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Reference:

Van Hulle Dirk.- 'Louis & Blanc', or: Beckett, Ponge, and 'l'Humanité quoi'

On in their company: essays on Beckett, with tributes and sketches; presented to Jim Knowlson on his 80th Birthday / Nixon, Mark [edit.]; et al. - ISBN 978-0-7049-1534-3 - Reading, Beckett International Foundation, 2015, p. 125-136

To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1243580151162165141>

This is the author's version of an article published by the Beckett International Foundation in *On in Their Company: Essays on Beckett, with Tributes and Sketches. Presented to Jim Knowlson on his 80th Birthday*, ed. Mark Nixon and John Pilling (Reading, 2015), pp. 125-136. Please refer to the published version for correct citation and content. For more information, see <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/39097/>. 1

DIRK VAN HULLE¹

'Louis & Blanc', or: Beckett, Ponge, and 'l'humanité quoi'

'Médaille de la Reconnaissance'

for Jim Knowlson

When James Knowlson's biography came out in 1996, it drew scholars' attention to several manuscripts most Beckettians had hitherto hardly been aware of. In the meantime, the 'grey canon' has been growing continuously. Yet, paradoxically, the more manuscripts and marginalia come to light, the more the number of lacunae seems to increase as well. Thanks to James Knowlson, we have discovered new manuscripts and source texts, but perhaps more importantly, thanks to James Knowlson, we have also found new lacunae. Genetic criticism does more than simply discover new source texts. *Exogenetic* research into external source texts is only part of the genesis of each of Beckett's works. An equally important challenge to genetic Beckett studies is the *endogenetic* endeavour to reconstruct not just separate works in progress, but his complete works as an *oeuvre in progress* – or, to employ the word he used in a letter to Jacoba van Velde (25 May 1959): his *travail*. This *travail* – as the ongoing work on the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project illustrates – is a dialectics of completion and incompleteness, and no matter how many missing documents occasionally resurface, they will not only fill the gaps, but also create new enigmas.

One of these enigmas is a dramatic fragment, which I'll refer to as 'Louis & Blanc', and which poses more questions than it answers. In this essay, I would like to examine this fragment and read it against the background of the *oeuvre in progress*, exploring its affinities with (1) *En attendant Godot*, (2) *L'Innommable* (contra Francis Ponge's *L'Homme*), and (3) 'Avant *Fin de partie*'. The dramatic fragment contains a

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement n° 313609.

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reference to a 'Médaille de la Reconnaissance', with which I would like to pay tribute to the work of James Knowlson.

0. 'Louis & Blanc': a brief description of the document

The holograph fragment 'Louis & Blanc' covers the first seven recto pages of a notebook preserved at Harvard University's Houghton Library. Not unlike the manuscripts Beckett donated to the University of Reading, this notebook was a gift, as the inscription on the cover reads: 'for / The Harvard Theatre / Collection / with all good wishes / Samuel Beckett / Paris 1976'.

The only other word on the front cover is 'Plombière' and on the inside of the cover, the only sentence is the question 'Où as-tu la tête', written underneath three doodles, two of which show a head in left profile. The most striking material aspect of this notebook is that the top of several pages has been cut off with scissors: a page-wide strip of a few centimeters high is missing from folios 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 12. At the top of page 14r, the strip is not removed, but three lines are heavily cancelled: the title 'L'INNOMMABLE', followed by two lines:

L'INNOMMABLE

CARLIER

~~Sept. 1950~~ Ed. de Minuit (BDMP7, HU MS THR 70.3, 14r)

Carlier probably refers to Robert Carlier, who worked with the literary agent Odette Arnaud (*LSB II*, 206) and drew Jérôme Lindon's attention to Beckett's work (Lindon 1997, 95). According to Lindon, it was a few weeks after Carlier had brought this work to his attention that he found three typescripts on the desk of Georges Lambrichs (the secretary to the reading committee of Les Editions de Minuit) brought to him by Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil (*LSB II*, 235–6). If the cancelled date '~~Sept. 1950~~' refers to this moment, the three cancelled lines at the top of page 14r seem to be the remnants of an account, made toward the end of the five-year period of extreme creativity after the war, to keep track of where his typescript was at what moment

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(first given to 'Carrier', then to 'Ed. de Minuit' in 'Sept. 1950'). Following this hypothesis, the cut strips at the top of pages 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 12 might have had a similar function for the other works Beckett wrote in the immediate post-war years, *Mercier et Camier*, the 'nouvelles', *Eleuthéria*, *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *En attendant Godot*.

