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## Cognition Enactment: Beckett's *Molloy* Manuscripts and the Reader's Role in Genetic Criticism<sup>1</sup>

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This essay investigates to what extent it is possible with hindsight, on the basis of manuscripts, to reconstruct the cognitive process underlying the textual genesis of a literary work. The case study is Beckett's novel *Molloy* and the characterization of Molloy and Moran against the background of Beckett's reading of André Gide's *Dostoïevsky* and Pierre Gustave Brunet's *Curiosités théologiques*. The seemingly programmatic Molloy/Moran dichotomy, possibly modeled after Gide's contrast between Dostoevsky and Balzac, turns out to be the result of an *écriture à processus* rather than *à programme*. This case study serves to illustrate how consciousness-enactment, combined with an enactivist approach to cognition, can be of help in defining the role of the reader in genetic criticism.

**Keywords:** Beckett; Genetic Criticism; manuscripts; cognition; Enactivism; Ryle; Holt; Consciousness-enactment; Caracciolo; Hutto; Abbott; postcognitivism; *Molloy*; Brunet; Gide; Dostoevsky; Balzac

In an important position statement, Louis Hay made a clear distinction between genetic criticism and what he called "reading in someone's soul" or "reliving the writer's inner experience" (*l'expérience intérieure de l'écrivain*).<sup>2</sup> The question is whether it is possible to make such a clear distinction between *interior* and *exterior*. This essay investigates to what extent it is possible with hindsight, on the basis of manuscripts, to reconstruct the cognitive process underlying the writing process of literary works in general, and of Beckett's works in particular. The metaphor of *looking into the soul* has a long tradition that goes back at least to John Locke, as Gilbert Ryle already noted in 1949, when he criticized this model:

When the epistemologists' concept of consciousness first became popular, it seems to have been in part a transformed application of the Protestant notion of conscience. [...] When Galileo's and Descartes' representations of the mechanical world seemed to require that minds should be salvaged from mechanism by being represented as constituting a duplicate world, the need was felt to explain how the contents of this ghostly world could be ascertained, again without the help of sense perception. [...] This model was employed again by Locke when he described the observational scrutiny which a mind can from time to time turn upon its current states and processes. He called this supposed inner perception 'reflection' (our 'introspection'), borrowing the word 'reflection' from the familiar optical phenomenon of the reflections of faces in mirrors.

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<sup>2</sup> "après avoir renoncé à 'lire dans les âmes,' à revivre *l'expérience intérieure* de l'écrivain, la génétique a pu se donner une position critique autonome: elle vise les processus d'écriture dans la réalité de leur exécution, dans l'attestation d'une trace scripturaire" (1994, 19; emphasis added).

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The mind can 'see' or 'look at' its own operations in the 'light' given off by themselves.  
The myth of consciousness is a piece of para-optics.

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Ryle tried to demythologize this Cartesian doctrine, which he called "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine" (17). In "Descartes' Myth," the opening chapter of *The Concept of Mind*, he argues that it is customary to present the physical world, including the body, as external and the workings of the mind as internal: "This antithesis of outer and inner is of course meant to be construed as a metaphor, since minds, not being in space, could not be described as being spatially inside anything else" (14). Ryle's book was published in the year Beckett not only started writing *L'Innommable* but also wrote a letter to Georges Duthuit (9 March 1949) in which he suggests that "what are called outside and inside are one and the same" (Beckett 2011, 140). So far, no indications have been found that Beckett read Ryle's book, and Ryle could not yet have read Beckett's three novels, since they were only published in the early 1950s. Nonetheless the affinities between Beckett's three novels and Ryle's model of the mind are sometimes striking. For instance, Ryle's analysis of "Self-Knowledge" in chapter VI of *The Concept of Mind* contains a section on "The Systematic Elusiveness of 'I'" which discusses the problem of self-commentary. An act of ridiculing, he argues, cannot be its own butt: "A higher order action cannot be the action upon which it is performed. So my commentary on my performances must always be silent about one performance, namely itself, and this performance can be the target only of another commentary. Self-commentary, self-ridicule, and self-admonition are logically condemned to eternal penultimacy" (186).

