Timewise, the writing and translation of *Comment c'est* coincide with the efforts of the Soviet Union and the United States to outman each other by means of technological progress. The danger of being wiped out by a

nuclear bomb also seems to transform the landscape of this novel that looks as if it had been ravaged by some powerful force, of which no clear traces remain.

How It Is begins with a solitary narrator crawling in the mud, holding on to a coal-sack filled with tins, until he meets another half-living being. The narrator abuses him. In the third part we find the narrator alone in the mud, waiting for *his abuser* to come. Evidently, there is a method to this madness.

Though it is impossible to locate the narrator in time, the coal-sack containing tins already refers to a certain pre-existing human activity, but there is no proof of any production or any material for production. The sacks filled with cans are all that remains: "more sacks here then than souls infinitely if we journey infinitely and what infinite loss without profit there is that difficulty overcome something wrong there" (Beckett, *How It Is* 97). The returning comment "something wrong there" that seems to rectify the said, also, through its multiple repetitions (twenty-nine times in the text) adds the sense of moral judgement. Something *is* wrong there. The abuse described by the narrator is methodical and unending, which, understandably, allows for all kind of parallels with depictions of hell. However, the very movement of bodies and sacks, which recalls a conveyor belt, also lends itself to a reflection on the nature of capitalism: "'It is regulated,' 'it's mathematical," the narrator keeps pointing out as he describes the social interchange of this world […]. Pim operates in perfect accord with a rigid behaviorism in which nothing more is needed than the principles of positive and negative reinforcement" (Porter Abbott, "Farewell to Incompetence: Beckett's 'How It Is' and 'Imagination Dead Imagine'" 39). The narrator tells us:

> a sack no doing without a sack without food when you journey as we have seen should have seen part one no doing without them it's regulated thus we're regulated thus leaving then without a sack I had a sack I had found it on my way there is that difficulty overcome we leave our sacks to those who do not need them we take their sacks from those who soon will need them […]
>
> at the instant I leave Bem another leaves Pim and let us be at that instant one hundred thousand strong then fifty thousand departures fifty thousand abandoned no sun no earth nothing turning the same instant always everywhere (Beckett, *How It Is* 96–97)

The strict systematic regulation of Pims, Bems and Boms "crawling and resting, panting and murmuring flash on and off with the regularity of a neon sign" (Porter Abbott, "Farewell to Incompetence: Beckett's 'How It Is' and 'Imagination Dead Imagine'" 41) coincides with a vast deregulation of the natural world: "no sun no earth" (Beckett, *How It Is* 97).

Instead of sowing seeds, the creatures in the mud litter what is left of the earth ("with the gesture of one dealing cards and also to be observed among certain sowers of seed I throw

away the empty tins they fall without a sound," Beckett 7). This idea of pollution is taken one (giant) step further by the narrator's suggestion that perhaps what they are crawling in is not mud after all, but another form of pollution: "quick a supposition if this so-called mud were nothing more than all our shit yes all if there are not billions of us at the moment and why not the moment there are two there were yes billions of us crawling and shitting in their shit hugging like a treasure in their arms the wherewithal to crawl and shit a little more" (Beckett, *How It Is* 44).

Shit is a polluter of sky and earth – it pollutes groundwater while its inescapable ally, methane, has more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over the first 20 years after it reaches the atmosphere (Environmental Defense Fund); and thus, in vast quantities, shit is a destructive force on its own.

Timothy Morton makes the matter of talking about something as embarrassing as excrements central to the ecological thought: "It [the ecological thought] isn't *like* thinking about where our toilet waste goes. It *is* thinking about where our toilet waste goes" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 9). The ecological thought "brings into light aspects of our existence that have remained unconscious for a long time; we don't like to recall them. […] Freud described the unconscious as a wilderness area. Wilderness areas are the unconscious of modern society, places we can go to keep our dreams undisturbed. The very form of modern consciousness is itself this dream" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 9). Beckett's *How It Is* haunts the modern consciousness with straight-forward dung. In terms of humbling, it is hard to find ways to drop lower than Beckett's creatures in the dark, unable to escape their own and collective waste.

Yet, *shit*'s metaphorical grasp is vaster than "excrement." It can mean nearly anything; it can also name our unsinkable, ineffaceable things, things we no longer love or feel the need for, things we would rather be rid of – rubbish. In *Malone Dies*, a reflection on such things begins with the sight of an old pipe, a pipe "thrown away because it could no longer serve, the stem having broken off" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 240). The narrator writes: "This pipe could have been repaired, but he must have said, Bah, I'll buy myself another. But all I found was the bowl" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 240). At the sight of this old useless pipe, the narrator's love for things takes over. It is the kind of love that reminds me of Bowen's essay on toys. "The toy is the first possession; it has the power to concentrate all the imagination and every feeling" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 178), she writes, while reminding us that "Toys for today must be the toys *of* today," for "with each generation of children the formula for the enchantment differs" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 179). Beckett's Malone's relation to things, for which

he claims to feel pity, gives littering a more poetic turn, in which, strangely enough, we might recognize ourselves:

> […] I loved to finger and caress the hard shapely objects that were there in my deep pockets, it was my way of talking to them and reassuring them. And I loved to fall asleep holding in my hand a stone, a horse chestnut or a cone, and I would be still holding it when I woke, my fingers closed over it, in spite of sleep which makes a rag of the body, so that it may rest. And those of which I wearied, or which were ousted by new loves, I threw away, that is to say I cast round for a place to lay them where they would be at peace for ever, and no one ever find them short of an extraordinary hazard, and such places are few and far between, and I laid them there. Or I buried them, or threw them into the sea, with all my strength as far as possible from the land, those I knew for certain would not float, even briefly. But many a wooden friend too I have sent to the bottom, weighted with a stone. Until I realized it was wrong of me. For when the string is rotted they would rise to the surface, if they have not already done so, and return to the land, sooner or later. In this way I disposed of things I loved but could no longer keep, because of new loves. And often I missed them. But I had hidden them so well that even I could never find them again. (Beckett, *Three Novels* 240–41)

Malone's burial of old loves, which recalls children's treasure burials, such as seen in Bowen's *The Little Girls*, also betrays something important about our relation to things: our relation to things is not merely utilitarian. Malone's new and old loves, amongst which we find "wooden friends," are things he caresses, reassures, and eventually abandons, things that also seem to have "the power to concentrate all the imagination and every feeling" (Bowen, *People, Places, Things* 178) – the power that Bowen associates with toys. Malone's closeness, emotional as well physical, to those "loves" is at once sad, heartwarming, and familiar. Far past our childhood, we still adopt new loves, as Malone does, that we carry with us or that we immobilize beside us while sleep makes a rag of our bodies. As Bowen notes, toys change with generations; however, they also change with age. The child's plush-toy is in adulthood replaced with a new love: a new phone, laptop, tablet, iWatch, Kindle, etc. – things we spend hours picking out, designing, personalizing, and upgrading to our own tastes and fancies. While those things do have purposes, our relation to them is often more than utilitarian. If it were so simple, then perhaps we would not need to dump our old things for new ones quite so soon – an old phone would suffice if it were not for curiosity, envy, affection, aesthetic pleasure, social significance, and many other thoughts and feelings that pull us towards new loves.

While our new loves take their places on our tables, bedstands, couches, pockets, pillows, old ones need to be disposed of. Globally, that means billions and billions of old loves. Beckett's example poetically frames the problem of getting rid of things we no longer desire or need. Much like Malone's floating old loves, our abandoned things rise to the surface and return to us sooner or later, in one form or another (while the changed form makes them also invisible). The plastic around the necks of seals and inside the bellies of whales, or the

microplastics on our plates are just a few elements of this kind of return. Something as near and dear as an old phone could contaminate the soil, groundwater, fish, and wildlife.

Not to mention the carbon emissions linked to phone production and usage, phones contain chemical substances such as antimony, arsenic, beryllium, nickel, copper, lead, and cadmium; the leakage of cadmium in the battery from a single phone could contaminate 600 000 liters of water (Velmurugan 152;154). Those toxic substances, as they seep from decaying waste in landfills (where we have put them, perhaps in the hope that they "would be at peace for ever," Beckett, *Three Novels* 241) into the groundwater, contaminate the soil and eventually enter the food chain (Velmurugan 155), and thus, they return to the sender. Yet, it is not a simple return, but rather a reenforced return, something that wreaks havoc on its way, and goes far beyond the initial sender. Our garbage outlives us. "A Styrofoam cup will outlive me by over four hundred years," Morton ponders, "I am directly responsible for beings that far into the future, insofar as two things will be true simultaneously: no one then will meaningfully be related to me; and my smallest action now will affect that time in profound ways" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 60).

