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Beckett's Ticklish Characters: reading Beckett through Žižek

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During the last decade, around the centennial celebration of Samuel Beckett's birth, criticism of the author underwent a discreet yet radical subversion. After the era of existentialist reception and the subsequent postmodern phase, it looks like fresh interpretations are emerging that do without the dreariness of the former and the idiosyncrasies of the latter. At the forefront of this movement are Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, who provide the tools to interpret Beckett's literary characters as mirroring a certain understanding of the subject.

This paper is part of a broader inquiry into the ontological status of the character in contemporary literature that will attempt to reclaim a consistency and centrality for the character that the last decades of critique have negated. In here, I will show how Beckett's characters, far from representing a 'fragmented self', are the expression of a radical experience of the subject, which shares a deep affinity with Žižek's theory, especially as presented in *The Ticklish Subject*. In consideration of space limitations, rather than providing an exhaustive overview of the Beckett corpus, I will focus on the last novel of his trilogy, *The Unnamable*, the most challenging yet most relevant of his works on this topic. I will demonstrate how this comprehension of the subject takes shape in the narrative world and how this narrative world curdles around it, giving birth to a character that grounds its singularity in its being originally split.

On the ideological level, how the experience of the subject operates in the character depends upon a certain comprehension of the humanity of the human subject. Through an analysis of his later short text *All Strange Away*, I will show how Beckett's characters function as a radical critique of the conception of the human as a 'gifted animal.' Instead, the characters are a conceptualization of the human subject as the place of an original void.

Beckett's work will then not only be an example of how "poets, as is well known, [even though they] don't know what they are saying, [...] manage to say things before anyone else," (Lacan 1998: 7) but also the medium for potential ideological resistance, based on the subversion in the comprehension of the human.

The Unnamable Ticklish Character

The Unnamable, published in 1952 in French and translated into English in 1959, represents a watershed in Beckett's artistic evolution; in this text the trajectory that the novelistic form had been drawing since *Murphy* and *Watt*, and that had then progressed through the first two books of the Trilogy, reaches its apex. According to Badiou:

the novelistic form is still present in *Molloy* but already exhausted since *The Unnamable*; we still can't say that poetry has taken over, even though cadence, paragraph disposition, and the intrinsic value of visions reveal that the text is ruled by what we could call a 'latent poem.' (Badiou 1995: 12)¹

Instead of looking for the organizing principle of this novel in the mingling of genres, one should rather focus on the immanent mutation of the novel form itself, with the modification of the character as its constituent element.

At first it may seem counterintuitive to talk about the character in relation to a text that, from its very title, refuses to affirm its existence by denying it a name. Asja Szafraniec commented on *The Unnamable* from a Derridian perspective:

[the] 'autobiographic' but also proteiform nature of *The Unnamable* allows it to question the nature of the subject from a position different from that of the subject. *The Unnamable* [...] is the "between" – precisely that which precludes naming and thereby subjectification (Szafraniec 2007:123)

This holds true if we consider naming, in accordance with most deconstructionist critique, as a precedent to subjectification. I will prove that Beckett, far from thinking of the name as the

only arbitrary grounding for the unity of the subject, informs his artistic inquiry to express the way that the opening of the subject precedes both subjectification and naming. The Unnamable is unnamable not because it has no ontological consistency to which a name can refer, nor can the continuous differing of the name be thought of as the model for the structure of a polymorphous subject; rather we should first look for the conditions of the denomination and of its 'differing' in the being of the character itself. The Unnamable is not what shuns being named. It is the condition that every nomination presupposes, the rooting of the name in the being-- the imaginary space that extends between the Real and the Symbolic. Therefore, the Unnamable is simultaneously the super-namable, that is, the object for which many contradictory names can be given, since of these names it establishes both the possibility and inefficacy.

Contrary to conventional interpretations, what is represented in *The Unnamable*, is not the vanishing of the subject in a whirlwind of names, but rather the exposure of its hidden mechanisms. As noted by Badiou:

This 'character', whose name itself is erased or uncertain, and who is at the extreme of bareness, has rather managed to lose all secondary ornamentations, all doubtful possessions, which would have turned him away from what he is destined to experiment, and that belongs to a generic humanity, whose essential functions are: going, being, and saying. (Badiou 1995: 22)ⁱⁱ

Of these three essential functions, the author has already exhausted the possibilities of movement in the first book of the trilogy, *Molloy*, and the possibilities of being in the second, *Malone Dies*. Beckett is now faced with the task of taking language back to the point where it is nothing but pure potentiality. But let's now move to the text itself:

