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BECKETT, DANTE AND THE ARCHIVE

Dante is ubiquitous in English-speaking modernism: Ezra Pound, in 1910, celebrates the advent of what he calls 'the master'; W.B. Yeats regards him as the only poet able to achieve 'unity of being'; T.S. Eliot, called by Pound 'the true Dantescan voice' of modernism, hails him as 'a European' in an essay of 1929, which, according to Samuel Beckett, sports an 'insufferable … professorial tone'. Beckett, who early on in his career demonstrates the presence of Dante in Joyce's *Work in Progress*, develops instead, after his slothful character Belacqua, a purgatorial Dante whose faint, shadowy presence traverses his oeuvre.

Dante is, of course, a long-term presence in the history of English-language literature: a major occurrence in Chaucer but notably absent in the period between him and Milton, Dante is regarded as an example of medieval lack of measure throughout the eighteenth century. Rediscovered in the nineteenth century, his perceived Romantic genius is first reflected through the figure of the Byronic hero and then welded to the Risorgimento. Today, Dante remains an icon, associated in mainstream literary culture with poetic excellence, Italian musicality, and even mystery, but also treated by contemporary artists with the kind of irreverence that would be unthinkable without the experiments of the modernist period.[1] The first half of the twentieth century is a key historical moment to understand the leap between Dante as the hero of national unity and a Dante exploded and fragmented – the Dante of Andrea Zanzotto, or of Ciaran Carson's *Inferno*, for instance. But why does the Dante inherited from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, Browning's *Sordello*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* metamorphoses into what Seamus Heaney has called 'the aquiline patron of international Modernism'? Heaney's description gives us a very strong reason: Dante's perceived, and in part fabricated, internationalism. While Shakespeare is, in the early

[1] See for instance, Ciaran Carson, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Granta, 2004); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La divina mimesis* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975); and Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips's *A TV Dante* (1989).

twentieth century, very much part of a geographical and symbolic Englishness, Dante the exile becomes the figure of linguistic and aesthetic innovation.

This is precisely the Dante we encounter, through *De vulgari eloquentia*, in Samuel Beckett's 1929 essay 'Dante…Bruno.Vico..Joyce'. Here, both Dante and Joyce 'saw how worn out and threadbare was the conventional language of cunning literary artificers, both rejected an approximation to a universal language' (Beckett 1995: 30). Joyce's language is, in the early Beckett, an artificial construction that paradoxically 'desophisticates' language through the unity of form and content. Dante's language is correspondingly described as similarly 'artificial', the result of the 'synthetic' skimming of the best parts from a number of dialects.[2] As Lucia Boldrini explains, the view that 'the *De vulgari eloquentia* postulated the need for an artificial, "synthetic" language – a refined and immutable version of the common language – was one of the predominant interpretations at the time of Beckett's essay.'[3] The reaction against the conventionality of a worn-out language – Latin in Dante's case, English in Joyce's – is in Beckett a common characteristic of the two authors, both free from narrow national or regional prejudices.

There are a few problems with these claims, though. In order to bolster his argument, Beckett's essay reproduces excerpts from *De vulgari eloquentia* in which Dante expresses his contempt for anyone who thinks his own town the most delightful place, and who likes his own dialect better than any other: Nam quicumque tam obscenae rationis est, ut locum suae nationis delitosissimum credat esse sub sole, huic etiam proe cunctis propriam volgare licetur, idest maternam locutionem. Nos autem, cui mundus est patria…etc.' When he comes to examine the dialects he finds Tuscan: '*turpissimum…fere omni Tusci in suo turpiloquio obtusi…non restat in dubio quin aliud sit vulgare quod quaerimus quam quod attingit populus Tuscanorum.*' (30; sic)

The passage illustrates Dante's indignation with anyone who gives primacy to his own narrow reality. Yet, in *De vulgari* the passage in which Dante describes himself as someone 'for whom the world is fatherland as the sea is for fish' is followed by the declaration of his affection for Florence.[4] Importantly, the adjective 'turpissimus' is

[2] '[…] a theory which had been denounced as "false" by Vico'. Lucia Boldrini 2001: 20.

[3] Lucia Boldrini, 2001: 19.

[4] The whole passage reads: 'Nam quicunque tam obscene rationis est ut locum sue nationis delitiosissimum credat esse sub sole, hic etiam pre cunctis proprium vulgare licetur, idest maternam locutionem, et per consequens credit ipsum fuisse illud quod fuit Ade. Nos autem, cui mundus est patria velut piscibus equor, quanquam Sarnum biberimus antes dentes et Florentiam adeo diligamus ut, quia dileximus, exilium patiamur iniuste, rationi magis quam sensui spatulas nostri iudicii podiamus' (For whoever reasons so disgustingly that he considers his birthplace to be the most lovely place under the sun, he also values his own language, that is, his mother tongue, above all others, and consequently he thinks that it was the very one which was Adam's. I, however, for whom the world is fatherland as the sea is for fish, although I drank from the Arno before I had teeth and so love Florence that for my love I suffer unjust exile, I prop up the shoulders of my judgement more by reason than by the senses) (I.vi,

from chapter eleven of book one of *De vulgari* and refers to the vernacular of Rome, while the rest of the sentence comes from chapter thirteen. Although the omissions are indicated, they are misleading; once contextualised, Dante's assertion has very different implications. In chapter ten Dante describes every vernacular found in Italy, in order to exclude them all because none of them can be regarded as *vulgare illustre*. He starts from those furthest away from 'the panther whose smell is everywhere and which is nowhere visible' (I.xvi, 1); the first *vulgare* discussed in chapter eleven, the vernacular of Rome, does not even deserve that name, since it is a 'tristiloquium'.[5] The vivid Dantean adjective 'turpissimus' is quoted (conjugated) in the Beckett text as if it referred to the Tuscan vernacular, whereas in Dante it describes the Roman dialect: *De vulgari* is remarkably less harsh towards the dialect of Tuscany.