Our "shit" (as any form of pollution, including toxic waste) does not abide quite so nicely by any democratic idea of equality on its own; already within our generation, it does/will not touch all the people the same way. The export of waste (also toxic waste) from industrialized countries to less industrialized countries, "in need of the income to be gained from accepting toxic waste from the West" but often "not equipped to handle those wastes in such a way as to protect peoples' health and the environment" (Clapp 505), has more recently caught media attention, as these countries have begun dispatching the waste back to the sender. In 2014, the Philippines tried to ship tons of falsely labelled rubbish back to Canada; China, that had been "the largest dumping ground for plastics" processing it into higher-quality material that could be reused, banned the process in 2018, diverting vast amounts of trash that otherwise would come their way (Ma); in 2020, Malaysia sent back 150 shipping containers of plastic waste to rich countries (among which are the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada) "insisting it won't be the 'garbage dump' of the world" (Picheta). Canada's rubbish, mislabeled as "plastic recyclables" and sent to the Philippines remained stranded there for years, before Canada agreed to take its sixty-nine containers of mislabeled waste back in May 2019 (Miner).

This game of hot potato is also what threatens effective climate action. As Gardiner writes: "The temptation to pass the buck on to the future, the poor, and nature is very strong" (Gardiner 9). Seeing the inaction towards climate change as "most centrally an ethical failure"

that "implicates our institutions, our moral and political theories, and ultimately ourselves, considered as moral agents" (Gardiner 3), Gardiner underlines subtle forms of corruption involved in thinking about climate change that strike at "our ability even to understand what is going wrong in moral terms, by subverting moral discourse to other (usually selfish) ends" (Gardiner 305): "Presumably, some social, political, and economic elites will try to capture the framing of climate policy in various fora at the expense of the less well-funded and well-connected. Similarly, we might see fairly overt intergenerational corruption: the twisting of climate policy to fit the perceived interests of the current generation at the expense of the future" (Gardiner 305). However, he also underlines that the problems of moral corruption are not completely unfamiliar to us: "Indeed, paradigm cases are common fodder in literature, history, and philosophy. So, there is some hope that making ourselves aware of the subtle mechanisms of moral corruption in other settings can help us when we face the perfect moral storm" (Gardiner 309).

In *How It Is*, the moral storm is blowing westward, uncovering the kind of slow violence Rob Nixon evokes: "[…] a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (R. Nixon 2). As Nixon explains, we need to engage with violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, violence that is not immediately visible and recognizable as such, if we are to think about global ecological problems: "Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively" (R. Nixon 2). Slow violence, while including forms of structural violence, "has a wider descriptive range in calling attention, not simply to questions of agency, but to broader, more complex descriptive categories of violence enacted slowly over time" (R. Nixon 11); it forces us to rethink our accepted assumption of violence as visible, spectacular, sensational, event-focused, time-bound, and body-bound.

In *How It Is*, the destruction of the environment is hinted at, but not visible. It cannot be pinned down to a single event we could point out as violence towards ecosystems. Instead, glimpses of destruction as well as the life before this degradation appear as fleeting images in the mud:

> […] I'm calm calmer you think you're calm and you're not in the lowest depths and you're on the edge I say it as I hear it and that death death if it ever comes that's all it dies

> it dies and I see a crocus in a pot in an area in a basement a saffron the sun creeps up the wall a hand keeps it in the sun this yellow flower with a string I see the hand long image hours long the sun goes the pot goes down lights on the ground the hand goes the wall goes (Beckett, *How It Is* 15)

The first image fades out, producing an ambiguous "it" – for the fading voice, image, or a life that goes by "it," we do not know. However, the fleeting image undermines the reader's calm: "you think you're calm and you're not in the lowest depths and you're on the edge" (Beckett, *How It Is* 15). The narrator's ambiguous "you" (it seems) turns to us, making the reader feel on edge now, by undermining the calm with what we do not know and are unable to predict, for we are merely "on the edge" and not in the heart of the matter, "in the lowest depths." With *How It Is*, Beckett truly toys with the reader's vision, reducing it to mere fading glimpses: making us unable to grasp the image as a whole. Reading *How It Is* often feels like looking at a painting up-close, without being able to step back. And yet, in order to read on, we need to collect those rare glimpses of the recognizable; knowing that to see them is to missee, to open yourself to the very possibility of short-sighted, blunted vison, vision as it always has been – limited.

The narrator's vision of a crocus, something we recognize as a flower (but also, through mythology, a mortal youth turned into a flower), also fades out: "the crocus the old man in tears the tears behind the hands skies all sorts different sorts on land and sea blue of a sudden gold and green of the earth of a sudden in the mud" (Beckett, *How It Is* 16). Then the animals go:

> some animals still the sheep like granite outcrops a horse I hadn't seen standing motionless back bent head sunk animals know
>
> blue and white of sky a moment still April morning in the mud it's over it's done I've had the image the scene is empty a few animals still then goes out no more blue I stay there (Beckett, *How It Is* 25)

After the ominous animals, the image of the earth briefly fades in and out:

> way off on the right the tugging hand the mouth shut grim the staring eyes glued to the mud perhaps we shall come back it will be dusk the earth of childhood glimmering again streaks of dying amber in a murk of ashes the earth must have been on fire when I see us we are already at hand
>
> it is dusk we are going tired home I see only the naked parts the solidary faces raised to the east the pale swaying of the mingled hands tired and slow we toil up towards me and vanish
>
> the arms in the middle go through me and part of the bodies shades through a shade the scene is empty in the mud the sky goes out the ashes darken no world left for me now but mine […] (Beckett, *How It Is* 25–26)

While this constant fading out reproduces the movement of a dying thought, it also further emphasizes that the dead world of the novel is not a purely fictional world, as recognizable images of "the earth of childhood" emerge in this empty scene where the only comforter is the narrator's inner world – impoverished, as it is. The earth that "must have been on fire" (Beckett, *How It Is* 25) is lost to the narrator, irretrievable, and there is no specific event or action that would give a final reason for this loss. There is, in other words, no clear, time-specific, act of violence. There is, however, an interesting passage on progress:

> another age yet another familiar in spite of its strangenesses this sack this slime the mild air the black dark the coloured images the power to crawl all these strangenesses
>
> but progress properly so called ruins in prospect as in the dear tenth century the dear twentieth that you might say to yourself to a dream greenhorn ah if you had seen it four hundred years ago what upheavals
>
> ah my young friend this sack if you had seen it I could hardly drag it and now look my vertex touches the bottom (Beckett, *How It Is* 17)

Rather than reading this passage as a metaphor for Beckett's writer's block (a reflection already on *progress* as "writing progress"),[122] I propose to look at it, and the text in its globality, as a reflection on the 20th century technological progress of the industrialized countries. The era of its writing was the time when the technological progress, "so called ruins in prospect," had already reached disastrous capacities of wiping out entire places, as the end of the Second World War had demonstrated, and the nuclear threat was looming large, while, as the reader knows, emissions were roaring towards a new global threat – the climate crisis. *How It Is* evokes the kind of ruthless progress that relies on destructive mastery over humans, nonhumans, and the earth, through a slow yet violent movement of characters.

There is no more proper strength in the world of *How It Is*, no more resources either: "ah my young friend this sack if you had seen it I could hardly drag it and now look my vertex touches the bottom" (Beckett, *How It Is* 17). Instead of reading those resources as a metaphor for the author's declining imagination, his creative resources, I focus on reading these diminishing cans in the coal sack and the very process of mindless Sisyphean work that drives *How It Is* as a portrayal of mindless mastery over the natural world, through the exploitation of earth, its resources, and people with less economic power.

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[122] As Daniel Katz reminds us, *How It Is* "arose from a period of profound artistic crisis for him [Beckett], in which he felt that his creative impetus had lost its proper intensity and necessity" (Katz 9). Jean Schultz Herbert's reading of this passage refers to such a creative block: "'(A)h my young friend,' he continues, 'this sack if you had seen it I could hardly drag it and now look my vertex touches the bottom.' This passage suggests additionally that the narrator feels he is coming to the end of his resources as a creator, an anxiety which has shown itself before in Beckett's works in the suggestion that each work completed is the last" (Schultz Herbert 222–23).

