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Body, Taboo and Transgression

A Batailleian Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Trilogy

Ik verklaar plechtig dat ik de masterproef, Body, Taboo and Transgression: A Bataillean Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Trilogy, zelf heb geschreven.

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Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek analyseert Samuel Becketts trilogie (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies* en *The Unnamable*) als zijnde transgressieve literatuur. Georges Bataille's filosofie betreffende lichamelijke taboes en transgressieve/innerlijke ervaring dient hiervoor als ankerpunt. De waarschijnlijk onafhankelijke convergentie van Bataille's en Becketts denken vóór 1950 en de convergentie nadat beiden elkaars schrijven ontdekten en begonnen te corresponderen is het uitgangspunt van deze thesis. Hierdoor is het mogelijk in de trilogie te peilen naar de spanning die bij de mens veroorzaakt wordt door diens onmogelijke verlangen naar een vereniging van de discontinuïteit en continuïteit van het bestaan. Dit Bataillaans theoretisch kader – waarbij ook het 'offer' centraal komt te staan in het onderzoek – wordt verder ondersteund door Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existentialistische fenomenologie. De keuze hiervoor is te verantwoorden omdat Merleau-Ponty's fenomenologische aanpak een lichamenlijk bepaalde vorm van subjectiviteit en ervaring in beschouwing neemt en dit strookt met een onderzoek naar ervaringsgerichte sublimiteit.

De thesis verdedigt twee hypothesen, en dit telkens op twee niveaus: het tekstuele niveau en het niveau van de reactie van de lezer op de tekst. Ten eerste wil het onderzoek aantonen dat de trilogie de mogelijkheid tot het hebben van transgressieve ervaringen demonstreert en hiermee Bataille's denken onderschrijft. Deze veronderstelde aanwezigheid wordt bewezen aan de hand van drie thema's: seksuele lichamenlijkheid, het abjecte lichaam en gelach. Becketts behandeling van deze onderwerpen wordt getoetst aan de mate waarin ze beantwoordt aan Bataille's denkwereld. Tegelijkertijd wordt hierbij de stelling verdedigd dat de lezer zelf door het leesproces tot innerlijke ervaring kan komen. Als theoretische onderbouwing voor deze mogelijke leesreactie wordt literatuur in het algemeen gekaderd als een specifieke vorm van de fenomenologische beschrijvingsmethode en Becketts trilogie in het bijzonder als behorende tot Bataille's literatuurtheoretische categorie van 'literatuur van het Kwade' die in communicatie kan treden met de lezer.

Het tweede deel van de thesis beweert dat de herhaling van transgressieve ervaringen een desintegrerend effect op de menselijke subjectiviteit heeft. Meer bepaald, het is de herhaling van het intrinsieke falen van transgressie die een transformatie bewerkstelligt waarbij een veronderstelde transcendente individualiteit verwordt tot een anonieme, materieel bepaalde niet-subjectiviteit. Deze langzame evolutie is ten eerste opnieuw waar te nemen op het niveau van de tekst van de trilogie. De vier opeenvolgende 'protagonisten' van de drie boeken (Moran, Molloy, Malone, the unnamable) zijn volgens dit onderzoek illustratief voor de desubjectificatie van het veronderstelde menselijke 'ik.' Deze desintegratie is het gevolg van een opeenvolging van transgressieve crises waarbij de

personages stelselmatig worden gedwongen om de hoop en het verlangen naar zowel een continue discontinuïteit als naar een discontinue continuïteit op te geven. Deze ontwikkelingen monden uit in het hopeloze narratief in *The Unnamable*. Hier benadert de verteller het beeld van de Bijbelse Job (in de versie van Søren Kierkegaard) die – nu geheel onverschillig geworden ten opzichte van de onmogelijkheid van het bevredigen van zijn verlangen – ervoor kiest om zijn menselijk lijden herhaaldelijk te belijden en zo ook uit te diepen. Daarenboven wordt er opnieuw, naar analogie met het eerste deel van de analyse, beweerd dat deze desintegratie ook evenzeer kan plaatsvinden bij de lezer wanneer deze ook herhaaldelijk geconfronteerd wordt met innerlijke ervaring.

Kernwoorden

Abjectie, Bataille, Beckett, continuïteit, discontinuïteit, erotiek, existentialisme, fenomenologie, gelach, innerlijke ervaring, Job, Kierkegaard, *reader-response*, lichaam, Merleau-Ponty, mislukking, offer, onverschilligheid, repetitie, seksualiteit, sublimiteit, taboe, transgressie, trilogy.

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Abstract

This investigation provides a close reading of Samuel Beckett's trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*) as an instance of transgressive literature, with the aid of Georges Bataille's philosophy regarding taboos and transgression. By focusing on transgressive somatic sublimity and its disintegrating effects on human corporeal self-identity, the research moves away from the dominant post-structural reading of Beckett, toward a non-subject-centered existentialist-phenomenological consideration of the text. Supported by Bataille's writings, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's body-focused phenomenology and the phenomenological descriptive method in general, two hypotheses on two different levels are put forward. On the level of the text, it is argued that the trilogy defends the possibility of transgressive sublimity and that it illustrates its disintegrating effects with the evolution of characters. On the level of a potential reader-response, this thesis claims that reading the trilogy can induce transgressive experience for the reader as well and can consequentially also engender the said disintegration of self-identity for the reader.

Key words

Abjection, Bataille, Beckett, body, continuity, discontinuity, eroticism, existentialism, failure, indifference, inner experience, Job, Kierkegaard, laughter, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, reader-response, repetition, sacrifice, sexuality, sublime, taboo, transgression, trilogy.

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GEORGES [*desperate*]: Would it all be absurd? Or might it make some kind of sense? I've made myself sick wondering about it.

SAMUEL: If there is one question I dread, to which I have never been able to invent a satisfactory reply, it is the question what am I doing.

GEORGES: I awake in the morning – just the way millions do, millions of boys and girls, infants and old men, their slumbers dissipated forever... These millions, those slumbers have no meaning.

SAMUEL: That is one of the many reasons why I avoid speaking as much as possible. For I always say either too much or too little, which is a terrible thing for a man with a passion for truth.

GEORGES [*convinced*]: But if nothing has any meaning, there's no point in my doing anything. I'll beg off. I'll use any deceitful means to get out of it, in the end I'll have to let go and sell myself to meaninglessness, nonsense.

SAMUEL: Words and images run riot in my head, pursuing, flying, slashing, merging, endlessly. But beyond this tumult there is a great calm, and a great indifference, never really to be troubled by anything again.

GEORGES [*suddenly worried*]: But if there is a meaning? Today I don't know what it is. Tomorrow? Tomorrow, who can tell? Am I going then to find what it is?

SAMUEL: I'll tell you. No, I'll tell you nothing. Nothing. [*he smiles condescendingly.*]

GEORGES [*baffled*]: ...

SAMUEL [*in apologetic tone*]: That last sentence is not clear, it does not say what I hoped it would.

GEORGES [*picks his nose and inserts nose dropping in his mouth.*]: No, I can't conceive of any 'meaning' other than 'my' anguish, and as for that, I know all about it. And for the time being nonsense.

SAMUEL: But that is all beside the point, like so many things. [*Pause*] All is pretext.

GEORGES [*evasively*]: My life only has a meaning insofar as I lack one: oh, but let me be mad!

SAMUEL: No more questions. Is not this rather the place where one finishes vanishing?

GEORGES [*turns to audience with trembling voice.*]: Make something of all this he who is able to, understand it he who is dying, and there the living self is, knowing not why, its teeth chattering in the lashing wind: the immensity, the night engulfs it and, all on purpose, that living self is there just in order ... 'not to know'.

SAMUEL [*scorches nostril hair and eyelash while lighting cigarette.*]: Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand.

[*Silence. Curtains open.*]

1. Introduction

Reading Irish writer Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) trilogy can be quite the experience for a reader, because of the plethora of sensations it can instigate. The lecture of the trilogy – i.e. *Molloy* (1955), *Malone Dies* (1956) and *The Unnamable* (1958) – sometimes debouches into a visceral experience for the reader: it can chill the nerves, repulse, give goosebumps, overheat the mind, make one stare absentmindedly, make one shudder, make one cry, make one wet the pants or make one laugh frantically. Beckett's writing draws us in a universe that forces us to abandon our everyday comfort zone. A parallel phenomenon seems to be going on *in* the trilogy: there, the body often seems to be pushed to its extreme limits. The starting point for this inquiry will therefore precisely be the notion of embodiment. There are three reasons why it is legitimate to question embodiment in Beckett's trilogy: the relative neglect of the body in academic writing on Beckett; the centrality of embodiment in existentialism; and the strong connection French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille (1897-1962) felt with Beckett when he read *Molloy* for the first time.

Firstly, we can observe that the body has often been overlooked in the vast – almost infinite one would be tempted to say – academic tradition on Beckett. That bodily experience has not been of primary importance in Beckett studies, is something that Ulrika Maude, to give one example, convincingly laments in her study on Beckettian embodiment entitled *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009). The first discernible cluster of criticism deals with Cartesian rationalism and its alleged confirmation or challenging by Beckett.¹ In this approach, the research topic of embodiment is overshadowed by the primacy of the workings of the mind.² Along the lines of the Cartesian distinction between trustworthy metaphysical rational and unreliable sensory knowledge, the latter is deemed less significant for critical inquiry. Beckett here becomes a writer who is concerned with the immaterial, going beyond the physical world toward an increasing interiority and moving away from matter and bodily experience. The second major scholarly current that impeded a concern for the notion of embodied experience in Beckett's writings is of course the post-structuralist wave which flooded Beckett studies from the 1990s onward. The emptying out of language, the problematic nature of signification or discursive deconstruction became central to understanding Beckett's art. This heterogeneous post-structuralist criticism pushed Beckett studies in a textual/linguistic

1 The questioning of Cartesianism is still central to Beckett's early novel *Murphy* (1938).

2 Hugh Kenner, Ruby Cohn, Martin Esslin or David Hesla are a few disciples in this tradition. Epistemologically speaking, Beckett could be said to explore the impotent mind, not the enlightened Cartesian one. Michael Mooney for example, in his 1978 essay 'Molloy, part I: Beckett's 'Discourse on Method,' argues that *Molloy* has to be read as a jesting inversion of Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* (1637).

direction. Unfortunately, the post-structuralist approach was also convinced that it disqualified a budding scholarly tradition on Beckett that was in vogue in the 1970s and 1980s and which allowed for a more materialist delving into embodiment: the phenomenological-existentialist one.³

Existentialism – the 20th century philosophical current that can be associated with Beckett's art broadly speaking, if only for their shared omnipresence of the theme of death – is the second justification for an investigation of bodily experience in the trilogy. The body is a main concern in existentialism, due to the primacy existentialists give to “the existing individual – the individual engaged in a particular world with a characteristic form of life” (Wrathall and Dreyfus 4). The investigation of concrete human experience – at the expense of abstract rational reasoning such as, for example, German Idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) philosophy – was advocated by Danish religious philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The latter is generally regarded as one of the predecessors of modern existentialism, alongside Prussian nihilist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Russian novelist and philosopher Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881). Following said reasoning, humans are not regarded as primarily rational beings, but as experiencing subjects. Human existence in this regard cannot be accounted for, but it merely *is*. Therefore, in existentialism, our concrete existence – of which our bodily existence is a crucial part – is the gateway to embark on a study of the human condition. This focus on embodied experience allows for an existentialist-phenomenological consideration of the trilogy.

It is impossible to provide a concise overview of the many nuances in existentialist writing, more so because it did not have an aesthetic agenda, nor was it a uniform school of thought (Glicksberg 2). Rather, it are the fundamental questions raised by existentialism which offer a point of entry into the trilogy – and which also lead to the question of embodiment. One of those problems is, as Wrathall and Dreyfus summarize in their introduction to *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (2006), “[t]he [...] philosophical task [...] to help us cope with anxiety and despair in such a way that we can affirm *this* life in all its absurdity” (5, original emphasis). This absurdity of life and the human anxiety it instigates arise from existentialism's essentially nihilist stance toward meaning: the universe and our finite existence in it possess no inherent divine or rationally deductible meaning, value or purpose. Human life cannot be rationally justified, nor can any meaningful knowledge of the world or our identity be attained due to the existentialist assertion that

3 One example of this is Thomas Trezise's *Into the Breach* (1990), which is a downright post-structuralist critique on the applicability of a phenomenological approach to Beckett. This because of its disregard of the mediating sign, which arguably subverts the presence of a fixed subject. For a closer discussion and refutation of this theoretical attack on the possibility of a phenomenological reading of Beckett, see Stanton B. Garner's article 'Still Living Flesh': Beckett, Merleau-Ponty, and the Phenomenological Body' (1993: 443-447).

there exists no knowledge with any absolute sense to it.⁴

French existentialist philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) – who is generally regarded as the father of the modern existentialist movement – claims that existence is indeed prior to essence (Plessen 24). According to him, an emotional anguish or 'angst' is therefore wedded to our finite existence, because we are condemned to an absolute freedom and thus to the responsibility to design our own lives (Plessen 35). Hence, living 'authentically' is the acceptance of this existential responsibility and of the persistent self-formation of our identity by our choices and deeds (Plessen 36). Sartre's victory over the absence of meaning is thus rooted in the subject's construction of *personal* meaning and *subjective* truths on non-transcendent grounds. David Sherman, in an essay on absurdity, claims that suchlike choices are basically an altered version of the religious absurd act of putting one's faith in the non-provable existence of God (273). In the philosophy of French novelist and philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960), the recognition of the absurdity of life and the human suffering connected to it is the point of departure as well. However, differing from Sartre, he sees any 'leap' that creates meaning as a false consolation which is detrimental to the experience of absurdity. Instead, he proposes *living* the irrational relationship with the world (a stance developed in his 1942 essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*): the absurd man must ceaselessly revolt against all absurdity, while being fully aware that all his strivings are meaningless.

In general, these existentialist lines of thought concerning life's non-meaning and absurdity can be said to be present in Beckett's works as well.⁵ Nevertheless, I want to propose that Beckett takes on a broader perspective in the trilogy than interrogating the human condition as an isolated given (which I believe Sartre and Camus predominantly do). I wish to argue that his frame of reference is existence as a whole – against which every human individual or human action is of minor interest. In the trilogy, Beckett arguably attempts to go beyond the limits of our human existence to enter the sphere of that which exceeds us: the ever-changing totality of the flux of existence as whole. As we will see, it is impossible that this entirety can be known, grasped or explained in either language or conceptual thought. Yet, Beckett is arguably convinced that it can be

4 To make this epistemological idea more concrete, I want to compare it with receiving the doctor's diagnosis of your rare disease. When you are explained what is going on in your body, and what the causes of this are, this new knowledge still begs the *why*-question, because there is no *sense* to it. Malone's remark on Macmann's refusal of finding comfort in any kind of knowledge when terribly sick, expresses this idea of nonsense in the face of death perfectly: "[S]ticklers have been met with who had no peace until they knew for certain whether their carcinoma was of the pylorus or whether on the contrary it was not rather of the duodenum. But these are flights for which Macmann was not yet fledged, and indeed he was rather of the earth earthy and ill-fitted for pure reason" (*T* 243).

5 In the trilogy, the characters sometimes appear as helpless, despairing death-sentenced prisoners who are unable to find out why they were condemned for life. Although Beckett's writing may come through as a very bleak view on human existence, it does not have to entail the renunciation of living as such – as the above quote of Wrathall and Dreyfus already proposed. A life-affirming evaluation of Beckett's art is widespread and generally accepted. As Russell Smith stresses in his conference paper, 'Beckett, Negativity and Cultural Value' (1998), on Beckett's misanthropy and its broader cultural reception, the Nobel Prize Committee praised Beckett for having "transmuted the destitution of modern man into his exaltation," when awarding him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 (s.p.).

approached experientially via our corporeality. Correspondingly, I want to assert that the trilogy directs the reader as well toward this totality of being.

The third reason to focus on the subject of embodiment in the trilogy is the fact that Georges Bataille – a thinker who strongly foregrounds bodily materiality in his writings – was the first reader of Beckett in France to comment on *Molloy*. In his 1951 essay '*Le silence de Molloy*' (which was first published in *Critique* – a journal founded by Bataille), Bataille interprets *Molloy* as a renunciation of rational language and thought in order to expose the fundamentals of our being.⁶ In the essay, Bataille argues that Molloy makes the reader recognize that human beings are but inhuman wretches stuck in a repellent world (instead of believing in an allegedly elevated humanity); and that we are all bound to return to the formless anonymity and silence of the universe (instead of pretending that our existence as individuals is of any lasting significance).

Bataille's interest to comment on Beckett was not arbitrary: he found in Beckett a writer whose writing practice remarkably converged with his own ideas. In *Molloy*, Bataille detected a fierce rejection on Beckett's part of the human tendency to avoid all traces of death, a tendency he despised as well. Small wonder that right after Bataille's essay on *Molloy* was published, Beckett and Bataille met each other in person in Paris and exchanged texts and letters (Rabaté 56).⁷ In his writings, Bataille stresses that humans tend to avert themselves from bodily taboos – i.e. those things which are deemed obscene, immoral, disgusting, bawdy, filthy, vile or repellent about our bodies. Bataille is convinced that this strong human disapproval is anxiety-ridden, because its origin lies in man's attempt to evade the terrifying idea of death. However, for Bataille, the popular inclination not to confront taboos to the fullest is a downright charade, precisely because this attitude evades the *tragic* content of these taboos – i.e. the inevitability of our death. This is why Bataille glorifies the character Molloy:

[Molloy] monstrously indulges an incongruity, obscenity, and moral indifference that all mankind, in anguish, and ill by very virtue of its scruples, rejects. [...]. [T]his grotesque figure balanced miserably on his crutches represents the truth of our malady, a malady that follows us no less faithfully than our own shadow; it is our very dread of such a figure that conditions our human gestures, our well-groomed attitudes, and our crystal-clear phrases. By the same token this figure is in some sense the horizon into which the human show must ultimately fade, if only to shroud itself: oblivion, powerlessness. (*MS* 135, 138)

⁶ All further references are to the 1986 Grove Press edition of *Molloy's Silence*, abbreviated as *MS*.

⁷ Although Beckett could have read some of Bataille's work, there exists no conclusive proof for a direct Bataillean influence on Beckett's thinking before 1951. This thesis is thus best regarded as a Bataillean reading of Beckett which proves that their ideas had already converged independently of each other before they read each other's works and met each other, but also that a possible mutual influence of ideas after this moment might have taken place.

The 'obscene moral indifference' Bataille finds in Molloy is what enchants him. Bataille himself had already put similar convictions into practice in his own prose writings. In *Madame Edwarda* (1941)⁸, for example, the reader is taken on a sexually explicit adventure with a prostitute.⁹ However, Bataille's 'foul writing' must not be seen as a mere gratuitous pornographic shocking strategy. Rather, this style of writing reflects the conviction that the fundamentals of our existence are to be found in the extreme bodily experiences connected to taboos and the violation of these prohibitions. Correspondingly, I wish to found this thesis on the strong similarities between Beckett's and Bataille's ideas on embodiment in their writings.

However, to assume that Beckett attaches as much importance to the body as Bataille does, can at first appear to contradict the increasing disembodiment in the trilogy (and even in Beckett's oeuvre in general if we take into account the growing dephysicalization in his later works for theatre and radio after 1960.¹⁰ Indeed, although physicality is foregrounded many times in the trilogy, a reduction of physical presence is also at work, finding its culmination in the almost disembodied, ghost-like narrating voice in *The Unnamable*. One could draw the superficial conclusion that Beckett obliterates physicality in order to privilege the human mind. Nonetheless, I will argue against such an interpretation. I am convinced that Beckett, by 'destroying' the body, wants to draw the reader's attention to embodiment. However, to comprehend this line of thought, one must first be acquainted with Bataille's notion of *transgression* (or *inner experience*).

The concept of transgression can be introduced by making an analogy with Asja Szafraniec's post-structuralist comment on Beckett's fascination for the Italian poet and writer Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) – made in her book on language in Beckett's works, *Beckett, Derrida and the Event of Literature* (2007). In it, she points out that Dante saw the Biblical fall from paradise as a semantic punishment by which Adam's original unmediated knowledge and communication with God was abruptly altered into a relationship mediated by linguistic signs (173). The direct experience of God was now hindered by the mediation of language. Szafraniec draws our attention to Beckett's frustration with language as he expressed this in a 1937 letter to his friend Axel Kaun. In this letter, he stated that “language appears to [him] like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it” (173). According to me, this Dantean linguistic line of

8 All further references are to the 2012 Penguin edition of *Madame Edwarda*, abbreviated as *ME*.

9 Note that Bataille's choice for a prostitute character is a choice for a social outcast. This ties in with his thinking as a whole. For, similar to the mechanism of taboos which excludes all 'abject' features of the individual's body, such a character represents the social mechanism of contempt for those parts (people) of the social body who live below the norm of decency. Beckett's choice for a vagabond character like Molloy can also be seen in this regard.

10 For a closer discussion of the paradoxical development of dephysicalization/foregrounding of the body in Beckett's theatrical work, see George Hunka's article 'Access to the Body: The Theatre of Revelation in Beckett, Foreman, and Barker' (2010).

thought can be converted into a reflection on our fleshy existence in order to introduce how corporeality appears in Bataille's thinking – and by extension in Beckett's trilogy.

In essence, being 'given' a living body can be seen as something that also mediates a former direct intimacy with the formless flux of the totality of existence. In this frame of mind, the body is merely a temporary constellation of matter to endure a life into which we are suddenly thrown. By analogy with Szafranec's remarks, being born (or conceived) resembles the expulsion from paradise and life becomes a stay in the absence of God to be undergone. In Bataillean ontological terminology, being born is the fall out of the 'paradise' of the *continuity of being* (i.e. the undivided unity of the universe) into a bodily mediated *discontinuous* existence (i.e. our existence as self-contained individuals). For Bataille, the limitations of our isolated discontinuous state are a temporary “defect” (*Literature and Evil* 26).¹¹ Our embodiment could be said to limit us: it renders us mortal; it makes us conscious of this state; it obstructs a former state of non-being in which dying was impossible; it casts us in a (self-)defined space and time; and our perception ossifies and breaks up the flux of existence into particulars.¹²

John Fletcher's short essay 'Malone 'Given Birth to into Death' (1970), allows us to assume that a similar take on life is ubiquitous in Beckett's world. Fletcher states that, in *Malone Dies*, “[l]ife is everywhere seen as a punishment, a 'pensum' for [...] the sin of having been born” (59-60). In this context, Claire Lozier, in her study *De l'abject et du sublime: Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett* (2012), proposes links between the classic *vanitas* pictorial tradition (with its ethics of contempt for worldly existence) and Beckett's works' obsession with being dead, never having been born, and the body as a prison (213-214). In line with this, Bataille is convinced that we (unconsciously) harbor an innate desire to escape our mortal condition by seeking to retrieve the lost intimacy with the continuity of existence. However, the only way to actually return to continuity is the death of self. Yet, we are generally not willing to die for this end: “Continuity is what we are after, but generally only if that continuity which the death of discontinuous beings can alone establish is not the victor in the long run. What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain” (*Erotism: Death and Sensuality* 18-19).¹³

11 All further references are to the 1997 Marion Boyars edition of *Literature and Evil*, abbreviated as *LE*.

12 This idea of being embodied as a lapsarian state to be suffered is present in the views of the Spanish-Basque existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1865-1936) as well. In *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1911-1912), he states that life equals suffering, because man is grievously aware of the impossibility to be all and the lack of immortality while living (Martin 190). Being embodied is a continual frustration: de Unamuno even suggests that “it may be that our body was given us simply in order that suffering might be able to manifest itself” (ibid.).

13 All further references are to the 1986 City Lights Books edition of *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, abbreviated as *EDS*.

At this point, transgressive experience comes in. In transgressive experience, the subject can approximate the continuity of being without having to die physically. Our bodies and the taboos connected to them (e.g. bodily excrements and fluids, corpses or genitalia) provide us with this opportunity to transgress. Bataille states that when taboos – which delimit the forbidden, 'sacred' realm of death – are confronted, we can enter into *communication* with the totality of being. This experience thoroughly destabilizes our sense of being a stable discontinuous being. Our incarnated existence becomes the site which can make us 'intuit' our eventual unavoidable return to the formless overlap with the universal flux of matter. Thus, the body is indeed given a privileged ontological position in Bataille's view on transgression. For him, it is the instrument through which the subject can 'approach' continuity. When reading Bataille, it becomes apparent that he does not regard our body as an entity isolated from the 'exterior' world (cfr. infra 2.2.). In her article 'Erotic Experience and Sexual Difference in Bataille,' Zeynep Direk stresses this depersonalization *through* our bodies by summarizing the Bataillean body as “a communicative, non-separate being, embedded in the dynamic life of the cosmos [...] as an impersonal part of the biomass” (96).

In connection to this, Jean-Michel Rabaté, in his article 'Blanchot, Beckett, Bataille: From the Impossible to the Unknowing' (2012), further clarifies the said intellectual bond between Beckett and Bataille. He stresses that Bataille discovered a fellow original thinker who was also trying to undermine human categories in order to expose the “inhumanity of man” (56-57). In his short essay 'The Practice of Joy before Death' (1939), Bataille points out that this inhumanity sprouts from an annihilation of an assumed individual human self: “[B]efore the terrestrial world whose summer and winter order the agony of all living things [...] I can only perceive a succession of cruel splendors whose very movement requires that I die” (Bataille, qtd. in Rabaté 60-61). In Bataille's world of thought, humans arise as merely temporary, undefinable links which will vanish into continuous existence again, constituting a dynamic chain over time of which every living being in the material world is part. As Rabaté complements, Beckett also destroys, as Bataille does, all humanist values, such as an assumed individual existence or human agency (56-57). Humans are reduced to mere passive corporeal victims, subordinate to a gorging material world.

Most crucially, the imaginary promise of grasping continuity is nullified by the dispossession of self during the act of transgression. This provokes the hybrid stance toward transgression. Bataille explains: “Men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions: they are driven away by terror and drawn by an awed fascination. Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it” (*EDS* 68). Put differently: “Humanity pursues two goals – one, the negative, is to preserve life (to avoid death), and the other, the positive, is to increase the intensity of life” (*LE* 73). In Bataille's opinion, our human condition is tragic

because we harbor these two contradictory urges: we want to protect to our false feeling of autonomy our temporary discontinuous existence gives us, but at the same time we crave to be reunited with the essential continuity of being.

I believe the trilogy revolves around the impossible reconciliation of these two poles (discontinuity – continuity) for the subject. For Bataille, man is an *insufficient* being because of the limits set by its discontinuity. To counter the suffering from this insufficiency, humankind can adopt two hopeful strategies to pretend being sufficient: one can evade taboos and thus the risk of transgressing, in order to uphold a view of being an eternal, autonomous 'I' (i.e. an attempt to establish a continuous discontinuity); or one can believe to be able to identify the discontinuous 'self' with the entirety of the continuous whole, in an act of 'possessing' or 'knowing' the alleged object of continuity (i.e. an attempt to establish a discontinuous continuity). I purport that Beckett's trilogy develops itself along this tension. I want to ascertain that Beckett reformulates human subjectivity as inextricably intertwined with its continuous essence and its impossible passion to experience this continuity discontinuously. As such, the question of the increasing disembodiment in the trilogy can also be said to border on this same tension. Beckett does not go beyond the question of embodiment, but he instead forces us to re-evaluate our attitude toward being embodied. This re-examination of our identity consists in regarding our living body paradoxically as the portal to draw closer to the totality of existence of which it is but a transient part, but at the same time also as the insuperable obstacle to be *one* with that totality of existence.

By reading Beckett's trilogy as determined by a transgressive impetus, I want to prove two main hypotheses – which in their turn can be both developed on the level of the author/text and on the level of the reader's response to the text.¹⁴ First, I will argue that the trilogy makes human identity revolve around the opportunities for transgression that the body and the taboos connected to it give. This assertion can be situated on the level of the author and text (Beckett is convinced that transgression is possible and he constantly hints at this in his text). In addition to this, on the level of the reader, the trilogy can be said to cause the reader to experience his or her own transgressive experience (during the reading process itself, but also afterwards in the reader's own confrontations with somatic taboos). Secondly, I will argue that the repetition of transgressive experiences causes a disintegrating transformation of the subject's sense of its (bodily) self-identity and annuls all hope of being able to cure its insufficiency. Again, this disintegration takes place on the level of the text (the transformation is illustrated in the development of the successive characters of the trilogy), but can also manifest itself in the reader's own changing view of self. Structure-wise, the thesis is divided in

¹⁴ The text- and reader-part will not be dealt with separately, but are to be found in connection throughout this thesis.

two main sections: I will first develop my theoretical framework, after which I will apply it in my analysis of the trilogy in order to prove my above hypotheses.¹⁵

My theoretical framework consists of three parts. As a starting point of reference, I will briefly discuss Sartre's and Camus' specific existentialist and absurdist ideas. These authors have achieved canonical classic status because they were the first to ceaselessly attempt to present the human condition in their prose writings in all its purposelessness, emptiness and amorality. However, they in a way often confine human identity to the isolated, discontinuous individual – a view Beckett arguably deviates from. I believe he attempts to equate the human 'self' with the formless flux of the totality of existence (beyond personal meaning; beyond individual life and death) by foregrounding the (mystic) concept of transgression in his writing.¹⁶

The second part is the Bataille lens through which I want to read the trilogy. For this conceptual framework, I have chiefly based myself on his anthropological-philosophical study *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1957) and on his (more abstract) mystic-philosophical work *Inner Experience* (1954).¹⁷ Other writings that I rely on are his short story *Madame Edwarda* (1941), *Molloy's Silence* (1951) and *Literature and Evil* (1957). This part will be subdivided in five topics: the continuity and discontinuity of being; taboo and transgression; transgressive experience regarded as somatic sublimity in the tradition of the sublime; the inherent failure of transgression; and lastly the subject's indifference toward this failure and its own insufficiency (by a comparison with Kierkegaard's concept of religious repetition and the metaphor of the Biblical Job-figure).

The concluding part of my theoretical framework deals with existentialist phenomenology and its descriptive approach. First, I will delve into French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) take on subjectivity, as set out in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). His notion of the 'body-subject' permits me to consider sublime pre-rational and pre-verbal experience, by which the embodied subject is able to experience the material world *through* its body. After this, I will align literature with the phenomenological method of description to indicate how literature can function as an indirect means to lead the reader toward an experiential reality. For this, I will fall back on Bataille's 1957 study *Literature and Evil*, in which he develops the argument that 'literature of Evil' is a multilateral sacrificial event in which author, characters and reader engage.

15 For my theoretical framework, I will already rely upon quotes and fragments taken from the trilogy, as preparatory support for the argument I will develop.

16 Bataille's concept of transgression can be regarded as an ideosyncratic form of mysticism, as it is influenced by Western and Oriental mysticism. The Beckett-Bataille connection established by this thesis is endorsed by the fact that Beckett was familiar with the mystic tradition as well. He read mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, Thomas à Kempis and Julian of Norwich (Szafraniec 165-166).

17 All further references are to the 1988 State University of New York edition of *Inner Experience*, abbreviated as *IE*.

Having set up this framework, I will move on to my actual analysis of the trilogy. My argument is divided in two main parts. The first part illustrates the omnipresence of somatic taboos and the Beckettian transgression of the prohibitions they dictate. In order to confirm that transgression is ubiquitous in the trilogy, I will research three separate themes: sexuality (reproductive and erotic); the abjection of the body (the inherent animal nature of man; abject physical features; and the decaying body); and laughter as indicative of the resistance against transgression at first (comic laughter), but which can possibly evolve to an indication of the willingness to be submerged in inner experience and its implications (absolute/sovereign laughter).

The second part of my analysis investigates the characters' disintegrative transformation caused by the repetition of inner experience – as if the trilogy were an ironic inversion of a classic *Bildungsroman*. I wish to read every protagonist as a different manifestation of one narrating voice. In this regard, the succession of the consecutive characters allows me to read the trilogy as a coherent whole in which each novel prepares for the next one. This transition is determined by a succession of transgressive crises – i.e. moments because of which a character is forced to abandon former opinions, beliefs or hopes. As such, I will trace an increasing 'indifference' toward one's insufficiency. I will demonstrate how we move from Moran (defined by his anti-transgressive attitude and his illusory hope that he, as a discontinuous subject, is granted an eternal autonomy); to Molloy (defined by his hope that he, as a subject, should be able to 'know' continuity in order to equate his 'self' with 'it'); to the deathbed-ridden Malone (who functions as a transitional character, still hesitant to give himself up to a final indifference); and finally to the non-character of the unnamable (that, deprived of all hope, fully accepts the torment of suffering from insufficiency).

In sum, I will basically extend Bataille's fragmentary comments on *Molloy* to a consistent reading of the entire trilogy. Bataille's writing endeavors to infuse as much continuity as we can bear into our discontinuous consciousness. This writing performance derives from his ascertainment that humans avoid “the fundamental reality, which is always in front of us but which fear always separates us from, which we refuse to see and which we always strive to avoid being engulfed by” (*MS* 131). This infusion orients human identity toward the future annihilation of the self and proclaims “the identity between being and non-being” (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 125). Likewise, I believe the words in the trilogy attempt to intensify our anguish for the unknowable, by enveloping us tighter and tighter in their death shroud. Before we let ourselves be enwrapped, I can only advise the reader the line from Dante's *Inferno* that Bataille grants *Molloy* as its epigraph: “*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate*” [“Abandon all hope you who enter here”] (*MS* 135).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Beyond the Absurdity of Existence

Human beings, who long to be given reasons for their existence, suffer because the world does not speak. With this, I of course do not mean that humans are waiting for this to literally arrive one day, but the metaphor does founder all our efforts to say something meaningful in language about our existence. Man is a sense-craving being, but this desire is continually frustrated by our inability to attain any meaning on any solid grounds.¹⁸ Michael Kinnucan, in his essay 'Molloy' (2011) on Beckett's *Molloy*, states that, in the novel, language is presented as an accessory culprit and partial cause for our suffering (s.p.). Kinnucan argues that reason and speech can be seen as a human disease that makes us suffer under the compulsion to gain clarity about what we are doing in or with our lives – an effort, however, doomed to fail and end in incomprehension (s.p.). Framed this way, discursive language is nothing but babbling non-sense which impedes us from hearing the initial silence of existence. Consider Moran, who tries to pierce through this noise, in order to hear “beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made” (*T* 121).¹⁹ Nevertheless, the inability to distill absolute meaning out of the vast universe can bring man to an abyss of despair.

Sartre, in his first novel *La nausée* (1938), expresses this constant suffering: “The bare world showed itself all of a sudden, and I choked with anger against this big absurd being” (190, my translation). The novel is the diary of historian Antoine Roquentin who, by digging underneath his everyday occupations, gradually arrives at a nauseating feeling: “This morning, I took a bath, I shaved. Only, when I think of these little acts of care, I cannot understand how I was able to do them: they are so empty. They are habits, without doubt, who did them for me” (222, my translation). The habitual everyday occupations of society reveal themselves to him as unconscious, illusory essence-ascribing, which constantly denies that absolute meaning does not exist. This sudden awareness lays bare his existential condition. In his article 'Literary Existentialism' (1997 [1953]), Charles Glicksberg asserts that *La nausée's* protagonist's 'nausea' stems from the revelation that “the universe of matter is not interested in [his] fate [...], his aspirations or ideals, his suffering or his dreams” (3). Consequentially, Roquentin comprehends how every essence is created by man.

18 Nietzsche's renowned declaration at the end of the 19th century that 'God is dead' is an example of this conviction that there does not exist any metaphysical justification for human existence. In this mode of thinking, things just *exist* – because there is no teleological explanation for existence.

19 All further references are to the 1991 Grove Press edition of Beckett's *Trilogy*, abbreviated as *T* (herewith underlining this thesis' assumption that the trilogy is best read if read as one interconnected whole). (*Molloy* [7-176]; *Malone Dies* [179-288]; and *The Unnamable* [291-414]).

This renders his former justifications for his life as lived up till then imaginary. His feeling of nausea stems from his sudden absolute freedom: he is condemned to constantly construe his own personal essence and identity – a task which he can flee from, but not escape. In the concluding pages of the book, Roquentin expresses this belief that looking for personal meaning is a never-ending labor, when he suggests to himself to write a book: “So, can one justify its existence? A little bit? I feel extremely intimidated. I don't have a lot of hope. [...]. But can I not try... [...]. It should be a book: I don't know anything else. But not a history book: history, this talks about what has existed” (249-250, my translation). So, here, the anguish arising from the absurd contingency of existence is partly overcome by incessantly making existential choices and construing *subjective* values, without these ever becoming a foundation for the future. Sartre's logic does imply that a form of personal mastery or control can be obtained by an own willed self-interpretation and persistent self-formation.

In his 1942 essay *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus provides a different response to the absence of absolute meaning. As we can infer from this essay, Camus does not advocate Sartre's version of existentialism, because he does not try to escape the condition of the absurd by creating a belief in personal meaning. For Camus, it is a vain attempt to try to obtain any meaning out of the absurd predicament of life, because the situation of absurdity can never be overcome. However, this realization must not lead to suicide – the only “truly serious philosophical problem” for Camus (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 11). In the last part of his essay (107-111), Camus metaphorically compares the human condition with the mythological character Sisyphus. The Gods have condemned Sisyphus to push a rock to the top of a mountain, but he has to do this for eternity because the rock keeps falling down. Nevertheless, Sisyphus is the “absurd hero” (108), because he happily and passionately keeps rebelling against the absurdity of life by pursuing his repetitious task, while he knows that nothing will or can be accomplished. “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (111). In a paradoxical gesture of accepting and confronting the absurd, the absurd man passionately continues to live his purposeless life, “that series of unrelated actions [...] soon sealed by his death” (110), without any hope or further want for meaning.²⁰ This absurd condition must be confronted by the subject to the fullest – again and again.

Although Sartre and Camus differ in their views on human strivings, in Glicksberg's reading, both writers are also still conjoined in their conviction that a “passionate subjectivity [is] the basis of existence” (18). In contrast to this – although it is not my main intention to pinpoint similarities and differences between Beckett and various other existentialist or absurdist philosophers – I would like

²⁰ Remark that this purposelessness does not univocally exclude a particular 'faith' from Camus' thinking as a whole, nor does it dictate a nihilist morality. Because, when reading for example his novel *La peste* (1947), the 'faith' in solidarity with other human beings can be read in the novel as a value to strive for, frail as it may be.

to propose that the trilogy moves beyond the said concerns of Sartre and Camus. This because the novels contain Beckett's own "little private idea on the subject" of "life and death" (*T* 225). A reference to the myth of Sisyphus in *Molloy* points in this direction. I am convinced that it can be read as an indirect philosophical response to Camus' essay on Beckett's behalf which expresses his discontent with it.²¹ Doing so, Beckett subtly hints at what is going on in the trilogy. More specifically, I believe that Jacques Moran – the central character of the second part of *Molloy* – scorns the limitations of the existentialist occupation with (the absurdity of) human existence. He does this by presenting his own striving of setting out for the horizon of the human self, behind which the continuity of existence as a whole lies (here referred to as 'the Molloy country').

[...] I shall say what little I knew, on leaving my home, about the Molloy country, so different from my own. For it is one of the features of this penance that I may not pass over what is over and straightway come to the heart of the matter. [...]. And it would not surprise me if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events. But I do not think even Sisyphus is required to scratch himself, or to groan, or to rejoice, as the fashion is now, always at the same appointed places. And it may even be they are not too particular about the route he takes provided it gets him to his destination safely and on time. And perhaps he thinks each journey is the first. This would keep hope alive, would it not, hellish hope. Whereas to see yourself doing the same thing endlessly over and over again fills you with satisfaction. (*T* 133)

What Molloy deems inadequate here is, according to me, the current 'fashion' of 'they' (certain existentialist/absurdist philosophers, *in casu* Sartre and Camus) who let their endeavor revolve around the human subject in 'the same appointed places' (i.e. the world of discontinuous existence).²² Indeed, Sartre's 'solution' – which can be said to display a 'hellish hope' by suggesting an always to be renewed leap into an illusory individual meaning – seems to be abandoned in the trilogy. Likewise, Camus' ambiguous rejoicing revolt against and satisfaction with the absurd meaninglessness of life is not what is principally at stake in the trilogy. Although Camus annuls all hope of succeeding in creating any meaning, and instead proposes to embrace the absurd human condition until death, he as well, like Sartre, still clings to an assumed humanity. I do believe an incessant impetus comparable to Sisyphus' efforts (a constant movement toward an unattainable goal) can be found in the trilogy, but on a level exceeding the confines of the subject's actions. I think that Beckett, like Bataille, sees the absurd human condition as a too narrow – perhaps even tedious – point of interest. The experience of absurdity propels the author to set out for the horizon

²¹ *Molloy* was written between 1946-1950, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* was published in 1942.

²² In *Malone Dies* – in what appears to refer back to Moran's Sisyphus passage in *Molloy* – Malone also disdains the everyday occupation with our discontinuous existence in the 'world of work' (cfr. *infra* 2.2.): "[I]n the corridors of the underground railway [was] the stench of their harassed mobs scurrying from cradle to grave to get to the right place at the right time" (*T* 226).

of individuality by trying to transgress the world of discontinuity.²³

I want to argue that the trilogy's characters (who are, as I mentioned in the introduction, different manifestations of one narrating voice) display a dispassionate attitude – in contrast to the aforementioned passionate subjectivity advocated by Sartre and Camus. Put differently, the will to control their individual existence progressively falls apart. For Camus, in the context of Sisyphus' task, the 'satisfaction' mentioned at the end of the above quote stems from Sisyphus' mastery over the explanatory confines of his condition. He can live happily in a world devoid of meaning, because of his passionate dedication to meaningless, particular matters. Camus gives other examples, next to Sisyphus, of absurd men that have found a good way to *live* the absurd: Don Juan (66-73) who repetitiously dedicates himself to the search for total everlasting love without any hope of finding it; or the actor of drama (73-79) who stages ephemeral lives, indifferent to the fact that his own performances of these will leave no permanent trace. In contrast to this, I contend that the trilogy proposes a repetition of the transgressive act. The effect of which is that subject's attachment to all discontinuous concerns is increasingly ridiculed. For, the ever failing transgressive attempt to transcend our discontinuous subjectivity completely and be one with the continuity of existence (which can be found in the trilogy) is not without effect: the character's identity becomes defined by transgression over time; an increasing indifference toward all particulars connected to the discontinuous state of being grows in force (cfr. *infra* 2.2.4. and 2.2.5.).

In sum, I want to ascertain that Beckett dares to set out for the region existentialists like Sartre and Camus shun: the sublime region of transgression. Moran affirms my assumption in the lines immediately following upon the previous quote: “By the Molloy country I mean that narrow region whose administrative limits he [Sisyphus] 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” (*T* 133). The frame of reference in the trilogy is not the construed stable world of human society with well-defined subjects in it; nor the question of (personal) meaning; nor man's attempt to find personal self-identity. It is the Bataillean flux of material existence as a whole, which annihilates every humanistic concern. In this sense, the trilogy exhibits mankind's fall from the flanks of the mountain of humanity, which metaphysical reasoning erects. This fall into the ludicrousness of the base condition of material embodiment takes place if a subject crosses certain 'administrative limits': i.e. when one stands on the trapdoor of taboos ...

23 Yet, the 'project' of transgression will lead toward another 'absurd' situation, as I will show in 2.2.4. and 2.2.5.

2.2. Georges Bataille

I will not attempt to give an introductory summary of Bataille's oeuvre as a novelist, anthropologist, art critic, sociologist and philosopher. Rather, this section will touch upon those key concepts encountered in my selective reading of Bataille that are, according to me, indispensable and revelatory to analyze the trilogy as revolving around transgressive inner experience.²⁴ I will first elucidate the relationship between the *discontinuity and continuity of being*; then *taboos* in connection with *transgression*; thirdly transgressive experience as an ideosyncratic, somatic variant of the *sublime*; after this I will treat the *failure of transgression*; and lastly I will explain how the concept of *indifference* ties in with the previous. I will already exemplify the applicability of these notions to Beckett's art, by supporting them with quotes extracted from the trilogy.