The second problem sidestepped in the essay is that, although Dante in *De vulgari* reacts against the 'conventionality' of Latin, he also adopts it. Dante's Latin in this text is indeed very sophisticated and has numerous cultural echoes, most notably of the thriving Latin scholastic prose of those years (especially St. Bonaventura and Egidio Colonna), but also of the philosophical prose of the radical Aristotelians.[6] Dante asserts the superiority of the vernacular over Latin using the typical scholastic antinomy between 'natural' and 'artificial'. Latin is artificial because it is a 'gramatica', a 'lingua regulata' constructed by the 'inventores gramatice facultatis'; Dante's illustrious vernacular is, on the contrary, a 'natural' language. Thus, Dante's dissatisfaction with the 'conventionality' of the language used by 'cunning literary artificers' is paradoxically demonstrated through examples from a text in Latin, which defends through a scholastic argument the naturalness of the vernacular over Latin's artificiality. What emerges from these comparisons is that the essay has to jump through a number of hoops in order to forge this experimental parallel between Joyce and Dante.

However, in the Beckett oeuvre, this almost quintessentially modernist Dante as a linguistic innovator is extremely short lived. Such muscular Dante is readily supplanted by the image of laziness itself. 'Behold' Belacqua, the slothful character from *Purgatorio IV* who appears in a variety of guises throughout the *œuvre*: he is the overfed child pedalling faster and faster after Findlater's van in the opening of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932); he is Belacqua Shua, Dubliner, avid reader of the *Comedy* in

3). *De vulgari eloquentia*, in Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo (ed.), *Opere minori*, Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1979, vol. V, ii. *Dante in Hell. The De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Introduction, Text, Translation, Commentary by Warman Welliver, Ravenna: Longo, 1981, 53. Subsequent references are given in the text.

[5] Beckett's notebook on Ariosto also discusses the establishment of Italian as a common language and quotes a passage from *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in which the vernacular is referred to as the 'panther' to be hunted. TCD MS 10962, fo. 60.

[6] See Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Linguistica e retorica*, 70; Maria Corti, 1981: 33-76.

More Pricks Than Kicks (1934);[7] the 'Belacqua bliss' is Murphy's impossible goal in the 1938 novel of the same title; and, by 1960, Belacqua has become, as Beckett writes to Kay Boyle on 29 August of that year: 'no more than a kind of fetish. In the work I have finished [*Comment c'est*] he appears 'basculé sur le côté las d'attendre oublié des cœurs où vit la grâce endormi' (cor che in grazia vive), and I hope that's the end of him'.[8] Finally, in 1980, *Company/Compagnie*, tries, and fails – again – to say farewell once and for all to Belacqua, and, via him, to Dante:

> So sat waiting to be purged the old lutist cause of Dante's first quarter-smile and now perhaps singing praises with some section of the blest at last. To whom here in any case farewell.[9]

Dante will still be there, through the image of the brothers immersed in the ice of Cocytus, in *Ill Seen Ill Said* and, faintly, in *Stirrings Still*, as a 'souvenir du purgatoire effacé'.[10] All the way 'from A to Z', Dante is like the dim shadowy presence perceived by Mercier and Camier.

Tongue-in-cheek, *Dream* claims that 'the powers of evocation of this Italianate Irishman were simply immense'.[11] Today, I would like to ask why Dante's presence in both published texts and archival holdings can help us understand the role of scraps, residua, and odds and ends in Beckett while helping us to refocus our questions around literary value and authority.

Let me start with the most material of examples: the book itself, the *Divine Comedy*, which we encounter in *Dream*:

> One calamitous night, Belacqua [...] was affected by her person [the Syra-Cusa's] with such force that he pressed upon her, as a gift and a mark of esteem (mark of esteem!) a beautiful book, one that he loved, that he had stolen from shelves at great personal risk; with pertinent dedication drawn by the short hairs from the text. The crass man. His lovely book! Now he has only the Florentia edition in the ignoble Salani collection, horrid, beslubbered with grotesque notes, looking like a bank-book in white cardboard and a pale gold title, very distasteful. Not indeed that there is a great deal to be said in favour of Papa Isodoro, with his primos and secundos and apple-dumpling readings. But the book itself was nice, bound well, with a bad reproduction of the Santa Maria del

[7] For a full account of the tormented publishing history of this volume of short stories, see John Pilling, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (London: Continuum, 2011).

[8] Samuel Beckett to Kay Boyle, 29 August 1960, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. Now in *Letters*, II.

[9] Samuel Beckett, *Company*, London: Picador, 1982, 85. Samuel Beckett, *Compagnie,* Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985. 84 ('Ainsi se tenait en attendant de pouvoir se purger le vieux luthier qui arracha à Dante son premier quart de sourire et peut-être déjà enfin dans quelque coin perdu du paradis. A qui ici dans tous le cas adieu'.)

[10] UoR MS 2933-1 (*Stirrings Still*), [2 v], Ussy 5.11.83.

[11] Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1972, 143.

> Fiore prestidigitator, printed well on paper that was choice, with notes that knew their place, keeping themselves to themselves.12

The 'beslubbered Salani' is a reference to an edition of the *Divine Comedy*, published by Salani in Florence in 1892 and later reprinted many times, edited by different scholars and with a number of revisions.[13] 'Papa Isodoro' refers instead to the Del Lungo edition of the *Comedy*.[14]

A textual comparison taking into account the Dante occurrences in the so called *Whoroscope Notebook* (MS3000) and the *Dream Notebook* indicates that it is indeed the horrid Salani which is one of the main sources in this period, while only a few references to the *Comedy* correspond to the del Lungo edition. In the *Whoroscope Notebook*, for instance, we have a scheme entitled 'Purgatorial Distribution' on the verso of page 2, followed by indication of lines from *Purgatory*, namely, '*Purg.* XVII, 90 sgg. & XVIII 19-39 & 49-75'. This table corresponds to the Enrico Bianchi 1921 edition of the *Divina Commedia* for the publisher Salani:

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[12] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, New York: Arcade, 1993, p. 51. The typescript of *Dream* reads "the Fiorentia edition in the ignoble Salviani" (R.U.L.).