Such mastery is slow violence, as it occurs gradually, out of sight (while it also participates in the processes of invisibilization), and has far-reaching consequences dispersed across time and space. Beckett's system of work in *How It Is*, is, among other things, defined by absolute slowness:

> from left to right we advance each one advances and all advance from west to east year in year out in the dark the mud in torment and solitude at the speed of thirty-seven to thirty-eight say forty yards a year we advance
>
> such the feeble idea of our slowness given by these figures of which it is sufficient to admit and no doubt it can be done on the one hand that assigned to the duration of the journey and on the other those expressing the length and frequency of the stage to obtain this feeble idea of our slowness (Beckett, *How It Is* 109)

This extremely slow advancement, from left to right, can easily be reduced to the metaphorical progression of the writer's painfully slow writing process. Yet, another reference to writing, that of the narrator carving letters on his victim's back, underlines processes of slow violence: "with the nail then of the right index I carve and when it breaks or falls until it grows again with another on Pim's back intact at the outset from left to right and top to bottom as in our civilisation I carve my Roman capitals" (Beckett, *How It Is* 60). The narrator's progress in the mud becomes an endless progression: "from the next mortal to the next leading nowhere" with "no other goal than the next mortal cleave to him give him a name train him up bloody him all over with Roman capitals" (Beckett, *How It Is* 53). Through the narrator's progress, Beckett translates the Western pride – ideological, economical, technological progress, as an immoral act of violent naming, reduction, destruction, and eventually, self-destruction.

Like the narrator, Pim, the "unbutcherable brother" (Beckett, *How It Is* 64), is a little old man (Beckett, *How It Is* 46), but we also learn he is "perhaps a foreigner an oriental" (Beckett, *How It Is* 48). When the narrator meets the stranger, his first touch is described as "a touch of ownership already on the miraculous flesh" (Beckett, *How It Is* 43). Thus, the touch is not a greeting between two strangers, but an establishment of the narrator's mastery over the stranger. Both men are incredibly weak, but that mutual fragility does not evoke empathy in the narrator. As the narrator learns that the other being is slightly shorter and weaker, probably a little older, and also a foreigner who does not speak the same language, he sees an opportunity in his newfound potency to dominate him. Thus, the only human contact we are made to witness in *How It Is* immediately recalls colonial violence that seeks political and economic power through the exploitation of people and the resources they might possess – a process that begins with stating a sense of superiority over "the other," whereby the colonizers make themselves the judges, the ones who know better, over the management of resources and education.

The idea of force, that is, being taller and stronger than "Pim," becomes not only the fuel for physical violence, but also the authority to name the stranger and "educate" him. "The reason of the strongest is always the best" (qtd. in Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 78), Derrida echoes *The Wolf and the Lamb*, a fable by Jean de la Fontaine, which he uses to develop links between the power of domination and the power over knowledge (what is considered as proper knowledge). As Derrida writes:

> […] we have the presentiment, or even the suspicion, that the order of *knowledge* is never stranger to that of *power*, and that of *power* [*pouvoir*] to that of *seeing* [*voir*], willing [*vouloir*], and having [*avoir*]. It is not original but it is not false, no doubt, to recall that the scene of knowledge, and especially of knowledge in the form of the objectivity of the ob-ject, […] supposes that one disposes, that one poses before oneself, and that one has taken power over the object of knowledge. (Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign* 279)

From the moment Beckett's narrator first touches the stranger, he assumes that he has power over him, and most importantly: that he has the *right* to that power – *because* he is taller, stronger. He seems to operate through the idea that the reason of the strongest is always the best, which, for satirical purposes, is undermined through the fact that the differences between the narrator's and Pim's physical strength are ever so slight. The violence the narrator subjects "Pim" to is not a singular occurrence, in fact it seems hardly personal; we learn the violence there is systematic and laid out over a "vast stretch of time" (quoted forty times in the text).

The progress bodies make in the "mud" is motivated by the violent transmission of sacks that, the narrator writes, keep him "dying in a dying age" (Beckett, *How It Is* 12), the sacks that are given to "those who do not need them" and taken "from those who soon will need them" (Beckett, *How It Is* 97). The very movement, which seems to recall an infinite capitalist conveyor belt of exploitation without a beginning and an end, leaves the narrator "sandwiched between victim and tormentor" (Beckett, *How It Is* 111) in part three, where he is able to reflect on the system that keeps them going in that way. The narrator proposes various numbers and methods to make sense of this endless torturous going, with "no sun no earth nothing turning the same instant always everywhere" (Beckett, *How It Is* 96–97), in an endless loop:

> at the instant I reach Pim another reaches Bem we are regulated thus our justice wills it thus fifty thousand couples again at the same instant the same everywhere with the same space between them it's mathematical it's our justice in this muck where all is identical our ways and way of faring right leg right arm push pull (Beckett, *How It Is* 97–98)

The justice the narrator evokes is peculiarly focused on the equality of suffering: "[…] our justice which wills that not one were we fifty million not a single one among us be wronged

not one deprived of tormentor as number 1 would be not one deprived of victim as number 50000000 would be assuming this latter at the head of the procession which wends as we have seen from left to right or if you prefer from west to east" (Beckett, *How It Is* 107). The idea of equal suffering, to which the narrator dedicates many lines and calculations, that is presented as a sort of ethical justice between all beings, sounds absolutely ridiculous to any empathic being. It is a recipe for hell. Yet, precisely that kind of pseudo-ethical mumbo-jumbo is put forward in propositions that focus mainly on political and economic consequences in order to make the global ecological crisis a win-win situation…for the powerful.

Rob Nixon points out a particularly clear example in which "equal" suffering (without equal benefits) is suggested as an answer to rich nations' garbage issues: in a confidential World Bank memo on December 12, 1991, Lawrence Summers, a former president of Harvard University and chief economist of the World Bank writes:

> I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that. . . . I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles. . . . Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries? (qtd. in R. Nixon 1)

Summers' scheme to export toxic waste to "under polluted" African countries presents pollution itself as a standard which needs to be shared, equalized, for a one-sided double-gain: "it would benefit the United States and Europe economically, while helping appease the rising discontent of rich-nation environmentalists" (R. Nixon 1). Nixon writes that this scheme "stands as a grandiose (though hardly exceptional) instance of a highly rationalized official landscape that, whether in terms of elite capture of resources or toxic disposal, has often been projected onto ecosystems inhabited by those whom Annu Jalais, in an Indian context, calls 'dispensable citizens'" (R. Nixon 17), out of sight, out of mind. "As Peter Singer puts it, if their past record is anything to go by, the rich countries are even less likely to contribute large sums of money to help the world's poor directly than they are to do so to combat climate change" (Gardiner 325). These sorts of demands for "equal" suffering, which might make some sense from a strictly economic viewpoint (but we do not live in a strictly economic world), lead Gardiner to suggest that the dominant discourses about the nature of the climate threat are scientific and economic, yet the "deepest challenge is ethical": "What matters most is what we do to protect those vulnerable to our actions and unable to hold us accountable, especially the global poor, future generations, and nonhuman nature" (Gardiner xii). "Who we are," he writes,

"morally speaking, is a significant ethical issue, and one which […] has considerable bearing on the global environmental tragedy" (Gardiner 4).

The strange underground post-apocalyptic human conveyor belt that looks back at us from the depths of *How It Is* is no capitalist's dream, but it might be its consequence. As the narrator confesses: "[he] always understood everything except for example history and geography understood everything and forgave nothing never could never disapproved anything really not even cruelty to animals never loved anything" (Beckett, *How It Is* 34). An eco-logic that emerges from Beckett's *How It Is*, is the kind of ethics that teaches us to seek humility in our relation to knowledge and the management of our waste, earth's resources, and the climate crisis, urging us to see geography and history through a humbler lens – if we are to take its narrator's ethics of "equal" suffering as an example of the death of ethics, the core of immorality.

The organization of life based on systematic domination in *How It Is* fails, as the slow violence it produces leaves all the crawling creatures without profit, resources, and earth. Such mastery also fails to recognize the ethical obligations that bind humans to each other, to our past and future actions, to non-human animals, and to the earth and other forms of life and death on it. Only in Pim's absence, when it is too late, the narrator wonders if: "in reality we are one and all from the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last glued together in a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure" (Beckett, *How It Is* 122), and adds further on: "linked thus bodily together each one of us is at the same time Bom and Pim tormentor and tormented" (Beckett, *How It Is* 123). This is the only passage that ends with "nothing to emend there" (Beckett, *How It Is* 123) against the sea of mentions "something wrong there."

