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NABEUL … TAROUDANT . EL JADIDA . . TANGIER

Beckett in the postcolonies

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Beckett, Samuel

Irish colonial history

the Maghreb

the postcolony

Tangier

tourism

Beckett's knowledge of the history of imperialism has left abundant traces. Irish colonial history in particular provides a fertile ground for allusions and residual echoes in many of his texts, and this facet of his writing has received close attention. His alertness to the history of colonial conquest, exploitation and oppression is evident on the peripheries of his bilingual oeuvre too – notably, in his translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro anthology and Octavio Paz's Anthology of Mexican Poetry, and in minute alterations to some of his manuscripts revealing a careful reflection on the historical and political weight of words. Charting Beckett's exposure and responses to the history of decolonization in its French and francophone contexts, however, has proved more challenging, owing to the difficulties posed by the work's multiple cultural and linguistic positionalities, which are often treated as matters of secondary importance. This essay attempts to destabilize and expand the coordinates commonly used when thinking about Beckett as a postcolonial writer, by considering his relation to the postcolony through the prism of his long stays in the Maghreb between 1969 and the early 1980s. Retracing Beckett's steps in Tunisia and Morocco, I delineate postcolonial and neocolonial imaginaries around Beckett's creative process that are more challenging and uncomfortable

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than the evidence previously scrutinized elsewhere, and I pay particular attention to the awkward sense of colonial presence underlying marginal texts such as his Tangier mirlitonnades. The extended periods Beckett spent in Tangier proved immensely generative for him; here, I examine his relation to Tangier in light of the city's colonial history as an International Zone and a much-fetishized haven for expatriate Anglo-American writers, offering a portrait of Beckett that conveys his simultaneous involvement and non-involvement with his surroundings.

To Saafa Fathy ([1999] 2008), Jacques Derrida once portrayed himself as "a kind of colonial product, or a postcolonial product if you like". "[W]hatever I say or whatever happens to me, I belong to a certain history of the French colonies. As such, in this way, everything I do, write or try to think has a certain affinity of synchrony with postcoloniality", he affirmed. We will never find such confessions in what Samuel Beckett said or wrote; his attachments to postcoloniality seem less life-shattering, less visceral, more symbolic than Derrida's. Much has been written about the density of allusion to Irish colonial history in Beckett's English-language prose and drama, and their reliance on idiosyncratic forms of critique, satire and dismissal; Patrick Bixby, notably, has amply demonstrated the rewards to be reaped from situating Beckett's novels prior to *The Unnamable* in a specifically Irish postcolonial context (see Bixby 2009). Other types of texts tied to different writing processes – manuscript drafts, discarded ideas, self-translations conducted alone, collaborative translations, commissioned translations – are just as intimate with the history of colonialism and show how Beckett harnessed his interest in Irish history to reflect on the impact of imperialist doctrines far beyond Ireland. Overall, the elements of his oeuvre that entertain the most stern, genuinely probing relation to histories of Empire tend to belong to the peripheries: they include, as I have discussed elsewhere, his translations for Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology from the early 1930s and Octavio Paz's *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* from the early 1950s; discarded fragments in French from the time of the Indochina War dealing with fantasies of colonial conquest, semi-military settlements and torture; minute alterations registering the political weight of words scattered in occasional manuscript drafts, of *Fin de Partie* and *Comment C'est* notably. The contexts of these developments are neither firm nor affirming, however, and the dominating coordinate remains an all-encompassing metropolitan whiteness. Beckett's ties to the anticolonial cultures formed in Paris, for example, are tenuous: there is little beyond his closeness to Jérôme Lindon (renowned for his dedication to documenting the Algerian War of Independence, and

for publishing periodicals such as *Revue d'études palestiniennes*) and his long-term acquaintance with Maurice Nadeau (one of a few French publishers to promote Algerian and Moroccan writers and novels about decolonization, at the Editions Denoël). Even "Murderous Humanitarianism", Beckett's celebrated translation of an anticolonial Surrealist tract, is ambiguous: aspects of Beckett's translation seem forced and tongue-in-cheek, and the original document is both a fierce indictment of colonialism and a self-celebration of political acumen that defers to an earlier manifesto against the Moroccan Rif War, oblique in its diagnosis (*L'Humanité*, 21 September 1925).

It is never easy to define Beckett's position: he inhabited awkwardly crisscrossing political worlds, as an upper-middle-class Irish Protestant whose relations to Irish nationalism fluctuated greatly, as an exile born in a British colony who settled in Paris, the centre of a rival colonial empire, and as a French-language writer fond of holidays in the prime tourist sites of Tunisia and Morocco – some of which, Tangier notably, bore the impact of colonialism's long history more visibly than anywhere else Beckett knew. The work's variegated forms and lives pose intractable difficulties: all too often, thinking about its relation to coloniality can mean privileging its Irishness and relinquishing reflection about its Frenchness; all too often, thinking about its relation to broader anticolonial and postcolonial literatures can mean relinquishing a reflection on its positionality and the great social privileges that shaped its genesis. Yet Derrida's observation is relevant to Beckett's own affinities with postcoloniality, no matter how odd or dissonant their synchrony. On a larger scale, Derrida's self-portrait offers piercing insights into a francophone intellectual climate that Beckett also inhabited, in which creativity and the course of thought were widely seen as disconnected from the long agonies and rebirths of imperialism. What happens when we think of Beckett, too, as the product of a certain kind of colonial and postcolonial history?

The answer to this question, if we take into account the multilingualism of the writer and of the work, and their long life spans, is neither happy nor conclusive, and the process of labouring towards an answer can yield insights that are more messy, more unwieldy, than Beckett enthusiasts of postcolonial, anticolonial or decolonial persuasions would probably hope for. In Beckett Studies, in the wake of Bixby's landmark study, the engagement with the work's postcolonial dimensions has been underpinned by a focus on narrative form and the politics of form. This essay takes a different approach and attempts to account for what happens when the outcome of the writing process is uncertain, the form more in flux than usual, the context multifarious and racially fraught. I seek to build an alternative repository of insights, and expand the coordinates commonly used when thinking about Beckett as a postcolonial writer by embracing a form of biographical

documentation attuned to a different complexity of circumstance. The parameters are contained: I focus on Beckett's long holidays in Tunisia and Morocco between 1969 and 1981, moments in his life that have remained under-documented thus far, and I show how retracing Beckett's steps in Nabeul, Taroudant, El Jadida and Tangier –where composite imperial-colonial identities could coexist semi-comfortably and in full daylight – sheds a different light on the work's historical attachments and the workings of Beckett's creative imagination. There are no political epiphanies to be found here; none of the moral righteousness, critical verbosity and gradual intellectual and political emancipation that discussions of Beckett's relation to postcoloniality in an Irish frame have rightly brought to the fore. In the tourist sites of former French colonies, old privileges tied to race, as well as class and gender, made themselves felt strongly and openly, and Beckett was no exception to the rule.