[13] *La Divina Commedia*, edited with a commentary by Father B. Lombardi, Florence: Salani, 1892. (Reprinted in 1898, 1899, 1905, 1920). *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, turned into prose with facing original text by Mario Foresi, Florence: A. Salani, 1899. (Reprinted in 1909, 1913, 1920). *La Divina Commedia*, with a commentary by Enrico Bianchi, Florence: Salani, 1921, 1922, 1925, 1927, 1928, 1931, 1946, 1953, 1958. The editions of 1925 and 1931 are at present not available for consultation. James Knowlson, in his Beckett biography *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), writes that when Beckett moved to an old people's home in his eighties, he "took with him the little edition of Dante's *Divina Commedia* that he had underlined and annotated in classes with her [Bianca Esposito]" (p. 53). Knowlson points out the resemblance between this and the "beslubbered Salani edition" mentioned in *Dream* (p. 151). Edward Beckett has kindly confirmed that Samuel Beckett also possessed the 1897-8 edition of the *Divine Comedy* edited by G.L. Passerini, Florence: Sansoni, in three small volumes (105 x 70 mm). In this edition, however, no corresponding passages are to be found. Moreover, Edward Beckett infers that given the small print and the absence of underlining or annotation it is highly unlikely that Samuel Beckett would have referred to them. I would like to thank John Pilling for having first passed on to me this information, and Edward Beckett for kindly confirming it.

[14] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, with a commentary by Isidoro Del Lungo, Florence: Le Monnier, 1926. John Fletcher was the first critic to establish that the reference to "Papa Isodoro" in the text was in fact to the Isidoro Del Lungo edition: "At one moment in the *Dream* [...] Belacqua parts with his cherished copy of the *Divine Comedy* (the Del Lungo edition, at that, we are carefully informed) to his *amata* Syra-Cusa" (John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett's Art*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1971, 112).

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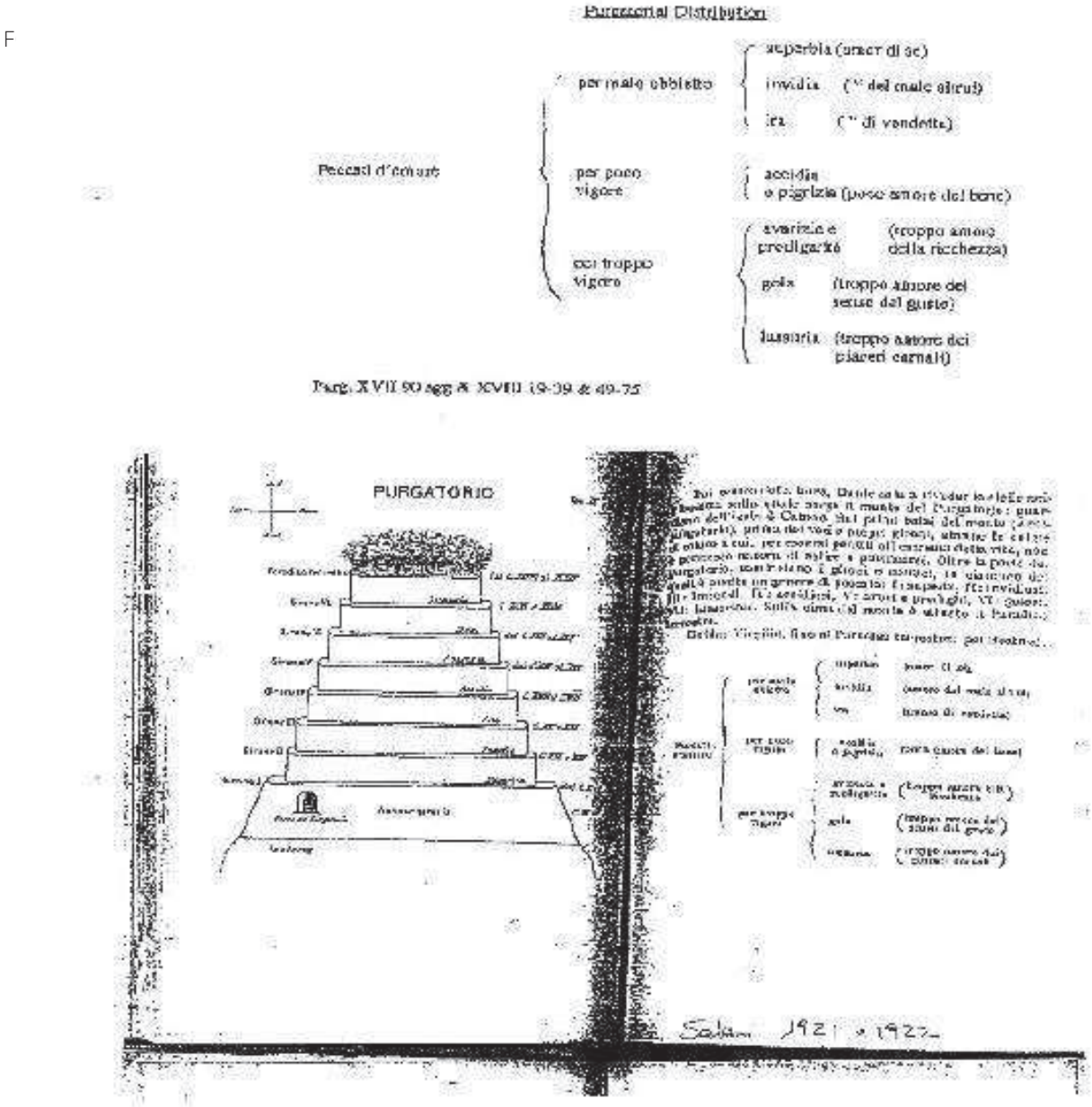