The glue that holds us together is not only economic. It is also cultural, transcultural, and ecological. It is not pure and it is not simple. We are, in many ways bound together by the pollution that is and is not our own, the pollution that is from elsewhere, from many years ago – so, there is no living in the here and now, as the here and now is connected to a "united net sufferings" (Beckett, *How It Is* 125) of yesterday and tomorrow, elsewhere. The logic of progress that is based on mindless, profit-driven mastery over the earth and its resources, animals, and other humans, lives in the here and now and does not take responsibility for the past wrongdoings and for the future, not to mention the future that is elsewhere, somewhere across the world, for it does not understand or care for the interconnectivity of species, things, communities, and actions: it does not understand that "we are one and all from the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last glued together" (Beckett, *How It Is* 122).

Conclusion

There is ethical responsibility both in what sort of environment is left to the future generations (human and nonhuman generations to come, at their respective speeds), but also in what sort of ethics is left behind for the next *human* generations. To make human technological progress a sustainable and ethical force, progress needs an ethics of humility that breaks with the old anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of thought that are comfortably blind to the wide implications of ruthless mastery over the powerless, the poor, the non-human animals, and the future generations of human and non-human animals. This ethics or eco-logic cannot be presentist, since manmade global ecological crises, such as climate change and mass extinction, are not problems of the present only – their causes as well as their consequences do not limit themselves to the present. Thinking in terms of the present, as we saw in Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr," implies precisely the willingness to stop thinking ethically about the impact of our present and past actions on the future: "I should not mind what you did, so long as you never said, 'What's next?'" (Bowen, *The Collected Stories* 824). By cancelling history and its impact on the future, Pepita creates a present where you do not have to think: what is next? However, such lack of causality only holds up in Kôr – an imaginary city. We do not live in Kôr.

We live in a vast imbrication of flesh: we depend on others who live with us, within us or outside us, we depend on things, we depend on oceans and lands and the air we breathe, and this air, water, land make up the single habitable planet we have. That means, the causes and consequences of manmade ecological crises are not merely local either, therefore, reducing ethical concerns to "what is happening here" only is not helpful. As Beckett's Malone so well demonstrates, our waste returns to us as well as it goes beyond us, even if we do send it far away or hide it well. Living in a vast imbrication of flesh implies uncanny reinforced returns. The progress based on mindless, profit-driven mastery over the earth and its resources, animals, and other humans, that thinks in terms of local, immediate economic profit, does not understand or care for the interconnectivity of species, things, communities, and actions. The systematic-automatic slow violence in Beckett's *How It Is*, as a mirror in the mud for the imagined consequences of technological progress based on domination and exploitation, offers us a ground for an ethics that would turn away from ruthless mastery, an ethics that thinks for tomorrow, through yesterday, from a humbler viewpoint or relation to knowledge – a new eco-logic.

General Conclusion: An Eco-Logic, or Ethics of Humility Against Human-Caused Climate Change and Mass Extinction, in/through the Works of Samuel Beckett and Elizabeth Bowen

In the last following pages, I will underline some of the main ideas that have emerged from this deconstructive reading of Modern identities through the notions of *humility* and *mastery* in Bowen's and Beckett's fiction, which constitute a rhizomatic map for thinking climate change and species extinction through an ethics of humility instead of an ethics based on capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery. The latter, I argue, is both at the source of the current crises, and unable to offer pertinent, long-term solutions for dealing with them, as it is insensitive to vulnerability, which is the very core issue of those ecological crises as the Earth's ecosystems and their many different inhabitants are becoming extremely vulnerable to the impact of human-caused climate change.

1.

Thinking of the earth as vulnerable began with thinking about the *eco-* in the eco-logic. To think about eco- (from Greek *oikos*), I veered from the ecological concept of *habitat* towards the more familiar notion of *hom*e (in its wider spectrum, as a house, a place, a territory, a country, a planet) which is already contaminated with some form of affection or a strong sense of familiarity. *Home* is the kind of notion that we not only understand but feel for, yet it also has strong links to the idea of possession/mastery. In other words, home is always *someone*'s home. *Home* is dear because it is yours, mine, ours. A "habitat" does not have the same connotation, which is why ecological discourses that evoke *home*, *our home* that needs saving, benefit from the affection and familiarity this word evokes; however, thinking about *home* in the midst of the ongoing climate crisis and its (mis)management also lends itself to necessary discussions about the political, economic, cultural, and ideological visions and structures we impose on habitats, as they become our (actual or metaphorical) homes. The idea of mastery is inherent to our attempts to save the environment, save the planet, as it implies both a potential for excellence and a certain amount of control. As the "managers" or "agents" of the plans we put in place, we also run the risk of establishing unfair power structures, which is why an ethics of humility is necessary in order to perceive as well as critique and change the underlying forms of destructive mastery that run the danger of making ecological projects unfair to the most vulnerable.

This project takes the *oikos* of the powerful Westerners as a basis for exploring the links between place and identity, both from the viewpoint of the powerful and from the viewpoint of the vulnerable/the marginalized, in Bowen's and Beckett's fiction. It underlines some of the dangerous traits in destructive *oikos*-management that are not only restrained to the sphere of human homes – the management of a house, a city, or a country, but also reflects on how this management of "human" environments affects natural environments as well as predicts how we might mismanage the climate crisis.

The first element of the proposed eco-logic that the reading of Bowen's and Beckett's fiction gave rise to is that the queries about places (especially the places we call home) should not be separated from the queries about identity.

Bowen's fiction shows that homes cannot be considered as the innocent and passive receptacles of our influence; instead, homes and their underlying affective, material, ideological, political, and economic structures mould our identities, our values, and views of the places we inhabit. Through Bowen's depictions of rootedness, dislocation, and dissolution, *home*'s identity is destabilised enough to show the readers that some dominant traits (often invisibilized through their very familiarity) are not as natural or universal as they might seem, and thus their importance and pertinence can be questioned. Bowen's depiction of the very notion of identity as mutable, slippery, and dependent, rather than independent, fixed, and original, was shown to be a tool for thinking *home* in terms of local and global contexts and forces. My reading of *Eva Trout* in 1.1 argued that Bowen's cosmopolitanism shows how whole places have become, in some respects, global as well as hybrid, and *home* can no longer be seen as a miniature clearly rooted and localizable world. The impact of urbanization, globalization, and technological progress haunts the very idea of locality of a home through objects that override the originality of a local home. Bowen's homes are vulnerable to the changes coming from the outside: wars, urbanization, globalization, as homes today are vulnerable to climate change. I argue that the discrepancy between the changing habitat and the *willingness* to see identity as original, permanent, and innocent are worrying, especially now when it has become one of the major obstacles to finding, accepting, and implementing solutions to climate change that demand profound reprioritizations and collective efforts. The desire to go on as one has always done, "traditionally," as far as I or we can remember, is making us fail to adapt to the accelerating lability of ecosystems, their demise, to which we must respond.

The idea that the queries about places should not be separated from the queries about identity, both gives this eco-logic the method to look for the traits in our modern European

identities that might directly or indirectly feed into our global ecological crises, but Bowen's fiction also gives this eco-logic some hope and directives for the future. For, if our identities are mutable, slippery, and dependent, we *can* mould them, adapt them to the needs of the world of today and the world of tomorrow.

The second element proposed by the eco-logic that stems from my reading of Bowen's and Beckett's fiction is the necessity to question the viewpoints "from nowhere," as they might harbour forms of domination and forms of knowledge, that disregard the viewpoints and the needs of the vulnerable.

As shown in 1.2, Molloy's viewpoint is moulded by his vulnerability; it is an embodied viewpoint that cannot be considered objective, as it often stems from/leads to misreadings. Yet, by contrast, the embodied viewpoint of the vulnerable Molloy also interrogates the viewpoint "from nowhere," which often is the viewpoint of the powerful, considered as a default mode of reading the world, as if the powerful did not misread, structure, affect what they read; as if they were not, in their turn, affected by the structures – bodily as well as mental, linguistic, cultural, political ones, into which their existence has been planted. Molloy's viewpoint is not the objective measure of reality; however, his particularities also call into question the neutrality of the able-bodied gaze, the male gaze, but also the particularities proper to our species. Though Molloy's view from his failing body onto his native region is subjective (to a point) and species-specific, it can also be translated into wider concerns about invisible abuses of power. The reader is made to witness evident acts of violence as Molloy is arrested or contained, but also more subtle forms of violence on natural environments and their less powerful inhabitants.