The three cancelled lines on page 14r are written with the same pen and the same black ink as the dramatic fragment ('Louis & Blanc') on the first seven recto pages. On page 10r, another dramatic manuscript starts, an early English version of the radio play *Embers* (also referred to as 'Henry & Ada') in the form of a dialogue between 'He' and 'She', which ends on page 20r. This dialogue is written in the same black ink (later switching to blueblack ink, from page 17r onwards) but with a finer pen. This version of *Embers* was probably written shortly before 21 January 1958 (in December 1957–January 1958), while Beckett was translating *L'Innommable* into English. The manuscript of the translation, *The Unnamable*, features a note (on page 23v of the second notebook; *BDMP 2*) referring to the manuscript of 'Henry & Ada' (*Embers*): 'Reprise 21.1.58 après échec de Henry et Ada' ['Taken up again 21.1.58 after failure of Henry and Ada'] (HRC MS SB 5-9-2, 23v; *BDMP2*).

1. Mercier & Camier, Didi & Gogo, Louis & Blanc: another pseudocouple

The manuscript of 'Louis & Blanc' opens with a preliminary jotting. Beckett wrote down a rough idea in four lines, which he subsequently developed. The four lines read:

On t'a ~~lavé~~^{brossé} les dents?

Je n'en ai pas.

À moi on ne me les a pas ~~lavées~~^{brossées}

Il faut réclamer. (BDMP7, HU MS THR 70.3, 1r)

These four lines are followed by a long dialogue between 'L' and 'B'. Originally, Beckett seems to have worked with another initial; the first four interventions by 'L' were marked by another initial, later overwritten by an 'L'. B stands for Blanc, who

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presents himself as 'Blanc. (Pause) Médaille de la Reconnaissance [française].' Blanc does not immediately recognize L's voice. His first guess seems to be 'Rothschild' (the handwriting is hard to decipher):

B C'est [Rothschild] ?

L Non

B (ayant reconnu la voix) Ah ! Louis.

L. Louis même. (BDMP7, 1r)

This dialogue between Blanc and 'Louis même' could thus be read as a dialogue between B and 'lui-même' (B and himself), or B and 'l'ouïe même' – implying hearing voices and talking to oneself (see also the last section of this essay). The conversation between B and 'Louis même' recalls the pseudocouple Mercier-Camier, to borrow the Unnamable's words (*Un*, 7). And perhaps even more than Mercier and Camier, Louis and Blanc are reminiscent of Vladimir and Estragon. Abbreviating their names, as in Didi and Gogo, would result in Loulou and Blabla – Blabla as the body's comment on the mind's talking or the 'voice quaqu'; and Loulou as an ironic embodiment of the mind, soul and spirit as in Félicité's parrot representing the holy spirit in Flaubert's 'Un Cœur simple'.

When B asks L whether they are alone ('Nous sommes seuls?'), L replies that the rules stipulate: 'Deux par jour, c'est le règlement.' Every day, only two persons can be given an airing, 'mis à l'air'. The expression 'mis à l'air' is a substitution for the crossed-out word '~~découvert~~'. This is the word I would like to focus on.

Blanc has a sense that he has been given a breath of fresh air the day before as well: 'Mais il me semble qu'on m'a ~~découvert hier~~ mis à l'air hier.' (1r) It was apparently another person with whom he was outside the day before, someone who did not say a word. This implies that the pairs are not aired two by two in turn, and Blanc concludes there's no justice here: 'Il n'y a [...] pas de justice ici' (1r). Blanc suggests it was perhaps Louis himself who was with him the day before, but Louis immediately denies, for he is very fond of conversations, 'with moderation' ('En modération'). Blanc agrees: 'B Oh moi aussi ! L'échange ! / L D'idées. / B

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D'impressions. / L De souvenirs. / B D'espoirs.' The exchange of ideas continues on page 2r, with more compliments and best practices – again 'with moderation'. The passage is reminiscent of passages such as the 'échange d'injures' and other dialogues in *En attendant Godot*, notably the description of the dead voices' sound: 'ESTRAGON: All the dead voices. / VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings. / E: Like leaves. / V: Like sand. / E: Like leaves. [...] V: [...] they whisper. / E: They rustle. V: They murmur. / E: They rustle' (CDW, 58).