In Beckett Studies, these holidays are portrayed as suspended periods of little or no interest, and there is a tacit agreement that the places which matter in Beckett's creative geography, where the serious work was done in his later career, are Paris and Ussy-sur-Marne – and Berlin and Stuttgart, to a lesser extent. Tangier – a pre-eminent colonial experiment in the *longue durée* – and Morocco at large are evoked in passing, as nondescript settings where Beckett spent pleasant moments with his wife Suzanne. Beckett's letters encourage such assumptions, evoking a life of "fainéant et pensenéant" (do-nothing and think-nothing) spent between hotel and beach (Craig et al. 2016, 282). "Can hardly believe ever put 2 words together", he commented in 1975, during an idyllic summer in Tangier (Craig et al. 2016, 402). The reality, as always, was different, and the periods spent in Tangier in particular proved immensely generative for Beckett as a poet, playwright and translator. The city, with its multilingualism and omnipresent colonial past, enabled him to recreate the relation of alienation from French that he consistently craved: "French feels rusty. Perhaps time to try with it again", he wrote in 1979 from Tangier, while wrestling with *Compagnie* (Craig et al. 2016, 510).

The archives and recent chronologies reveal that the Becketts spent considerable amounts of time in the Maghreb (see Craig et al. 2016; TCD MS 10948/1). They travelled to Tunisia once, in 1969: they had a brief stay in Hammamet, then a holiday in Nabeul (6 October–13 December). Fifteen trips to Morocco followed, between 1972 and 1981. Their first destinations were Taroudant and El Jadida (3 February–13 March 1972). They went back to El Jadida in spring 1973 (9 March–10 April); that autumn, they travelled to Marrakech and El Jadida, then discovered Tangier (10 September–17 October 1973). Tangier's geographical position – on the Strait of Gibraltar, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean – clearly appealed to them: from 1974 to 1980, they went on holidays to Tangier exclusively. The dates convey durations clearly: 26 March–20 April 1974; early

September–5 October 1974; 11 June–23 July 1975; 3 September 1975–early October 1975; 1 January–7 February 1976; 18 April–9 May 1977; 25 July–25 August 1977; 8 February–6 March 1978; 5/6 August–3 September 1978; 8 December 1978–2 January 1979; c. 5 August–9 September 1979; 27 September–1 November 1981. In 1982, they took their last holiday abroad, in Courmayeur, an Italian resort at the foot of Mont Blanc, and another favourite destination. In biographies of Beckett, a haze surrounds their trips to Morocco; James Knowlson portrays these holidays as the solution to Suzanne's chronic winter bronchitis and Beckett's lumbago (1996, 586–587), and Anthony Cronin as moments when they restored their relationship and Beckett made amends (1996, 550). Deirdre Bair presents Tangier and Morocco as different entities (as they were when Tangier was an International Zone prior to Morocco's independence, and prior to its full absorption into Morocco in 1960) and asserts that Suzanne's sister lived in Algeria at the time of the Algerian War (she lived in Tunisia) (1978, 631, 543).

Writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun and Lamia Berrada-Berca have sought to redress this vision, in texts that speculate on Beckett's thoughts and whereabouts in Tangier and navigate a difficult territory between semibiography and complete fiction (see Ben Jelloun 2010a; Berrada-Berca 2018). Within Tangier itself, Beckett's presence is recorded through the buildings dedicated to him: the Salle Samuel Beckett, a theatre owned by Tangier's French Institute, and the Ecole Samuel Beckett, a private francophone school in Bella Vista, a notably affluent area issued from the colonial period. Many tourist guides have portrayed Beckett as a regular at the Librairie des Colonnes, a Tangier institution on Boulevard Pasteur (now Mohammed V), and he is evoked as a fixture of Tangier's beaches and European quarter elsewhere, in letters and recollections by local and holidaying writers. In 1974, Mohamed Choukri explained to Jean Genet, also a Tangier regular, that Beckett was "constantly" in Tangier (1992, 87). "Here people come and go, including Beckett and Genet as usual", Paul Bowles wrote to Brion Gysin in September 1978 (Miller 1994, 484). The folklore can be peculiar: in a diary entry dated, or probably misdated, 18 January 1978 (three weeks before Beckett's arrival), the travel writer John Hopkins recorded that his wife Ellen-Ann had spotted someone in the French restaurant La Grenouille who looked uncannily like Beckett. The man in question promptly puts an end to her speculations ("Mais non, madame. Je ne suis pas Samuel Beckett"). That cannot be right, she says: "Who else has a face like that?" And Hopkins concludes: "His brother, I'm told, owns a garage in Tangier" (1997, 228). What a canny way of escaping curiosity, if this was indeed Beckett. Something unites all these portraits: the ease with which Beckett's angular silhouette seemingly appears out of nowhere, only to disappear again.

The materials chronicling Beckett and Suzanne's holidays in Tunisia and Morocco are uncharacteristically abundant. Two silent "interviews" – the only television footage Beckett consented to – were shot at Hotel Riadh in Nabeul in late 1969, presumably to accompany reports of his Nobel award on Swedish television and on French and Italian television. The Sveriges Television footage, interspersed with views of Nabeul's beach and the hotel's garden, features Beckett standing on his hotel balcony and allowing himself a brief look at the camera (Svenska Akademien [1969] 2021). In the other film shot jointly by the ORTF and the RAI, Beckett is sitting still in the hotel lobby, looking away (INA 1969). He proved slightly more responsive to advances from the local press: he reminded the reporter sent by *La Presse de Tunisie* that he had no intention to speak to journalists but conceded, "Je réfléchis" (I am thinking about it) (*La Presse de Tunisie*, 26 October 1969). The newspaper published what is surely the fullest portrait of Beckett at the time of his Nobel award, describing his habits in minute detail, including the content of his bag (notebook, pen, glasses) and the rhythm of his days (breakfast at the beach café, then walks all day, before returning to the hotel in the evening to a hot bath and voluminous mail). There are also striking photographs of the Becketts in Tangier in 1978, taken by François-Marie Banier (see Banier 2009) – who confessed to becoming so obsessed with Beckett that summer that he looked for him all day long and followed him around whenever he could (Rondeau [1987] 2000). Banier's portrait of Beckett walking on Tangier's Plage Municipale, following a trajectory parallel to that of a Moroccan boy playing with a football, has become an iconic photograph. Other shots show Beckett and Suzanne strolling down Avenue d'Espagne (today Avenue Mohammed VI), a large avenue lined with palm trees that runs from the port along the beaches. They seem close and complicit; they walk at the same pace; they look tanned, slim, healthy.