This eternal penultimacy and the systematic elusiveness of the 'I'<sup>3</sup> are useful concepts to describe the structure of Beckett's *Molloy*, which will be discussed in the second part of this essay. First, however, it is necessary to further elaborate on the theoretical framework of Ryle's model. As Daniel Dennett notes in the introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Concept of Mind*, "many of the themes that are emerging as hot new directions in up-to-the-minute cognitive science bear a striking resemblance to long-disregarded Rylean themes: embodied and 'situated' cognition; your mind is not in your brain; skill is not represented; intelligence without representation – to name only the most obvious" (Dennett qtd. in Ryle 2000, xii). These "hot new directions" are sometimes referred to as 4E cognition – the embodied, the embedded, the extended and the enactive mind (Rowlands, 67).<sup>4</sup> But then again, Ryle was not the first to suggest these themes either. For instance, as early as 1915, E. B. Holt suggested a model of consciousness that clearly diverged from the Cartesian doctrine in that it no longer separated mind and matter, but saw consciousness as consisting of the relation between an organism and its environment: "Consciousness is not a substance but a relation – the relation between the living organism and the environment to which it specifically responds" (96).

This model can be usefully applied to the situation of a writer at work: what Holt calls the relation between the organism and its environment corresponds to the relation between the writer and her material environment, such as the books in her library (exogenesis) and the paper, parchment or computer on which she writes her drafts (endogenesis). But if this hypothesis (the writer's consciousness is not a substance but a relation) holds true, can it also explain how and to what extent we – after the fact – might be able to (partially) reconstruct a twentieth-century writer's consciousness during the writing process? To investigate this, it may be useful to start from an exogenetic analysis of *Molloy*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting discussion of the absence and presence (or neither absence nor presence) of the 'self' in Beckett's works and in Beckett studies, see Engelberts 2000.

<sup>4</sup> In *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing*, I investigate the link between modern manuscripts and some of these recent cognitive philosophies (Van Hulle 2013).

<sup>5</sup> This exogenetic analysis zooms in on a small aspect of the genesis. For a more elaborate analysis of the making of *Molloy*, see O'Reilly, Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017.

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### Manuscripts and the Mind in the Making of *Molloy*

When Molloy alludes to Wordsworth's definition of poetic composition to explain that it is "in the tranquility of decomposition" that he remembers and judges "the long confused emotion which was my life" (Beckett 2009c, 22), the "tranquillité de la décomposition" (Beckett 1951, 36) concisely summarizes not only Molloy's character but also Beckett's approach to characterization. This approach had its roots in his lectures on "Racine and the Modern Novel" at TCD in 1931. In his lectures on Gide, Beckett advised his students to read Gide's essay *Dostoïevsky* (consisting mainly of a series of lectures presented at the Vieux-Colombier in Paris in 1922), and to "Apply remarks to [Gide] himself" because Gide would have written this essay "pour exprimer [s]es propres pensées" (Burrows, 19; see also Le Juez 2008, 33-48). Beckett must have read several passages from this essay to his students, because Rachel Burrows's notes contain numerous quotations. Almost all of them stress the complexity and integrity of incoherence of Dostoevsky's characters,<sup>6</sup> usually presented against the contrastive background of Balzac's works.

Of all of Balzac's works, Gide notes, *Louis Lambert* is undoubtedly the least accomplished.<sup>7</sup> As opposed to Balzac, Dostoevsky allows his characters to be incoherent, which Gide compares to Rembrandt's *clair-obscur*.<sup>8</sup> Beckett seems to have positioned himself against Joyce the way Gide positioned Dostoevsky against Balzac. As Andy Wimbush has shown,<sup>9</sup> Beckett presented both Balzac and Joyce as masters of their material: in *Dream*, Balzac is said to be the "absolute master of his material" (Beckett 1992, 119); after Beckett's "revelation," Joyce is presented as someone who went as far as one could go in the direction of "being in control of one's material" (qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 352), "a superb manipulator of material" – against whom Beckett positioned himself as a writer who is "not master of [his] material" (Shenker 2005, 162).