The second page of 'Louis & Blanc' develops the initial jotting:

B Est-ce qu'on t'a brossé les dents tout à l'heure ?

L Je n'en ai pas.

B A moi il me semble qu'on ne me les a pas brossées.

L C'est comme tout le reste, [moins] on a de dents mieux ça vaut.

B On ne nous les a pas brossées.

L Il faut réclamer. (BDMP7, 2r)

Blanc fully agrees, for otherwise one's mouth fills with 'débris alimentaires' – with all that follows ('avec tout ce qui s'ensuit'). The expression 'avec tout ce qui s'ensuit' also appears in *En attendant Godot*, when Estragon suggests they hang themselves, which would give them an erection, 'With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow' (CDW, 18). What follows in 'Louis & Blanc' is yet another enumeration: 'L. ~~Abscès.~~ [sic] – Aphtes. / B ~~Ulcères.~~ – Muguets. / L ~~Fluxions.~~ – Fluxions. / B ~~Aphtes~~ – Ulcères. / L ~~Muguets~~ – Abscès. [sic] / B Fistules. / L Stomatite / B Gingivite' (2r).

This enumeration is a nice addition to the vast collection of physical ailments in Beckett's notes (such as the nine pages of notes on Samuel Johnson's medical conditions in notebook UoR MS 3461/2, including oedema, ascites, scrofula and sarcocele) and in his works (such as the bacteria 'Gonococcus! Spirochaete!', used as abusive terms in the altercation between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*; CDW, 68).

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After the enumeration of buccal conditions in 'Louis & Blanc', a guardian comes, asks them if everything is all right ('ça va, les gars? / Oh oui monsieur!') and disappears again. Louis then reiterates something Blanc said in the beginning: that there is no justice here. What follows (from page 5r to the end on page 7r) is a long rationalisation of the bizarre situation: Louis suggests they take a period of, say, 100 years, and that one is entitled to 50,000 'mises à l'air', or 100,000 hours in the open air ('à l'air libre'). The point he tries to make is that, once one has received the ration one is entitled to, the manner in which one receives it hardly matters: 'Du moment que nous recevons [tous] la ration d'air à laquelle [...] nous avons droit, peu importe le.. le.. la manière, vous me suivez?' (5r-6r). Blanc does not follow, so Louis gives an example: 'Moi, par exemple, je [peux rester] trois semaines sous la [neige] et ensuite dix ans sous la [cloche] sans que je songe une seule seconde à crier à l'injustice.' (6r) The 'cloche' could be a bell, but in this context of being covered or uncovered it is probably a bell-glass. Louis would endure the three weeks in the open air by thinking that it is the final result that counts: 'C'est le résultat final qui compte' (6r). Then, Blanc suggests they take an extreme example – which already brings us to the last page of the dramatic fragment. If 100,000 hours equals about 12 years – Beckett made the calculations on the verso (6v) – it would theoretically be possible that they are left in the open air for 12 years and would have to remain covered under the bell-glass for 88 years on end, 'sans songer une seule seconde à me plaindre.' (7r) Louis replies that it is entirely up to Blanc to complain or not, but that would not change the fact that he would have received the quantity of 'this' to which he was entitled:

L Tu peux te plaindre, si ça te chante. N'empêche que tu auras reçu, jusqu'à la dernière [bouchée] et jusqu'au dernier rayon, ee-[qui te revenait.] la quantité de de

B [~~d'air et lumi~~] ceci.

