

The Monad and the Cut in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*

Llewellyn Brown

Introduction

The various systems or “world-views” offered by philosophical elaborations promise an imaginary coherency which many readers have sought to identify in Beckett’s work, interpreting the latter, for example, as expressive of the human condition in a Godless age, or in the aftermath of the *Shoah*. *Endgame* in particular has been said to offer the image of a post-apocalyptic world and, without going so far, it is doubtless possible to discern in this play elements of a “world” and a “story.” However, this text in no way comforts a perception that the elements presented might fit together into an overall meaningful picture. When questioned, Beckett forcefully rejected any suggestion of a world-view,¹ and rather than reinforcing any imaginary consistency, his work is constantly marked by omnipresent cuts and breaks.

If “false starts” (Beckett in Harmon 139), interruptions and breaches are so crucial to Beckett, they also echo similar preoccupations in psychoanalysis. Indeed, the latter insistently points to – and integrates into its practice – the cut, which serves to break down the imaginary register – marked by its syntactical articulations and the resulting dimension of meaning – and to bring into play the absence of meaning – the *hors sens*– anchored in the real. Indeed, Lacan situates the subject not as a conscious agent, but as one that is both produced and effaced by the signifier. As explained in *Seminar VI*, the subject’s relationship to the real – which is “not symbolised by anything” (471) – is caused by a cut that has nothing to do with natural ones (474), since it is “the ultimate [*dernier*] structural characteristic of the symbolic as such” and

therefore points to the subject's "pure being as a subject" (471), where the death drive "can be found to converge with being."

The dimension of the real involved thus radically resists meanings, conceptualisation or even – in the ultimate formalisation Lacan gives to it – truth, the latter remaining determined by discursive structures, where the manifestations of the subject remain evanescent. For this very reason, psychoanalysis and anything pointing to the cut is less and less tolerated in our postmodern age², making it particularly deserving of our investigations. In the following lines, we propose to study Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame* in the light of the cut, in order to establish the latter's manifestations and function, involving the real.

A Closed Monad

What Beckett seems to present in *Endgame* as the fundamentally problematic situation in language is one where the cut is absent. Indeed, the stage setting appears as a coherent whole, which is strangely stylised and markedly removed from any of the components of what one would conceive of as composing a "world." It is a self-contained universe – a characteristic marking its affinity with the imaginary register –, which is nonetheless set apart from conventional reality.

The spectator encounters the image of a rather bare room – often associated with the interior of a skull –, which presents an imaginary continuity, devoid of any real breach, producing a rather disquieting impression. The place is called a "refuge" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 93) or "shelter" (in Harmon 23)– significantly echoed in the two ashbins where the parents, Nagg and Nell, are confined–, which Hamm sees as his final place: "There I'll be, in the old refuge, alone against the silence and... [*he hesitates*]... the stillness." (*Complete Dramatic Works* 126).

However, in contradiction with the notion of a world-view, the existence of any space beyond the room's walls remains problematic. Indeed, if the original drafts for the play described various realistic components³, the latter were subsequently eliminated, leaving only vague residual traces, such as the sand collected by Clov on the shore to line the parents' ashbins⁴ (*Complete Dramatic Works* 100). This process of paring the visual or referential dimension down brings the setting closer to its structural truth. It may be objected that Hamm does speak of an outside, declaring the walls to be an uncertain source of protection: "Hollow bricks! [...] All that's hollow!" (104). As for the external world: "Outside of here it's death." (96; cf. 126); "Beyond is the... other hell." (104). The use of the term *without* (106) is deliberately equivocal, undermining the conventional geometrical opposition – determined by an imaginary cut – between inside and out, and pointing rather to the similarity, or to a degree of equivalence between the two. Indeed, the within (significantly, never termed such) would seem to be profoundly structured by the "without", the latter being only the Möebian reverse side of the former. This perception would seem to be corroborated by one declaration Beckett made elsewhere: "The trouble about my little world is that there is no outside to it."⁵

As for the within, it appears as a prison whence Clov aspires to escape, as he says to himself in his final monologue: "[...] Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go – one day" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 132). Such a flight remains problematic, since Clov describes the "without" as in no way composing a world: "I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (132). While the "refuge" appears as a smooth, closed space, the outside is by no means a world furnished with a living reality: it is endless powder and dust. In either case, the absence of any structuring cut is apparent. For this reason, Clov is indeed frightfully free to leave, since there is no Other capable of condemning him to any sentence, a condition that

would offer the advantage of pointing to the outside as a place of freedom. On the contrary, he remains under the weight of an endless and undefined culpability he can, therefore, never atone for.