2.2.1. *The Continuity and Discontinuity of Being*

As an ontological starting point, it is necessary to explain Bataille's base materialist view on the universe. For him, a neutral, purposeless material 'violence' is the basis of the entirety of existence. Although Bataille does not give an univocal definition of this violence, we can conceptualize it as the excessive, meaningless, destructive violence at the heart of everything, and, most importantly, in which humans take part as well. “[N]ature [is] a squandering of living energy and an orgy of annihilation,” a “devilish cycle” of birth and death, of creation and destruction that uses up all living beings (*EDS* 60, 61).²⁵ Existence as a whole is a voracious and prodigal flux in which all beings – plants, insects, animals, humans – partake as passive victims and are eventually swallowed up to generate new life. Death and reproduction reign as a unity: life feeds on destruction. Surplus energy is constantly used up to create new life: plants get eaten by insects; insects by animals; animals by other animals; animals and plants by man; man by worms and insects; etc. (*EDS* 60). Formulated alternatively by Malone: “What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles” (*T* 185). Or, because defecation is manure, Malone also remarks that “[his] arse [...] can hardly be accused of being the end of anything” (*T* 235).

Bataille uses the term 'continuity of being' to refer to this ontological interconnected unity. The universe is a constant *becoming*: 'death' and 'reproduction' constitute the fundamental unity of

²⁴ I have used and will continue to use 'inner experience' and 'transgression' as interchangeable synonyms, although in Bataille's writings the former appears in *Inner Experience* as a notion in more abstract terms, while the latter is used as a more concrete, communal anthropological given in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*.

²⁵ This viewpoint of Bataille is reminiscent of mystical views such as for example Shiva's dance of destruction and re-creation in Hinduism. Note what a splendid name *Bataille* is (in French), in relation to man's futile battle against the destructive nature of existence.

the renewal of life. Existence is a materially propelled whole, constantly generating and destroying. It is a constant useless expenditure of matter to perpetuate the ceaseless arrival of new life; a contingent material flux; an incessant succession of birth and death; a “world collapsing endlessly” (*T* 40), in Moran's formulation.

For Bataille, the continuity of existence as a whole is synergetic: this entirety exceeds the sum of its constituting parts (*IE* 85). These 'parts' are what Bataille calls the 'discontinuity of being': the unities which come into existence as a temporary constellation of matter, live a while, die off and eventually vanish into the continuity of existence again. We could say that the continuity of being is the origin and end of all discontinuous beings. Yet, while being alive they never overlap with this totality of continuity. Bataille argues that even on the smallest scale, an incessant transition from discontinuity to continuity is going on: for example, in cellular division, the original discontinuous cell ceases to exist in order to give way to two new discontinuous ones (*EDS* 13, 95-97). Regarded this way, a discontinuous being's conception/birth and death can be seen as mere interruptions which respectively tear it away from and bring it back to the continuity of existence.

Bataille also employs the term 'discontinuity' to stress that each being is temporarily distinct from any other. Giving the example of human beings, he states that man “is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity” (*EDS* 12). Yet, because of the synergetic prevalence of the whole, all discontinuous beings could be said to be essentially continuous. Viewed as such, no discontinuous being fundamentally exists as a particular, because it is an inseparable part of the immanence of continuity. As a consequence, construing any form of hierarchy between different parts of the whole would also be false, because it would deny the equality of all beings in their future expenditure. We find this idea in *Malone Dies*, in the character of Macmann, when “suddenly all swam before his eyes” (*T* 244), because he, when working as a gardener, “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” (*ibid.*).

This materialist flux as point of departure also has repercussions for the philosophical mode of thinking to adopt. Along these lines, John Caputo, in his study *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987), condemns any attempt of speculative metaphysical philosophy to elevate itself above the motion of the flux by ossifying it with human reasoning and fixed essences.²⁶ For him, the radical difficulty of life and the gaps in being that arise from the flux must be kept open and not subverted. Therefore, a philosophical consideration of human existence must depart from any form of misplaced

²⁶ Caputo finds examples of this in the speculative thinking of Plato or Hegel, who for him wrongly ascribe fixed essences to constant temporal becoming, still its movement and as such remove themselves from the flux (13-21).

subjectivism and humanism (Caputo 6). This is exactly the path that Bataille's philosophical works – and arguably Beckett's art as well – take.

As mentioned, one conclusion to be drawn from Bataille's proposed material equality between all discontinuous beings is that the human condition should not be elevated above that of animals. As such, it is better to speak of non-human animals and human animals. “There is horror in [human] being: this horror is repugnant animality, whose presence I discover at the very point where the totality of being takes form” (Bataille, *The Accursed Share II*, qtd. in Privitello 177). A similar realization of man's primordial animality and animal-like position in the entirety of existence slowly seems to be kicking in with Moran, when petting his neighbors' dog through a railing:

[The dog] did not realize he disgusted me. He reared up on his hind legs and pressed his chest against the bars. Then I could see his little black penis ending in a thin whisp of wetted hair. He felt insecure, his hams trembled, his little paws fumbled for purchase, one after the other. I too wobbled, squatting on my heels. With my free hand I held on to the railings. Perhaps I disgusted him too. I found it hard to tear myself away from these vain thoughts. (T 105)

Both creatures are obviously mirrored because of their physical similarity. Moran's initial disgust for the dog is of course also ironically inversed by the dog's disgust for Moran, because this proclaims the latter's underlying abject animality (e.g. the penis, cfr. 2.2.2.). Nevertheless, in this fragment, a major difference between humans and animals is also present in the first sentence. According to Bataille, this difference arose during the evolutionary transition from animal to man: man became a rational animal and developed language and self-consciousness.²⁷ This human rational discontinuous consciousness had a profound effect: mankind could now live at odds with the flux of continuity.

First, by grace of language, humans were able to particularize the immanent flux of the world by breaking it up in different discernible entities. Reason thus induced mankind to bring an artificial order to a primal chaos, by naming it with language, and thereby ascribing a false stability to it. Bataille adheres to this point of view and finds an ally in Beckett's *Molloy* for his conviction that language automatically arrests the fundamental flux of being. For example, he describes Beckett's shared disavowal of the illusory nature of language as follows: “Language calcifies that calculated world which our culture, our activities, our very edifices make manifest in the domain to which we attach significance, but it does so at the cost of reducing our culture, our activities, and habitations to one and the same level” (MS 133). This rejection of the ossifying effects of language can be found in

²⁷ Bataille does not fix an exact historical period for this transition, but he does address the first use of stone tools or Neanderthal man's taboos regarding burials as decisive evolutions (*EDS*, e.g. 83-84).

the entire trilogy as well. We find this idea, reduced to its essence, in the unnamable's remark on its own use of the word 'silence' – a word with which I think the unnamable here refers to the flux of continuity²⁸: “[T]he simple use of this mighty word alone” “stops the rot” (*T* 376). Elsewhere, the unnamable, in its fierce refusal to be some kind of slavish parrot, phrases the pernicious, inescapable effects of being brought up with language as “a poor trick that consists in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can't bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed” (*T* 324).

Secondly, in addition to the rational illusion created by language, Bataille claims that human self-consciousness had a thorough impact on the view of self as well. Ben Brewer, in his article 'Unsayings Non-Knowledge: Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Writing' (2013), explains that a human, because of his discontinuous particularization of the continuous unity of existence, also started to perceive an apparent distinction between himself as a subject and the surrounding objects in the world outside of him (118-119). So, the operation of 'discontinuizing' not only allows humans to produce a particularized world, but also to experience and carve out a stable, separate identity for themselves – a sensation which is however false because it only exists by means of human consciousness. In his 1992 study *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (an Essay in Atheistic Religion)*, Nick Land sets forward that Bataille constantly calls into question this discontinuous mode of consciousness, because for him it engenders a “transcendent illusion” that is at odds with the base materialism of existence as a whole (Land, qtd. in Brewer 119). This gap between the rational mind and the material world causes the false belief a human discontinuous creature cherishes of being an isolated 'self.' Formulated differently by Bataille: the discontinuous being “believe[s] in the immortality of his separate existence [and] looks upon his 'soul', his discontinuity, as the deepest truth of his own being” (*EDS* 98).

In sum, because of its cognitive capability of language and reason, mankind became stuck with a mode of consciousness that constantly elevates the mind above the world of immanence.²⁹

28 That the unnamable indeed connects the word 'silence' here with the continuity of being can be inferred from the fact that, on the same page, silence is described as that “from which supposedly he came, to which he will return when his act is over, he doesn't know what it is, nor what he is meant to do” (*T* 376).

29 Note that I will use the word 'immanence' from now on not in its epistemological meaning of 'that which is available to consciousness', but as the ontological notion of 'continuity' as constitutive of the universe. Following from Bataille's conviction that man belongs to the instable 'order' of material things, he also believes that to differentiate between body and mind is a false distinction (M. Richardson, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings* 12). In this regard, we can trace Nietzsche's influence on Bataille's view on totality. Bataille read Nietzsche and wrote about him (see for example *Sur Nietzsche* (1945) or the references in *Inner Experience*). Walter Kaufman, in his study *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1968), explains how Nietzsche also states that the human 'flesh' and 'spirit' can never be entirely separated (260-261). Construing a breach between these two terms therefore constitutes a false dichotomy created by language (*ibid.*). For Nietzsche, any analysis of human existence must assume a fundamental correspondence with the world of animals and plants, because he believes that the entire universe is governed by one basic force, which he calls the 'will to power' (*ibid.*).

This way, being is infused with a transcendent stability that it does not possess.³⁰ It is this deceptive state of affairs which Bataille condemns, because “[b]eing is 'ungraspable'. It is only 'grasped' in error; the error is not easy – [...] it is the condition of thought” (*IE* 82). As a consequence, for Bataille, language and thought always offend the uncontainable flux of the totality of existence:

There is in nature and there subsists in man a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order. We are generally unable to grasp it. Indeed it is by definition that which can never be grasped, but we are conscious of being in its power: the universe that bears us along answers no purpose that reason defines. (*EDS* 40)

What is of crucial importance for my argument is that Bataille fiercely condemns the refusal to apply the above basic traits of existence to human life as well and acknowledge that humans also partake in an ever-changing material world:

On a comprehensive view, human life strives towards prodigality to the point of anguish, to the point where the anguish becomes unbearable. The rest is mere moralising chatter. How can this escape us if we look at it dispassionately? Everything proclaims it! A febrile unrest within us asks death to wreak its havoc at our expense. (*EDS* 60)

With this, we have arrived at a third (besides language and self-consciousness) fundamental difference between humanity and the animal world: human intelligence and self-awareness have lead to the consciousness of the fact that we will die (Bataille, *IE* 71). Bataille underlines that anguish for death is a exclusively a characteristic of human consciousness (*IE* 35). However, by grace of our discontinuous system of thought, we are also able to make 'death' into a distinct category – which in its turn enables us to push it away from our consciousness: “[T]o speak, to think [...] is to dodge existence: [...] it is to enter the extinguished and calm world in which we usually linger: there everything is suspended, life is put off until later [...]. [T]hought in me *suspends* anguish; I am the being gifted with the power to *suspend* within him being itself” (Bataille, *IE* 46, original emphasis). What is more, Bataille is convinced that humans have erected a “world of work, of project” that not only obscures man's inherent animality, but also constantly evades the anguish inspired by our mortality (Boldt, Introduction to *IE* xi). In other words, human “[s]ociety is governed by its will to survive” (Bataille, *LE* 18).

Mankind found a way to evade its death-anxiety: a 'profane world' (which was founded on rational principles such as stability, work, utility and productive activity) was organized:

³⁰ Compare this to the observer effect in quantumphysics, where phenomena are determined by the act of observation.

Man is the animal that negates nature: he negates it through labour, which destroys it and changes it into an artificial world; he negates it in the case of life-creating activity; he negates it in the case of death. [...]. The forms of animality were excluded from a bright world which signified humanity. These forms, however, could only be denied fictitiously. (Bataille, *The History of Eroticism*, in *The Accursed Share*, qtd. in M. Richardson 16)

According to Bataille, the profane human sphere allows humans to deny the continuity of being: we can push away a constant awareness of death by postponing the idea of dying to the future (Boldt, Introduction to *IE* xi). Because the rational world of work is founded on accumulation and being productive, it artificially infuses the world with the principles of utility and future goals to be achieved. Direk helps elucidate Bataille's view on the mechanism governing this rational world of project: productive work is based on an increase of resources in the light of future goals (98). This specific human temporal construction allows mankind to constantly distance itself from the present moment, in function of the primacy of the future (98). Regarded from this perspective, an artificial intelligibility is created in order to fulfill self-imposed goals to which humans then attach a transcendent content or meaning. Basically, human society is a transcendent denial of the permanent meaningless consumption which governs the universe, and which governs humans as well.

Before I move on to a closer inspection of this profane world and Bataille's accompanying ideas on taboos and transgression, I already quickly want to illustrate Beckett's arguable compliance with the aforementioned Bataillean ideas. Consider, for example, Beckett's renowned essay *Proust* (1930), in which he identifies his concerns along those of French novelist Marcel Proust (1871-1922) who also investigated the relationship of the inner self with the material world around him in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). In this essay, Beckett defends the untenability of the common belief of being a stable, impermeable 'self' (which is a bias due to man's mental makeup):

Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability [...]. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; *the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness* [...]. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. [...] [T]he pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attentions, drugs those handmaidens of perception whose cooperation is not absolutely essential.³¹ (*Proust*, qtd. in Esslin 59-60, emphasis added)

31 In her article 'The Voice and Its Words: 'How it is'' (1986), Judith Dearlove outlines different phases in Beckett's oeuvre. She frames the trilogy as the end of Beckett's first phase in which he still lamented this dissociation of the workings of the mind from the material world (150-152).

In the trilogy as well, Molloy seems to affiliate with the opinion that man's apparent isolation is but a 'transcendent illusion,' when he explains what amuses him in the science of anthropology:

Yes, I once took an interest in astronomy, I don't deny it. Then it was geology that killed a few years for me. The next pain in the balls was anthropology and the other disciplines, such as psychiatry, that are connected with it, disconnected, then connected again, according to the latest discoveries. 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 horribly confused, for my knowledge of men was scant and the meaning of being beyond me. (*T* 39)

Beginning from an astronomical macro-perspective and then descending to the geological level, I believe Molloy, when coming to the human micro-perspective (i.e. anthropology), indirectly raises objections against considering man as a distinct topic for research in a distinct study area – and not in the perspective of the previous levels. In other words, Molloy criticizes society for not viewing the human sort as merely a part of the material world on a micro-level (especially so since, at the time of Beckett's writing, psychiatry had already been influenced by the neurologically oriented study of the brain). Failing to do so, the materiality of man is indeed negated (i.e. 'the definition of man in terms of what he is not'), and the discontinuous conception of the human 'self' as an isolated being can indeed be said to become similar to that of God: a transcendent invention.³²

Likewise, Malone, in a long digression on a hat and a coat and “their decay” (*T* 227), rejects the human tendency to elevate man's individual being above the material world: “[I]t is a pleasure to find oneself again in the presence of one of those immutable relations between harmoniously perishing terms and the effect of which is this, that when weary to death one is almost resigned to – I was going to say to the immortality of the soul, but I don't see the connection” (*T* 229).

A last fragment from the trilogy I want to address here forcefully illustrates again man's inescapable, imminent annihilation. Molloy's contemplation on a garden pulls him down to the level of the plant world and proclaims his similarity to an inanimate material entity:

32 My interpretation of Molloy's words assumes that his 'liking' of anthropology is an ironic distancing himself from the 'wrong definition' of man upheld by humankind.

However, Molloy's indication of defining 'God in terms of what he is not' can also be interpreted as a reference to the mystic *via negativa* of negative theology (i.e. an attempt to experience God as a void or an absence by constantly negating ['unsaying'] every proposition about God). In chapter seven of her already mentioned post-structuralist study *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature*, Asja Szafraniec explains that Beckett's negating discourse is an attempt to express 'Nothingness,' bearing resemblance to the *via negativa* that comes closer to God by an endless negation, although God can never become present (161-182). For the trilogy, this strategy is most obvious in the unnamable's proposition to work by “affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered” (*T* 291) because “I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak” (ibid.).

Although language is not my research topic, it can be argued that the *via negativa* is indirectly present in my research: in my argument, the trilogy acknowledges the ineffability of continuity, but does want to keep on approaching 'it' by repeating inner experience. Viewed differently, continuity is thus expressed by the repetition of an experience that is *not* the normal discontinuous experience of the world. This way, the illusory appearance of discontinuity – although it can never be shed – is increasingly affirmed (cfr. *infra* 2.2.4.).

Men were always busy there [in the garden], working at I know not what. For the garden seemed hardly to change, from day to day, apart from the tiny changes due to the customary cycle of birth, life and death. And in the midst of those men I drifted like a dead leaf on springs, or else I lay down on the ground, and then they stepped gingerly over me as though I had been a bed of rare flowers. Yes, it was doubtless in order to preserve the garden from apparent change that they laboured at it thus. [...]. [I was] looking at it [the garden] as it shrivelled up and finally disappeared, like the famous fatal skin, only much quicker. (*T* 52)

Apart from aptly expressing the constant gush of life followed by death and Molloy's part in this cycle as a human being, this fragment also testifies to the human world of work (the men working in the garden serve as *pars pro toto*). In this everyday world with its rational occupations, mankind tries to evade being confronted with the destructive flux of being and is obsessed with the preservation of life. In order to fully comprehend the previous line of thought, I need to turn to Bataille's concepts of taboos and transgression.

2.2.2. *Taboos and Transgression*

As explained in 2.2.1., the principle of productivity (i.e. the useful employment of resources) governing the world of work and reason obscures the meaningless expenditure of energy of existence as a whole and constantly postpones man's awareness of his death. Man wants to obscure his death-to-come, because “[t]he most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being” (Bataille, *EDS* 16). Yet, in order to protect the profane world's will to survive and prevent man of being reminded of his final collapse, certain accompanying cultural prohibitions and restrictions arose as well (i.e. 'forbidden' things or 'taboos'). These taboos try to cover up and shield off the traces of the violence of continuity which constantly hurls being into nothingness and which thus threatens every discontinuous being. Consequentially, somatic matters directly connected to sexual activity and death – the border regions of 'coming into being' and 'disappearance of being' which together constitute the transition moments in the useless cycle of life and death – became the two primary universal taboos.

Yet, all bodily matters that are connected to the unproductive consuming totality of continuity became taboos to a certain degree. Urine, feces, rotting entities, vomit, genitalia, dead bodies or (menstrual) blood repel humans as well, because these things are all linked to the horror of existence: the constant consumption of material that always ends in collapse, decay and decomposition. Taboos make us nauseous because they all imply death (Bataille, *LE* 17). Taboos in vigor attempt to distance man from the realization that life constantly devours that which it has

produced – especially man's own discontinuous existence.³³ In Bataille's words: the profane world “removed the object of the taboo from our consciousness by forbidding it, and at the same time deprived our consciousness – our full consciousness, at any rate – of the movement of terror whose consequence was the taboo” (*EDS* 38). Hence, the human cluster of taboos is basically a defense mechanism which protects the idea of our discontinuous mode of being as something autonomous; taboos prevent that contra-experiences of our sense of individuation take place.

For Bataille, the aversion humans feel before taboos is something artificial and not natural or innate. In the first place because rational thinking was the prerequisite for taboos to arise, but also because our relationship with taboos is a human cultural product of socialization passed on incessantly over many generations from parents to their children (*EDS* 58).³⁴ Yet, Bataille also maintains that humans tend to forget this (*ibid.*). These cultural taboos can serve as a safe haven, if they are slavishly obeyed as absolutes. However, Bataille is convinced that the law taboos dictate can be 'violated' (or 'transgressed'). This act can provoke a sensation in which death is 'set free' and which can lead to an experience that disrupts the subjugation to the established order and equilibrium of the profane world of human discontinuity (*Direk* 98). When the disgust and anguish we feel when confronted with taboos (and the awareness of death they induce) is pushed to its limits, we can open up this ecstatic abyss of death, because, as Bataille claims, “[m]en as discontinuous beings try to maintain their separate existences, but death, or at least the contemplation of death, brings them back to continuity” (*EDS* 83).

What is more, Bataille believes that this transgression of our everyday discontinuous mode of being and of the habitual structures of society is not merely a possibility, but actually defines man's nature: it is a forceful human instinct appertaining to man's longing for continuity. The fact that we are shocked by taboos, but can also be strangely fascinated by them, attests to this hybrid desire for continuity without dying biologically. This tension is aptly formulated by Bataille in his introduction to *Erotism*:

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (*EDS* 15)

³³ Note that eating plants or animal meat is not a taboo. Yet, the egestion of feces and eating human meat are generally speaking subject to taboos, although in varying degrees.

³⁴ Here, Bataille disregards possible biological-evolutionary explanations that state that keeping away from, for example, a cadaver could be a defense mechanism, a biological reflex, to prevent contagion by diseases.

Bataille's concern is exactly to situate humankind in the light of its two contradictory and mutually exclusive passions: our desire to exist as discontinuous, autonomous beings and our desire to embrace the continuity of existence (cfr. *infra* 2.2.4.).

Bataille's preferred example of a transgressive act – addressed numerous times in *Erotism* – is an actual (human, animal or even plant) sacrifice. At the time of the beginnings of mankind's history, taboos were not regarded as all-powerful dictates. They rather functioned as a law on which a discontinuous, rational order was built, but these ancient societies were aware that the order could be violated. As John Gregg explains in the preamble of his study *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (1994), Bataille claims that sacrificial violence was a periodically allowed, organized and actively pursued “legal crime” (12) in ancient societies – during for example Dionysian religious festivals which counteracted the Apollonian paradigms of the rational world (*ibid.*). These 'sacred' sacrificial festivals – based on feelings of awe for what subsisted behind the taboo of death – broke the laws of the rational world in order to regain the lost intimacy with continuity. Bataille contends that man, in its “instinctive tendency towards divine intoxication” (*LE* 22), acts against the principle of the future's prevalence and against the paradigm of survival that the rational world of 'Good' and 'morality' proclaims (*ibid.*). Indeed, a possible way of looking at a sacrifice is to frame it as a useless expenditure of resources (i.e. of the sacrificial victim).

In order to elucidate what exactly happens in a sacrificial event, Gregg's summary of Bataille's interpretation of human sacrifice is helpful again. In Gregg's terminology, a human sacrificial event is a beholding of a “simulacrum” (14), and an “initiation to death” (13) which gives the onlookers the possibility of a “vicarious experience of [their own] death” (*ibid.*). By beholding the death of another discontinuous being, the executioner and the community gathered around are given a glimpse at death, because they identify with the victim (14). The onlookers thus become receptive for the implied danger behind the taboo of the dead body: the menace of their own death. “[W]hat the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one” (Bataille, *EDS* 22). A sacrificial event basically brings a feeling of continuity into the discontinuous world. Clearly, it involves religious sentiment. The goal of a sacrifice seems to be to attain an ecstatic state of contact with the continuity of being, in order to counteract every being's isolation with that which binds all discontinuous beings.

However, even more crucially, this ritualistic limit-experience also violates the beholders' idea of death as a discontinuous category belonging to the individual. This because none of the beings participating in the sacrifice (both executioner, onlookers and victim, united in their shared mortality) is able to appropriate the death that occurred (Gregg 14). I will come back to the

consequences of this in more detail when I deal with the failure of transgression in 2.2.4.

I believe this sacrificial fascination is ubiquitous in the trilogy as well – confirming again the close association between Bataille's and Beckett's interests. Hints that Beckett believes in a similar 'transgressive' experience can already be found in his essay on Proust, where he also claims that there exist “dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious, and fertile” sensations for the individual, moments when “the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being” (*Proust*, qtd. in Esslin 59). In the trilogy, one clear illustration of this is a scene in which Molloy runs over a dog with his bicycle, as a sort of unintentional executioner, after which the animal dies. Importantly, Molloy is of the opinion that the woman, Mrs. Lousse, to whom the dog belonged, “must have thought she had left nothing to chance, so far as the safety of her dog was concerned, whereas in reality she was setting the whole system of nature at naught” (*T* 32). This remark endorses the Bataillean idea that every attempt to protect a discontinuous being (the dog in this case) from the workings of nature is nothing but an illusory consolation. Hence, the death of the dog (its so-called return to continuity) gains the quality of a sort of sacrificial event. Further support for this interpretation we find in Molloy's assistance of the woman when she buries her dog. In this scene (*T* 36) – if we consider the burial to be an extension and closure of the sacrificial event – Molloy clearly assumes a role similar to that of an onlooker of a sacrifice who identifies with the victim: “[W]hat was my contribution to this burial? It was she dug the hole, put in the dog, filled up the hole. On the whole I was a mere spectator. I contributed in my presence. As if it had been my own burial. And it was.” (*T* 36).

Another example in case is Big Lambert (a neighbor in Malone's story about Sapo), a pig-slaughterer who works with old “methods preferred to those of younger men” (*T* 200). He is obsessed with the pigs he kills “without haste” (*T* 201) and with their ensuing death-struggles. Afterwards he is “drunk and exhausted by [...] the emotions of the day” (*T* 200). Equally telling is the fact that he wears an apron over his Sunday suit, as if he is keenly aware that he is disobeying the anti-transgressive dictates of his Christian beliefs (cfr. *infra*).³⁵ Moreover, Malone remarks that these pigs are “dispatched, [he] would say into the other world if [he] was not aware that pigs have none but this” (200). Herewith, Malone of course voices the rather common acceptance that animals have no 'soul.' However – if we take into account the material equality of man and animal Bataille proposes and the physical similarity between pigs and humans (see 3.1.2.), to which I believe Beckett adheres as well – the reader indirectly understands that believing the contrary for humans is also erroneous.

35 We can assume that Big Lambert is a Christian because he connects the month of December with Jesus' birth (*T* 200). He also displays other heretic behavior: e.g. he was married a couple of times, even with a cousin of his (*T* 199).

If we return to Bataille's transgressive theory, the importance of the just mentioned factor of Christianity as obstructive for transgression becomes clear. Because, in regard to the possibility of (communal) transgressions, Bataille fiercely condemns Christianity. According to him, Christianity has killed the spirit of transgression by transforming taboos into absolutes and thus forbidding organized transgressions (*EDS* 117-128). In Christianity's longing for continuity – and thus escape the limits of the discontinuous individual – it ironically banished all acts of excess that are transgressive. Christianity tried to transcend the violence of existence as a whole by transforming our discontinuous existence into a continuity governed by the infinite love of a creative – not a destructive – God (*EDS* 118-119). Furthermore, for its intended victory over the annihilating violence of the world, an illusory “atomisation of totality” (*EDS* 120) took place which impeded desubjectification, because the totality of being was wrongly limited to an eternal structure of separate beings (*ibid.*). Indeed, Christianity established a sort of continuous discontinuity by contriving the fable of the immortality of discontinuous beings (*ibid.*). Humans were told that they lived on eternally as individuals (as 'souls') – but only ended up in Heaven on the condition that they obeyed taboos (*ibid.*). This way, transgressive behavior became an absolute sacrilege and sin. It was relegated to the realm of (the) '(D)evil.' Religious experience and sacredness was limited to a denial of the violence of the universe; only the creative/productive world of 'G(o)od' was advocated as realm to abide by. By obeying the prohibitions taboos dictate, the Christian's illusory hope to uphold his or her allegedly autonomous discontinuous state was kept in place. This way, Christianity reduced divine continuity to its life-giving aspects and contrived a personal afterlife; and it negated its destructive side in the forbidden realm of the worldly 'profane' (*EDS* 120-124).³⁶ Clearly, Christianity's effort to transcend the reign of matter led to a misconception of the nature of humankind: man's transgressive desire for the continuity of being was oppressed. Christianity erected a false distinction between body and mind, degraded the material world and elevated the spiritual. Bodily features or functions linked with destruction were considered disgraceful. The censorship on such bodily matters cut off the possibility of sacred transgressive limit-experiences.³⁷

With this background, we can interpret Bataille's thinking as 'diabolical': he efforts to infuse the spirit of transgression – in contradistinction with the denial of the flesh as it appeared in Christianity. In a mocking comment on the Christian concept of hell, Bataille's intentions become

36 In the context of Christianity, 'profanity' refers to 'negative' somatic matters. In Bataille's terminology on the other hand, the notion 'profane' has a different content. Bataille's 'profane' world of work and project can have a negative connotation as well, when it is used to denote a human society that absolutely opposes any transgressive behavior.

37 Not surprisingly, Nietzsche also sharply condemns the elevation of the spiritual in Christian culture. Walter Kaufman highlights Nietzsche's strong opposition to Christianity's “abnegation, repudiation and extirpation of the passions” (223) to the detriment of base bodily urges, as a crucial point for his entire philosophy.

clear: “Hell is the paltry notion God involuntarily gives us of Himself” (Preface to *ME* 128). Admittedly, reading Bataille's oeuvre can feel like an initiation and conversion to the worship of the violent continuity of existence. In what could be ironically named his proselytic oeuvre (in reference to the Christian endeavor of 'soul-winning,' while Bataille propagates that no such thing as 'soul' exists), he hands his readers pieces of a new atheist religion in which a destructive 'God' of continuity stands central. It is as if human beings must pawn their discontinuous 'soul' to this God-like continuity and sinfully surrender to the realm of 'evil.'³⁸ Viewed from this perspective, Bataille wants nothing more than an avid celebration of the cycle of meaninglessness, because “[w]e are the offspring, the effect of being hurling itself into horror [...], of being leaping headlong into the sickening emptiness, into the very nothingness” (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 128), and Bataille therefore invites us “to join in the terrible dance whose rhythm is the one that ends in collapse, and which we must accept as it is and for what it is, knowing only the horror it is in perfect harmony with” (ibid.).

At this point, I have to remark that Bataille does not plead for a dissolute licentiousness. Man cannot discard the effect taboos have on him and live as animals do. As mentioned before, there is a fundamental difference between human animals and non-human animals: the genesis of taboos was unavoidable and proves human intelligence and sensibility – things which Bataille values positively. For example, with regard to animal sexuality, Bataille stresses that our sexual experience of the disrupting continuity of being (cfr. 3.1.1.) calls into question our own being, while animals only experience the continuity of being without knowing it is a threat to their life (*EDS* 29). “Man differs from animal in that he is able to experience certain sensations that wound him and melt him to the core.” (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 125-126). Hence, it is exactly because human consciousness has removed mankind from its former animal state and because man possesses self-awareness that the idiosyncratic human experience of transgression has been become available to man.

So, although the order of taboos is an artificial product of humanity, a subversion of this order is not what Bataille intends to accomplish. Taboos are indispensable, precisely because they allow for the unique human capability to undergo transgressive experience. Because the experience relies on the violation of the restriction, the restriction is needed. For Bataille, a transgressive experience “suspends a taboo without suppressing it” (*EDS* 36). What is more, our automatic death-anxiety makes it plainly impossible to suppress taboos. The temporary suspension of the taboo simultaneously affirms the power of the prohibition. Put differently, transgression “transcends [the taboo] and completes it” (*EDS* 63). Bataille describes this ambiguousness as follows:

³⁸ 'Transgression' is of course a synonym for 'sin.'

Anguish we feel when violating the taboo, especially at that moment when our feelings hang in the balance, when the taboo still holds good and yet we are yielding to the impulsion it forbids. If we observe the taboo, if we submit to it, we are no longer conscious of it. But in the act of violating it we feel the anguish of mind without which the taboo could not exist: that is the experience of *sin*. That experience leads to the completed transgression, the successful transgression which, in maintaining the prohibition, maintains it in order to benefit by it.³⁹ (*EDS* 38, emphasis added)

In sum, transgression depends on the human subject's "will [...] to open wide the eyes, to see forthrightly and fully *what is happening, what is,*" despite and because of taboos (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 125, original emphasis). Accordingly, Bataille defines the conventions and occupations in the habitual world of work as merely illusory "narcotics" that "suppress the pain of our limited existence" (Boldt, Introduction to *IE* xi). This is due to his opinion that the world of significance obscures death's lack of meaning (*MS* 135). That is why we have to give in to something "that surpasses our powers and our understanding, [we have to] acknowledge something greater than ourselves, greater than we are *despite ourselves*" (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 126, original emphasis).

With this last quote (which already touches upon the failure of transgression, which will be explained in 2.2.4.), I have come to a main concern for my analysis: to what degree does there exist a readiness to forsake the will to protect the sense of discontinuity ('something surpassing our powers') and to forsake the will to maintain intelligibility during inner experience ('something surpassing understanding'). For now, it suffices to say that the subject's desire for continuity seems to grow with every failure. But, if the subject really wanted to transcend its state of discontinuity in order to be reunited with the continuity of existence, this could only be accomplished by actually dying. Consider, for example, Bataille's short story *Madame Edwarda*. The narrator displays a potentially self-destructive longing for Edwarda (who arguably functions as a goddess of continuity [cfr. 2.3.2.]) after his first contacts with her: "I consented to suffer, I desired to suffer, to go farther, as far as the 'emptiness' itself, even were I to be stricken, destroyed, no matter. I knew, I wanted that knowing, for I lusted after her secret and did not for one instant doubt that it was death's kingdom" (Bataille, *ME* 137). Transgression is ambiguous: one tries to overcome the limits reason and taboos have set and becomes receptive for continuity (one is given 'glimpses,' although be aware of continuity). Yet, inevitably, we are thrown back into our discontinuous state afterwards. In other words, the impenetrability of continuity is affirmed. I believe the trilogy unfolds itself along this tension of the impossible attempt to trespass the limits of the discontinuous state of being.

Nevertheless, an option comes to mind as a possible reaction to the frustration of being

³⁹ Note that Bataille's choice to speak of a 'successful transgression' if the power of the taboo is maintained has nothing to do with the inherent failure of transgression he also describes (see 2.2.4.).

unable to fulfill the wish to be one with continuity: suicide. In my analysis of the trilogy, the theme of suicide will emerge sometimes. Of course, in the light of the subject's desire to regain the lost intimacy with continuity without dying, suicide would be a failure as well. Yet, this inclination can attract the subject. However, it is not the option Bataille advocated, because it would exclude the repetition of the failure of transgression (as will be explained in 2.2.5.). I will propose that Moran, after considering suicide, arrives at this same realization (as I will demonstrate in 3.2.1.1.). Molloy (who is the posterior version of Moran) seems to describe this exclusion of suicide:

[T]here seem to be two ways of behaving in the presence of wishes, the *active* and the *contemplative*, and though they both give the same result it was the latter I preferred, matter of temperament I presume. The garden was surrounded with a high wall, its top bristling with broken glass like fins. But what must have been absolutely unexpected was this, that this wall was broken by a wicket-gate giving free access to the road, for it was never locked, of that I was all but convinced, having opened and closed it without the least trouble on more than one occasion, both by day and night, and seen it used by others than myself, *for the purpose as well of entrance as of exit.* (T 52, emphases added)

Indeed, both the 'active' (suicide) as the 'contemplative' manner (i.e. allowing the awareness of death and push it to its extreme [which is the starting point and process of a transgressive act]) give 'the same result' (i.e. the failure of grasping continuity as a discontinuous subject). Arguably, Molloy chooses to be able to repeat his transgressive act and accepts the unavoidable return to his discontinuous mode of being (the 'wicket-gate' serves as metaphor for the possibility of transgressive experience, as if it is a passageway through which one sets out for the continuity of being that lies at the horizon of the self). Before delving further into the more abstract specifics of the failure of transgressive experience (2.2.4.) and its repetition (2.2.5.), I first wish to prepare for this by framing inner experience as a somatic sublime experience, when it is situated in the broader tradition of the sublime.

2.2.3. *The Somatic Sublime*

Generally speaking, a sublime experience is a hybrid, ecstatic sensation that follows upon a confrontation with that which is inaccessible for the ordinary epistemological possibilities of man's cognitive faculties and senses (the Latin '*sub limen*' means 'up to our limits'). Thus, sublimity is a failure by definition. I will first delve into Alan Richardson's tentative subdivision of the sublime made in his study *The Neural Sublime* (2010), after which I will briefly sketch North-American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's sublime experience as set out in his 1836 essay 'Nature'. By affirmation and contrast, these will help to comprehend Bataille's concept of transgressive

experience as a specific form of the sublime, connected to the body. The sublimity of Bataille's somatic transgression will allow me to address the long-term effects of (repeated) inner experience in 2.2.4.

Alan Richardson, in his study *The Neural Sublime* on Romantic poets and the neurological workings of the brain in sublime experience, categorizes the sublime on two axes, the poles respectively being Burkean-Kantian and positive-negative (23-29). Although interest for the topic started in antiquity with Longinus' sublime language as rhetoric that is able to cause ecstasy, sublimity was for the first time elaborately explored in Irish philosopher Edmund Burke's (1729-1797) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and in German philosopher Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) *The Critique of Judgment* (1790). For Kant, sublime experience is a failure of the mind to grasp – in imagination or by perception – something infinitely vast or something formless (A. Richardson 29). However, for Kant, after this experience of unimaginability, there follows a victory of human Reason over the defeat of our sensory apprehension in imagination (29). Because the intellect's conceptual thinking is able to contemplate the transcendental and infinite in spiritual rapture, the sublime experience affirms Reason's extraordinary super-sensory potential for abstraction (24-25).⁴⁰ Richardson contrasts Kant's sublime with Burke's anti-transcendental sublime. For Burke, sublimity (being the result of an empirical, sensory confrontation with a vast and therefore horrifying object) is first and foremost a physiologically embedded experience of the mind: it is a painful bodily contraction and swelling of the nervous system and the brain because of the interaction between mind and body (25-27).

Richardson's second opposition is one between a positive and a negative sublime – dependent on what effect the state of sublimity leaves behind afterwards. For Kant, Reason has the possibility to transcend the natural world; for Burke, the painful “swelling” of the mind can be a pleasing “exercise” for the sensory and nervous system (A. Richardson 27). In these readings, the process of the sublime is a pleasurable sensation, because after having approached a breaking point of the mind, the post-sublime moment restores and fortifies the one who underwent the experience. Contrary to this, the negative sublime – sometimes found in the writings of Romantic poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) – entails a more permanent collapse of the cognitive system: the encounter with the limits of perception leaves the mind vacant afterwards (32-33). The subject can be disrupted or confused; it can distrust its former reliance on sensory perception; it can possibly even be emptied out of its former knowledge; or it can be bereft of its former sense of identity.

⁴⁰ An example of this is Kant's mathematical sublime: although the mind is unable to imagine an infinite number, the effort does affirm Reason's potential to reason independent of the senses (A. Richardson 36).

The second preliminary to help situate Bataille's sublime is North-American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-1882) Idealist religious sublime in nature. Similar to 18th and 19th century continental Romanticist poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) or to North-American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) – a disciple of Emerson – Emerson believes that a sublime experience can emerge out of an immersion in nature. In 'Nature' (1836), Emerson argues that the universe is a divine entity of energy – a benevolent Spirit behind the Universal Being that includes wisdom, love, beauty and power. This Spirit pervades the material world. He defends the view that beneath surface discrepancies, there resides a deep similarity or “radical law” (Emerson 60) that brings order to the material world. This order is also reflected in the human mind. For Emerson, “the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind” (53). Human beings are connected to nature because they are a part of the same spiritual flux. Because of this “consanguinity” (72) with the divine in nature, human beings can, when they worship nature, “enjoy an original relation to the universe” (35) and open their Mind to Nature. In this state of openness, Nature flows through the human Mind. Emerson describes this sublime state of revelatory rapture – attainable only in solitude in a natural environment – with the canonically renowned words: “I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God” (39). The possibility of merging with the Universal Being, as it arises out of the above quote, implies that Emerson partly suppresses the duality between mind and matter by moving beyond the dichotomy 'self/other.' In the experience, all oppositions between distinct particulars which are normally perceived are condensed in one unity in which “outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them” (64). In this process, perceiver and perceived seem to become one in harmony and, as a result, the subject becomes divine as well (68-69).

By means of Alan Richardson's division and Emerson's illustration, I can now paraphrase five specific characteristics of Bataille's transgressive sublime: it is provoked by a confrontation with somatic taboos (1); it is an experience bordering on the limits of our bodily discontinuity (2); it is a vicarious experience of death (3); in the post-sublime moment, the transgressive experience is absent (4); and it is a 'negative' sublime which disrupts all discontinuous faculties (5).

(1) First, transgression arises from a confrontation (sought for or automatically generated after being initiated to its possibility) with taboos connected to the body in general – one's own body

or that of others.⁴¹ Bataille contends that the beholder of a sacrifice undergoes a sublime experience that is similar to the movement that can be caused by a confrontation with nature (Bataille, *Sacrifices*, qtd. in Lozier 106). However, we can extend this literal notion of 'sacrifice' and expand it to include all abject bodily features, functions and impulses that have become subject to taboos – because they all imply death and thus the continuity of existence.⁴² Because, basically, in general terms, “this word *sacrifice* signifies this: that men, by virtue of their will, introduce certain goods into a dangerous region, where destructive forces prevail” (Bataille, *IE* 96, original emphasis). Elements such as nakedness; the sexual organs; the sexual or erotic act; defecation; urine; or the decay, decomposition and death of the body have all been 'abjectified' in the profane world, because they are all related to discontinuous creatures' essential continuity.

Claire Lozier's study *De l'abject et du sublime* (2012) argues that the subversion of the normative hierarchy between the categories of the 'low and abject' and the 'sublime and elevated' is a central endeavor of Bataille who tries to convert the abject into a source for sublimity (27-109). It seems that Molloy, like Bataille, considers abject features of the body as a gateway to sublime experience as well – thus not via an awe-inspiring Nature as Emerson or other elevated, ennobled principles. Casually noting that he had his finger up his arsehole one day, Molloy goes on to add:

I apologize for having to revert to this lewd orifice, 'tis my muse will have it so. Perhaps it is less to be thought of as the eyesore he called by its name than as the symbol of those passed over in silence, a distinction due perhaps to its centrality and its air of being a link between me and the other excrement. We underestimate this little hole, it seems to me, we call it the arsehole and affect to despise it. But is it not rather the true portal of our being [...]. [W]hat comes from within does not seem to receive a very warm welcome [...]. Are not these significant facts. Time will tell. (*T* 79-80)

A sublime contact with 'our being' through the arsehole is hinted at mockingly here. Also, Molloy's representation of himself as defecation of the universe is of course a Bataille-scented metaphor. Molloy then ironically concludes, despite his 'divinely' inspired fascination for the hole, that he “shall do [his] utmost [...] to keep it in the background, in the future” (*T* 80). Ironically indeed, because scatologies like this will be the center of attention many more times to follow in the trilogy, affirming herewith indeed the importance of abject somatic matters for Beckett.

(2) Secondly, Bataille's inner experience is an embodied limit-experience (not just a meeting

41 In *Inner Experience*, Bataille for example writes how he was led to inner experience by staring at a photo of a heavily tortured Chinese man or by mentally picturing the face of a person in his death throes (119, 122). Yet, he also relates how an inner experience can 'take' him unexpectedly at the moment when he awakes from sleeping (127).

42 In this regard, Bataille's sublime must be distinguished from traditional Hindu or Christian ascetic striving, because these attempt to rise above, for example, the sexual urges of man by a thorough contempt for bodily instincts and the emotions connected to them (*IE* 23).

with imaginative limitations) which afterwards testifies to the limits of our discontinuous bodily being. In this regard, it shows some affinities with Burke's physiologically based sublime. For example, Bataille describes transgression as an experience in which “[m]an is seized first with nausea, then as it passes by a heady vertigo” (*EDS* 69). The difference with the Burkean “tension,” “contraction,” and “stretching” of the nerves and the brain (A. Richardson 27) is that Bataille's transgression is even more radical: it appears like – for lack of an adequate discontinuous metaphor or visualization – an 'expansive contraction' and 'porosity' of the entire body. We could say that the sensation emanates from the body touching its limits. Consequentially, this causes a rupture of the entire bodily mode of being of the subject (because mind and body are for Bataille, as I addressed in 2.2.1., indistinguishable manifestations of this condition [M. Richardson 12]). As discontinuous embodied being, a subject is apparently deprived of its self-contained body when it is hauled in by inner experience (because the material flux of continuity in the world can be said to 'flow' through what is perceived as the 'self,' as every creature embodies the movement of continuity).