L qui te revenait (BDMP7)

This is where the fragment ends. The first attempt ended without the hesitation: Louis reminds Blanc that he can complain as much as he wants, but that doesn't change the

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fact that he would have received what he was entitled to. Beckett deleted this first version (~~'ce [qui te revenait.]'~~) and consciously replaced it by the two long ellipses ('de de'), which give extra prominence to the 'thisness' of 'ceci', prefiguring the similar use of 'this this here', 'ce ceci-ci' in Beckett's last work, *Comment dire*: 'folie vu ce – / ce – / comment dire – / ceci – / ce ceci – / ceci-ci – / tout ce ceci-ci –' ['folly seeing all this – / this – / what is the word – / this this – / this this here – / all this this here –'] (*BDMP1*)

The combination of the snow and the covering/uncovering of the characters, who are apparently quite constrained in their mobility, is reminiscent of the story of Mahood in the jar, the difference being that in *L'Innommable* Mahood is covered with a tarpaulin ('bâche') to *protect* him against the snow. The 'I' says he has tried to make Madeleine/Marguerite understand that he should like to be 'veiled' ('occulté') more often. The French version specifies that he does this when the snowing has diminished and she uncovers him, using the verb 'découvrir' (as in the first writing layer of 'Louis & Blanc'): 'J'ai essayé de lui faire comprendre [...] au moment où, la neige ayant diminué, elle me découvrirait, que j'aimerais être occulté plus souvent.' (*BDMP2*) The verb 'découvrir' is also used in relation to the notion of the 'voice', in a self-reflexive context of ventriloquism, as in 'me découvrir une voix': 'Ah comme je voudrais me découvrir une voix dans ce concert, je sais que ce serait la fin de leurs peines, et des miennes. [...] Je crois que Murphy parlait de temps en temps, les autres aussi peut-être, mais c'était mal fait, je voyais le ventriloque. Je sens que ça va commencer. Ils doivent ~~me croire~~ ^{m'estimer} suffisamment ~~abasourdi~~ ^{abrutir}, ~~toutes ces~~ ^{avec leurs} histoires d'être et d'existence.' (HRC MS SB 3-10, 69v; *BDMP 2*) All these stories, 'with all their balls about being and existing', can be read as a direct reference to the context of existentialism and the 'absurd' in the Parisian post-war context, when Beckett was not only writing non-stop, but also trying to make ends meet by translating, notably a few texts by Francis Ponge.

2. 'Louis même': Beckett's *L'Innommable* and Ponge's 'dupe'

The Unnamable's discourse is marked by an obligation to speak: 'I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have

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to speak. No one compels me to' (*Un*, 25). There is nothing to say and, moreover, there is nothing to discover:

Nothing can ever exempt me from it, there is nothing, nothing to discover ['rien à découvrir'], nothing to recover, nothing that can lessen what remains to say, I have the ocean to drink, so there is an ocean then. Not to have been a dupe, that will have been my best possession, my best deed, to have been a dupe, wishing I wasn't, thinking I wasn't, knowing I was, not being a dupe of not being a *dupe*. (*Un*, 25; emphasis added)

The pre-war Beckett, in his capacity as the author of the German letter to Axel Kaun, still expected to find 'die dahinterliegenden Dinge (oder das dahinterliegende Nichts)', 'das Dahinterkauernde, sei es etwas oder nichts' (*Dis*, 52) behind the 'veil' of language; the post-war narrator/narrated of *The Unnamable* does not expect to find anything: 'there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover' (25). Of course, one could interpret the verbs as performatives, as Richard Begam has suggested with regard to *Waiting for Godot*: when Didi says 'nothing to be done', one of the many things Didi can do is 'nothing' (Begam 2007, 138); similarly the Unnamable has 'nothing' to discover and to recover. Whether it is 'I' or 'not I' who does the talking ('ce n'est pas moi qui parle [...] c'est moi qui parle'; Beckett 1998, 165–6), he has to talk in order not to be the dupe of his expression: 'Not to have been a dupe, that will have been my best possession, my best deed, to have been a dupe, wishing I wasn't, thinking I wasn't, knowing I was, not being a dupe of not being a dupe.' (*Un*, 25) In the French version, the notion of being a dupe is already introduced in the famous opening sentence of the preamble's last paragraph: 'Ces Murphy, Molloy et autres Malone, je n'en suis pas dupe.' (Beckett 1998, 28)

The word 'dupe' – in connection with the notion of the 'unnamable' – has an interesting prehistory. On the first of March 1949, only a few weeks before Beckett started writing *L'Innommable*, he wrote to Georges Duthuit about the translation work he was doing for *Transition Fifty* No. 6 (October 1950), notably (1) the 'Préface pour Ponge' by Pierre Schneider, which appeared in Beckett's translation as 'Introduction