Earlier notebooks also point to the relevance of the horrid bank-book. Of special interest to someone looking at Dante in Beckett are, of course, the so-called *Dante Notebooks*, TCD MS 10963 (pre-1926), TCD MS 10964 (dated on the cover as "Bought at Tours: Sept. 3rd 1926") and MS 10966, held here at Trinity. Beckett titled TCD MS 10963 'Dante Alighiere [sic] Inferno Purgatorio and part of Paradiso' (up to *Paradiso* X); its summaries of the Cantos continue in TCD MS 10964, which stops at Canto XXVIII, when the summaries are abruptly ended by the claim: "[Don't understand a word of this]". The subject is "stuck", like Belacqua in "Dante and the Lobster", making an exit – weeping – like B. in *Three Dialogues*.

TCD MS 10963 also has a 'Plan of Dante's Inferno', which corresponds to the drawing of Hell present in the Salani edition, like in *The Whoroscope Notebook*.[15] Moreover, in perfect symmetry with the Purgatorial distribution of sins present in that notebook, TCD MS 10963 has on f31 a table entitled "DISTRIBUTION OF SINS", which is compatible with the one present in the Salani edition (the only difference lies in the use of square brackets rather than braces). The only two variants are that Beckett's notebook has added to the list of traitors of 'chi si fida' [those who trust them] the four corresponding zones of torment: Caina, Antenora, Tolomea and Giudecca. The last general heading 'Città di Dite' is instead omitted in the notebooks, though present in the Salani edition.

While TCD MS 10963 leaves blank folio 126, on which the title suggests we should have seen a 'Plan of Dante's Paradiso', the 'Plan of Dante's Purgatorio', which appears on f87, corresponds again to the Salani edition, down to the shadowing of the Purgatorial gate, the 'isoletta' [small island], the trees on the summit (rather more abstract in Beckett that in Bianchi), and the cardinal points. In both the Trinity mss and in the *Whoroscope Notebook*, 'the ignoble Florentia edition in the Salani collection' -- as *Dream* defines it -- presents identical 'plans' of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and illustrations of the distributions of sins. Moreover, many of the summaries of the Cantos are translations of the footnotes which 'beslubber' the Salani edition. For instance, the summary of Canto I of the *Inferno* reads:

> Canto I
> Dante, wandering aimlessly in a dark wood, comes to the foot of a steep hill and commences to climb it. But his path is barred by three wild beasts, a panther, a lion and a wolf. The poet is compelled to return to the wood, where he meets Virgil, who promises to save him from the present danger, to lead him through Inferno, and then to entrust him to the charge of Beatrice if he would ascend through Purgatory to Paradise. Dante follows him.
> Allegory of Canto I
> Selva Oscura Morally, vice and sin; it is 'oscura' because [//f3] it clogs and overcasts the mind.
> Colle Virtue, which Dante is trying to attain.
> Pianeta God, who is the friend of virtue.
> Lonza Morally, Luxury [sic]
> Politically, Florence, divided between the Bianchi & Neri
> Leone Morally, Pride.
> Politically, House of France
> Lupa Morally, Avarice
> Politically, Papal Diocese.

[15] The only changes to the table are the addition of an even more detailed list of the hierarchies of the damned spirits in each "girone" and the altered position of the numbering of the "cerchi", which in Beckett's drawing are to the left of the picture rather that within it. The cardinal points also match, but appear at the bottom, rather than at the top of the page. For a discussion of the relevance of the Salani edition see Caselli 2001a.

> Virgilio Reason, which had been dead & dumb [sic] in Dante for so long that 'per lungo silenzio parea fioco.'
> Veltro Literally, a hound. Allegorically refers to some future leader who will save Italy from the oppression of the ruler and especially of the Papal Diocese at Rome. [//f4]
> It is unlikely that Dante was referring to any definite person.

Much of the information written under the heading Allegory of Canto I can be found in the footnotes of the Salani edition. The notebook is a literal translation of many of them. A few examples follow:

> 2. *Selva oscura*: moralmente significa il vizio, il peccato, ed è oscura appunto perché il peccato ottenebra la mente.
> 13. *d'un colle*: è il colle della virtù, al quale Dante si sforza di giungere.
> 17. *pianeta*: [...] Moralmente, il sole che illumina il colle rappresenta Dio che protegge e assiste la virtù.
> 32. *lonza*: pantera, che moralmente significa la lussuria, politicamente Firenze, divisa nelle fazioni dei Bianchi e dei Neri.
> 45. *leone*: moralmente, la superbia: politicamente, la casa di Francia.
> 49. *lupa*: moralmente, l'avarizia; politicamente, la Curia papale.
> 63. *chi per lungo silenzio ecc.*: [...] Allegoricamente, vorrà dire che la ragione, rappresentata da Virgilio, da lungo tempo taceva in Dante peccatore.
> 101. *'l Veltro*: letteralmente un cane, che ucciderà la lupa; allegoricamente, un principe o un imperatore che salverà l'Italia liberandola dall'avidità dei suoi dominatori e specialmente della Curia di Roma. Che si alluda a una persona determinata non par probabile.

