



This is a repository copy of *Beckett, affect and the face*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/129514/>

Version: Submitted Version

Article:

Piette, A. (2011) *Beckett, affect and the face*. *Textual Practice*, 25 (2). PII 936566851. pp. 281-295. ISSN 0950-236X

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2011.552292>

Reuse

Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Adam Piette

Beckett, Affect and the Face

The production of affect in reading is riddled through with tiny inscrutabilities.

Identification with strong feeling as represented in literary texts is explicable as one of the modes of expression of basic human sympathy. But the ‘as if’ clause necessary to fictional sympathy demands a complex set of conditions: you must internalise the affect as if the strong feelings were really taking place to someone close to you. This act of identification with textual affect is accepted as fictional and mediated (because more often than not focalized through a ‘remembering’ narrator, complicating the idea of the present). Furthermore, the affects generated by the act of sympathetic reading are governed by conventions both literary and cultural, not least those involved in the structuring of the affective event into quasi-dramatic situations with their own logic, power relations and fluid potential for projection, role play, allegorisation, the inviting of quick and provisional adoption of rival points of view. The invitation to entertain the possibility of another’s feeling in literary texts depends, too, on assurances of common feeling across time, culture and space – as it does on an acceptance of the premise that literary texts are indeed read this way, as invitations to feel. The premise implies a host of subsidiary half-truths: that literary reading is a post-romantic practice designed to gain access to the emotions of strangers; that feelings can be communicated through words alone if mediated by a sympathising narrator; that reading is a performance of those mediated stranger-feelings in the manipulable heart of the reader-respondent. All these conditions are put to severe test by the venom and malice of Beckett’s metafiction. His

narrators deny their own powers of sympathy; aim to kill off all feeling; seek to destroy communicable affect through a purging of language's capacity to represent; lay bare the conventions controlling the eliciting of sympathy; desire to cripple all performances through an acid-bath dissolution of objects of desire, including all strangers, friends and foe.

The targetting of human sympathy is so remorseless in the prose and drama that readers are entitled to suspect there is more at work than deconstructive postmodern satire. Psychoanalytic interpretation in particular has fastened on the fictions as symptoms of Oedipal drives wreaking textual havoc, libidinal energies strangling maternal imago, mother tongues, all trace of renascent mother love. Beckett's psychoanalysis with Bion in the 1930s has generated a powerful wing in Beckett criticism and theory. Didier Anzieu's *Beckett et le psychanalyste* (Paris: Menthis, 1992) reads the prose works as textual defence systems against the maternal image, the fictions creating imaginary envelopes within which the ego dreams of recreating the common skin of mother and embryo only the better to tear it through. Evelyne Grossman and Yann Mével have been demonstrating, with compelling authority, the melancholia in the texts, the violence of the language a constant ripping away from the maternal.¹ Affect, according to these psychoanalytic readings, is generated textually by the constantly painful revisiting of the maternal-in-language as both impossible dream of reunion and murderous violence targetting the mother Chose. The self-lacerating, self-hobbling textual mannerisms are both symptoms of, and strategic assaults upon, the prehistoric (m)Other within the subject.

These readings rest on the assumption that the texts are theatres for the display of the symptoms of the melancholic struggle over representation of the imago in all its forms. As such, they seem to have narcissistic value only. The question then arises: what point is there to the display of symptoms beyond Beckett's own psychobiography? If there is no point, then the affects generated by the texts in readers, if affects there are, become side-effects only, fake creatures of naive forms of readerly identification. If the affective charge of the texts is acknowledged to be more central than that, then one must accept that Beckett's case study does have an abstract function as exemplary, moving beyond auto-analysis to exploration of the mind caught in the toils of libidinal forces within language – and is generalisable as such. But this move from the particular case to the general 'species' feeling is precisely what Beckett's texts are overtly designed to countermand with the full broken energy of their comedy. To work as emotional texts, then, Beckett's stories must have some hidden counterforce to the affect-denying ordinances of the severe comedic procedures and routines.

That counter-force stands and falls, I would argue, on the ground assumption that readerly sympathy as sentimental feeling with is capable of performing the affect triggered by half-conscious signals in the texts.² To perform an affect is to simulate the rhythmical surges and tensed knots of conflicted feeling that might accompany an acting-out of the words as touched or organised (even 'secretly') by the affect.³ With Beckett's words, that simulation would depend also on a readerly capacity to perform blockages to feeling within textual acts of affect-censorship as themselves also organized by some muffled and 'secret' affect (not 'deeper', but more cryptically diffused). In particular, the blocked affect will be enacted through simulation in the form of baffled mystery, as

estranging enigma – the secretiveness a direct consequence of the white noise produced by the narrator’s screening effacements of all feeling. How Beckett’s prose invites readers to perform affect-as-enigma is the research question this paper addresses.