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to the Works of Fancis Ponge'; (2) Ponge's 'Poems' that appeared in the same issue in a translation by Pierre Schneider and Richard Wilbur; and (3) Ponge's essay 'Braque, or Modern Art as Event and Pleasure', translated by Beckett. In this letter to Duthuit, Beckett calls the essay 'dégoûtant' ('revolting'), but it is interesting that he spends a whole paragraph on this short essay by 'notre grand chosier' ('our great thinger'), as he calls the author of *Le Parti pris des choses* (1942). By then, Beckett was quite familiar with Ponge's works since he had translated various pieces by the 'chosier' for *Transition* (27 May 1948, n. 1; 1 March 1949, n. 3, n. 4, n. 5; see *LSB II*, 381). The reaction to the essay on Braque is remarkably fierce, compared to Beckett's comments on his other translations. Ponge's poetics with regard to 'things' transpires in the second part of the essay: 'Il s'agit des objets les plus communs, les plus habituels, terre à terre. C'est à eux que nous devons nous réadapter' (Ponge 1999, 139). His approach cannot be reduced to phenomenological bracketing, but it does aim at a similar effect. By 'readapting' himself to the most common objects, the human being would see the world again as 'primitive man' did: 'Nous sommes de nouveau jetés nus, comme l'homme primitif, devant la nature' (139). Given the immediate context of Beckett's revelation (which in a biographical reading of *Krapp's Last Tape* has often been linked to Krapp's decision to focus on 'the dark I've always struggled to keep under') and of the completion of *En attendant Godot*, Beckett must have taken offence at Ponge's explicit glorification of hope ('quel espoir!') and the belief that man is still 'to come': 'Que l'homme est vraiment à venir. Que nous avons à le constuire' (Ponge 1999, 140). In his essay on Braque, Ponge makes the connection between his work on 'things' and on 'man', *Le Parti pris des choses* and his 'Notes premières de *L'Homme*': 'Voilà les objets à qui nous demandons, car d'eux nous savons l'obtenir, qu'ils nous tirent hors de notre nuit, hors du vieil homme (et d'un soi-disant humanisme), pour nous révéler l'Homme, l'Ordre à venir.' (140)

The idea that man is 'à venir' is an echo of '*L'Homme est à venir. L'homme est l'avenir de l'homme*' (Ponge 1999, 230) in Ponge's 'Notes premières de *L'Homme*', the third part of *Proèmes*, published in September 1948. The second part of these *Proèmes*, 'II. Pages bis', opens with Ponge's 'Réflexions en lisant "l'essai sur

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l'absurde", his notes in reaction to Albert Camus' essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (published in 1942). It opens with what Ponge regards as one of the most important themes addressed by Camus: 'l'impossibilité pour l'homme non seulement de s'exprimer mais d'exprimer n'importe quoi' (206). This corresponds to the first part of Beckett's oft-quoted line from the first of his 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit', published in *Transition Forty-Nine* (December 1949): 'The expression that there is nothing to express' (*Dis*, 139). As in the case of the potentially performative sense 'nothing to be done' (cf. *supra*), there appears to be a well nigh inexhaustible amount of 'nothing' that is to be expressed. The subject is so pressing that it implies 'the obligation to express' (139). Ponge not only notes the same impossibility, but also the same obligation; moreover, he points out that he already formulated this much earlier ('vers 1925') in the first of his 'Douze petits écrits', which he quotes:

Quelconque de ma part la parole me garde mieux que le silence. Ma tête de mort paraîtra *dupe* de son expression. Cela n'arrivait pas à Yorick quand il parlait. (Ponge 1999, 206; emphasis added)

Yorick's skull, with its unwitting grin, was the dupe of his own expression. His ossified silence is an expression in and of itself. Only as long as Yorick was alive and talking could he avoid being a dupe of this unintentional expression. This was the starting point for Ponge: after having recognized the impossibility to express himself, he attempted to simply describe things, and subsequently recognized the impossibility to describe things. At that point he had to make a decision: 'Je puis donc soit décider de me taire, mais cela ne me convient pas: l'on ne se résout pas à l'abrutissement. Soit décider de publier des descriptions ou relations d'*échecs de description*.' (206-7; Ponge's emphasis) Beckett's reaction to Ponge's essay on Braque was decidedly negative, but it also suggests that Beckett was not entirely indifferent to Ponge's poetics. The (uplifting, hopeful) content of Ponge's literary programme was quite different from Beckett's, but the notions of the 'échec' and the obligation to express show clear affinities with some aspects of Beckett's poetics of ignorance. In the fourth section of 'Pages bis', Ponge reiterates his ideas on the problem of silence: '*Il faut*