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. Can it be that one day, of it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far. Perhaps that is how it began. (Beckett 1966: 293)

As is often the case, Beckett delineates the whole novel in its opening lines, giving in a condensed form all the elements on which the work is built upon.ⁱⁱⁱ In order to focus on the *fonction essentielle* of speech, *The Unnamable* requires a minimal main character, freed of a body that moves through space, and set from the very beginning of the novel in that proximity to

non-being with which *Malone Dies* concludes. However, it cannot be a simple negation of body or of life; if there were no body, there would simply be a ghost – if there were no life, there would be a corpse. What the author needs is an asymptotic reduction of the being broken down into its raw nature, a pure matrix of speech, “a big talking ball.” (Beckett 1966: 307).

“Where now? Who now? When now?” This minimal matrix affirms its existence by questioning the nature of its spatio-temporal collocation. Where can one be if space is exhausted? Who can one be when life overlaps with death? The answer is: in a dimension that precedes space, in an existence that precedes life. This answer, though, takes the form of a question, since it does not point toward a reality, but it opens up a possibility. The text opens with such questions, and its structure is articulated around a continuous cycle of posing and trying to answer questions, thus creating a highly fluid fictional reality.

In this reality the character does not begin its existence in a gradual way, by gathering together a series of features^{iv}, nor is it simply constructed piece after piece in a possible world by a reader that follows the instructions included in the text^v, but in an abrupt and gratuitous gesture, a discontinuity of the plan of the narration.

From the indistinct space preceding the novel comes forth a subject which as it affirms itself opens itself up to a multiplicity of possibilities: from the very beginning, it is already marked by the fundamental break between being and saying. “I, say I”: the minimal formula of the discursive matrix that the text puts into motion is articulated over this original difference that mirrors the Lacanian difference between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. The ‘I’ retroactively gives a subject to the opening questions, and simultaneously an answer to it: this retroactive movement demarcates the empty space the signifier is intended to occupy.

The self-affirmation of the character, at least in this context, then strictly mirrors the primitive gesture of contraction that founds the subject^{vi}: the movement that in Shelling and Pareyson is described as the original inclusion of negativity itself in positivity, and that implies the necessity of conceiving a pre-ontological dimension “that can never be grasped as such, merely glimpsed in the very gesture of its withdrawal.” (Žižek 1999: 55) In the same way as “the subject is the contingency that grounds the [...] positive ontological order, that is, the ‘vanishing mediator’ whose self-effacing gesture transform the pre-ontological chaotic multitude into the semblance of a positive ‘objective’ order of reality” (Žižek 1999: 158), the character is the contingency of the word that evokes it and that delineates, in this way, the first dimension of the narrative world that it brings forth.

The ‘origin’ of the character, can be only postulated retroactively at the moment of

reading, even when it precedes the text itself in the case of an historical character or when it has been already introduced in previous books. It is only some kind of 'unfathomable absence' that is diluted in the white space that precedes the first line. This should not be read as a metaphor for the writer's mind in which the character takes shape, but as the very tangible surface the eye skims over before hitting the first line, the realm behind the scenes that remains unquestioned. The character, as the subject, "must be born alive. That is not something you can acquire." (Beckett 1966: 384) This implies that each depictive layer of the character, both direct and indirect, presents itself in a complete immediacy^{vii} that can be possible only for an absolutely gratuitous being. However, this still does not make of it a platonic idea of it since "immediacy itself is mediated; it is a product of the mediation of traces" (Žižek 2000: 26).

This withdrawal and retroactive splitting of the subject constitutes the primal imbalance of the narrative plane from which the rest of the book will derive its momentum. Once named, the character is a story unto itself, that unravels in words that reveal their fragility in their hesitation, and the original split glides along each edge of the text.

'Keep going, going on. Call that going, call that on'. Once begun, and as we have seen you have always already begun, you cannot but go on and on^{viii}.

I 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, 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 to think of them a little. (Beckett 1966: 303-4)

The 'here' and the 'now' of the character are always in a way left behind. They cannot be but in relation to an 'elsewhere' that precedes the reading. The first 'here', the first 'now', then, signal the absence that the character is: the absence of the present. The time of the character, included in the space between the first and the last pages, is Deleuze's 'pure past', the past that is not the past of any present, and that characterize virtuality^{ix}. This 'absent present' runs the temporal economy of the novel, and it can be thought of as the fissure in which the two flows of the narrative's past and future are attracted.