In *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1982), Beckett stages a confrontation between the remembering, self-analytical ‘drivelling scribe’ and the mental traces of the maternal imago in the shape of an ‘old so dying woman’.⁴ She is figured as an Eve-Venus in her last throes, mourning for her dead partner, awaiting the end, subject to rapt nostalgia. She is seen in her cabin and pastures over sixty-one paragraphs (Beckett numbered each paragraph in the drafts) fitfully attended by twelve mysterious watchers/mourners/guardians.⁵ The scribal narrator cannot control her image sufficiently to put an end to his own fiction – as if she were a memory trace, or as if she were alive and present to the mind’s eye.⁶ The fiction takes as its subject, then, the problem of imaginary identification with the mother within. At the same time, the narrative drive is towards extinguishing the affects normally associated with the plangencies of the dying mother. The narrator wields several weapons against sentimental feeling: dark cynicism, sexualization, clinical diction, dismissive fictionalizing, destructive energy, overt Oedipal tricks. This panoply of tactics is broadly comic, and is ranged with gusto against the narrator’s own project. But just as the narrator finds it impossible not to imagine the woman as maternally present, so does he find his own hunger for destruction of the imaginary world he has conjured into being impossible to bring to conclusion. Or rather, both the imagining desire and the decreative drive are subject to a third force, a power of intermittence in the object that gainsays both. The old woman’s intermittence is a rhythm

set up not only by her appearances and disappearances, but also by the tendency, when she does appear, to alternate wandering and freezing in petrified attitudes.

In an early draft of the French original, *Mal vu mal dit*, Beckett had scrawled one of his permutation sets, in this case the permutations between O, P and I. As published by Charles Krantz in his variorum edition of both English and French texts, these are identified as ‘pleurs’, ‘oeil’ and ‘intermittences’.⁷ In other words, one of the games being played by the narrator is to break down into pseudo-scientific blocks the mechanics of elegy: that is, the relations between the mourning imagination (the eye), the ritual act of mourning (the tears), and the uncontrollable absence-presence of the lost object (the dead mother’s intermittent image). Beckett’s representation of her ‘Intermittences’ is based, clearly, on Proust’s ‘Intermittences du coeur’, the section of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* on the narrator’s mourning for his grandmother – which Beckett thought was ‘perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote’.⁸ As Angela Moorjani has argued, the act of mourning in the ‘Intermittences’ section reenacts the death of the lost one but within the subject – the dead loved one inhabits the psyche as an alien presence/absence, acting almost as an artificial unconscious, the memory traces encrypted (following Torok and Abraham) as a living dead presence.⁹ Moorjani sees Proust’s ‘Intermittences du coeur’ exemplifying Melanie Klein’s idea, in her *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, that the artist, like the mourner, repeats the experiences of grief by re-performing both the loss of self caused by the destructive (m)other, and the loss of the (m)other inflicted by the destructive self (Moorjani, ‘A Cryptanalysis’, p. 877). It is this complex of fantasy death and fragmentation that Klein understands as leading to the guilt towards the loved/hated object and the consequent desire to make reparation.

The narrator's mourning for his grandmother revisits the lost (m)other in just this way, reenacting the death in dream form to play out the guilty secret of the destructive dialectic. For he had unconsciously desired her death because of his love for her, and her (postmortem) love for him inhabits him as his own death within – taking on the form of an uncanny ghost in the next room. The imagination then encrypts this knowledge within the text of the novel in enigmatic form: Moorjani cites one of the two dreams of the dead grandmother, where the narrator's father talks of her tears beyond the grave. The dream ends with the cryptic words of the dream self: 'cerfs, cerfs, Francis Jammes, fourchette'.¹⁰ These words are cryptonyms, for Moorjani, hinting at the secret affect governing the dream, in this case parricidal and matricidal impulses: the 'cerfs' repetition an allusion to Flaubert's short story 'La Légende de St Julien l'Hospitalier' where the saint accidentally kills his parents whilst shooting deer thus fulfilling the stag's prophecy; 'Francis Jammes' because Jammes had begged Proust to excise the Montjouvain sadism scene in which Gilberte and her lesbian lover desecrate the memory of her father's memory.¹¹