This may create the impression that, from Beckett's point of view, Joyce was on a par with Balzac, which seems an unfair analysis, given that Beckett kept admiring Joyce until the very end of his life, even paying homage to him by adding an allusion to the end of *Finnegans Wake* – "a way a lone a last a long the" (Joyce 1939, 628) – in "what is the word": "afaint afar away" (Beckett 2009a, 134). But Gide's contrastive analysis does seem to have provided Beckett with a strategy to position himself with regard to Joyce. And the notion of being master of one's material (or not) is a crucial element in his poetics. *Molloy* can be read as a demonstration or performance, rather than an explanation, of this aesthetic vision. What is explained in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* is enacted in *Molloy*.

In *Dream*, as John Bolin notes (2012, 151-152), the content of Beckett's lectures (especially the Gidean analysis of Dostoevsky v. Balzac) is concentrated as a mini-lecture:

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<sup>6</sup> Also the "tranquility" of Molloy's decomposition is presaged by what Gide calls Dostoevsky's "quietism": "c'est à une sorte de bouddhisme, de quiétisme du moins, que nous conduit Dostoïevsky" (226-227) – summarized as "Dost's quietism" by Rachel Burrows in her notes on Beckett's lectures (Burrows, 24).

<sup>7</sup> "De tous les livres de Balzac, *Louis Lambert* est sans doute le moins réussi; en tout cas, ce n'était qu'un monologue. Le prodige réalisé par Dostoïevsky, c'est que **chacun de ses personnages**, et il en a créé tout un peuple, **existe d'abord en fonction de lui-même**, et que chacun de ces êtres intimes, avec son secret particulier, se présente à nous dans toute sa **complexité problématique**" (Gide, 71; Burrows, 21; bold typeface in the quotation indicates the passages noted down by Burrows).

<sup>8</sup> "Ses principaux personnages restent toujours en formation, toujours **mal dégagés de l'ombre**. Je remarque en passant combien profondément il **diffère par là de Balzac** dont le **souci principal** semble être toujours **la parfaite conséquence du personnage**. Celui-ci dessine comme David; celui-là peint comme Rembrandt" (75; Burrows, 21).

<sup>9</sup> Andy Wimbush, "'Omnipotence and Omniscience': Beckett's Joyce vs. Beckett's Gide from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* to *Molloy*," paper presented at the conference "Beckett and Modernism", University of Antwerp, 27-30 April 2016.

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“The procédé that seems all falsity, that of Balzac, for example, and the divine Jane and many others, consists in dealing with the vicissitudes, or absence of vicissitudes, of character in this backwash, as though that were the whole story” (Beckett 1992, 119). This procedure is characterized as a “nervous recoil into composure,” “a backwash of composure,” “a kind of centripetal backwash that checks the rot” (119):

To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. [...] he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages<sup>10</sup> and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses.  
119-120

The question, however, is what is human about his *Comédie humaine*: “Why human comedy?” (120). In *Dream*, the character of Lucien is presented as “a stew of disruption and flux,” he *is said to be* “disintegrating” (116-117; emphasis added). The flaw of *Dream*, however, was not that it attacks Balzac's tendency towards explanation, but that it does so by using the same explanatory strategy. In his lectures, Beckett had said about the “darkness” and “unexplained mysticism” of Alissa in Gide's *La Porte étroite*: “If Balzac treated this he'd establish train of motives & explain it all” (Burrows, 27). As opposed to Balzac, there are “no explanations in Dost[oevsky]” (Burrows, 27). In *Molloy*, Beckett seems to have found a way to *apply* or *enact*, rather than *explain*, the Dostoevskian method. And this is also where the Balzacian and Joycean methods diverge. What Beckett admired in Joyce's work was the convergence of form and content: “his writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*” (Beckett 1983, 27; original emphasis). Later on, Beckett spoke of his poetics in terms of finding a form that “accommodates the mess” (Driver 2005, 219). One could argue about the nuances between the form *being* the content and the form *accommodating* the content, but the result is that the character of Molloy is not *said to be* disintegrating (like Lucien in *Dream*), but that he *is* disintegrating.

