

**LASSATA SED:  
Samuel Beckett's Portraits of his Fair to Middling Women**

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Critics of Beckett's early work have lamented the caustic tone adopted towards women. My purpose is neither to accuse Beckett of misogyny nor exonerate him, but to describe the method used in an early poem, "Hell Crane to Starling", and in the satirical portraits of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. These are set pieces in a literary tradition of misogyny running from Juvenal to Burton. Beckett's important source is the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, as entries in the *Dream Notebook* reveal. These, and other details, I expand and critique. One conclusion is that Belacqua's misogyny in *Dream* is as much self-laceration as it is flagellation of the fairer sex. My coda examines an unpublished poem, "To My Daughter". I argue that this addresses Mary Manning, the younger Fricka, and responds to the end of Beckett's affair with her, when she returned to her husband and had a daughter who was not but might have been Beckett's own.

My title derives from Juvenal's *Satire VI*. 130, the infamous diatribe against women: "et lassata viris necdum satiata recessit" ("then exhausted by men but unsatisfied she went away"). This is Messalina, wife of the emperor Claudius, who by night took on all comers in a reeking brothel, leaving with passion still raging. Beckett used the allusion in his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (hereafter *Dream*), of the Syra-Cusa: "never even lassata, let alone satiata" (50). He wrote "lassata sed" on a card to Con Leventhal postmarked 2 May 1934 (Pilling, "Losing One's Classics", 13); and in *Murphy* (225) "lassata" is used of the insatiable Miss Counihan.

Beckett's misogyny is a recurrent grievance, causing some critics of the earlier works to wish that he had not written certain caustic passages. The charge is not easily refuted given his one-word exchange with Joyce ("Marsupials"); the inclusion in *More Pricks than Kicks* of the Smeraldina's billet-doux; Murphy's refusal (72) to wear a waistcoat because it makes him feel like a woman (a jest about Adam's rib); Molloy's comment (137) that women have souls that they might be damned; Malone's decision (263) to bother no more with Moll, "who after all is only a woman"; and the Unnamable's reflection (364): "What can be worse than this, a woman's voice perhaps, I hadn't thought of that, they might engage a soprano".

Ruffled feathers are not smoothed by saying that Beckett's male characters fare little better, that "some of his best friends" were women, or that his attitude reflects a wider misanthropy. Beckett's will, enforced by the Estate, insists that *Waiting for Godot* is "a play for five male actors" ("Women don't have prostates"). Feeble ripostes may be delivered: that Celia is his most sympathetic character; that Watt is less impressive in his *amours* than the fish-woman; that "Human Wishes" has an all-female cast (saving Hodge); or that many of the latter plays are written exclusively for female performers.

"Feminist" elements of Beckett's writing have been identified: notably, its challenge to the Law of the Father and the patriarchal linguistic hegemony, opposing the (phallic) pen with the Unword, an "intent of undoing" by the dismemberment of language. This is not my concern. I wish neither to accuse Beckett of misogyny (the subject as gendered male, the female as object of his gaze), nor exonerate him, but to examine the technique of an early poem, "Hell Crane to Starling", as deployed in *Dream* to portray the Smeraldina, the Syra-Cusa and the Frica. These form set pieces in a tradition of misogynistic satire running from Juvenal to Chaucer and Burton (conversely, Belacqua's adulation of the Alba reflects the Provençal tradition of the idealized Lady). The best introduction to such matters is still Francis Lee Utley's *The Crooked Rib* (1944), an analytical index of "the argument about Women" in early English and Scots literature, which makes wide reference to classical and European satires, fabliaux, catalogues and *centi*.

"Hell Crane to Starling" appeared in *The European Caravan* (1931, 475–76); but not in the *Collected Poems*. Beckett had this piece particularly in mind when he condemned his early work as "showing off", dismissing its display of erudition as that of a young man with nothing to say but "the itch to make". True, but the piece has a vitality arising from the irreverent use of biblical pastiche. It is reprinted with the allusions usefully identified in Lawrence Harvey's study of Beckett's poetry (1970, 303–05):

Oholiba charm of my eyes  
there is a cave above Tsoar  
and a Spanish donkey there.