The former French colonies were initially Suzanne's territory, not Beckett's. In correspondence with me, Michèle Tholozan/Warluzel, Suzanne's great-niece, has shed light on facets of Suzanne's life that are important for understanding the Becketts' relation to the Maghreb. Contrary to what is widely thought, Suzanne did not spend some of her youth in Tunis, but the whole of her childhood and youth. The Déchevaux-Dumesnils moved from Argenteuil to Tunis in 1902; Suzanne was two years old and her sister Andrée five years old. Tunisia offered the kind of drier, warmer climate that their father Paul badly needed for his health. Paul – who worked as *agent de fabrique* (sales representative) in Tunis – passed away in 1921, at 53, of an illness thought to have been tuberculosis. Before his death in Tunis, in 1918 or 1919, Suzanne returned to France alone, to study at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. Andrée stayed. She earned teaching qualifications and held teaching posts in schools across Tunisia; her trajectory is

carefully detailed in the genealogical research compiled by Jean-Pierre Tholozan on Geneanet. Andrée lost her French citizenship when she married a Tunis-born Italian citizen, then regained it when he was naturalized in 1923 (Geneanet), at the same time as large numbers of Spanish and Italian nationals living in Tunisia. After her divorce, she worked in a school in Zarzis, in the south, and learned Arabic. She returned to France in 1957, the year after Tunisian independence was proclaimed – a time when the mass arrival of French settlers from Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt in metropolitan France posed serious logistical concerns for the French government (*Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 1 March 1957). Shreds of evidence suggest that Andrée was supportive of, and interested in, Beckett's writing and the *nouveau roman*: in 1958, Beckett had the Editions de Minuit send books to Andrée in France and to one of her close friends in Tunis (Fonds Beckett). Suzanne, it seems, thought of Tunis often, particularly during World War II: in October 1942, she wrote to Andrée from Roussillon, asking her to find out whether it would be feasible to move with Beckett to Tunis. The plan did not materialize: a month later, the Nazis invaded Tunisia, then ruled by the Vichy government, and took control of the Vichy "free zone" in France. In any case, the memory of her father's premature death may have made the prospect of a return daunting for Suzanne: the fact that the Becketts only briefly travelled through Tunis in 1969 and generally avoided places familiar to Suzanne from her youth suggests as much. In the sunsets and landscapes of Morocco, she later saw echoes of happy memories that seemingly sufficed for her (see Knowlson 1996, 589). In any case, the idea of a holiday in Tunisia may have originated from Lindon, who had heard Alain Robbe-Grillet praise the weather (Fonds Beckett). If we want to speculate, we could say that Beckett, who took his last trip to Ireland in 1959, and had spent much of his youth mourning his father, understood Suzanne's predicament all too well. In the texts he worked on in Tunisia and, later, in Morocco, mourning and memories of youth – some radiant, some ambivalent, some painful – often dominate.

Beckett on holiday

What Beckett seems to have relished the most about their holidays was being catapulted into a different ordinariness: his letters from Morocco relate anecdotes about Hertz rental cars (a string of 4Ls, Simcas and Mercedes), the Club Méditerranée and Orly airport. On the one hand, he forgot about everything; his main challenge, he declared during a particularly relaxing spell in 1975, was "how to find without glasses little bundle of clothes on beach after swim" (Craig et al. 2016, 404). On the other hand, he seems to have

immersed himself in local life more intensely than in Paris, where he tended to avoid public exposure and decline public invitations. He celebrated his Nobel Prize at a reception organized by Ridha Azzabi, the recently appointed Governor of Nabeul, with Tunisian ministers and mayors, and appreciated the "complete unobtrusiveness" of the "cultural affairs and local nobs" who lavished gifts on him (Craig et al. 2016, 192, 188). In El Jadida, he was invited to, and presumably attended, the festivities organized in 1972 for the Fête du Trône celebrating Hassan II's reign by the *caïds* and Pasha of El Jadida (the local government officials and mayor); he described it as one of the nicest days of the holiday, presumably not just on account of the weather (TCD MS 10948/1/516). He tried to be a good tourist, particularly at first: he walked around Taroudant's olive and orange groves, visited a noria in El Jadida, attended a match played by El Jadida's football team (Craig et al. 2016, 288, 331). In one of many letters to Barbara Bray, he recorded as a marking event the parade and celebrations organized in Tangier in 1975 for Hassan II's birthday (TCD MS 10948/1/587). Everything in his letters to Bray (an immensely important presence in his life, as his lover and frequent literary advisor) is phrased to suggest that he is completely alone. Yet Suzanne clearly accompanied him on numerous excursions. In 1972, they drove from Taroudant to the snow-covered Atlas foothills, then to Agadir, whose beach and harbour Beckett found particularly striking, then to Casablanca (TCD MS 10948/1/512–514). In spring 1973, they drove to Marrakech, Safi and El Jadida (TCD MS 10948/1/533). That autumn, they travelled to Marrakech again (TCD MS 10948/1/540), then stayed in El Jadida and Tangier. In spring 1974, during another stay in Tangier, they pondered a trip to Fès and Meknès but abandoned the idea owing to unfavourable weather (Craig et al. 2016, 364).

To Bray and friends, Beckett sent postcards of neutral aerial views as well as tourist postcards claiming to represent the real Morocco, featuring people in various types of traditional dress and camels in the desert, and sites such as the Bab Targhount wall in Taroudant, the wall ramparts of Tiznit, the Chefchaouen market, El Jadida's Portuguese Cistern and Portuguese fortifications, and Tangier's Cape Spartel, Grand Socco, Spanish consulate and Spanish hospital. He kept some Tangier postcards as mementos (TCD MS 10948/1/676). What his letters reveal of his behaviour and habits suggests that he tried to fit in. He read francophone Moroccan newspapers including *L'Opinion*, Istiqlal's newspaper (TCD MS 10948/1/508). He bought contraband whiskey (TCD MS 10948/1/623). He called Casablanca "Casa" (Craig et al. 2016, 285, 376), as French people in the know tend to do, to this day. He occasionally dated letters according to the Islamic calendar (Craig et al. 2016, 283). In Tangier in particular, where his stays often coincided with the beginning or end of Ramadan, he observed the rhythms of Ramadan. He bought the Qur'an in a paperback French edition (Van Hulle and

Nixon 2013, 172, 267), probably in 1974 (TCD MS 10948/1/567). Later, he said that he had found the Qur'an difficult, enigmatically adding that he liked neither dogmatism nor bad interpretations (Kamyabi Mask 1990, 28). While previous holidays in Portugal had led him to learn Portuguese, there is no evidence that he attempted to learn Arabic; there is only evidence, in *L'Innommable* and the manuscripts of *Comment C'est*, that he was aware of some French borrowings from Arabic, and of the degree to which French slang and pejorative terms draw on Arabic words.