Molloy's humility, which is read as poverty but also as his relation to the literal earth and to his heightened sense of becoming part of the earth – his mortality, offers an embodied view on the complex entanglements of place and identity, but also on one's dependence on the others' ability to understand, accept, and value vulnerability.

The third element proposed by this eco-logic is the need to read the vulnerability of various lifeforms in order to build a humbler sense of personal and national identities that would be better adapted to the worsening conditions of climate change and extinction. The idea of porosity, I argue, could help us in that regard.

Porosity, understood not as a complete effacement or disintegration, is the state of being open to outside forces; to think porosity is to think the communication or touching between the

inside and the outside, that does not necessarily efface the concept, or the object which is considered to be porous. Beckett's trilogy opens up the human world by making the world, as an anthropocentric concept, porous. Not only is there no sealed-up controllable and neatly separable "my world," but also no exclusively human world which is not already deeply porous.

Molloy, who inhabits ditches and forests, becomes a vessel for thinking ecological violence, as his vulnerability and his suffering from social injustice in his natural environment, in his native region, place him in a particularly precarious position from which the reader is made to perceive the ecological demise of the Molloy country and its subjects-actors, such as Molloy, corncrakes, and the swamp. Realizing the extent to which Molloy and Beckett's other narrators are shaped by the places they inhabit, and yet slowly destroyed by the violence of uncontrollable human progress and blind state management, paves the way for thinking the porousness of our worlds as well as developing the skill to read vulnerability. Such thinking and such a skill will help to build humbler personal, national, and species identities that would include the needs of different forms of vulnerable lives, so that the politically, culturally, and economically overdetermined material spaces would have a chance of still being habitats to vulnerable humans as well as a multitude of species.

The reading of fragility (in 1.3) in mental as well as natural landscapes, in Bowen's *The Little Girls* led me to explore the idea of mass extinction, as it appears in the novel, through the notion of contamination (as mingling, corruption, infection, pollution, and touching). Through its negation of "a whole thing," the novel explores porosity, as the impossibility of a complete separation, a seclusion of a thing as a whole in itself. Instead, things are seen as always already contaminated, touched, affected, and affecting. Things evaporate, that is, they morph, being themselves the trace of something else; things are contaminated, and they contaminate.

This eco-logic, following in Bowen's footsteps, thinks the strange co-existence or co-exist-dance through contamination, a stranger's (perhaps strange) touch. The discovery of inhabiting a complex, interconnected world is in Bowen's novel also linked to the realization of not knowing you have done, you might be doing, or you will do an irrevocable thing, without knowing exactly what it was. The irrevocable thing, as Bowen imagines it, is what escapes recognition. It is haplessly out of key with your world as you perceive it. What you do is unmasterably enmeshed with other forces and becomes a trace over which one has no control as an individual. It becomes extinction. It becomes climate change.

That brings me to the fourth element of the proposed eco-logic: the need to face the current unmasterability of our destructive traces, at an individual, collective, and species level,

which leads us to the problems of reading, understanding, and estimating our individual as well as collective traces in the ongoing global destruction of habitats and their non-human and human inhabitants. The problem of erasing our destructive traces, I argue, cannot be only about "taking action," but it implies thinking the enmeshment of places and global forces, and calls for deconstructive analyses of the traces we leave behind as well as the concepts we use. Concepts such as "Nature" or the "real."

In a world that is falling apart in *The Little Girls*, the nostalgic ideas of Nature as inexhaustible and everlasting, are haunted by the very fragility of places and things; whereas the sense of the "real" as what is here (verifiable) now is shown to be useless for thinking about extinction, since the real, apprehended from what is present, does not necessarily think the fragility of what hardly is, what only barely or no longer exists. Thinking about extinction, therefore, must become the business of thinking about and reading the real through fragile presences and absences which literary writings such as Bowen's make possible.

The reading of fragile presences and absences, though it is never easy, I argue, could take example from the experience of the only world-scale disaster we still remember through history books and movies, but, perhaps more strikingly, through fiction – the Second World War, the event that marked the beginning of the Great Acceleration. Bowen's portrayal of the difficulties of perceiving the war as a global event meets the current challenges of thinking about climate change and mass extinction, for they both entail imagining what is out of proportion to our faculties of knowing, thinking, and checking up.

Reading elusive events such as climate change becomes an experience of more than local forces, an experience of complicated, dissolving boundaries, that do not lend themselves to reading quite so easily, and thus, it is necessary to think about the enmeshment of the local home in global phenomena (such as the Second World War and climate change). As Bowen shows through the failure of the isolationist practices of Ireland and her depictions of Londoners' lives during the war, the war can cross, or even obliterate, all sorts of borders, physical or not, thereby creating a strange territory that cannot be mapped down, seen, or touched directly. This territory is perceived through the strange phenomena it evokes, much as we perceive climate change through the recurring aberrations of the weather.

As Bowen and Beckett show, there is no escape from the effects of global events, on an individual and a national level, since there is no outside of the event – one is infected, affected at every turn. Instead, one is brought low through the shared suffering and the obliteration of solid things.

Being enmeshed without mastery also provides innovative ideas about care, in Beckett's and Bowen's fiction, that are pertinent to the current ecological crises, namely, the need to care for what/who is unfamiliar/unknown. This leads me to the fifth element of this eco-logic, which is the need to think about and care for what/whom we do not know to be "real," in order to provide care for ecosystems in their complexity (thus, not only focusing on what we know and appreciate right now right here).

The representation of war in Bowen's *The Heat of The Day* shows that the present and what is perceptibly present often constitute our sense of the real, which poses a serious problem: how can we make the reality of something as complex as climate change or species extinction *feel* real without coming face to face with the absolute breakdown of solid things? It is necessary to learn how to care about/for the unknown or even the perceptibly unknowable, in order to care for it or mourn it, which would require going beyond our comfortable sense of the real (what is here now). Though we know humans to be capable of caring about the unknown or the unknowable in this sense, since most religions rely on presences which do not appear as such, an eco-logic based on humility underlines the necessity of caring about/for the "insignificant" unknown, the little lives, elsewhere. Eco-logical thinking must think the small creature elsewhere, in another time, in order to make it "real" for us, to mourn it (preferably *before* its extinction), to care for it, to render it important on our scale of reading the world. It must also think our connection to what cannot be seen here, or even understood (perhaps ever), phenomena for which there are perhaps no words. In other words, the eco-logic must first and foremost think our failure.

As I showed in 1.4, Beckett's *Worstward Ho* makes its readers empathize with what cannot be known, thus revealing–not only our difficulties in caring for and mourning the unknown, but also the ability of inventive language and fiction to enhance the reader's potential to feel for the unknowable. Through shifting, fragmented images, the broken language of the text contaminates us with the experience of failure (to read, to see, to know), a well as with a complex experience of empathy, for suddenly we are left to empathize with what we do not know, cannot fully see and identify.

2.

The second part of the dissertation explored the *logos* (word, speech, ground, reason, etc.) in the eco-*logic* through the notion of *concatenation*, borrowed from Elizabeth Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout*, which serves as a metaphor for the event or practice of reading, writing,

and more generally, thinking, but also as a concept that underlines a way of thinking connections without mastery, that is, in other terms than excellence and domination.

On the one hand, "concatenation" as connecting without mastery (domination), is shown to open up more humble ways of relating the human species to the Earth and its many inhabitants. On the other hand, "concatenation," as "interdependent sequence" (*OED*), opens the way to thinking about correlations between causes and effects, and the moral responsibilities that emerge from them.

This dissertation evaluates *mastery* (as domination and excellence) in its manifold contexts, and compares it to the notion of *humility*, which, I argue, is a more suitable core for an ethics that must think the vulnerability of multiple lifeforms in the context of global ecological crises. Being humble is not only seen as synonymous with being "modest, unpretentious," but it is also something more intrinsic and inevitable, that is, being essentially vulnerable, being mortal, connected, and Earth-bound.