The affect governing the nonsense is so censored and distorted, however, that it cannot be registered by the reader without this secret information. What is intuited is the enigma itself. Moorjani argues that the 'Intermittences du coeur' section is networked through the cryptonyms into relation with the Montjouvain episode and to Proust's early story about matricidal fantasy, 'Confessions d'une jeune fille'. But these allusions are only rendered available by arduous and disputable sleuthing, where decryption is likely to smother all affect. The elusive feeling of strangeness and bafflement that the narrator's dream words summon have affective power as mysteries. The surrealist sequence of

deer-deer-Jammes-fork comes after the father's reassurance about the grandmother's tears of joy that he will write a book. The comedy of the sequence informs the affective charge, therefore: his mourning is being scrambled by nonsense. The affect, for the reader, resides in the narrator's effort to tear himself away from the depth of feeling his grandmother's tears summon in him. That tearing away is half-comic because it is also a sign of the mental confusion experienced as he awakes, the nonsense a rambling as the logic of the dream loses its hold on the mind. It is only once that first set of affects has been registered by the reader – a combination of feelings of bafflement, compassion for the depth of feeling occasioning the tearing away, and amusement at the verbal confusion – only when these mixed feelings are registered fully that the decrypting is motivated. The move to the deeper suppressed matricidal affect only takes place once affect as such has been experienced. And it is the feeling of mystery that is most significant here – but only, I repeat, because it has been experienced as so richly charged with readerly compassion and amused fellow-feeling.

As an example of this, the third puzzle in the sequence, 'fourchette', Moorjani argues, is there because it summons the involuntary memory episode of the fork striking the plate in the hotel, summoning memories of the halt of the train and the sound of workers striking the rails. But it is as likely to be a distorted allusion to Forcheville, agent of jealousy in the novel for Swann (and therefore example of all phantom lovers of the loved one for the narrator). Swann remembers at one point in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* when he had tried to read one of Odette's letters to Forcheville through the envelope: 'But the memory was not a pleasant one, and rather than allow the shame which he felt to deepen any further, he preferred to indulge in a little grimace at the

corner of his mouth, complemented if need be by a shaking of his head which signified: “Why should it affect me?”¹² The instability and nonsensical chaos that the end of the narrator’s dream feels like with its ‘cerfs, cerfs, Francis Jammes, fourchette’ random series is a counterpart to Swann’s affect-avoidance. Swann’s grimace and shaking of the head denies affect but is a signal that the affect shame is operating and needs to be suppressed. Swann gives himself up to his face (‘préfèrait se livrer à’), thus surrenders to the surface of his skin, to the mobile features of his displayable ‘I’ as (un)feeling subject-for-others (‘Qu’est-ce que ça peut me faire?’) in order to perform the dismissal of the unpleasant memory and its affective charge of shame.¹³ But the performance is a mixed one: it aims to be light-hearted (to smile and shake the head in amusement), but performs the stinging affect (the shake of the head signifying a fearful no, protesting too much, the smile become a grimace of pain).

So the intermittence of the lost other, one could say, is partly a consequence of inward affect-avoidance. The cryptonyms that are the sign of the affect are, on the face of it, just as much superficial signs of the affect being denied. Intermittence, as Proust understood it, is the heart’s unbearable swing from joy at the presence of the lost loved one to sudden alienating sense of loss according to the fractures and repressions of memory – a systole and diastole which beats its way down to an ending and forgetting. But the intermittence lies just as surely in the rhythm between full affect and affect denial, and in the obscure lines of force that structure their interrelation. With Beckett, the narrator concentrates solely on intermittence as ungovernable appearance and disappearance of the affective source; the bare mechanics of the swing from full presence to sudden absence is being deployed to efface the affects. And just as Swann prefers to

put on a brave face to weather the suppressing of the affect of shame yet signals his secret shame by so doing, so Beckett's narrator in *Ill Seen Ill Said* desires to conquer all affect with his abstract metafictional view of the mechanics of elegy, yet displays affective symptoms at every move. Shame-facedly, it is the very act of witnessing the face of the other which most unnervingly displays this to the reader.