Molloy arguably describes this disruptive experience – fortuitously coherent with the 'radicality' of Bataille's sublimity here defended – as follows: “Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved, but a wall gave way and I filled with roots and tame stems for example” (*T* 49).⁴³ Bataille uses the first sentence of this quoted passage to demonstrate the “absence of mind” Beckett is continually striving for in *Molloy* (Bataille, *MS* 138). This absence can be conceptualized as a temporary destruction of self-consciousness, a moment when our discontinuous transcendent schemes forsake us. But also the habitual sensation of bodily presence forsakes us to make way for a state of 'intimacy' with the immanence of continuity. In *Inner Experience*, Bataille digresses on a oneness with the material world – similar to Molloy's just quoted experience – in which a part of his body had “become a tree” (127), without however having any mental idea or image of this tree anymore, nor of his overlap with it:

The upper part of my body – above the solar plexus – had disappeared, or at least no longer gave rise to sensations which could be isolated. Only my legs – which kept a link to what I had been: the rest was an inflamed gushing forth, *overpowering*, even free of its own convulsion. A character of dance and of decomposing agility [...] situated this flame 'outside of me'. [...] I was thrown into this hearth, nothing remained of me but this hearth. In its entirety, the hearth itself was a streaming outside of me.⁴⁴ (*IE* 127, original emphasis)

⁴³ Note that the opposition between (wild) 'roots' and 'tame stems' could attest to the insurmountable failure inherent in transgression, which Bataille defends (cf. *infra* 2.2.4.). This failure is the aporia that arises from the subject's will to appropriate the experience to its consciousness and as such is negligent to the fact that the “experience is thus domesticated – like the flower – through this it ceases to answer to hidden demands” (Bataille, *IE* 23). In Molloy's phrasing, this comes to the fore in the fact that he still speaks of an 'I' in an experience that implies the loss of self.

⁴⁴ The solar plexus is the name for the nerve-centre situated around the diaphragm.

However, this 'openness' at the same time shows the insurmountability of bodily confinement – this condition impedes the subject to reunite with continuity. Continuity is both interior and exterior to the subject, but the subject never *is* continuous as long as he is a living, discontinuous body.

(3) Next, connected to the previous, we are forced to acknowledge that the only thing that can ever reunite a being with continuity is its dying away (an idea already touched upon a few times). “It is by dying [...] that I will perceive the rupture which constitutes my nature and in which I have transcended 'what exists'” (Bataille, *IE* 71). To know continuity (i.e. 'what exists') would require being alive at the moment we die (Lozier 86-87). Continuity is therefore something that will always remain inaccessible according to Bataille (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, as I already discussed, a sacrifice functions as an artifice that makes onlookers fictitiously approach that transition moment as close as possible, by a mechanism of identification with the victim. By analogy, we can apprehend Bataille's transgression in general as a symbolic death of the self as well. In inner experience, “[t]he self-that-dies [...] truly perceives what surrounds it to be a void and itself to be a challenge to this void; the self-that-dies restricts itself to intuiting the vertigo in which everything will end (much later)” (Bataille, *IE* 71). Clearly, transgressive sublimity is not concerned about making contact with Infinity, Beauty, Nature, or a benevolent God, but with the Nothingness the continuity of being produces and which only the sublime impression of death can lead to.⁴⁵

(4) Fourth, a general characteristic shared with the tradition of the sublime is the fleetingness and ineffability of inner experience. We catch a glimpse of continuity one instant, after which this closeness disappears again. When the experience stops, the instantaneous intuition of continuity becomes foreign to the subject again. In her introduction to *Inner Experience*, Leslie Anne Boldt clarifies that for Bataille, to give a representation of the sublime in the post-sublime moment is a futile expectation: “Radical continuity slips into a continuity which is identifiable at the horizon of discontinuous being. Individuals retreat from communication [...]. [T]he subject re-presents to itself its absence in fusion” (xxii). The idea of a concrete continuity indeed again affirms our illusory act of 'discontinuizing.' The same realization is paraphrased by the unnamable as “the [...] madness, the mad wish to know, to remember, one's transgressions. I won't be caught at that again” (*T* 336).⁴⁶

45 What is more, when this vicarious experience of death evaporates afterwards, the restitution of the subject might be said to resemble a symbolic resurrection from death.

46 This is the only time that the word 'transgression' is used in the trilogy, but my research provides ample indications that Beckett's conception of the concept is similar to Bataille's. As I will assert in 3.2.3., the unnamable is more than likely making explicit the insurmountable impasse of inner experience with quotes as this one. The unnamable's assertion that it 'won't be caught at wanting to know its transgressions anymore' fits in perfectly with the argument that I will develop in part 3 which states that the unnamable has lost all hope of grasping continuity (cfr. *infra*).

This impossibility of self-appropriation logically entails that a personal experience of transgression is by definition incommunicable to others. The previous is reminiscent of Shelly's renowned metaphor, set out in his essay *A Defense of Poetry* (1821 [published 1840]), that in poetic composition “the mind in creation is as a fading coal.”⁴⁷ Although Shelly's Romantic attitude oft glorifies the human imagination, he also admits that “deep truth is imageless” (A. Richardson 40). The turn to poetry then, although it is “the restricted part [...] linked to the realm of words” (Bataille, *IE* 29), is also the path Bataille takes as the inadequate yet closest possible representation of inner experience. He traces a poetic outtake on life back to humankind as it existed before the emergence of human consciousness: “This man before rational thinking entered in [...] may have thought [...] some of the time that a thing simultaneously is and is not, or that it can be what it is and something else at the same time” (*EDS* 45). A poetic attitude partly rehabilitates the initial intimacy with the unity of continuity that was once enjoyed, by the destruction of immediate perception. In the concluding lines of his introduction to *Erotism*, Bataille briefly addresses this 'poetic knowledge' present in erotic experience: “We all feel what poetry is. [B]ut we cannot talk about it. [...]. Poetry leads [...] to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity” (*EDS* 24-25).

In his standard work *The Theatre of The Absurd* (1991), Martin Esslin states that Beckett as well – in his 'search for the self' in his art – attempts to communicate the “pristine complexity and poetic truth” of the “intuition in depth” of the “total sense of being” by renouncing all logical and conceptual thought (404, 406). About Beckett's writing process itself, Bataille asserts that *Molloy* is not the outcome of any “careful composition” by Beckett, but “a product of the sleep of reason” (*MS* 137-138).⁴⁸ Bataille believes that, because Beckett writes about a “reality” that is “elusive” and absent to humankind, he has to abandon “the clear distinctions of normal discourse” (*ibid.*). I will return in more detail to the paradox of writing about something incommunicable when I will consider the phenomenological method of description in 2.3.2. There, I will show that Bataille is convinced that inner experience can be communicated not only by a poetic rendition of that experience, but also by a description of the conditions in which it emerges.

(5) Lastly, Bataille's sublime is 'negative' in the sense that reaching a breaking point of discontinuous faculties is not compensated for by a recovery afterwards as with Kant's laudation of

47 Compare this to Molloy's exclamation that “not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition” (*T* 28). This metafictional quote could indicate that Beckett holds a similar position as Shelly regarding the failure of recreating sublime experience in the act of writing about it afterwards.

48 That Beckett wrote in a state of (mystic) rapture or that he wrote himself to rapture are intriguing possibilities, which seem especially defensible when the reader experiences the mesmerizing force of *The Unnamable*.

Reason.⁴⁹ Lozier confirms that in Beckett's texts as well, the sublime "ego-loss" is ever expanded without any subsequent Kantian stabilizing phase (247). Discontinuous embodiment, perception and thought are (fictitiously) taken away in a temporary breakdown. This cognitive collapse borders on the classic philosophical perceiver-perceived question. When adopting Bataille's epistemological subjectivist stance that the world is not how it appears to us but is construed by human perception, we are forced to conclude that "though we may be intellectually aware that any given experience *must* be an illusion, we cannot [...] watch ourselves having an illusion" (Ernest Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1960), qtd. in A. Richardson 22, original emphasis). In Bataille's writings, man's discontinuous perception of the world emerges as a transcendent illusion, due to the 'limiting possibilities' of the human mind. In this regard, man's rationality and perception is an aberration; the limits of the mind and consciousness erroneously ossify and particularize what is essentially a flux.

Yet, we are unable to perceive this discontinuous illusion in a direct manner. The mind is of course unable to perceive itself perceiving; consciousness cannot be conscious of its workings; subjectivity can never transcend itself. We are thus unable to *experience* our discontinuous experience.⁵⁰ Or in Malone's witty words when commenting on Lemuel giving himself a blow to the head with a hammer: "[T]hat is understandable, for [the head] is [...] the seat of all the shit and misery" (*T* 267-268). However, being exposed to an experience that exceeds our discontinuous consciousness and sense of self does have an effect: it disrupts the reliance on this restricted mode of consciousness. It can be felt as an attack on the habitual schemes of perception and identity and as such can have a transforming effect on the subject. This undermining quality needs closer examination, because I want to claim that the effect of the repetition of transgressive experience is demonstrated in the trilogy and also affects the reader of the trilogy.

2.2.4. *The Failure of Transgression*

As explained, when we 'communicate' with continuity in transgression, we are exposed to something that does not appear in our normal schemes of experience and perception. In other words, our capability of 'discontinuizing' is checked, because the sublime experience is exactly at odds with the everyday rational experience of life as composed out of distinguishable particulars. Not surprisingly, Bataille often describes the outcome of the mechanism of transgression in the line of the mystic tradition as it developed in Christianity and Eastern systems of thought like Buddhism:

49 Remark that the label 'negative' does not apply to the sublime transgressive moment itself, because all oppositional thinking such as 'negative' or 'positive' loses its alleged significance in it.

50 I will treat these ideas more thoroughly in 2.2.4. and in 2.3.1. (i.e. Merleau-Ponty's views on subjectivity).

[M]ystical experience [...] brings to a world dominated by thought connected with our experience of physical objects (and by the knowledge developed from this experience) an element which finds no place in our intellectual architecture except negatively as a limiting factor. Indeed, mystical experience reveals an absence of any object. Objects are identified with discontinuity, whereas mystical experience, as far as our strength allows us to break off our own discontinuity, confers on us a sense of continuity. (*EDS* 23)

In the mystic tradition, the ideal often is to let consciousness of the object world vanish by a gradual, intellectual methodical pursuit. Transgressive behavior differs from this in that it does not focus on the self in a move of rejecting the exterior world, but instead turns toward the material world. When inner experience takes place, the perception not only of objects, but of the subject as well is suppressed (Bataille, *IE* 9). Also, transgressive behavior should rather be seen as coming forth from a sudden confrontation with the material world or from a release of an instinctual tendency.

Yet, as remarked before, transgression must be analyzed as a failure. One of Bataille's outlines of inner experience helps us to assess this failure and its consequences in more detail:

[A]nguish is evidence of my fear of communication, of losing myself. [...] [A]s *ipse*, through knowledge, I would like to be everything, therefore to communicate, to lose myself, however to remain *ipse*. The subject (me, *ipse*) and the object (in part undefined, as long as it is not entirely grasped) are presented for communication, before it takes place. The subject wants to take hold of the object in order to possess it [...], but the subject can only lose itself: the nonsense of the will to know appears, nonsense of all possible, making *ipse* know that it is going to lose itself and knowledge with it, if it gives itself up to non-knowledge in this abandon, then rapture begins. In rapture, my existence finds a sense once again, but the sense is referred immediately to *ipse*; it becomes *my* rapture, a rapture which I *ipse* possess, giving satisfaction to my will to be everything. As soon as I emerge from it, communication, the loss of myself cease; I have ceased to abandon myself – I remain there, but with a new knowledge. (*IE* 53, original emphases)

Bataille introduces the term *ipse* (Latin for 'self'), with which he indicates the individual identity man transcendently delineates for himself: man's discontinuous consciousness construes a radical division between subject/object (self/other). Two insights are provided here. Because inner experience basically fails, we are forced to acknowledge that the discontinuous self and the continuity of which that 'self' is an indiscernible part stand opposed to each other in a conflicting relationship that can never be resolved (1). But because of this failure to access continuity as a discontinuous being, a certain 'new knowledge' is nevertheless gained according to Bataille (2). These two interconnected traits need closer investigation.

(1) The cardinal tension in the above description is that the discontinuous subject/object

distinction (*ipse* versus the idea of continuity as an object to be 'possessed') is the condition for inner experience ('communication') to take place. Yet, only when *ipse* momentarily renounces its will to protect itself, can inner experience haul him or her in. However, the experience is immediately disrupted by *ipse's* restoration of the subject-object distinction. The moment of communication vanishes immediately, because *ipse* pulls itself back into discontinuity. Transgression of discontinuous schemes (arising from the subject's craving to exceed its limits) is a process that always departs from within an illusory 'self' and always ceases as it debouches into the subject's will to appropriate the experience. Human subjectivity is the condition for inner experience, but this subjectivity is a product of human rationality (the conceptual difference I have been establishing between discontinuity-continuity is indeed also a consequence of my discontinuous thinking). Brewer quotes from *Inner Experience* to stress that the movement of transgression already confirms the confinements of discontinuity which it wishes to overcome (121-123):

Principle of inner experience: to emerge through project from the realm of project. Inner experience is lead by discursive reason. Reason alone has the power to undo its work, to hurl down what it has built up. [...]. Natural exaltation or intoxication have a certain 'flash in the pan' quality. Without the support of reason, we don't reach 'dark incandescence'. [...]. No one can lucidly have an experience without having had the project for it. [...] I attain experience contrary to the project I had of having it. (Bataille, *IE* 46, 54)

Discursive reason thus makes inner experience possible, yet at the same time prevents it from being successfully attained by the subject. In his article 'S/laughter and Anima-lēthē' (2007) on violence and animality in Bataille's 'trilogy' *The Accursed Share*, Lucio Privitello confirms that this tension is insurmountable in Bataille's thinking: it is only through the project of transgression that one can try and overcome the world of project (192). We are forced to conclude that the intimacy with continuity can only be undergone as a personal illusion as well, because inner experience (and any knowledge of it from outside the experience) betrays itself as it "arises along the edges of the discontinuity of project" (Brewer 123).

In order to elucidate this rather abstract tension as it was formulated in the previous two quotes, we can fall back on the example of human sacrifice again to make it more concrete. Again, John Gregg's introduction to his study on transgressive literature and his comments on sacrificial events are helpful. Gregg frames sacrifices as a 'simulacrum' of the onlookers' own death to achieve "a more complete consciousness of death" (14). Basically being a reformulation of the above, the failure of the intention of the sacrificial event becomes clear in the fact that nor the victim (who dies), nor the onlookers (who are only given an impression of dying) can personally appropriate the

death and make it fully available to consciousness (ibid.). Again, the sacrifice is unsuccessful because the intended object (to experience death as that which leads to continuity) cannot be made personal, possible or present for the onlooking subjects. More specifically, because they are dispossessed of their “individualized consciousness” at the stage of communication with continuity (15-16). At this point, “interiority is transformed into an impersonal spontaneity which is not a self-identical entity” (16). Thus, the subject is always 'lost' in the sublimity of transgression; it becomes an impersonal porosity; and its discontinuous consciousness is temporarily destroyed.⁵¹

This way, the initial intention to gain mastery over or present the object of continuity (to gain knowledge) is proven to be impossible. Death necessarily escapes *ipse*; it is inaccessible; it is unmasked as an impersonal continuous category; *ipse* cannot die. As a consequence, the experience emerges like the discovery of an entirely different domain of being, one in which the individual does not exist and in which death is not a personal category. Pulled back into discontinuous consciousness, “the primacy of the subject” (Gregg 16) as it is normally experienced is queried as a constrained form of being. “Just as the significance of the events of the feast can only be partially assimilated into consciousness retrospectively, after the restoration of limits, the notion of a self-coincident subject is an aftereffect produced by interiority's desire to return to a point prior to its dispossession and to regain what it lost in transgression” (ibid.). The above helps to assess the implications of the failure of transgression: the subject is confronted with an insurmountable limit to its consciousness. Continuity can never be achieved by or revealed to its consciousness; 'it' cannot be subjugated to discursive reason; 'it' cannot be possessed, grasped, or known.

What we have learned from the penultimate quote taken from Bataille's *Inner Experience* and from Gregg's explanation of the sacrificial ritual, is that in the rapturous moment of intuiting continuity the subject is always absent. This is why transgressive experience leaves us lost in something “so unlimited [...] that it is not even a thing: it is *nothing*” (*LE* 26, original emphasis). As a result, during the contact with the sacred sphere of being, the subject's will for autonomy is frustrated. For Bataille, in transgressive experience, a subject is basically confronted again with the “*wound of insufficiency* felt by each individual who wishes to surpass his limited existence” (Boldt, Introduction to *IE* xi, emphasis added). The discontinuous human condition is revealed as an inescapable suffering, an uneasiness, a longing for the impossible, an incomplete state of being that is fundamentally in “imbalance” (Bataille, *IE* 118), because of the two mutually exclusive desires man harbors within to overcome his feeling of insufficiency: the will to return to existence as a

51 Remark that 'inner experience,' despite its name, disrupts the subjective categories of inside-outside: 'inner' can no longer be separated from 'outer,' because inner experience evokes the unity of the material world.

whole and the will for autonomy. Allow me to explain this feeling of insufficiency.

First, by being born, we are thrown by improbable chance into a limited existence – torn away from, foreign to a limitless continuity. This suffering from our mortality propels us to be all again, to transcend our limited being, to identify with the universe (Bataille, *IE* 85). The human subject “is condemned to wishing itself to be other: all and necessary” (ibid.). The very first lines of *Molloy* (“I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there” [*T* 7]) are (if we interpret the room as a metaphorical space for the womb or the post-uterine environment) a poignant expression of this suffering from the contingency of coming into existence and the feeling of disconnectedness ('there,' not 'here'). As far as Bataille is concerned, human beings therefore wish to believe that their discontinuous state of being can be equated with the entirety of the universe – a desire which, if fulfilled, would make us immortal and necessary the way existence as a whole is.

Second, on the other hand, in our everyday state of mind, we also constantly imagine that we will not die, by grace of our dedication to the distractions we have set up in the habitual world of work and project (which are able to numb the uneasiness caused by our awareness of our mortality). As a temporary, particular part of existence as a whole we desire to preserve our autonomy at all costs. Because of these two impossible human desires, Bataille describes the human condition as an insurmountable insufficiency, laid bare in transgressive experience:

[*Ipse's*] will for autonomy opposes it at first to the whole, but it withers – is reduced to nothing – to the extent that it refuses to enter into it. It then renounces autonomy for the sake of the whole, but temporarily: the will for autonomy is only abated for a time and quickly, in a single movement in which balance is achieved, being devotes itself to the whole and at the same time devotes the whole to itself. [...]. [T]his will to be the *universe* is [...] a ridiculous challenge directed at the unknowable immensity. The immensity eludes consciousness – it infinitely eludes an individual who seeks it by eluding, in turn, the improbability which he is [...].[...] To seek sufficiency is the same mistake as to enclose being in some sort of point: we can enclose nothing, we can only find insufficiency [...]. Man cannot, by any means, escape insufficiency, nor renounce ambition. His will to flee is the fear which he has of being man: its only effect is hypocrisy – the fact that man is what he is without daring to be so [...]. There is no concurrence imaginable [...] [*This assumes an anguishing dissociation of oneself, a definitive disharmony, discord – experienced with vigor – without useless efforts to palliate them.*]. (*IE* 85, 88, 91, original emphases)

Transgressive experience unveils that the subject can never achieve a permanent balance; that it can never be 'sufficient'; and that it has a restrictive consciousness. The fundamental contradiction of human subjectivity is that it is divided against itself: it is a desperate craving to *be* continuous without dying, to reconcile the continuity and discontinuity of being. In inner experience, we learn what our discontinuous human condition essentially is: a suffering from the never-ending struggle between the will to enter the whole of continuity and the will for autonomy.

“Our existence is an exasperated attempt to complete being (completed being would be *ipse* having become everything)” (Bataille, *IE* 89). The project of inner experience is a situation of *aporia*: an impasse out of which there is no escape. Brewer describes it as “the torturous process of grasping at inner experience, finding the continuity of immanence in fits and spurts, all the while being pulled back into project and durational time” (123). For the above reasons, Lozier defines Bataille's writing not as “cathartic,” “healing” or “therapeutic,” but as “sickening” and “psychopathological” (83, my translation). Bataille states that the repeated experience of communication with the continuity of existence “opens a bit more every time the [...] the wound [...]; extends a bit more the limits of the heart, the limits of being [...] (*IE* 103-104). Thus, if we agree that Bataille does not intend a cathartic purification of our insufficiency, we must now return to the second major point of interest mentioned at the beginning of this section: what then exactly could be the effects of the 'new knowledge' or realization that insufficiency can never be overcome?

(2) Bataille's 'knowledge' that the striving to overcome our limited existence (by trying to protect our discontinuous isolation and by wishing to be one with the whole of the universe) is doomed to be continually frustrated, leads him to propose that we must fully accept this insufficiency. Bataille wants the subject to acknowledge “the movement of painful communication which it is” (*IE* 118). In transgression, we discover the *aporetic* nature of our strivings. Transgression's after-effect exposes the vanity of the subject's attempts to overcome its felt insufficiency. We can only confirm the impasse by experiencing it. “His limitations are no doubt necessary to the being, but he cannot endure them. It is by going beyond these limitations which are necessary for his preservation that he asserts the nature of his being” (Bataille, *LE* 68). For Bataille, transgressive experience is a *hyper-humanism*: it leads man toward a deeper understanding of himself because he can now define himself against the background of his experience (Bataille, *Larmes d'Éros* (1961), qtd. in Lozier 39-40). This is why “fiasco, collapse, despair are, in [Bataille's] eyes, light, laying bare, glory” (Bataille, *IE* 55).

The gained knowledge can be said to be the discovery of the law of discontinuity by transgressing that law. The limit-breaking experience forces the subject to recognize the limitations set by discontinuity. One example of this could be that the subject's outtake on societal norms and prohibitions (e.g. taboos that are imposed as absolutes) becomes more 'truthful,' as they are now revealed to him or her as strategies that try to cover up the wound in being by preventing the subject to be lost in transgression. Another example could be that the subject comprehends that its subjectivity and discursive thought inevitably impose a false perception of existence as a discontinuously structured phenomenon and automatically generate an erroneous view of a self-

contained 'self.' As such, transgression has the ability to destabilize the subject's sense of identity and the manner in which the subject relates to the world. Hence, transgression can be framed as a discovery of the fictions and deceits of the discontinuous mode of being, yet also of man's boundedness to it. This acceptance of the terrain of the human condition has two main implications.

First, man must not cling to the preservation of his discontinuous 'soul,' but he must dare to face the suffering which the awareness of his inevitable death gives him. For Bataille, this anguish must not be evaded or soothed – but reaped:

If someone admits of having anguish, it is necessary to show the inexistence of his reasons. He imagines the way out for his torments: if he had more money, a woman, another life ... The foolishness of his anguish is infinite. Instead of going to the depths of his anguish, the anxious one pratters, degrades himself and flees. Anguish however was his chance: he was *chosen* in accordance with his *forebodings*. But what a waste if he escapes: he suffers as much and humiliates himself, he becomes stupid, false, superficial. (*IE* 35, original emphases)

This passage seems to imply that Bataille is concerned with what could be called a certain 'authentic attitude' in contrast to 'the easy life.' Through it glimmers Bataille's concern that modern man is perhaps losing the awareness that continuity can be communicated with – an event which archaic societies still organized. The modern individual must not seek the illusion of never dying by entirely dedicating his life to profane, productive activities. Humans must instead 'consume' the anguish that they are given in order to communicate with continuity. If not, the fear of death would entirely control an individual and make of him a 'slave' of discontinuity. According to me, suchlike ideas are the only instants when a reader of Bataille's philosophy could contrive something that tries to resemble a distorted sense of 'meaning' of being born: living is the possibility to transgress and be lost in an experience that gives an intuition of existence as a whole:

It is true that this isolated 'being' – foreign to what is not it – is the form in which existence and truth first appeared to you. [...]. Yet the unity which you are fleeing from you and escapes. [...]. I am and you are, in the vast flow of things, only a stopping-point favoring a resurgence. Do not delay in becoming precisely aware of this anguishing position: if it was your experience to attach yourself to goals enclosed within those limits in which no one is at stake but you, your life would be that of the great majority; it would be 'deprived of the marvelous'. Were you to stop a short moment: the complex, the gentle, the violent movement of worlds will make of your death a splashing foam. [...]. The fragile walls of your isolation, which comprised the multiple stopping-points, the obstacles of consciousness, will have served only to reflect for an instant the flash of those universes in the heart of which you never ceased to be lost. [...]. [To be lost] in the midst of the celestial bacchanalia. (*IE* 94-95)

For this end, the subject must lessen its flight in the everyday narcotics of the profane world. The world of project, with which the idea of particularized existences is nourished, must be valued for what it is: a human construction that keeps us away from what lies beyond the grasp of our discontinuous consciousness. This way, one constituting aspect of that world – somatic taboos – becomes functional for us: these do not exist to be obeyed at all times, but to be transgressed.

The second effect of the subject's acceptance of its insufficiency (besides the increased willingness to confront taboos in order to communicate with the totality of being) is a diminished belief that continuity can be approached as an 'I', as an individual. That the assumed separate self must be temporarily given up to allow inner experience to take place, indeed confirms that the will to be everything while holding on to *ipse's* will for autonomy is a pretentious effort at personal salvation or liberation. Therefore, “[e]xperience at the extreme limit of the possible [...] requires a renouncement: to cease wanting to be everything. [...]. [T]he will to 'become everything' [must be] regarded as an obstacle to that of losing oneself (of escaping isolation) [...]” (Bataille, *IE* 22). Inner experience can never be possessed by the subject, but only undergone. In Bataillean terms, the experience is *sovereign*, because it can never be *my* experience. The subject must therefore cease to want to be everything, which implies that it has to stop valuing his individualized consciousness as mode of being to retain at all costs. This renunciation will augment the occurrence of inner experiences as well, because clinging to personal interiority as highest value hinders transgression:

I arrive at this notion: that subject, object, are perspectives of being at the moment of inertia, that the intended object is the projection of the subject *ipse* wanting to become everything, that all representation of the object is phantasmagoria resulting from this foolish and necessary will [...]. [...]. But when communication itself – at a moment when, inaccessible, it had disappeared – appears to me as non-sense, I attain the height of anguish; in a surge of despair, I abandon myself and communication is once again given to me – rapture and joy.⁵² (Bataille, *IE* 54, original emphasis)

In sum, the 'new knowledge' gained in transgression (i.e. the insuperability of insufficiency) increasingly breaks down the will to deny the wound of insufficiency in being. The reluctance to transgress diminishes. The anguish taboos inspire does not always have to lead to fleeing away from them anymore. The attachment to an autonomous subjectivity is gradually abandoned as well. This way, the view on identity changes: man is dissociated from his psychologically-based, assumed stable individual existence as he experiences his dissolution in the movement of continuity he embodies.

⁵² The 'inertia' in this quote must not be confused with the 'inertia' that will be defended in 3.2.5. Bataille's use of the word here basically denotes the state of being that ossifies the movement of the flux of existence.

3.2.5. *Sickness and Indifference*

To conclude this methodological part on Bataille, I can interrogate once more the applicability of the aforementioned Bataillean ideas for a close reading of Beckett's trilogy. Can we find the same 'sickening' quality Lozier detected in Bataille's writing in the trilogy? If we are to believe Esslin, who compares the Theatre of the Absurd in general with the uplifting *catharsis* in Greek tragedy, Beckett's absurd drama does provide a possible wholesome "therapeutic" effect in the despairing confrontation with the all-pervasive absurdity and "madness of the human condition" (414). Esslin suggests a *liberation* from existential anxieties precisely in a no longer vague but full awareness and consciousness of them "below the surface of euphemisms and optimistic illusions" (ibid.).⁵³ Abiding by this logic, Esslin also believes the loss of former illusions "will ultimately be felt as exhilarating" (426) and can give "serenity of mind and strength to face the human condition" (428) – analogous to metaphysical mystical experience that liberates the human subject (426-428).

Nevertheless, Esslin's interpretation of salvation and therapeutic liberation seems detrimental at first to the claim that Beckett – like Bataille – would practice a sickening writing by exposing the aporia of escaping our insufficiency. Nevertheless, I can maintain my Bataillean frame of analysis. For one thing, Esslin's 'liberation' consists of an inverse flight toward that which is normally fled from, comparable to Bataille's recognition of being shackled to an insufficiency that we constantly try to cover up or overcome. This indicates that in Beckett's art this Bataillean logic is perhaps at work as well. This way, my claim that the trilogy's characters are never purified from their insufficiency and that their consciousness remains a state of illness does comply with the 'freedom' and 'catharsis' Esslin upholds – at least to the extent that it is a refusal of a former self-denial.

A passage from *Molloy* (if analyzed as a post-sublime comment on a transgression undergone) seems to support Esslin's choice of vocabulary, because it explicitly comprises the concept of freedom in relation to a Bataillean awareness of the 'discontinuizing' human mind:

And once again I am I will not say alone, no, that's not like me, but, how shall I say, I don't know, restored to myself, no, I never left myself, *free*, yes, I don't know what that means but it's the word I mean to use, *free* to do what, to do nothing, *to know*, but what, *the laws of the mind perhaps*, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that 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 is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (*T* 13, emphases added)

⁵³ For Esslin, the absence of meaning in Beckett's art in general does not terminate in despair, but is rather "the starting point of a new kind of consciousness, which faces the mystery and terror of the human condition in the exhilaration of a new-found freedom" (88).

Indeed, Molloy's transgression of his discontinuous consciousness forces him to identify the limits of the laws connected to that mode of being, and, correspondingly, to renunciate of a potential revert to the discontinuous tool of language.⁵⁴ Molloy's description of his return to his solitary discontinuous state as a sort of inert freedom confirms Esslin's choice of terminology. However, I prefer to define this movement in the trilogy not as 'liberation,' but as '*indifference*.'

The choice for this concept comes from Bataille's interpretation of *Molloy*. In his analysis of the novel, his use of the word 'indifference' ties in with the effects of the acceptance of insufficiency highlighted above. In the context of a persistent confrontation with existential anguish, Bataille applies the word in a negative sense in relation to the inescapable given of this human suffering: “[T]here can be no doubt that death and inhumanity, both equally lacking in being, are not a matter of indifference in the life we lead, as they are its limit cases, its backcloth and its ultimate reality” (*MS* 138). However, the word also functions in a positive sense as the description of Molloy's willingness to transgress taboos, while also indicating that taboos are a human inevitability because of man's consciousness that he will die: “There is not a single human taboo that has not here been engulfed by an indifference that would like to be definitive but cannot be; and how *could* one be other than indifferent when doomed to so imperfect an indifference?” (*ibid.*, original emphasis). Next to this, the concept of indifference is also an indicator of Bataille's conviction that the subject must abandon its will to make continuity available for its individual consciousness: “Beckett is concerned with that indifference in which man forgets his own name, forgets he is man even, being perfectly indifferent to his most repugnant misery” (*ibid.*). The importance of an attitude of indifference also emerges in Bataille's own artistic writing, for example in the rendition by the narrator in *Madame Edwarda* of what is arguably his pre-transgressive moment:

Torn apart, a certain power welled up in me, a power that would be mine upon condition I agree to hate myself. Ugliness was invading all of me. The vertiginous sliding which was tipping me into ruin had opened up a prospect of *indifference*, of concerns, of desires there was no longer any question: at this point, the fever's desiccating ecstasy was issuing out of my utter inability to check myself. (*ME* 140, emphasis added)

Thus, this growing indifference toward the wound of being can manifest itself in versatile manner, but it is basically a withdrawal from all discontinuous human structures, conducts, strivings and

⁵⁴ This interpretation ties in with the argument that will be developed in my analysis. I believe the trilogy's consecutive characters (Molloy is the second version of the narrating 'I') display a increasing recognition of their 'symptoms.' Gradually forsaking all means to overcome their insufficiency, they prepare for the unnamable's final acceptance of the torment of inner experience.

hopes. It is an indifference toward taboos' prohibitions; toward the inescapable anxiety for death; toward maintaining *ipse*; toward reason and discursive knowledge with which we elevate the human state above that of animals. This indifference provokes a passivity, inertia and powerlessness in the face of the inability to heal the wound which our discontinuous state inflicts upon us. Bataille visualizes this attitude with the Old Testamental figure of Job, the man who suffers for no reason:

Trembling. To remain immobile, standing, in a solitary darkness, in an attitude without the gesture of a supplicant: supplication, but without gesture and above all without hope. Lost and pleading, blind, half dead. Like Job on the dung heap, in the darkness of night, but imagining nothing – defenseless, knowing that all is lost. (*IE* 35)

This reference to Job allows me to explain the profound influence of Kierkegaard's existential theory of religious repetition on Bataille's notion of transgressive experience – and helps me to assess the change of identity I want to trace in the trilogy. John Caputo, in his chapter on Kierkegaardian repetition in his study *Radical Hermeneutics* (11-35), analyzes Kierkegaard's references to Job's story in his 1843 treatise *Repetition*. To delve into the specifics of how Kierkegaard examines the notion of repetition on an aesthetic, ethical and religious level would occupy too much space at this point. But I do believe a brief outline of his general existentialist theory helps to clarify the repetition of transgressive experience I want to put forward as the trilogy's impetus. In short, Kierkegaard advocates an existential theory of the self in which the concrete existing individual does not assume a fixed metaphysical essence for being, but has to choose to constantly produce an identity for itself “in the face of the incessant 'dispersal' of the self [...], of the dissipating effects of the flux” (21) to truly become the being which it is and always has been.

We can indeed already sense the influence of this Kierkegaardian conviction on transgressive experience, because the subject's inability to appropriate the flux of continuity is crucial for inner experience as well. For Kierkegaard then, the key to attain identity – to make existential progress that transforms the individual, without stilling the chaotic movement of the flux in which human existence resides – is *repetition*. Although 'repetition' also evokes Sartre's ongoing task of personal self-formation, the highest and genuine form of repetition for Kierkegaard is an anti-immanent and anti-subjectivist religious transcendence, in relation to the faith in an absent God who works in ways that are not understandable to mankind. Man must deliver himself to the contingent and absurd “'play' in which the world, that is, the hand of God, is playing with him in order to humble his finite understanding and lead him into another and transcendent sphere” (Caputo 31). This true manifestation of repetition occurs when the limits of all categories connected to finite immanent

existence are given up. This breakdown discredits any attachment to anthropocentrism, subjectivism, human agency, or the use of reason (31-35).

However, in the context of these convictions, Kierkegaard employs the story of Job as an imperfect example of religious repetition. Job – having his children, his possessions and his health taken away from him by God's action – desperately supplicates for an explanation for his absurd condition. Nevertheless, he does not try to explain it as a punishment by God, but instead regards it as an ordeal to test his faith (25). The religious sphere thus opens up by Job's acceptance of his human powerlessness to make sense out of the meaningless flux. He acknowledges that he *is* nothing but his relationship with God. This is the point of surrendering to God's action “to let God make something new in us, effect a transcendence in us of which we are incapable ourselves” (27). However, Job is not a perfect example of Kierkegaard's religious repetition: Job's ongoing lament betrays that he still clings to his (lost) worldly 'goods' and, at the end of the story (although he is given no reason for his suffering), Job is also rewarded for his persevered faith by a restoration of all his earthly wealth (32). The repetition is one of immanence. Genuine religious repetition would have required that “[t]he whole question of finitude [had become] a matter of indifference,” because “[r]epetition takes place only if the finite is crucified and the individual surrenders everything in order to enter the divine absence, the dark night, the fear and the trembling” (32).

This Kierkegaardian religious indifference toward immanent matters obviously echoes the atheist Bataillean version of it as the indifference toward the insufficiency of our discontinuous embodied state. We comprehend that the highest state of being for the Kierkegaardian subject is when, after an anxiety-ridden breakdown, a state of openness to the divine is reached and the subject gives itself up to God's action. However, genuine religious repetition requires a definite giving up of everything profane. This entails that the subject does not flee again toward worldly matters and that, in Caputo's formulation, it realizes that “from a human standpoint, everything is lost, that there is nowhere to turn” (31). The previous exposition helps to understand Bataille's own quote on Job better: the absolute indifference emerges when the subject has nothing but the 'God of continuity' to turn to anymore and wishes nothing else.⁵⁵ Not work, not knowledge, not action, not concern for the future, not the 'self,' not *ipse*. Only then a subject can approach, by a constant repetition of inner experience, the flux of continuity of which it is but a transient part. Yet, repeating inner experience is not something that the subject can master: “[I]t is contradictory to plan [its] repetition. We cannot obtain [it] by our own feeble means” (Bataille, *LE* 199). Like Kierkegaard's God, inner experience must seize us, when we surrender to it by waiting in indifference. This indifference toward our

55 Note that this 'God of continuity' is not a Kierkegaardian transcendent category, but an immanent one.

discontinuous suffering requires dispelling all thought bound to overcoming our discontinuous insufficiency. Indeed, one has to be “*like Job [...] but imagining nothing – defenseless, knowing that all is lost*” (Bataille, *IE* 35, emphases added).

It is the evolution of this specific Bataillean concept of indifference toward insufficiency that I will trace in the trilogy's characters' development (or rather breakdown). I believe Bataille rightly detected that Beckett was already expressing this growing indifference in *Molloy*. I will argue that the first character, Moran, will gain an indifference toward taboos and give in to his transgressive urge; after which Molloy will gain an indifference toward his will to possess continuity as *ipse*. However, I am convinced that the real tipping-point (the final indifference toward one's insufficiency) is to be found later, in the transition from *Malone Dies* to *The Unnamable*. Malone arguably moves toward a more definitive point of exhaustion and acceptance of the torment of its insufficient existence, which is caused by the repeated previous setting out for what lies behind the ever-receding horizon of the self and its concurrent frustrations. As such, the subject's hope to overcome its insufficiency gradually crumbles in *Malone Dies*, after which *The Unnamable* displays the final, 'disintoxicated' disregard for all taboos that protected his sense of self and the ceased will to appropriate continuity as *ipse*. Doing so, the unnamable reaches the stage of genuine transgressive repetition, merely in order to deepen the wound of suffering from his inescapable insufficient being.

For Bataille, this movement constitutes a transformation of an ordinary human morality toward the genesis of an entirely different sovereign *hyper-morality*: “The principle of classic morality is connected with the *survival* of being: that of sovereignty (or sanctity) with the being whose beauty is composed of indifference to survival, of attraction, we might almost say, to death” (*LE* 183, original emphasis). To attain this other morality, we must give up our obsession with our alleged isolated 'I.' Formulated differently, Privitello summarizes Bataille's striving for a sovereign morality as “a process of de-subjectification, a stripping of the self, unhinging the idea of a self housed by a body that responds to 'me'” (185). The self's identity as a stable category is dissociated entirely. It can merely be presented as the flux of continuity which it embodies. What appear to us like isolated walls of our embodiment have to be ridiculed. The view of self is gradually transformed in the light of its future annihilation, “as if I did not exist here and now but in the future in store for me, though that is not what I am now” (Bataille, *EDS* 57). The complete indifference toward preserving our discontinuous appearance leads to inner experience that is undergone for what it is: a confirmation of our essential continuity, which we are however denied access to. Or formulated differently by Bataille: a “supplication without response” (*IE* 12).

Before I can begin my analysis of the trilogy, I however still need firmer theoretical support for the claim that an individual can have an irrational experience rooted in bodily matters. To contextualize this sentient and non-knowing subject, I will turn to existentialist phenomenology, which values the subjective singularity of concrete individuals' experiences – and more specific to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. Besides this, the hypothesis that being exposed to transgressive literature can provoke transgressive experience for the reader, which is in its turn formative for the reader's own identity, demands further support as well. This I will find in the phenomenological method of description in general and in Bataille's thesis in *Literature and Evil*.

2.3. Phenomenology of the Body and Literature of Evil

First, in order to comprehend the possibility of transgressive experience, I will delve into the theoretical-philosophical current of phenomenology that views being as something that is lived in experience – thus not intelligible in or reducible to abstract concepts. After a brief discussion of Austrian-German philosopher Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) founding ideas on the investigation of the phenomena of experience and the objections that can be raised against his 'transcendental' and subject-based approach, I will move on to Merleau-Ponty's reworking of Husserl. Merleau-Ponty does away with the conception of man as primarily a thinking being and instead views humans as embodied beings in a world with which they engage.⁵⁶ I will set out Merleau-Ponty's ideosyncratic body-focused approach in order to prove the complicity with Bataille's views on human subjectivity.

After having dealt with Merleau-Ponty's theoretical claims, the non-reasoning and non-verbal nature of transgressive experience begs the question how it can be expressed in writing without argumentation or satisfying description. Next to this, the assumption that a reader-response can occur by which the reader is led to his or her own transgression also needs theoretical back-up. I will answer these questions by addressing the phenomenological method of description and Bataille's *Literature and Evil*. In the latter, Bataille enacts the belief that literature can function as an initiation for the reader into the realm of 'Evil' – in the instant when 'communication' between author and reader takes place.

⁵⁶ The phenomenological current consists of various thinkers who did not agree upon one specific method of investigation. 'Existentialist phenomenology' is the term used for the reworking of Husserl's initial phenomenological method by thinkers such as Heidegger, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty. The existentialist redirection of phenomenology's goals and methods took a start with German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) *Sein und Zeit* (1927), in which this student of Husserl proposed that the focus must be laid on discovering the structure of our being-in-the-world (as part of an interconnected world), not the structure of our consciousness as Husserl envisaged. However, Heidegger's existential hermeneutics remains rather abstract for us, as the concrete body is not stressed.

2.3.1. Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body

The movement of phenomenology took its start when Husserl conceived the project to redirect philosophical thinking away from empiricism and rationalism. In his study *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett*, David Hesla explains that Husserl grew convinced that an ontology must be grounded in the description of the subject's lived experience – thus not in knowledge extracted empirically from the outside world, nor in knowledge attained by an independently reasoning human mind (170). Instead, Husserl sees our everyday consciousness as a subject-object relation (ibid.). The consciousness of the subject does not exist independently from the external world – it is always conscious *of* something. In his article 'Husserlian Phenomenology' (2006), Steven Crowell summarizes that all thought for Husserl is *intentional* – the mind is always directed toward objects or events (20-22). Thought is always an intentional act, but various types of intentional acts can occur. Accordingly, many different meanings can be bestowed upon objects, determined by the perspective and presuppositions in the subject's act of experiencing (ibid.). This way, it is always consciousness that transcendently constitutes the object (ibid.).

Husserl tried to develop a method of 'bracketing' the world of objects in order to *describe* the essential structures of consciousness. The movement of *epoché* tries to suspend all biased assumptions about objects in the external world to uncover an essence in the way phenomena present ('give') themselves to the consciousness of a specific 'I' (Crowell 11-20). The goal of Husserl's phenomenological reduction in its entirety is to describe this “pure consciousness” of the unbiased experiencing Ego – i.e. to become conscious of the workings of consciousness by focusing on how the thing appears as a phenomenon in experience (Hesla 171-172). Husserl's thinking provides us with the possibility of investigating the world and subjectivity not in general logical, but experiential terms – a step needed for us to escape 'knowability.' Moreover, Husserl's method can be applied to a certain extent to Bataille's thinking by claiming that the phenomenological reduction makes us recognize how our everyday habitual experience functions. As Bataille states: “[W]e know nothing, we are sunk in the depths of ignorance's darkness. But we can at least see what is deceiving us” (Preface to *ME* 125). Translated to Husserlian terminology: because of its attempt to bracket its habitual projection of meaning onto objects, the subject equally initiates a mistrust toward the preconceptions of its habitual observations of the world. As a result, the everyday world is recognized as a mere construct.