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parler: le silence en ces matières est ce qu'il y a de plus dangereux au monde. On devient *dupe* de tout.' (Ponge 1999, 212 ; emphasis added)

Ponge's insistence on the word 'dupe' in relation to the obligation to express provides an interesting context for Beckett's frequent employment of this word in the manuscript of *L'Innommable*. Moreover, the word 'innommable' features prominently in Ponge's essay. Just after having claimed that man is still to come ('Que l'homme est vraiment à venir'), Ponge notes 'Que l'individu, encore, n'existe pas à vrai dire, sinon comme désordre innommable et chaos, plus que la société, que la nature.' (140) Again, Beckett's take is quite different from Ponge's, but his careful reading of Ponge's essay (as a translator), shortly before the writing process of *L'Innommable*, does seem to have had an impact on its genesis, albeit *per negativum*. The text of *L'Innommable* certainly does not 'construct' man, as Ponge suggests ('nous avons à le construire'). If anything, it seems to repudiate man's urge to construct himself, or a 'self', or different 'selves': 'être obligé de dire, C'est moi qui me fais cette vie, ee c'est moi qui me parle de moi' (HRC 4-1, 53v; Beckett 1998, 179). Against this urge, and possibly in reaction to Ponge's appeal, Beckett is more interested in the 'non-existence' of the individual. Preferring not to 'construct' an individual, Beckett rather endeavoured to accommodate what Ponge called 'chaos' and 'désordre innommable', resisting the urge to name it. Evidently, this form of repudiating the self by denarrating the 'I' simultaneously draws attention to the denarrated, not unlike the way Molloy repudiates motherhood by abolishing the syllable 'Ma':

And I called her Mag because for me, without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other letter would have done. And at the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, that is a mother, and to proclaim it, audibly. For before you say mag you say ma, inevitably. (*Mo*, 14)

3. 'Louis & Blanc', mind and body 'Avant *Fin de partie*'

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If the denarration of the self simultaneously draws attention to it, this mechanism also applies to the narrator/(de)narrated's fellow-creatures and vice-existers, 'mes soi-disant semblables' (HRC MS SB 3-10, 6v; *BDMP* 2). 'They' have taught the 'I' about love and intelligence. In the manuscript, the combination of these two notions is summarized as 'l'humanité quoi' (6v; *BDMP* 2). They have also taught him how to reason. Again the first writing stage of the manuscript shows extra emphasis on the 'human' element of this ability: 'eux aussi qui m'ont (...) montré l'emploi de la raison humaine' (6v). And when one of 'them', 'un nommé Basile je crois', is introduced for the first time, he is said to fill the 'I' with 'une réulsion^{pugnance} particulière', because 'Il suait l'humanité' (6v). All these explicit references to the notions of 'humanity' and the 'human' have been removed in the published version. The narrator/narrated constantly questions his own humanity: 'Ou par l'absurde me convaincre d'humanité d'être, l'absurde d'être sans en être passée, présente ou à venir' (66v).

The idea of convincing oneself of one's own humanity through or via the absurd corresponds remarkably well with Ponge's 'Réflexions en lisant "l'essai sur l'absurde"' in 'Pages bis': 'Quand j'ai pris mon parti de l'Absurde, il me reste à publier la relation de mon échec' (Ponge 1999, 207; emphasis added). Ponge reproaches Camus for dramatizing the absurd – 'Bien entendu le monde est absurde ! [...] Mais qu'y a-t-il là de tragique ? J'ôterais volontiers à l'absurde son coefficient de tragique' (213). And his attempt to temper this dramatization crystallizes in the notion of 'mesure': 'Dans une certaine mesure, dans certaines mesures, la raison obtient des succès' (207).