Ill Seen Ill Said proceeds as if by remorseless killing logic to seek out the immobilising of the subject in order to liquidate her material traces. In a parody of Proustian intermittence and its swing from memories of presence to recognition of the stillness of the dead loved one, the narrator's paragraphs detail the old woman's ordinary movements only the better to construct a petrifying resolution as her strength slowly dies away. The matricidal impulse, instead of being the hidden and encrypted secret as with Proust, is the overt norm. The intermittences which perform the absence-presence dialectic in Proust are the means whereby the sadistic affect is repressed. In Beckett, all is inverted: the sadistic impulse is the governing drive and is the means whereby affect as such is kept secret. The endgame in both Proust and Beckett is the same: the death of the subject as affective source. In Proust, intermittence itself becomes a routine and mechanical thing and the feeling of bereavement fades. In Beckett, we start with mechanical routine elegy: it is Proust's endgame which interests him.

In Beckett, the desired matricidal resolution occurs most hopefully when the old woman sleeps – he watches her face (parodying the narrator's gaze on Albertine's sleeping form) for signs of death at this time of high vulnerability to the killing gaze: 'Dead still on her back evening and night [...] Alone! Face defenceless evening and night' (*ISIS*, pp. 38-9). Her eyes closed, her face is without protection against the mind's eye.

Yet the desire to put an end to her, to see her ‘dead still’, fatally immobile, is crossed by the affect it denies: the desire to see her simply persisting, still dead but also quietly there asleep nevertheless. And the killing gaze itself betrays this in its desire for her eyes:

Quick the eyes. The moment they open. Suddenly they are there. Nothing having stirred. One is enough. One staring eye. Gaping pupil thinly nimbed with washen blue. No trace of humour. None any more. Unseeing. As if dazed by what seen behind the lids. The other plumbs its dark. Then opens in its turn. Dazed in its turn. (ISIS, p. 39)

The desire to see the eye is outwardly a vampiric hunger to see if the mind is alive, the seeing a yearning for no life. The narratorial urge is to describe the eye and therefore extinguish any visible affect, all trace of feeling, life as feeling. Happy that there is ‘[n]o trace of humour’, there is still life though in the old woman’s dazedness – her inner vision is sign of persistence. At the same time, the wishful thinking is shadowed by its repressed affect – the desire for the eyes is crossed by a desire for her life: ‘Quick the eyes’.¹⁴ The sign of intermittence, the suddenness of presence after absence (‘Suddenly they are there’), signals the resurgence of affect in the narrator, an eye-for-an-eye return upon the self. His eyes too are dazed by the mystery of what she might be feeling. He too is the ‘other’ who plumbs the dark of the pupil, core of all facial affects. He cannot see what she feels, is as unseeing as her inwardly stricken eye. Everything he says of her eyes signals his own denied affect: the ‘gaping’ feeling for her dark interiority is ‘nimbed’ over the face of his text. Intermittence here is less a sequential swing from absence to

presence, than an ingrown intertexture of difference within the same words: the difference lying at the same faultline between bereaved affect and empty heartlessness. Part of the reason of the crossing of her eyes with his in *Ill Seen Ill Said* is due to the uncanny fact that he is mourning someone whom he remembers in mourning. Tracking down signs of her affects will always signify his own in this doubled elegiac situation.

The narrator manages finally to isolate her within her cabin; she is unable to move outside, and he scents the final days. The triumph would be the witnessing of her death and the extinguishing of her world. Like the toxic camera of *Film* (1965), the eye zooms in on her face, display-board of human affect,¹⁵ hunting for signs of dying: ‘the face yet again in the light of the last rays. No loss of pallor. None of cold’ (*ISIS*, p. 48). But instead of the desired tragic close, a mysterious smile:

Impressive above all the corners imperceptibly upcurved. A smile? Is it possible?
 Ghost of an ancient smile smiled finally once and for all. Such ill seen half seen
 the mouth in the light of the last rays. Suddenly they leave her. Rather it leaves
 them. Off again to the dark. There to smile on. If smile is what it is. (*ISIS*, p. 49)

Intertextual ambiguity streaks through the prose: if the upcurve is imperceptible, how is the smile seen? The shock at her humour (gainsaying the previous paragraph) as sign of persistent lively mind – ‘A smile? Is it possible?’ – betrays its opposite, a gladness at her gladness. The syntactical confusion (the ‘they’ of the rays revised by the ‘it’ of light) points to an affective glitch, a turn upon the observing self, from the plural of the twelve watchers to the ‘it’ of his own eye. The glitch creates a tiny hesitation as to the anaphoric

reference of ‘Off again to the dark. There to smile on.’ The ‘it’ it could be that may be off to the dark to smile on – hinting at his secret joy that she smiles. What motivates the confusion, and generates the tiny semi-erased affects, is the Mona Lisa mystery of the smile. The face preserves the enigma of its interiority – is she smiling that the sun is at last leaving the world? Is she as glad as the eye that these may be the very last rays? Or is she smiling at some memory, triggered by the ritual return of the evening star? Does she smile at the vision of her own lost loved one – ‘Eyes closed does she see him?’ (ISIS, p. 42). Is she smiling at all, or merely performing enigma through withdrawal from readable affect? The affect here is the enigma.