The point made in my example of Canto I is valid for most Cantos in TCD MSS 10963 and 10964; the footnotes in the Salani are not sufficient to account for everything present in the summaries, but they largely correspond to most entries explaining allegorical or moral meanings or illustrating various characters in the *Comedy*. If we read these summaries as *aide-mémoire*, they nevertheless construct a very specific idea of memory; in this case, the translated footnotes from the Salani edition construct a Canto I in which spatial, allegorical and moral meanings dominate.

'Basta!', there is considerable evidence that the horrid bank-book in white cardboard is both despised and made to work in the oeuvre. And if we zoom out for a moment, this is just an example of how Dante is a very good way to think of the relation between waste and function in Beckett: the examples from the beslubbered Salani edition demonstrate the importance in the economy of both published and archival texts of the ambiguous, somewhat even devious, relation between what is claimed to have been discarded, lost, or given away in a moment of folly and what is being made to work.[16] As discussed by Dirk Van Hulle, in Beckett we do not have Adorno's 'Absolutes Wegwerfen'. And yet, if it the absolute throwaway is missing in Beckett this is not a

[16] Cf MSA panel, organised by Dr Iain Bailey on the Modernist Throwaway. Sussex, August 2013.

pragmatic approach: it is not that anything can be made to work in Beckett in the name of a frugal Protestant economy which refuses to discard helpful material.[17] Rather, it partakes in the constitution of an aesthetics not of the 'big Dante', as Signorina Ottolenghi calls it in 'Dante and the Lobster', but of 'little Dantes'. Or, rather, Dante is big in Beckett because it contributes to the see-saw movement between effacement and presence, between wasteful and valuable material.

The fact that the horrid Salani ends up being a relevant source for early Beckett creates a structural parallel with the textual last farewell to Belacqua in *Company*. In Beckett, it is not so much that anything can be put to use but, more in line with *Endgame*, that nothing can avoid having meaning. What ends up in the archive is the beslubbered Salani, and, as Peter Fifield has argued 'the archive is prefigured in one of Beckett's most iconic-and thus valued-props: an ashcan.'[18]

My comparison, then, points to Beckett as an archivist's author, but not because the scraps and the notebooks simply document his intellectual development, but because what is claimed to have been lost (del Lungo) and what claimed to be worthless (Salani) construct a model of the oeuvre as archive. This archive of memories proceeds by repeating odds and ends, conjuring up dim presences, producing faintly heard noises, as if hoarse, or perhaps faint, from long silence.

But if there is something eager about the Dante summaries of the Trinity notebooks and the extracted lines in the *Whoroscope Notebook*, there is also something 'sullen' about the employment of these self-declared 'horrid' sources: 'sullen' is 'the word used in the famous Carlyle-Wicksteed [prose] translation of Dante's 'tristi fummo' (Pilling and Lawlor, *Poems*, 264).[19] Belacqua's accidia is, in other words, a structuring principle in the relation between Beckett and Dante.

Slothful Belacqua, who is never described in the *Comedy* as a lute maker, is instead a lute maker in two early commentaries to the *Divine Comedy*, in Benvenuto de Rambaldis de Imola (1375) and the Anonimo Fiorentino (ca 1400), as the reference to

[17] Dirk Van Hulle, Modern Manuscripts: the Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond, London: Bloomsbury, 2013,135.

[18] Peter Fiefield, 'Introduction' *Modernism/Modernity*, 18:4 (2011), 676.

[19] Another passage relevant to the published works is that from *Inferno* VII, 123 "tristi fummo / nell'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra, / portando dentro accidïoso fummo" [We were sullen in the sweet air that is gladdened by the sun, bearing within us the sluggish fumes], present in TCD MS 10963a and in RUL MS 3000 on its own, and in TCD MS 10963 as part of a rather long summary of the Canto, which includes, rather unusually, a comment after the title: "Canto VII (more difficult)". The introductory paragraph to this Canto is a translation of the Salani edition, with some slight spelling difficulties. "Tristi fummo" appears in *Foirade IV* as: "Je rentre à la nuit, ils s'envolent, ils lâchent mon petit chêne et s'en vont, gavés, dans les ombres. Tristi fummo ne l'aere dolce. Je rentre, lève le bras, saisis la branche, me met debout et rentre dans la maison" (Beckett 1976, 45). The sentence is omitted in the English. The importance of Canto VII in *How It Is*, which I have demonstrated elsewhere (Caselli 2001b), is further amplified by the repeated entries in the notebooks.

'aliquando etiam pulsabat' in *Dream* signals. Hard to access directly at the time, the passages are reproduced under the entry 'Belacqua' in Paget Toynbee's *Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante*, the standard reference book for an English-speaking student of Dante in Beckett's time (1898 edition only).[20] This is just one example of the centrality of textbooks to the Beckett aesthetics, which can be seen also in the case of the philosophical and psychology notes. Even a word such as 'precipitates', as John Pilling and Sean Lawlor have recently shown, comes from *A History of German Literature* (JG Robertson's revised 3rd ed, p. 352).[21] This is in perfect accordance with the motivations for reading that we find in the correspondence in this period, such as:

> I am reading Schopenhauer. Everyone laughs at that. Beaufret & Alfy etc. But I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted – is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi & Proust rather than Carducci & Barrès.[22]

We witness to novels and letters that claim to be taking a sentence or an idea from a source, and disregarding the rest, shortchanging, perhaps even sabotaging, every kind of authority.

Another good example to think of *accidia* as a structuring principle in the oeuvre would be to look at what is possibly the most common of all places in the Comedy as received in the late nineteenth century, the episode of Francesca da Rimini in *Inferno* V. Francesca appears in *The Whoroscope Notebook* as:

> Francesca da Rimini the first spirit in Inferno to speak to Dante.
>
> Francesca fù [sic] la zia di quel
> Guido Novello da Polenta, presso
> cui Dante passò a Ravenna gli
> ultimi anni della sua vita.