The “refuge” thus has an equivocal status. It assumes an imaginary form, being exaggeratedly unified – or, rather, uniform – but, at the same time, it negates any possibility of being situated in reference to shared reality. Consequently, the appearance it composes must be seen as having its equivalent in the real. As such, it points to – while seeming to dissimulate, by means of its enveloping qualities – what the characters experience as the unlimited “pain of existing” (Lacan *Écrits*, 777), which allows for no escape, unless it be by recourse to *saying*, in order to create a breach. This condition can be seen in the light of Lacan’s explanation of the signifier as producing the subject and, at the same time, reducing the latter “to being no longer anything other than a signifier” (*Séminaire XI* 188). This petrification is inscribed however in the “temporal pulsation where the initial characteristic of the unconscious as such – closure” (189), also termed *aphanisis* or fading – is instituted. This original inscription in existence as an effect of the signifier is impossible to escape from, since it holds in its sway all subsequent choices made by the subject: be it the very desire to opt out of life.

On the surface, life in the “refuge” takes the form of extreme monotony, reflecting the stage set: “All life long the same questions, the same answers” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 94). However, this seemingly unbreachable sameness is, in turn, the manifest face of the unbearable dimension of existence. Hamm asks Clov: “Have you not had enough? [...] Of this... this... thing.” (94; cf. 114). The “thing” they find themselves plunged into is a *quod* for which they are unable to define the *quid*: they know there is *something* – but even that is inadequate, as shown by the *aposiopesis* in the sentence –, but are totally unable to say *what* it is. They are caught up in an unidentifiable and uncontrollable movement that causes them

extreme anxiety: “HAMM [*Anguished*]: What’s happening, what’s happening? / CLOV: Something is taking its course.” (98; cf. 107). This *something* therefore is of the order of stifling continuity, devoid of any vivifying breach.

However, the apparently opposed expression is also possible. Jean-Claude Milner points out that the One as real – as such, detached from any property – is ascribed various contradictory (and necessarily inadequate) metaphors: “[...] the atom or the fixed star, but also the fine cloud, the cluster, the heap, flocculation [...]” (*Les Noms indistincts* 29). Infinite and ungraspable fragmentation describes the same state, as we find expressed in Clov’s opening words: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. [*Pause.*] Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 93). The expanding sentence structure illustrates the impossibility of achieving a cutting-off or ‘quilting’ point (*point de capiton*) capable of retroactively inscribing a signification, and giving substance to the signifier *life*, as Hamm states, referring perhaps to Protagoras⁶: “...that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life”⁷ (126). *Saying* only pushes the term further off. This experience is indicated by Beckett concerning Clov’s initial inspection of the place: “C perplexed. All seemingly in order, yet a change. Fatal grain added to form impossible heap. *Ratio ruentis acervi.*” (*Theatrical Notebook II* 47). This echoes the earlier perception by Arsène of something indescribable having slipped:

The change. In what did it consist? It is hard to say. Something slipped. [...] There is a great alp of sand, one hundred metres high, between the pines and the ocean, and there in the warm moonless night, when no one is looking, no one listening, in tiny packets of two or three millions the grains slip all together, and then stop, all together, not one

missing [...] millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one nearby, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. (*Watt* 42–3)

This imperceptible movement of countless minute units escapes seeing and definition, revealing the endless chain of the signifier, painfully brought to the fore by the absence of the “assent of the Other” (Lacan *Séminaire VIII*, 414) which alone could bring it to a halt by means of an identification. Indeed, the internalising of the gaze of the Other would create a breach between what remains inaccessible to the subject, and what could create an order of the perceptible.

Exclusion from the Phallic Register

One major cut thus becomes apparent between the inexplicable state where the characters find themselves, and the phallic register. The phallus is understood as “the signifier destined to indicate as a whole the effects of signified” (Lacan *Écrits*, 690). This definition is later followed up in Lacan’s formulæ of sexualisation, where the phallus is logically founded as a limited whole, by the exclusion of an element. Thus the formula defining the inscription of the subject in the realm of the universal – “for all x , Φx ” (*Séminaire XX* 73)– is necessarily grounded in the exception: “there exists an x not Φx .” The exception thus inscribes a border, and the part that is excluded remains the foundation of the whole, in the terms of the (modified) expression “the exception founds the rule.” The excluded objet a allows itself to be ignored, serving to consolidate the illusion of a substantial reality as an echo of the individual ego. Moreover, at the expense of the exception, the phallus affords a dialectical mediation between *one* and its Other, since both sexes situate themselves in reference to it. Lacan thus states that the sexual rapport “is not without a third term, which is properly speaking the phallus” (*Séminaire XVIII* 142).