You needn't bring wine to that non-relation.

And he won't know  
who changed his name  
when Jehovah sprained the seam of his haunch  
in Peniel in Peniel  
after he's sent on the thirty camels

suckling for dear death  
and so many fillies  
that I don't want log tablets.

Mister Jacobson mister Hippolitus-in-hell Jacobson  
we all know  
how you tried to rejoin your da.  
Bilha always blabs.

Because Benoni skirted aftercrop  
of my aching loins  
you'll never see him  
reddening the wall in two dimensions  
and if you did  
you might spare the postage to Chaldea.

But there's a bloody fine ass  
lepping with stout and impurée de pommes

in the hill above Tsoar.

The poem varies the *topos*, “Come live with me and be my love”. The title invokes Dante’s *Inferno* (V. 40–51), Paolo and Francesca, of whose infidelity the starlings and cranes are an emblem. The poet is wooing “Oholiba”, or *Ahohibah*, whore of Egypt (*Ezekiel* 23: 1–4). His petition embraces Old Testament references to whoredom and adultery, recasting them as Irish peasant burlesque, with the enticement of an ass in a cave above Tsoar, and stout and apples *impurées* [mashed potatoes?], manna in the “Saorstat” or Irish Free State. Hippolytus, son of Theseus, refused to pollute his father’s bed when his step-mother Phaedra desired him; hence “Hippolitus-in-hell”. “Tsoar” is the city where Lot sought refuge after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis* 19: 17–18); “the cave” is where he lay with his daughters (19: 30). He who “changed his name” is Jacob, who wrestled with an angel and put out his thigh (“sprained the seam of his haunch”) at Peniel (*Genesis* 32: 24–32). He brought “thirty camels” to Esau (*Genesis* 32: 15). “Bilha always blabs” tells of Jacob’s son Reuben (“Mister Jacobson”) who lay with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and gathering with the other sons (“rejoined your da”) was rejected. “Benoni” is Jacob’s youngest son. “Reddening the wall” returns to the whoredoms of Aholibah (*Ezekiel* 23: 14–16), who saw on the wall images of the Chaldeans “pourtrayed with vermilion”, and “doted upon them, and sent messages unto them into Chaldea”.

The “bloody fine ass” suggests: “For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses” (*Ezekiel* 23: 20). Harvey calls the poem “more a lecherous leer than the recalled emotion of authentic experience” (273), but he fails to appreciate the witty lepp into Oirish as biblical iniquities are retold in the idiom of Synge.

As a young man with nothing to say but an urge to say it, Beckett adopted literary imitation and Joyce’s mode of “note-snatching” (reading for the sake of his writing). “Hell Crane to Starling” is pastiche, but hardly constitutes misogynistic satire in the Juvenal vein. It is mocking rather than vicious, clever rather than bitter. The portraits in *Dream* are more complex, particularised, and darker in tone. Beckett’s misogynist reading, from Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* to such curious items as William M. Cooper’s *Flagellation* (1869) and Pierre Garnier’s *Onanisme: seul et à deux* (1880?), is documented in the *Dream Notebook*, ed. John Pilling (hereafter “DN”). Another source is Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (1930), remarkable for its compelling style, unexpected insight, and range of reference. Praz fueled Beckett’s rejection of “the gangrene of Romanticism” (*Proust*, 80). He saw Sade as “a sinister force”, and described the cult of “Medusan” beauty, the sexual pathology of decadence, and the Satanic hero.