Almost all the characteristics mentioned in the statements quoted from Gide's *Dostoïevsky* during the TCD lectures are applicable to Molloy: the contradictions and inconsistencies;<sup>11</sup> the humility and complexity;<sup>12</sup> the self-abnegation.<sup>13</sup> But the analogy goes even further. Gide quotes Jacques Rivière, who distinguishes two types of characterization: either the novelist can insist on a character's complexity, or he can stress its coherence; either he shows all its obscurity<sup>14</sup> or he can suppress it; either he preserves and respects its caverns or he exposes them.<sup>15</sup> In his lectures, Beckett summarized this as follows: “You can either

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<sup>10</sup> As Andy Wimbush notes, the narrator's comment on Balzac's characters being “clockwork cabbages” (Beckett 1992, 119) echoes Rachel Burrows's note “B[alzac] considers humanity as so much vegetable inertia” (Burrows, 58; Wimbush 2015, 7).

<sup>11</sup> “Je ne connais pas d'écrivain plus **riche en contradictions et en inconséquences** que Dostoïevsky; Nietzsche dirait: '**en antagonismes**'.” (Gide, 83; Burrows, 23)

<sup>12</sup> “Cette **humilité** [...] le disposait à la soumission devant ce qu'il reconnaissait supérieur. Il s'est **incliné** profondément **devant le Christ**; et la première et la plus importante conséquence de cette soumission, de ce **renoncement**, fut [...] de préserver la **complexité** de sa nature.” (Gide, 116; Burrows, 23)

<sup>13</sup> “**C'est cette abnégation**, cette résignation de soi-même, **qui permet la cohabitation en l'âme de Dostoïevsky des sentiments les plus contraires**, qui préserva, qui sauva l'extraordinaire richesse d'antagonismes qui combattaient en lui.” (Gide, 117; Burrows, 23)

<sup>14</sup> A similar obscurity is alluded to in the “darkness I have always struggled to keep under,” as it is called in *Krapp's Last Tape* (Beckett 2009b, 9).

<sup>15</sup> “L'idée d'un personnage étant donnée dans son esprit, il y a, pour le romancier, deux manières bien différentes de la mettre en œuvre: ou il peut insister sur sa complexité, ou il peut souligner sa cohérence; dans cette âme qu'il va engendrer, ou bien il peut vouloir produire toute l'obscurité, ou bien



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respect a cavern or go about it with an electric torch as Stendhal & Balzac" (Burrows, 29), continuing by quoting Rivière's statement (as quoted by Gide) that Dostoevsky was mainly interested in the unfathomable depth of his characters' "abîmes": "Dostoïevsky s'intéresse avant tout à leurs abîmes et c'est à suggérer ceux-ci les plus insondables possible qu'il met tous ses soins" (qtd. in Gide 1923, 167; Burrows 29).

These "abîmes" or "gulfs" characterize Molloy, who enjoys the "spurious deeps" (Beckett 2009c, 18), whereas Moran presents himself as "a sensible man, cold as crystal and free from spurious depth" (Beckett 2009c, 117). Andy Wimbush therefore insightfully interprets the two-part structure of *Molloy* as a demonstration of the Dostoevsky/Balzac dichotomy: "In Balzac's novels, Beckett said, 'characters can't change their minds or artistic order crashes – must be consistent' [(Burrows, 41)]. Similarly, Moran declares: 'I [...] never changed my mind before my son', implying that he sees it as shameful or weak to do so [(Beckett 2009c, 107)]" (Wimbush 2015, 12). In the beginning of the novel's second part, Moran indeed seems to represent the Balzacian "nervous recoil into composure," "the centripetal backwash that checks the rot" (Beckett 1992, 119). His task is to "see about Molloy" (Beckett 2009c, 95), "restoring the novel to order" as Andy Wimbush notes (12).