For our purposes, though, more interesting than the temporality of the character is its relation to the narrative space. If it originates as a split, its positing opens up two planes - the

interior and the exterior - over which the writing can roam. Of course the separation of these planes is relative, since they constitute the unity of the narrative world; but they only appear with the birth of the character as complementary dimensions of its existence and as the variables of its personification.

An outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two [...], I'm the partition, I've got two surfaces and no thickness [...] on the one hand the mind and on the other the world. I don't belong to either. (Beckett 1966: 386)

By mapping the two planes, the writing fulfils the creation of a subject that up to now "is only beginning, it hasn't begun" (Beckett 1966: 385). "The mistake they make of course is to speak of him as if he really existed, in a specific place, whereas the whole thing is no more than a project for the moment." (Beckett 1966: 375)

This same bipartition could be originally found in *Murphy*, where it was declined, in a parody of Descartes^x, as the problem of the relation between the body and the soul; or between the 'small world' and the 'big world', according to the way the mind and the exterior physical space are called in this novel.

He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one. Perhaps the knowledge was related to the fact of the kick as two magnitudes to a third. Perhaps there was, outside space and time a non-mental non-physical Kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick in intellectu and the kick in re. (Beckett 2006: Vol. II, 68)

The parodying intent is clear, but still the problem of the coordination between the interior and the exterior world and the necessity of a third element to relate the two will remain central for Beckett. In *The Unnamable* it will eventually take the shape of the ambiguous figure of the Master. Being the central concern of this novel about language, the 'process of supernatural determination' is translated into an entity placed among the linguistic wheels and that in the end controls them, that is the Master.

The function of the Master is realized in two ways: as 'addressee' - to whom the character is speaking -, and as 'author' - who is speaking through the character. On one hand, the Master is the implicit addressee of the communication, he who could, even though only in an ideal world, gather the whole text under one single meaning, transparent and complete, that in

so doing would free the character from the need to struggle unsuccessfully to explain its being. On the other hand, if the character exists in the language, there must be something in the language that from the very beginning could vouch for its existence: the Master, then, is also the figure of this something, that is of the ability of language to 'make space', to welcome the new 'narrative inhabitant'. This space, though, is never a neutral void: it's rather a field strength that determines the possibilities of realization of the character. The linguistic system welcomes it as much as it constrains it, thus generating a creative tension between, on one side, the system that 'speaking through' the character wants to absorb it to realize itself, and, on the other, the subjective character which represents in it a place of resistance.

In the first sense, as an 'addressee', the Master expresses a tendency of the text to close in upon itself; in the second, as an 'author', it expresses its openness and instability. This partition entails a binary topology at the level of the actions that the character performs. In the case of *The Unnamable*, of course, these will be primarily verbal actions. These actions are classifiable along two different spectra. In the first case it will be between the two poles of the 'speaking to express oneself', and the silence that mark the impossibility of this project: in the second case the extremities are those of a passive actualization of the linguistic system on one hand and, on the other, the active attempts of destabilizing it from the inside. This paradoxical knot between the two levels delineates the internal and external surfaces of the character.

When the Master is represented as ideal addressee the activity of the character will be aimed at finding the words that, taking its existence to the transparency of its sense, could free it of having to talk.

I have a pensum to discharge, before I can be free, free to dribble, free to speak no more, listen no more, and I've forgotten what it is [...]. (Beckett 1966: 312)

When, instead, the Master, or its incarnations Mahood or Worm, is thought of as the interior nucleus of the symbolic system, the character will act by adopting the exterior form^{xi} that is imposed on him, fluctuating between acceptance and rejection of it. At times it will wonder:

What if we were one and the same after all, as he affirms, and I deny? And I been in the places where he says I have been, instead of having stayed on here, trying to take advantage of his absence to unravel my tangle? (Beckett 1966: 317)

At other times, it will completely or partially deny the discourse of the Other. In this sense,

the character may accept his role as a travelling cripple struggling to return back home for a while, but then eventually he denies this image. In this way, he re-affirms his radical autonomy from the neutrality of the system, founded in his primordial withdrawal from it.^{xii}

But enough of this nonsense. I was never anywhere but here, no one ever got me out of here. Enough of acting the infant who has been told so often how he was found under a cabbage that in the end he remembers the exact spot in the garden and the kind of life he led there before joining the family circle. (Beckett 1966: 326)

Of course, despite all of this struggling, the character, as the subject, can never really step out of the system but only try to find space in it, since in order to reach the consistency of something more than a simple function of the system, the character must resist the mechanisms that sustain it.