Much in Beckett's correspondence suggests that he apprehended himself as a neutral subject – although he never was that, of course. The places he frequented were primarily the European quarters, the beaches, ports and luxury tourist hotels. In Taroudant, El Jadida and Marrakech, the Becketts stayed in high-end hotels such as La Gazelle d'Or, Hotel Marhaba and La Mamounia, whose Royal Gardens Beckett particularly liked (TCD MS 10948/1/653). In Tangier, they stayed in brand new, five-star seafront hotels such as Hotel Les Almohades and Hotel Solazur. They went to La Brasserie de France and the Café de Paris, places also frequented, then or in previous times, by Genet, William Burroughs, Jane Bowles and Paul Bowles. Beckett and Suzanne reportedly had their evening meals at the same French restaurant, Chez Gagarine, for years (Rondeau [1987] 2000, 72). The restaurant was on a street close to the Plage Municipale that retained its colonial name – Rue Victor Hugo – until the late 1970s; following a broader national attempt to reclaim colonial street names, the street was renamed after the philosopher and writer Abou Alae El Mari. In Beckett's evocations of Tangier, however, the city seems immutable. His correspondence does not describe the places he frequented but focuses mostly on the beaches, sea and weather.

On the rare occasions when his letters acknowledge direct confrontations with poverty, nonetheless, the tone changes. He described what he called "la ville arabe" in Taroudant, the medina where he occasionally ventured for walks, whiskey and cigars, as "horrible"; there, he was confronted with a town "finally dreadful within, filth, disease, misery, stink" (Craig et al. 2016, 283, 285). When it comes to the orange and olive groves, naïve and picturesque description seems the only mode he felt he could adopt. "Delightful little donkeys loaded to the teeth with whole families. Not a trace of a camel. Very gentle very poor people. It's olive-picking time. They climb the trees and strike the branches with sticks while singing at the top of their voices" (Craig et al. 2016, 283). On other occasions too, he insisted on people's kindness and gentleness, but everyone is designated as "the Arabs" in his correspondence from Tunisia and Morocco. There is no sign of interest in Tangier's cultural history in his letters, although the city's older streets and architecture make visible how multiple ethnic and religious groups have lived there in harmony; Tangier's population has historically comprised Rifian Berbers, Arabs, southern Moroccans, Sephardic Jewish, Indian and Spanish

communities, and communities from other parts of the Sahara and from sub-Saharan Africa, as Brian T. Edwards emphasizes (Edwards 2005, 124, 143). The only Moroccan to whom Beckett gives a name in letters from Tangier is the writer Mohamed Choukri.

In his holiday correspondence, Beckett liked to suggest that he was doing no work whatsoever. This could not be further removed from the truth (see Craig et al. 2016; Pilling 2006; TCD MS 10948/1; UoR MS 5100 [COH]; UoR MS 5200 [HER]; A. J. Leventhal collection). In Nabeul in 1969, he worked on the translation of *Sans*, *Lessness*. In Taroudant and El Jadida in 1972, he translated some of *Mercier et Camier* into English, corrected the Calder proofs of *The Lost Ones* and attempted to work on "Pour en finir encore". An encounter inspired *Not I*, and marked a radically new turn in his playwriting: he saw "an Arab woman all veiled in black absolutely motionless at the gate of a school in Taroudant" (Craig et al. 2016, 287), whom he observed silently, and whose identity remains forever unknown. In 1973, in El Jadida, he worked on *Mercier and Camier* and the French translation of *Not I*, and revised Elmar Tophoven's German translation of *Not I*; while in Marrakech, he pondered doggerelizing Pascal's *Pensées*. During his two holidays in Tangier in 1974, he worked on *Mercier and Camier* and *Pas moi*, revised "Old Earth", planned the Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* and the London production of *Happy Days*, and worked on the poem "Dread Nay". The year 1975 involved thinking about *That Time* and its sequencing. In 1976, in Tangier, he corrected the Minuit proofs of "Immobile" and "Pour en finir encore", had the vision that led to *Ghost Trio*, worked on *Ghost Trio*, and wrote the poem "Roundelay". In 1977, in Tangier, he wrote several *mirlitonnades* ("noire soeur", "silence vide une", "d'abord", "ne manquez pas à Tanger", "mots mourants", "plus loin un autre commémore"), worked on the French translation of *Company*, completed the French translation of *Footfalls*, and worked on Tophoven's translations of *Ghost Trio* and *… but the clouds …* in preparation for television productions in Stuttgart. The Tangier *mirlitonnades* were written on whatever was at hand: the lid of a cigar box, the back of an envelope and the packaging of a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label (Van Hulle 2019, 72, 74, 76). The year 1978 brought more *mirlitonnades*: "pas davantage" and "comme au/berceau". He worked on *Pas* and an abandoned text, "Marine", translated *That Time* into French, and thought about the German revival of *Spiel*. In 1979, he thought about *Eh Joe* and finished *Compagnie*. In 1981, he translated *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* into French, and worked on "Epilogue", soon abandoned.

These were times, then, when Beckett reflected even more intensely than usual on nuances of expression, wrote some of his most striking poetry, and got on with challenging tasks of translation – some of the most challenging he undertook, in fact: for *Company* and *Compagnie*, the writing and

translation processes were particularly convoluted; as for *Mercier et Camier* and *Mercier and Camier*, they are effectively different texts. It seems as though he needed to be in Tangier to write these texts in the way he wanted, and to render memories of Ireland: *Mercier and Camier*, *That Time*, *Eh Joe* and *Company*, notably, stand out in this otherwise abstract, sparse period, as texts in which Irish place names and geographies are granted particular prominence.

This prolific work was undertaken alongside an immersion in world news and an odd miscellany of books dealing with world history. Beckett's correspondence conveys how assiduously and keenly (and sometimes obsessively) he kept up with world news. He used a succession of portable radios to listen to France Inter and stations relaying BBC Radio 4 (TCD MS 10948/1/543, 629; Craig et al. 2016, 456). He read francophone Moroccan newspapers, *Le Monde* when it was available and, when there was no other option, *Le Figaro* (which he despised) and *France-Soir* (TCD MS 10948/1/585; Craig et al. 2016, 420). His correspondence registers some of the events taking place around him, including the build-up to the 1972 referendum on the Moroccan Constitution (TCD MS 10948/1/516); the festivities organized in 1973 to celebrate the *récupération des terres*, the nationalization of land donated to French settlers when Morocco was under French rule (TCD MS 10948/1/542); and the conflict between the Polisario Front and the Moroccan and Mauritanian armies in the Western Sahara (Craig et al. 2016, 510). In 1972, from Taroudant, he comments on how surprisingly free-spoken he finds *L'Opinion* (TCD MS 10948/1/508); in 1973, from El Jadida, he alludes humorously to a sky lined with military aircraft (Fonds Beckett). Beyond that, there are no open allusions to the dark period known as Morocco's *années de plomb*. Yet, as Berrada-Berca emphasizes in her novel *Et vivre, Beckett?*, 1973 is when the repression of political dissent began to be truly felt, with mass imprisonments, deportations, disappearances and growing unrest over poverty; the month of June 1981 – shortly before Beckett's last stay in Morocco – saw the repression of a general strike and the Casablanca bread riots, which culminated in thousands of arrests and hundreds of deaths (Berrada-Berca 2018, 84, 86).