Around the “refuge” in *Endgame*, there is no “world”, and any reference to it remains extremely tenuous. The allusions made by the characters appear as strictly isolated fragments or vignettes, which we can examine at present. Regarding these allusions, it might be argued that the characters of *Endgame* are situated within the confines of a world, since Clov describes scenes he purportedly perceives through the two windows. However, nothing in his evocations accredits this evaluation. The windows manifestly function as signifiers in a binary *left/right* composition, giving a view of land and sea respectively. This distribution is underscored, for example, when Clov answers Hamm’s question: “What window is it? / The earth” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 123). The only access to such reality is through the windows, which appear as purely conventional devices. The view supposedly seen by Clov is more of a verbal construct than a description: “The light is sunk” (106). This is particularly true in the French original, which plays on the rhyme *fanal::canal* (*Fin de partie* 47). Again, Clov asks if Hamm wants him to describe any “particular sector” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 128), or: “The general effect?” Indeed, in the final analysis, the “refuge” appears as a Leibnizian windowless monad: the presence of the windows as a visual and verbal motif points precisely to the fact that the characters do not enjoy the subjective function of the “window” (*fenêtre*⁸) – that of the fundamental fantasy – capable of framing a singular reality. The windows therefore function rather as points of blankness, where the view evoked remains devoid of any extension that may give access to a coherent or believable reality. Thus, the spectator has no direct perception of the vista they are supposed to offer: only Clov’s words give any idea of what may be “without.” In fact, the evocations of these scenes are intended to act as substitute openings, breaking the monotony reigning in the shelter: “What’s the weather like? / The same as usual. / Look at the earth. [...] No need of the glass. / Look at it with the glass” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 105).

The windows are also cut off from the characters: not only is Hamm himself blind (he too relying on Clov's accounts), but in order to look through them, Clov needs to cross over the stage, and use a ladder to reach them (*Complete Dramatic Works* 106). In addition, he views the supposed scene through a telescope. This accumulation of prostheses points not to the existence of a visible reality but, on the contrary, to its total and radical evacuation. What Clov sees at one point is literally nothing: "Let's see. [*He looks, moving the telescope.*] Zero... [*he looks*]...zero... [*he looks*]... and zero" (106). This insistence on Clov's behalf could also point to the delight he takes in thwarting Hamm's will. What remains operational is the minimal – and ever problematic – action involved in moving from one point to another.

The structured function of the window – based on the *unary trait* (*trait unaire*), as an internalisation of the gaze of the Other – is materialised not in the cut, as such, but in the notch (*entaille*; *Séminaire XI* 187): it renders visible the invisible mark of the signifier.⁹ However its problematic nature testifies to the way castration is generalised in melancholy.¹⁰

The same principle applies to Hamm's sporadic evocations of nature. Like Pozzo before him, in *Waiting for Godot*, Hamm is ironically associated with the status of a wealthy property-owner, who speaks of Clov's "rounds": "When you inspected my paupers" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 96). In his "chronicle" too, he speaks of his preparations for the "festivities" (117) of Christmas Eve.

If this story is pointedly fictional, his other mentions of nature are also limited to the verbal realm. Upon awaking, at the beginning of the play, he exclaims: "What dreams! Those forests!" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 93). His dreams afford him the idea of a reality that is excluded from the fundamental situation that is his in the refuge. A whole delicious world opens up in his dreams, complete with a human partner and bucolic surroundings: "If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth" (100). His exclamations offer fleeting lyrical images of an idealistic world, marked by irony

with regards to his real condition: “Flora! Pomona!” (111). Rather than entering a syntactical construction – lending credence to belief in reality – the images are fragmentary, disjointed, with intentionally bookish connotations.

Rather than pointing to the real existence of an outside world, these evocations thus belong to what Beckett calls “escape mechanisms¹¹”: means by which the characters seek to situate a possible – hypothetical – attachment to an Other. This is what is referred to when Hamm asks Clov if he has had his visions, and the latter replies: “Less” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 112). As Beckett explains (in Harmon 22), these visions are associated with Clov’s “light dying” (98); Hamm having just asked him, ironically, what he sees on his kitchen wall: “Mene, mene? Naked bodies?” (98). In other words, he denounces any “visions” Clov may have had as being simply vain fantasies (concerning destiny or erotic union) aiming to cover up an inescapable situation.

Stasis of the Monad

There is thus a marked cut between objects belonging to the phallic register – supporting desire in the context of the fantasy, and which corresponds to what Beckett calls “traversable space” (*Complete Short Prose* 111) – and the environment depicted by the stage setting. What dominates in the refuge is stasis rather than movement, particularly in the character of Hamm. The latter’s “chronicle” opens up to an indefinite expansion of the world and humanity: “All those I might have helped. [...] Saved. [...] The place was crawling with them.” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 125). However, his refusal to help his fellows points to his radical incapability of conceiving of any community, or the interest of saving anyone from the real problem of existence: “Use your head, can’t you, use your head, you’re on earth, there’s no cure for that!” (125). Such is the function of his blindness, which expresses his incapability of endowing existence with form and colour. It could be said of Hamm’s eyes that they represent

the source of the “evil” inherent in existence, as evoked in *Ill Seen Ill Said*: “Implying furthermore that it the culprit. And from it as from an evil core that the what is the wrong word the evil spread.” (46).