But of course, even before his TCD lectures, Beckett already warned us for the danger in the neatness of identifications. When we read the Molloy/Moran opposition in terms of the Dostoevsky/Balzac dichotomy the question is whether Beckett had this dichotomy in mind as a programme for his novel and, if so, whether he is not guilty of the same kind of programmatic writing of which he accused Balzac.

According to the analysis in *Dream*, Balzac "can write the end of the book before he has finished the first paragraph" (Beckett 1992, 119-120), and that is indeed how Moran begins his journey: "how can you decide on the way of setting out if you do not first know where you are going" (Beckett 2009c, 102). The neatness of the identification would suggest a programme on Beckett's part. But that would contradict what Beckett told Charles Juliet: "Quand j'ai écrit la première phrase de *Molloy*, je ne savais pas où j'allais" (Juliet 1995, 19). It can never be excluded that there are notes that have not yet surfaced, but so far we have not found any evidence that contradicts Beckett's statement. The extant manuscripts suggest that the idea of introducing a second narrator in a second part developed *during* the writing process, as part of Beckett's "*écriture à processus*," rather than "*à programme*" (Hay 1984).

At numerous instances in *Molloy* Part I the narrative 'composure' is complicated (and to a certain extent de-composed) by means of additions (very often metacommentary that undermines Molloy's reliability as a narrator) between the manuscript and the first edition, which indicates that the idea of emphasizing Molloy's de-composition came at a relatively late stage in the writing process. The paragraphs in the manuscript gradually became longer and longer, until Beckett, in a subsequent version, decided to undo the paragraph breaks and turn the majority of Part I into a typographically monolithic mass of text, unstructured by paragraphs. While the novel's first part gradually becomes less 'paragraphed' in the manuscript, the contrast with the second part's regular compartmentalization in paragraphs indicates that the idea of creating a contrastive, two-part structure may have suggested itself during the writing process and was then developed by emphasizing the contrast, eventually eliminating the paragraph structure in Part I and adding numerous metafictional interjections that complicate Molloy's narrative. For instance, when Molloy receives a mug of tea from the social worker, he suddenly flings everything far from him. The first writing layer simply states that he threw it to the ground. In a subsequent revision campaign Beckett complicated

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il peut vouloir la supprimer pour le lecteur en la dépeignant; ou bien il réservera ses cavernes, ou bien il les exposera. (*Nouvelle Revue française*, 1er février 1922)" (qtd. in Gide 1923, 166-167). Gide comments on this passage as follows: "Vous voyez quelle est l'idée de Jacques Rivière: c'est que l'école française explore les cavernes, tandis que certains romanciers étrangers, comme Dostoïevsky en particulier, respectent et protègent leurs ténèbres." (167)

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the simple statement by adding more uncertainty (in an addition between the lines): '*ou contre le mur, je n'en sais rien*' (MS HRC SB 5-1, 59r; emphasis added). This type of complication that muddles the narrative is added regularly between the manuscript and the published version, for instance while, in the manuscript, Molloy simply says he is intelligent and quick – '*je suis intelligent et vif*' (FN1, 63r; emphasis added) – Beckett not only changed the present into a past tense, but he also translated this change of mind into a moment of hesitation: '*car je – j'étais intelligent et vif*' (1951, 35; emphasis added).