Emmanuel Levinas, in an essay written for Alan Montefiore, meditated on the strangeness of the face as site of phenomenological affect. For Levinas, the face of the other in its ‘nudity, destitution, without defence [...] is for me at one and the same time a temptation to kill and the “thou shalt not kill” by which I am accused or suspected.’¹⁶ This double attitude summons the observer as ‘a concrete expression of mortality’ in that the face is so exposed to ‘the invisibility of death, to the mystery of death, to the never to be resolved alternative between Being and not Being’ (Levinas, ‘Beyond Intentionality’, p. 109). Yet it is not death which provides the face with its enigmatic force, but another alternative to the intermittence between being and non-being, an alternative ‘extending beyond the unknown’. That alternative demands a primordial response from the observer before subjectivity: ‘The face itself constitutes the fact that someone summons me and demands my presence’ (p. 109). It summons because of its very mystery, the enigma of otherness, ‘this ineffaceable strangeness of the other within my responsibility for [her]’.¹⁷ The strangeness of the summoning face lies in the fact that it ‘provokes my response or

my responsibility, which [...] would be for-the-other' (p. 111). Its enigmatic force, then, lies in its 'questioning which, ipso facto, summons me' (p. 113). And it is proximity (being face-to-face) that triggers questioning, the move beyond the being/non-being intermittence to a radical response to the call of human otherness.

Levinas' phenomenology can be made more concrete by giving a specific content to the face of the other. Jean Laplanche sees the source of all enigma in the inscrutability of the parental face, or rather the 'sexual messages that are unconscious for the adult and unmasterable by the child'.¹⁸ That originary enigma is compounded by the 'enigma in mourning: what does the dead person want?'¹⁹ The enigma in mourning is sourced in 'the otherness of the other; and the otherness of the other is [her] response to [her] unconscious, that is to say, to his otherness to [herself]' ('Time and the Other', p. 257). What the dead revenant wants is necessarily an act of reconstruction of some imagined past, the other's past, and the past of the observer and his own unconscious. Analysis of the enigmatic face of the other 'goes back along the threads of the "other"', for Laplanche, to

the other thing of our unconscious, the other person who has implanted [her] messages, with, as horizon, the other thing in the other person, that is, the unconscious of the other, which makes those messages enigmatic. ('Time and the Other', p. 258)

For Beckett, it is the *mother's* face which is source of all enigmatic otherness, due to the inscrutability of her (erotic) interiority for the child – inscrutable, as Laplanche argues,

because the mother is (and was) unconscious of her own unconscious. It is the mother's face, too, which is most powerfully enigmatic in mourning, the dying/dead face summoning a primordial response from the observer by means of her very strangeness, as Levinas shows. What fuses the two enigmas, the enigma of otherness with its enigmatic signifiers and the enigma of the face of mourning and its post-mortem questioning, is enigmatic otherness at radical endgame, the intertexture of the unconsciousnesses of both subject and object in elegiac proximity, face to face.

The narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said* gains access at last to the immobilized face after the Mona Lisa paragraph, in paragraphs 48 and 49. Paragraph 48 revisits the mouth and finds no change in the smile, even though the eyes are now closed. Paragraph 49, after a journey away of 'many winters', again finds the smile unchanged, but still believes, on no evidence, that his absence from her has changed his own eye and scribe. In other words, if her face remains unchanged, there is hope of a change in the simple compositional fact that his own writerly apparatus is aging. So he resolves to set up a new form of controlled intermittence, a sequence of visits and absences which may bring about the end, 'to finish with it all at last' (ISIS, p. 51). Yet the very voicing of the need to depart triggers the affect being stage-managed: 'But first see her again. [...] Just one parting look. Before all meet again. Then go. Barring impediment. Ah' (ISIS, p. 51). The trace of Victorian sentimental ballad and Burns may be corrosively sarcastic, but the 'Ah' of recognition of her power to impede his own intermittence-machine speaks with the voice of enigma. As if to challenge and defy his intermittence scheme, in the next paragraph she is gone – 'But see she suddenly no longer there' (ISIS, p. 52). Whilst she is

away, he attempts to imagine her cabin to extinction: '[w]ell on the way to inexistence' (ISIS, pp. 54).