These tensions that run through the interior and the exterior of the character hold together its being an autonomous individual with its being part of a narrative - both the one immanent to the novel as those others transcending it and relating it to its historical and cultural context-, that is, on one side, the place of concrete universality and on the other the result of specific contingencies.

All Strange Away, an allegory of humanity as limitation

By reducing the character to its minimal condition of existence, in *The Unnamable* Beckett reveals its essential structure, that is its being a fissure, a crack in the narrative plane, in a way that, in our account, mirrors Žižek's view of the subject. Through this radical investigation of the character, though, an even more radical critique of the status of the concept of humanity in general takes place. The artistic manipulation of the status of the subject, in fact, entails an internal critique of the ideological framework from which it arises, starting from the self-representation of the human subject as human. Such a critique is possible thanks to the fact that the meditation on the subject that the literary practice performs, offers a stance which is partially extra-ideological^{xiii}. This allows an experience, albeit a mediated one, of the empty space that the subject is, prior to its being 'filled in' by the Master Signifier. This is the same empty space around which ideology grows in order to hide it.^{xiv}

In this section I will deal with *All Strange Away*, in which Beckett allegorically fulfils the task of challenging the idea of the human subject as characterized by 'something more' in

respect to the other animals. Instead, he puts forward, the idea that the essence of humanity lies in its limitations, its poverty of being, its radical lack.

All Strange Away opens with probably one of the most popular of Beckett's sentences, that would also become the title of another of his short texts, written in French: "Imagination dead imagine [Imagination mort imaginez]" (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 349). Again, in the first line we have the condensed formula of the project that the text will realize. The investigation of the possibilities of the character will this time begin from the exploration of the limits of imagination. What does it mean, for the imagination, to be dead? If we were to interpret it as the failing of the imagination in producing mental images, it would be difficult to understand the subsequent invitation to imagine this situation. How could you picture a faculty unable to represent anything and all the more so itself?

The only way out from this paradox lies in ceasing to interpret imagination simply as the active production of representations and, again on the wake of Žižek^{xv}, look for a different approach. We should start thinking of imagination not as a productive-constructive faculty, but rather as primarily disruptive: it acts selectively, tearing the fabric of the perceived world apart, it "disperses continuous reality into a confused multitude of 'partial objects.'" (Žižek 1999: 30) The title itself of our text, *All Strange Away*, seems to invite such a reading, showing how it makes part of the same trajectory aiming at the elimination of all the 'ornamentations secondaires' that he had started with his first books and that had reached its climax with *The Unnamable*.

According to this interpretation, then, a dead imagination should not be thought of as some kind of broken machinery, but rather as the fulfilment of its lacerating work: the imagination is dead when it has already distanced its whole range from itself. It is not, then, a simple interruption of activity, but a state charged with tension that can be exercised only on itself. To imagine a dead imagination is reproducing this tension in the vacuum, which is in the end the radical withdrawing from the world in which the subject poses itself.

Imagination dead imagine. A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again. [...] five feet square, six high, no way in, none out, try for him there. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 349)

As in *The Unnamable*, the first requirement is a place. One must create a space for something to happen in, and the only way to do it is by making space, withdrawing and setting boundaries. 'No way in, none out'. The surfaces that delimit this volume themselves will produce the tensions that will determine whatever may occur in it.

Only after having created this space can the character appear, and its existence will be

strictly related to the possibilities offered by it. Each space brings about a character, and each character realizes the possibilities of the space in which it is set. So that if at the beginning there is room enough for a certain freedom of movement, he will do that by “sitting, standing, walking, kneeling, crawling, lying, creeping, all any length.” (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 350)

This situation, though, does not last for long, and the imagination restarts its dissection work amputating part of the volume, and in so doing limiting his possibilities.

Tighten it round him, three foot square, five high, no stool, no sitting, no kneeling, no lying, just room to stand and revolve. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 350)

Every movement is impossible now, but still the minimal distances between him and the walls let him revolve and observe the four pornographic images hanging there, representing respectively “face alone [...] then breasts alone, then thighs and cunt alone, then arse and hole alone” (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 351) of a woman.^{xvi} These pictures excite his fancies, that are expressed again by a climax of verbs.