The historical baggage concealed in Beckett's silence is difficult to decode, but these holidays seem to have ignited in him a desire to reflect on political ideology and imperialism – a mature version, possibly, of the feeling that had spurred him to throw rocks "at England" from Dublin strand in his youth (see Knowlson 1996, 228). While on holidays, he read widely and idiosyncratically, no matter how often he complained about what was on offer (see Craig et al. 2016; Pilling 2006; TCD MS 10948/1). In 1969, in Nabeul, he read (with distaste) *Napoléon* by the monarchist Jacques Bainville, which describes Napoleon's Egypt campaign in detail. In Morocco, between 1972 and 1981, he read books by Balzac, Pascal, Jean Rostand, Dante, Rex

Stout, Dorothy L. Sayers and Ibsen, as well as Edmund Wilson's overview of the histories of socialism and communism, *To the Finland Station*; Louis-Ferdinand Céline's novel about his escape to Sigmaringen with the disgraced Vichy government, *D'un château l'autre*; Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*; and an unidentified book about Christopher Columbus. In February 1978, during a holiday dominated by long walks along Tangier's beaches (TCD MS 10948/1/626), he reread Samuel Pepys's diaries.

This was a choice clearly driven by circumstance, and is worth lingering on for that reason: indeed the rise and fall of the English colony of Tangier (1661–1684) occupied a significant place in Pepys's concerns (Lincoln 2014). The colony, taken over from the Portuguese, was then populated by garrisons of English, Scottish and Irish soldiers recruited from the ranks of the political and religious undesirables, by Portuguese settlers too poor to leave, by a small community of Portuguese Catholic monks, and by gregarious English, European and Jewish merchants and Spanish, Dutch, French, Italian and Jewish families, who traded with Berber and Arab merchants (De la Véronne 1972, 14; Routh 1912, 15, 272–307). Pepys, a member of Charles II's Tangier Committee, helped oversee the construction of the Tangier mole and, thereafter, the evacuation of the colony (the town, castle and outer forts were reduced to ruin). He only set foot in Tangier once, and the colony appears as a blurry, phantasmagoric creation in much of his *Diary* and the related *Tangier Papers* (Pepys 1935, 2016). Tangier quickly became an economic and political liability and was never the source of bottomless wealth Pepys had foreseen. His diaries chronicle his gradual disenchantment; they also register the tensions around Colonel John Fitzgerald, the Catholic commander of Tangier's Irish Regiment and one of three Irish governors appointed to Tangier; the regiment itself was predominantly made up of Catholics. Nothing suggests that Beckett noticed Pepys's references to Fitzgerald and the Irish Regiment; however, his *mirlitonnade* "plus loin un autre commémore" betrays his sensitivity to other Irish presences in Tangier, as I show below. Beyond Pepys's *Diary*, Beckett was aware of another account of Tangier's colonial history: Ben Jelloun's first novel *Harrouda*, which Ben Jelloun sent him upon its publication in 1973 (Ben Jelloun 2006). *Harrouda* retells Tangier's history by intermingling fable, the story of a woman's marital life, and a Surrealist history of colonialism that sketches successive invasions since the Roman Empire. Justice catches up with Charles II, who is captured and tried for his illegitimate ownership of Tangier; he becomes a vagrant beset by syphilis, then a narcotics dealer, who spends the remainder of his life huddled between two stones on the mole, haranguing the passers-by with shreds of his story.

As Pepys's diaries and *Harrouda* reveal in their different ways, Tangier remained a deeply enviable colonial possession across the centuries, and

bears the marks of successive invasions, wars and settlements deeply in its fabric. In the vast literature fetishizing Tangier as a colonial possession and celebrating the presence of American and European authors and artists (see, notably, Green 1992; Shoemake 2013; Woods 2016), Tangier is portrayed as a vibrant internationalist utopia; less frequently, it is acknowledged as an experiment in competition and deregulation between rival colonial powers, involving a multiplicity of legal regimes, currencies and banking and postal systems (see Edwards 2005, 121–243; Hannoum 2020, 1–12). Much colonial-era writing admits an inability to categorize Tangier as a polity. Paul Morand once described it as "a diplomat's tale": "An international city, its sewers are Spanish, its electricity English, its tramways French, and in this hornet's nest invented by the chanceries (to prevent any from acquiring ownership over the western entrance into the Mediterranean), there are few real Moroccans" (1938, 131). From 1923 until Franco's invasion in 1940, the city remained an international enclave within the Spanish zone of Tétouan, and was controlled by France, Spain and Britain and by a Committee of Control dominated by European consuls; after World War II, this Committee of Control – an uneasy mix of representatives from France, Spain, Britain, the US, the USSR, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Portugal, and Muslim and Jewish representatives of the Sultan of Morocco – was restored. For European and American visitors and residents, exempted from the punitive taxation system that applied to Moroccans, and protected by treaties guaranteeing advantageous extraterritorial rights, Tangier was a haven; for Spanish nationals, frequently poorer, and for the native Tanjawis, the most deprived, it was a place scarred by lack of work, widespread poverty and hunger (see Edwards 2005, 121–157). A weakened justice system allowed the sale of narcotics and sex to flourish in an otherwise depleted economy. The laws prohibiting sex with minors were not enforced, and the police and the courts were renowned for systematically discriminating against Moroccans. "I like that, and I don't abuse it", Burroughs wrote to Allen Ginsberg in 1954. "The tribunals don't even make a pretence of not discriminating" (1982, 54).

The Tangier Beckett knew cannot be easily disentangled from the International Zone idolized by British and American writers, where young Moroccans, kif and opiates seemed in limitless supply, and sexual freedoms available to tourists were unavailable elsewhere: the colonial tourist economy shaped the poverty that endured thereafter (Hannoum 2020). Gysin remembered the International Zone of 1950 as "a colonial world, colonial life, which had disappeared everywhere else" (Weiss 1982, 12). In his late novel *Answered Prayers*, Truman Capote was more precise: "Except for those present for presumably legitimate business purposes, virtually every foreign Tangerine is ensconced there for at least one, if not all, of four reasons: the easy availability of drugs, lustful adolescent prostitutes, tax

loopholes, or because he is so undesirable, no place north of Port Said would let him out of the airport or off a ship" (2001, 77). Tennessee Williams made no mystery of his reasons for liking Tangier: "Things are cheap there. Bootleg liquor is $2.50 for a quart of the best Scotch. A piece of ass is two bucks and the swimming is great in the summer" (Carr 2004, 276). Neither did Burroughs, who portrayed the International Zone as "a huge whorehouse" (Burroughs 1982, 63), "the Promised Land flowing with junk and boys" (Harris 1993, 241), "a sanctuary of noninterference", "a vast overstocked market", and a "vast penal colony", "full of vaguely disreputable Europeans" (Burroughs 1989, 54, 58–59). There is no enthusiasm for Moroccan nationalism in this literature, and it takes a generous eye to find signs of interest. In his autobiography, where Tangier is kept firmly in the background, Bowles portrayed Tangier on the cusp of independence as "a reasonably attractive town" that had regrettably been "progressively de-Europeanised" and characterized Tangier after 1960 as a "vast slum" (1972, 346, 332). Burroughs saw the Moroccan independence movement as a major inconvenience; although his letters to Ginsberg say one thing and its opposite, they chronicle the increasing frequency of riots and public incidents, and the sudden shift around how his presence, as a gay man understood to be a sexual tourist, was perceived on the streets. "I have frequently encountered sheer black hate. It scares me. Not the hate itself but the condition that underlies it", he writes in a rare moment of political lucidity in June 1954 (1982, 39).