As an expression of moderation, Ponge's notion of 'mesure' accords with Louis's repeated phrase 'en modération' in 'Louis & Blanc'. In that sense, Ponge resembles the 'defamer' in *The Unnamable*. The short sentence 'But I should not like to defame my defamer' in the English version was longer in the manuscript of the French original, and the words of the defamer were reminiscent both of the Grimm brothers ('So it goes in the world'; see Van Hulle and Nixon 2013, 96) and of Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses* ('Il faut en prendre son parti'):

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Mais je ne voudrais pas être injuste envers mon ~~informateur~~^{diffamateur}, lui qui avait horreur de l'injustice, à tel point qu'il avait coutume de me dire, Que veux-tu, mon ~~cher~~^{pauvre ami}, *le monde est ainsi*, il faut en *prendre son parti*. (37v; BDMP 2; emphasis added)

The original 'informateur' was made more negative ('diffamateur'). In the context of Beckett's previously mentioned reaction after reading and translating Francis Ponge, it is interesting that the informateur/diffamateur employs the expression 'prendre parti' as in Ponge's most famous work, *Le Parti pris des choses* (1942). But it is probably even more significant that Beckett eventually decided to *omit* this latter part of the sentence. This act of creative undoing could be a silent comment on the 'chosier' (*LSB II*, 381), who suggested the possibility of a 'happy Sisyphus' ('Sisyphes heureux, oui, non seulement parce qu'il dévisage sa destinée, mais parce que ses efforts aboutissent à des résultats relatifs très importants'; Ponge 1999, 208) and who advocated the acceptance of one's inevitable 'échecs' by regarding them as relative successes – 'des succès *relatifs* d'expression' (207; Ponge's emphasis).

If the idea of a 'parti pris du monde' may be read in this Pongean context, the act of taking away or *retracting* these words is telling in terms of Beckett's post-war poetics, in which failure did become increasingly important, though certainly not as a form of acceptance. Moreover, man / manhood / Mahood (Cohn 2001, 188) may be part of *L'Innommable*, but there is definitely a difference from Ponge's project *L'Homme*. Man does not occupy the privileged place in the teleological 'parti pris' project, which in Ponge's case starts with objects and culminates in the capitalized and happy 'Homme'. In Beckett's literary project, man has a more humble place in the arbitrary hap of a relentlessly pushing, dysteleological 'on'.

Ma(n)hood's 'place' in this dysteleological universe is a jar. When the narrator/narrated in *L'Innommable* mentions the collar, fixed to the mouth of the jar in which Mahood is contained, he explains that it secures his neck so that his mouth is no longer hidden. One of the advantages is that he can now catch flies. At this moment in the manuscript (HRC MS SB 3-10, 48v; BDMP 2), Beckett inserted an addition, written on the opposite page (49r):

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‘Est-ce à dire que je j’ai mes dents? Avoir perdu ses membres et ~~gardé~~ conservé ~~ma~~ sa denture, quelle dérision! Mais ~~ee n’est pas sûr~~ ça m’étonnerait.’ [‘Does this mean I still have my teeth? To have lost one’s limbs and preserved one’s dentition, what a mockery! But it would surprise me.’] (HRC MS SB 3-10, 49r; *BDMP* 2)

This reminder of the body’s presence, even if only in its capacity as a series of phantom limbs, emphasizes Beckett’s sensitivity to reason’s inappropriate sense of superiority, given the mind’s helpless dependence on a defective body. The mention of teeth or lack thereof is echoed in *Fin de partie* when Nagg tells Nell that he has lost his tooth (‘J’ai perdu ma dent’; Beckett 1974, 26). The bottoms of Nagg and Nell’s dustbins used to be covered with sawdust (‘It was sawdust once’; Beckett 1974, 28), just like Mahood’s jar (HRC MS SB 3-10, 47v; *BDMP* 2).

That the human mind’s sense of superiority is literally misplaced becomes most painfully explicit in Hamm’s desire to be right in the centre – the equivalent of the central place of *L’Homme* in Ponge’s project. In a way, Ponge’s project was a phenomenological exercise in ‘bracketing’, a critique of man’s unquestioning trust in preconceived ideas, which had separated him from pre-conceptual experience. But this Husserlian *zu den Sachen selbst* (back to the things themselves) was presented as a ‘parti pris’: since the things could not speak for themselves, the human being (represented by Francis Ponge) was going to speak on their behalf. And eventually, Ponge wanted to speak on behalf of Man. On the one hand, this project reduced man to his place among the other objects, but on the other hand the capitalization of Man implicitly set him apart, and Ponge’s presentation of ‘l’Homme’ as ‘l’Ordre à venir’ gives a teleological twist to his project: ‘c’est l’Homme qui est le but’ (Ponge 1999, 211). This teleological view of evolution, culminating in humanity, is ridiculed in *Fin de partie / Endgame* and driven to extremes in the scene with the flea, when Hamm is totally perturbed, exclaiming: ‘But humanity might start from there all over again!’ (Beckett 1974, 50).