Indeed, Hamm is situated in a metonymical continuity with the space of the refuge. Supposedly, he took in Clov as a child, a fact which leads him to declare: “My house a home for you. [...] But for Hamm, [*gesture towards surroundings*] no home.” (*Complete Dramatic Works*, 111). This “world” is shrinking, being constantly pared down, and the underlying experience is, as Hamm admits, that of an absence of being: “I was never there.” (128). This inspires his angered insistence on being placed both approximately and exactly in the centre: “I was right in the centre, wasn’t I?” (104); “Roughly! Roughly! [...] Bang in the centre!” (105). The enveloping environment of the refuge only testifies to the absence of any place wherein the characters could find reassurance of being. For this reason, Hamm relies on Clov as an *alter ego*, to provide him with the impression that there may be a substantial reality, if only in the presence of another speaking creature.

The refuge as a monad, while seemingly offering a place of stability, suggests that a structuring cut must be situated somewhere in the symbolic register.

“Come and Go”

It is striking that this play’s construction rests on the mobilisation of pairs, notably in the roles of Hamm and Clov. The opposition between these two characters is underscored by various motifs: Hamm cannot stand, while Clov cannot sit (*Complete Dramatic Works* 97); Hamm is blind, while Clov can see; Hamm is “father,” and Clov is his adoptive “son.” Far from comforting any idea of complementarity, this underscores its absence: the fundamental breach between the partners. If the “signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier”¹², the pair of signifiers $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ are, as Lacan develops in his “four discourses,” marked by an

impossibility.¹³ Such, for example, is the impossibility for the Master to put the labourer to work.

This fundamental dual arrangement structures incessant movement, as if to counter the fixity of the refuge. However, this motion is not dialectical in nature: one that would be capable of subsuming any negativity by raising it toward a higher unity or accomplishment. Rather, it borders on a radical cut. This movement is described in the *incipit* of *A Piece of Monologue*: “Birth was the death of him. [...] From mammy to nanny and back. All the way. Bandied back and forth. So ghastly grinning on” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 425). This passage situates birth as marked by the “lethal alternative” (*Séminaire XI* 191): the signifier that gives life also inflicts death. This original cut is transferred or carried over to the “come and go” movement between two maternal figures, in an oscillation that remains without any resolution, in the absence of any subsuming by the phallic register. This is why the character continues to go “on”, bearing the mark of his original mortification. In Hamm’s words: “The end is in the beginning and yet you go on” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 126). Freud’s *fort/da* game of the spool (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) – with which we can associate this movement – does not lead to a dialectic capable of covering up the absence; on the contrary, it leaves the gaping hole open, inscribed by the cut of the signifier. As Henri Rey-Flaud points out: “The rapport between the right hand and the left hand, between *fort* and *da*, between masculine and feminine is, as a fact, impossible to write, since language cannot signify itself [...]” (28 n. 3).

Indeed, Lacan explains: “For the game of the spool is the subject’s response to what the absence of the mother has come to create on the frontier of his domain, on the edge of his cot, that is to say a gulf, around which there is nothing to do but play the game of the leap” (*Séminaire XI* 60). This means that even if one succeeds in negotiating the hole, there remains the fundamental non-negotiable gulf, and the response by a subjective leap which concerns

the subject as an *a* object, whereby it is a matter of “being the *fort* of a *da*, and the *da* of a *fort*” (61), the dimension that is not represented.

As Pierre Fédida observes, in the non-dialectical aspect of the game, the “*afar*” (*da*) means “*making disappear* without return”: for the child, it belongs to the “*game of death* and not that of absence” (in Lambotte 525). And what is involved is the disappearance of the subject, with the likelihood of him not reappearing (Lambotte 523–4). It is for this reason that “going on” is vital, as Malone observes, echoing Pascal¹⁴: “Because in order not to die you must come and go, come and go, unless you happen to have someone who brings you food wherever you happen to be, like myself. And you can remain for two, three and even four days without stirring hand or foot [...]” (*Three Novels* 225). Thus contrary to what life in the monad may suggest – being constantly served, while remaining motionless –, what continually drives the characters is this radical disquiet causing the come and go movement, showing the going “on” to be not the progression towards a goal but a movement emptied of any teleology or possible meaning: outside the realm of the “possible.” This fundamental relationship to the cut of the signifier enables Beckett to tear himself away from the risk represented by the melancholic identification with nothingness – with regards to the ego ideal – which can lead to suicide in an effort to complete the identification in the real. Here the “come and go” movement maintains a part that *ek-sists*, that continues to remain exterior. This operates at various levels in Beckett’s creation: on one level, the tormented relationships between the characters and, on another, the relationship to language in the act of creation.

Immobility and Movement

The characters are distributed in pairs, notably Hamm and Clov, who occupy the centre. Their fraught relationship inscribes a strong emotional tension. As Beckett pointed out, this play, by contrast with *Waiting for Godot*, is intended to “claw.”¹⁵ The indefinite nature of the waiting

for an end is unrelieved by the evocation of a hypothetical “Godot.” Hamm himself is the embodiment of the “refuge”, with its subjacent unbearable quality. Beckett points to the divergent role of these two characters: “They endure their ‘thing’ by projection away from it, Clov outwards towards going, Hamm inwards towards abiding” (in Harmon 22). This shows that, as a “pseudo-couple” (*Three Novels* 291), they do not complete each other on the imaginary level, but bring to light their radical incompatibility.