Both Bowen's and Beckett's fiction offer the reader a literary space where one is made to concatenate, that is, read, in a deconstructive manner, as words and concepts do not chain well; words strike outside of their usual contexts or binary confines, thus uprooting thought-systems relying on such a guarded difference. Beckett and Bowen are both sensitive to the impact of words and the ways in which words unthinkingly inform our value-systems as well as our imagination, which leads to alternative modes of thinking about value, about what is real and what makes something or someone important. Their writings that challenge binary categorizations through strange deconstructive concatenations of meaning, demonstrate the power of inventive literary texts to shake the ordinary language out of its stale structures and concepts that imply violent mastery.

One of those concepts is that of a (social) parasite, which, in my reading of Beckett's *Malone Dies* (2.1), is linked to the capitalist value system. Through Macmann, whose inability to earn a living is linked to the very notion of having the right to live, it is shown how one's utility within the capitalist socio-economic machine quickly begins to determine one's value as a living being. That brings me to the sixth element of the eco-logic, which is the need to re-evaluate the correlation between value and economic profit by redefining our relation to the earth and its many resources. Resources, I argue, should not be reduced to economic ties and reason only (which rely on the ideas of possession and domination); instead, ecological connections and their value should be prioritized.

Beckett's Macmann, who can neither understand nor meet the demands made on his socio-economic usefulness, is reduced to being a parasite in his socio-economic human world;

however, being close to the earth, crawling, earthy and ill-fitted to Cartesian pure reason, Macmann draws his own conclusions on parasitism from a humbler viewpoint. Wondering why the earth favours what we call "parasites," he shifts from anthropocentric capitalist modes of thinking to considering the earth as a complex decider with non-human agency, thereby showing that parasitism is not an original feature that survives all contexts. By replacing the anthropocentric economic context with the ecological context, he shows that weeds are not necessarily harmful (and neither is he).

Thinking about the earth, our connections to it as well as its many human and non-human inhabitants through a value-system based on economic utility, I argue, creates a vicious circle, a fatal concatenation of suffering and disconnection. This is also emphasized in 2.1 through Malone's writing practice which concentrates on the ideas of violence, humiliation, and domination. I show that his inability to engage in an ecological play that would rethink his connection to humans, things, and animals in other terms than mindlessly reinforcing a form of thinking based on domination and human exceptionalism, consolidates the logic behind his own misery as an outcast and a social parasite.

It is the necessity to question anthropocentric ideas of human exceptionalism, as an excuse for human mastery over non-human animals, that constitutes the seventh element of the proposed eco-logic.

As shown in 2.2, Beckett's trilogy questions human exceptionalism (which is mostly measured in terms of speech, intelligence, and erect carriage) through vulnerable characters and their complex relation to *logos*, which is explored first as speech and reason, through its ties to 17th-century rationalism; then as "ground," its supplementary meaning. The superiority of the Western Man-Master is undermined through the inability of Beckett's characters to produce infallible objective knowledge and reduce language to their singular voice (i.e., utter subjectivity), but also through their physical suffering that brings them closer to the literal ground and their own earthliness. The change of perspective that allows them to observe prevalent learned ideas about animal-human difference from a humbler viewpoint triggers an opposing recognition that a man is inherently humble in the following sense: vulnerable (mortal), dependent, and earthly, much like other living beings.

Beckett's trilogy not only challenges Cartesian ideas of the inability of animals to have *logos* through feisty speaking parrots, but it also raises questions about the sanctified status of human language through vulnerable narrators who struggle to keep their theories safe, their perception fully reliable, and their sentences structured into a stable, coherent narrative. These inabilities also refer to vaster failures to establish objective knowledge, leading me to consider

the limitations inherent to our language as a tool, but also, the limitations of human intellect to master all kinds of knowledge.

I argue that the trilogy echoes both Beckett's own coming to terms with his false sense of superiority through his declining health, but also allows a wider questioning of destructive mastery and its consequences. Through the impoverishment of the powers of *logos* as anthropocentric speech and reason, Beckett decentres elements that make humans exceptional; instead of "reason/reasoning as ground," *logos* begins to recall the literal ground to which all Beckett's characters, without exception, are drawn. Beckett's characters are earth-bound in the most humorous sense of the word "humble," held down by merciless gravity: some limp, some crawl, some are bedridden. By rendering his human characters humble (lowly, poor, vulnerable, literally and metaphorically, close to the earth), Beckett fractures the illusion of self-sufficiency and human exceptionalism (or *arrogant otherness*, as he had unknowingly encouraged within himself). Forced to reckon with being on earth and earthly through their shared vulnerability, Beckett's characters start to lose ground in their identity as humans. The trilogy undoes the idea of pure reason (accessible to humans) on the basis that there are no pure humans.

Beckett's vulnerable characters who fail to be the masters of a purely rational mind and an autonomous and erect body, become the very proof against human exceptionality based on those features. Instead, humans are shown to be similar to a large variety of species. Their dependence on other species and the earth is illuminated by vulnerability which becomes the common ground of all living, that is, all that can perish. *Humility* as "modesty" is not given to Beckett's characters through some fixed hierarchy involving God or human exceptionality; it is constantly rediscovered through the suffering of vulnerable narrators as they reconsider their links to their environment, their language, and their species' inflated self-importance. Humility, in that sense, evokes the need for our species to become modest in terms of demarcating itself within ecosystems, but also in terms of recognizing its nearness to and dependence on the ground (*humus*).

The eighth element proposed by this eco-logic is the necessity to undo the Cartesian separation between body and mind (intellect), and through it, the binary opposition between humans and animals.

Bowen's satirical gaze upon benevolence and intellect as human nature or animality as proper to animals does not allow her readers to buy into deeply polarized representations of humanity and animality. As I have shown in 2.3, Bowen's characters in *The Death of Heart*

use animal comparisons and animalization as a tool to dehumanize, humiliate, and dominate human characters that appear emotional or are judged to be misbehaving. This humiliation is only possible because notions such as *animals*, *the animal* or *animality* can be translated as metaphors for inferiority. However, in Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* animal comparisons clearly mask "undesirable" (socially/culturally improper) human qualities. The figures of animality are employed to accentuate one's difference from and superiority over another person who is defined by their "animality." Bowen's novel also shows how these metaphorical references to animality backfire and fail to accentuate one's utter difference and superiority, because the animal-human opposition is itself merely metaphorical. It alludes to the misguided idea that the identity of humans as a species can be constructed and consolidated through its opposition to non-human animals. Bowen challenges the animal-human opposition through the *corporal reality* (within the fictional reality of the novel) of her characters, linking their intelligence to their bodily existence, more precisely, to their emotions. It is shown that the most treasured human trait, our intelligence, is in fact disabled without one's emotional, that is, bodily, response. The ability to feel is shown to be human but is also shown to be more than human. Thus, the Cartesian separation between body and intellect, and that between animals and men, is undermined through the universality of emotions, emotions interconnecting bestialized human characters and superior human characters as well as non-human animals and human animals.

A concatenation between species is also evoked through the cinematographic style of the narrative. *The Death of the Heart* subverts the animal-human opposition by making characters read the bodies of other characters, evoking a mode of reading that is not exclusively human.

Such a reading of non-verbal traces is vital, especially in the era of climate change. The ninth element this eco-logic underlines is the power of literature to make visible complex irregular phenomena in a *habitual* (and apparently normal) environment and challenge their unreadability through marginal viewpoints.

Through what Timothy Clark calls 'scalar literacy' (Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* 84), i.e., reading what does not fully present itself in the present, Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* challenges the way one experiences a place; here lies the power of certain literary writings to expand, question, and alter our perception of phenomena. My reading of *The Death of the Heart* (in 2.4) shows the correlation between air pollution in London and the socio-economic framework of Londoners; both are made readable and imaginable through the sensitivity of a marginalized character, Portia. Her sensitivity as a half-outsider and a teenager

allows her to notice what the local adults do not perceive. From her marginal viewpoint, she challenges the normalized way of life at Windsor Terrace in opposition to which her life abroad with her parents is bestialized, but also, she perceives the further consequences of the Londoners' lifestyle, namely, the smog. Portia's sense of dislocation challenges the way she, and through her, the reader, experiences a place, allowing the reader to see the strangeness within an otherwise common phenomenon – the invisible pollution in the air. Through the brown stain archived in Portia's diary, the evasive, hardly perceptible pollution resurfaces and haunts the 21st-century reader who has a different perspective on smog and its damage. Portia's diary becomes a shaky shared ground, a passage between other characters and Portia, as well as between the novel and its contemporary readers, thus constituting a gateway between reality and fiction, but also a temporal passage between the 20th century and the 21st century that makes the invisible concatenation of pollution visible, and thus responds to the challenge of the unreadability of the destructive traces of human activity causing the climate change.