Imagine him kissing, caressing, licking, sucking, fucking, and bugging all this stuff, no sound. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 351)

Once the possibilities of the ‘box’ are exhausted, the author reduces its dimension again, forcing the character to discover a new way of using it.

Ceiling wrong now, down two foot, perfect cube now, three foot every way. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 352)

Enclosed into such a small volume, no possibility is left for movement, and the character lies in the utmost passivity. As such, it begins hearing a voice, probably his own, talking about religion and love and philosophers “suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period.” (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 354) We are here presented again with the splitting of the narrative subject between the levels of the enunciation and the enunciated: it is both inside itself and outside, in the voice speaking to it. Moreover, at this point the gender of the character suddenly changes: it is said to be a woman called Emma. This event, inside the economy of the text, has the effect of amputating the character of even another element, the (symbolic) phallus, forcing it into an even more radical passivity.^{xvii}

In the prosecution, as the same structure is repeated again and again, we recede even further into the basic structure of the subject. The woman is literally folded in order to make her body mold to the claustrophobic container that meanwhile becomes smaller and smaller, each time more similar to a uterus surrounding a huddling foetus.

The more the space is limited, the more her functions are excluded: she stops hearing the voice, she loses rationality and expectation for the future, and is left only with vague memories and a sort of primitive fear and indistinct desire.

So in the rotunda up to now with disappointment and relief with dread and longing sorrow all so weak and faint no more than a leaf indoors on earth in winter to survive till spring. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 358)

By meticulously condensing the character, by taking away from him all his functions – moving, dreaming, thinking, feeling - we are finally brought to this immobile yet alive body, the image of vulnerability and frozen passivity. In a sense, we expect to be here on the edge of the animal world, but we are actually on a totally different plane. The logic underlying Beckett's works fights the conceptualization of the human that relies on the equation according to which a human subject is an animal with 'something more', may it be rationality, language or sociality. Instead, by limiting the human subject we do not obtain something else, we rather expose the lack that constitutes its core and then posits its limitation as the essence of self. As a consequence, the 'richnesses' of the human subject are nothing but epiphenomena of its original poverty. The human attributes are human only in the measure that as they could also not be: in not being able to express oneself despite mastering language, in feeling lonely while living in a society, in risking irrational acts. That's why Emma is

Hinged and crooked as only the human man or woman living or not when light at full without all this poking and prying about for cracks holes and appendages. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 355)

Beckett provides "a definition of the human which, beyond and above (or, rather, beneath) the previous infinite universal, accentuates the limitation as such: being-human is a specific attitude of finitude, of passivity, of vulnerable exposure," and he does so by negating any "positive definition of humanity as the autonomy of will: there is a kind of passive exposure to the overwhelming Otherness which is the very basis of being-human" (Žižek, 2006a, 112).

By undermining the notion of the human subject through an intensive penetration into the

narrative form of the character, Beckett performs an interior critique of ideology in the most Žižekian way. In here is the notion of a free willing subject, structured around the fullness of its singular essence, that is questioned, but the critique is not moved by putting forth another positive essence: instead, the reader is faced with “the radical negativity that ultimately defines the status of the subject,” (Vighi and Feldner 2007: 31) and the vision of its unavoidable passivity.

This critique constitutes the *fil rouge* of the whole Beckettian corpus, in particular the novelistic part of it, and sediments on the level of the textual form as the relation between space/container and character/contained. By subtracting space properties and features of the character are erased: this movement, though, does not imply the dissolution of the subject, but rather its concentration around its interior vanishing point, the fissure that hold its existence. If the room in *Malone Dies* and the vase in *The Unnamable* had anticipated the role of the closed space as a narrative function not delimiting but determining the character, and if *All Strange Away* represents the mature artistic awareness of this mechanism, then *Worstward Ho* is its full realization. Here the space is compressed against the body adhering perfectly to it and realises at the same time both its individualizing function and its possibilizing one, that offers a place for the event to happen.

Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 471)

In this work, one of the last and most cryptic, we eventually find the final formulation of the law for which, at the limit, characters, like the subjects, are nothing but the proximity to the nothing of the physical or textual space they occupy.

Nothing to show a child and yet a child. A man and yet a man. Old and yet old. [...] Nothing and yet a woman. (Beckett 2006: vol. IV, 484)

Here we eventually step beyond the question on the subject or humanity, and we are eventually shown the ultimate spring from which all these issues come from. After having seen the way the subject is originally split and reduced the whole symbolic field to its radical arbitrariness, we glimpse the Real in all its horrific indefinability. Nothing is what lies beyond the symbolic fabric, and toward this core of absence, of which no positive experience can be done, the language pushes, making of it its ultimate unattainable truth.