As soon as the dichotomy between Molloy's decomposition in tranquility versus Moran's composure was established, Beckett started undoing it again by introducing the gradual decomposition of Moran's composure. Towards the end of Part II, Moran's own decomposition is staged by means of several elements Beckett 'cogged' from an anonymously published book by Pierre Gustave Brunet, called *Curiosités théologiques*, which enumerates hundreds of the most bizarre theological theories and practices. Moran's initial, 'Balzacian' composure is questioned in the form of 16 unanswered questions (Beckett 1951, 258-9), based on Brunet's *Curiosités théologiques*,<sup>16</sup> until he starts reciting his "quietist Pater," also based on Brunet, which indicates that Moran eventually (and gradually) becomes less of a 'Balzacian' character, more in line with "Dost[oevsky]'s quietism" (Burrows, 24). Moran's initial composure and self-command is based on a rigid application of religious rules. By making Moran ask questions derived from a bibliographical work that ridicules the most extravagant excesses of religion, Beckett makes effective use of exogenetic material to infiltrate Moran's composure and expedite its decomposition. So, it seems fair to read the two parts of *Molloy* as an illustration of the Balzac/Dostoevsky dichotomy (Wimbush 2015), and as a de-composition of the Balzacian composure, but the manuscripts also provide us with indications that what, with hindsight, looks like a rather schematic programme – a programme to make an aesthetic statement about being non-programmatic – was apparently not the result of programmatic writing (*écriture à programme*) but of *écriture à processus*.

### **Consciousness Enactment**

This preliminary conclusion brings us back to the initial research question: how and to what extent can we reconstruct the cognitive process underlying this writing process if we only have the 'draff' of this process, the material traces such as manuscripts and marginalia? I think the beginning of an answer may be found in what Monika Fludernik has termed "experientiality" in her book *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (12) and what Marco Caracciolo has dubbed "consciousness-enactment" (122), because "Fludernik's definition seems to construe experientiality as a property of narrative rather than as something that 'happens' in the text-reader interaction" (47). Caracciolo's emphasis on the reader's role in his narrative theory of consciousness-attribution and consciousness-enactment builds on enactivism (one of the 4 Es of "4E" cognition) – which, as we have seen, has its roots in proto-enactivist theories of psychologists and philosophers such as E. B. Holt and Ryle. Caracciolo quotes the "radical enactivist" philosopher David Hutto to argue that "The only way to understand 'what-it-is-like' to have an experience is to actually undergo it or re-imagine undergoing it" (Hutto qtd. in Caracciolo, 98). This re-imagining "requires responding in a way that is enactive, on-line and embodied, or, alternatively, in a way that is re-enactive, off-line and imaginative – and still embodied. It involves undergoing and/or imagining experiences both of acting and of being acted upon" (99). Caracciolo immediately takes issue with a possible interpretation of Hutto's claim: this kind of imagination is "not necessarily re-enactive in the sense that it is forced to re-enact past experience" (99). In other words, one does not need to have experienced, say, Molloy's bicycle accident with the dog to be able to imagine what it must have felt like. So, the imagination necessary for this kind of enactment

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<sup>16</sup> For the full quotations of the relevant passages I retraced, linked to the respective questions, see *The Making of Samuel Beckett's Molloy* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

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consists in the “simulation of perception” and “depends on memories and knowledge structures that are part of our experiential background [...], but only insofar as it can use them as raw material for story-driven experiences that are, to some extent, unprecedented” (99).

As readers of fiction we are perfectly aware that a fictional character is not capable of being conscious. In a similar way as Coleridge's “willing suspension of disbelief,” readers willingly and actively attribute consciousness to a character. At the intersection between consciousness-attribution and story-driven experience, Caracciolo locates what he calls “consciousness-enactment,” that is, the way a reader not only attributes a consciousness to a character, but also empathetically experiences a character's consciousness (122-123).