Unbidden

Some of Beckett's poems manifest his awareness of a history indissociable from the "unbidden" who landed on Tangier's shores. "Roundelay", sent to Bray from Tangier in February 1976, is a recollection of long walks "on all that strand / at end of day" (2012, 205); of the Tangier beaches and seafront he loved, where the Spanish coast can be discerned in good weather. The lines "until unbidden stay" and "until unbidden go" dominate, contrasting the speaker's solitary, uninvited and possibly unwelcome presence with the permanence of sea and sand (2012, 205). In his wanderings away from the beach, too, Beckett thought of the unbidden. He settled for traces of colonization that were the least French and the most English: in the summer of 1977, he often walked through the grounds of Tangier's well-known "English Church", St Andrew's Church (TCD MS 10948/1/618, 620). These visits led him to write two *mirlitonnades* unambiguously located in the cemetery, inspired from stone benches erected in memory of Arthur Keyser (1856–1924) and Caroline Hay Taylor (née Ritchie, … –1932). Beckett was not the only writer to find inspiration in Tangier's cemeteries:

Choukri – albeit in very different conditions – wrote portions of his two autobiographies in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim cemeteries of Larache and Tangier, and was fond of Tangier's imposing nineteenth-century graves ([1996] 2007, 32).

St Andrew's Church, a famous landmark painted by Henri Matisse situated on Rue d'Angleterre, is an Anglican church, part of the Archdeaconry of Gibraltar, where the British middle and upper middle classes gathered to worship (Taylor 2005; Vaidon 1977, 106). The church was built in the Moorish style as an expression of gratitude to Hassan I, who had donated the land to Queen Victoria, and it features engraved excerpts from the Qur'an and the Lord's Prayer in Arabic. Its cemetery, "bondé de britanniques" as Beckett noted (packed with British people; see Wheatley 1995, 62), hosts tombstones and plaques commemorating British Christian subjects. In Beckett's *mirlitonnades*, languages enter in uneasy competition. The cemetery – known in French as "cimetière Saint-Andrew" – is gallicized, to rhyme with Tanger, and renamed "cimetière Saint-André". Keyser's and Taylor's names, as much as their desire to be remembered, rupture the harmony of the rhymes. *Mémoire*, memory, is made to misrhyme with Keyser (derived from the Dutch for emperor, and related to the German *Kaiser*):

> ne manquez pas à Tanger
> le cimetière Saint-André
> morts sous un fouillis
> de fleurs ensevelis
> banc à la mémoire
> d'Arthur Keyser
> de cœur avec lui
> restes dessus assis (Beckett 2012, 215)

Taylor is gallicized too, and made to rhyme with *commémore*, commemorate, in a pattern supporting an implicit, lingering resonance between *mort* (death) and *or* (gold):

> plus loin un autre commémore
> Caroline Hay Taylor
> fidèle à sa philosophie
> qu'espoir il y a tant qu'il y a vie
> d'Irlande elle s'enfuit aux cieux
> en août mil neuf cent trente-deux (Beckett 2012, 215)

What sparked off "ne manquez pas à Tanger" was seeing the stanza from Robert Browning's "Epilogue" to *Asolando* that Taylor's daughters had

had engraved on a memorial bench in the cemetery:

> One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
> Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake. (Browning 1891, 113)

Transforming these lines proved a struggle (TCD MS 10948/1/620). Jottings in the "Sottisier" notebook relating to the *mirlitonnades* include a line from the memoirs of John Morley, who cites Charles Stewart Parnell's portrait of Ireland as "a very good place to live out of" (Wheatley 1995, 68): did this line provide a resolution, or simply remind Beckett of St Andrew's cemetery? Eventually, Beckett simplified Browning's lines into a familiar philosophy: *tant qu'il y a de la vie, il y a de l'espoir* – where there's life, there's hope. The poem's tongue-in-cheek tone originates from the tension between the life of adversity suggested by the inscription, and the life of opulence and idleness that Beckett had clearly discerned in the bench's very existence. Indeed Taylor's life did not qualify her as a legitimate candidate for Browning's lines. The daughter of a powerful Protestant industrialist, related by marriage to one of London's wealthiest bankers, she belonged to one of Belfast's richest families; her activities and those of her socialite daughters (particularly her daughter Feridah, well known in British high society after her marriage with a Scottish aristocrat) fascinated the Belfast press and magazines such as *The Tatler* (British Newspaper Archives). Tangier was the place where Taylor "escaped". Her brother William Ritchie owned a villa in Tangier and spent every spring there with her and their sisters, becoming a prominent member of St Andrew's congregation (British Newspaper Archives; Taylor 2005). Her daughter Feridah accompanied a British Legation mission sent to meet the Sultan of Morocco in 1909 (Gleichen 1909, 3). The family were in Tangier so often that newspaper notices of Taylor's death identify her as being "of Tangier, Morocco", although she died in Northern Ireland and was buried in Belfast City Cemetery (British Newspaper Archives; Findagrave). Keyser belonged to the same sphere: the semi-absentee landlords of Tangier, representatives of a British social class that occupied the very top of the peculiar hierarchy of expatriation (see Kessel 1952, 285). A prominent British diplomat, and a novelist and memoirist, Keyser served in various parts of the British Empire, notably Fiji and the colonial Malay States, and acted as British Consul in colonial Borneo, British Somaliland, Spain and Ecuador. He retired in 1920, moved to Tangier, and published a memoir in which he remembered entertaining Taylor's two daughters (1923, 174). He died in Naples in 1924 (Ancestry). For Keyser, Tangier was "the happy land of 'do nothing'" – by which he meant

that no one ever gave him the answer he wanted and nothing worked according to his wishes; solace could be found in this resistance, he concluded, emphasizing that he relished the harmony of a society in which "British, French, Americans, Spanish, and Italians […] live among and intermingle with Moors, Arabs, and Jews" (1923, 265, 266).