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In one of the preparatory versions of *Endgame*, which Beckett retroactively called 'Avant *Fin de Partie*' (UoR MS 1227/7/16/7), X regrets being the last specimen of the human race: 'Dommage que nous soyons les derniers du genre humain' (17r). This explicit reference to humanity follows immediately after a pun on 'l'ouïe' (hearing). From the fact that F's voice is sometimes loud and sometimes faint, coming from different points in space, X deduces that F must still be moving around. F suggests that perhaps X's senses are no longer reliable, notably his hearing:

F A moins que ce ne soit l'ouïe qui commence à vous jouer des tours.

X Louis? Quel Louis?

F Votre ouïe.

X A oui. Mon ouïe.' (17r)

In and of itself, the Louis/l'ouïe pun may seem rather gratuitous, but in connection with the pun on Louis même / lui-même in 'Louis & Blanc' it becomes a more complex wordplay, standing for the nexus between sensory experience and the self itself, whatever that is. Blanc and 'Louis même' are a Racinian pseudocouple, consisting of a character and his confidant, a post-Cartesian combination of body and mind. The few jottings preceding the fragment 'Louis & Blanc' constitute a dialogue between someone who is concerned about his body, notably the hygiene of his teeth, and someone who doesn't have any teeth. Blanc concentrates on the body being aired, complaining that there's no justice 'here'; his alter ego, 'Louis même', rationalizes the suffering and the feeling of injustice.

4. Conclusion: 'Il faut réclamer'

In his 'German Diaries', Beckett had already touched upon this kind of rationalization with reference to history. The famous passage on the 'straws, flotsam, etc.' was introduced by Beckett's statement 'I can't read history like a novel': 'I am not interested in a "unification" of the historical chaos any more than I am in the "clarification" of the individual chaos, & still less in the anthropomorphisation of the inhuman necessities that provoke the chaos' (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 177-8). Names,

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dates and other details interested him more than 'the modern animism that consists in rationalising them' (178), 'the fashionable *monde romancé* that explains copious[ly] why e.g. Luther was inevitable without telling me anything about Luther' (qtd. in McNaughton 2005, 107). As James McNaughton and Mark Nixon have shown, this passage has to be read in the context of German fascism's fondness for expressions such as 'historical necessity' and 'Germanic destiny', which 'start the vomiting moving upwards' (107). Even though the research into the genesis is still ongoing and it is too early to determine precisely when the fragment 'Louis & Blanc' was written, it seems safe to say that Blanc and Louis fit in with the series of post-war decrepit characters, personifying a decomposing humanity, situated in a landscape that is vaguely reminiscent of the horrors caused by the rhetoric of 'historical necessity' suggested in the above quotation. If Blanc's first guess is 'Rothschild' (again with the disclaimer that the handwriting is rather unclear), the function of this Jewish name is reminiscent of Lévy, Estragon's original name in the manuscript of *En attendant Godot* (Duckworth 1966, xliii). Not unlike Adam's complaint in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* ('Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay to mould me Man?'), not unlike the creature's complaint to Victor Frankenstein ('Accursed creator!'), and not unlike Hamm's complaint to Nagg ('Accursed progenitor!'), Louis' conclusion is: 'Il faut réclamer'. 'Louis & Blanc' reads as a dramatic expression of Beckett's criticism (contra Ponge's *L'Homme*) of anthropomorphising the 'inhuman necessities'. His ironic demonstration of the human mind's tendency to rationalize injustice questions the mind's inappropriate sense of superiority by showing the fragility of the rationalization when confronted with the body's direct reaction to 'this this here': 'ceci'. Even though this Racinian duologue between Blanc and his confidant 'Louis même' takes place in the relative obscurity of the archive, their exchange of ideas adds another dimension to Beckett's post-war notion of the pseudocouple, prefiguring the complexities of embodied cognition.

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