As regards the sparseness of the “refuge”, Clov’s role is to ensure the idea of a “world” and knowing. He thus provides an extension to Hamm, functioning like the Freudian spool: it is he who takes Hamm on a tour of the room – “Right round the world!” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 104) –, and gives news of what may be seen through the windows. The tension is manifest, on this level, in Clov’s violent reactions, pointing out the absence of any phallic register, a fact that he underscores by enumerating all the worldly objects that are disappearing: “bicycle-wheels” (96); “pap”; “nature” (97) or, more importantly, “pain-killer” (127). Rather than the non-existence of these things, what is important is the fact that Clov refuses to give them in language. This generates the meta-theatrical nature of the play, and the importance of speech: “Why this farce day after day?” (107); “What is there to keep me here? / The dialogue” (120–1).

While Hamm remains stationary, Clov insistently declares – or threatens – he is about to leave.¹⁶ In his own productions, Beckett accentuated the tension and uncertainty created by the respective positions of Hamm and Clov. He states: “‘Clov has only one wish, to get back into his kitchen – that must always be evident, just like Hamm’s constant effort to stop him. This tension is an essential motif of the play’ (*Berlin Diary*).” (*Theatrical Notebooks II* 48). As Gontarski explains: “[...] Clov is now poised midway between Hamm and the doorway, midway between obligation and relief [...]” (xviii). This spatial aspect is accompanied by a moral one, whereby Clov reveals himself to be progressively more disobedient to Hamm’s

injunctions. However, the idea of providing a clear-cut solution is contrary to Beckett's ethics and aesthetics, and his work on stage production enabled him to deepen this fundamental logic. This can be read in the light of the inclusion/exclusion relationship determined by the place of the *a* object in Lacan's formula of the fantasy ($S\Delta a$), and which Beckett describes in the terms "*nec tecum nec sine te.*"¹⁷ However Beckett's undertaking goes beyond any will to give substance or credence to the imaginary construction but, rather, to reveal the profound distress it reveals, as caused by the underlying abyss whose existence the characters cannot ignore.

Therefore, not only is the question of mutual dependency involved, but also the absence of any elsewhere, as Beckett explained in Berlin: "You're not looking outside any more; Clov already knows there's nothing there" (*Theatrical Notebook* XIX). Indeed, the "without" is also a "nothing there", and the absence of any possible metaphysics or meta-language: "You're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 118). Hamm's exclamation is an expression of personal powerlessness, but it also points to a logical impossibility, as expressed in the following exchange: "HAMM: All right, be off. [...] CLOV: I'm trying. [...] Ever since I was whelped" (98). Movement on stage is expressive of an effort to inscribe existence in the phallic register and, at the same time, its impossibility, from a structural point of view: there is no elsewhere to the ever-present "here," from which no exit exists.

This back and forth movement between the characters is also manifest on the level of objects, in the case of Clov. The example of his action in relation to the windows is telling. Objects here do not confirm the existence of a material universe; they rather show up the latter's absence. Not only are the windows – "perhaps" – as "blind" as Hamm, but they also serve as manifestly inadequate complements to Clov's movements on stage. A series of actions unfolds: Clov looks at the windows (*Complete Dramatic Works* 92), takes the ladder to look through left window; goes to right window without the ladder, and has then to go back

for it. Conversely, he goes to the ashbins with the ladder, but has to set it down. The same sort of game occurs with the telescope (105), which Clov also deliberately lets fall (106). A form of dislocation – rather than a complementarity – affects Clov’s relationship to objects; the latter support his bodily movement as a form of artifice, with the aim as expressed by Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*: “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?” (64). This is why Clov needs to move in order to think: “[*He starts pacing to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground, his hands behind his back. He halts.*] The pains in my legs! It’s unbelievable! Soon I won’t be able to think any more.” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 114–5). With regards to the “nightmare thingness” (*Complete Short Prose* 69) that oppresses them, the characters’ actions offer the indispensable, vital simulacrum of going somewhere. Hamm exclaims: “We’re getting on.” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 111); and when Clov questions him: “What’s the matter with you today? / I’m taking my course” (112). Hamm is “taking his course” as trying to continue the “farce” (107), but his very movement can only be at a certain remove from the all-enveloping “thing”; in the same way as Geulinx’s sailor is free to go back and forth on the deck of a boat whose movement he can in no way command (*Three Novels* 46). This means that the relationship between two signifiers opens up a possibility of continuing, establishing a discursive space – associated with an imaginary – bordering on the hole as other, in the impossibility of finding a grounding in phallic mediation.