The colonial history that can be prized out of Beckett's *mirlitonnades* involves lives of privilege marked by a calculated blindness to the nature of colonialism as well as the comings and goings of imperial wealth – the very interdependencies that sustained the International Zone's segregated economy. Taylor's and Keyser's life histories correspond to a type that would have been praised and envied in the culture in which Beckett grew up – where it was expected to have servants, colonial hunting trophies were seen as the epitome of good taste, and stories of lost prosperity and fears of losing rank fed an existential anguish. The British Empire remained a purveyor of wealth and status, taking Beckett's brother Frank to a Gurkha garrison in colonial India, or enabling their "Uncle Ned", Edward Price Roe, to accrue wealth. Roe – a keen hunter, whose children lived in Cooldrinagh for extended periods – spent much of his life in the small community of British settlers in British Nyasaland, where he served as unofficial member of the Legislative Council of the Nyasaland Protectorate, following an appointment by George V (*Scotsman*, 15 March 1916). Roe first worked as an accountant for the British Central Africa Company (Knowlson 1996, 26) – a large company that had appropriated vast swathes of the most fertile lands and specialized in the cultivation and trade of cotton, tea, tobacco and coffee. He then became a plantation owner, first specializing in tea and coffee (Bair 1978, 19), then tobacco (Findmypast). Blantyre, where he lived, was the nevralgic centre of plantation agriculture, the fiefdom of the Shire Highlands Planters' Association and the Nyasaland Planters' Association (Withers 1949); the plantations across this area relied on *thangata*, a system of forced labour imposed upon Black tenants that sparked profound unrest (Kandawire 1977; Morris 2016). The kudu horns and leopard skins that decorated Cooldrinagh during Beckett's childhood (Knowlson 1996, 4, 14), seen from that perspective, become apt reminders of the concealed proximities and interdependencies, beyond Ireland, that tied together the Becketts' genteel, quiet privilege and the knowing brutality of colonial exploitation and trade. It is tempting to think that Beckett's fascination for colonial cities such as Tangier and places such as St Andrew's Church had to do with engrained ways of thinking from which he had never quite extricated himself – even if his trajectory, from Trinity College rooms with servants to a small Paris flat overlooking a major prison, had certainly altered his vision of the world. Beckett's interest in Taylor and Keyser is unsurprising for other reasons: so much in his work is about the nobodies of history who accept injustice and subsist on cultural and political

inheritances. He loved inventing stories about figures entangled with the history of Empire, and about moments when British, Irish and French national histories crisscross; *Mercier and Camier*, a translation composed in Morocco, features a Great War veteran who has modelled his military career on the example of Patrick Sarsfield, and a tree planted by Saint-Ruth, Field Marshal of France, hero of the battle of Aughrim, renowned for his thirst for blood and destruction.

Beckett's Tangier

The texts Beckett wrote and pondered in Tangier (about a cemetery's absent dead, words and figures crossing thresholds, trauma and homelessness) fit awkwardly, to say the least, with the Anglo-American expatriate literature that has become Tangier's hallmark – although in another world, at other times, Beckett's name belonged to the same literary sphere as authors known for their involvement with Tangier, their paths intersecting in literary magazines such as *transition*, *Merlin* or the *Evergreen Review*. It is odd to think of Beckett's melancholic *mirlitonnades* and *Ghost Trio* as having originated in the city that shaped so many of Bowles's texts, Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch*, written in a dingy hotel, Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, drafted at a beachfront restaurant, or Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, honed in a flat in the Casbah (no matter how fond Beckett was of Barnes). That Beckett did not write about Tangier like anyone else, but as someone "unbidden", walking on the margin, is significant. In a late essay about Tangier as literary myth, Choukri argued that tourist and expatriate writers had generated a literature peculiarly disconnected from the preoccupations and histories of the city's inhabitants, yet successfully managed to pass crass ignorance and ingrained contempt as insight; for Choukri, Tangier, as seen through the tourist culture, was "little more than a bordello, an endless beach or a huge sanatorium" (2010, 137–138). In Choukri's memoirs as in Ben Jelloun's writings, neocolonial power relations manifest themselves in ways that are just as insidious as they are brutal. When Choukri related his conversations with Genet, he also recorded all the interruptions: everyone around them is hustling for money; everything is a transaction; anything involving Genet's money, promises or favours is ambiguous. There is acceptance yet deep sadness in Choukri's writing; in other memoirs, a terrible self-congratulatory naivety prevails. Hopkins's diary from 1978, notably, evokes a party organized by a night watchman to provide "whores" to tourists (1997, 229), rendering the event as a manifestation of sexual liberation in tune with the times.

Achille Mbembe has defined the postcolony as "a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or re-forming stereotypes" (2001, 80), and has demonstrated how the postcolony remains harnessed to, and scarred by, the symbols of systemic colonial violence, which are most tangibly and vividly registered in the sexual metaphors commonly used around colonial conquest and subjugation. These are not mere metaphors, Mbembe argues, but insights into a whole system of power relations that endures across time. Tangier is a good case study for the libidinal economies that Mbembe describes (see Hannoum 2020, 161–202; Mullins 2002). *Harrouda* depicts sexual exploitation and political domination as indissociable, and presents Tangier as a place where the privileged behave as though they no longer need to live by the political precepts they otherwise defended, in another life; the visitor who exploits Moroccan boys, says the narrator, fails to understand how he is seen and how the experience is lived; "all there is in reality is the illusion of exchange" (Ben Jelloun 1973, 140). While Ben Jelloun's novels and Choukri's autobiographies portray a city marked by deep poverty and desperation, where selling sex is the only option many have to survive, the expatriate literature that records Tangier's sexual economy remains happily oblivious to the realities and presents the order of things as immutable. Joe Orton's diaries and Burroughs's letters, notably, feature episodes ranging from the unsavoury to the sordid down to the frankly terrifying, involving cynical transactions and bartering, and the exploitation of deprived boys and young men living below the breadline (Burroughs 1982, 125–126; Orton 1986, 155–225). What is striking about some of this literature is how eagerly it foregrounds its neocolonial symbolism as though it were a badge of honour (see Caraës 2003). When Georges Lapassade (a friend of Genet who appears in Choukri's diaries) wrote about a famous male brothel owned by a Spanish Francoist and situated by Tangier's Petit Socco, he portrayed an act of repossession – "[t]he relation between the continents was reversed, Europe was joyfully letting Africa possess her" (1971, 12) – and lingered on the architecture of the building: a hammam with two entrances, one opening onto what he called the "Arab world", the other onto what he called "the city's European surface" – or, here, Place du Général Franco; on that irony he does not comment (1971, 11).