Nevertheless, Husserl's initial phenomenological approach does not suffice when attempting

to provide a Bataillean analysis, because of two main reasons: he limits experience to a conscious investigation of things and he tends to overlook the importance of the body for the phenomenological subject. Firstly, for Husserl, it is still the reflecting ego that deliberately determines the assessment of the world; the *epoché* requires an agent to perform it (Crowell 23-24). A conscious and reflective subject still decides how it directs itself toward the world, as it relies for its investigation on certain alleged ideas it has about the comportment of phenomena (i.e. that a description of how they 'give' themselves to our consciousness suffices to catch the essence of the thing) (ibid.). Secondly, Husserl's methods have often been condemned by critics as a very idealist, and even solipsistic way of thinking that reductively privileges an absolutely transcendental consciousness (Crowell 9-10). For example, Stanton B. Garner, in his article 'Still Living Flesh': Beckett, Merleau-Ponty, and the Phenomenological Body' (1993) which deals with Beckett's work for theatre, esteems the phenomenological subject as conceptualized by Husserl less applicable to Beckett's art because the subject is merely "present to itself in transcendental ideality" (443). In this regard, Husserl neglects the material world in general and the body in particular (448). For Crowell, the place of the body in Husserl's thought is rather ambiguous and therefore inadequate: an analysis of the perceptual world necessitates a bodily engagement with it, but for Husserl, this body is situated as an object in the world outside of our consciousness (25-26). Because of this non-satisfying stance toward the importance of the body and toward non-intentional experience, I also prefer to treat Bataillean and Beckettian subjectivity and consciousness the way Stanton B. Garner does for Beckett's theatre: i.e. as "embodiedness" as it was conceived by Merleau-Ponty (447).

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's existential-phenomenological theory of the *body-subject* considers an experiencing being that is not in control because it is not explicitly aware of its experience. Mark Wrathall, in his article 'Existential Phenomenology' (2006), emphasizes that existential phenomena do not indispensably depend on our "determinate and explicit awareness" of them to show themselves to us, because a "primary perception" of things can also occur (32). In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty states that this said primary perception of things can be indeliberate (non-thetic), can resist articulation in manageable and identifiable terms and thought (pre-objective) and can precede awareness of it (pre-conscious) (Wrathall 32). For Merleau-Ponty, this primacy of perception opens up a "world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, qtd. in Wrathall 32).

A difference with the Husserlian *epoché* is that an active investigation of how things 'give' themselves to our conscious reflection is esteemed inadequate, because it does not grasp what lies

beyond self-aware investigation (Crowell 21). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty rejects Husserl's assumption of the possibility of a *complete* phenomenological reduction – the attempt to bracket the world only confirms the world's inescapable imposing itself on us (ibid.). What the attempt at *epoché* does do is call into question our everyday acceptance of the way we normally experience the world (ibid.). So for Merleau-Ponty, because of this imperfection, we do become aware of the inescapability of our – in Bataille's terminology – discontinuous condition, yet we can never lay hold on the experience assailing that condition.

What further confirms Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach's compatibility with Bataille's view on subjectivity is the grounding of the understanding of things via the lived body and its pre-reflective experience which exists independently of our awareness and self-consciousness of it. As J.N. Mohanty explains in his article 'Intentionality' (2006), Merleau-Ponty rejects the mind-body dualism and regards the body not as an object disconnected from our consciousness, but as a part of the incarnate subject (75). The body is not just an object as in Cartesianism or in Husserl's phenomenology; the body is part of the subject and as such forms the inextricably intertwined body-subject (ibid.). In this view, the mind is not separate from the body. Our experience of the world is not merely mentally, but also bodily. It is not an absolute thinking subject who experiences the world: the body-subject perceives the world. In this subject-body-world relationship, the body stands in the ambiguous middle between consciousness and the exterior world (ibid.).

Merleau-Ponty thus regards the existing subject as inextricably bound up with its body and with the world in which it exists. He defends the perspective that consciousness and the world must not be viewed as separated entities, because we are first and foremost “through and through compounded of relationships with the world” (Mohanty 76). The world, our consciousness and our body all partake in a single system. Subjectivity is made up partly by our corporeality which is a part of the material world as well. Hence, our body is object and subject at the same time. This makes for a depersonalization and anonymity of our subjectivity: we are materially present as body, but we are alienated from it as well because we can never fully coincide with this subjectivity (Garner 451). So, although our consciousness is intertwined with our body, we are dispossessed of it at the same time because our body is also part of a bigger entity. An example of a briefly attempted suicide by Molloy is illustrative in this perspective. “I took the vegetable knife from my pocket and set about opening my wrist. But pain soon got the better of me. First I cried out, then I gave up, closed the knife and put it back in my pocket” (*T* 61). Here, the body's urge to survive obstructs a wanted suicide. The idea of an autonomous subject becomes a mere myth, and gives way to a deterministic view of

human existence as primarily bodily.⁵⁷ I believe that the Bataille/Beckettian subject has no clear boundaries as well, because it is presented as an impersonality rooted in a material world.

Moreover, another important Merleau-Pontian concept for us is *bodily intentionality*. Merleau-Ponty understands this intentionality as the body-subject being automatically directed toward the world (both toward inanimate objects and living beings) in which it partakes, independent of and prior to any conscious self-reflection (Wrathall 40-41).⁵⁸ As a consequence, we do not possess a full-fledged 'understanding' of our existence. Rather, an experiencing being exists and acts in the world without having a full rational understanding of why it acts or what it experiences in that world (ibid.). The body and bodily movement constitute subjectivity itself. One example Mohanty gives is reaching out to an object without consciously thinking first of performing this specific bodily motion (75). And, in connection to Merleau-Ponty, Mohanty adds that “[t]he intentionality of bodily movement confers the primary meaning on things in the world, which thought subsequently conceptualizes by a process of idealization” (75). Because we already participate in the world because of our intentionality, we do not 'possess' our actions or our 'selves.' So, we can actually act a certain way without knowing why we respond in that way to the world. In this regard, we could say that there is a world present in us, that acts *through* us, but to which we have no epistemological access. Merleau-Ponty speaks of a mysteriousness of the thing and the world that can sometimes emerge because they are “not amenable to elucidation, and this through no provisional gap in our knowledge [...], but because it is not of the order of objective thought in which there are solutions” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, qtd. in Maude 27). The apprehension of the world becomes something non-reflective, beyond mental representations or theories.

To summarize, important analogies can be traced between Merleau-Ponty's incarnated body-subject and the Bataille views on subjectivity. Both testify to a deconstruction of the human subject as an individual or isolated entity. Both Merleau-Ponty and Bataille present to us a different form of subjectivity which again I would like to visualize as a 'porosity' (although this confirms my [and the reader's] need for discontinuous concepts and imagery). Bataille's and Merleau-Ponty's shared ontology can be exemplified with a passage from *Inner Experience*, from which arises the image of the 'self' as an anonymous composition of relationships with the material world:

57 Viewed this way, an 'I' in control does not exist. The slow disintegration of our body, for example, is a forced suicide.

58 The use of the concept of 'intentionality' in philosophy has nothing to do with performing an action with a specific goal, but must rather be seen as our consciousness reaching out automatically to the world, participating in it and responding to it with a mental state. Merleau-Ponty's specific concept of *bodily intentionality* must be regarded as a special form of this mechanism: our body – and not only our mind – possesses 'intentionality' too. Our incarnated being-in-the-world is directed toward the world and responds to that world in which it is engulfed.

What you are stems from the activity which links the innumerable elements which constitute you to the intense communication of these elements among themselves. These are contagions of energy, of movement, of warmth, or transfers of elements, which constitute inevitably the life of your organized being. Life is never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity. Thus, where you would like to grasp your timeless substance, you encounter only a slipping, only the poorly coordinated play of your perishable elements. Further on, your life is not limited to that ungraspable inner streaming; it streams to the outside as well and opens itself incessantly to what flows out or surges forth towards it. (*IE* 95)

As far as Bataille is concerned, as I already explained in 2.2.1., humans are in essence continuous beings, but our consciousness falsely ossifies this continuous flux of existence. In this process of transcendence of the immanent unity of the world, humans constitute a difference between themselves as a subject and exterior objects. This transcendent knowledge and the subject that it creates can be said to belong to a restricted form of consciousness – the discontinuous one. Merleau-Ponty's body-subject then attests to another sphere of consciousness: the non-representable bodily level of experience that resembles my concept of somatic sublimity (as laid out in 2.2.3.). This experience throws us back on the undefinable movement of continuity we effectively embody.

I believe that Merleau-Ponty's concept of a primary perception of the world, arising from the constant bodily engagement with the world which breaks loose from our explicit awareness, corresponds with Bataille's concept of sublime transgressive experience. In this fleeting instant, the subject enters into a state of communication with the immanent continuity. This intimacy entails the disappearance of any object, and thus a dispossession or disintegration of the notion of self as well. In this experiential sphere, the subject as 'I' is broken up and experiences a different mode of being. I believe that similarly the trilogy, when it is read with a Bataillean eye, progressively shatters the view of a coinciding self-identity and sense of self-possession. This evolution is illustrated by the increasing blurring of the boundaries between the protagonists' bodies and the exterior world.

In general, Merleau-Ponty's body-centered phenomenology proposes a subjectivity that originates in the body and that defies the paradigm of representation or logical argumentation. Being is lived in experience, while no exterior knowledge of this experience can be gained. My choice to connect existentialist phenomenology to an analysis of the trilogy obviously ties in with the abandonment of logic and sound philosophical argumentation Beckett displays in his art.⁵⁹ With

⁵⁹ The inadequacy of the rational mind is, according to Esslin, a common theme in *Theatre of the Absurd*: “[Theatre of the Absurd] strives to express [...] the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (24).

regard to a possible connection between the Paris-based contemporaries Merleau-Ponty and Beckett, a direct intellectual influence between these two men cannot yet be proven beyond doubt. However, Ulrika Maude argues in favor of certain shared characteristics and friends in her effort to shift the attention to the body in Beckett's writing with her study *Beckett, Technology and the Body*.⁶⁰

My research does not intend to extensively analyze physical and sensory experience in Beckett's work with the help of Merleau-Ponty's writings as Maude's does. Mainly, I find support in Merleau-Ponty's experiential phenomenological ontology of the incarnated subject to explore the sublimity of transgressive experience. In "Molloy," part I: Beckett's 'Discourse on Method' (1978), Michael Mooney for example indicates that, in *Molloy*, "[Beckett] makes rational philosophy a mythology which exorcizes the unexplainable" and expresses man's "[inability] to gain knowledge about himself or his place in a naturalistic world" (s.p.). An important remark must however be made: while phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty substitute 'experience' for 'knowledge,' they are still looking for meaning. Beckett, on the other hand, does not assume that meaning exists and is not purchasing it anymore. Maude stresses this crucial philosophical difference between Merleau-Ponty and Beckett: "Where Beckett differs from Merleau-Ponty [...] is in the avidity with which the philosopher finds in the body a new locus of meaning. While Beckett's work insists on grounding subjectivity in materiality, it radically departs from Merleau-Ponty's work in its stern refusal of all forms of transcendence" (22). For instance, contemplating his physiological decay, Molloy utters: "[A]ll things run together, in the body's long madness, I feel it. But it is useless to drag out this chapter of my, how shall I say, my existence, for it has no sense, to my mind" (T 56). With this difference in mind, I can continue and further examine how literature can be interpreted as a device bearing similarities to the existentialist-phenomenological practice that tries to describe experience, in order to allow a reader to experience the experience tentatively *de-* or *circumscribed*.

2.3.2. *The Evil of Literature*

What Bataille's writings and the trilogy seem to have in common with the phenomenological approach in general is that they seem to 'bracket' many preconceptions the reader might have had, to the degree that the former acceptance of things as 'normal' suddenly becomes an outrageous habit for the reader. One of those habits is our mode of perceiving ourselves as integral subjects – which is for Bataille an effect of our discontinuous consciousness. Brewer, in his aforementioned article on Bataille's writing practice, defends this line of thought: he claims that Bataille's writings bring the

⁶⁰ Throughout her study, Maude points out that possible *liaisons* between Beckett and Merleau-Ponty are French art critic Georges Duthuit (1891-1971), French philosopher Jean Beaufret (1907-1982), or Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966).

reader “to maddening experiences of aporia that call into question the apparatus of discursive reason and that provide an opening for the unification of subject and object” (117). For him, Bataille *enacts* or *performs* this mystic experience for the reader, rather than merely describing it (117).

This ties in with the non-reasoning nature of the phenomenological approach, but also imports that it must go beyond language. As I have explained, phenomenology insists on its descriptive approach – not a theoretical one – in order to get to an understanding of the world. I believe the trilogy's novels can be said to function as a form of writing bearing resemblance to the existentialist-phenomenological method of description, as a literary form of this method. What is more, I want to claim that the reader is not led to an understanding of inner experience, but to an experience of the experience written about. It follows that two crucial questions must be answered first if I want to maintain that the trilogy can communicate inner experience to the reader via a literary description comparable to a phenomenological one.

The first problem is the movement from experience to a written account *of* that experience: how can experience be translated into words? Because, obviously, when a subject (e.g. Beckett-the-author) wants to write about a pre-reflective and non-conscious experience, this paradoxically requires a reflective consciousness to turn it into some kind of description of the experience encountered. A description implies a possession of the experience, which contradicts the impossibility of conceptualizing it. From the moment a tentative description is given, the non-reflective nature of the experience by definition seems to vanish. However, Merleau-Ponty counters such rash conclusions in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) by asserting that a phenomenological description does not intend to capture experience in words, but functions as an indirect means to express a silence: “[P]hilosophy [...] does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it does not transform it into something said [...]. It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression” (qtd. in Wrathall 45). In his 1970 essay ‘Georges Bataille and Divinus Deus,’ Japanese writer Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) comments on two of Bataille's prose works (i.e. *Madame Edwarda* and *My Mother* [1966]) and defends a similar idea: although Bataille is forced to verbalize what is basically an experience of silence – and which is thus “impossible for language to reach” (4) – the reader must “suppose that only the part that managed to break through the limits of language is left” (4).

Our second problem is the reversal of the first question: how can a written account, which is processed by a thinking subject (the reader), induce a non-conscious experience for that reader? Indeed, we also face “the impossibility of re-experiencing anything through language” (Mishima 4). Wrathall offers a way out of this second paradox when he underscores that the existential-

phenomenological descriptive method must be envisioned as a description that also functions indirectly (42-46). Its goal is directing the reader to his or her own access to a lived experience of the phenomenon, not just offer him or her a direct conceptual rendering of that experience. The narrator of Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* hints at this reader-response mechanism, when he directly addresses the reader in an aside about the impossibility of conveying his transgressive experience in words:

If you have to lay yourself bare, then you cannot play with words, trifle with slow-marching sentences. Should no one unclothe what I have said, I shall have written in vain. Edwarda is no dream's airy invention, the real sweat of her body soaked my handkerchief, so real was she that, led on by her, I came to want to do the leading in my turn. This book has its secret, I may not disclose it. Now more words. (*ME* 140)

Our protagonist has had an erotic transgressive experience of his own (his sexual ecstasy with the god-whore Edwarda); and because he is now witnessing what seem to be Edwarda's final death-pangs, he is on the threshold of transgression again. But the aside of our narrator-as-writer indicates that he now wishes 'to take the lead,' just the way Edwarda took the lead for him. As if he wants to assume the role of a writing 'pimp' of continuity, he wants to guide the reader toward that same sublimity Edwarda lead him into. To this end, he invites the reader of the story to read through his unavoidable 'clothing' of words – similar to the way he had to experience Edwarda: i.e. in all her nakedness. This is a crucial tension to understand Bataille's (and arguably also Beckett's) writings: he first and foremost attempts to animate an experiential reality in the reader – i.e. inner experience which abandons all discursive thought – but for this goal he is shackled to the discontinuous human tool of language. However, for Bataille, the reader has to rely solely upon experience, not words. Formulated differently: Bataille trusts that his reader will get rid of the fictions of discontinuity by experiencing what is beyond the meaning of the words of his writing.

To make the claim that reading the trilogy can elicit a similar response from the reader, as is purportedly the case in Bataille's fiction, it is of course a coherent move to turn toward 20th century *reader-response criticism*. German reader-response literary scholar Wolfgang Iser (1936-2007) provides us with a specific interpretation of Beckett's trilogy by which we can gain a profound insight into the reader's reaction to the books. In his article 'When is the End Not the End? The Idea of Fiction in Beckett' (1986), Iser adopts an 'anthropoetical' stance toward literature in general: he frames fiction as a “consciously false” consolation that attempts to satisfy the human need to gain insight in “a reality that is detached from human perception” by construing fictional images that are

then taken for real knowledge by the reader (49-53). Fiction pretends knowledge about what is unknowable by falsely conforming that what lies beyond our grasp to our minds. In other words, open gaps are filled with “concord-fictions” (56).⁶¹ One of those gaps in human understanding is “knowledge of the end” (48). For Iser, the deep human longing to penetrate the end is satisfied by fiction when this fiction projects fixed images about the end (48-49). Although Iser analyzes the idea to possess or gain access to the end, I believe the validity of his argument can be extended into the frame of Bataille's transgressive thinking if we equate the idea of 'the end' with that of 'death.'

Iser finds the trilogy fundamentally concerned with the end as well. However, he claims that the trilogy refuses to provide any consolidated image of the end (53-54). As a consequence, Beckett's trilogy continually frustrates the human need for concord-fictions and exposes what the end really is: “an event that one cannot avoid and yet that one cannot hope to understand in its true nature” (49). The text's effect on the reader forces him to re-evaluate every presentation of the end in fiction for what it is: nothing but unreal “images [...] designed simply to satisfy a human need” (49). This causes “discomfort” in the reader, because the comfort of fiction – which appeased his need for knowledge before – now falls away (49). As a consequence, for Iser, the driving force in Beckett's fictional writing (*in casu* the trilogy) is an “act of 'decomposition'” (58). Beckett is unveiling the falsity of his own fictions and instigates the reader to do the same. This self-destructive tendency found in the trilogy corresponds to the impetus I discerned in Bataille's writings: to force the reader to experience the falsity of his habitual perceptive schemes (which rely on knowledge that sprang forth from the reader's discontinuous consciousness) in order to weaken the mastery of that system. In relation to this process of undermining the habitual experience of the world, Guy Sircello ranks Bataille's writings among the tradition of sublime discourses that incite an “*intuition of nothingness*” with the effect of uncovering the reader's “radically limited access” to “reality” ('How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?' (1993), qtd. in A. Richardson 23).

Having detected a similar transgressive urge in both Bataille's and Beckett's writings, I now wish to conclude the setting up of my theoretical framework by a brief explanation of Bataille's views on the possible function and effect of literature – as set out in his study *Literature and Evil* – before I begin with my close reading of the trilogy. Bataille's exposition further supports my hypothesis that the trilogy can change the reader's identity by making him or her acquainted with (the repetition of) transgressive experience.

61 Iser borrows the term 'concord-fiction' from Frank Kermode's 1967 book *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*.

In this collection of eight essays on canonical writers (Emily Brönte, Baudelaire, Michelet, Blake, Sade, Proust, Kafka and Genet), Bataille expresses his conviction that their literary writings are “essential” because they are “guilty,” which for him means that they contain a “knowledge of Evil” while *communicating* it to the reader (*LE ix-x*). This 'Evil' is of course the transgressive sphere which can be discovered when obedience to the system of moral laws and prohibitions is abandoned. The profane order of 'Good' directed toward the future – including the taboos on which human society is based – tries to maintain and protect our integrity as discontinuous beings, but the violation of taboos is the destructive threat to this order. Bataille believes that all eight authors he deals with were more or less aware to some degree of this Evil and have therefore infested their writing with it. He evidences this claim with biographical digressions on the consistent breaking of the laws of society which many authors displayed during their lives. He gives the example of Franz Kafka's (1883-1923) irrational desire to dedicate himself to the 'non-profession' of writing, in disobedience to his father and family who wanted him to pursue a business career. Bataille typifies Kafka's resolution as an infantile, yet also very conscious revolt against the pressure to impose future goals on the present moment (155-160).⁶² Indeed, for Bataille, the basic act of writing in itself is already 'guilty' because its non-profitable nature forms a threat to the principle of productivity on which the profane world of work is based (Lozier 56-59).⁶³

However – analogous to the possible reader-response mechanism detected in the phenomenological practice of description and in *Madame Edwarda* – transgressive literature can be even more profoundly 'guilty' when it not only contains this knowledge of Evil, but also leads the reader indirectly into the ecstasy of transgression. This moment of literary communication can be defined as the communication of the communication with continuity from writer to reader. Bataille is convinced that this communication of transgressive communication cannot simply be described, but is nevertheless possible: “[Evil] would be incommunicable if we could not approach it in two ways: through poetry and through the description of those conditions by which one arrives at these states” (*LE 26*). In the section on somatic sublimity, I already touched upon Bataille's belief that a poetic rendition of a transgressive sublime experience is the closest we can get to a description of that experience. It now becomes clear that he also believes that suchlike rendition can have an effect on the reader. Moreover, we are given a second possible cause of a reader-response: a literary representation of being confronted with a somatic taboo and refusing to flee from the anguish it provokes, so that the reader breaks the laws imposed by its discontinuous consciousness as well.⁶⁴

62 That Kafka wanted his entire oeuvre to be burnt after his death is extra support for Bataille's interpretation.

63 This of course does not mean that *any* writer is automatically aware of the realm of Evil Bataille writes about.

64 Remark that Bataille sees this second option as essentially belonging to the poetic realm too.

For a deeper understanding of why Bataille endows literature with this extraordinary potential for communicating continuity to the reader, I can revert to the practice of sacrifices once more. For Bataille claims that literature of Evil is in fact heir to these ancient religious rites, because the effects of a sacrifice are enacted in literature by the subterfuge of language (*EDS* 87). Literature of Evil serves the human being's transgressive instincts, just as ancient sacrificial festivals did.

For Bataille, the similarity between a sacrificial event and the violence in the literary process lies in the multiple (symbolic) deaths that *can* occur in literary writing as well. For example, a possible death is a *character's*, by which this character becomes similar to a real-life sacrificial victim. In this regard, the author executes a character so that the reader can become the onlooker of this sacrifice. An example of this we find in *Madame Edwarda*. The narrator and Edwarda go out on the Parisian streets late at night and spend some time under a grand arch. This setting becomes similar to a sacrificial altar when Edwarda suddenly starts to convulse and is apparently in her death-struggle (the narrator labels this as the “unutterable barrenness” and the “black night hour of the being's core” [139]). Although Edwarda does not die at the end, her struggling body leads our narrator into transgressive ecstasy as well. Mesmerized by her alternating presence and absence, he feels himself slowly becoming a part of her convulsions on the threshold of dying as well:

Edwarda's sufferings dwelt in me like the quick truth of an arrow: one knows it will pierce the heart, but death will ride in with it. As I waited for annihilation, all that subsisted in me seemed to me to be the dross over which man's life tarries. Squared against a silence so black, something leaped in my heavy despair's midst. Edwarda's convulsions snatched me away from my own self, they cast my life into a desert waste 'beyond', they cast it there carelessly, callously, the way one flings a living body to the hangman. [...]. When I saw Madame Edwarda writhing on the pavement, I entered a similar state of absorption [...].⁶⁵ (*ME* 139-140)

This scene suggests that a reader-as-onlooker can be directed toward his own sublime experience as well – the way our narrator is by beholding Edwarda's death agony. Like the spectator of a sacrifice, the reader is engulfed by death during his reading and glimpses at the continuity of being. But, Bataille also defends the conviction that a literary work is only completed, and therefore actually *created*, by the reader's response, because “without [the reader's] thought [the writer's] work could not even have existed” (*LE* 191). Abiding by this reader-response interpretation (in the context of the death of a character), the act of reading is not merely a distant beholding, but also an active killing of that character. Thus, the reader is no longer exclusively a passive onlooker, but also becomes an accomplice in the sacrificial process as the reader-as-executioner (Lozier 104-105).

⁶⁵ Note the similarity of the arrow-image with Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* on the cover of *Erotism* (cfr. 3.1.1.2.).

A second victim in literature of Evil is the *author*, because he or she performs an altruistic self-sacrifice in order to excite the reader's transgressive experience (Lozier 108). As far as Bataille is concerned, a 'guilty' writer must constantly attempt to break free of any “*servitude*” to the rational world in which the self is the limit of being (*LE* 191). This is accomplished in the non-useful act of transgressive writing itself: an author as Bataille, aware of the realm of Evil, repeats his endeavor to lose himself in transgression, solely to offer these experiences for communication to the reader (Jonathan Strauss, 'The Inverted Icarus,' qtd. in Lozier 98-99). Formulated differently, he places his discontinuous existence entirely in the service of continuity and thus becomes the willing victim eager to be sacrificed. Again, the reader assumes the role of witness to this sacrifice. But next to this, the writer's symbolic self-sacrificial death can be said to rely on the reader's executive act of reading as well (Lozier 105).

However, for Bataille, the *reader* does not only occupy the 'safe' position of onlooker or executioner, but actually becomes the metaphorical victim of the literary sacrificial event as well. Lozier explains that the destructive violence in Bataille's writings implies that the reader, when he or she communicates with continuity as a consequence of the act of reading, is in fact the victim of the writer-as-executioner (103). In addition to this, regarded from the perspective that a reader consents to submit himself to transgressive writing, the reader can even be paradoxically regarded as his own executioner (106).

In sum, the general reader-response mechanism by which transgressive experience takes place for the reader can be framed as induced by a poetic description of the experience; by a persevered description of (and thus confrontation with) all sorts of taboos; and by the multiple possible deaths in a multilateral sacrificial event. According to Bataille, when these moments of literary communication occur, they are basically a movement that takes place between author and reader in which “[the writer] can deny [the reader] to the extent in which he has denied himself (*LE* 191-192). When adhering to this belief that transgressive literature can constitute a connection between two living beings – in which both are bereft of their individualized subjectivity – Bataille's concept of literary communication arises as an extension of his general ontological stance:

I am sure about one thing: humanity is not composed of isolated beings but of communication between them. Never are we revealed, even to ourselves, other than in a network of communications with others. We bathe in communication, we are reduced to this incessant communication whose absence we feel [...]. (*LE* 198-199)

Indeed, this quote is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's constant unconscious connection of the body-

subject with other beings or objects, which I aligned with Bataille's view on subjectivity as being constituted (or rather disintegrated) by the movement of continuity. Indeed, for Bataille, in the moment of literary communication between author and reader, “the consciousnesses that reflect each other” also pass into “that impenetrability [of continuity] which they 'ultimately' are” (*LE* 200). In *Inner Experience*, Bataille reworks this ungraspable material movement of continuity and translates it to the movement from author to reader in literature as follows:

Now to live signifies for you not only the flux and the fleeting play of light which are united in you, but the passage of warmth or of light from one being to another, from you to your fellow being or from your fellow being to you (even at the moment when you read in me the contagion of my fever which reaches you). [...]. Thus we are nothing, neither you nor I, beside the burning words which could pass from me to you, imprinted on a page: for I would only have lived in order to write them, and, if it is true that they are addressed to you, you will live from having had the strength to hear them. (*IE* 94)

The second part of this quote again attests to the writer's self-sacrifice as I explained above: the only 'goal' in Bataille's discontinuous life was to dedicate it to transgression and to initiate others into this cult of symbolic death and resurrection. Hence, literature of transgression leads the reader to the ecstasy that arises when one does not flee from the fear before taboos and consequently exposes oneself to the risk of transgression. If the reader was not aware of this transgressive possibility beforehand (because, for example, he or she held the moral system of Good for an absolute one), the act of reading can serve as a discovery of the sphere of Evil. When the reader has been initiated to this 'knowledge' of Evil, it is possible that inner experience will repeat itself for the reader. As such, transgressive literature can also propel a transformation of the reader's view on human identity, leading him or her to a *hyper-morality* (which is the consequence of transgressive repetition as discussed in 2.2.5.), of which the main feature is an indifference toward the success of attempts to overcome the insufficiency of one's discontinuous existence.

Having come to the end of my theoretical framework, I can start my detailed analysis of Beckett's trilogy. At times, I have already illustrated the convergence of Beckett's art with Bataille's frame of mind. Now, I wish to fully develop my hypothesis that the trilogy is transgressive literature of Evil as well and as such lets human subjectivity revolve around the disintegrating effects of sublime inner experiences – an experience which the reader can undergo as well.

3. Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Trilogy

Surely, the trilogy could confirm Beckett's *epitheton* 'novelist of depression' (testifying to his frequent bursts of depression). A lot of his work could indeed be read in this autobiographical manner – arguably containing then his intense feeling of a negatively experienced disconnectedness from the world and his strong awareness of his mortality. One could therefore superficially read Beckett as being nothing more than a depressing author. However, I want to claim that these 'depressing' elements conveyed in his writings are indispensable elements for his transgressive writing. Bataille, in a speech at the 1938 conference '*Attraction et Repulsion*' before *le Collège de Sociologie*, enounced the possibility of transforming a depression in a more neutral tension.⁶⁶ Lozier maintains that Bataille here affirmed that human existence is fundamentally “disgusting and depressing” but that this can be transformed in an “object for exaltation” in which the “category of death becomes the principle of life, and the fall the principle of gush” (70, my translation).⁶⁷ This blurring of categorical distinctions excludes the possibility of judgment (which labels such as 'depressing' or 'negative' construct by assuming the human individual to be a valid point of reference). As Molloy states: “to decompose is to live too” (*T* 25). I want to prove that Beckett's transgressive writing attains the same desubjectified neutrality as Bataille propagates.

Although I have already fragmentarily indicated in my theoretical frame that the trilogy contains transgressive elements as well (e.g. the sacrificial element [2.2.2.]), I first wish to affirm this once more. One major condition is of course the recognition that the system of taboos erected around our corporeality should not be regarded as an absolute law, because this would deny the transgressive urge that subsists in man. Molloy provides us with this assertion when he confesses his recidivist exhibitionism when it comes to his public display of certain 'unclean' habits:

I have only to be told what good behaviour is and I am well-behaved, within the limits of my physical possibilities. [...]. And as far as good-will is concerned, I had it to (sic) overflowing, the exasperated good-will of the overanxious. So that my repertory of permitted attitudes has never ceased to grow, from my first steps until my last, executed last year. And if I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who corrected me only on points of detail instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the

⁶⁶ *Le Collège de Sociologie* was a collective of thinkers that was founded by Bataille and existed from 1937 to 1939.

⁶⁷ 'Life-and-death' as an inseparable unity that transcends the notion of the individual is a mystic feeling also found, for example, in Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) self-written epitaph: “Rose, oh pure contradiction, desire, / To be no one's sleep under so many / Lids.” [“*Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust, / Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel / Lidern.*”]. John Mood, in his 1975 essay on this epitaph, explains this image of petals of a blossoming rose around an empty core. In Rilke's world, it is the “curling-into-nothing essence” that animates dying as the ever intertwined part of living (*The Difficulty of Dying: Rilke's Self-Composed Epitaph* 106-107)

manner of the great English schools, and the guiding principles of good manners, and how to proceed, without going wrong, from the former to the latter, and how to trace back to its ultimate source a given comportment. For that would have allowed me, before parading in public certain habits such as the finger in the nose, the scratching of the balls, digital emunction and the peripatetic piss, to refer them to the first rules of a reasoned theory. On this subject I had only negative and empirical notions, which means that I was in the dark, most of the time, and all the more completely as a lifetime of observations had left me doubting the possibility of systematic decorum, even within a limited area. (*T* 24-25)

Indeed, (Western) infant socialization is a peculiar thing, because body-related prohibitions are taught without ever making explicit an all-encompassing reason for these interdictions. But Molloy is also raising a more radical Bataillean critique: it is precisely because society has become unaware of why taboos came into existence or how they function, that it *can* no longer explain the 'essence of the system' or the 'ultimate source' for 'decent' behavior. Snot, genitalia or piss are examples of testimonials of the useless consumption of the universe's continuity. In the evolution of man, these abject matters were shielded off by a 'reasoned theory' – a system constructed in order to protect man's sense of self. Organized transgressions of this erected system were, as I discussed, allowed in ancient societies. The problem, as Molloy points out, is the present-day supremacy of the 'overanxious' – i.e. they who, in their dread of death, have made their 'good-will' (their dedication to ban life's destruction) absolute and have become blind maidservants of discontinuity.

In his trilogy, Beckett constantly attempts to transcend the habitual infatuation of our ordinary discontinuous perception and our abuse of death by 'discontinuizing' it (i.e. categorizing it as a distinct entity so that it can be pushed away from consciousness). In order to bypass this discontinuous mediation (i.e. to look beyond the subject's representation after its formulation in thought or language), he is forced to start from the primeval condition of existence that is most closely linked to existence as a whole: being embodied. In what follows, I will focus on the ideosyncratic presentation of the human body, including what society deems 'filthy' about it, because I want to argue that it attests to Beckett's attempt to probe the limits of discontinuous experience.

Therefore, in the first part of my analysis, I will demonstrate how Bataille and Beckett share their views on bodily identity, somatic taboos and the possibility of transgressive sublimity connected to it. This I will do by examining three Bataillean themes in the trilogy: reproductive and erotic sexuality; abjection; and laughter. The second part of my analysis will focus on the evolution of the trilogy's characters. I believe they reflect the effects on their identity because of the repetition of transgression undergone and the increasing 'indifference' this generates. Having explained previously how a reader-response mechanism can take place, the characters' disintegration then of course mirrors the transformation that the reader can undergo as well.

3.1. The Body, Taboos and Transgression in the Trilogy

3.1.1. *The sexual body*

The first theme with which I want to analyze the trilogy as fundamentally concerned with transgression is the taboo of sexuality. Molloy indeed observes: “It is true they were extraordinarily reserved, in my part of the world, about everything connected with sexual matters” (*T* 58). However, to interrogate this peculiar taboo with a Bataillean mindset, I must first address Bataille's distinction between animal sexuality (which is aimed at biological reproduction) and human eroticism (which is non-reproductive and therefore rather a bodily-induced psychological matter). According to Bataille, human eroticism has lost the direct connection with the basic reproductive intentions of animal sexuality. He views eroticism as a transgressive act, because it can be viewed as a direct challenge to the discontinuous order: it is an unproductive, purposeless expenditure of energy (an activity thus opposed to the imperative of productivity and accumulation). In the disequilibrium caused by erotic experience, humans can feel their discontinuous self tremble. While animal sexual activity brings forth the same disequilibrium, animals do not question the attack on their discontinuous being because they lack self-awareness (*EDS* 29).

Nevertheless, I wish to address human reproductive sexuality as well in this section, because it also contains elements which dispossess mankind of its assumed stable discontinuous identity.⁶⁸ Thus, sexual activity in general (in both its reproductive and non-reproductive form) is as a reminder that death, “the rupture of the discontinuous individualities to which we cleave in terror, stands there before us more real than life itself” (*EDS* 19). This is proven by the fact that the taboos that try to contain sexuality in general – so not only those concerning non-reproductive erotic promiscuity – are widespread.⁶⁹ Although reproducing is not 'forbidden,' it is generally confined to the private sphere. For Bataille, “[s]exual activity [in general] is a critical moment in the isolation of the individual. We know it from without, but we know that it weakens and calls into question the feeling of self” (*EDS* 100). Let me clarify why this is the case in both reproductive and non-reproductive sexuality, and especially how the trilogy acquaints the reader with these Bataillean lines of thought.

⁶⁸ To assume there exists an absolute distinction between animal sexuality and human eroticism could be said to be an effect of our 'discontinuizing' mind that tries to achieve order by thinking in absolute opposites.

⁶⁹ Consider for example the shame that was bestowed upon the sexual act in Christianity. Sexuality was made into something that must not be enjoyed. Shame for certain sexual bodily functions and features is only possible when humans impose a normative distinction between 'good' and 'evil.'

3.1.1.1. *Reproductive Sexuality*

Thus, my first point of investigation is the representation of *reproductive* human sexuality in the trilogy. In the act of reproduction, the challenge to the discontinuous world by the useless expenditure of energy could be said to be absent, because a new discontinuous being is created. Thus, superficially, life-giving seems to dominate reproductive sexuality. However, the death-giving side of existence as a whole is also present, when approached from a generational point of view: new life and growth in the cycle of being can be said to be produced at the expense of two other beings in the long run (Bataille, *EDS* 13). The birth of a human being is the product of the death of other beings, as Malone seems to confirm: “Death must take me for someone else” (*T* 274). Man's reproductive impulse is a manifestation of the movement of continuity humans embody. The former allegedly isolated self is used up as it were to serve the prodigal cycle of life, which squanders discontinuous beings. Put differently, the inscription of reproduction in this purposeless cycle brings into play the continuity of being – opposed to the feeling of self – for the participants.

Bataille stresses how we take taboos such as the privacy which the sexual act seems to require or the shameful nature of nakedness (an almost global cultural phenomenon at present day) for granted, but, for him, all of this originates in the horror before the violence and terrifying instinct which sexual impulses are (*EDS* 49-54). Our (animal) sexuality horrifies, because it leads to our own death – and thus to a reunification with continuity – in the long run. To this absurd condition of growing in order to reproduce and then die Bataille alludes in his chapter on the affinities between reproduction and death in *Erotism*:

Mankind conspires to ignore the fact that death is also the youth of things. Blindfolded, we refuse to see that only death guarantees the fresh upsurging without which life would be blind. We refuse to see that life is the trap set for the balanced order, that life is nothing but instability and disequilibrium. Life is a swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion. But since the incessant explosion constantly exhausts its resources, it can only proceed under one condition: that beings given life whose explosive force is exhausted shall make room for fresh beings coming into the cycle with renewed vigour. (*EDS* 59)

Bataille even radicalizes this general view of reproduction as part of the prodigal cycle of continuity up to a level where he equates reproducing with dying, by disregarding the temporal factor:

In the long or short run, reproduction demands the death of the parents who produced their young only to give fuller rein to the forces of annihilation (just as the death of a generation demands that a new generation be born). [...]. We must never forget that the multiplication of beings goes hand in hand with death. The parents survive the birth of their offspring but the

reprieve is only temporary. A stay is granted, partly for the benefit of the newcomers who need assistance, but the appearance of the newcomers guarantees the death of their predecessors. Death follows reproduction with sexual beings too, at a distance even if not immediately.⁷⁰ (*EDS* 61, 100-101)

This Bataillean idea of dying when reproducing is present in the trilogy as well, more specifically on the first page – from the perspective of Molloy as a son – when this character is in his mother's room and expresses his uncertainty about her death:

The truth is I don't know much. For example my mother's death. Was she already dead when I came? Or did she only die later? I mean enough to bury. I don't know. Perhaps they haven't even buried her yet. In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more. All I need now is a son. (*T* 7)

This is indeed a succinct literary reformulation of Bataille's theoretical ideas. If we read Molloy's 'coming' not as coming into his mother's room, but as his being born into discontinuity, we can interpret his words as the awareness of the voracity of existence in which everything constitutes a link that generates and degenerates, consumes and is consumed. Molloy's birth meant that his mother fulfilled her reproductive function – like a cog, a resource for a machine – after which she is headed for death. Whether she is still biologically alive at the moment of speaking is of no importance, because the linking function of the cycle is the point of reference.⁷¹ In this regard, Molloy has indeed taken his mother's place. All he can do now is consume other material resources until he generates his own offspring, after which he can await his own annihilation as yet another superfluous link in the chain of existence. The same point of view is found in Moran's story as well (but now from the perspective of a father) when his only son, who had accompanied him on the quest for Molloy he undertook, leaves him during the night after a quarrel:

[W]aking early I found myself alone [...]. And what is more my instinct told me I had been alone for some considerable time, my breath no longer mingling with the breath of my son [...]. [...]. And this was not yet all, for he had left with a considerable sum of money, he who was only entitled to a few pence from time to time, for his savings-box. [...]. I was therefore alone [...], knowing myself coldly abandoned, with deliberation and no doubt premeditation [...]. And I remained for several days, I do not know how many, in the place where my son had abandoned me, eating my last provisions (which he might easily have taken too), seeing no living soul, powerless to act, or perhaps strong enough at last to act no more. For I had no

⁷⁰ One example of this 'immediate' dying could be maternal death related to pregnancy or giving birth when medical care is absent. This close connection between reproduction and death finds expression in *The Unnamable* as well, when we learn that the unnamable's parents have died “at seven months interval, he at the conception, she at the nativity” (*T* 377). Yet, this quote could also indicate their symbolic death because their reproductive task is fulfilled.

⁷¹ Molloy will go on a quest for his mother in the novel, an enterprise that could be interpreted as the impossible task to look for the origins of the *why* of his existence (cfr. *infra* 3.2.1.2.).

illusions, I knew that all was about to end, or to begin again, it little mattered which, and it little mattered how, I had only to wait. And on and off, for fun, and the better to scatter them to the winds, I dallied with the hopes that spring eternal, childish hopes, as for example that my son, his anger spent, would have pity on me and come back to me! (T 160-161)

Metaphorically speaking – abiding by our Bataillean perspective – the son's disappearance could be said to figure as the end of Moran's parental care. Because this care suddenly comes to a stop, Moran is fully struck with the superfluity of his existence, which the presence of his son formerly obscured for him. In fact, his “thirteen or fourteen” (T 94) year old son can be said to still be in the life phase of growth (that puts his theft of his father's money in perspective, associated as it is with the world of work and accumulation), while his father has entered the phase of decay after having generated his posterity. Now, this dying father only has his future death in sight, while being fully aware that his consumption of 'provisions' to sustain his life is nothing but another ultimate meaningless expenditure as well. Indeed, when reproduction has taken place, one can only wait passively for death to come. Or as Macmann says to his partner Moll – both highly aged characters – in *Malone Dies*: “When you hold me in your arms, and I you in mine, it naturally does not amount to much, compared to the transports of youth, and even middle age” (T 261).

Importantly, Bataille and Beckett refrain from distilling any existential meaning from this view on reproductive sexuality. They do not claim that life only becomes meaningless when old age is reached. Being able to engender new life does not give individual existence any purpose. Malone confirms this philosophical nihilist stand in a frantic existential lamentation:

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. Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. And seeing what a poor thing I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it. Then be alone a long time, unhappy, not knowing what my prayer should be nor to whom. (T 226)

Here, procreation is denied any transcendent meaning-giving quality. For Malone, procreation is merely the possibility to multiply meaningless discontinuous existences and deaths, as the child he would make would only be another mortal creature like himself. The continuity of existence ascertains the prodigality of every discontinuous being. Furthermore, because the child-creature is reduced to an 'it,' to a 'thing,' we can again discern the Bataillean materialist 'objectification' of human individuality. What is more, we can also detect an imaginative transgressive act in Malone's idea to eat his child: i.e. cannibalism. According to Bataille, in archaic societies, eating human flesh sometimes occurred as a transgressive ritual (as an extension of the general taboo on human

murder), in which the flesh itself became a sacred matter (*EDS* 71-72).⁷² In addition to this child-cannibalism, Bataille also draws our attention to the practice of child sacrifices in general as a transgressive event, in for example Aztec society (*EDS* 87). Thus, Malone's proposed killing of his newborn aptly illustrates the possible symbolic sacrificial nature of literature: on the level of characters, the reader is complicit in the sacrificial violence as onlooker and/or as executioner by way of the reader-response mechanism (as I explained in 2.3.2.). In addition to this, after having had the illusion of meaningful sexual reproductivity shattered (because of the imagined cannibalistic-transgressive behavior), Malone's despondent declaration that there is nothing to wish and no one to turn to anymore of course echoes Job's Kierkegaardian religious moment (which I framed as the indifferent stance necessary to fully surrender to the repetition of transgression).