In his stage productions, Beckett accentuated the dissociation between movement and words. In Berlin, he advised: ““Never let your changes of position and voice come together. First comes (a) the altered bodily stance; after it, following a slight pause, comes (b) the corresponding utterance’ (*Berlin Diary*)” (*Theatrical Notebook II*, XIX).

The emotional tension between the characters is not the only aspect supported by the “come and go” movement, since the construction of the dialogues reveals the absence of

complementarity. Thus the terms associated with Hamm express a point of impossibility: “HAMM: I can’t leave you. / CLOV: I know. And you can’t follow me” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 114). Hamm’s stasis is expressed by two negations: that of leaving – the term associated with Clov – and that of following. The hypothetical separation of the two characters would mean the possibility of creating a breach in the stifling continuum that envelops them. This exchange activates the inverted message which undercuts the verbal symmetry (*leave/follow*): Hamm cannot execute Clov’s projected action (*leaving*), neither can he hinder the latter. So while speaking of Hamm, both characters’ actions are evoked: by denegation, Hamm wants Clov to stay; Clov asserts his liberty to leave, while remaining motionless.

Thus while complementarity would seem to be present – “It’s we are obliged to each other” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 132) –, it serves only to reveal a fundamental breach, as can be seen in the use of equivocation whereby, for example, Hamm questions Clov: “What? Neither gone nor dead? / In spirit only. / Which? / Both. / Gone from me you’d be dead. / And vice versa” (126). To one division (*gone/dead*), Clov adds another (*body/spirit*), and asserts the unity (*both*) of what Hamm had proposed as an alternative (*neither*). While Hamm had just settled into his solitude – telling his “chronicle” (121) in order to populate it –, he suddenly finds himself in the presence of Clov again, and expresses the wish for his absence. He suggests the two words might be equivalent, in the sense that for the melancholic, the disappearance entails a dimension of the real. This is expressed in *A Piece of Monologue*, where the alienation to the signifier resulting from birth remains present in any separation in life: “Never were other matters. [...] From the word go. The word begone” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 429). In the latter sentence, one can only *be* by being *gone* which, owing to the differential principle inherent in the signifier, is not identical to the state of death (the absence of being).

This condition follows Lacan's explanation of the signifying *vel* (*Séminaire XI* 192). However, the exchange breaks up the conflated terms, so that the two faces require to be expressly formulated, showing their lack of identity as the result of a fundamental cut. A causal dimension is revealed: *going* would entail *death* (spatial), and *death* would produce a form of *going* (spiritual or existential). Thus while the confusion of the two belongs to the imaginary register, the back and forth movement of the dialogue, based on equivocation, brings to the fore the dimension of *hors sens* which cannot be assimilated or reduced. It supposes the necessity of going around the edge of the cut, and taking it from one side and the other: completing a circuit. Thus the original *vel* of alienation can be caught up, in a second stage, in the movement of separation (*Séminaire XI* 195), following a binary logic (199). In this perspective, Lacan uses the lozenge-form *poinçon* (\diamond) – read as “desire for¹⁸” – to indicate the fundamental breach separating subject and objet *a*. The barred subject ($\$$) is a pure cut, and his alienation is represented in the upper half of the lozenge (\wedge), read as a retroactive arrow (indicating conjunction: both $\$$ and *a*). The lower half is disjunctive (\vee), read as an arrow joining $\$$ and *a*, but excluding elements they do not have in common. In the light of the overlapping sets, the two sides remain unequal, since they only allow for “life” (as in the summons: “Your money or your life”), with the loss of one element. By contrast, “liberty or death” entails the loss of both. Earlier in *Seminar XI*, Lacan analysed the drive as a “come and go” (*aller-et-retour*; 162) circuit, where “aim” (trajectory) and “goal” remain distinct, ensuring the “self-erotic” function of completing the circuit. However, the latter can never be complete, and while the movement is accomplished around the cuts formed by the “erogenous zones¹⁹” or bodily orifices, there remains “a hollow, a void” (164) that can only be known by means of the *a* object which, consequently, is “of the order of the real²⁰” (*Séminaire XIII* 6 January 1966).

Thus the dialogues and the use of equivocation, in *Endgame*, point to the fact that “the conjunction of a real – the *a* object – with a reality (the fantasy) is a gaping hole (*béance*), the very hole of the imaginary and the real, that only the symbolic binds together according to the structure of the Borromean knot” (Regnault 44). These fleeting moments of humour hollow out rather than consolidate meaning, confirming the central idea of the play, as enounced by Nell: “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness [...]” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 101). As Marie-Hélène Brousse points out, the phallic register returns by means of laughter, revealing the incidence of *lalangue*. The latter, understood as “the integral of the equivocations” that the history of a language has allowed to persist (*Autres écrits* 490), manifests itself in the inexhaustible dimension that exceeds the cut. The difference that it embodies resides in the *jouissance* of saying: it cannot be named (see Milner, *L’Amour de la langue* 21–2), only observed in the effects it produces. In the case of Nell, it allows her to surprise the spectator by mocking unhappiness, rather than identifying with it in the fullness or adequacy of a tragic posture.