Beckett kept himself at a remove from the coterie of writers who had remained steadfastly around Bowles in Tangier, and deliberately avoided them (he didn't think highly of their predecessors; Burroughs, who admired him, felt his dislike whenever they met). The literary Tangier makes its first appearance in his correspondence in September 1974. "Ran into Choukri accompanied by Roditi who said he had met me at Joyce's 1933. Town to be avoided like literature", he wrote to Bray (Craig et al. 2016, 374–375). The encounter, Choukri recalled elsewhere, took place at

the Café de Paris with Suzanne, and Choukri gave Beckett a copy of his book on Genet (1992, 87), freshly published in Bowles's English translation. Beckett does not seem to have reciprocated; Choukri does not mention receiving a gift from him. There must have been several encounters: Edouard Roditi remembered meeting Beckett elsewhere, in the Librairie des Colonnes (1990, 171). Days later, Beckett confirmed that his strategy of avoidance had been successful, and stated that he had not seen Choukri, Roditi or Bowles (TCD MS 10948/1/563). Whether, where and how Beckett and Bowles met is anyone's guess. Bowles felt that they had much in common (Caponi 1993, 184), and he told Brian T. Edwards during the 1990s that Beckett would occasionally send him a signed copy of one of his books (Edwards 2011; personal correspondence with Brian T. Edwards). After that jittery trip, the only encounter Beckett records in his letters is with a Moroccan writer he does not name, in February 1978 (TCD MS 10948/1/627). Everything points to Ben Jelloun, whose work was known to him; in 1973, in response to Ben Jelloun's gift of a copy of *Harrouda*, published by Nadeau that year, Beckett had sent one of his characteristically undecipherable notes of thanks (Ben Jelloun realized who the note was from twelve years later, when he saw Beckett's signature reproduced in *Libération* in Mathieu Lindon's special feature, "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?") (Ben Jelloun 2006). On a now defunct blog, Ben Jelloun recalled a missed encounter with Beckett and Suzanne on the beach, then a real encounter at Café La Española in front of the French Consulate, where Beckett was drinking tea and reading a francophone Moroccan newspaper. Their conversation revolved around mundanities; Ben Jelloun did not sit down and was probably not invited to do so. He subsequently imagined the conversations that had not taken place, evoking all the things he would have liked to have spoken about – including bilingualism, and the unrelenting pressures exerted by French imperial history upon francophone writers: "I would have told him, perhaps, that we the writers of Francophonie are always summoned to explain why we don't write in our mother tongue. This is often asked aggressively, as though we were personally responsible for unpredictable historical and political conditions in our countries" (Ben Jelloun 2006). As Ben Jelloun notes, Beckett never faced such hostility; neither did Emil Cioran and Eugène Ionesco. This imagined conversation, and Ben Jelloun's sole meeting with Beckett, stand as the polar opposite of Ben Jelloun's long dialogues with Genet about politics over the course of their twelve-year friendship (see Ben Jelloun 2010b).

There is a consistency between this awkward, curtailed conversation and the observer position Beckett adopted in his Tangier poems: good-humoured (to a degree), present (but never fully), at once involved and uninvolved. That Beckett, on balance, felt closer affinities with Ben Jelloun than the group associated with Bowles is nonetheless telling: Ben Jelloun was then already

known as a vocal critic of Bowles's neocolonial thinking. In an article published in *Le Monde* the year prior to *Harrouda*'s publication, he depicted Bowles as someone who used translation as a "gentle, imperceptible technique of rape" and argued that expatriates like Bowles neither knew nor understood the realities of Morocco (*Le Monde*, 9 June 1972). His later novel *Leaving Tangier* evokes a type of American writer who "want[s] everything, men and women from the common people, young ones, healthy, preferably from the countryside, who can't read or write, serving them all day, then servicing them at night" (2009, 32–33). The vision Choukri offered in a late essay was also without appeal: "Paul Bowles loved Morocco, particularly the Morocco of the 1930s, but he has never loved Moroccans" (2010, 298). For Choukri, only Gysin was genuine and sympathetic; Roditi too was a predator, only preoccupied by "fantastic sexual escapades", and Burroughs was a presumptuous and arrogant person, who "trampled on […] traditions and customs without the slightest concession to civility or courtesy" (2010, 166, 177, 172).

The Becketts' Tangier was a world away from the Tangier of kif, opiates and sex work chronicled in anglophone literature. It revolved around the Ville Nouvelle, built over the old Tangier during the colonial era – where surprise encounters with naked poverty were less likely than in the medina, and the spaces allowing different communities to crisscross remained firmly demarcated, firmly contained. Unlike Genet, who commented on the blatant visibility of poverty in conversations with Choukri, and felt that "prostitution [was] growing at vertiginous speed" in 1974 (Choukri 1992, 66), Beckett never commented on what he could see around him. Yet he surely knew that Tangier was a prime destination for sexual tourism – like Hammamet, which he baptized "Pigalle-on-Sea" (Craig et al. 2016, 184–185). Sometimes, he and Suzanne brushed against this other dimension of Tangier's tourist economy. Ben Jelloun recalls Beckett complaining about their noisy hotel when they met; the hotel in question, situated at a busy crossroads, did not seem shady but, according to Ben Jelloun, it allowed "accompanied" visitors to rent rooms by the hour (Ben Jelloun 2006). Ben Jelloun's later play *Beckett et Genet, un thé a Tanger* identifies it as Hotel Atlas (a hotel frequented by Jane Bowles and by Burroughs during the 1960s) and speculates that Beckett was either unaware of its other clientele or simply didn't care. The latter seems more likely: in Paris, too, sex work was everywhere visible; Suzanne's close friend Marthe Gautier, whom she visited often, lived close to the Pigalle metro station, on Rue de Douai. For the most part, however, Beckett's Tangier was like Matisse's: a city envisioned through a haze, where the things that otherwise mattered suddenly seemed inconsequential. He took to walking without glasses on the beach: he relished the thought of being as indistinguishable to others as they were to him, as he confessed to Bray in 1979 (TCD MS 10948/1/651).

It is difficult to reconcile the records of Beckett's stays in Tangier with the fictional Becketts created by Berrada-Berca and Ben Jelloun, who celebrate an author remarkably alert to his surroundings. Ben Jelloun's play *Beckett et Genet, un thé a Tanger* stages Beckett and Genet in Café Hafa in the Marshan quarter, not in the French cafés of the European quarter that they frequented. Ben Jelloun's Beckett is voluble, well-meaning and politically insightful; he reads *Le Matin du Sahara*, a francophone daily affiliated to the Palace of Morocco; he is interested in learning Arabic like Genet and carries around a French–Arabic dictionary; he seems to feel as though he has finally found kindred spirits (Ben Jelloun 2010a). Likewise, Berrada-Berca portrays Tangier as the place where Beckett found himself, became at peace with himself. Her Beckett grows into a fully fledged character after meeting Moussa, a homeless man to whom he listens silently. This imaginary Beckett, who "writes all that can never be said. To anyone", recognizes in Moussa, who "tells in his language all that can never be written", a solitude akin to his own (Berrada-Berca 2018, 55, 56, 57). From these imagined encounters, Berrada-Berca builds a picture of Beckett's writing in which she discerns unending compassion and an innate understanding of the destruction wrought by colonialism across the African continent. Wishful thinking, certainly: where Berrada-Berca and Ben Jelloun see understanding, empathy and unconditional revolt, the records point towards tentative interest and a search for comfort. Nonetheless, being in Nabeul, Taroudant, El Jadida and Tangier did spark profound reckonings, and it is to his stays there that Beckett owed some of his most striking ideas and translations. It may well be that Tangier, as Berrada-Berca suggests, was the place where Beckett listened (2018, 50), in a way he had not listened before.

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