[20] Toynbee, *Dictionary of Proper Names*, 74; (the 1968 reprint of Toynbee's volume revised by Charles S. Singleton is appreciably different). I would like to thank Zygmunt Baranski for pointing out to me that the excerpts from Benvenuto and the Anonimo were reproduced in Toynbee. See also Daniela Caselli, '"Looking It Up in My Big Dante": A Note on "Sedendo and Quiescendo"', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 6:2 (Spring 1997), 85-93, and '"L'andar su che porta?": Dante nel primo Beckett', *The Italianist*, 18 (1998), 130-54. The relevance of Toynbee and of the commentaries is later reiterated by Jean-Pierre Ferrini, who however does not acknowledge my previous work on this topic. Jean-Pierre Ferrini, *Dante et Beckett* (Paris: Hermann, 2003), 24-25.

[21] Beckett, Samuel, Sean Lawlor, and John Pilling (eds). 2014. *The collected poems of Samuel Beckett: a Critical Edition*, 259 (JG Robertson's *A History of German Literature*, 352).

[22] Samuel Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, Friday, ca. 18 to 25 July 1930. *The Letters 1929–1940*, 33.

> [Francesca was the aunt of that Guido Novello da Polenta with whom Dante spent the last years of his life]
>
> Dante may have known Paolo in Florence

This corresponds verbatim to the notes to the Scartazzini-Vandelli 1922 edition (Caselli 2001a). another important edition of the *Comedy* (which, however, has no place in the fictional universe of Beckett.)

MS 10966 also elaborates on Canto V (the last Canto present in this notebook) and its 'carnal sinners' – among whom Semiramis, who is one of the epithets for the Syra-Cusa in *Dream*. Francesca is described as follows:

> first spirit in Hell to speak to Dante. Daughter of Guido Minore da Polenta, died 1310. About 1275 married Gianciotto Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, by whom she had a daughter, Concordia. According to some, Francesca thought she was marrying Paolo, and only realised morning after marriage [sic] that her husband was Gianciotto, deformed and hunchbacked. Improbable, as Paolo was married since 1269 to Orabile Beatrice di Ghiaggiuolo, by whom he had 2 [one word erased, probably "sons"] children, Umberto & Margherita. Francesca was the aunt of Guido Novello da Polenta, under whose protection, at Ravenna, Dante spent his last years. Cf. Ricci: L'Ultimo Rifugio di Dante.

The MS continues to describe Paolo and Gianciotto debating the quality of Dante's cruelty, and reproducing large portions of the Canto. It would be tempting to read the long quotations from Canto V, the detailed summary, and the echoes between the *Whoroscope Notebook* and TCD MS 10966 as part of a special interest on the part of Beckett (or of his private tutor in Italian, Bianca Esposito) for one of the better-known Cantos of the *Comedy* (Knowlson 1996, 51-4). Certainly, *Inferno* V is a Canto which remains relevant to the published works; it appears in 'Hell Crane to Starling', which refers to lines 40-48 in which 'the souls of the lustful are compared to wheeling flocks of sterlings and to cranes chanting their lay' (Federman and Fletcher 1970, 10). It also occurs in the short story 'A Wet Night', in which *Inferno* V, 122 is misquoted by 'the Gael', who replies to the aptly named 'violist d'amore': "Like hell they do' groaned the Gael, *ricordandosi del tempo felice*' (Beckett 1993, 69; the author's emphasis). Moreover, the line 'quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante', [that day we read no further], from the 'Paolo-Francesca episode' is described in the essay 'Papini's Dante' (an essay which defines itself as 'marginalia') as 'the imperishable reference [...] to the incompatibility of the two operations [i.e. reading and loving]'.[23] The same line becomes in *How It Is* /

[23] "The purpose of these marginalia would be the reduction of Dante to lovable proportions. But who wants to love Dante? We want to READ Dante, for example, his imperishable reference (Paolo-Francesca episode) to the incompatibility of the two operations." (Beckett 1984, 81)

Comment c'est 'that day we prayed no further' / 'ce jour-là nous ne priâmes pas plus avant' (Beckett 1964, 36; 1961, 57).

But how important is this canto to the oeuvre? Two classic ways of answering this question would be what I would like to call here 'the Beckett scholar's interpretation', and 'the Dante scholar's interpretation'. The first scholar might emphasise the importance of the Paolo and Francesca episode in a series of texts by Beckett, using the detailed summary in the Trinity notebooks as evidence to support her interpretation, and arguing that the chronological distance separating the different texts from the notebooks is proof of Beckett's long-lasting interest in the Canto. The Dante specialist, on the other hand, might underline the cliché quality of the episode, and use the history of the reception of Dante in English-speaking literature to prove that throughout the nineteenth century Canto V was one of the most often translated and reprinted. Any short quotation from such episode would not prove Beckett a Dante scholar but, on the contrary, it would only demonstrate an unimpressive, if not necessarily uninteresting, schoolboy knowledge of the 'divine Florentine', followed by sustained recycling, or, perhaps less uncharitably put, echoing.

The first observation to be made is that all these texts, notebooks included, display a fragmentary use of Canto V (even when they summarise it). The fragmentariness of these allusions and quotations, however, can be defined as such only if we assume that it comes from a whole (in this case the *Comedy* or Dante) to which a higher value is assigned. To see the fleeting fragmentariness of such allusions and quotations as unimpressive (the Dante scholar's position) implies an a priori decision on what would be a 'correct', or 'successful', or 'significant' use of Dante. This critical position is challenged by the Beckett *œuvre*, which questions ideas of value by, as we know, 'failing better'. On the other hand, to see the recurrence of Canto V as proof of Dante's influence on Beckett, or of Beckett's deep knowledge of Dante (the Beckett scholar's position) amounts to disregarding the ambivalence produced by Beckett's poetics of residua and to privileging the idea that Beckett's originality derives from his knowledge of great literature in general, and of Dante in particular. In short: the two positions follow the same logic, even when they support a different author.