“Assumption” (1929) is an overblown bloom from the Romantic hothouse, anticipating Beckett’s reading of Praz. The Woman comes to the poet as he is listening in the dusk, and he winces at her speech. It is the usual story, admiration of his genius, sympathy for his suffering, and the Poet clenches his hands in fury against “the monstrous impertinence of women, their noisy intrusive curious enthusiasm” which violates his silence. He calms himself with thoughts of George Meredith (“Married Love”), but is tempted by her extraordinary pallor, the sensuality of her lips, the green-flecked eyes and faded green hat of charming shabbiness; so, in contemplation and absorption of her he loses part of himself. The story depicts artistic isolation and suffering, but ironically. A torrent of sound bursts forth to shatter the silence, and she is left caressing his “wild dead hair”). The blue flower of Novalis is invoked, but the ending is overstated, young Werther on a bad hair day. Women may intrude upon his being, but the object of mockery is less the Woman than this very deep young man, whose romantic agony may be post-coital. “Assumption”, then, displays one aspect of the later portraits in *Dream*, the saving grace of an ironic self-awareness.

The unnamed Woman who admires the Poet’s genius, sympathises with his suffering, but finally scatters his seed and thought, is the Smeraldina (“little emerald”) of *Dream*. Her name derives from Dante’s *Purgatorio*

(XXXI. 116–17): “li smeraldi / ond’ Amor già ti trasse le sue armi” (“the emeralds from which Love once shot his darts at you”). Sometimes she is called the Smeraldina-Rima, the adjunct deriving from W.H. Hudson’s Rima, the wild Brazilian girl of *Green Mansions*. She is based on Beckett’s cousin, Peggy Sinclair, with whom he first fell in love, captivated by her charm, her laughter, the way she dressed in green, and her English comically corrupted by German idioms and calques. In *Dream*, Belacqua adores the Smeraldina’s “loveliest little pale firm cameo of a birdface” (15), not recognizing that this vision comes with a body that is all wrong: “big breech, Botticelli thighs, mammoose, slobbery-blubberty, bubbubbubub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe.” Then she rapes him (18), wrenching him perforce out of his precious world of art and ecstasies and into “the gehenna of sweats and fiascos and tears” (19). Her physicality begins to nauseate him (“collops of pork gone greasy”, 111). He turns to the Syra-Cusa (briefly) and the Alba (ecstatically, hopelessly), before the “calamitous Sylvester” (228) brings the affair to a tearful and “unsanitary” end.

Belacqua takes “stock” of “Smerry” (23). The passage combines Dante with bits from Burton, mostly from Part III, *Cure of Love Melancholy* (listed by Part, Section, Member and [sometimes] sub-section). There is a story behind each allusion. For instance, when Belacqua recalls “that first assault on his privities” (19), he echoes the Turkish eunuchs “deprived in their childhood of all their privities”, penned in the seraglio with the wives who cannot have a cucumber or carrot sent in “but sliced”; they live, “left alone to their unchaste thoughts all the days of their lives” (III. 3. ii, 643).

The entries testify to Beckett’s delight in demented detail, and show how he used obscure scholarship to create a *cento*, as Burton described his own work (Preface, 7):

She was pale, pale as Plutus, and bowed towards the earth. She sat there, huddled on the bed, the legs broken at the knees, the bigness of thighs and belly assuaged by the droop of the trunk, her lap full of hands. Posta sola soletta, like the leonine spirit of the troubadour of great renown, tutta a se romita. So she had been, sad and still, without limbs or paps in a great stillness of body, that summer evening in the green isle when first she heaved his soul from its hinges; as quiet as a tree, column of quiet. Pinus puella quondam fuit. Alas fuit! So he would always have her be, rapt, like the spirit of a troubadour, casting no shade, herself shade. Instead of which of course it was only a question of seconds before she would surge up at him, blithe and buxom and young and lusty, a lascivious petulant virgin, a generous mare neighing after a great horse, caterwauling after a great stallion, and amorously lay open the double-jug dugs.