At last in paragraphs 55-59, she is there, her face immobile, stony, near death. The apotheosis of the decreative drive is near conclusion, she is at last on her death's bed: 'Alone the face remains. Of the rest beneath its covering no trace' (ISIS, p. 55). The old woman hears a sudden sound, which seems to startle her, 'the gaze the mind awake'. The observing eye closes in: 'Far behind the eye the event recedes. When suddenly to the rescue it comes again.' What the eye is seeking far behind her eye, the quest, is for the organizing affect 'behind' her face, deep in the darkness of the pupil.²⁰ He wants to know what the dead woman wants. So though the memory of her dying face is being revisited with an anti-elegiac spirit of enquiry, the quest is still to seek out the dark 'other thing' of her unconscious affect. The sound of something collapsing in her house triggers the affect-response that ought to be traceable in her face, in the depths of her eye:

far from the still agonizing eye a gleam of hope. By the grace of these modest beginnings. Within second sight the shack in ruins. To scrute together with the inscrutable face. All curiosity spent. (ISIS, p. 55)

Deep behind her eye he intuits the affect of hope at the inner vision of her own house in ruins. And yet ambiguity unpicks the confidence of this reading of her: it is his own eye which hopes for the vision, the 'second sight' his own point of view, confused by the doubled elegiac situation. Like the coinherence of a reader's affect with the performative display of affect in a text, the heart of the scribe is twinned to the affects imagined in the

face of its (m)other with quasi-illocutionary force. The performative fusion of the two unconscious affects, hers with his, constructed through the hopeful ‘together’, is belied, however, by the contradiction in the phrase as a whole: ‘[t]o scrute together with the inscrutable face’. His scrutiny is scripting the face with affect it cannot read into the face. What is being performed by the eye subject to the face under its gaze is not a perceived affect but unreadability of affect – inscrutability, not clear affect-signals.²¹

What the scribe reveals here is the lineaments of both his desire to destroy (‘the shack in ruins’) and the desire for the (m)other’s enigmatic otherness, the ‘event’ conjured by his questioning ‘quest’.²² The radical fusion of the observing eye and the old woman’s ‘[u]nspeakable globe’ (ISIS, p. 57) that occurs at this pitch may mean that what is collapsing is the difference between them. The returning eye may even be hers, a postmortem return to the final days. Or again, the difference between the destructive eye and her dying inscrutable face may be so radical as to represent the unspeakable difference between self and other, between self and unconscious. The intermittence she displays, her suddenness, expresses the unpredictable shifts and swings brought on by bearing those two inscrutable contradictions in mind.

And yet, as with Levinas’ move beyond the dialectical machine of intermittence, a third alternative exists, of her summoning him to respond, beyond the premises structuring his anti-elegiac routines. And as Laplanche argues, it is the enigmatic messages of the mother within collapsed into the enigma of mourning which is being performed on the display-board of the face. It is not affect which is being performed, however, but the inscrutable, unspeakable otherness far behind the eye, and yet mysteriously there on her surfaces, in and on her face, in the proximity of close-up, face-

to-face. And it is that inscrutability which, paradoxically, is no longer a sign of the blocked affect which is so fitfully moving in the narrator's own contradictions and intertextures. It signals, or performs, the source of all affect – the face that attends, closely, to the face of the other. Her inscrutability is what, in the end, he cannot say farewell to. The echoes of her face organize his speech, unconsciously, ineluctably, unspeakably:

And what if the eye could not? No more tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what was never. Quick say it suddenly can and farewell say say farewell. If only to the face. Of her tenacious trace. (ISIS, pp. 58-59)

The face, because so destitute and defenceless, begins to demand human response, to generate, because of its inscrutable enigmatic force, performances of affect in the observer, as if it were the mother of all faces. Her trace is tenacious in the textures of his voicing of the tearing away, the obsessive return of the rhymes miming the obsessive return to her face. To write 'farewell say say farewell' is less a chiasmus than a broken, affect-driven imperative which gives the lie to its own decreative drive. The scribe is being forced by the face and its tenacious trace – through its inscrutability and the ethical responses these spark into being²³ – to perform being summoned. The mother's face to the mourning imagination is the site of the extraordinary fusion, not of two unconsciousnesses, but of the mother's enigma as unconscious source of affect and the observer's deep feeling as radical self-questioning shame and unspeakable bereavement.