So, we are able to discern in the trilogy a materialist view on the constant, purposeless expenditure of existence as a whole and the anonymous 'objectification' of human subjectivity it induces. Indeed, when reproductive sexuality is the point of reference, the elemental "violence [of existence] belongs to the flesh, the flesh responsible for the urges of the organs of reproduction" (Bataille, *EDS* 93). But we know that Bataille shatters the entire notion of a stable, self-contained discontinuous, physical integrity as well. In *Erotism*, we find this formulated as the "limited particularity" that is replaced by the "limitless, infinite nature of sacred things" in moments of sexual ecstasy (*EDS* 90). Formulated from the perspective of a male human being:

[T]he act of the man who lays bare, desires and wants to penetrate his victim [is intentional]. The lover strips the beloved of her identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim. The woman in the hands of her assailant is despoiled of her being. With her modesty she loses the firm barrier that once separated her from others and made her impenetrable. She is brusquely laid open to the violence of the sexual urges set loose in the organs of reproduction; she is laid open to the impersonal violence that overwhelms her from without. (*EDS* 90)

We can indeed read into this passage the exposition of the Merleau-Pontian *intentional* body-subject, which is not an entity, but composed out of a 'relationality' with the material world. Both the man and the woman disappear as conscious entities: their desire is an anonymous and automatic manifestation of the violence of continuity they embody (acted out by their genitalia), of a flux that is both exterior and interior to them, but that defies human appropriation. But there is also another disintegration of the category of isolated human individuality at work in the above quote. For this we must turn to the Bataillean concept of eroticism and examine if it is present in the trilogy as well.

72 Remark how the Christian ceremony of communion (presented as eating the body of Christ) illustrates Christianity's aversion from the material world by limiting itself to a symbolic, imagined cannibalist sacrifice.

3.1.1.2. *Erotic Sexuality*

Eroticism's origins lie in man's animal sexual instincts, yet it is exclusively human. It does not involve the initial reproductive purpose of sexual activity and thus does away with the direct life- and death-giving implications that were just discussed. Nevertheless, the attack on our discontinuous subjectivity is present in another form according to Bataille. For him, non-(re)productive human eroticism is a “psychological quest” that looks to “substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity” (*EDS* 11, 15). As I already explained, Bataille believes that all humans harbor this instinctive urge toward continuity, but which only death can really fulfill. In eroticism, however, continuity can be pursued. The possibility to experience an instant of continuity lies in the promise of merging with one another (analogous to the sperm and ovum that disappear as discontinuous entities when they fuse). Two discontinuous beings can be said to attempt to 'communicate' the continuity of being among each other and experience it together: 'I' as an individual can say that “*I am losing myself*” (Bataille, *EDS* 31, original emphasis). This way, they are in fact working toward a fusion of their isolated discontinuous bodies. They seemingly transgress the limits between their separate existences and as such counteract their individualistic experience of existence.⁷³ The erotic act in itself can therefore be viewed as “the negation of the isolation of the ego” (Bataille, *LE* 16). The orgasm then, as the culmination of this impulse toward continuity, is the state of 'openness,' the sublime moment of an apparent fusion with continuity. As Zeynep Direk recapitulates, the ecstasy of (Bataillean) eroticism gives a glimpse of “the beyond being-in-the-world in a return to an amplified contact with the immanent energy of the universe” (99). About this idea Bataille writes – reminiscent of Emerson's sublime in nature – that “the beloved makes the world transparent” (*EDS* 21).

Nevertheless, we must not forget that every transgressive experience is a failure. The striven-for fusion – which would negate our discontinuous solitude – is and will always be just an illusion and remains impossible to attain. If an actual fusion occurred, this would “destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives” (Bataille, *EDS* 17). Because to *be* continuous requires to die. Eroticism promises to end our suffering from our discontinuous solitude, but that end can never be accomplished in the discontinuous state to which we are bound. Therefore, the climax of orgasm is the vicarious experience of death; the orgasm is a hybrid pain-pleasure

⁷³ Note that in non-reproductive eroticism, we are no longer normatively shackled by the possible reproductive sexuality between a man and a woman for our analysis. This because eroticism between two people of the same sex does comprise the same promise of a fusion. So, even though Bataille does not elaborate on homosexual eroticism, his views can be extended and maintained for homosexuality as well.

intermingling.⁷⁴ Formulated differently, “[t]he urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death” (Bataille, *EDS* 42).⁷⁵

Before I move forward to the trilogy, I first want to examine how Bataille molds his theory on eroticism into literature in his aforementioned short story *Madame Edwarda*. The narrator, a drunkard in Paris, is erotically obsessed by the whore Edwarda, who calls herself 'God.' Her God-like quality resides in the fact that a prostitute ambiguously dedicates her life to transgression because her 'work' is a constant violation of society's taboos. Edwarda seduces our protagonist to break the taboo of sex – or at least the part that dictates the privacy of it – when she convinces him to have oral sex in the middle of the whorehouse and be lost in erotic ecstasy:

She had not shifted from her position, her leg was still cocked in the air. And her tone was commanding: 'Come here.' 'Do you mean,' I protested, 'in front of all these people?' 'Sure,' she said, 'why not?' I was shaking, I looked at her: motionless, she smiled back so sweetly that I shook. At last, reeling, I sank down on my knees and feverishly pressed my lips to that running, teeming wound. [...]. In the brothel's boisterous chaos and in the atmosphere of corroding absurdity I was breathing (it seemed to me that I was choking, I was flushed, I was sweating) I hung strangely suspended, quite as though at that same point we, Edwarda and I, were losing ourselves in a wind-freighted night, on the edge of the ocean. (135)

The connection of *cunnilingus* with the representation of Edwarda's vagina as a wound again suggests the close connection between eroticism and death. Besides this, it could also refer to inner experience as a direct experience of the Bataillean 'wound of insufficiency.' Before our protagonist then retreats upstairs with Edwarda to copulate, he first pays the *souteneur* of the brothel. In accordance with my reader-response hypothesis, Bataille and Beckett can be framed as *souteneurs* as well: they are 'pimps' who offer their writings to the reader so that he or she can experience the rapture of transgression outside the boundaries of 'decent' society – as onlooker and/or victim.

In the final scene, our narrator beholds Edwarda having sex with a taxi-driver. As such, he takes up the position of engaged onlooker (like the reader has been the entire time). Because, while looking at Edwarda's orgasm, he is able to state that he can “read death's letters” in the “transparence [of her eyes]” (141). He remarks that “Edwarda's pain-wrung pleasure filled [him] with an

74 The strong connection between death and sexuality, between Thanatos and Eros is aptly conveyed on the cover of my copy of *Erotism*. It pictures the face of Teresa in 17th century sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture 'The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa.' An angel who is about to penetrate her with his spear is bringing Teresa into a state of divine rapture. Teresa's face borders on dying and having an orgasm, with pain and joy hybridly coinciding.

75 To illustrate the profound unity of sexuality and death, Bataille calls our attention to the popular euphemism '*la petite mort*,' used for the post-orgasmic state of exhaustion (*EDS* 100). In relation to this, French literary scholar Roland Barthes' (1915-1980) renowned statement, in his book *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), that true literature must lead the reader to '*la petite mort*' as well, of course ties in with the sublime reader-reaction that I am proposing as possible effect of reading the trilogy (especially so since '*la petite mort*' can also refer to the loss of self associated with the moment of sexual orgasm).

exhausting impression of bearing witness to a miracle” (142). Because our narrator is led to inner experience as an onlooker/witness of Edwarda's erotic act, the story enforces my argument that a reader can be lead toward a transgressive sublime of his or her own via literature. Furthermore, the hybrid intermingling of pain and pleasure conveys the idea, as Bataille states in his preface to the story, that “joy is the same thing as suffering, the same thing as dying, as death” (125). Having 'intercourse' with or 'bearing witness' to the God-like Edwarda attests to a moment of absorption and falling into a void, during which continuity is unveiled but remains covered at the same time.⁷⁶

Does the trilogy also exhibit a similar transgressive stance toward eroticism? Does it also represent the entanglement of erotic activity with death? A couple of selected key scenes are revelatory. Allow me to begin with an extensive one in which Molloy digresses on his memory of the only woman he “once rubbed up against” and who made him “acquainted with love” (*T* 56):

She had a hole between her legs, oh not the bunghole I had always imagined, but a slit, and in this I put, or rather she put, my so-called virile member, not without difficulty, and I toiled and moiled until I discharged or gave up trying or was begged by her to stop. A mug's game in my opinion and tiring on top of that, in the long run. But I lent myself to it with a good enough grace, knowing it was love, for she had told me so. She bent over the couch, because of her rheumatism, and in I went from behind. It was the only position she could bear, because of her lumbago. It seemed all right to me, for I had seen dogs, and I was astonished when she confided that you could go about it differently. I wonder what she meant exactly. Perhaps after all she put me in her rectum. A matter of complete indifference to me, I needn't tell you. But is it true love, in the rectum? That's what bothers me sometimes. Have I never known true love, after all? She too was an eminently flat woman and she moved with short stiff steps, leaning on an ebony stick. Perhaps she too was a man, yet another of them. But in that case our testicles would have collided, while we writhed. Perhaps she held hers tight in her hand, on purpose to avoid it. (*T* 56-57)

The described sexual deeds (apparently with a woman of high age, while also including the possibility of anal penetration or homosexuality) are indeed erotic by definition. Representing these as 'rubbing up against' another being, reminds us of eroticism as the longing to exceed the limits of the discontinuous isolated state of being. Nevertheless, at this point, Molloy's description primarily seems to frame the human sexual urge as a primordial animal instinct – thus connected to reproductive sexuality like dogs'. Hence, Molloy also indirectly discards the elevated notion of 'love.' Pityingly, he suggests the futility of his use of this concept, as it exposes the human idealization of immanent lust and the (discontinuous) transcendence of the material, carnal world. These characteristics are further developed as Molloy's recollection continues:

⁷⁶ Tellingly, Madame Edwarda is oft portrayed in terms of an absence: she opens “the emptiness of heaven” (136); looking at her is “as distressing as an emptiness, a hole” (137); “beneath the garment enfolding her, she [is] mindless: rapt, absent” (ibid.); and she becomes invisible and resembles “a deathly darkness” (ibid.).

And all I could see was her taut yellow nape which every now and then I set my teeth in, forgetting I had none, such is the power of instinct. [...]. She had no time to lose, I had nothing to lose, I would have made love with a goat, to know what love was. [...]. [U]nder our desperate strokes the couch moved forward on its castors, the whole place fell about our ears, it was pandemonium. [...]. I would have preferred it seems to me an orifice less arid and roomy, that would have given me a higher opinion of love it seems to me. However. Twixt finger and thumb tis heaven in comparison. But love is no doubt about such base contingencies. And not when you are comfortable, but when your frantic member casts about for a rubbing-place, and the unction of a little mucous membrane, and meeting with none does not beat in retreat, but retains its tumefaction, it is then no doubt that true love comes to pass, and wings away, high above the tight fit and the loose. (*T* 57-58)

Molloy expands his blurring of the animal-human distinction (instinctual biting of the neck; bestiality with a goat) and his ironic, derogatory degradation of 'love' (as a winged angel ascending to heaven, away from the world of the flesh). But the question remains if Beckett's trilogy also contains the more psychological urge for continuity (besides the small hint of 'rubbing up against someone'). One clue is Molloy's description of sexual fervor, not as an ascent up to heaven, but as 'pandemonium.' This term for hell, borrowed from John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost*, suggests the violent outburst of a hellish chaos in sexual ecstasy. As such, the metaphor concurs with the exposure to the violent disorder of the continuous flux. Furthermore, a Bataille-like view on erotic activity (i.e. leading to a vicarious experience of death) emerges when Molloy relates his lover's death, moments before he arrived to 'make love' again, to which he adds the remark: "When I think she might have expired in my arms!" (*T* 58). Although Bataille states that actual "[d]eath is the result of the sexual crisis only in exceptional cases" (*EDS* 100), Molloy's suggestion could indicate Beckett's awareness of a connection between (the climax of) erotic sexuality and death.

Another possible allusion to the psychological complicity of Eros and Thanatos is found in the unnamable's imaginative zoophilia with a horse – which again suits the image of eroticism as a base bodily-induced impulse. For, after having spoken about its potential suffocation, the unnamable immediately associates this physiological state on the verge of dying with a sexual fantasy:

Asphyxia! I who was always the respiratory type [...]. I who murmured, each time I breathed in, Here comes more oxygen, and each time I breathed out, There go the impurities, the blood is bright red again. The blue face! The obscene protrusion of the tongue! The tumefaction of the penis! The penis, well now, that's a nice surprise, I'd forgotten I had one. What a pity I have no arms, there might still be something to be wrung from it. No, tis better thus. At my age, to start masturbating again, it would be indecent. And fruitless. And yet one can never tell. With a yo heave ho, concentrating with all my might on a horse's rump, at the moment when the tail rises, who knows, I might not go altogether empty-handed away. Heaven, I almost felt it flutter! (*T* 332)

What is interesting here is that we can interpret this asphyxia-sex association as a physiological experience that is symbolic for Bataille's notion of transgression. More specifically, the transgressive desire can be said to be analogous to the sexual fetish of erotic asphyxiation: the brain is temporarily deprived of a life-giving element (oxygen) and filled with an excess waste product (carbon dioxide), which leads to a state of loss of self-consciousness. Indeed, similar to a transgressive urge (which, as far as Bataille is concerned, is an innate human instinct), the ruinous ecstasy into which suffocation can lead is basically provoked by not fleeing from the anxiety before death. The temporary uplifting of the taboo on (erotic) suffocation (which can lead to death) borders on the extreme limits of our discontinuous state and leads to a somatic sublime moment in which life and death are unified.

I could even go so far as linking the above discoloration of the face, visibility of the tongue and erection of the penis (which are all medical symptoms of suffocation) with *rigor mortis* (the fermentation or swelling of a corpse). As such, it functions as even more evidence of Beckett wanting to stress the strong connection he believes death and eroticism have. Admittedly, this could perhaps be too much wishful thinking on my part due to the Bataillean bias in my reading. But on the other hand, Moran does refer to the sometimes observed phenomenon of post-mortem erections and ejaculations of men that have been executed by hanging, as if to stress once more the complicity of death and the regeneration of life: "I tried to remember the name of the plant that springs from the ejaculations of the hanged [...]" (T 155).

Nevertheless, we need more solid confirmations than the previous, admittedly, fragmentary proof for my assumption that, in the trilogy, eroticism is also considered to be a transgressive urge toward the continuity of being. A strong indication for this we do find in *Malone Dies* when Malone, in a quintessential, abstracted manner, visually describes sex almost identically to Bataille's theories on eroticism. He does this by reducing it to a phantasmagoria. In his room, Malone is looking out on the window, through which he normally beholds "the nocturnal sky where nothing happens, though it is full of tumult and violence" (T 237). Suddenly two contours appear outside behind the curtain:

[I] see them standing up against each other behind the curtain, which is dark, so that it is a dark light, if one may say so, and dim the shadow they cast. For they cleave so fast together that they seem a *single body*, and consequently a single shadow. But when they totter it is clear they are twain, and in vain they clasp with the energy of despair, it is clear we have here *two distinct and separate bodies*, each enclosed within its own frontiers, and having no need of each other to come and go and sustain the flame of life, for each is well able to do so, independently of the other. Perhaps they are cold, that they rub against each other so [...]. (T 238, emphases added)

Malone here makes a subtle, indirect transition from a star-lit sky to two undefined worldly shapes,

which could be human. The implied antropomorphization of celestial bodies concords with Bataille's ontological framework. For, as I previously discussed, Bataille sees human existence as essentially a part of the violent movement of the universe as well – because human nature and its embodied urges partake in this immanent continuity. Although the reader can already sense the sexual innuendo, Malone is only assured of this when the curtain is briefly lifted by a breeze, after which he proceeds:

So it is not cold they are, standing so lightly clad by the open window. Ah how stupid I am, I see what it is, they must be loving each other, that must be how it is done. Good, that has done me good. I'll see now if the sky is still there, then go. They are right up the curtain now, motionless. Is it possible they have finished already? They have loved each other standing, like dogs. Soon they will be able to part. Or perhaps they are just having a breather, before they tackle the titbit. Back and forth, back and forth, that must be wonderful. They seem to be in pain. Enough, enough, goodbye. (*T* 238)

When we return to the penultimate quote, we comprehend that Malone's observation of two bodies 'rubbing' against each other was in fact the desire of two isolated subjects to transgress their bodily limits and isolation, with the help of the ecstasy of eroticism. After the apparent unity the two bodily entities have experienced, the sensation which they sought for (although it always remains incomplete) evaporates. They 'desperately' take note of the failure of their transgression and 'in pain' they are thrown back into their insufficient, solitary state. Again, we can conjecture that Malone-as-onlooker – like the narrator in *Madame Edwarda* – is possibly lead toward an inner experience as well. Nevertheless, more importantly, the difference in the representation of eroticism previously in *Molloy* and here, in *Malone Dies*, is insightful: Malone's abstract representation of carnal love can be interpreted as a contemplation on Malone's part of his own former sexual deeds as Molloy (cfr. the use of the same dog-comparison). 'It has done Malone good' to be confronted with what his unconscious erotic strivings, suddenly laid bare in a more abstracted form, fundamentally are: an attempt to defy his discontinuous limitations, but simultaneously also exposing his instinctual urge toward continuity as unappeasable – because continuity will always remain beyond the subject's grasp. As a consequence, this scene ties in with the trilogy's narrator's increasing awareness and acceptance of the insurmountable gap in his/its being (which is the main argument I will develop in my analysis of characters in 3.2.).

Having demonstrated the trilogy's undoing of the conventional idea of the subject as an an autonomous and elevated category in reproductive sexuality, and in the rendition of erotic experience as a transgressive longing, I can now move on to another category of taboos that can impel transgression. This is the category of 'abjection' in general, or, more specifically, the abject features of the human body.

3.1.2. *The Abject Body*

In general, the category 'abjection' pertains to those things that are cast off by society as 'low,' 'bad,' or 'filthy.' As discussed previously, man is repulsed by suchlike taboos and shuns them because they imply the squander of the continuity of existence. Bataille disdains the human elevating principle of rational transcendence and its denial of the reign of the material world. Concomitantly, his anti-idealist base materialism undermines the normative distinction between 'abject' and 'elevated.' In '*Le gros orteil*' (1929 [the big toe]), an essay about feet, Bataille explains:

[H]uman life is erroneously considered to be an elevation. The division of the universe into subterranean hell and a perfectly pure heaven is an indelible conception, mud and darkness being the *principles* of evil as light and celestial space are the *principles* of good: with feet in the mud but heads almost in the light, people obstinately imagine a tide that will forever elevate them into pure space. [...]. [B]y its physical attitude, the human race distances itself *as far as possible* from the terrestrial mud. (qtd. in M. Richardson 15, original emphasis)

In this regard, the Christian representation of a Heaven in the skies and a subterranean Hell is a specific manifestation of the broader human tendency to establish a cultural cover-up for the workings of nature on which human existence depends. As a reaction to this, Bataille brings abject features to the fore in his writings, because a persevered confrontation (an actual or literary one) with these can engender inner experience for the reader. I want to argue that Beckett adopts a similar strategy by scattering 'indecent' things all over the trilogy.

An appropriate visualization of Beckett's intended transgressive reader-response we find in Malone's dilatation on Macmann's job as a street cleaner – which I believe is a literary meta-comment on Beckett's part. Instead of clearing the street of all filth, Macmann throws extra waste on the street “as if a demon had driven him” (*T* 244). He scatters banana and orange peels, papers, cigarette-butts and canine and horse feces, “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” (*ibid.*).⁷⁷ These passers-by of course represent the trilogy's readers and their possible transgressive 'slip.' I want to focus on the reader's immersion in the trilogy's abject depiction of the human body and its concurrent consequences for the view on human identity. I will investigate three specific topics connected to a base materialist conception of human existence: man's inherent animal nature (1); his abject physical features as constitutive of his 'self' (2); and man's decaying body (3).

⁷⁷ I would like to take the liberty to mention that I was plagued for over a week by a horrible yet undetectable stench in my apartment while writing this thesis. Until I found hidden a rotting pumpkin in a closet. I then took a shower to get rid of the odor of the decomposing fruit I believed had invaded me, but again I was disgusted when I saw the hank of hair soiling the drain. This memorable day provided me with further courage to continue writing.

(1) In relation to mankind's false effort to transcend matter, the first element worthy of investigation is the undoing of mankind's self-definition by contrast to the animal world. The distance humans perceive between themselves and animals affirms the human shame for 'base' carnal existence and the horror that the violence of nature incites. The accepted refusal to use the pronoun 'it' to indicate humans – therewith pretending that humans and animals are worlds apart – accompanies this cultural identity-forming structure. Bataille constantly draws our attention to man's animal nature and instincts, as an atavistic element that testifies to our pre-rational origins we prefer to deny in the world of work. For example, in *Madame Edwarda*, the protagonist describes the sex he has with Edwarda as “an animal coupling” (Bataille, *ME* 136); Edwarda puts on a mask that seems to make her more animal (136); she nicknames our narrator “fifi” (136); while she is apparently dying, her body “flopped like a fish” (139), and when she strips naked in the taxi she finds herself “naked as a beast” (141). This 'animalization' of the human body is also omnipresent in the trilogy. This already came to the fore in the depiction of sexuality as canine copulation (*T* 57, 238 [see 3.1.1.]). In *Molloy*, our animal beginnings are also recognized in the downward movement toward the ground – which is in an evolutionary sense the reversal of man starting to walk erect and distancing himself from the animal world. Molloy gradually realizes his original animality at the end of his story when he crawls around in the forest and relinquishes his human decency:

The black slush of leaves slowed me down even more. But leaves or no leaves I would have abandoned erect motion, that of man. And I still remember the day when flat on my face by way of rest, in defiance of the rules, I suddenly cried, striking my brow, Christ, there's crawling, I never thought of that. [...]. The advantage of this mode of locomotion compared to others, I mean those I have tried, is this, that when you want to rest you stop and rest, without further ado. For standing there is no rest, nor sitting either. [...]. [H]e who moves in this way, crawling on his belly, like a reptile, no sooner comes to rest than he begins to rest, compared to other movements, I mean those that have worn me out. (*T* 89-90)

Like a sudden epiphany after his fall, Molloy discovers in his crawling about like an animal – a 'defiance of the rules' of the rational human world – a sort of satisfaction. In his lawless animal posture, he seems to have found relief from his lifelong pretense of being human.

In 2.2.2., I outlined how Bataille describes the human condition as a hybridity: inherently animal, but also radically different from animal experience. Because of the development of self-consciousness, humans had to distance themselves from the immanent violence of continuity and introduced taboos relating to death and sexuality. In addition to this, Bataille posits that there was a phase in which primitive mankind still revered animals as holy, *sovereign* beings because they live in closer intimacy with the continuity of existence: animals know no taboos, nor despair or anguish in the face of death (*EDS* 83-86). Consequentially, Bataille presumes that, because of the sacred

nature ascribed to animals, animal sacrifices were preferred by these early primitive societies (*EDS* 87-88). These animal sacrifices were very powerful for the participants, because an essential similarity between humans and animals was also still recognized (*ibid.*). The human disdain for animals only developed in a later stage, when “civilisation” and the rational world gained firmer ground and further widened the construed distance between humans and animals (*ibid.*).

So, transgression can be instigated by drawing closer again to our animal impulses. Man has to display a sort of animal behavior, an indifference toward the repugnance taboos arouse – like a dog carelessly sniffing at excrements. Molloy's primeval reptile-like crawling already evidenced this. But also Molloy's above discussed concession (see introduction to 3.1.) that he “behaved like a pig” (*T* 25) further supports my argument that Beckett redefines human identity as fundamentally transgressive and as such dissolves it in the continuity of existence as a whole. The expression 'to behave like a pig' equates 'dirty' (indeed: transgressive) behavior to 'pig-behavior.' Admittedly, this saying is a commonly used one. Yet, what was perhaps also of importance for Beckett to use exactly this expression is the hybridity of this mammal: pigs are generally regarded as 'smart' animals (with human-like eyes and a pink, light-haired skin), but also as 'dirty' muck-relishing creatures (rolling in the mud and arguably eating feces sometimes). The physical likeness with humans, combined with its evident 'filthy' behavior, could therefore explain Beckett's choice for the pig – with which he thus again expresses his belief that humans have to give in to transgressive behavior. Furthermore, also Big Lambert's extreme fascination for pig-slaughtering (which I discussed as an ancient transgressive sacrifice in 2.2.2., endorsed by the 'old slaughtering methods' Lambert uses) can be analyzed against this background. Although butchering pigs is, again, very common in (Western) society, the strong attraction Lambert feels toward these killings could attest to his recognition of the close similarity between humans and pigs, similar to primitive societies' fascination for animals.

That my above interpretation of the significance of Beckett's use of pigs in the trilogy is not merely guesswork, but conforms to the beliefs that Beckett and Bataille share, is further evidenced at the end of *Madame Edwarda*. There, Bataille visualizes the 'god of continuity' as a pig with a peruke on its head: “GOD, if He knew, would be a swine” (*ME* 143). Indirectly mocking the Christian depiction of God as a human man, Bataille implies that human existence is governed by something that goes beyond humanity, and is more akin to the 'principles' in the 'filthy' animal world. With this Bataillean mindset, the explicit restriction on eating pork meat in the Koran (Islam) and the Old Testament (Judaism and Christianity) because it is an 'impure' animal, is also interesting. For, the pig's closeness to humans implies a partial leveling of pork meat with human flesh and thus confirms the materiality of human beings as well (something which classic religions

want to deny). Beckett's unnamable serves this idea of human flesh being mere matter for consumption like animal meat is: it imagines walking around in its family tomb between the entrails, breasts, private parts and hearts of its family members and then ponders the possibility to devour, “in a sudden access of independence, [...] what remained of the fatal corned-beef” (*T* 324).

(2) Besides this undoing of humankind's attempt to transcend its material-animal status, I want to claim that the second conversion of human identity in the trilogy resides in the novels' inclination to regard abject physical bodily parts, functions or products related to excretion and reproduction as that which mostly defines human existence.⁷⁸ A confrontation with these abject taboos is a transgressive challenge to the consolation which man's idea of self-possession provides – a consolation created by the everyday world of reason governed by these taboos. Bataille specifies this once more for us:

The place for filth is in the dark, where looks cannot reach it. Secrecy is the condition for sexual activity, just as it is the condition for the performance of the natural functions. [...]. We have fashioned this humanised world in our image by obliterating the very traces of nature; above all, we have removed from it everything that might recall the way we come out of it. [...]. I can deny my dependence, denying sexuality, filth, death [...]. But this negation is fictitious. (*The History of Eroticism*, qtd. in M. Richardson 16, 18)

In *Erotism*, Bataille remarks that human excreta or sexual organs engender a similar revulsion as the one we feel before a corpse (57). As I remarked in my methodological section, Bataille also claims that all clusters of taboos are interconnected with each other, because they all imply death and the Nothingness which nature perpetually produces. Because of this inclusive approach, we are able to include menstrual blood or sperm in this category of corporeal excrements as well. But even 'minor' filthinesses such as sweat, dandruff, crusts, vomit, shed hair, nails or dead skin all answer to Bataille's denominator of continuity if they are regarded as superfluous, dead matter that is cast off by the body. However, let us focus on the reproductive and main excremental organs, which are, for Bataille, psychologically closely related to each other: “The sexual channels are also the body's sewers; we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them” (*EDS* 57). Bataille utilizes this transgressive potential in his own prose, as he demonstrates in *Madame Edwarda*:

⁷⁸ Note that strictly medically speaking, the word 'excretion' is used to denote the discharge of waste products such as, for example, urine or sweat. Excretion does not include feces, because this waste matter has never entered the metabolism of the body. It is undigested food that has only 'passed through' and is therefore called 'egestion.' However, the common use of the terms excretion/excreta/excrements generally denotes waste products in general – thus with feces included as well. Bataille does this in his writings and I will do this as well.

She was seated, she held one leg stuck up in the air, to open her crack yet wider she used fingers to draw the folds of skin apart. And so Madame Edwarda's 'old rag and ruin' loomed at me, hairy and pink, just as full of life as some loathsome squid. 'Why,' I stammered in a subdued tone, 'why are you doing that?' 'You can see for yourself,' she said, 'I'm GOD.' 'I'm going crazy-' 'Oh, no you don't, you've got to see, look...'. (134-135)

The explicit nakedness here portrayed makes of Edwarda an object of worship, similar to the position a sacrificial victim assumes. And again, the reader, by being forced to look at Edwarda's orifice, can get possessed by this “delirious joy of being naked” as well (Bataille, *ME* 136). Humans (here generically personified by our narrator) are generally reticent toward nakedness and are humiliated before suchlike infamous obscenities as Edwarda displays. In *Erotism*, Bataille minutely explains why a confrontation with the naked human body (the foundation of the embodied discontinuous state of being, but without any cultural embellishment) can be a condition that leads to transgressive experience:

Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through *secret channels* that give us a feeling of obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognized and stable individuality. Through the activity of organs in a flow of coalescence and renewal, like the ebb and flow of waves surging into one another, the self is dispossessed, and so completely that most creatures in a state of nakedness, for nakedness is symbolic of this dispossession and heralds it, will hide. (*EDS* 17-18, emphasis added)

Let us now turn to the trilogy, to see if Beckett's literary writing creates similar abject conditions to transgress. Indeed, the trilogy constantly draws attention to suchlike obscene corporealities as well – arguably intent on counteracting the common discontinuous, elevated definition of self. Take for example Moran's first impressions of a man⁷⁹ who suddenly presents himself in the forest: “And indeed there reigned between his various parts great harmony and concord, and it could be truly said that his face was worthy of his body, and vice versa. And if I could have seen his arse, I do not doubt I should have found it on a par with the whole” (*T* 150). Moran's casual remark on the man's veiled anus and the indirect implication that an anus is equally important as the face to form a judgment of man's appearance, clearly effectuates an 'abjectionification' of human bodily identity. Nevertheless, rather than being a normalization of what is commonly regarded as 'filthy,' the repeated foregrounding of such obscenities in the trilogy restores these taboos as fruitful possibilities for transgression – to the detriment of considering them as absolutes.

79 In 3.2.1., I will argue that this appearance could be Molloy.

Because of this, in my argument, this literary transgressive device achieves a subversion of any discontinuous delineation of the 'self' in terms of a transcendental autonomy or stability. Ulrika Maude, in her aforementioned study *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, partly supports this claim: she also believes that Beckett's repeated abject thematics effect a systematical blurring of the distinction between the spiritual and the material, between the subject and its world (99).

As I already set out in 3.1.1., Beckett's base descriptions of female and male genitalia as 'holes' (*T* 56), 'slits' (*T* 56), 'arid and roomy orifices' (*T* 58), 'mucous membranes' (*T* 58) or 'frantic members' (*T* 58) mock mankind's contrivance of idealist concepts such as 'love' in order to attempt to transcend the base materialism that governs existence as a whole. But can we find other clear examples – by looking at excretion instead of at reproductive organs – of the trilogy's systematic ridicule of human subjectivity as something other than an anonymous, material manifestation of a continuous, squandering nature? A scene at the beginning of *Molloy* exemplifies a scatological interest. Molloy is stopped by a police officer and is asked to present his identity papers, to which he responds: “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” (*T* 20). The officer could be said to represent the 'law of discontinuity.' A law that requires a piece of paper with well-defined aspects on it such as temporal indicators (date of birth) and spatial location (place of birth), so that a subject's theoretical, individualized identity can be ascertained vis-a-vis existence as a whole. Molloy, on the other hand, outraves the officer and his discontinuous identity-establishing system, by only valuing pieces of paper that are subordinated to his excremental necessities.

But, the trilogy does not only draw attention to the excremental features of the human body. It extends this pattern and presents humans as being excrements themselves, as we already shortly came across in Molloy's ode to his arse (*T* 79-80, cfr. supra 2.2.3.). A more profound example of this is Moran who starts to muse about – what I purport to be – his previous moments of inner experience, in which he could glimpse at the continuous essence which he embodies, yet can never access: “[T]here were moments when it did not seem so far from me, when I seemed to be drawing towards it as the sands towards the wave, when it crests and whitens, though I must say this image hardly fitted my situation, which was rather that of the turd waiting for the flush” (*T* 162). We are given a bantering style-transition from an elevated, pompous, romantic description of himself to a 'low' equation of the self with a turd in a toilet pot waiting to disappear and dissolve in underground sewers. Moran's statement not only supports the sustained conception of the 'self' as a material object ('it' arguably denotes the continuity of which Moran is part and parcel), but could at the same time also express an indifferent transgressive attitude that consists of a passive waiting when one momentarily relinquishes all hope of being able to maintain one's view of 'self' (cfr. infra 3.2.).

In short, the trilogy makes use of the discomfort the reader feels when he or she is confronted with taboos such as obscenities of the human flesh or somatic waste products. As such, transgressing these taboos (which imply death) provides the occasion to experience an annihilation of the sense of self. We are therefore led to believe that the trilogy's recurring abject passages serve this purpose for the reader. Molloy's long enumeration of his "weak points" (T 80) – with which he denotes his various health problems – is a point in case, because the said passage clearly illustrates the textual cumulation of abject bodily features. Moreover, Molloy only classifies matters related to excretion (urine-system, penis, sweat) and reproduction (penis) in the list of his "true weak points" (T 80, emphasis added). This choice ties in with Bataille's above quoted opinion that these features are all secret channels through which we open up to continuity. However, Molloy explicitly focuses on his precarious health situation. This theme automatically leads me to my third and last point of interest concerning the abject body in the trilogy: the decay and decomposition of the human body.

(3) In my discussion of reproductive sexuality (3.1.1.1.), I briefly touched upon the conviction that humans prefer the growth of things (like plants moving away from the soil), but despise the reversed motion (the collapse to the ground which comes with the decay of the material). Against this general cultural background of concealing wastage, Bataille in fact wants to effect a philosophical conversion regarding human existence. He erects a view of the human condition as a constant falling toward the ground/death, as a slow dying, because any temporal growth can be said to be outdone by the perpetual, timeless destructive workings of continuity in general. In the trilogy, this conversion of the normal order gradually takes ground too, by strongly foregrounding the decaying and prostrate human body. Maude asserts that Beckett's art constantly reminds us of the materiality we cannot escape from (99). This philosophical upturn of human subjectivity is literally performed by Molloy, when he reports on his changing 'stance' of 'moving' about in the world:

[...] I was saying that if my progress, at this stage was becoming more and more slow and painful, this was not due solely to my legs, but also to innumerable so-called weak points, having nothing to do with my legs. Unless one is to suppose, gratuitously, that they and my legs were part of the same *syndrome*, which in that case would have been *of a diabolical complexity*. The fact is, and I deplore it, but it is too late now to do anything about it, that I have laid too much stress on my legs [...]. For I was no ordinary cripple, far from it, and there were days when my legs were the best part of me, with the exception of the brain capable of forming such a judgement. I was therefore obliged to stop more and more often, I shall never weary of repeating it, and to lie down, *in defiance of the rules*, [...] as much as possible with the feet higher than the head, to dislodge the clots. And to lie with the feet higher than the head, when your legs are stiff, is no easy matter. But don't worry, I did it. (T 82-83, emphases added)

Again, in this scene, Molloy first and foremost exemplifies Bataille's materialist ontology, by literally bringing his head closer to the ground – inverting herewith his regular physical posture and the normative bias toward the mind the erect position exhibits. Molloy symbolically counteracts the discontinuous human transcendence of matter with the aid of thought, as well as he disrupts – again 'in defiance of the rules' – the false dichotomy between mind and matter.

Nevertheless, we also notice that this inversion is instigated by Molloy's gradual physical decay, which he previously termed as the “slow and painful progress” (*T* 78) of being human. At a certain stage in his narrative, as I have just discussed, Molloy groups his physical deterioration under the common denominator of his “weak points” (*T* 80). He now suggests that these are perhaps part of one large 'diabolically complex syndrome.' The reader as well is led to surmise that perhaps these 'weak points' are what constitutes the human condition: being alive then is fundamentally a claustrophobic experience of being incarcerated in an ever-shrinking somatic prison, as the bodily collapse is inevitable. I believe Molloy metaphorically expresses this state of being thrown into discontinuity with a fundamental awareness of one's mortality, by comparing living to a constant asthmatic attack:

[T]here was never anything wrong with my respiratory tracts, apart of course from the agonies intrinsic to that system. Yes, I could count the days when I could neither breathe in the blessed air with its life-giving oxygen nor, when I had breathed it in, breathe out the bloody stuff, I could have counted them. Ah yes, my asthma, how often I was tempted to put an end to it, by cutting my throat. But I never succumbed. [...]. And I wrapped my head in my coat, to stifle the obscene noise of choking, or I disguised it as a fit of coughing, universally accepted and approved [...]. (*T* 79)

We are inclined to assume that Molloy does not really suffer from the medical condition of asthma. Rather, he resembles an existential hypochonder: he experiences the mere act of breathing as a torment; every single day of breathing feels asthmatic to him from an existential point of view. He labels living as a slow asthmatic choking, because of the intolerable awareness that every breath brings him closer to death. Indeed, the 'diabolically complex syndrome' of continuity is acted out physiologically by each living being. In the given example of breathing, man constantly squanders oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide – similar to how its own constellation will be spent as well in the long run. And, complementary to this interpretation, we can read this passage and even assume that Molloy frequently holds his breath and deliberately refuses to give in to respiration, incited by his transgressive motivations (cfr. the striving for the sensation of asphyxia, as I discussed in 3.1.1.2. in the context of an erotic fetish).

In the previous quote, we can still observe an inclination to obscure and palliate this

existential state of being 'sick' (Molloy tries to cover up the sound of his death-breaths, an attitude clearly in the line of human attempts to push the constant awareness of death away from consciousness). Yet, the trilogy's narrator's blatant physical deterioration and decreasing mobility throughout the trilogy does serve as a constant reminder of mortality and death pending – for both the character and the reader. This way, the multiple features of the body in decay become loci for the anxiety for death, although these can be said to express “only an infinitesimal part of the truth” (*T* 79). Motility, for example, is paradoxically foregrounded as well in the trilogy, by means of the gradual decrease and near-absence of it in the last two novels. According to Maude, the increasing absence of mobility, motility and a proper functioning body “bring[s] the characters to the border of their condition as autonomous beings, to the threshold of a place where the subject is not” (99).

In this sense, a sustained confrontation with one's own body in decline – which is a general taboo to a certain degree – offers the possibility for transgression. One possible reason for this could be that it prefigures the image of the corpse. The sight of a human or animal corpse is one of the strongest nausea-inducing taboos, as far as Bataille is concerned, because its (imminent) decomposition and disappearance horrifies us and depicts our death-anxiety (*EDS* 56-57). As a prefiguration of the corpse, our own living-but-always-dying body is a forceful taboo as well. Because “[t]he mainspring of human activity is generally the desire to reach the point farthest from the funereal domain which is rotten, dirty and impure. We make every effort to efface the traces, signs and symbols of death. Then, if we can, we efface the traces and signs of these efforts” (Bataille, *LE* 66-67). For Bataille, one such symbol or trace of death is the foot, because it is the part of the body that touches the ground (Maude 92). Hence, he also finds repulsive maladies of the feet (corns for example) a reminder for man of his “arrogance” to disavow his future terrestrial putrefaction. (*Le gros orteil*, qtd. in M. Richardson 15). He even goes as far as comparing the big toe with a hideous cadaver that expresses the impending dying away of the entire body (*ibid.*).

The trilogy alludes to these Bataillean somatic imagery-relations as well. Consider Molloy who notices the sudden “dastardly desertion of [his] toes, so to speak in the thick of the fray” (*T* 80). Marveling at this necrosis of the toes of one of his feet, Molloy indirectly gives voice to his naïveté in the past not to consider the abhorrence of his feet: “I thought they were in excellent fettle, apart from a few corns, bunions, ingrowing nails and a tendency to cramp” (*T* 80). Because he embodies the workings of continuity, the loss of his toes could be seen as death performing an amputation. As such, death wins a battle in the constant war (the metaphorical 'fray' Molloy mentions) between – in Maude's words – “the force of life and death struggling in the body” (97). A war of attrition that death is bound to win. Any former unwillingness to confront these fundamentals of his ever-

decaying body is now brutally under attack by death which literally invades a part of Molloy's living flesh.

In this regard, man's ever-ongoing bodily decomposition brings him closer and closer to his final reunification with continuity, out of which he is only temporarily taken away to be a discontinuous being. This absurd human condition is forcibly put into words by Moran, when he describes the conditions under which he has to return home: i.e. as “a prey to the malignancy of [...] nature and my own failing flesh” (*T* 165-166). In fact, the trilogy's successive characters progressively undergo this process of somatic disintegration and mortification (organs and senses degrade, limbs fall off, etc.). Up to a point where Malone's bodily presence is disappearing and the unnamable's seems to have vanished (cfr. *infra* character analysis [3.2.]). Especially the unnamable endorses the view of man's unknowable continuous identity, by extending the image of bodily dissolution in time. The unnamable first scorns the human convention of making self-portraits by evoking the image of a portrait of the sole “surviving leg” (*T* 315) of Mahood (who is a representation of 'character' in a state of advanced 'decomposition'). Having ridiculed this portrait, the unnamable proposes another method of portraiture: to let the corpse rot away first. “[M]utilate, mutilate, and perhaps some day, fifteen generations hence, you'll succeed in beginning to look like yourself, among the passers-by. In the meantime it's Mahood, this caricature is he” (*ibid.*). When trying to aptly portray human non-identity (as my thesis attempts to do), we indeed understand why this kind of portrait would be a better approximation than a 'caricature-portrait' that depicts a human body or parts of the body that are still recognizable and are not yet entirely dissipated.

Hence, in the trilogy, the body in decline constantly anticipates the moment when the subject's apparent self-possession and autonomy will disappear again into a continuous anonymity. This sensation breeds a gradual change in the subject's perception of its bodily identity. Rather than having a feeling of corporeal agency and autonomy, a sense of being an impersonal passivity arises. Again, a passage in *Molloy* illustrates this. Because of his malfunctioning urinating system, Molloy's penis “oozes urine” (*T* 81) – an observation which makes him exclaim despairingly: “Can one speak of pissing, under these conditions? Rubbish!” (*ibid.*) and “How I eliminate, to be sure, uremia will never be the death of me [?]” (*ibid.*).⁸⁰ Indeed, his bodily autonomy is under attack, because Molloy does not control his urinating anymore and because he realizes that any eventual malfunction of his kidneys is beyond his control as well. The decline of the organs is yet another instance of the imagined boundaries between the embodied 'self' and the exterior world being blurred.

From this point of view, the trilogy's progressive foregrounding of the character's pending

⁸⁰ Uremia is a form of bloodpoisoning caused by the kidneys not functioning properly.

bodily breakdown is the physical equivalent of the persistent indifference, of the not-fleeing from the revulsion before nature's consumption in progress. Bataille personally renders this transgressive attitude as the acceptance of “the annihilation to come which will fall with all its weight on the being I now am” (*EDS* 57), so that “I can anticipate and live in expectation of that multiple putrescence that anticipates its sickening triumph in my person” (*ibid.*). A quote like this contains the indifference toward the discontinuous state of being 'sick,' by neutrally refraining from any negative judgment toward the workings of continuity. I will claim that the increasing absence of bodily presence of the character(s) also runs together with its consecutive attitudes (*cf.* *infra* 3.2.).

To conclude this part on the abject body, I briefly want to illustrate this accruing 'readiness' for the annihilation of the self by using Molloy's and Malone's bodily self-presentation. Molloy voices this neutral, non-judgmental attitude by playfully framing his deterioration as a graceful upsurge of destruction. He first makes mention of his two defect legs, then remarks that “they suddenly began to gallop” (*T* 80), after which he immediately specifies that “[his] weak points did, and their weakness became literally the weakness of death” (*ibid.*). This growing sense of acceptance of his imminent destruction also manifests itself in the strong attraction the ground exerts on him, an appeal which makes Molloy speak about his “daily longing for the earth to swallow [him] up” (*T* 81). This passive surrender to continuity and the consequent neutral indifference toward protecting the self grows as the trilogy progresses and approaches a point where the 'self' is reduced to a material entity in the vast flow of things. This we detect further on, for example, in Malone's representation of his body as a crop waiting to be reaped: “I believe I have entered the season of increase and plenty, yes? I believe I have entered on the season of increase and plenty, of increase at last, for plenty comes later, with the harvest” (*T* 234). I will come back to this increasing indifferent attitude in more detail in my analysis of characters (3.2.). There I will explain how the indifference toward taboos grows in the transition from Moran to Molloy; how Malone then has to shed all his former hopes concerning his subjectivity and the 'knowability' of continuity; after which the absolute indifference finds its culmination in the non-character of the unnamable.