The traces of destructive ways of living and of an ethics based on domination (which I argue, are at the source of our current global ecological crises), were explored in 2.5, through Beckett's descriptions of Moran's ethical responsibilities, and led me to another element of the proposed eco-logic.

The tenth eco-logical element underlines the necessity to question an upward-looking sense of responsibility directed only at the one with power (often in the hope of moving up in the world), which is shown to be destructive in Beckett's *Molloy*, as it does not include the responsibility for what/who is vulnerable.

Such a sense of responsibility (to/for the master), as shown through my reading of Moran's responsibilities in *Molloy*, is not compatible with ecological concerns that precisely require thinking about what/who is vulnerable, and about their unmet needs. Moran's storyline offers quite an overview of the matter of responsibility in its manifold forms, many of which may concern a single individual at once. As Moran is faced with being responsible to and for someone with more power, namely, his absent and ambiguous employer, Youdi, he nonetheless cannot escape his responsibility for those who are dependent on his care, namely, his son, bees, hens, and various other plants and creatures that inhabit *his* home.

My reading also explores the mechanisms through which this upward-looking sense of responsibility can be justified, namely, a certain sense of independence and self-reliance that is blind to one's responsibilities for those dependent on one's care (such as Moran's son and his domestic animals), but also, by the same token, blind to one's own vulnerability and dependence. Moran's ideas of self-reliance are turned upside down by his declining ability to

fend for himself. By rendering Moran humbler in the etymological sense: "close to earth," literally, bound to the ground, unable to walk, Beckett fractures Moran's illusion of being able to get by, by thinking "to every man his own responsibilities" (Beckett, *Three Novels* 117).

Another mechanism through which this upward-looking, highly hierarchical sense of responsibility can be justified, I argue, is a certain unthinking fidelity, or what is described as "corpse fidelity," to orders/messages that relies on the willingness of the reader/thinker to defer responsibility to the writer/speaker of the message/order. Moran's description of Gaber's reading of Youdi's orders exhibits the violence of reading that veers blindly, that is, a reading not conscious of its inescapable divergence from the text which takes one's interpretation in the event of reading to be automatically identical to what the author of the message had intended, thus releasing the reader from all responsibility. To suppose that a text could assume full responsibility for itself in the event of reading or that the responsibility could belong to its author only is to believe in the absolute neutrality of the reader. Such reading fails to respond to ethical responsibilities that belong to the reader.

Responsibility (from Latin *respondēre*, meaning "respond, answer to," *OED*), I argue, implies a kind of exchange; being responsible involves a correspondence or the ability to respond to the needs of another being, and thus, irresponsibility cannot be reduced to mere recklessness only, but could also be explored as a certain kind of illiteracy. The ability to read the impact of one's choices, as shown through Bowen's *Eva Trout* in 2.6, is linked to a certain sensitivity (emotions), not merely to "intellect/rationality" (as separable from the latter). The characters' numbness, and their inability to read their own emotions as well as those of others, result in a destructive chain of misunderstanding and hurt.

According to Frans de Waal, emotions are "intelligent instincts" (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 258) that play an important part in decision making in a constantly changing environment; they prepare the organism for an appropriate response (de Waal, *La dernière étreinte* 113). Emotions are what, to a great extent, help to determine a suitable response. The characters' insensitivity therefore is an obstacle to a responsible reading, reading that is responsive to a situation/being in its manifold complexities. As Doctor Bonnard suggests, not every character's reading of Eva, transmitted to the reader of the novel, is a responsible reading. Constantine's reading of the "big picture," of life, as a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, a chain of good or bad luck, is contrasted with multiple possible causes and effects depicted in the novel, but also, with Doctor Bonnard's suggestion that choice and not chance is the only escape out of circumstances that one finds oneself in. The reading of chance does not imply responsibility, it focuses on what is happening, or at what rate something is

happening, rather than on why something is happening. Choice, on the other hand, implies an agent, which is why it is a necessary element for ethics, not to mention the ethics in the era of worsening climate change.

Various calculations about climate change can estimate what is happening and at what rate (in other words, what the chances are of things going terribly wrong and when), but these calculations, though very important, need to be paired with a deeper understanding of how our choices affect/have affected/and will affect ecosystems, and the various responsibilities that we have in that regard. The eleventh element of this eco-logic is the necessity to shift the dialogues on the current global ecological crises from reading data, that is, pure measurable facts of climate change, to reading the ethical choices behind this data, evoking our responsibilities as ethically responsible agents. This means, we must read the concatenation (correlation) between causes and effects beyond the physical data of climate change and species extinction – we must think about choices in order to think about responsibility.

3.

The third part of the dissertation focused on reading the modes of mastery and violence that are not easily recognizable from every viewpoint, especially from the viewpoint of the powerful. The definition of who is powerful is not self-evident, as one's power can always be compared to someone else's, thought to be even more powerful, or divorced from its history – and thus, power can also be minimised along with one's responsibility to respond to possible negative side effects of such power. This final part of the dissertation explored several layers of power structures in the context of the 20th century, mainly: the power of men over women, the power of the Western nations over what are reductively called the developing countries and their natural resources and ecosystems, and the power of human animals (in other words, "humans") over non-human animals and their shared environments.

With Bowen and Beckett, we, as readers, are made to sink lower on such power structures, to imagine or try and imagine what the world looks like from the position where one has only so many cards left, or none at all. We are made powerless through fancying we are at the mercy of the (linguistic and other) structures that we cannot fully control. Thinking about powerlessness and vulnerability is the territory of thinking and feeling that brings us close to humility in its myriad connotations: mortality, impotence, closeness to the ground, but also modesty and a certain earthly consciousness, the consciousness of the global forces of human activity from which we cannot escape.

As I have showed, through their disruptive use of language and the structure of their writings, Bowen and Beckett lay bare the forces of dispossession within writing and thinking, and along with it, forces of more subtle and invasive forms of domination and violence. Beckett's and Bowen's later works dispossess the reader of her/his habitual ways of thinking/reading/making sense, and then further dispossess the reader of the world as they know it, replacing it with the one that has become unimaginable, unmanageable, and unbearable. Thus, we may begin to imagine the vast consequences of global ecological crises as well as our responsibility for them.

As its twelfth element, this eco-logic proposes readerly dispossession as a tool to think about certain humbler viewpoints in order to perceive complex forms of mastery and violence that are at the origin of the global ecological crises, and also countering efforts to fight against such crises. Reflecting on the ideological, psychological, as well as species-specific biases that stand against reading, recognizing, and responding to suffering, cruelty, structural and slow violence, this final part underlines several elements of the ethics of humility against human-caused climate change and mass extinction that would make human technological progress a less destructive force on a global scale, for the future human and non-human generations, through the disrupted reading process.

In 3.1, the disrupted rhizomatic plot and language structures of Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* were shown to undermine the structural violence of the 20th-century patriarchal order in men's and women's lives. Focusing on the spectral and semantic otherness that haunts the novel and its structures, and particularly the notion of possession, I examined how the patriarchal domination over inheritance, language, story, history, and literature were undermined. Dispossession as an underlying force within any attempt at mastery, was shown to be a tool proper to Modernist writing, but also a tool capable of providing ethical insight into the mastery that ignores *différance*. The plot of *The Heat of the Day* is a rhizomatic web where each version of the story not only completes or complicates the "original" story, but challenges and decentres it; the novel thus constitutes a "net-tie" of stories where marginal characters, such as the "crazy" Cousin Nettie, can also take center stage, and their "absolute" difference from powerful people as well as the structural violence used against them can be questioned. Such a rhizomatic narrative that embraces the plurality of voices and ghosts opens a space for thinking about otherness within the familiar, but also sympathy with the unfamiliar. Bowen's strange grammar, rhizomatic plot, and torn-up social contracts constitute what she calls "a vital writing," the kind of writing that requires sympathy, which is to be obtained through the disloyalty to what is most familiar.