The End...

The play ends with Clov on the verge of leaving – or not... –, and Hamm remaining alone. As the central character, he is the heart of the “refuge”, and so the play folds in over him. The symbolic cut resulting from the succession of the generations has been excluded: Clov’s status as adoptive son remains uncertain²¹, and he is henceforth inaccessible to blind Hamm. However, while rejecting his “[a]ccursed progenitor” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 96), he situates himself symmetrically (almost) between two generations: “I’ll have called my father and I’ll have called my... [*he hesitates*] ...my son” (126); and at the end, he calls successively: “Father!” then “Clov!” (133). His others – Clov/dog/man imploring²² – acted as so many Freudian “spools” for him, forming a single paradigmatic axis. For want of a set

place in transmission, he has to be himself his “own other” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 441), like an earlier narrator: “Yes, I was my father and I was my son, I asked myself questions and answered as best I could, I had it told to me evening after evening, the same old story I knew by heart and couldn’t believe [...]” (*Complete Short Prose* 103). Finally, this function is delegated to his handkerchief: “Old stancher! [*Pause.*] You... remain.”²³ (*Complete Dramatic Works* 134). The handkerchief functions as a comforting, maternal, enveloping (*a*) object (appearing as refuse, not as *cause*), replacing the tormented relationships with his others: along with the ashbins, it is a miniature version of the “refuge” itself as a self-contained monad. It appears as a derisory but necessary reduction to the strict minimum of all the others previously present, as well as of Hamm’s environment.²⁴ It allows the latter to be silent:²⁵ to cease making his voice resound in an effort to create a breach in the continual slipping of the “thing.” The refuge, like the handkerchief, provides a physical fixed point, for want of a subjective one: enveloping replaces framing; however, it also reveals the persistence of a cut that will never be effaced.

Conclusion

In *Endgame*, Beckett thus inscribes a cut in what seemed to be the irremediably continuous and closed structure of the monad. However, in any closed structure there must be an opening, in the same way as there needs to be one for the sack, which is its equivalent – and a central metaphor– in *How It Is* (Brown *passim*): the cut allows discourse to find its anchoring in a part that *ek-sists*.

Indeed, as a literary composition, *Endgame* forms a discourse, in which the barred subject ($\$$) is grounded; it is what can be called a *said* (Lacan *Autres écrits*, 472), or an utterance, marked by its “closed cut.” The latter is the “ending”, the idea of which torments Hamm from the outset (*Complete Dramatic Works* 93), but which also leads to a point that is both *hors*

sens, and excluded from the symbolic. It is thus that, with regards to written art, of which Lacan states that “far from transforming reality in any possible way at all” (*Séminaire VI* 471) it “introduces in its very structure the advent of the cut, insofar as is manifested there the subject’s real, in that, beyond what he says, he is the unconscious subject.”

The nature of the latter however is deepened in Lacan’s later teachings where he promotes the *parlêtre* or speaking being, as opposed to the *subject*. Indeed, as of *Seminar XI*, Lacan aimed to produce the subject – or the speaking being – as “absolute difference” (*Seminar XI* 248). This is later termed a “One alone” (*Séminaire XIX* 165; meaning: devoid of any Other) that is real. The latter belongs to the dimension not of the said, but of *saying*, as pointed to in the first part of Lacan’s sentence from “L’Étourdit”²⁶, where the subjunctive (*qu’on dise*) withholds the “saying” from any assertive value. This suspension of actualisation impedes the verb’s integration into a set grammatical realisation which, entailing its correlative the negation, would support the register of truth (Leray 453). *Saying* thus belongs to the register of *existence*, and not to *being* (Hamm’s being “there”). It testifies to the unceasing pulsation of the living, driven by the *One-saying* (*Un-dire*; *Autres écrits* 551), anchored in the real, and situated on the side of the creator. This however takes us away from the signifier and the cut, and opens up to the dimension of *writing*.

It is doubtless the dimension of *lalangue* – extracted from discourse and beyond the cut – that informs the play’s vivacity and humour (Brousse), along with the unbearable dimension of existence that it reveals. Jean-Claude Milner points out that the Borromean knot only holds together by virtue of a breach caused by the real, which causes the rings to fall apart (*Noms indistincts* 12–3). In psychoanalysis, the truth is a “real cut” which, bound to the symbolic, produces a “real nomination”, which also suspends the symbolic. But immediately, the breach closes over: “Nothing has taken place except that, in this nothing that separates a before from an after, to a subject, a real has happened” (*Noms indistincts* 15–6). From a real, nothing

ensues – in a symbolic or imaginary reutilisation, on the register of knowing (*savoir*)—except, as Milner points out in the writing of Thucydides and Lucretius, “the readers discover at each instant a given that they did not expect, that no previous experience allows them to deal with and from which, moreover, no knowing [*savoir*] follows. [...] The plague will have taught me nothing, an Athenian survivor could say. Nothing, except the plague itself and that one can speak of it” (*Relire la Révolution* 241). Putting to work the signifier with its correlative cut, in the symbolic and discursive register, the actions and the dialogues of *Endgame* succeed producing a breach in the oppressive and mortifying situation of the “refuge”-monad. However, the play itself enables the spectator to hear, through its anchoring in *lalangue*, something of a real– the “plague” of existence – beyond knowing.