But before I move on to this second part of my analysis, I will end this first part with an analysis of the theme of laughter. More specifically, I will try to find evidence that the occurrence of laughter in the trilogy is another strong indicator that Beckett held similar beliefs concerning transgressive experience. Because the issue of laughter is closely linked to the indifference I have just mentioned, it also constitutes a perfect preparatory transition for my analysis of characters.

3.1.3. *The Body and Laughter*

Investigating the theme of laughter (and more specifically how Bataille treats it) is a valid manner to further ascertain my claimed centrality of transgression in the trilogy. More so because we can link it directly to certain somatic taboos that are in vigor. Bataille is of the opinion that laughter (which is of course an exclusively human capability) can be indicative of the human resistance against transgression when it is mere *comic* laughter. Yet, in contrast to this comic laughter, laughter can also manifest itself as *absolute/sovereign* laughter when it arises as a feature belonging to the (possible) communication with continuity. This distinction allows me to claim that the reader of the trilogy is lead from *comic* to *sovereign* laughing as well, in line with the increasing transgressive attitude I uphold the trilogy displays and conveys to the reader.

3.1.3.1. *Comic Laughter*

In his preface to *Madame Edwarda*, Bataille explains how, generally speaking, a non-serious air surrounds the taboos concerning sexual 'indecencies.' These sexually related taboos stand in contrast to those directly concerning death, because death-taboos automatically instigate a certain seriousness. The comic laughter Bataille writes about is the scornful laughter of someone who mocks erotic taboos and treats them rather light-heartedly (Preface to *ME* 124-125). However, as I have stressed several times up to this point, Bataille claims that all taboos are to be taken 'gravely,' because they all initially came into being because they imply our own inevitable collapse and thus lead to continuity. Although Bataille does not address non-sexual abject taboos such as feces or urine in his preface to *Madame Edwarda*, we can include these as well, because people are often inclined to treat these with ridicule as well. So, for Bataille, when people make fun of genitalia or excreta – however repugnant they may find these things – these people are actually blind for the 'serious' or 'tragic' implications of these prohibitions. Consequentially, such “[comic] laughter launches us along the path that leads to the transforming of a prohibition's principle, of necessary and mandatory decencies, into an iron-clad hypocrisy, into a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to understand what is involved” (Bataille, Preface to *ME* 124). Put differently: “[Comic] [I]laughter is the compromise attitude man adopts when confronted by something whose appearance repels him, but which at the same time does not strike him as particularly grave” (ibid.). Thus, in sum, the jest pertaining to comic laughter is a joking attitude toward certain taboos, which reveals the subject's anti-transgressive attitude: the reaction lays bare its unwillingness to deliver

itself to the horror present in the taboo.

I do not intend to give a hyperbolic description of all the piggish squealing involved while reading the trilogy. What is of relevance, in the light of Bataille's concept of comic laughter, is that Beckett often makes the reader laugh with what could be designated as a form of non-serious body-humor. On first sight, the trilogy does contain many elements of *slapstick* humor. This physical humor foregrounds the body and it involves characters chasing each other, slipping, falling, being hit or meeting with physical violence. On the surface level of the trilogy, these slapstick elements are indeed present: Molloy communicates with his mother by knocking on her head (*T* 18); Moran's son flees from his father, afraid that the latter would chase him in a highly comical way of running with "knees nearly hitting [him] in the face" (*T* 144); or Malone pees his pants, which makes his conversation partner burst out laughing (*T* 217-218). However, I believe that degrading Beckett to a writer who employs this kind of humor merely to get some easy laughs would be misplaced. One possible way of interpreting his slapstick humor in general, is that Beckett tries to convey the absurdity of human existence – including our bodily conditions and behavior – which is to the utmost extent a laughable given; a nonsensical farce; an inexhaustible comedy.

Nevertheless, when we focus specifically on what could be called 'abject slapstick' (the various humorous passages that involve bodily taboos, in which the entire trilogy abounds), I can provide – with Bataille's aid – a more thorough interpretation, which complements the previous. Consider, for example, the rendition of the 'love-affair' between Macmann and the woman named Moll in *Malone Dies*. I interpreted this scene as a mockery of the transcendental idea of romantic love (see 3.1.1.2.). Beckett achieves this effect by constantly stressing the abhorring physicality of the relationship, but this mode of narration also has a strange humorous effect on the reader:

The spectacle was then offered of Macmann trying to bundle his sex into his partner's like a pillow into a pillow-slip, folding it in two, and stuffing it in with his fingers. [...]. And though both were completely impotent they finally succeeded, summoning to their aid all the resources of the skin, the mucus and the imagination, in striking from their dry and feeble clips a kind of sombre gratification. (*T* 260)

If a reader spontaneously laughs with foul descriptions like these, I could say that his or her initial reaction of comic laughter is actually not incited by a well-defined object or motivated by something which can be clearly pointed out at first. Let me first clarify this position by making an analogy with another situation in the trilogy that can be labeled as a classic (not an abject) instance of slapstick humor: i.e. falling, something which Moran and his son suddenly do when they try to ride a bicycle together (*T* 156). Again, when someone spontaneously laughs at people falling to the ground, this

begs the question *why* he or she laughs with this situation. When we abide by Bataille's beliefs, this kind of reaction could be due to the fact that the sight of someone falling actually repels us, and that we then hypocritically ward off the 'grave' implications of what we behold by considering it to be comic. Indeed, the act of falling to the ground (a topic which I discussed in the analysis of the abjection of the body in 3.1.2.) can be considered to be the exposure of mankind's futile effort to distance himself from his animality; from the pull of the ground; and from the inevitable decomposition of the body. As such, 'falling' can be linked to the 'grave' continuity of existence.

This insight allows us to comprehend how the trilogy's 'low' or 'foul' humor actually functions as a reader-response device, and how Beckett's recurrent use of it corresponds to my claim that the trilogy's reader-response mechanism directs the reader toward his or her own transgressive experience. For, the repetition of intended humorous passages that depend on abject features of the body gradually forces the reader of the trilogy to question *why* he or she actually responds laughingly to these abject matters. As a consequence, the reader can be led to consider that this laughter is a self-misleading, avoiding reaction (“the compromise attitude” Bataille mentioned [Preface to ME 124]). When abject taboos are merely considered to be 'laughable,' a subject is led by its inclination to flee from the continuity of being: it denies that these taboos are inherently 'serious.' So, the reader is confronted with what could be called his or her own anti-transgressive shield, which is forged from comic laughter.

This possible phase in the reader's sense of identity actually clearly corresponds with the character of Moran who is – as I will discuss in 3.2. – an example of an individual that is still reluctant to transgress. One clear case in point, which reveals his anti-transgressive attitude, is when Moran commands his sick son to take his body temperature with a thermometer and jocosely asks if his son knows “which mouth to put it in” (*T* 117). Moran then proceeds:

I was not averse, in conversation with my son, to jests of doubtful taste, in the interests of his education. Those whose pungency he could not fully savour at the time, and they must have been many, he could reflect on at his leisure or seek in company with his little friends to interpret as best he might. Which was in itself an excellent exercise. And at the same time I inclined his young mind towards that most *fruitful* of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions. (*T* 117-118, emphasis added)

Moran's words first and foremost imply that the son cannot fully understand his father's joke, because he has not yet been fully socialized (i.e. made fully acquainted with the normative aversion before abject matters). Bataille indeed claims that the human repugnance before taboos is not a natural, innate propensity, but something which is transmitted from parents to children by a process

of socialization (as I explained in 2.2.2.). We can suspect that Moran, because he is a devout Christian (as I will illustrate in 3.2.1.1.), is intent on passing on to his son this 'fruitful' reflex of hatred for man's fleshy existence as an absolute to be obeyed (in line with the Christian loathing of base bodily functions). However, next to this, Moran also treats the anus as something which should merely be made fun of (although laughter is not necessarily a Christian reflex). This can be considered to be Moran's particular coping-strategy: it demonstrates his unwillingness to acknowledge the 'grave' implications of certain abject matters and to consider them as an opportunity to transgress. In this sense, Moran constitutes a mirror for the reader's own hypocritical propensities. In addition to this, it is not hard to sense that Beckett at the same time also ironically subverts and discredits Moran's use of the word 'fruitful.' Because, arguably, for Beckett, children should resist somatic taboos to become absolutes, so that the 'fruitful' possibility of somatic sublimity is kept open. By analogy, we can also assume that Beckett wants to counteract the possible tendency in the reader to treat those abject matters that are not directly related to death 'unseriously.' In other words, the trilogy will stop the reader from fleeing from the horrifying content of taboos.

The trilogy's purported intention of abandoning simple comic laughter (which I have just defended) I believe is evidenced by the evolution of characters as well. We can discern this for example quite clearly in the transition from Moran to Molloy (when it is kept in mind that the latter is a posterior version of the former, as I will demonstrate in 3.2.1.). For example, Moran, when sitting on the rear of a bicycle which his son is steering, tells us that he “trembled for [his] testicles which swing a little low” (*T* 157) – herewith implying that his testicles could possibly get twisted in the wheel. Moran makes no further remark on this comic image. Molloy, on the other hand, elaborates on this same topic: he first remarks that his testicles, from which “there was nothing more to be squeezed” (*T* 35), are “dangling at mid-thigh at the end of a meagre cord” (*ibid.*), and as such hinder him when walking, sitting or riding his bike. Due to this, he labels them as “decaying circus clowns” (*T* 36). However, this same image and the obvious humorous association – which can of course potentially also induce comic laughter on the reader's part again – is immediately followed by a grimmer remark: “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?” (*ibid.*). I believe this testifies to Molloy's increased awareness of the attack on his sense of discontinuity which his abject observation entails. The pull of gravity on his now useless testicles strikes Molloy as an affirmation of his imminent death. It compels him to describe his discontinuous state of being as something which has already ended; his life is subordinate to the entirety of continuity which he embodies. Moreover, he states that this experience of a part of him

already clearly indicating death to come, leads him to consider amputating his testicles (ibid.). Molloy's tragic realizations and his peculiar sensation of time, which he cannot even express aptly in language, is of course illustrative of the ongoing movement of the dissolution of the boundaries between 'self' and exterior world. At the same time, it reveals Molloy's diminished will to preserve his bodily integrity: he experiences his individual existence as synchronous with his future non-being. Thus, the changing sense of self-identity the characters arguably demonstrate can be connected to the transition of the levity of comic laughter to a more 'grave' attitude – a conversion of which I thus argue that the trilogy incites it in the reader as well by repeating this abject humor.

3.1.3.2. *Absolute Laughter*

Nevertheless, this evolution of relinquishing comic laughter does not mean that laughter as such can only be analyzed in a negative sense as a factor that impedes transgression. The reason for this is that Bataille also claims that a 'serious' form of laughter – which he labels as *absolute* or *sovereign* laughter – can occur as well in connection to transgressive moments of communication with continuity. Bataille clarifies this distinction: “[I]t is not impossible that this truth [of the continuous unity of life and death] itself evokes a final laugh; but our laughter here is absolute, going far beyond scorning ridicule of something which may perhaps be repugnant, but disgust for which digs deep under our skin” (Preface to *ME* 125). This disgust present in absolute laughter basically corresponds to the subject's acknowledgment of its insufficiency: firstly, the impossibility of preserving its alleged discontinuous autonomy; and, secondly, the recognition of its inability to 'access' continuity or comprehend it as a discontinuous being. These two related characteristics need some further elucidation, but, most importantly, I will simultaneously exemplify them with fragments taken from the trilogy as well.

To be clear, absolute laughter can be incited by those same abject taboos which were previously met with the scorning ridicule of comic laughter – but only when the continuity present in these taboos is not fled from. Hence, this absolute form of laughter is not the thoughtless pleantry before abject bodily functions. Absolute/sovereign laughter is basically a consequence of an increased awareness of the all-pervasiveness of the continuity of being, and is thus first and foremost wedded to death (Bataille, *LE* 68). It might be said to have partial affinities with the aforementioned experience of the absurdity of our existence inherent in slapstick. However, it is far less non-committal than a mere sense of how 'silly' existence is. Lucio Privitello, in his

aforementioned article 'S/Laughter and Anima-lēthē', presents Bataille's concept of sovereign laughter as a sacrificial slaughtering of subjectivity. While comic laughter, as Privitello explains, preserves the sense of self and as such only confirms the profane order, sovereign laughter on the other hand can uncontrollably escape from the subject when its sense of discontinuity is attacked in intoxicated moments of communication with the continuity of being (176-181). In other words: "The folly of laughter is superficial. It burns as it comes into contact with death; from the symbols of the emptiness of death it draws a heightened consciousness of being" (Bataille, *LE* 68). So, absolute laughter only arises on the condition that our death-to-come, which we embody, and the pettiness of keeping this absurd fate away from our consciousness, have been recognized first. Hence, this potential absolute laughter (which is closely associated with the communication with the continuity of being) is the bodily accompaniment of the ruin of the illusory assumption that one's alleged individual 'soul' is the essence of one's being. In this regard, absolute laughter – as a form of gallows humor – can be framed as a mockery of the ridiculousness of the subject's attempts to stave off his future annihilation by abiding by the structures of the habitual rational world.

A slice from Moran's evolution serves as a first illustration that the above idea (i.e. that absolute laughter occurs when the subject's sense of autonomy evaporates) is present to a certain extent in the trilogy as well. Initially, Moran still clings to the Christian idea of the immortality of a soul belonging to the individual. As such, he falsely pretends that a degree of sufficiency resides in his discontinuous being. Consider, for example, the gravestone with a "Latin cross" (*T* 135) Moran has already placed in the graveyard for himself. On this stone he insists his name must be put, reasoning that this future grave is his "plot in perpetuity" (*ibid.*), and that "[a]s long as the earth endures that spot is [his], in theory" (*ibid.*). Appeased by this Christian hopeful conception and his sense of eternal discontinuity safeguarded, Moran concludes: "Sometimes I smiled, as if I were dead already" (*ibid.*).⁸¹ In contrast to this satisfied smiling and the Christian view on subjectivity it demarcates, Moran is engulfed in absolute laughter further on. In order to claim that his laughter now is in fact indicative of the disappearance of Moran's formerly cherished sense of an individualized subjectivity, I need to mention that at this point in his story Moran is violently struck with an increased awareness of the continuity of being (I will develop this extensively in 3.2.1.1.). For now it suffices to mention that the following quote immediately follows after Moran's

⁸¹ Subtle textual hints are already provided that Moran's ideas on human identity, as he presents them at this point, have to be refuted. Moran's claim that his grave belongs to *him* is followed by the addition that this is, however, merely theoretically speaking ('in theory') is a case in point. In addition to this, Moran also briefly mentions that 'they' would not let him engrave his name on his tombstone, without further specification of who 'they' are (*T* 135). Assuming that 'they' can refer to Gaber and Youdi (who, as I will discuss in 3.2., are allegorical characters representing continuity), this is another indication that Moran wrongly disregards the anonymous continuity of his being.

realization that his son has abandoned him (an event which I indeed analyzed in 3.1.1.1. as disruptive of all his former “hopes that spring eternal” [*T* 161] and fostering his sense of closeness to death). The way prepared by these previous tribulations, Moran, out of joint, is arguably engulfed by an ecstatic attack which always takes place before a subject is taken in by transgressive experience:

And at the thought of the punishments Youdi might inflict upon me⁸² I was seized by such a mighty fit of laughter that I shook, with mighty silent laughter and my features composed in their wonted sadness and calm. But my whole body shook, and even my legs, so that I had to lean against a tree, or against a bush, when the fit came on me standing, my umbrella being no longer sufficient to keep me from falling. Strange laughter truly, and no doubt misnamed, through indolence perhaps, or ignorance. (*T* 162)

Moran's physical description of his unexpected experience as 'trembling' affirms that the sublimity in the trilogy is indeed somatic and thus bodily-induced. Clearly, Moran still wants to prevent falling to the ground (i.e. 'falling' in the void of inner experience). This expresses his attempt to still maintain his everyday posture and protect his discontinuous self (he still refuses to give up *ipse* in the ecstasy before inner experience [cfr. *infra* 3.2.]). Nevertheless, the fact that he needs to find support against a bush (which of course will send him to the ground as well) simultaneously conveys the futility of Moran trying to maintain his hope of maintaining his individual soul. In this sense, a slapstick situation (i.e. leaning against a bush and falling) is converted into a 'serious' situation. Out of it automatically arises Moran's absolute laughter at his powerless position (something which is enforced by the passive construction of 'being seized by laughter').

Further evidence of Beckett's affiliation with Bataille's concept of absolute laughter we find in the unnamable's 'practicing' of its death – a premeditation which I propose can lead to the vicarious sublime sensation of dying in inner experience:

I'll laugh, that's how it will end, in a chuckle, chuck chuck, ow, ha, pa, I'll practise, nyum, hoo, plop, psss, nothing but emotion, bing bang, that's blows, ugh, pooh, what else, oohh, aaah, that's love, enough, it's tiring, hee hee, that's the Abderite, no, the other, in the end, it's the end, the ending end, it's the silence [...]. (*T* 408)

First, the unnamable's comment that its moment of dying will be 'nothing but emotion' should be, as far as I believe, read as an ironic attack on man's pretense that he is not first and foremost a material object (because this remark is inserted in an entirely physical-focused representation of dying). This serves as yet another affirmation that the human subject is inherently determined by the inescapable,

⁸² Because Youdi represents continuity, the thought of Youdi's punishments can be interpreted as Moran's persevered confrontation with the idea of death without fleeing from it any longer.

immanent movement of continuity, which works through its body. Moreover, the unnamable makes references to the physical features that can possibly be involved in a human being's expiration: defecation ('plop,' 'pooh'); urination ('psss'); and, although actual ejaculation is not common when a man dies, orgasmic contractions are also arguably hinted at (we can rightly assume that the orgasm is referred to with 'love,' considering Beckett's ongoing ironic treatment of this transcendent notion). This way, the unnamable's references symbolically depict the moment right before death as a violent eruption of several taboos. Compare this to Bataille's already mentioned assertion that “the complex, the gentle, the violent movement of worlds will make of your death a splashing foam” (*IE* 95, cfr. supra 2.2.4.). This upsurge ultimately stresses the subject's literal porosity, as if it opens up to continuity through its organs of consumption and digestion.

At first, the unnamable's laughter which accompanies the demolition of its body seems odd and inappropriate – as if one would be laughing during a funeral mass. However, in the light of the previous, this ecstatic eruption of laughter is basically a derision of the entire profane realm in which taboos reign, and of the view of self that is maintained there. The unnamable's laughter expresses the transformation of the common human anguish before death as an individual category into an indifference toward shielding the 'self' from death (because death as a continuous category excludes the subject). Indeed, because the 'character' of the unnamable is almost entirely deconstructed as an alleged individual being (as I will argue in 3.2.3.), its death does not belong to the unnamable. In the unnamable's presumptions about how the moments before its death will be, dying achieves the status of an ecstatic, laughter-ridden celebration of death as the culmination of the workings of continuity.

In addition to this, the unnamable's words also establish the connection between laughter and death by making mention of the 'Abderite.' We can safely assume that this is a reference to the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus of Abdera (ca. 460 – ca. 370 BC), who is nicknamed 'the Laughing Philosopher.'⁸³ Importantly, Democritus' apparition could be read as an implicit endorsement of the unnamable's foregrounding of the corporeality of dying. As such, it further supports my claim that the ontological view Beckett puts into practice in the trilogy – through the character's evolution – resembles Bataille's materialist view on the totality of existence as a constant becoming. For, as Sylvie Henning points out in her article 'The Guffaw of the Abderite: 'Murphy' and the Democritean Universe' (1985), Democritus' atomist theory posits that the universe is made up out of atoms moving through an empty void, and it proposes that these atoms and the relations

83 Originating in the 5th century BC, the two proponents commonly connected to the Greek atomist school of Abdera are its founder Leucippus and his pupil Democritus. Of course, we cannot know for sure if the unnamable assumes that the reader will first think about Leucippus and therefore says (as an aside to the reader) 'no, the other,' to ascertain it is Democritus whom is talked about. However, indications of Beckett's preference for Democritus exist: Democritus appears in Beckett's collection of prose stories *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) and in *Murphy* (1937); and Beckett also borrows Democritus' punning aphorism '*Nothing is more real than nothing*' in *Malone Dies* (*T* 192).

between them are themselves subject to constant change and as such constitute an incessant chaos of becoming (s.p.). This view is also detrimental to the mind/body dualism, as Democritus defends the existence of a 'corporeal soul/mind,' consisting entirely of atoms (Henning s.p.). Nevertheless, I do not want to dwell upon these broad, apparent overlaps between Democritus' and Bataille's ontologies and Beckett's possible support of this atomist philosophy. What is of importance is that we are given the image of Democritus possibly laughing *at* the unnamable's attempt to experience death. With this, I have come to the second feature of absolute laughter: a token of transgression's failure.

Besides being a derision of our daily efforts to protect our autonomy, absolute laughter also partly derides the impossibility for man of penetrating continuity without *ipse* being lost. As I explained in 2.2.4., the aporia of transgression unveils the insatiability of the human desire to be one with the continuity of being. In a way, the subject's confrontation with the impossibility to achieve sufficiency, to soothe the wound of its limited being, turns a subject's situation (of being torn between discontinuity and continuity, of its impossible urge to access continuity discontinuously) into a laughable given. Therefore, because he is aware that "our will to arrest being is damned," Bataille recognizes the "inanity" of this foolish human desire (*IE* 91). Consequentially, as Michael Richardson stresses, Bataille sometimes labels the movement of inner experience as the 'comical' operation (*Georges Bataille: Essential Writings* 139). However, the word 'comic' here does not signify the hypocritical levity present in comic laughter anymore. A quote taken from Bataille's *Inner Experience* helps us to assess the difference:

Man cannot, by any means, escape insufficiency, nor renounce ambition. [...]. There is no concurrence imaginable, and man, inevitably, must wish to be everything, remain *ipse*. He is comical in his own eyes if he is aware of this: it is necessary, then, for him to *want* to be comical, for he is so, to the extent that he is man (it is no longer a question of characters who are emissaries of comedy) – without a way out. (*IE* 91, original emphases)

Thus, in this context, the word 'comic' paradoxically suggests to continue to deliver oneself to inner experiences, knowing however that one's insufficiency will only be affirmed once more. In this regard, the repetition of transgression is by definition a hopeless, but also absurd, ridiculous attitude.

This being said, we can return to the image of Democritus laughing at the unnamable. The expression 'Abderitan laughter' commonly denotes an incessant, scoffing laughter, mocking the human condition. Hence, we can interpret Democritus' mockery as directed toward the unnamable's 'practicing' to experience death. More specifically, as a mockery of the unavoidable failure of any attempt to grasp the continuity of existence. The same ridicule of man's impossible attempt to be one

with the universe, we find voiced by Moran. For, right after Moran's surmise that a successful transgression is impossible (cfr. *infra* 3.2.1.1.), he starts starving himself and narrates how he made a habit of having “a good laugh at the lights of Bally” (*T* 162) every night. Because these lights of the city of Bally arguably allegorically represent Moran's projected object of existence as a whole (cfr. *infra* 3.2.1.1.), Moran's “guffaw” (*T* 163) directed toward this city seems to express his acceptance of the foolishness of his former belief that he could ever 'arrive' at this city without actually dying.

Another way of framing absolute laughter's connection to the failure of transgression, is by conceiving it as the confirmation of the vain discontinuous hope to gain 'knowledge' of continuity. Privitello states that, for Bataille, sovereign moments in general lapse into silence because they abandon all discursive knowledge (178, 181). Privitello explains that absolute laughter can be viewed as the effect of the subject opening up to the unknowable violence of the world, of being thrown into the unknown (172). The principles of the world of reason defied, the burst of laughter is then “directed in the face of *logos*” (178, original emphasis). In support of this interpretation, Joseph Libertson's article 'Bataille and Communication: Savoir, Non-Savoir, Glissement, Rire' (1995) – a Derridean analysis of Bataille's concept of laughter – also discusses absolute laughter as a reaction to this “dissolution of lucidity,” when the possibility to know has reached its limits at the extreme of the possible, and has slipped into non-knowing (217, 221).

So, generally speaking, laughter can be viewed as an incomprehensible utterance which comprises a movement away from discursive knowledge (affirming herewith the ineffability of continuity). But at the same time, absolute laughter can also be framed as something which breaks the striven-for pure experience of the silence of continuity. In a posthumously published collection of his writings, Bataille formulates this idea. He states that the movement toward sovereignty entails a “silent, angelic feeling of divine mockery” in its striving for “maximum silence” (*The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (2001), qtd. in Privitello 178). In this regard, the apparition of absolute laughter can indeed be seen as a trace of our insurmountable discontinuous consciousness. Like a mocking voice, it imposes itself onto the silent secret of continuity we embody, and affirms our inability to 'know' continuity. This aporetic, impossible situation seems to be described with an air of indifference by the unnamable, when on the verge of losing itself in inner experience again:

It will be the same silence, the same as ever, murmurous with muted lamentation, panting and exhaling of impossible sorrow, like distant laughter, and brief spells of hush, as of one buried before his time. Long or short, the same silence. Then I resurrect and begin again. That's what I'll have got for all my pains. Unless this time it's the real silence at last. (*T* 393)

This hybrid simultaneity of silence and laughter (also note Moran's previous observation of “mighty silent laughter” [T 162]), together with the image of being buried alive, indeed strongly attests to the tormenting, despairing situation of being trapped in-between discontinuity and continuity, with no hope for escape. The distant laughter still heard in the background concords with always being pulled back into the discontinuous sphere, due to the subject's urge to lay hold on the experience.

With this last illustration, I have come to the end of my demonstration that the trilogy makes human identity revolve around the possibility (and failure) of transgression. I can now start the second and last part of my analysis, in which I will trace the effect of the repetition of transgression on the successive characters' identities and their changing attitude toward their discontinuous insufficiency.

3.2. Transgressive Transformation in the Trilogy

Having demonstrated the ubiquitousness of taboos and (the possibility of) transgression in the trilogy, in the second section of my analysis I will basically read the trilogy as the ever-failing search to grasp the self as a continuous discontinuity or as a discontinuous continuity. I am convinced that every novel prepares for the next one regarding the effects of being exposed to inner experience and the transformation of the sense of subjectivity it instigates. More specifically, I will argue that the evolution of the consecutive characters is the piecemeal disintegration of one narrating 'I.' Wolfgang Iser supports this choice to regard all protagonists of the three novels as various *persona* of one narrator who presents contrived images of 'self' to the reader. Iser claims that Moran, Molloy and Malone are all fictional “masks of the unnamable [that] refer to particular relationships, limitations, and attitudes that, in the last novel, have lost all substance” (53). Abiding by Iser, I also assume that the unnamable is speaking all the time.

Consequentially, these masks or projections of 'self' which the unnamable first assumes can be seen as hypocritical facades, as falsehoods, employed to give form to the 'self' in an attempt to construe a sense of stable human identity and evade the acknowledgment of being essentially a formless, anonymous part of the ungraspable flux of the continuity of being. In my argument, the multiple evasions with which the unnamable flees and its hope to overcome the symptoms of its insufficiency (i.e. by suppressing the idea of death or by desiring to 'possess,' to 'know,' to 'embrace' the continuity of existence as *ipse*) are gradually deconstructed, renounced and destroyed. Only when both these means to overcome our limited existence are (temporarily) shed, (the repetition of) transgressive experience can occur. So, in other words, the narrating 'I' of the trilogy gradually

ceases to try pretend sufficiency as a discontinuous subject. This narrating voice will increasingly remove the multiple camouflages for the wound in its being. It forsakes its 'palliative' hopes and substitutes them by an indifferent acceptance of the torment of being. It recognizes that it is an insufficient discontinuous creature that can find no way out of its contradictory impulse to protect its alleged autonomy on the one hand and merge with, enter the totality of existence on the other hand.

I want to prove that the trilogy exemplifies the Kierkegaardian-like process of constantly becoming, by a series of transgressions, the powerless being-in-between humans are. Because of the transgressive experiences repeatedly encountered (in which the subject temporarily gives up its will for autonomy and its desire to experience continuity as *ipse*), the subject is forced to acknowledge the unknowable flux of continuity it is. Both the narcotic of the daily pretending to be a sort of transcendent, immortal 'I' (an attempt to assume a degree of continuity for a discontinuous solitude), as the will to access existence as a whole as *ipse* (an attempt to fuse with continuity as a discontinuous being) are increasingly ridiculed as illusions that vainly try to maintain a sense of self. With these means, a subject is able to prevent transgressive experience to occur, but, as I explained, this is a hypocritical attitude impeding the more 'authentic,' tormenting experience of being. Thus, I want to show that the trilogy's evolution is a movement toward a final acceptance of this tormenting insufficiency. The narrating voice of the trilogy must accept its transgressive nature, but also the fact that its yearning for continuity as a discontinuous being will always be frustrated. By keeping to this to a point of exhaustion, the sick narrator will finally abandon its hope to heal its insufficiency.

I will trace this development chronologically from Moran to Molloy to Malone to the unnamable, by focusing on how a changing view of 'self' manifests itself in the characters' literary 'decomposition' of their bodily identity. I believe the tipping point – i.e. the final acceptance of the failure of transgression, the final indifference to the wound in being – is to be situated in the transition from *Malone Dies* to *The Unnamable*. Although deciding for one specific tipping point traceable in a particular passage is a vain enterprise, I will propose one possibility: the conclusion of *Malone Dies*. Doing so, I can read *The Unnamable* as the culmination of the trilogy. The unnamable then represents the indifferent attitude that leads toward a constant state of 'openness' to inner experience. In this view, the unnamable suffers inner experience merely for the sake of suffering – without any hope of overcoming its insufficiency. The only thing that can be confirmed is the elusiveness of man's continuous 'identity.' Indeed, as such, the trilogy will destroy the typical existentialist preoccupation with aspects within the safe confines of man's discontinuous existence and replace it with the striving for the unattainable continuity of the entirety of existence.

3.2.1: *Molloy*: Moran and Molloy

Analyzed in its structural entirety, the first novel of the trilogy for me constitutes the commencement of the gradual demolition of the alleged discontinuous 'self' that begins with Moran and debouches into the unnamable. For me, when combined, the two distinct stories in *Molloy* (the first one about Molloy, the second about Moran) already demonstrate how repeated inner experiences alter the notion of individual subjectivity. Ludovic Janvier, in his essay *Molloy* (1970), proposes that Molloy is a posterior transformation of Moran, so that their two separate voyages actually constitute two moments in one “single process of becoming” (54). Agreeing with this, I wish to propose that Molloy's sense of self-identity differs from the one upheld by his previous self (i.e. Moran). This because the former has arguably suffered the effects of a transgressive experience – in which a loss of self occurs – encountered as Moran. This division between Moran and Molloy as being the same person, but the former an anterior version of the latter (Moran is still less affected by inner experiences) offers a sound frame for analysis. Moran emerges as a still more rational character tied to the world of work and productivity. His initial attitude is one of clinging to his self-constructed Christian image of being an autonomous, immortal, discontinuous individual. Because of this, Moran shuns transgressive behavior. Molloy, on the other hand, will display a more irrational transgressive attitude than Moran, arguably due to his increased indifference toward wanting to uphold an 'immortal' discontinuous sense of self at all costs.

Before analyzing this identity change in detail, I wish to demonstrate how this contrast between Moran and Molloy can also be read on another level as a personification of the tension present in man's impossible wish to safeguard his sense of discontinuity (dominant in Moran) while at the same time also longing for the continuity of being (more dominant in Molloy).⁸⁴ This division into two inner poles of one subject (Moran representing discontinuity and Molloy continuity) allows me to interpret a certain scene in the woods as an allegorical visualization of the two contradictory impulses Bataille discerns in man. To be more precise, this one scene is actually told twice, if we are to believe David Hesla in his study *The Shape of Chaos: an Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (1971). He argues that both Molloy's and Moran's unexpected meeting with a stranger in the forest is actually a direct encounter between Molloy and Moran narrated from a different perspective

⁸⁴ Support for this division I find by making a partial analogy with Edith Kern's psycho-analytical interpretation of the characters of Moran and Molloy. She views them as different manifestations of the same character, but the former representing the conscious Apollonian self and the latter the subconscious Dionysian self (*Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett* (1970), qtd. in Hesla 95).

– once in Molloy's version and once in Moran's (96-98).

Moran unexpectedly comes “face to face with a dim man, dim of face and dim of body, because of the dark [...], [with a] face which [he] regret[s] to say vaguely resembled [his] own” (*T* 150-151). If we agree that this man is Molloy (i.e. Moran's desire for continuity, in which lies the threat of transgressing), the man's vagueness seems to represent the continuous anonymity which Moran is but which he still tries to deny (as such the man's 'dimness' also already announces Moran's future, more anonymous view of 'self' when he will have turned into Molloy). Moran then is still predominantly led by his fear of death and being pulled into transgression, because he fears that inner experience will be an unwanted attack on his idea of his absolute, discontinuous delineation of self. Thus, Moran tries to flee from the man who can tear his discontinuous identity apart, toward his self-constructed shelter. This shelter arguably represents the safe haven of the world of discontinuity in the “God-forsaken” (*T* 150) forest where one behaves according to one's transgressive urges:

I went towards the shelter, he barred my way, emboldened by my limp. [...]. He came closer to me. Get out of my way, I said. [...]. What do you want to know? I said. [...]. How long have you been here? he said. His body too grew dim, as if coming asunder. [...]. He thrust his hand at me. I have an idea I told him once again to get out of my way. I can still see the hand coming towards me, pallid, opening and closing. As if self-propelled. *I do not know what happened then.* But a little later, perhaps a long time later, I found him stretched on the ground, his head in a pulp. I am sorry I cannot indicate more clearly how this result was obtained, it would have been something worth reading. [...]. I myself was unscathed, except for *a few scratches* I did not discover till the following day. I bent over him. As I did so I realized my leg was bending normally. He no longer resembled me. (*T* 151, emphases added)

The encounter turned grim, as if the man wanted to kill Moran. It looks like Moran has experienced a sublime symbolic death in transgression. This interpretation is supported by the fact that he is unaware (*ipse* was lost) of what has happened. Indeed, I will argue in my analysis of Moran that this scene is Moran's moment of transgressive experience. But, it must also be pointed out that Moran kills the man, expressing herewith the idea that Moran's inclination to preserve his discontinuous sense of self still has the upper hand in him. This anti-transgressive attitude is also confirmed when Moran drags the body into the bushes and covers it with the branches of his shelter (*T* 152). Plot-wise, we could interpret this as Moran merely wanting to hide the traces of his murder. Yet, Moran's act can also be indicative of his urge to hide dead bodies from sight. According to Bataille, burials originated in Neanderthal man's horror before a corpse, because this was the “image of his own destiny” (*EDS* 44), testifying to the violence of continuity (*EDS* 43-45). So, Moran literally covers the traces of continuity with the branches with which he attempted to shield himself from continuity

in the first place. In other words, he tries to impede that transgressive experience occurs again.

On the other hand, the rendition of this same encounter from Molloy's perspective highlights the pull of the other inner urge of man: to satisfy the longing to return to existence as a whole by trying to transcend the limits of his embodied discontinuous state. When Molloy meets a charcoal-burner⁸⁵ [i.e. Moran, here representing Molloy's will for autonomy] in the woods, this man emerges as a factor impeding Molloy's transgressive quest and desire for continuity.

I notably encountered a charcoal-burner. [...]. He was all over me, begging me to share his hut, believe it or not. A total stranger. Sick with solitude probably. [...]. [H]e wanted to keep me near him. [...]. [F]or when I made to go, he held me back by the sleeve. So I smartly freed a crutch and dealt him a good dint on the skull. [...]. Seeing he had not ceased to breathe I contented myself with giving him a few warm kicks in the ribs, with my heels. [...]. I carefully chose the most favourable position, a few paces from the body, with my back of course turned to it. Then, nicely balanced on my crutches, I began to swing, backwards, forwards [...]. (*T* 83-84)

In this scene, the stranger literally holds Moran back. As such the stranger seems to represent the subject's tendency to maintain its sense of self by fleeing toward discontinuous 'narcotics' (the hut) that impede the awareness of death to impose itself to the fullest. But Molloy's irrational instinct propels him to embrace the continuity of existence. Moreover, Molloy's frantic assault on the still breathing body seems to attest to his scorn of his discontinuous embodiment which limits him.

So, Molloy displays a stronger transgressive attitude than Moran. To understand how this evolution came to be, I must investigate Moran and Molloy separately. For Janvier, Moran is symbolically reborn because he experiences several symbolic deaths during his quest (54). The interpretation that I am about to give, deviates from Janvier's hypothesis that there are multiple 'deaths.' I will purport that the difference between Moran and Molloy must be seen as the effect of *one* inner experience Moran underwent – i.e. the one just discussed. That this inner experience can slowly effect a change, was already indicated in the penultimate quote in which Moran remarked: “I myself was unscathed, except for a few scratches I did not discover till the following day” (*T* 151).

3.2.1.1. Moran

My investigation of Moran must start with the telling fact that he is a Christian and attaches great importance to formal Christian liturgy: he regrets being late for mass because of Gaber's unexpected Sunday visit (*T* 94, cfr. *infra*), and he goes to father Ambrose afterwards because he cannot stand the idea of not having received communion, which he needs to appease his soul (*T* 99-

85 In Moran's story, Moran had just lit a fire when the dim-faced man appeared in the forest.

101). The dictates of his faith also have more philosophical implications. In my discussion on absolute laughter, I already explained how Moran's Christian grave reveals his belief in a transcendent, eternal notion of self. Put differently, Moran responds to his limited mortal existence by adhering to a conception of continuity as an atomized whole consisting of immortal entities. As a consequence, some of Moran's religious utterances emerge as a perfect object for a Bataillean critique of Christianity's creative God: "Personally I just liked plants in all innocence and simplicity. I even saw in them at times a superfetatory proof of the existence of God" (*T* 99). Moran's remark that his having only one child is proof of his "lack of breeding" (*T* 96) also reveals Christianity's philosophy to highly esteem the productive side of life. In general, Moran can be seen as a personification of the tendencies Bataille despised in Christianity, because these inhibit man's instinctive urge to transgress. Father Ambrose exemplifies this perfectly with a command for Moran: "Above all no profane comparisons" (*T* 100).

However, we can notice that Moran does not obey Christianity's revulsion of matters of the flesh at all times. Consider his explanation for his want for privacy after his son Jacques has just walked in on him: "Now if there is one thing I abhor, it is someone coming into my room, without knocking. I might just happen to be masturbating, before my cheval glass. Father with yawning fly and starting eyes, toiling to scatter on the ground his joyless seed, that was no sight for a small boy" (*T* 102). However, in his quote, we still observe Moran's hypocritical (Christian) tendency to keep his violent bodily lusts hidden from view and, in a broader perspective, the socialization of children by relegating abject matters to a forbidden sphere with the risk of denying their existence.

Nevertheless, a more profound sense of doubt about Christianity's teachings and a suspicion that these only provide 'narcotics' are stirring in Moran as well. For example, after having received communion from father Ambrose, Moran compares the host to a pain-killer that no longer gives any relief (*T* 102). A little further on, he even states: "As for God, he is beginning to disgust me" (*T* 105). The origin of these blasphemous utterances actually lies at the beginning of his story. On a Sunday (tellingly a day of rest, as opposed to the world of work), Moran is paid a visit by an acquaintance named Gaber (who significantly crushes Moran's daisies upon his arrival in Moran's garden [*T* 93]). Gaber instructs Moran to track Molloy down, encounter him, come back and report on it. According to Janvier, we can equate this Gaber figure with the archangel Gabriel, who is in religious traditions a messenger of God (56). Gaber works for a chief named Youdi. For Janvier, this Youdi and Gabriel "are the order that summons existence" and that "leads us from the interior toward the horizon of our selves" (*ibid.*). He also argues that, structure-wise, *Molloy* in its entirety can be visualized as a spiral that is driven by a "motivating force that depicts the journey of being," with an "endless

ascent after a conclusive descent” (55-56).⁸⁶ Although Janvier focuses solely on the structural aspects of *Molloy* without making any reference to Bataille, I am convinced Janvier's interpretation allows us to interpret Youdi as a Bataille-like 'God of continuity' and Gaber as a personal messenger who represents Moran's inner urge to transgress.⁸⁷ That Gaber compels Moran to go on a quest for Molloy ties in with my previous contention that Molloy partly functions as Moran's longing for continuity. Moran himself also asserts that the Molloy figure partly inhabits him (*T* 115). In addition to this, we can simultaneously regard the “Molloy affair” (*T* 98) as an allegory for Moran's previous transgressions (that took place before the one that will occur in Moran's story). Moran tries to 'report' on these, still believing that a subject can encounter the totality of being.

Importantly, Moran – governed by reason and engulfed in the world of work that protects his self-identity from transgression by deferring his death anxiety – is mainly hesitant to give in to his transgressive nature. At first, he is not interested in the Molloy affair, finding it “banal” (*T* 98). He acknowledges that he knows “how to listen to the falsetto of reason” (*T* 107). He also states that because of his “methodical mind,” he “never set[s] out on a mission without prolonged reflection as to the best way of setting out” (*T* 98). All of this can explain his long delay of his quest for Molloy until midnight (*T* 95-126). Also, Moran puts the blame on Gaber's visit for having missed mass; and on Gaber's habit of drinking beer for him having to drink beer along with him, while indicating that alcohol is a “sin” (*T* 100) and an “excess” (*T* 102). But, taking into account that his wife states that she saw no visitor (*T* 97), we can conclude that Moran still presents his deviant behavior as something external to him, rather than admitting that he harbors transgressive instincts. Nonetheless, Moran is also aware of his self-deceiving evasion. He states that it is perhaps “in order to win a few more moments of peace that [he] instinctively avoided giving [his] mind to [the Molloy-affair]” (*T* 96), to which he adds that “soon [he] would have to admit [he] was anxious” (*ibid.*).

In addition to this, we notice how Moran is already slightly aware of the illusory habitual discontinuous mode of perceiving and structuring the world. For example, he declares that he “drown[s] in the spray of phenomena” (*T* 111), but admits merrily: “[I]t is at the mercy of these

86 Janvier comes to this conclusion by including for example, among others, the argument that, because the ends of the separate stories of Moran and Molloy return to their own beginning or to the beginning of the other story, the stories can be said to recommence endlessly and form a never-ending intertwined unity (55).

87 According to David Hesla, Youdi is a pun on the French *Dieu* (DiYou) (99). Northrop Frye, in his essay 'The Nightmare Life in Death' (1970), underscores that the Hebrew name for God (Jahweh) also resounds in Youdi and that, on top of this, this name is replaced once by 'Obidil' (*T* 162), which is an anagram for 'libido' (Frye 30). Consequentially, the latter ties in with Bataille's view on eroticism as a (barred) gateway to continuity. Also, Gaber tells Moran (who is reluctant to embark on the quest) rather ambiguously that Youdi “wants it to be [Moran], *God* knows why” (*T* 94, emphasis added). One indication for interpreting Gaber as Moran's own transgressive urge is found in what could be first regarded as a mistake on Beckett's part – writing “Gabor” instead of 'Gaber' (*T* 106). But the two overlapping letters with Moran's name (*or*) could be a hint to indicate Moran's overlap with Gaber.

sensations, which happily I know to be illusory, that I have to live and work. It is thanks to them I find myself a meaning” (T 111). In my opinion, he has gained this insight from his previous inner experiences. Yet, at this point Moran prefers to push these insights away from his consciousness and relishes in his delusions.