This kind of vital writing, the writing that seeks sympathy with the unfamiliar, was further explored in 3.2, through the reading of *textual and bodily tears* as forces of dispossession in Beckett's *The Unnammable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Beckett's texts in tears were shown to undermine the secondary role of literature next to philosophy, as Beckett's texts emphasise the sense that our imagination is fallible and dependent; thus, literature cannot be reduced to pure fictionality, mimetics and unreality; instead, it has a philosophical force of its own. By taking away the reader's comfort of being "inside" fiction, Beckett's choraesque literary forces at once call for outside forces (language, knowledge, experience, history, philosophy, etc.) and suspend them, thus, challenging the automatic assumptions made in the reading-thinking process. Such assumptions were humbled in 3.2 through the processes of writing, reading, and thinking about suffering through tears (as traces of human emotion, which appear as sites of ambiguity, anthropocentrism, and dispossession) in *The Unnamable* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*.

Arguing for the importance of reading vulnerability in our time of global ecological crises that make us vulnerable to the impact of climate change and mass extinction, this eco-logic foregrounds the necessity to read suffering. However, as Bowen and Beckett show, reading suffering is not so easy.

For the thirteenth element of the eco-logic, I propose that it is necessary to humble our expectation of being able to read suffering. It is not to suggest that we, human readers and the readers of human behaviour, have no ability whatsoever to read suffering, but rather to insert some modesty and doubt into that ability, so that the reading of suffering would be able to question itself and the violence it might generate in thinking it knows suffering.

In 3.2, I show how the difficulties in reading signs of human suffering, such as tears, humble the reader's expectation of being able to read suffering, because tears, like words, are open to *différance*. That is, suffering is not strictly masterable and readable, but rather like a choral tear: it is something one receives, but does not necessarily possess, own, understand, or control. Instead, tears divide the readers' thoughts into a number of impossibilities, posing quite a challenge to our ability to think *sympathy* with someone's suffering, if sympathy is based on the experience of the suffering we are able to recognize in ourselves, and ergo, in others.

As shown in 3.3, the danger of misreading, and the threat of subtle and direct violence that might follow, is even more acute when we are dealing with reading non-human suffering which takes unfamiliar forms. As it "fails" to have an anthropomorphic image of suffering – tears, the reasons to have sympathy for beings/things without tears, can easily be lost to us or intentionally invisibilized.

The ability of literary writings to evoke sympathy gives literature much of its power in terms of thinking about ethics. Beckett's and Bowen's texts are highly capable of evoking sympathy in the reader towards strange characters (to name but a few: Beckett's violent yet vulnerable Malone, cruel yet heart-breaking Moran, his nearly human nearly bodiless Unnamable; Bowen's queer scheming "monstrous" Eva Trout, "crazy" Cousin Nettie, the Nazi Robert Kelway and his "man-eating" mother, etc.), yet they also challenge the limits of our sympathy with suffering, especially with the suffering that is unfamiliar.

Beckett's portrayal of the suffering of non-human species in the trilogy, which involves no tears, reveals the possibilities of invisibilization of suffering and further violence and exploitation of non-human animals via the unfamiliar form of the expression of suffering. As it is based on the (often even intentional) misreading of the suffering of non-human animals, sympathy with non-human animals can become the very source of their suffering, especially when the reading of suffering is overshadowed by the reader's (economic) self-interest. Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* and "Tears, Idle Tears" reveal psychological mechanisms as well as ethical shortcomings in the sympathy that rests on the ideals of patriarchal, anthropocentric mastery that is insensitive to vulnerability and suffering, as it values strength and the suppression of feelings, especially the feelings that can be interpreted as signs of vulnerability (often also seen as signs of effeminacy).

As Bowen suggests, cruelty starts with the refusal to feel. How can one be expected to care about the suffering of others, if one does not allow for feeling? Suffering, as I argue in 3.3, is not efficient as a reason for fighting for animal rights in the ideological framework that does not value physical and emotional vulnerability. The ideological framework based on anthropocentric, patriarchal mastery values strength in its manifold forms (as the survival of the fittest or mastery: domination, excellence, superiority) and creates both social as well as psychological obstacles to thinking about suffering. When ecosystems are becoming extremely vulnerable, thinking about suffering cannot be reduced to slogans such as "man up" or even "grow up," as grown-ups often "advise" young female climate activists such as Greta Thunberg to do. Not valuing vulnerability becomes an issue when we are dealing with global ecological crises such as species extinction and climate change that cause suffering on a vast scale, and therefore, need an ethics that thinks suffering and responds to suffering in a responsible manner. That leads me to the fourteenth element of the proposed eco-logic, namely, the necessity to adapt our moral codes as well as our institutions to an ethics of humility that values the kind of sympathy where suffering is not seen through a patriarchal lens as humiliation, but instead as shared humility. *Humility*, seen as "closeness to the earth" already thinks of

vulnerability as mortality, but it also allows to consider more modest viewpoints for reading and evaluating suffering, without constantly reducing someone's suffering to the kind of vulnerability that can be discarded as a humiliating lack of strength. In the midst of global ecological crises that make us as well as many non-human habitants of the same planet ever more vulnerable, we cannot afford to use the tactics of shaming vulnerability and advocating for the survival of the fittest, because vulnerability is the general condition of life on Earth, now more than ever.

Mere survival, as Beckett's *How It Is* shows, is not equal to a life worth living; survival is a very poor concept for thinking about global ecological crises, as it does not consider the quality of life – the suffering to come. As I have shown in 3.4, both Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" and Beckett's *How It Is*" depict habitats where life has become unusually fragile, and the exterior conditions alter severely the quality of life. Bowen's "Mysterious Kôr" shows a world in which the patterns of normal living are shattered by the war, forcing the habitants to seek shelter in their imagination, while Beckett's *How It Is* imagines the most dreadful loss of the natural world (of which only brief flashbacks remain), a life in the void, in the mud, where living is suffering.

In order to avoid a life that is no longer worth living, or, to avoid imposing such a life to future generations or more vulnerable human or non-human populations now, it is important to think about vulnerability and our ethical obligations to read and respond to the manifestations, the causes, the nuances, and the range of suffering caused by anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of thought which rely on domination and exploitation. As I argue in 3.4, an ethics that focuses on the present and presence does not think history and history's impact on the future, and thus, it fails to think responsibility in terms of manmade global ecological crises, which are not the problems of the present only – their causes as well as consequences do not limit themselves to the present, and their manifestations do not limit themselves to presence (to what/who is here now).

As the fifteenth element of the proposed eco-logic, I argue that we must turn away from a technological progress based on domination and exploitation, and instead turn towards thinking influence and impact through a humbler ethics that is more earthly-conscious, that is, aware of and sensitive to the global impact of human activity on a vast time-scale, but also more modest, i.e. not turning the tables to one (group/nation/species)'s advantage only. That means that the technological progress and the politics of today should not disengage themselves from the past (from the responsibility for the past emissions, exploitation of resources, destruction of habitats, etc.) and from the analyses of past ideologies and ethical failures that

led us to human-induced global ecological disasters, such as the current climate change and mass extinction.

As I have shown in 3.4, thinking about global ecological issues in terms of the present and by taking into consideration local concerns only runs the danger or ethical corruption. The "ethics of 'equal' suffering" in Beckett's *How It Is* is ill-adapted to deal with manmade global ecological issues, as it promotes a destructive progress based on mindless, profit-driven mastery over the earth and its resources, non-human and human animals, which thinks in terms of local immediate economic profit, and does not understand or care for the interconnectivity of species, things, communities, and actions. We cannot count on such an ethics to offer fair treatment to future (human and non-human) generations or current non-human beings or people who, in the eyes of such a system, matter less.

An ethics based on humility is the kind of ethics that must think earthly consciousness humbly: it must think the effects of human activities and *choices* on a vast global scale, that is, without reducing those discussions to the present and merely local concerns, while not overestimating one's ability to be earthly-conscious (that is, without reducing the complexity of those issues to one's ideas of full consciousness). The eco-logic stemming from Beckett's and Bowen's works veers towards humbler viewpoints, bringing our species lower, dispossessing us of our fictions of superiority over other species and groups of humans; however, this lowering of our species' ego is not all about humiliating humans, but rather about changing the framework in which this lowering can be seen as a humiliation: the capitalist, patriarchal, and anthropocentric mastery. Bowen's and Beckett's later fiction brings their readers closer to the ground, by evoking vulnerability on multiple levels, so that it becomes no longer a mere exception to strength but something much more intrinsic – a general condition of all living. Bowen's and Beckett's fiction shows the power of literature to evoke profound thinking-feeling about ethics and ecology, but it cannot be reduced to such ecological thinking, just as this eco-logic cannot be reduced to Bowen's and Beckett's fiction, though it was its source: the eco-logic can be thought over, expanded, passed on, knowing that no statement of it can be final.

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