ⁱ “[L]a forme romanesque est encore perceptible dans *Molloy*, mais dès *l’Innommable* elle est épuisée, sans qu’on puisse dire que le poème l’emporte, si même la cadence, la disposition de paragraphes, la valeur intrinsèque des visions indiquent que le texte est gouverné par ce qu’on pourrait appeler un ‘poème latent.’ [Translation by the author]

ⁱⁱ “Ce ‘personnage’, dont le nom propre même est effacé ou indecis, et qui est au comble du dénuement, a bien plutôt réussi à perdre toutes les ornements secondaires, toutes les possessions douteuses, qui l’auraient détourné de ce qu’il a pour destin d’expérimenter, e qui touché à l’humanité générale, dont les fonctions essentielles sont: aller, être et dire.” [Translation by the author]

ⁱⁱⁱ Cfr. Casanova (2006)

^{iv} Cfr. Thomasson (1999).

^v Cfr. Eco (1979)

^{vi} Cfr. Žižek (1999) p. 31.

^{vii} As it is, we cannot say that the narrator is *wrong* in the way he presents the character.

^{viii} “One starts things moving without a thought of how to stop them. In order to speak. One starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The search for the means to put an end to things. An end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue.” (Beckett 1966: 297)

^{ix} Cfr (Žižek 2007: unpaginated).

^x Or, more likely, of the late cartesian philosopher Arnold Geulincx, one of main Beckett’s intellectual obsessions.

^{xi} This ‘forms’ is to be understood as the many possible forms of *subjectification* that mask the constitutive void which the *subject* itself is. (Cf. Žižek 1999, 174f.).

^{xii} This process of oscillation between the acceptance of the status imposed by the Other and its refusal would deserve a longer analysis. In fact, it is interesting to notice how in its repetition in the text, it follows a double step movement parallel to Žižek’s account of the ‘negation of negation’: first a certain value is negated, then the possibility itself of this value, the symbolic framework, is torn aside. In the case we are taking into consideration the first step involves the negation of the *pietas* in the name of “mine was not to go, nor to judge, nor to rail, but to go” (Beckett 1966: 324). Then the possibility itself of this movement falls apart: “there will be no more from me about bodies and trajectories” (Beckett 1966: 326). In the same way the following ‘incarnation’ of the character, that of the stump in the jar, is overcome by first negating any perceptible happening outside of the character, and then by negating the possibility itself of perceiving something, making of it a “being entirely enclosed, and yet nothing touching it” (Beckett 1966:348).

^{xiii} “The symbolic cogency of the ideological paradigm is brought to depend upon the trace of void which is both external to ideology (insofar as it cannot be rationalised and co-opted by language) and internal to it (insofar as ideological consistency hinges on the void at its core), thus producing the uncanny effect of *extimacy*”. (Vighi, Feldner 2007: 40). “[T]he subject is a non ideological concept; [...] we ‘subjectivize ourselves when we recognize ourselves in a determinate content of the Master Signifier, [...] whereas the subject is the void correlative to the empty signifier.” (Žižek 1997:49).

^{xiv} “[T]he non-discursive excess of ideology effectively coincides with the non-discursive excess of subjectivity, in the sense that both supplements embody the Real substance around which the commonly misunderstood notions of ideology and subjectivity are structured. [...] The core of ideology can be reached via subjectivity” (Vighi, Feldner 2007: 38).

^{xv} Cfr. Žižek 1999: 28-9.

^{xvi} This tearing the body into pieces in which fancy lingers serves as a sort of counterbalance to the general representation of the imagination that works, instead, by continuous dissection. The polarity between the two is constituted by the former being the unproductive dissemination of the unity while the latter is a creative movement by progressive depauperization. By introducing this inverted *mise en abîme*, Beckett seems (as opposed to both Joyce and Proust) to affirm, in Fredric Jameson words, his embracing of the second of “the two poles of the dilemma of modernist form: the content of the episodes and the organizing device or overall pretext of their formal totality - fancy versus imagination again, or the molecular versus the molar.” (Fredric Jameson in Žižek 1992: 48).

^{xvii} Badiou has already pointed out the way in which, in Beckett, the relation between the sexes is

always played on the symbolic level and is eventually grounded on the distinction between activity and passivity. (Badiou 2007: unpaginated).

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