This self-deceitful straddling position is characteristic of Moran's attitude at the outset of his story. Having finally decided that he will obey Gaber and search for Molloy – and thus give in to his urge to transgress once more – Moran arguably ponders his previous transgressive upsurges:

This was how [Molloy] came to me, at long intervals. Then I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact. [...]. What it was all about I had not the slightest idea. [...]. As he appeared to me, so I felt he must have always appeared and would continue to appear until the end, an end indeed which I was hard put to imagine. (T 113)

We sense how Moran perceives his transgressive urge as merely an unwanted inconvenience that bothers him once in a while. Accordingly, from these transgressions he refuses to draw any fundamental conclusions regarding the nature of his being:

That a man like me, so meticulous and calm in the main, so patiently turned toward the outer world as towards the lesser evil, creature of his house, of his garden, of his few poor possessions, discharging faithfully and ably *a revolting function*, reining back his thoughts within the limits of the calculable so great is his horror of fancy, that a man so contrived, for *I was a contrivance*, should let himself be *haunted and possessed by chimeras*, this ought to have seemed strange to me and been a warning to me to have a care, in my own interest. Nothing of the kind. (T 114, emphases added)

Although Moran already extends his knowledge about the daily delusions he lives under to the insight that he also upholds a fictitious view of being an isolated self (“*I was a contrivance*” [T 114, emphasis added]), he paradoxically still minimizes this conclusion. Like Kierkegaard's Job who is restored in his finite concerns, Moran also returns to and clings to his worldly goods, discontinuous cares and habitual life. Clearly, Moran has not yet reached a final indifference. And although he is aware that transgression undermines his transcendent image of an alleged 'self,' he does hold on to the value of his will to protect this image. He prefers to uphold his narcotic pretense of being a sufficient, immortal 'I' – a self-delusion which he arguably describes as a beneficent weakness:

I saw it only as the weakness of a solitary, a weakness admittedly to be deplored, but which had to be indulged in if I wished to remain a solitary, and I did, I clung to that, with as little enthusiasm as to my hens or to my faith, but no less lucidly. (T 114)

At this point, Moran refuses to consider the possibility that a future transgression could be detrimental to his efforts to preserve his self-constructed illusion of 'self.' Again, while conceding that his discontinuous life is produced by his imagination, he maintains that his transgressive urge is but an aberration, a trifle which he can easily suppress and distance himself from:

Besides this [Molloy] took up very little room in the inenarrable contraption I called my life, jeopardized it as little as my dreams and was as soon forgotten. Don't wait to be hunted to hide, that was always my motto. And if I had to tell the story of my life I should not so much as allude to these apparitions [...]. (T 114)

Indeed, the above sums up Moran's hypocritical cowardice at the outset of his quest: "His will to flee is the fear which he has of being man: [...] the fact that man is what he is without daring to be so" (Bataille, *IE* 91). But another inner experience will force him to change his position ...

Thus, when Moran finally embarks on his quest for Molloy (T 126), he temporarily ceases to suppress his urge for continuity, therewith going against the prescriptive orders of Christianity. From now on, Moran carefully admits it to be an inner need, describing his impulse as an 'inner voice':

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 Gabe 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. (T 131-132)

Having decided to indulge his impulse, Moran suddenly does seem to sense the 'seriousness' of his transgressive urge and insists on the possibility that he will cease to obey taboos in the future:

And I feel I shall follow it from this day forth, no matter what it commands. And when it ceases, leaving me in doubt and darkness, I shall wait for it to come back, and do nothing, even though the whole world, through the channel of its innumerable authorities speaking with one accord, should enjoin upon me this and that, under pain of unspeakable punishments. *But this evening, this morning, I have drunk a little more than usual and tomorrow I may be of a different mind.* (T 132, emphasis added)

The last sentence of this quote still attests to Moran's reluctance to capitulate his entire being to inner experience. But his anticipation of this possibility already announces the irrevocable collapse of his hope of trying to escape his insufficiency by dedicating himself to the world of discontinuity. Similarly, a foreshadowing of the test of faith Job found him in is evoked by Moran with an image that coincides with the crisis of the forlorn Job Kierkegaard and Bataille advocate as starting point:

Does this mean I shall be banished from my house, from my garden, lose my trees, my lawns, my birds [...] and be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, which it was my life's work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep? I am too old to lose all this, and begin again, I am too old! (*T* 132)

But I must not run ahead of matters. After having finally embarked on his quest for Molloy, we indeed observe how Moran increasingly gives in to his transgressive longing for continuity by disregarding the rules governing the world of work and of project. For instance, Moran records that he has lost count of the amount of money he should have left, to which he adds: “Usually I kept the most rigorous accounts when away on business and was in a position to justify my expenditure down to the last penny. This time no. For I was throwing my money away with as little concern as if I had been travelling for my pleasure” (*T* 142). Next to this, the incurable wound in his being seems to impress itself on Moran's consciousness as well. Yet, again, he still tries to deny this. This is evidenced by his endeavor to conceal his malady for his son: “He [my son] did not know I was ill. Besides I was not ill. [...]. [H]e would have seen I was ill. Not that I was exactly ill. And why did I not want him to know I was ill? I don't know” (*T* 141-142). Moran still tries to keep his wasteful behavior and his suffering hidden from his son in order to hold high (for his son, but also for himself) the principles of the world of productivity. However, Moran will be pulled into the aforementioned inner experience, after having sent off his son on the first day of their voyage to buy a bicycle in a nearby town.

This future inner experience will force Moran's to change his view of self (cfr. *infra*). But, that Moran will no longer be able to deny being subject to the destructive workings of continuity because of this inner experience, already announces itself on the first day – to himself and to the reader – in a metaphorical passage which is a clear reference to the Greek myth of Narcissus:

I dragged myself down to the stream. I lay down and looked at my reflection, then I washed my face and hands. I waited for my image to come back, I watched it as it trembled towards an ever increasing likeness. Now and then a drop, falling from my face, shattered it again. I did not see a soul all day. (*T* 145)

Importantly, the water he looks into is slowly streaming – as if it is a Heraclitean river. So Moran's perception of his clearly delineated image of his face is in fact but an illusion of stability, a fixed point he imposes upon the flux of all that exists. Moran has been in love all his life with this illusory

stable 'self' which he believes (or wishes to believe) is real. Keeping to this narcissistic imagery, we could also say that his love is an unrequited one, because his beloved discontinuous self always breaks up when he touches the limits of this projected self in inner experience. Furthermore, taking into account that Moran has looked at himself, his statement that he did not see a soul all day is actually an indirect, unwilling indication that he as well should not regard himself as one anymore.

Moran's premonition that his transgressive experience to come will engender this radical disintegration of his human sense of subjectivity, could be the reason for his initial caution to keep close to his shelter (which represents the protection provided by the habitual rational world, as I have suggested in the introduction to this section). Although on the second day this reticence slackens and he explores the forest further and further, Moran's attachment to this discontinuous safe haven, which is as a "little house" (*T* 148) for him, remains strong: "I kept my eye on the shelter, which drew me with an extraordinary pull [...] [and] each time I had to retrace my steps, the way I had come, to the shelter, and make sure all was in order, before I sallied forth again" (*ibid.*). In order to express Moran's growing anxiety that he will perhaps not be able to return to his safe habitual life of denial if he transgresses once more, Beckett takes up again the image of Moran as a modern day Narcissus on the second day, but even more pregnantly this time:

And on myself too I pored, on me so changed from what I was. And I seemed to see myself ageing as swiftly as a day-fly. But the idea of ageing was not exactly the one which offered itself to me. And what I saw was more like a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be. Or it was like a kind of clawing towards a *light* and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied. [...]. And then I saw a little globe swaying up slowly from the depths, through the quiet water, smooth at first, and scarcely paler than its escorting ripples, then little by little a face, with holes for the eyes and mouth and other wounds, and nothing to show if it was a man's face or a woman's face, a young face or an old face, or if its calm too was not an effect of the water trembling between it and the *light*. (*T* 148-149, emphases added)

I believe this moment shows Moran being affected by the anxiety-ridden ecstasy right before the moment of possibly being pulled into transgression. Here, he begins to understand that he fundamentally longs to seize a certain light. I believe that Beckett uses this concept of 'light' to allegorically denote what Bataille would call 'continuity'.⁸⁸ Against the gleam of this light (i.e. against the background of the earth's surface underneath [see previous footnote]), a generic, age- and

⁸⁸ That Moran positions the light under the surface of the water endorses my suggestion: the water lies between Moran's reflection and the light. So the surface of the earth overlaps with the light. Consequently, this equation suggests that the trilogy's 'light' is a similar principle as Bataille's 'devouring soil.' In *Literature and Evil*, Bataille also speaks of transgression as "the moments when fortune lets us glimpse the furtive lights of communication" (194). In my analysis of Molloy's narrative, my interpretation of 'light' as 'continuity' will obtain further validity.

sexless face takes shape – arguably so because Moran takes the earth as a whole ('a little globe') as point of reference to reflect on his own identity. Although an anonymous *face* is not yet the absolute formlessness of the 'self,' it does have the quality of being a less narcissistic, individualistic perception of self. Nevertheless, Moran, on the verge of inner experience, still refuses to give up his will for autonomy and flees. Because, immediately following the previous quote, he adds:

But I confess I attended but absently to these poor figures, in which I suppose my sense of disaster sought to contain itself. And that I did not labour at them more diligently was a further index of the great changes I had suffered and of my growing resignation to being dispossessed of self. And doubtless I should have gone from discovery to discovery, concerning myself, if I had persisted. *But* at the first faint light, I mean in these wild shadows gathering about me, dispensed by a vision or by an effort of thought, at the first light, I fled to other cares. (*T* 149, emphasis added)

Despite his 'growing resignation to being dispossessed of self,' Moran undergoes the transgressive experience shortly after – more specifically at the end of the second day. This is the forest encounter with Molloy (which I have discussed in the introduction to this section), condensed in the sentence: “I do not know what happened then” (*T* 151). The way the reader of *Madame Edwarda* had to read beyond Bataille's words, the reader of the trilogy must also fall into what is beyond what this sentence expresses. From this moment onwards – although he is unaware that he has unconsciously 'found' Molloy – Moran's view of self changes drastically. The day after, he is not aware of what took place. As mentioned, he immediately tries to cover up the dead body, as a last act of trying to shield himself from transgression in the future. But the fact that he uses the branches from his shelter for this (“In a word I struck camp” [*T* 152]), lets the reader know that Moran has unknowingly broken up the possibility to flee any longer toward his safe discontinuous habits.

Moran's habitual concern for the future, which the world of work and reason dictates and with which man constantly postpones his awareness of dying, crumbles further. In contrast to his concerns about his shrinking provisions on the second day (*T* 148), Moran now “got rid of [his] various burdens and [...] ate a whole tin of sardines and one apple” (*T* 153). And when his son finally comes back at the end of the third day and offers him a bar of chocolate, Moran confesses: “[I]nstead of eating it, as I longed to, and although I have a horror of waste, I cast it from me, after a moment's hesitation, which I trust my son did not notice” (*T* 156). His son then asks him what happened to him, presumably because he notices his father's scratches. Moran, still eager to teach his child the 'right path,' lies that he “had a fall” (*T* 155). But this is actually also not a lie, if we take into consideration that Moran fell into the void of inner experience.

The only problem at this point is that Moran is still unaware of the fact that he met Molloy (and thus already experienced a transgression), and goes on looking for him. In other words, Moran actually thinks that his quest has not yet been 'successful.' This is due to Moran's wrong opinion that continuity is something that can be encountered and contained by the subject, oblivious to the fact that transgression is in essence the failure to do so. I will return to this at the end of this section, but let us first take a look at what Moran *has* accepted. Because, swiftly, Moran does claim that something has indeed happened: "I had changed and was still changing" (*T* 154); "I'm sick" (*T* 163); I have suffered "great inward metamorphoses" (*ibid.*).

The core of this change is that Moran finally understands that his Christian faith and normal life was aimed at suppressing the transgressive nature of man's being – i.e. his longing to be reunited with continuity to counter the fundamental solitude of his discontinuous existence. The feeling of sufficiency he formerly obtained by cherishing a belief in a transcendent, immortal soul, he now considers to be false. After his son has left him again (see 3.1.1.1.), Moran deals the final blow to the confines of discontinuity that obstructed the view of what lies at the horizon of himself:

And on and off, for fun, and the better to scatter them to the winds, I dallied with the hopes that spring eternal, childish hopes [...]. [T]hat Molloy, whose country this was, would come to me, who had not been able to go to him, and grow to be a friend, and like a father to me, and help me do what I had to do, so that Youdi would not be angry with me and would not punish me! Yes, I let them spring within me and grow in strength, brighten and charm me with a thousand fancies, and then I swept them away, with a great disgusted sweep of all my being, I swept myself clean of them and surveyed with satisfaction the void they had polluted. [...]. And in the evening I turned to the lights of Bally [...]. And I said, To think I might be there now, but for my misfortune! (*T* 161-162)

So, the hope of being able to shield himself from death has vanished from the center of Moran's strivings. Yet, a misunderstanding has arisen: from the 'failure' of finding Molloy and the conviction that Molloy will never come to him, he draws the premature conclusion that his longing for continuity commands him to die. The 'misfortune' of being torn away from continuity fosters a death-wish and Moran starts to starve himself: "I grew gradually weaker and weaker and more and more content. For several days I had eaten nothing. I could probably have found blackberries and mushrooms, but I had no wish for them" (*T* 162-163). Ironically enough, this image of starvation concurs with an image of Job introduced by Beckett earlier on. Moran spoke to father Ambrose of a problem with one of his hens which refused to eat and "which would neither brood nor lay and for the past month and more had done nothing but sit with her arse in the dust, from morning to night" (*T* 101). To this, father Ambrose responded: "Like Job" (*ibid.*). While at the time both men still

laughed with this comparison, Moran seems to have become this hen. However, suicide (the 'easy way out,' as Camus would say) is not the Job Bataille wished for.

Therefore, Moran's project of suicide is interrupted by the sudden return of Gaber who “put a stop to these frolics” (*T* 163). The many questions Moran asks Gaber can be framed as a Socratic dialog with himself, in which Moran corrects his own (pessimist) suicidal misunderstanding of his urge for continuity. At the end of the dialog that ensues, Moran learns that Youdi told Gaber that “life is a thing of beauty [...] and a joy for ever” (*T* 164).⁸⁹ Moran responds to this: “Do you think he meant human life? I listened. Perhaps he didn't mean human life, I said. I opened my eyes. I was alone” (*T* 164-165). Coming to the conclusion that starvation would be a “a nasty thing” (*T* 165) to do, Moran decides to return back home after all. This reversal of Moran's crisis of depression to the decision to live on, testifies to the neutral exulting qualities which I believe reside in the trilogy (and which I explained, in the first paragraph of the actual analysis of the trilogy, to be Bataille's intention as well). By substituting his personal negative feelings with the mystic 'splendor' of existence/life as a whole, Moran here moves beyond the existentialist question of suicide.

Moran's story has turned into one of a crisis of faith, in which he will lose his Christian beliefs. If at first he only questioned Christianity by committing blasphemy, he now curses and damns God to hell (*T* 165); he ridicules Christianity by making an (abject) mockery of theological questions and dogmata (*T* 166-167); and later on he becomes an apostate who renounces his Christian faith as he tells father Ambrose “not to count on [him] anymore” (*T* 175). Besides this conversion (as if Moran now worships the Bataillean-like 'God of continuity'), Moran also experiences the world differently (something which can, as I explained in 2.3.2., be caused by having had a phenomenological experience). Having acquired a radical different outlook on existence, Moran experiences the falsity of the world and is no longer confined by any preconceptions. For example, with his deeper understanding of why the human world is structured the way it is, he remarks: “I ate, in obedience to the voice of reason [...]. I finished the morphine” (*T* 165). He can no longer value the human world of work and reason which is infused with 'narcotic' meanings construed by man. Hence, understanding that human life does not differ from the meaningless existence of animals, he compares the activities of his bees (an insect constantly busy working) with those of men: “I admitted with good grace the possibility that this dance was after all no better than the dances of the people of the West, frivolous and meaningless” (*T* 169).

Next to these existential insights (which are reminiscent of Roquentin's in Sartre's *La*

⁸⁹ This contention refers to the English Romanticist poet John Keats (1795-1821) and his renowned line that “A thing of beauty is a joy forever,” from the poem *Endymion* (1818).

nausée), Moran's bodily sensations have also changed. After having admitted that he was always taught to 'ascribe' his body to God (*T* 169) – as if wanting to criticize the Christian view of possessing a 'soul' housed in a body belonging to the 'self' – Moran confesses:

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. And yet the gist of the sensation was the same as in the far-off days when I was well-shaven and perfumed and proud of my intellectual's soft white hands. And this belly I did not know remained my belly, my old belly, thanks to I know not what intuition. And to tell the truth I not only knew who I was, but I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered. (*T* 170)

Moran describes a dispossession of self that expresses his renewed sense of subjectivity, in line with the Merleau-Pontian body-subject. Forming the passageway in-between consciousness and the materialist exterior world, Moran clearly experiences his body as an anonymous part of the immanent continuity of existence. Moran has also learned that his identity is a wound: he desires to 'know' this continuity, but he is also still convinced that he can only access it by dying. This is the impasse Moran has come to. This compels him to ask in despair: “What would I do until my death? Was there no means of hastening this, without falling into a state of sin?” (*T* 167).⁹⁰

When Moran arrives home at the end of the story, his situation partly resembles Job's: his hens and bees are all dead, his wife has disappeared, he sells most of his valuable possessions and he refuses to have electric lighting in his house (*T* 174-175). Nevertheless, Moran is not yet the Job-figure deprived of all hope that Bataille advocated. The reason for this is that his hope of satisfying his want of continuity is renewed in the last couple of pages. Moran's surprised response when Gaber visits Moran again to ask him for the report of his previous quest is an indication of this: “That's funny, I thought I was done with people and talk” (*T* 175). Moran's hope that a transgressive act (his quest for Molloy) could be successful after all is fortified. With this renewed hope, Moran now exclaims: “I am clearing out. Perhaps I shall meet Molloy” (*T* 175).

In sum, Moran has shed the Christian attitude to satisfy man's longing for continuity by edifying an immortal self and by suppressing man's transgressive tendencies. He has accepted that his nature is transgressive. Moran summarizes the transformation of his sense of subjectivity he has undergone in the concluding lines of his story:

⁹⁰ I assume that Moran has not entirely shed his Christian discourse, and here refers to the Christian taboo of suicide.

I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, *I understood it, all wrong perhaps*. That is not what matters. *It told me to write the report*. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn. (*T* 175-176, emphases added)

Importantly, these ending lines confirm that Moran does indeed retain a new misunderstanding concerning the continuity of being. Moran's old Christian hope has been replaced by a new hope: the belief still subsists that a transgressive act can be successful (and thus that suicide is not required to be reunited with continuity). Moran wrongly believes that he should be able to grasp continuity. For him, continuity is still an object which can be 'found' by a subject when it is actively pursued and enclosed in a fixed point – continuity can thus be possessed and 'reported' on. This is where Molloy's story – the posterior version of Moran who renews his quest for continuity – takes off: Molloy will indeed learn that this new conviction is merely a new narcotic for an incurable wound. He will be forced to forsake the image of continuity as something identifiable. For, during transgressive experience, the subject always falls into a void in which both subject and object dissolve ...

3.2.1.2. *Molloy*

I will analyze Molloy's story, as I have done for Moran's, as revolving around one transgressive moment as well – which now takes place at the end. We find our narrator in his mother's room, about to relate how he ended up there. Chronologically, we have to situate this moment of speaking right after the adventure Molloy went on (but which still has to be told). Therefore, the narrative is actually told in Malone's retrospective voice, because another inner experience of Moran-turned-Molloy has turned Molloy into Malone.⁹¹ We discover that it is probably Youdi/Gaber again who coerced Molloy and still coerces Malone to look for continuity.⁹² Except, this transgressive urge is no longer presented as propelled by other humans, but has been internalized as an inner voice. Molloy describes it as a “far whisper” (*T* 40) that rustles in his head and that will never leave him, although he dislikes this (*ibid.*). But, whereas Moran went out to look for Molloy, Molloy now journeys to find his mother. This new object of quest – which can of course be related to Molloy's coming into existence⁹³ – functions as another allegorical *pars pro toto* for

91 This was actually also the case for Moran's story (which was thus already told by Molloy), but for clarity's sake I will also speak here of 'Molloy's narrative.'

92 The first lines state that “[t]here's this man who comes every week. [...] He gives me money and takes away the pages. [...] When he comes for the fresh pages he brings back the previous week's. [...] He comes every Sunday apparently. [...] He is always thirsty” (*T* 7-8).

93 For example, Molloy describes his mother as she “who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse I my memory is correct. First taste of the shit” (*T* 16)

existence as a whole. In relation to Gaber's instructions, the narrator immediately admits that he hasn't "much will left" (*T* 7). We have to interpret this as Malone's confession that his hope of ever succeeding in grasping continuity has greatly diminished. This is due to yet another failed transgression: the one our narrator encountered as Molloy and which will now be told ...

As to his definition of self, we observe how Molloy is a disintegrated Moran who now resigns himself to be subject to the destructive workings of continuity. He describes himself as being in ruins: "[T]hey are a place with neither plan nor bounds and of which I understand nothing, not even of what it is made, still less into what. [...]. I don't know what it is, what it was, nor whether it is not less a question of ruins than the indestructible chaos of timeless things" (*T* 39). Furthermore, Molloy has fully accepted the hypocrisy of his former attempts to counteract his transgressive urge as Moran. Consider, for example, a remark, after having been brought to the police station, which can be read as Molloy's unwillingness to obey any anti-transgressive dictate as an absolute: "To apply the letter of the law to a creature like me is not an easy matter" (*T* 24). In this regard, Molloy's immediate departure after waking up around noon contrasts with Moran's prolonged delay to embark on his quest. Plot-wise, Molloy leaves his home; goes to his hometown; is arrested; roams the countryside after his release; goes back to a town where he then lives for some time with a woman named Lousse; leaves her again; goes to the seaside; and then finally enters a forest.

Nevertheless, the problem with Molloy's quest is of course that he still projects the entirety of existence as a definable object (i.e. his mother) which he believes he can find. However, there are actually several projected objects for continuity between which Molloy switches. Besides making use of the mother-figure, Molloy also visualizes his desire for continuity as his "insane demands for more light" (*T* 32), as well as with other metaphors, taken for example from nature:

[O]ther things calling me and towards which too one after the other my soul was straining, wildly. I mean of course the fields, whitening under the dew, and the animals, ceasing from wandering and settling for the night, and the sea, of which nothing, and the sharpening line of crests, and the sky where without seeing them I felt the first stars tremble [...].⁹⁴ (*T* 11)

By taking up these images of 'light' (the way Moran did with the lights of Bally) and of places in nature to represent continuity, Molloy implies that he believes that his transgressive longing could be satisfied by bringing himself in this light or to these places. Wolfgang Iser's

94 Note that I have claimed that Molloy is the posterior, disintegrated version of Moran, but Molloy's use of vocabulary such as 'soul' is at odds with the transformation I am proposing. This seems to indicate that the traces of Moran's former beliefs still faintly linger in Molloy and therefore emerge in his story's discourse sometimes.

interpretation of the trilogy as exposing the human need for 'concord-fictions' about the 'end' (as I laid out in 2.3.2.) confirms my assertion that Molloy is erring. For Iser, Molloy exemplifies the longing to bridge the gaps in his understanding of the 'end' (which I equated with Bataille's continuity) by construing “consciously false” (54) images. Iser explains that

Molloy is not completely free from the desire to imagine the end, and he falls into the very temptation to which his insight should prevent him from succumbing. [...]. [T]he end is still visualized with detailed images, and obviously an end without such images is not conceivable. [...]. Is the peace Molloy is searching for perhaps impossible without images? If so, then the images would be the obstacles to peace, for one only creates images in terms of one's own human reality, and it is exactly this reality of which one seeks to be free. The end is therefore inconceivable without images and irrelevant with images. (54-55)

The specific tension Iser defines here leads to what is the core tension of Molloy's quest in my argument: Molloy still deceives himself by presenting continuity as an object which can be defined and known by *ipse*. He is convinced that he will be able to penetrate continuity and gain mastery over 'it' after all. However, as I remarked in 2.3.2., Iser argues that the trilogy is an “act of 'decomposition'” (58), exactly because Beckett's writing exposes such concord-fictions as untenable.

Generally speaking, this process of literary decomposition indeed accrues in Molloy's story. Classic traits of the novel are rendered uncertain by an increasingly confused and chaotic Molloy: he soon loses his sense of location (e.g. *T* 19, 31, 66); he forgets and mixes up his own name and those of other characters (e.g. *T* 22-23, 56); and he has trouble with giving clear indications of time (e.g. *T* 29). All man-made realities, sprouting from Molloy, are questioned and are gradually obscured, as if to discredit man's discontinuous reasoning and perception. In the context of this broader narrative development, Molloy will be forced to adjust his ideas on transgression as well and little by little accept the futility of trying to access existence as a whole.

A premonition of this inherent failure of transgression smolders in Molloy and will come to a climax at the end of his 'story.' This presentiment of the impossible imposes itself more and more on Molloy. Consider the following conjecture: “For the particulars, if you are interested in particulars, there is no need to despair, you may scabble on the right door, in the right way, in the end. It's for the whole there seems to be no spell. Perhaps there is no whole, before you're dead” (*T* 27). Molloy voices the inability to access the entirety of existence in a different manner when he contemplates the changing outlook of his room, caused by the shadows cast by the moving moon: “But that there were natural causes to all these things I am willing to concede, for the resources of nature are infinite apparently. It was I who was not natural enough to enter into that order of things, and

appreciate its niceties” (*T* 44). Importantly, what we notice here is that Molloy's is adapting his initial idea of the continuity of existence as a definable entity. He seems to become more and more aware that his human consciousness always ossifies the continuous flux and inevitably distances his discontinuous being from this ever-changing totality of being. Related to this, Molloy also draws closer to the Batailleian apprehension that “[t]here is no way out from the contradictory impulses which agitate men” (Bataille, *IE* 33): “[I]n me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on. [...]. And these inseparable fools I indulged turn about, that they might understand their foolishness” (*T* 48). Assuming that one inner fool represents his will for autonomy and the other his desire for continuity, Molloy already strikingly portrays the ridiculousness of his hope of ever possessing continuity as *ipse*. Yet, his 'fools' still need to acknowledge each other, so that they can fully comprehend that what they are striving for is the impossible, because of their contradictory desires (I will argue that this is finalized in *The Unnamable* [cfr. *infra* 3.2.3.]

Molloy's history revolves around this tension, which is similar to Moran's moment of crisis when he despaired of not being able to succeed in his quest. But there is a difference due to his previous experience as Moran: although Molloy does lapse into suicidal thoughts similar to Moran's, he also feels it is not the right option (I touched upon this issue in 2.2.2. of my theoretical part on Bataille). When Molloy fails to open his wrists due to the pain, he immediately avows that he “wasn't particularly disappointed” because “in [his] heart of hearts [he] had not hoped for anything better” (*T* 61). A little further on, he thinks about hanging himself, considering that he will perhaps never see the light again, nor find his mother (*T* 78). Yet, again, he quickly counters this: “But the thought of suicide had little hold on me, I don't know why, I thought I did, but I see I don't” (*T* 79).

Resulting from the previous, I have shown that Molloy's narrative is basically a preliminary confirmation of the impasse of not being able to penetrate into the continuity of existence – although a glimmer of hope resides. Nonetheless, it has prepared for a crucial development: as his quest advances, Molloy starts to wallow in an ever stronger indifference toward the failure to come:

What I can assert, without fear of – without fear, is that I gradually lost interest in knowing, among other things, what town I was in and if I should soon find my mother and settle the matter between us. And even the nature of that matter grew dim, for me, without however vanishing completely. For it was no small matter and I was bent on it. All my life, I think, I had been bent on it. [...]. I had been bent on settling this matter between my mother and me, but had not succeeded. (*T* 64-65)

But Molloy does not give up. After a detour to the seaside, he goes back inland to look once more for the town where his mother could be found. On his way, he decides to go through a forest. These woods, as if they are a sort of primeval forest untouched by mankind, can again be interpreted as the border-region of discontinuous existence where Molloy will be pulled in by inner experience – just as Moran was. At this point, Molloy starts having problems to stay upright because his legs start to weaken and get stiffer (*T* 76-78). He will even start crawling, hereby abandoning “erect motion, that of man” (*T* 89) – a manner of conduct which I analyzed in 3.1.2. as being at odds with humanity's transcendent elevating efforts that try to deny the immanent materiality of being. Importantly, as Ulrika Maude points out, this increasing physical decay can be metaphorically seen as a “growing sense of disequilibrium” (93). As such, it signals that Molloy allows inner experience to take place. For, as Mishima summarizes Bataille's idea of transgression: “*God* does not manifest himself while our being remains in its proper, balanced form” (5, emphasis added).

In the forest, we understand that Molloy finally comprehends that transgressive experience is perhaps aporetic and that *ipse* will probably always be lost. He even clarifies this quite explicitly, as if to rectify his former misunderstanding of transgression for himself and for the reader: “[W]hen the time came I knew no longer, you may have noticed it, or only when I made a superhuman effort, and when the time was past I no longer knew either, I regained my ignorance. And all that taken together, if that is possible, should serve to explain many things [...]” (*T* 82).⁹⁵ This knowledge of non-knowledge gained, Molloy determines to obey the dictates of his transgressive inner voice. He intends to get out of the forest, believing that he will arrive at his mother's village. Hence, this time, the desire to be everything is conveyed with the metaphor of trying to bring himself *in* the lights (of continuity), although he is simultaneously conscious of the fact that he will probably fail again.

[...] I looked forward to getting out of the forest, some day. [...]. And I was all the more convinced that I would get out of the forest some day as I had already got out of it, more than once, and I knew how difficult it was not to do again what you have done before. But things had been rather different then. And yet I did not despair of seeing the light tremble, some day, through the still boughs, the strange light of the plain [...]. But it was a day I dreaded too. So that I was sure it would come sooner or later. For it was not bad being in the forest, I could imagine worse, and I could have stayed there till I died, unrepining, without pining for the light and the plain and the other amenities of my region, and I considered that the forest was no worse. And it was not only no worse, to my mind, but it was better, in this sense, that *I* was there. (*T* 85-86, emphasis added)

95 The word 'superhuman' can be read as an ironic comment that it is exactly impossible to transcend his condition.

In the last part of this quote, Molloy suddenly seems to value his rational will for autonomy more than the irrational act of transgressing, because he knows his loss of self will occur (remain in the forest because 'I' is still there). But Molloy immediately contradicts this:

But I could not, stay in the forest I mean, I was not free to. That is to say I could have, physically nothing could have been easier, but I was not purely physical, I lacked something, and I would have had the feeling, if I had stayed in the forest, of going against an imperative [to transgress], at least I had that impression. [...]. For I have greatly sinned, at all times, against my prompters [the voice of continuity impelling him]. [...]. But imperatives are a little different, and I have always been inclined to submit to them, I don't know why. For they never led me anywhere, but tore me from places where, if all was not well, all was no worse than anywhere else, and then went silent, leaving me stranded. So I knew my imperatives well, and yet I submitted to them. It had become a habit. It is true they nearly all bore on the same question, that of my relations with my mother, and on the importance of bringing as soon as possible some light to bear on these and even on the kind of light that should be brought to bear and the most effective means of doing so. (*T 86*)

Moran's former habit of denying his transgressive inclination has been replaced by a new one by Molloy: to give in to his will to possess the alleged object of continuity. Yet, Molloy has now become aware of the possibility that perhaps his consciousness has always been and will always be snuffed out in the transgressive moment. Hence, Molloy realizes the madness of his desire for the impossible, there where his inner voice impels him to: "In forever reminding me thus of my duty was its [the voice] purpose to show me the folly of it? Perhaps. Fortunately it did no more than stress, the better to mock if you like, an innate velleity" (*T 86*). Expressing a similar idea, Molloy explains how he has always been on his way to his mother (still using his mother as personification for the alleged knowable object of continuity) and sometimes managed to 'be with her,' but also always "left her without having done anything" (*T 87*). On top of this foolishness, Molloy also acknowledges that his craving to know continuity has only been encouraged every time the impossibility of it was confirmed by a transgressive failure: "[W]hen I was no longer with her [his mother] I was again on my way to her, hoping to do better the next time" (*ibid.*).

Accordingly, Molloy has achieved a stage of willful denial in which he conjectures that he will probably fail to achieve his initial goal, but still has to preserve a glimmer of hope of succeeding one day. This ambiguity comes to the fore on the last pages of the story: "I am on my way to mother. And from time to time I said, Mother, to encourage me I suppose" (*T 90*). So, Molloy first needs to project this object to be possessed, in order for inner experience to be able to take place. Bataille's stance on transgression makes clear that Molloy is creating, in the forest, the conditions in which he can be pulled in by transgression once more:

The movement prior to the ecstasy of non-knowledge is the ecstasy before an object [...]. If this ecstasy before the object is at first given (as a “possible”) and if I suppress afterwards the object – as “contestation” inevitably does – if for this reason I enter into anguish – into horror, into the night of non-knowledge – ecstasy is near and, when it sets in, sends me further into ruin than anything imaginable. If I had not known of ecstasy before the object, I would not have reached ecstasy in night. (*IE* 123-124)

And Molloy does lose himself in inner experience during his attempt to get out of the forest to go to his mother. Beckett does not attempt to describe this sublime sensation: in the transition from one sentence to the next, we comprehend that Molloy must have transgressed:

[T]o hope that I was going forward in a straight line, in spite of everything, day and night, towards my mother. [INNER EXPERIENCE]. And true enough the day came when the forest ended and I saw the light, the light of the plain, exactly as I had foreseen. But I did not see it from afar, trembling beyond the harsh trunks, as I had foreseen, but suddenly I was in it, I opened my eyes and saw I had arrived. And the reason for that was probably this, that for some time past I had not opened my eyes, or seldom. [...]. The forest ended in a ditch, I don't know why, and it was in this ditch that I became aware of what had happened to me. I suppose it was the fall into the ditch that opened my eyes, for why would they have opened otherwise? (*T* 90-91)

Beckett uses the empty space in-between two sentences to 'circumscribe' Molloy's fall in the abyss of transgression (i.e. in the 'ditch'). In contrast to Moran who “did not know what happened” (*T* 151), Molloy stresses that he is “aware of what ha[s] happened to [him]” (*T* 91). In his post-transgressive mode, Molloy directly represents continuity again in language, as there where his mother is to be found and sought for. Leslie Anne Boldt claims that this is exactly what happens after an inner experience: “Radical continuity slips into a continuity which is identifiable at the horizon of discontinuous being. Individuals retreat from communication and the inevitable quest for the summit, for transcendence, for identification with the whole recommences. Knowledge becomes positive [...]” (Introduction to *IE* xxii). Compare this to Molloy lying in the ditch on the last page:

I looked at the plain rolling away as far as the eye could see. [...]. [W]hether it was my town or not, whether somewhere under that faint haze my mother panted on or whether she poisoned the air a hundred miles away, were ludicrously idle questions for a man in my position, though of undeniable interest on the plane of pure knowledge. For how could I drag myself over that vast moor, where my crutches would fumble in vain. Rolling perhaps. And then? Would they let me roll on to my mother's door? Fortunately, for me at this painful juncture, which I had vaguely foreseen, but not in all its bitterness, I heard a voice telling me not to fret, that help was coming. Literally. (*T* 91)

Instantly taking up his transgressive quest again (now altered into the metaphor of having to cross a swamp with the risk of being sucked in), Molloy immediately faces the impossibility of

'finding' continuity without dying once again.⁹⁶ But Molloy also seems to have reached a point of exhaustion, caused by his multiple failed transgressive efforts. A few pages before Molloy's transgression, he had already remarked: "Yet a little while, at the rate things are going, and I won't be able to move, but will have to stay, where I happen to be unless someone comes and carries me" (*T* 87).⁹⁷

It follows that Molloy, exhausted and physically deteriorated, has reached a new stage in the evolution Bataille wanted Job to undergo. This new way of being is summarized by the last three sentences of his narrative: "I longed to go back into the forest. Oh not a real longing. Molloy could stay, where he happened to be" (*T* 91). Molloy's wish to return to the forest (and thus seek to transgress once more) underlines that the longing for continuity has gained in vigor even more. What is more, Molloy displays a strong aversion to return to his 'normal' discontinuous life, and revels at the margins of the world of discontinuity. Yet, he has also taken on a high degree of awareness that he will probably never be able to deliver himself from his wound of insufficiency by accessing continuity as *ipse*. This has fostered an inertia that resembles Moran's death-wish, but not entirely: Molloy is not actively pursuing suicide, but rather passively waiting for death to come.⁹⁸ However, this general sense of indifference is not yet absolute, but will become so in *Malone Dies* ...

2.3.2. *Malone Dies*: Malone

Malone is the next disintegration of the trilogy's narrator, or, in Hesla's formulation, the "next personification of the hypostatic 'I'" (105) of the trilogy. In *Malone Dies*, a cripple, naked and impotent man is lying in bed in a room, in what could be a hospital or a madhouse. He writes about his own condition and he narrates stories. Yet, his entire narrative is a pastime: a means to distract him while waiting for death to seize him – as if he were an overripe piece of fruit. In contrast to man's constant postponement of the idea of his death, Malone constantly anticipates being dead (e.g. the returning thought he has of his corpse being carried out of the room [*T* 235]). As a consequence, Malone surmises that he could perhaps already be what the future has in store for him (because, mystically speaking, being also includes non-being): "There is naturally another possibility that does not escape me, though it would be a great disappointment to have it confirmed, and that is that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not. Perhaps I expired in the forest, or

⁹⁶ On page 76, we already learned that this moor is a swamp which one started to drain by digging canals. The ditch Molloy fell in is probably a part of these ongoing drainage works.

⁹⁷ When returning to the beginning of the narrative, we indeed read that Molloy/Malone has been brought to his mother's house, "perhaps in an ambulance" (*T* 7), and would "never have got there alone" (*ibid.*).

⁹⁸ Molloy had already remarked that he had no intention anymore of starving himself (*T* 85).

even earlier” (T 219). Significantly, Malone immediately makes explicit that suicide is no longer an option:

I could die to-day, if I wished, merely by making a little effort, if I could wish, if I could make an effort. But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things. Something must have changed. I will not weigh upon the balance any more, one way or the other. I shall be neutral and inert. [...]. Yes, I shall be natural at last, I shall suffer more, then less, without drawing any conclusions, I shall pay less heed to myself, I shall be neither hot nor cold any more, I shall be tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm. (T 179)

This indifferent tone and abstention from judgment (because judging presupposes that the human individual is an authoritative, significant point of reference) announces the attitude Malone is growing into. I wish to read *Malone Dies* as the trilogy's transition novel in which the knowledge the speaker has gained as Moran and Molloy is further radicalized in the conclusions he is now forced to draw. As such, the novel is another act of decomposition that prepares for the final Job to come in *The Unnamable*, where the 'protagonist' will have lost all hope of curing its insufficiency. I believe Malone is on the verge of falling into this final abyss of indifference, and will be tipped in when the symbolic death of his character arrives at the end (which is the book's instance of yet another inner experience). I believe this constitutes the final sacrifice of the narrator's will for autonomy and of *ipse*. To investigate how this sacrifice (3) is prepared by Malone, I will divide the following analysis in two preceding parts: Malone's accruing renouncement of former hopes that he attached to his 'worldly' discontinuous existence, and of the structures it imposed on his 'self' and on his bodily identity (1); followed by his final acceptance that transgression always fails for *ipse* (2).

(1) So, firstly, Malone increasingly displays a fierce dislike for the human world of discontinuity in general. Nevertheless, at the beginning of his narrative, Malone – finding the habitual world of no real concern anymore – states that he does want to “play” (T 180) by telling himself four stories. He informs the reader that he will tell these stories to pass the time before being dead and he (ironically) adds that he “look[s] forward to their giving [him] great satisfaction, some satisfaction” (ibid.). However, he repeatedly interrupts these stories – sometimes even in the middle of a sentence – with interjections such as “[w]hat tedium” (T 187, 189, 216); “[m]ortal tedium” (T 217); “[t]his is awful” (T 191); “I fell asleep” (T 194); or “no, I can't do it” (T 196). His own story-telling – which implies the contrivance of well-defined characters, a (linear) plot, a spatial setting and indications of time – generates uneasiness, weariness and boredom for Malone. His discontinuous consciousness and structuring of the world are confirmed to be a limiting and dull habit, a *pensum*. He experiences the confining fiction of discontinuity as an unsatisfactory offense to

the uncontainable fluidity of continuity. Indeed, “[t]he forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness” (*T* 196). Basically, these discontinuous forms arouse disgust in Malone, as they transform the undivided flux of existence into a wearing, statically and linearly experienced phenomenon to which he cannot dedicate himself any longer.

The story Malone wants to narrate “about a man” (*T* 181) is another example of the ridicule of the habitual strivings appertaining to the discontinuous order. The story can be interpreted as Malone who looks back on the former masks he assumed in the past because of his upbringing, starting with him as a child named Saposcat/Sapo.⁹⁹ With what are arguably his childhood memories, Malone confirms once again the falsehoods of human socialization. By describing the “axioms” (*T* 187) Sapo's parents live by, Malone underlines the absurdity of the world of work they erect. The parents focus solely on the accumulation of money for the future and they falsely extract the 'blossoming of life' as a separate category from the continuous unity of which it is a part: Sapo's parents are obsessed with having “better health and more money” (*ibid.*); they ponder taking an extra job, but are also aware that they would fall sick more quickly and thus would have to pay more doctor's bills (*ibid.*); they find it impermissible to have “a garden without roses and with its paths and lawns uncared for” (*ibid.*); and they want Sapo to become a doctor himself (*T* 189).