What Beckett's late elegiac prose demonstrates is that the affects the face performs do have textual form in the relations between the compositional 'I'-voice and the subject of the quest for the 'other thing' in the other. Those relations take place in the prose more forcefully in remembered and fictional form than in real present-time face-to-face encounters – because bereavement is at once a conjuring of the dead face and a revisiting of the traces of affect still being generated by the encounter with the face as enigma-in-proximity. Affect performance is defined by such conjuring acts. The retrieval of forgotten affect through visionary encounter with the face is offered to the reader as textual trace – and acts as a performative of sorts, having the reader perform the affects generated by the same inscrutable face. The fictionalizing and the remembering lay bare the fusional and differential intertexture of the narrator/reader's imagination with the affects generated by the summoning face. To grieve for the mother's face is a plumbing of two darks, the dark of the observer's own unconscious cloven into matricidal and loving affects, and the dark of the zone far behind her eye yet there in and on the face; the space of the (m)other enigma, source of all performances of narrational and readerly affects, yet in itself unspeakable, tenacious, inscrutable.

¹ Evelyne Grossman, 'Beckett et la passion mélancolique: Une lecture de *Comment c'est*', in Engelberts, Houppermans, Mével & Touret, *L'Affect dans l'oeuvre Beckettienne* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) (*Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*), pp. 39-52 and Yann Mével, *L'Imaginaire mélancolique de Samuel Beckett*, de Murphy à *Comment c'est* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

² Sophie Ratcliffe, in her fine book *On Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), argues that Beckett's texts 'ask us to reimagine the possibilities and the ambiguities of how we identify with others; to recognize the contempt, as well as the compassion, that these acts may involve' (p. 223).

³ This performance of affect is dependent on a process of imaginary audition, as defined by Harry Berger, an interlocutory process whereby the reader/spectator of a literary text will be called upon to adopt not

only the role of listener to any text through the dramatic cues embedded in the textual situation, but also to act out the speaker's own internal audience, the imaginary audition performing the affective role implied in the inward drama of any speech-act. Cf. Harry Berger, *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) and W.B. Worthen's critique of Berger's interlocutionary theory in *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 175-9. Worthen argues that Berger's imaginary audition is an 'armchair reading of speech as interlocution' which 'oddly removes speaking from the theatrical practices that contextualize it as activity, as production' (p. 178). That odd removal is precisely what *Ill Seen Ill Said* aims to reflect upon. Affects are performed nevertheless.

⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (London: John Calder, 1982), p. 51, p. 20. ISIS in future page references.

⁵ The drafts of both the French original and English translation have been published in synoptic variorum form by Charles Krance, *Samuel Beckett's Mal vu mal dit / Ill Seen Ill Said: A Bilingual, Evolutionary, and Synoptic Variorum Edition* (New York: Garland, 1996).

⁶ The 'as if' clause is operative within the narrative: 'as had she the misfortune to be still of this world' (ISIS, p. 8). But what she cannot sufficiently be is absolutely fictional: 'If only she could be pure figment', laments the narrator (ISIS, p. 20). This relates to Derek Attridge's argument as to the 'as if'-performativity of language's powers involved in any true literary artwork developed in this volume.

⁷ These permutations were set out in outline notes to paragraph 12 in the Reading manuscript for *Mal vu mal dit* ms 2203, transcribed by Charles Krance, *Samuel Beckett's Mal vu mal dit / Ill Seen Ill Said*, p. 157.

⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (1931) (New York: Grove-Evergreen, 1957), p. 25. 'Les intermittences du coeur' can be found in vol. III of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89), pp. 148-178. There is a further section, 'Les intermittences du coeur II', which concerns the break-up of his relationship with Albertine and consequent fits of grief and jealousy (III, pp. 497-515).

⁹ Angela Moorjani, 'A Cryptanalysis of Proust's "Intermittences du coeur"', *MLN* 105.4 (1990), 875-88, (pp. 875-77).

¹⁰ Moorjani, 'A Cryptanalysis', pp. 883-88. The episode occurs in *Sodome et Gomorrhe II* (vol. III, pp. 157-9).

¹¹ Angela Moorjani, 'A Cryptanalysis', p. 884. Moorjani follows Liliane Fearn's analysis of the dream in 'Sur un rêve de Marcel' for the Saint Julien reference. Liliane Fearn, 'Sur un rêve de Marcel', *Bulletin de la Société des amis de Marcel Proust* 17 (1967), pp. 540-47..