¹“He said that Krapp is not a way of looking at the world (*keine Weltanschauung*), and that in fact answers everything. No, this is just Krapp, not a world-view.” (Hayman).

² On the political level, see Jean-Claude Milner’s analysis of the Revolution as a cut, as opposed to “Polybianism”, which aims at maintaining an equilibrium (*Relire la Révolution* 81–3).

³Picardy “et plus précisément dans le Boulonnais...alentours de Wissant’ [...] ‘Votre habitation, édifée sur la falaise, comporte un living room et un couloir transformé en cuisine’ [...]” (“and more precisely in the Boulonnais region... in the environs of Wissant”; “Your inhabitation, edified on the cliff, includes a living room and a corridor converted into a kitchen”; *Theatrical Notebook* 43).

⁴“This reference to Clov’s activity outside the shelter was cut by Beckett in Berlin. With this cut, the only reference to Clov’s external activity is eliminated, and of course, the likeliness of Clov’s actually leaving Hamm is diminished.” (*Theatrical Notebook* 53).

⁵Letter to Alec Reid, 17 January 1956 (*Letters of Samuel Beckett* 596).

⁶Beckett in Harmon, p. 23.

⁷“One purpose of the image is to suggest the impossibility logically, i.e. eristically, of the “thing” ever coming to an end. [...] In other words the impossibility of a catastrophe.” (Beckett in Harmon 23).

⁸ Gérard Wajcman explains how the English term does not include any notion of a view: it refers simply an air-vent (*Fenêtre* 26–7).

⁹ It thus forms the ego ideal (Lacan *Écrits* 808).

¹⁰“It is as if he [the melancholic subject] affirmed castration in the real without it being possible for him to partially displace it and to go about things in such a way as it does not occult all the imaginary field of projects and hopes” (Lambotte, *Discours* 610–1).

¹¹ In the singular, referring to Clov (in Harmon 22).

¹² Lacan, *Écrits* 819. It is different from the letter since, being pure difference, it is without positivity (Milner, *L’Œuvre claire* 128). “Everything that concerns the signifier will be said in a vocabulary of the chain and alterity; reduced to its skeleton, it is summed up by S1 (a signifier), S2 (another signifier); § (the subject barred by the beating of S1 to S2); a (what falls under the effect of the bar).” (Milner, *L’Œuvre claire* 130).

¹³*Séminaire XVII* 202. This remark concerns the upper line.

¹⁴“Notre nature est dans le mouvement ; le repos entier est la mort.” (“Our nature is in movement; complete rest is death.” Pascal 126; quoted by Weber-Caflich 17).

¹⁵Beckett describes the play: “Rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than *Godot*” (in Harmon 11).

¹⁶*Complete Dramatic Works* 95, 97, 110, 111, 131.

¹⁷Letter to Alan Schneider, 19 December 1957 (in Harmon 24).

¹⁸ Lacan, *Écrits* 774. We follow the development by François Regnault (26–7). The *poignon* also points to any possible relationship with the other term.

¹⁹Lacan, *Écrits*, *op.cit.* 817.

²⁰ Lacan, *Séminaire XIII*, “L’objet de la psychanalyse”, 6 January 1966.

²¹ Regarding the paternal function, Clov says to Hamm: “You were that to me.” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 110). The reciprocal is also true, as Beckett states: “‘Son’ can have an ironic touch instead. What is meant here is that which has served me as a son.” (*Theatrical Notebooks* 65, note to line 1249).

²² Beckett had Clov adopt the same posture as the dog (*Theatrical Notebooks* II, 59, note to line 744).

²³ Ludovic Janvier (135) notes the same sentence in *How It Is*.

²⁴ It appears again later, as the “cloth” in *Nacht und Träume* (*Complete Dramatic Works* 465). Compare with: “The layers of Damask fused and drawn to the uttermost layer, silken blade. Blind and my mind a blade of silk, blind and music and whiteness facts in the fact of my mind.” (*Dream of Fair to middling Women* 182).

²⁵ “Asked if Hamm covers his face in order to die, Beckett responded, ‘No, only in order to be more silent’ (*Berlin Diary*)” (*Theatrical Notebooks* II, 71; note to line 1500).

²⁶ “*Qu’on dise reste oublié derrière ce qui se dit dans ce qui s’entend.*” (*Autres écrits* 449).

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Llewellyn Brown

professeur agrégé

Lycée international de Saint-Germain-en-Laye

llewbrown@free.fr

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