A further illustration of Malone's gradual derision of all profane concerns is his intention to make an inventory of the few possessions he has left. He plans to do this right before the moment he will die – thus leaving open the possibility that he will not be able to finish his list because of a lack of time. Hence, Malone is in doubt if he is able to “resign [him]self to the possibility of [him] dying away without leaving an inventory behind” (*T* 181). This is arguably an ironic question that informs the reader that Malone – like Kierkegaard's inauthentic Job – still clings to his worldly goods and faintly adheres to the paradigm of an 'I' that functions as point of reference (i.e. objects obtain a value from being in *his* possession). When Malone sets himself to the task further on, his inner queries erode this frame of mind. He first explains how he always gathered objects, which then kept him “company,” and which he caressed in order to talk to them and reassure them (*T* 248). Yet, he claims that this behavior did not reduce him “to the society of nice people or to the consolations of some religion” (*ibid.*), because he has always been inclined to dispose himself of these objects “because of new loves” (*ibid.*). So, rather than accumulating wealth (which could be seen as a sort of animistic religion that attributes to separate objects something that resembles a 'soul' and as such idolizes a 'God of discontinuity'), Malone describes the objects that are left in his room as the ones he “never got rid of” (*ibid.*). His musings lead him to a more profound doubt about his attachment to

⁹⁹ The name 'Sapo' could refer to the Latin prefix '*sap-*' ('wisdom'), perhaps ironically hinting that a child is 'wise' before it is corrupted by the dictates of the adult world of reason. Support for this reasoning we find in the fact that Malone changes Sapo's name into 'Macmann' when Sapo is an adult (*T* 229).

material objects: “I feel I am perhaps attributing to myself things I no longer possess and reporting as missing others that are not missing” (*T* 250). This leads him up to the point where he finally recognizes his inventory as a mere “distraction” and he wonders if it would not be better to “simply wait, doing nothing” (*T* 251). At last, Malone confirms the falsehood of his Job-like love for possessions when he decides that his inventory is of no importance whatsoever: “They are not mine, but I say my pots, as I say my bed, my window, as I say me” (*T* 252).¹⁰⁰

With this last quote and Malone's suggestion that he is no longer able to say 'me,' I have come to my last example of the disintegration of the contrived structures of the discontinuous order in *Malone Dies*: the refutation of an allegedly self-possessed bodily 'self.' Maude summarizes Malone's relationship with his body as an “overall loss of physical control” (95) that gainsays the subject's mastery over its body (95-96). This loss of agency appears, for example, in the fact that Malone is immobile from the waist down. The generated feeling of a dispossession of 'self' can be found in a passage in *Molloy* (*T* 65-66) – which I believe is a brief interruption¹⁰¹ (of the story on Molloy's peregrination) on Malone's part, in order to speak about his own present condition:

And when I see my hands, on the sheet, which they love to floccillate already, they are not mine, less than ever mine, I have no arms, they are a couple, they play with the sheet, love-play perhaps, trying to get up perhaps, one on top of the other. But it doesn't last, I bring them back, little by little, towards me, it's resting time. And with my feet it's the same, sometimes, when I see them at the foot of the bed, one with toes, the other without. And that is more deserving of mention. For my legs, corresponding here to my arms of a moment ago, are both stiff now and very sore, and I shouldn't be able to forget them as I can my arms, which are more or less sound and well. And yet I do forget them and I watch the couple as they watch each other, a great way off. But my feet are not like my hands, I do not bring them back to me, when they become my feet again, for I cannot, but they stay there, far from me, but not so far as before.¹⁰² (*T* 66)

At times, Malone's corporeal self-presence disappears. His limbs appear as distant, independently acting entities. The fact that his hands 'already' 'floccillate' the sheets is telling. Flocculation is the chemical process in which particles (molecules or groups of molecules) coalesce and form a very unstable connection (e.g. snowflakes). This weak connection between 'his' hands and the sheets that

100 Note how Moran's evolution here strongly echoes Kierkegaard's evolution of repetition from an aesthetic, to an ethical, and finally to a religious stage (*Repetition* (1843) + *Either/Or* (1843), see Caputo 1987: 21-30). The aestheticus finds pleasure in the 'rotation method': a constant alteration to counter the possible boredom of repetition (e.g. a seducer; Malone substitutes old objects for new ones). A higher level of being is the ethical mode of being: to find in repetition of the same an increasing existential development (e.g. marriage; Malone is stuck in his room with a set of 'final' objects which he now sees as a constitutive part of his identity). Yet, for Kierkegaard, genuine repetition must be religious: it starts from the indifference toward profane matters and the readiness to give up the self to a divine absence (Malone acknowledges the futility of deciding what his possessions are at the end of his life).

101 This intermezzo arguably starts from “This phenomenon, if I remember rightly, was characteristic of my region” (*T* 65) and ends with “End of the recall” (*T* 66).

102 That his feet are 'not so far as before' is due to the fact that his legs have shortened.

Malone sometimes experiences, indicates that 'his' body seems to him to be a material object on the verge of its imminent return to and dissolution in the material world – indeed, as if his body is 'already' dead. This way, Malone's embodiment gives voice again to the Merleau-Pontian subject-body-world relationship in which the subject's alleged autonomy and integrity is defied. Parts of his body 'leave' or have already left him permanently. His body has no clear boundaries anymore and is gradually overtaken by the workings of continuity. Nevertheless, the 'reason' for his corporeal existence and deterioration stays removed from his consciousness: Malone, as phenomenological body-subject, always 'forgets' about its bodily parts. As he confirms elsewhere: “My body does not yet make up its mind” (*T* 198). Seamlessly, this brings me to the second aspect of Malone's transformation: his acceptance of the inability to ever possess continuity through knowledge of 'it.'

(2) Again, I can use Malone's interlude in *Molloy*. Here, Malone also metaphorically conveys the idea that he has never been able to transcend his discontinuous condition ('escape his region'). Hence, Malone's bedridden stasis is expressive of *ipse*'s defeat:

No, I never escaped, and even the limits of my region were unknown to me. But I felt they were far away. But this feeling was based on nothing serious, it was a simple feeling. [...]. 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, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely. [...]. But now I do not wander any more, anywhere any more, and indeed I scarcely stir at all, and yet nothing is changed. And the confines of my room, of my bed, of *my body*, are as remote from me as were those of my region, in the days of my splendour. (*T* 66, emphasis added)

In retrospect, the opening paragraph of *Molloy* (which is Malone's introduction to the story of him as Molloy) already gave away that Malone has lost the hope of appropriating an alleged object of continuity. For, Malone immediately informs the reader that he has taken his mother's room and that she has died (*T* 7). Bearing in mind that the mother previously functioned as an object that represented continuity for Molloy, Malone seems to have accepted the being of terrain and avows that there is no controllable object anymore (i.e. the mother-object 'has died'). Likewise, in a remark on the difficulty of filling the timespan that is left to him before he dies with his four stories, Malone seems to refer to his previous experience of the aporetic deadlock of inner experience: “Perhaps I shall not have time to finish. On the other hand perhaps I shall finish too soon. There I am back at my old aporetics. Is that the word? I don't know” (*T* 181). In addition to this, Malone also indicates that any discursive reproduction of inner experience is fruitless. He mocks man's inclination to resort to language: “But I have felt so many strange things, so many baseless things assuredly, that

they are perhaps better left unsaid. To speak for example of the time when I go liquid and become like mud, what good would that do?" (T 224-225).

Importantly, for the first time in the trilogy, the option of repeating transgression solely to confirm its failure is arguably proposed by Malone. In one paragraph (T 194-195), he first recollects how he, as a "grave" (T 195) child, was never able to participate in the falsehoods of the normal world. We suspect that the other way of living he then sought for comprises his transgressive defiance of this order. As a result, Malone has come to realize that the only conclusion he can draw from all his previous failed transgressions, is to deliver himself to this suffering for suffering's sake:

I began again. But little by little with a different aim, *no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail. Nuance.* What I sought, when I struggled out of my hole, then aloft through the stinging air towards an inaccessible boon, was the rapture of vertigo, the letting go, the fall, the gulf, the relapse to darkness, to nothingness, to earnestness, to home, to him [Youdi?] waiting for me always, [...] whom I have never seen. There I am forgetting myself again. (T 195, emphasis added)

Finally, the narrating voice in the trilogy will lose all hope of curing the wound in being (neither by dedicating itself as a discontinuous being to the world of discontinuity, nor by believing existence as a whole can be grasped by *ipse*). Malone makes this destruction of all his former hopes explicit toward the end of his narrative. This crucial moment occurs when he, once more, suddenly interrupts himself in the middle of one of his stories:

But that is all beside the point, like so many things. All is *pretext*, Sapo and the birds, Moll, the peasants, those who in the towns seek one another out and fly from one another, my doubts which do not interest me, my situations, my possessions, *pretexts* for not coming to the point, the abandoning, the raising of the arms and going down, without further splash, even though it may annoy the bathers. Yes, there is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything. The horror-worn eyes linger abject on all they have beseeched so long, *in a last prayer, the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing.* And it is then a little breath of fulfillment revives the dead longing and a murmur is born in the silent world, reproaching you affectionately with having despaired too late. (T 276-277, emphases added)

Malone makes clear that in all that has been said up to now by the trilogy's narrator (the 'pre-text,' including *Molloy*) still lingered the pretext of pretending that the subject could be sufficient as a discontinuous being. This illusion now shattered, Malone is finally ready to become the genuine, Bataillean Job, "imagining nothing, [...] knowing that all is lost" (Bataille, *IE* 35). Malone – as an 'I' that is now finally willing to drown itself in its insufficiency – does not want to be helped or saved anymore. He stops acting like he believes that he can be rescued. And he scorns himself for having believed otherwise in the past. At last, Malone 'leaves everything.' The only 'prayer' left for him is to

adopt a despairing, hopeless attitude, knowing it will always remain a – as Bataille puts it – “supplication without response” (*IE* 12). Malone fully faces his suffering from insufficiency, without wanting to flee any longer to the 'narcotics' of the habitual world of work and reason or to his idea that *ipse* can overcome the flux.

(3) As such, I have come to the required last renouncement to enter the level of absolute indifference: the final sacrifice of *ipse* and its will for autonomy. I believe that the previous 'corrections' of subjectivity and the knowledge gained are finalized when Malone's narrative approaches its conclusion. Our narrator is willing to give up everything – including *ipse* – to the flux of continuity. This constitutes the final transformation of self-identity. The central claim of John Fletcher's previously mentioned essay 'Malone 'Given Birth to into Death'' is supportive of this: Fletcher argues that *Malone Dies* is preoccupied with the idea of the moment of dying as a second birth into something unknown. The following passage taken from the last pages of the book illustrates this: “I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth to into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence. Favourable presentation I trust. My head will be the last to die. [...]. My story ended I'll be living yet. Promising lag. That is the end of *me*. I shall say *I* no more” (*T* 283, emphases added). Fletcher proposes that this sense of rebirth would then release the narrating voice of the trilogy from the pains that followed being born into the world (58-61). But, if we read this impending 'death' on a symbolic level, we can interpret this general movement toward a 'rebirth' as Malone's slow release from the false *persona* and hopes he projected onto his being in the past. This slow 'rebirth' does not entail that Malone will be released from the limits of his discontinuous state, but rather that he will be released from his need to cure his state of sickness: the subject that wanted to pretend sufficiency must die away and dissolve.

Nevertheless, I wish to propose that, in addition to this rebirth-metaphor, a literary sacrificial event at the end of *Malone Dies* functions as the final destruction of the 'fictional' subject and its former hopes. After Moran was replaced by the more 'authentic' Molloy, and the latter in his turn by Malone, the still faintly 'inauthentic' character of Malone must be eliminated as well. Malone presages this inevitability to come. He considers his pending “demise” (*T* 236) to be the literary killing off of all the fictional identity-masks he previously imposed on his 'true' countenance: “Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloyes, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave. But *sufficient* unto the day, let us first defunge, then we'll see. How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them?” (*ibid.*, emphasis added).¹⁰³ Shortly after, Malone implicitly suggests that he must execute himself as well (being the last 'false' character). He

103 Beckett's novel *Mercier et Camier* immediately preceded the trilogy (written in 1946, first published in 1970).

mentions a club that is in his possession and adds: "It is stained with blood, but insufficiently, insufficiently. I have defended myself, ill, but I have defended myself" (*T* 249). But Malone is still slightly reluctant to do so at this point. This is but a stay of execution ...

Malone carries out the task in the conclusion of his story about Sapó (whom Malone has renamed Macmann as an adult) – which is also the end of the novel. We can still assume that Malone uses Macmann as a means to talk about his own evolution (taking into account the fragmentary overlaps with, for example, Molloy's journey). Macmann ends up in what appears to be an asylum for the insane. Together with an attendant called Lemuel and four other inmates, he is taken out on a picnic to an island. There and then, the sacrificial massacre unfolds itself. Lemuel kills two inmates with a hatchet, then perhaps the other two characters as well, after which it is implied, admittedly rather ambiguously, that Malone will be slaughtered as well (*T* 287-288).

Because of the open-endedness of Beckett's writing, it is impossible to decide whether Lemuel-the-executioner should be seen as Beckett-the-author, as Malone himself, as Youdi, as another personification of the 'God of continuity,' as the reader, or perhaps as all of these (and perhaps others as well) at once.¹⁰⁴ But the Malone character has arguably been sacrificed on the altar of continuity in function of the final disintegration of the discontinuous 'self.' In my interpretation, the alleged subject has accepted that its will for autonomy as *ipse* will always be frustrated. It can now fully become the passive, suffering being, subordinate to the flux of continuity, which it has always been. As such, I have arrived at the last stage of the trilogy. Now, the non-character that the unnamable is can repeatedly be lost, knowing that it will never be able to equate *ipse* with the entirety of the flux.

3.2.3. *The Unnamable*

Once again, I can fall back upon Wolfgang Iser's proposition that the protagonists of the preceding novels of the trilogy were fictions that the unnamable previously wanted to create about its being (53). Doing so, I can read *The Unnamable* as an attempt to deconstruct the previous lies with which the unnamable represented its being. More specifically, I want to argue that the unnamable tries to shed its pretense of sufficiency as a discontinuous 'self.' But has Beckett indeed 'come to the point' (i.e. the point of a despair-ridden final indifference) in support of my hypothesis?

¹⁰⁴ The echo of *Samuel* in *Lemuel* could point toward the author. For Malone himself, the name Lemuel as a near-anagram of the french *la mule* or *le mulet* (the mule) could be a reference to the passage in which Malone suggests that he resembles a dressed ass on a photograph (*T* 251).

Does *The Unnamable* confirm my claim by rendering its last 'character' absolutely indifferent toward its former hopes of obtaining sufficiency?

To structure the unnamable's rather obscure narration, I will analyze *The Unnamable* in two parts. First, I will illustrate how the unnamable – like a denuded, despairing narrator – abandons both means with which humankind tries to overcome its insufficiency. The unnamable counters the human inclination to isolate and shield its discontinuous existence as a particular from the contingent flux of the nothingness-producing continuity of being. Recognizing the unity of life and death, a mystic attitude that induces inner experience is adopted (1). Next to this, the unnamable also accepts the aporia of inner experience: recognizing the impossibility of appeasing the contradictory desire for a discontinuous continuity, the unnamable now projects an object of continuity (knowing it is false) merely to let it be suppressed and let *ipse* fuse with it (2). As such, I can show how, for the first time, the unnamable chooses to repeat transgressive experience, merely in order to deepen the wound in its being (3). My second part is closely intertwined with this gradual evolution. To conclude, I will finish my argument that the trilogy has been a slow transgressive disintegration of the human subject's corporeal identity. Because the unnamable endeavors to be in a state of 'openness' in order to let inner experience occur, it must refuse being restored to the structures created by its discontinuous consciousness. This refusal effects the representation of its corporeality. I will argue that the unnamable finishes the decomposition of its alleged human identity by moving from an 'I(d)-entity' to an 'it-entity' and finally to the necessary phenomenological experiential 'non-entity,' which nevertheless still fails to define the (embodied) continuity of being (4).

(1) So firstly, I believe that the unnamable becomes more and more unhesitatingly willing to be lost in inner experience. The first condition for such an attitude is of course the recognition that an eternal self does not exist. To give but one clear example, consider the unnamable's image of man in a sandglass. The image expresses the idea that any importance attached to the temporary state of discontinuous existence is nullified by the incessant workings of continuity:

[Time] piles up all about you, instant on instant, on all sides, deeper and deeper, thicker and thicker, your time, others' time, *the time of the ancient dead and the dead yet unborn*, why it buries you grain by grain *neither dead nor alive*, with no memory of anything, no hope of anything, no knowledge of anything, no history and no prospects, buried under the seconds, saying any old thing, your mouth full of sand [...]. (T 389, emphases added)

With suchlike mystic consideration of existence in its totality as an eternal all-pervasive instant, the unnamable confirms the human condition to be an in-between state in which it is impossible to

separate being alive from being dead. Secondly, being fully aware of this ever-present annihilation of its discontinuous being, the unnamable can indeed give full reign to its longing for continuity.

This shows in its persevering contemplation of (and thus confrontation with) taboos. As explained before, somatic taboos directly related to death testify to the future non-existence of every discontinuous being. The unnamable also goes in the opposite direction, when it employs sexual taboos regarding conception. It is as if the narrator wants to arrive at a continuous 'i-identity' by going back in time, through its parents, to its pre-discontinuous non-existence. Taking up again the idea of living as a punishment, the unnamable presents a (consciously false) image of its 'continuous I' as an ovum waiting before a firing squad of semen – sentenced to be executed into human life:

[T]he charge is sounded, present arms, corpse, to your guns, spermatozoon. [...] [T]hey want to bore me to sleep, at long range, for fear I might defend myself, they want to catch me alive, so as to be able to kill me, thus I shall have lived, they think I'm alive, what a business, were there but a cadaver it would smack of body-snatching, not in a womb either, the slut has yet to menstruate capable of whelping me [...]. (T 379)

This telescopic pre-impregnation portrait of 'self' complies with Bataille's contention (as explained in 2.2.1.) that, on a cellular level as well, the continuity of being is constantly brought into play. More specifically, as an incessant sequence of discontinuous entities that 'die' to form a new one. (*in casu* the sperm and egg cell in the fertilization process). Of course, the unnamable's above effort to establish a continuity of 'self' by framing it as an extension of another discontinuous entity requires a consideration of the male pole as well. This is given immediately after:

[A] sperm dying, of cold, in the sheets, feebly wagging its little tail, perhaps I'm a drying sperm, in the sheets of an innocent boy, even that takes time, no stone must be left unturned, one mustn't be afraid of making a howler, how can one know it is one before it's made, and one it most certainly is, now that it's irrevocable, for the good reason, here's another, here comes another, unless it escapes them in time, what a hope, the bright boy is there, for the excellent reason that counts as living too, counts as murder, it's notorious, ah you can't deny it, some people are lucky, born of a wet dream and dead before morning, I must say I'm tempted, no, the testis has yet to descend that would want any truck with me, it's mutual, another gleam down the drain. (T 379-380)

Apart from aptly conveying the contingency of possibly being born, the unnamable now paradoxically presents its pre-birth 'self' as all of its father's sperm cells and as one of these which will eventually cause the unnamable's creation. However – taking into account the unnamable's previous image of the ovum and the 'death' of a cell to make way for a new discontinuous entity – the suggested 'presence' of itself as a future newborn in one of the sperm cells precisely implies the untenability of the attempt: it is impossible to equate these discontinuous cells with the synergetic,

continuous sum of existence out of which a being's existence emerges. We are led to presume that the unnamable just wants to ironically affirm the impossibility of arriving at a continuous definition of discontinuous particulars. Therefore, this passage seems to be an instance of Iser's consciously false concord-fictions (as explained in 2.3.2.) – if we expand Iser's concern with 'the end' to the continuity of being in more general terms. Iser indeed suggests that *The Unnamable* can be defined as fiction that wants to keep all gaps in human understanding open by stressing the falsity of concord-fictions (56). As such, in my argument, the unnamable's overtly false pre-birth imagery functions as a means to expose that any knowledge about the continuity of being is but pretense.

(2) This assumption of a conscious decomposing strategy gains validity when we consider that *The Unnamable* constantly proclaims the insuperable failure of inner experience (due to the impossibility of gaining any knowledge about the projected alleged object of continuity). This knowledge of non-knowledge (i.e. that the continuity of being lies outside discursive reason and sensory knowledge) is of course the conclusion to be drawn from the trilogy's narrator's previous transgressions. As a sick being suffering from its discontinuous insufficiency, the unnamable has accepted that it will always be unable to gain insight in its continuous identity. It is unable to equate its being with the entirety of existence by 'possessing' it. Consider its acceptance that it can never avoid the pain of its limited existence, because *ipse* is always suspended in the sublime moment:

For on the subject of me properly so called, I know what I mean, so far as I know I have received (sic) no information up to date. [...]. Hearing nothing I am none the less a prey to *communications*. [...]. But never the least news concerning me, beyond the insinuation that I am not in a condition to receive any, since *I* am not there, which I knew already. [...]. That's suspicious, or rather would be if I still hoped to obtain, from these revelations to come, some truth of more value than those I have been plastered with ever since they took it into their heads I had better exist. But this fond hope, which buoyed me up as recently as a moment ago, if I remember right, has now passed from me. Two labours then, to be distinguished perhaps, as the mine from the quarry, on the plane of the effort required, but identically deficient in charm and interest. *I*. Who might that be? [...]. [...] I've stopped praying for anything. No no, I'm still a suppliant. (*T* 336, emphases added)

Thus, *The Unnamable* has to be read as the narrating voice's indifferent, hopeless resignation that there is no way out of the torment of its contradictory longing to quest for the totality of being while also maintaining its discontinuous consciousness.

Before I delve into the importance of the unnamable's declaration that it will however remain a suppliant (cfr. infra [(3)]), first consider another striking affirmation of the unsatisfactory, unredeeming transgressive process: “But say *I* succeed in dying, to adopt the most comforting hypothesis, without having been able to believe I ever lived, I know to my cost it is not that they

wish for me. For it has happened to me many times already without their having granted *me* as much as a brief sick-leave among the worms before resurrecting me” (*T* 342, emphases added). Indeed, the subject's symbolic death (which can never be rendered personal through *ipse*) is always complemented by the resurrection of the discontinuous 'I' (the restitution of the limits of the subject's discontinuous mind imposing itself and breaking off the transgressive moment). The unnamable can only conclude that its discontinuous consciousness produces mere transcendent illusions about the world. What is more, it is also aware that it has only been fighting these illusions with the illusion of a concrete object of continuity that could be penetrated:

It's a lot to expect of one creature, it's a lot to ask, that he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, before being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions. Two falsehoods, two trappings, to be borne to the end, before I can be let loose, alone, in the unthinkable unspeakable, where I have not ceased to be, where they will not let me be. (*T* 334-335)

Most importantly, we can ascertain that the unnamable is now finally resolved that there is no way out of his 'two trappings,' out of his two contradictory longings. For this reason, the unnamable takes up the image – used previously by Molloy (cfr. supra 3.2.1.2.) – of two inner fools struggling (i.e. one wanting to gain an intimacy with the whole of existence, while the other desires autonomy) and the demand that they understand that the other's striving makes their own desire impossible:

You come back from a far place, back to life, that's where you should be, where you are, far from here, far from everything, if only I could go there, if only I could describe it [...], often you pass yourself by, someone passes himself by, if only you knew, that's right, aspirations, you turn and look behind you, so does the other, you weep for him, he weeps for you, it's screamingly sad, anything rather than laughter. (*T* 401)

Read as a general post-transgressive comment, the above quote indicates that, in *The Unnamable*, the two inner fools of our narrator have at last acknowledged the aporia of their efforts combined. It is as if each of both fools is pulling on one side of the wound of insufficiency. Hence, by counteracting the other, they are tangled up in a slapstick situation. Yet, rather than giving way to comic laughter, the unwanted conclusion can only debouch in painful sovereign laughter which affirms the insuperability of man's limited existence. With this, I have come to the unnamable's reaction to this impasse: to repeat the failure of transgression, yet free from the will to be cured.

(3) This question of how to respond to the insurmountable failure of transgression is indeed a crucial one for the last book of the trilogy. This centrality is immediately affirmed on the very first

page of *The Unnamable*, where the unnamable states: “What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? [...]. There must be other shifts. Otherwise it would be quite hopeless. But it is quite hopeless. I should mention before going any further, any further on, that I say aporia without knowing what it means” (*T* 291). Faced with the impossibility of ever appropriating the flux of existence, the unnamable will gradually answer the attitude of the final despairing Job (something which will fully blossom at the end of the book): it will repeatedly suffer for no reason, without any hope of ever accomplishing anything.

The unnamable aptly summarizes the core of its final attitude to come with a condensed fishing metaphor, in which it is a fish delivered to a sadist God-fisherman:

The essential is to go on squirming forever at the end of the line, as long as there are waters and banks and ravening in heaven a sporting God to plague his creature, per pro his chosen shits. I've swallowed three hooks and am still hungry. Hence the howls. What a joy to know where one is, and where one will stay, without being there. Nothing to do but stretch out comfortably on the rack, in the blissful knowledge you are nobody for all eternity. A pity I should have to give tongue at the same time, it prevents it from bleeding in peace, licking the lips. (*T* 338)

Here, the 'three swallowed hooks' arguably refer to the unnamable's three previous inner experiences (as Moran, Molloy and Malone). It was thrown back three times into the discontinuous waters in which it lives, without ever having consciously (i.e. while being in the water of discontinuous consciousness) eaten the promised bait (i.e. the projected object of continuity). Like Bataille's final Job, the unnamable can indeed only imagine the eternal nothingness of continuity – but never 'know' or 'taste' continuity because the subject is always hauled out of the water. Moreover, the image of a palate being ripped up more and more evokes the Bataillean point of view that man only deepens the wound of his being when transgressive experience is repeatedly undergone. It is to this absurd repetition that the unnamable now completely realizes it is condemned.

Yet, the unnamable-fish also states that its 'hunger' to transgress is insatiable – despite the painfulness of the process. In other words, the urge to transgress increases after each inevitable failure. Consequentially, the unnamable has arrived at a situation similar to Kierkegaard's productive religious repetition, which John Caputo sums up as the process in which “the self by choosing the self comes to be the being which it all along has been” (30). Translated to Bataillean language: the unnamable can only fully become the being in-between that it has always been right from the start if it chooses to deliver itself to this series of transgressions and to constantly suffer from its insufficient discontinuous condition. With a comment on Worm (who can be seen as the penultimate version of the unnamable [cfr. *infra* (4)], still partly hesitant to act out the final despair), the unnamable

endorses the attitude it must grow into: “No one asks him to think, simply to suffer, always in the same way, without hope of diminution, without hope of dissolution, it's no more complicated than that. No need to think in order to despair” (*T* 367). With this, I have come to the last part of my analysis, which complements the first part. By investigating how the unnamable's changing representation of its identity also reflects the evolution just set out, I can demonstrate how the trilogy arrives at a decomposition of man's alleged corporeal integrity – in order to foster the occurrence of inner experience.

(4) As a starter, allow me to point out how the evolution of the trilogy's narrator's name has in fact increasingly approximated man's most 'essential' defining feature (i.e. from our Batailleian point of view). From an intelligent creature (if I now interpret Sapo, in contrast to what I proposed in 2.3.2., as denoting the rational mind); over a specific human individual (Moran and Molloy); to a representative of humanity (Macmann); and then a discontinuous being, defined by its solitude ([M]alone). This development can be said to be taken to its conclusion in *The Unnamable*.

The unnamable seems determined to try and find the right voice with which it can confirm its continuous identity. To this end, the unnamable first speaks as 'Mahood.' We could interpret Ma(n)hood as a generic denominator referring to human nature (i.e. the impossible desire to surpass its limited existence) which propelled the action in the previous books. As this Mahood, the unnamable tells two stories (the first about a traveler; the second about a being stuck in a jar). With these stories, the unnamable arguably looks back upon Moran's and Molloy's narrative (travelers), and upon Malone's (static), as to find out “what really took place, if Mahood [is] telling the truth” (*T* 322, 323). Yet, the unnamable already suspects that its revisionist retelling in Mahood's voice is still unsatisfactory: “[T]hese stories of a being whose identity he [Mahood] usurps, and whose voice he prevents from being heard, all lies from beginning to end?” (*T* 311). Indeed, every 'story' (in which characters still exist) could be said to limit being to the temporariness of discontinuous existences and to the illusion engendered by consciousness of autonomous corporeal beings. The unnamable admits that all of its previous talk was made up of mere subjective contrivances:

I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular. (*T* 314)

This statement strongly echoes Bataille's comment on the moment when he himself had gained a similar “excessive, nauseating clearness” (*IE* 93) about his insufficient condition: “Then, I had

nothing to do, could not conceive of a project: I was abandoned to the nausea which I have described under the name of 'torment'" (ibid.). The unnamable is growing into a similar eagerness to repeat the torment of the transgressive process, without any hope of ever accomplishing anything. For this to take place, it must sacrifice the illusion of being able to appropriate the whole of existence while maintaining a delineable *ipse* in the bargain.

Although the unnamable is therefore determined that "[t]here will be no more [talk] about bodies and trajectories" (T 324), it has not given up its combat against its "inaptitude to assume any [identity]" (T 330). In order to find its 'true' voice with which to express its continuous identity, the unnamable changes its name into 'Worm' soon after. It defends this choice as follows:

[W]orm is the first of his kind. That's soon said. I must not forget I don't know him. Perhaps he too will weary, renounce the task of forming me and make way for another, having laid the foundations. He has not yet been able to speak his mind, only murmur, I have not ceased to hear his murmur, all the while the others [the unnamable's previous masks] discoursed. He has survived them all, Mahood too, if Mahood is dead. (T 337)

A twofold interpretation of the use of 'Worm' seems possible. It can be seen as a recognition of man's origins in an evolutionary sense, indirectly discrediting a human identity allegedly elevated above that of an 'ordinary' animal. At the same time, 'worm' can also refer to every discontinuous being's future rotting consumption of its body. As such, the name functions as an ongoing prefiguration of the subject's disappearance. This view of self then overlaps with the idea of death, an idea necessary for inner experience to be initiated. Thus, the shift from Mahood to Worm further expands the movement set in motion in the previous books of the trilogy: a transformation from what could be called a human '*I*-entity' to an inhuman, taboo-ridden, material '*it*-entity' (this is also why I have chosen to use the pronoun 'it' instead of 'he' when referring to the unnamable).¹⁰⁵

However, the unnamable soon realizes that Worm is only another illegitimate masquerade. In fact, taking into account that it had made mention of Worm (before Worm appeared) as being a "next vice-exister" (T 315), the unnamable seems to have been aware of the vanity of its search for an identity all along. Indeed, this *it*-entity with which the unnamable tries to pretend to have captured a 'self,' is but a new particular image that serves as a fixating replacement for the embodied yet undefinable entirety of continuity. In *The Shape of Chaos*, David Hesla implicitly supports this

¹⁰⁵ The switch from Mahood to Worm also seems to echo the *scala naturae*. In this hierarchic classification of the universe coined by Aristotle, man was ranked as a higher level creature than animals. Beckett most likely intended to subvert this idea of a 'great chain of being.' Consider a scene in which our narrator calls to mind its education in the classroom as a child: "Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal. I couldn't" (T 337). Moreover, in Carl Linnaeus' renowned 18th century version of the great chain of being, worms were placed at the bottom of the animal kingdom. By equating man with a worm, Beckett again undermines any normative hierarchy of being.

inferior vicariousness of Mahood and Worm. Hesla states that both are but temporary “surrogates,” which the unnamable will eventually be forced to dismiss (120). But instead of effectuating this right away, the unnamable prefers to procrastinate a little longer: “But what then is the subject, Mahood? No, not yet. Worm? Even less. Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it. Matter of habit. To be adjusted later” (T 343).

Inevitably, the unnamable will have to carry out this final adjustment of the representation of itself as a self-contained subject. Actually, one of the very first lines of the unnamable's narrative had already announced this: “I, say I. Unbelieving.” (T 291). Suchlike statement of course springs forth from the unnamable's present awareness – gained in the previous novels – that anything created through discursive knowledge by its discontinuous consciousness always falsely contorts and ossifies the flux of the entirety of existence. In his *Méthode de méditation* (1947), Bataille helps explain the outcome of this realization: “[F]aced with the impenetrable simplicity of *what exists*; and, the foundation of open worlds, what I see and what I know no longer has any meaning, any limits” (qtd. in Richardson 194, original emphasis). Consequentially, the only 'true' identity that the unnamable can assume is an unbounded, nameless *non-identity*. A scene toward the end of its narrative indicates that the unnamable will finally perform this conclusion. In this passage, the unnamable is a blind, bedbound man who is interrogated (by police staff?) about its identity:

But my dear man, come, be reasonable, look, this is you, look at this photograph, and here's your file, no convictions, I assure you, come now, make an effort, at your age, to have no identity, it's a scandal, I assure you, look at this photograph, what, you see nothing, true for you, no matter, here, look at this death's-head, you'll see, you'll be all right, it won't last long, here, look, here's the record, insults to policemen, indecent exposure, sins against holy ghost, contempt of court, impertinence to superiors, impudence to inferiors, deviations from reason [...]. (T 377)

Indeed, the unnamable's 'transgressive record' (i.e. its previous defiances of the law of discontinuity) has swept away its reliance on reason and the accompanying postulation of a definable 'I.' Crucially, suchlike confirmation of its non-identity indicates that the unnamable has become a non-character. Like Bataille's final Job, it now refuses to be restored to the illusory world of all discontinuous structures and concerns – including any form of a self-projected 'self.' This final rejection is executed shortly after: “And now one last look at Mahood, at Worm, we'll never have another chance, ah will they never learn sense, there's nothing to be got, there was never anything to be got from those stories” (T 380). From this point onwards, the narrative has entered its conclusive stage of genuine transgressive repetition.

The oscillating tension of transgressive communication is acted out on the concluding pages of *The Unnamable*. The unnamable knows that its search for its continuous self will always fail, yet it is determined to be repeatedly lost in the void of inner experience. For this to take place, the unnamable must abandon its will to know and be willing to let *ipse* be absent during the sublime moment. Put differently, the unnamable must first try to shed its contrived, stable sense of a self-contained subjectivity (created by its discursive mind) and turn toward its experiential body. Formulated more specifically: it must solely rely on the phenomenological non-entity which it is, in order to gain a constant state of 'openness' required for transgressive communication.

Stanton Garner, in his aforementioned article that deals with the similarities between Merleau-Ponty's and Beckett's views on embodiment, confirms my statement. He claims that what he calls Beckett's middle works (with *The Unnamable* as pivot point) gradually abandon the "naturalistic body, with its physiological integrity," and pave the way for the "phenomenological body, with its decentered field of subjectivity and its ambiguous modes of absence and presence" (459). We can understand this ambiguous merger of a body which is never present nor absent, if we see it as an intensification of the impasse of the impossible transgressive search for the continuous 'self.' The unnamable now continually presents a false subject (*ipse*) and a false object of the whole (continuity), merely to let both subject and object be dissolved during transgressive communication.

Consider the subject-side of this repetitive pre-transgression projection process:

Equate me, without pity or scruple, with him who exists, somehow, no matter how, no finicking, with him whose story this story had the brief ambition to be. Better, *ascribe to me a body*. Better still, arrogate to me a mind. Speak of a world of my own, sometimes referred to as the inner, without choking. Doubt no more. Seek no more. *Take advantage of the brand-new soul and substantiality to abandon, with the only possible abandon, deep down within*. And finally, these and other decisions having been taken, carry on cheerfully as before. (T 390, emphases added)

The unnamable first has to pretend that an autonomous, corporeally delineable *ipse* will be able to conserve its autonomy and to 'grasp' an object of continuity. But during communication, subject and object fuse. Thus, the only reason for the unnamable's projection is the possibility that *ipse* will be suppressed and that inner experience will take place. The unnamable, having become a porous experiential subject, attempts a description of the sublime loss of its sense of self: "Help, help, if I could only describe this place, [...], portray it, I've tried, I feel no place, no place round me, there's no end to me, I don't know what it is, it isn't flesh, it doesn't end, it's like air, now I have it, you say that, to say something [...]" (T 399). The narrator plainly refuses to locate subjectivity within well-confined bodily limits any longer.

But, immediately, the urge to restore *ipse* and describe ('know') continuity imposes itself as well. The loss of self is immediately interrupted, as consciousness always pulls the experiential non-subject back into its discontinuous experience. The same restitution we can find in another passage. Now it is expressed as the tension between the illusion of capturing the transgressive loss of self in words and the inescapable illusion of 'self' caused by the 'discontinuizing' mind: “[F]ar from my subject [...], let us get back to it, it's gone, no longer there where I thought I last saw it, strange this mixture of solid and liquid, where was I, ah yes, my subject, no longer there, or no longer the same, or I mistake the place, no yes, it's the same, still there, in the same place, it's a pity, I would have liked to lose it [...].” (T 391). So, “like the ball of the cup-and-ball [falling back] in its cup at the end of the stick” (T 304), the mind always puts an end to the body-subject's sublime loss of self.

This constant aporetic reaffirmation of the pains of man's limited existence, is the ongoing torment at the end of the trilogy. The unnamable oscillates between its temporary discontinuous *being* and its sublime experience of its future, continuous *non-being*: subjectivity is a state of being neither dead nor alive. This mystic-like, inexpressible in-betweenness is frantically outpoured on the last pages, in an indecisive stream of words that harbors an almost mesmerizing quality:

[...] I don't know if it's big, or if it's small, or if it's closed, or if it's open, that's right, reiterate, that helps you on, *open* on what, there is nothing else, only it, *open* on the void, *open* on the nothing, I've no objection, those are words, *open* on the silence, looking out on the silence, straight out, why not, all this time on the brink of silence, I knew it, on a rock, lashed to a rock, in the midst of silence, its great swell rears towards me, I'm streaming with it, it's an image, those are words, it's a body, it's not I, I knew it wouldn't be I, I'm not outside, I'm inside, I'm in something, [...]. (T 410, emphases added)

In sum, the last mode of subjectivity that manifests itself in the trilogy is an intermediary one, facilitating the repetition of transgressive communication. The Merleau-Pontian subject-body-world relationality now thrives. The former discontinuous, self-possessed mode of subjectivity has disintegrated and given way to a communicative body-subject on an experiential level. Instead of a representable, unitary 'I' standing in opposition to an exterior world, the 'self' has indeed been expanded to a form- and limitless non-entity. The unnamable represents itself in the only manner possible: as the unnameable flux of continuity, but unable to ever let subjectivity overlap with this flux, no matter how many times it will try. Accordingly, the unnamable finishes the trilogy as Bataille's despairing Job, delivered to the non-mercy of the 'God of continuity':

[W]here I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know,
you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on” (T 414).

4. Conclusion

This thesis established the undeniable importance of the concept of transgression for reading Samuel Beckett's trilogy. I adopted a Bataillean point of entry into the books and supported this with Merleau-Ponty's existentialist phenomenology of the body. This way, I was able to favor a non-subject-centered 'existentialist' consideration of the text. I made Beckett's writing revolve around the tension created by man's impossible desire of ever arriving at a discontinuously experienced continuity of being. The first half of the analysis showed how the trilogy's overall concern with confronting human somatic taboos suggested the possibility of transgressive/inner experience. I was able to conclude that both Beckett's treatment of sexuality (reproductive as well as erotic) and of certain abject features of the body brought death – and thus the nothingness-producing continuity of existence – into play. The presence of transgressive sublimity thus confirmed, I then demonstrated how Beckett's body-centered humor indirectly denounced man's inclination to regard certain taboos as a mere source for comedy – and thus indicted man's hypocritical reluctance to confront the continuity of being. I finished this part by tracing Beckett's preference for what Bataille calls 'absolute laughter.' This specific form of laughter is indicative of man's discontinuous sense of self being under attack and of the subject's realization that it can never arrest the flux of the entirety being and make it available to consciousness.

Because I was able to detect these two features – pertaining to the failure of inner experience – in the trilogy, I could investigate its disintegrating effects on the sense of an autonomous (corporeal) subjectivity, displayed by the trilogy's protagonist (i.e. the narrating voice in each book). This second part of the thesis argued that each character's narrative revolved around one moment of inner experience. This repetition of transgressive experience brought forth a fragmented but gradual exhaustion of the narrator's hope of overcoming its insufficient condition. This took a start with the character of Moran who slowly indulged in his transgressive urge and was forced to renounce its Christian view of possessing an autonomous soul. The second step was Molloy's recognition of the untenability of his hope of ever possessing the whole of continuity. *Malone Dies* was then analyzed as the trilogy's transition novel that achieved a more profound indifference toward not being able to overcome the limits of man's discontinuous existence. These developments had prepared for *The Unnamable*. They resulted in the non-character of the unnamable, closely resembling a Kierkegaardian/Bataillean version of the despairing, self-tormenting Biblical Job who is willing to continue to transgress without ever accomplishing anything. The unnamable was no longer restored to its former belief in the illusory structures given by its discontinuous consciousness – including its

impression of a discontinuous; physical unity that defines a present 'self.'

The trilogy's transformation of man's identity into an anonymous, materially defined non-subjectivity has actually turned out to be a crucial development for Beckett's further artistic practice. Beckett mainly moved to theatre in his late period and put the near-absence of a definable, self-possessed body as it had found expression in *The Unnamable* on stage: he intensified this corporeal de-subjectification and enacted the body's future absence – while at the same time also keeping to the impossibility of the body's disappearance without dying.¹⁰⁶ What is more, the trilogy's significance also seems to reside in its gradual acceptance of the limitations of the 'discontinuizing' mind. For example, Beckett's choice for the dramatic medium of course partially entails a move away from discursive expression, and a more direct utilization of the phenomenological body. In 'The Voice and Its Words: 'How it is' (1986), Judith Dearlove also claims that the trilogy is as an important transitional work. For her, *The Unnamable* exhaustively examines the mind's limited ability to appropriately structure and comprehend a chaotic and “fluid universe” (150). Because of the acceptance of this failure (i.e. the failure of transgression from my Bataillean point of view), the trilogy led to a “celebration of the artificiality of structure itself” (150) in Beckett's later work. A possible further point of investigation could therefore be if transgressive experience still plays a role in Beckett's post-trilogy drama, as a further ridicule of man's abidance by its discontinuous mind.

In addition to the previous, the thesis also defended the point of view that Beckett not only explored the mechanism of transgression on a textual level, but also exploited it by communicating this experience to the reader. This hypothesis was defended by regarding Beckett's literary writing – in the light of 20th century reader-response theory – as a specific form of the phenomenological method of description that can provoke a reaction from the reader. As such, the reader's own sense of subjectivity also undergoes a disintegration during the reading process. The reliance on discontinuous identity-related illusions crumbles for the reader, along with the trilogy's narrator's. Likewise, the reader's reluctance to give in to transgressive experience – by shunning persevered confrontations with taboos – can have decreased as well.

The importance of my suggested reader-response should not be underestimated. In fact, this element has thoroughly determined my elaborate interpretation of the trilogy. The structure and argument of my thesis indeed reflect my own level of adherence to the world of discontinuity at the

106 In *Happy Days* (1961), the only character is buried up to her neck in a mound of earth; in *Play* (1963), only the heads of three characters stick out of urns; in *Not I* (1972), only one actress' mouth is visible, all other surroundings entirely in the dark; and in *What Where* (1983), often only voices are heard. In Beckett's radio plays, such as *Cascando* (1961) or *Words and Music* (1961), obviously, only disembodied voices speak out to the listener as well.

time of writing. Allow me to exemplify this. The current form of this thesis put forward one detectable moment of transgressive experience for Moran, Molloy and Malone. However, my initial structure (after my first reading of the three books) would have considered the trilogy to be the development of the consecutive stages of *one* transgressive act over the three books.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it is more than likely that a third reading of the trilogy would lead to yet another different frame of analysis – one in which I would maybe detect multiple actual transgressive moments per character. Indeed, “paths look different, when you go back along them” (*T* 165), as Moran observes. The varying quantity of my 'transgression-detection' could therefore be said to be a reflection of the force that my discontinuous state of mind exerts during my reading process.

To sum up, this thesis exploited the convergence between Beckett and Bataille. As such, I have revalued the 'old' phenomenological-existentialist reading of Beckett which has been overshadowed by post-structuralist analyses. To validate this approach, I can again take up the letter Beckett wrote in 1937 to his friend Axel Kaun on the subject of language. I used this letter in my introduction to draw attention to Beckett's frustration with Dante's semantic fall of language, which had mediated Adam's former direct experience of God. However, if I now replace the word 'language' for 'body' and include the rest of the letter, all of a sudden one person is speaking to us. It is Bataille's voice, written down by Beckett:

More and more my own [*body*] appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. [...] [*Our body*] is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate [*our body*] 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 [...] begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. (qtd. in Szafranec 173-174)

Together, Bataille's views, a letter by Beckett and my own mediation of words, perfectly sum up what the three of us have been trying to get through to the reader.¹⁰⁸ For me, as the writer of this thesis, there has been indeed no higher goal than to let an intuition of continuity seep through to my reader – not in imagination, but in experience.

107 In this reading, *Molloy* would have been analyzed as the accumulation of multiple confrontations with taboos. This persevered confrontation would have led to a transgressive loss of self in *Malone Dies*, which I would then have analyzed in its entirety as the symbolic moment of a vicarious transgressive death. Consequentially, *The Unnamable* would have been the evocation of the aporetic torment of glimpsing at continuity while constantly being pulled away from the experience. This interpretation could actually find support in Hesla's suggestion that the trilogy must be seen as a cyclical work in which the unnamable is again “reincarnated” in Molloy (123) and is brought back to “another round of the pensum which is human existence” (123). This could then have been analyzed as the unnamable's inner experience being entirely broken off, after which Moran or Molloy renews the transgressive quest. As such, the trilogy acquires an infinite renewal of the transgressive cycle of death and resurrection.

108 I would like to stress that by using the we-form, I am in no way trying to level myself with these two dead men.

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