- pale as Plutus*: Burton (I. 2. iii. 13, p. 188): “Timidus Plutus, an old proverb, As fearful as Plutus; so doth Aristophanes and Lucian bring him in fearful still, pale, anxious, suspicious, and trusting no man”. DN, 111.
- Posta sola soletta*: Dante, *Purgatorio* (VI. 58–59): “seated all alone”, like a crouching lion; said of the troubadour Sordello (c. 1200–?69).
- tutta a se romita*: Dante, *Purgatorio* (VI. 72): Sordello, “all in himself recluse”.
- heaved his soul from its hinges*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 2, p. 519): “Love mocks our senses, curbs our liberties, / And doth bewitch us with his art and rings, / I think some devil gets into our entrails, / And kindles coals, and heaves our soul from th’hinges.” DN, 119.
- column of quiet*: Burton (III. 2. v. 5, p. 621): “A good wife is a good portion . . . an help, a pillar of rest, *columna quietus*”. DN, 129. [In *How It Is* (77), the narrator’s erstwhile wife, Pam Prim, jumped from a window: “broken column”. Likewise, “my spinal dog it licked my genitals Skom Skum run over by a dray” (85), again a “broken column”].
- Pinus puella quondam fuit*: Burton (III. 3. i. 2, p. 630): “Constantine, in the eleventh book of his husbandry, *cap.* 11, hath a pleasant tale of a pine-tree; she was once a fair maid, whom Pineus and Boreas, two co-rivals, dearly sought; but jealous Boreas broke her neck”. DN, 131.
- casting no shade*: Dante, *Purgatorio* (III. 28), “a me nulla s’aombra”; of Virgil, his body the semblance of a soul and thus diaphanous. [The “post-obit” Belacqua in “Echo’s Bones” similarly casts no shade].
- blithe and buxom and young and lusty*: Burton (III. 2. v. 5, p. 610): the Lady Elizabeth, enamoured on Henry VII: “I am blithe and buxom, young and lusty”. DN, 128.
- a lascivious petulant virgin*: Burton (III. 2. v. 5, p. 614): “A virgin, as the poet holds, *lasciva et petulans puella virgo*, is like a flower, a rose withered on a sudden.” DN, 129.
- a generous mare neighing after a great horse*: Burton (III. 2. v. 5, p. 611), of those not making a good match in their youth: “like that generous mare in Plutarch, which would admit of none but great horses, but when her tail was cut off and mane shorn close, and now she saw herself so deformed . . . she was content to be covered by an ass”. Also Burton (III. 2. i. 2, p. 500): “They neigh after other men’s wives . . . like fed horses.” DN, 129 & 106.
- caterwauling after a great stallion*: Burton (III. 2. i. 2, p. 501): “she caterwauls, and must have a stallion, a champion, she must and will marry again, and betroth herself to some young man”. DN, 118.

*lay open*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 524): “Antoninus Caracalla observed his mother-in-law with her breasts amorously laid open, he was so much moved, that he said, *Ah si liceret*, O that I might; which she by chance overhearing, replied as impudently, *Quicquid libet licet*, thou mayest do what thou wilt”. DN, 121.

*double-jug dugs*: Burton (III. 2. iii, p. 564): that every lover loves his mistress, however deformed, “*pendulis mammis*, ‘her dugs like two double jugs’”. DN, 123.

The portrait is cruel, but it is the defining relationship of the novel, as it was in Beckett’s early life. It was doomed, because of Beckett’s inability to come to terms with his emotional contradictions about love and sex; because the two were intellectually far apart, Beckett unable to convince Peggy that illiteracy was a crime (Knowlson, 109); and because Peggy was under sentence of death, having contracted T. B. (she died on 3 May 1933). Her illness is echoed in the despair of “Enueg I” (“my darling’s red sputum”), and her death haunted Beckett, her memory, eyes or green coat returning in texts as different as “Ascension”, *Texts for Nothing* 6, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Eh Joe*. The object of scorn is less the Smeraldina than Belacqua himself, for his sexual and emotional inadequacies are as much to blame for everything going “kaputt” (18). A curious complexity arises. The cruelty is unforgivable and unforgiven; but the pain of that “first love” is intense. The ruthless withholding of pity compels a strange respect for the honesty of the portrayal, in which the victim is finally Belacqua, who neither seeks sympathy, nor makes it easy for the reader to grant it. He is thus an early instance of what Beckett later called the “fundamental unheroic”.