Beckett's work is particularly apt to elicit this kind of enactment: as opposed to Balzac's explanatory approach, it stimulates its readers to experience the cognitive process of its characters by means of syntactic strategies. For instance, as early as 1962, Ruby Cohn noted that towards the end of *Watt*, the “continuous use of *non sequitur* conveys the final disintegration of Watt's mind” (67). A similar disintegration of the mind is what Molloy calls the “tranquility of decomposition” (see above). Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry<sup>17</sup> focuses on “composition” in an aesthetic sense. The ambiguity of Molloy's notion of “decomposition” can be read in terms of what H. Porter Abbott calls the “cognitive sublime” (2013, 35), which “involves the most extreme type of unknowability – the inability of the inquiring intelligence to account for its particularity as an inquiring intelligence” (23). In his examination of the “*experience of unknowing*” in literature (22; original emphasis), Abbott admires Beckett's ability to devise textual mechanisms (such as egregious gaps) through which the reader *experiences* not only the character's consciousness (40), but above all the unknowability of that consciousness, “by keeping his reader from premature closure, from settling on meaning when meaning can only be approached, not arrived at” (88). Beckett manages to make his readers feel this unknowability. Instead of explaining à la Balzac and slipping into “aboutness,” as Abbott calls it (154), Beckett disengages us from the attitude of “aboutness” by “techniques of total immersion” (154) – but only “if we permit” this, Abbott adds explicitly. Referring to Beckett's analysis of Joyce's “Work in Progress” as a writing that is “not *about* something” but that “*is that something itself*” (see above; Beckett 1983, 27), Abbott calls attention to the “immediate cognitive/affective states in readers that, *if their reading is done right*, complete that ‘something in itself’ that is served by the text” (92; emphasis added). Whether it is possible to determine if a reading is done “right” or “wrong” is another matter, but it is important to note that, again, Abbott stresses the engagement of the readers.

Beckett creates the condition for this kind of reading, which Feldman refers to as “writing phenomenologically” (14): “In aesthetic terms, in fact, Beckett may be writing in the ‘no-man's-land’ between subject and object, *writing the veil*, the experience of self-reflexive consciousness itself” (30; original emphasis). But what is often left unmentioned because it ‘goes without saying’ – whereas it is not that evident – is that this experience is a matter, not only of writing, but of both writing *and reading*.

The same applies to manuscripts, as will be argued in the next section.

### **The Author's Cognition Enacted**

If one accepts the hypothesis that the mind is not a substance but a relation between the organism and its environment – as suggested for instance in Richard Menary's “Writing as Thinking” (2007) – and if manuscripts can be regarded as traces of a cognitive process, it may

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<sup>17</sup> “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on” (Wordsworth, 744-745).



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be possible for genetic critics to enact the consciousness of the writer at work according to a similar mechanism as the consciousness enactment described by Marco Caracciolo, which requires a form of simulation.

At first sight, such a simulation may seem an almost impossible task, especially in the case of *Molloy*, since its writing process was so dependent on feelings, as Beckett told Gabriel d'Aubarède: "All I am is feeling. Molloy and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel" (2005, 215). But here it is good to recall Louis Hay's words about the approach of *critique génétique*: "elle vise les processus d'écriture dans la réalité de leur exécution, dans l'attestation d'une trace scripturaire" [it focuses on the writing process in the reality of its execution, in the witness of a written trace] (1994, 19). It may be impossible to relive "l'expérience intérieure de l'écrivain" [the writer's interior experience] (19), but as we have seen, according to the enactivist paradigm the cognitive process of a work's genesis is more than just an interior affair. It is an interaction between the writer and his environment, including his written traces. Similarly, genetic criticism involves an interaction between these written traces and the reader/researcher, and this interaction is a form of consciousness enactment. Evidently, there is a difference: whereas a fictional character is evoked by the content of the literary work and has no consciousness, the author of the autograph manuscripts is not fictional and does have a consciousness. He or she is aware of and responsive to his or her surroundings and acquires understanding through thought, experience, and interaction with the environment. The challenge in the case of genetic criticism is that this process of cognition underlying the writing process needs to be reconstructed after the fact. What the reader of manuscripts performs is a form of 'cognition enactment', an enactment (or re-enactment, with Caracciolo's disclaimer that it is not necessarily the reader's own experience, but in this case the writer's, that is re-enacted) of the author's cognitive process during the writing of his or her work.

For the writer, the composition process may be a "long confused emotion" (be it the Wordsworthian "overflow of powerful feelings" or "the things I feel" according to Beckett); for the genetic critic, it is "in the tranquility of decomposition" – the disassembling analysis of the writing traces – that it may be possible to partially reconstruct and (re)enact the cognitive process underlying the textual genesis.

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