Canto V is a good example of a presence that cannot be taken as proof of either a 'good' or 'bad' use of Dante, but as illustrating a remarkably consistent aspect of the Beckett *œuvre* insofar as it contributes to its composition as 'odds and ends', 'disjecta', 'residua', 'fizzles', 'foirades', and 'abandoned work[s]'.

Dante is, in short, a great place to think about different forms of value implicit in the relationship between preservation, functionality, and getting rid of. A converse example is the line from *Inferno III*, 63 'chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco' – a line well-known to scholars. The crux in Dante studies is 'fioco': does it refer to the acoustic dimension (is Virgil hoarse?) or the appearance (faint, dimly visible?). In the critical tradition of the *Comedy*, the line is usually interpreted as a translation of 'a phonic emotion into a visual

one' to indicate a blurred image, surfacing from the surrounding darkness as if from a long absence.[24]

The undecidability is reflected and refracted throughout the oeuvre, from TCD 10963, f 3 (Virgilio Reason, which had been dead & dumb [sic] in Dante for so long that 'per lungo silenzio parea fioco.'), to the *Whoroscope Notebook* (these entries could be quite late,[25] but the similar phrasing admits the hypothesis of the Scartazzini-Vandelli 1922)[26], *Watt's* appearance as 'lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind' (16); *The Calmative*'s[27] marshalling of the words and hearing only 'a kind of rattle, unintelligible even to me who knew what was intended. But it was nothing, mere speechlessness due to long silence, as in the wood that darkens the mouth of hell, do you remember, I only just.' (33) ;[28] *How It Is*:

[24] Vittorio Sermonti, *L'Inferno di Dante*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1988, 9; Giovanni Getto, 'Inferno I', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera. Inferno*, Florence: Le Monnier, 1967, 12. Most critics follow Getto's interpretation. See for example Pompeo Giannantonio, '*Inferno* I', in Pompeo Giannantonio (ed.), *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana*, Naples: Loffredo, 1986. The passage has also been allegorically interpreted as the dim surfacing of reason after its long silence from the sinner's conscience. See Emilio Pasquini and Antonio Quaglio (eds.), *Commedia*, Milan: Garzanti, 1987.

[25] For hypothesis regarding the dating of the notebook, see Fredrik N. Smith, "Dating the *Whoroscope Notebook*", *Journal of Beckett Studies* n.s. 3:1 (1993), and Geert Lernout, *James Joyce and Fritz Mauthner and Samuel Beckett, In Principle, Beckett is Joyce*, ed. Friedhelm Rathjen, Edinburgh: Split Pea Press, 1994, 26; both quoted in John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 252, note 45.

[26] The Scartazzini-Vandelli edition of 1922 matches all the other entries of the notebook too; so does the Steiner 1921, which, however, presents no relevant notes. All the other Scartazzini and Scartazzini-Vandelli editions, from 1875 onward, do not have all these relevant notes. There are a few minor discrepancies between the Scartazzini-Vandelli 1922 and the first entries at the end of the *Whoroscope Notebook*. In the passage from *Inferno* IV, 103-105, the comma after "n'andammo" is missing in the notebook, while the contraction "dov'era" reads in the notebook "dove era". The line "Cesar armato con gli occhi grifagni" (erroneously marked as *Inferno* 20.103), misses the "e" at the end of Cesare, which, nevertheless, is present in the second quotation of the same line, also italicised in the notebook but not in Scartazzini-Vandelli or in any other edition.

[27] See also Jean-Pierre Ferrini, 'À partir du desert. Dante et l'aphonie de Virgile dans "Le calmant" de Samuel Beckett', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 13 (2003), 201-12; Ferrini's reading is indebted to Kelly Anspaugh's view of *The Calmative* as a subversion of the *Comedy* in his 'The partially purged: Samuel Beckett's "The Calmative" as Anti-*Comedy*', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 22:1 (1996), 30-41.

[28] Je préparai donc ma phrase et ouvris la bouche, croyant que j'allais l'entendre, mais je n'entendis qu'une sorte de râle, inintelligible même pour moi qui connaissais mes intentions. Mais ce n'était rien, rien que l'aphonie due au long silence, comme dans le bosquet où s'ouvrent les enfers, vous rappelez-vous, moi tout juste (53).

> question if what he has said or rather I heard of that voice ruined from such long silence a third two fifths or every word question if there when it stops if somewhere there food for thought prayer without words against a stable-door long icy toil towards the too late all-forgiving what else night at dead water on the deep on the little sea poor in isles or else some other voyage (91)[29]

This paragraph is also sprinkled with words that have Dantean relevance in the Beckett canon, such as 'icy' and 'toil', a word used for the purgatorial ascent from *Dream* to *The Calmative*. In the French, the verb used in the sentence 'quand elle s'arrête', lead us, via *Premier amour*, 'là où le verbe s'arrête, on dirait du Dante' (44). Furthermore, the 'dead water', 'morte-eau', is the Dantean 'morta gora', which describes the Stygian bog, a central setting for this Beckett text.