¹² Marcel Proust, from *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*; my translation: 'Mais ce souvenir ne lui était pas agréable et plutôt que d'approfondir la honte qu'il ressentait, il préférerait se livrer à une petite grimace du coin de la bouche complétée au besoin d'un hochement de tête qui signifiait: "Qu'est-ce que ça peut me faire?"' (*A la Recherche du temps perdu*, vol. I, p. 514)

¹³ The relationship between face and shame is partly due to what Bernard Williams describes as shame's 'notorious association with the notion of losing or saving face [...] I lose face or save it only in the face of others'. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 77-8.

Williams goes on to argue that shame is as importantly an internal recognition of failure to live up to an ideal ethical standard and need not have an audience in mind. This private form of shame is what is operative in both Proust's and Beckett's instances of affect-avoidance.

¹⁴ 'the longed-for eyes' (ISIS, p. 25).

¹⁵ The phrase is Donald Nathanson's ('affects are expressed on the display board of the face') in his 2000 paper 'The Name of the Game is Shame', available at:

<http://tomkins.org/PDF/library/articles/thenameofthegameisshame.pdf>. Nathanson is a disciple of Silvan Tomkins and is executive director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute. Tomkins's Affect Theory argues that affects are hard-wired into the human brain, with specific and invariable facial signals for nine basic families of response.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Beyond Intentionality', in *Philosophy in France Today*, edited by Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 100-115 (p. 109).

¹⁷ I have shamelessly 'translated' the masculine pronoun for the face under observation in Levinas and later for Laplanche into the feminine to emphasise the maternal.

¹⁸ Jean Laplanche, 'The Drive and its Source-Object', *Essays on Otherness*, ed. and trans. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), 117-132 (p. 129).

¹⁹ Jean Laplanche, 'Time and the Other', *Essays on Otherness*, 234-59 (p. 255).

²⁰ The inscrutability and the inwardness of the gaze – the old woman's face and eyes owe a great deal to Keats' *Moneta*: 'I saw the face / But for the eyes I should have fled away. / They held me back, with a benignant light, / Soft mitigated by divinest lids / Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem'd / Of all external things; – they saw me not, / But in blank splendour, beam'd like the moon, / Who comforts those she sees not'. Keats, 'The Fall of Hyperion', *The Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), pp. 443-57 (p. 450). The identification of the old woman with the moon ('the other marvel' (ISIS, p. 9)) and the fact her face is described in the draft outline notes as serene, glacial and queenly ('expression de reine', 'sereine', 'de glace', Krantz, *Samuel Beckett's Mal vu mal dit / Ill Seen Ill Said*, pp. 147-8) would support this. The queenly expression may also be a glancing reference to the death of Elizabeth I, who stood or sat for hours, resisting death. The odd details in *Ill Seen Ill Said* such as the lack of a ring finger and moments of shock when the old woman seems to see a ghost may issue from tales of the Queen's death – Elizabeth was said to have sawed off her coronation ring, embedded in the flesh of her finger. The French ambassador, according to Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson, 'refused to stay in bed during her last days but met her end fully dressed, silently staring at the the floor with one finger in her mouth'. A lady-in-waiting, Lady Southwell reported that the dying Queen 'was frightened by the vision of a spectral figure of herself in a dream'. Michael Dobson & Nicola Watson, *England's Elizabeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 14-15.

²¹ 'It is misleading', Wittgenstein argues when thinking about cases of uncertainty in guessing someone else's mental processes, 'to think of the real [affect] as a facial expression of an inner face, so to speak, such that this facial expression is defined completely clearly, and that it is only the outer face that makes it

uncertain whether the soul really has this expression'. Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. II 'The Inner and the Outer 1949-1951' (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 70.

²² Derek Attridge's essay in this volume argues that complex writing which challenges a reader's sympathy, as with the work of Cormac MacCarthy, functions by staging the body's vulnerability to violence (as the mother figure is vulnerable to the narrative gaze) as a form of otherness to 'derealisation of the perpetual goings-on inside our skins'.

²³ They are ethical because all ethics begins with the summons to responsibility (and the performance of affective responses) occasioned by the 'ethical proximity' of the face of the other (Levinas, 'Beyond Intentionality', p.109). That summons may very well be performing what Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes, in this volume, as the 'counter-interpellation' involved in the ironic stance: the maternal face is the counter-interpellative onlooker within as unconscious language event.