The faintness persists in *Stirrings Still* mss (RUL), also indicating a link between this line and the correspondence, such as the letter to Nancy Cunard in 1956: 'Have just succeeded in grinding out of my gritty old maw "per lungo silenzio..fioco" the one-act howl for Marseille and am not a pretty sight as a result.'[30]

Letters too create a disjunction between correct interpretation and attachment to an archive of memory. In a letter to Duthuit in 1949 (no exact date) Beckett gives details of the traitors in the 9th circle of hell (among whom the two brothers I have mentioned as appearing in *Ill Seen Ill Said*) and writes:[31]

> In the way of descriptive frozen verses I have not found anything that would do. It would not be so bad if from time to time the Innuit ate their young, like Ugolino …
> Poscia, più che il dolore, potè il digiuno.
> A very dubious interpretation, incidentally, but one to which I am attached.[32]

To summarise, *Inferno V*, a Dantean common place of which we hear a lot in the very early manuscripts, is only very marginally there in the oeuvre. And yet, the faint echo from Inferno I, instead, resonates throughout. An economic reading of Beckett, which can decide *a priori* which bits are valuable and which to be disregarded, is thus doomed to fail. The economy is of a different kind: as *Mercier and Camier* put it, there is always a price to pay for quotations, even when we agree to have 'no quotations at any

[29] question ce qu'il vient de dire plutôt moi d'entendre de cette voix ruinée de s'être si longtemps tue le tiers les deux cinquièmes ou alors tout chaque mot question si là quand elle s'arrête si là-dedans quelque part matière à réflexion prière sans paroles contre la porte d'une étable longue montée glacée vers la toute pardonnante trop tard quoi encore la nuit au large à la morte-eau sur la petite mer pauvre en îles ou alors quelque autre voyage (143).

[30] Beckett to Nancy Cunard, 6 June 1956, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1941–1956*, edited by Gorge Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overback (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 626.

[31] Duthuit had written an article and also *Une fête en Cimmérie* in 1949 containing Matisse's paintings of Innuits.

[32] SBLII, 112.

price'. Or, to follow a more scatological line, we can go back to a letter which Beckett sent to Jerôme Lindon of 20 January 1954, in which the author expresses his dismay that the publisher has taken *Mercier et Camier* seriously [and] 'jests that it could only come out with a number of abandoned works [...] in a volume to be called "Merdes Posthumes."'[33] Beckett is, at this point in time, fully into his role of *auctor* with 'his bay about his brow', as *Dream* puts it via Dante, and yet plays with the idea of the oeuvre as 'dumping ground' (Fifield; n.b. he makes distinctions between *Texts for Nothing* and *Foirades*, see p. 446 of *Letters*, II). In the 1970s, Italian artist Giacomo Manzoni unambiguously protested against (while also of course cashing in) the fraught relationship between authority and value by producing and displaying jarred turds that he entitled 'merda d'autore' ("author's shit"). Mark Nixon has recently reminded us of Beckett's scathing remark about Joyce signing toilet paper, while David Whatley has made an interesting study of these 'Carboniferous pudenda' of the self and the role of foul papers vs fair copies in *Molloy* and the *Watt* manuscripts (150).[34]

In Brecht's poem 'Lesebuch für Städtebewohner',[35] the I is incited to 'efface the trace'. But rather than the paranoid regime of the Brecht poem, we have in Beckett the promise of keeping Dante 'out of sight'; we are told of foolish bequeathing of copies of the *Comedy*, left behind in a bar; we witness lavish investments in Dantean *loci communes* giving as a meagre return a mere variation on a cliché. This is how, in Beckett, Dante shifts the focus from the problem of knowledge to that of authority: not so much 'how much' Dante but 'how' can we see Dante. Dante is not a source in its explicative sense, but is part of the Beckett archive. Not just because we have, in reality and in fiction, a number of *Divine Comedies* on the shelves of Beckett's Library,[36] but

[33] John Pilling, A Samuel Beckett Chronology, 122.

[34] "Your Papers!": Archiving Beckett and Beckett's Archive of the Self' *Literary Imagination* 15:2, 2013, 149-162.

[35] Trenne dich von deinen Kameraden auf dem Banhof / Gehe am Morgen in die Stadt mit zugeknöpfter Jacke/ Suche dir Quartier un wenn dein kamerad anklopft:/ Öffne, öffne die Tür nicht/ Sondern/ Verwisch die Spuren!// Wenn du deinen Eltern begegnest in der Stadt Hamburg oder sonstwo/ Gehe an inhen fremd vorbei, biege um die Ecke, erkenne sie nicht/ Zieh den Hut ins gesicht, den sie dir schenkten/ Zeige, o zeige dein gesicht nicht/ Soncern / Verwisch die Spuren!// Iß das Fleisch, das da ist! Spare nicht!/ Gehe in jades haus, wenn es regent, und setze dich auf jedem Stuhl, der da ist/ Aber bleibe nicht sitzen! Und vergiß deinen Hut nicht!/ Ich sage dir: / Verwisch die Spuren!// Was immer du sagst, sag er nicht zweimal/ Findest du deinem Gedanken beim einem andern: veleugne ihn./ Wer seine Unterschrift nicht gegeben hat, wer kein Bild hinterließ/ Wer nicht dabei war, wer nichts gesagt hat/ Wie soll der zu fassen sein!/ Verwisch die Spuren!// Sorge, wenn du zu sterben gedenkst/ Daß kein Grabmal steht and verrät, wo du liegst/ Mit einer deutlichen Schrift, die dich anzeigt/ Und dem Jahr deines Todes, das sich überführt!/ Noch einmal: / Verwisch die Spuren!// (Das wurde mir gesagt)/ Aus dem 'Lesebuch für Städtebewohner' / (Bertolt Brecht1960:172.)

[36] Various editions of the *Comedy* are held by the Beckett Foundation at the University of Reading (the Cary, the Dragone, the Concordances to Dante's Latin Work) or quoted in the published (the Del Lungo, the Salani) or unpublished works (Agnelli on Dante's topo-cronography, Ricci's *L'ultimo*

also because Dante is part of those layers, defined in *Malone Dies* as infinite, which constitute the very language of the Beckett *œuvre*.

The Beckett's archives do not help us to explain Beckett away; rather, the Beckett *œuvre* claims to be an archive.

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viaggio di Dante, Della Torre on the role of 'pity and piety both' in the *Inferno*). MS 10966 reads: "BIBLIOGRAPHY

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