The second portrait is the Syra-Cusa, “her body more perfect than dream creek, aramant lagoon” (*Dream*, 33), but her head “null”; whereas the Smeraldina’s face is lovely but her body all wrong. In the young thought of Belacqua (34–35) the two are compared, the heavy brune and the welter brunette; but, in a parody of scholasticism as well as boxing, no comparison can be established. The name derives from “Syracuse”, in Sicily, the inhabitants of which (saith *Lemprière*) were most excellent when virtuous, but wicked and depraved when addicted to vicious pursuits. St. Lucia of Syracuse, renowned for the beauty of her eyes, being pressed by a nobleman for her hand on their account, tore them out and presented them to her suitor, crying “Now let me live unto God” (DN, 110–11). Belacqua’s farewell to the Syra-Cusa (*Dream*, 179) says she might have sent him at least *one* of her eyes in a dish.

The portrait is based on Joyce’s emotionally unstable daughter. Beckett met Lucia when he visited Joyce’s flat in the autumn of 1928, and was

attracted by her vivacity, her dark hair and bright blue eyes, although her looks were marred by a small scar on her chin and a slight squint (strabismus) of which she was self-conscious. Beckett became attuned to her erratic nature, the product, perhaps, of an irregular and obsessive family life and (ironically) the lack of a stable language; but he early perceived signs of her instability. One disturbing irony is that Joyce, intensely superstitious, could have named his daughter Lucia (as in *Lucia di Lammermoor*), yet remain willfully oblivious to her mental deterioration.

This was not helped by her “lech” for Beckett. She would call at the École Normale, and they might go out together, or join the Joycean entourage. She would lie in wait for him when he visited, gaze at him passionately, and try to monopolize his attention. Her behavior became increasingly unconnected, and Beckett would watch, fascinated by aspects of the father’s mind running rampant in the daughter. In an undated letter to Thomas MacGreevy Beckett comments: “as usual impossible to see Joyce for Norah and Lucia. Usual fucking complications & flight.” Lucia, he noted, looked “foutue”. He tried to evade her, but in May 1930, when her parents were in Zürich, he had to tell her that he came to visit her father, and was not interested in her amorously. The outcome was an emotional scene, after which Mr. Joyce icily informed Mr. Beckett that his presence was no longer welcome.

The rift was not repaired until Joyce, reluctantly, accepted his daughter’s mental illness. The friendship resumed early in 1932, but Beckett tried not to visit when Lucia was there. Some things remain uncertain. James Knowlson and Deirdre Bair (from whom these details largely derive) agree that his involvement with Lucia was unwilling, and imply that he was unfairly treated by Joyce, who took Lucia’s side uncritically and denied culpability for her state of mind. This is largely true, yet Lucia was not unattractive, there was more to the relationship than usually admitted, and Joyce’s response as outraged father may not have been totally unwarranted. Knowlson believes that a sexual affair was “unlikely”, as Beckett was involved with Peggy Sinclair. He cites Albert Hubbell, with whom Lucia had a physical relationship at the end of 1930, as saying that she was still a virgin (104–05). However, in *Dream* (34) the narrator asks of the Syra-Cusa: “Would she sink or swim in Diana’s well? That depends what we mean by a maiden.” Burton’s footnote (III. 3. ii, p. 644) states that “Ismene was so tried by Diana’s well, in which maids did swim, unchaste were drowned”. This suggestion of dalliance is endorsed by a letter to MacGreevy (10 March 1935), in which SB admits to “the Lucia ember” again flaring up and fizzling out.



Beckett farewells the Syra-Cusa (49–51) in a composite portrait, using Burton as a substrate into which is introduced flecks of text from Praz, Cooper, Garnier and others. As he says (49), “A paragraph ought to fix her. Then she can skip off and strangle a bath attendant in her garters”. This is from Burton (III. 2. iii, p. 572), of a dotting lover: “it would not grieve him to be hanged, if he might be strangled in her garters.” The vignette concludes with Belacqua telling Lucien that she lives “between a comb and a glass”; Burton’s image (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 528) of a Roman matron, who, unlike Cornelia, would rather be fair than honest:

The Great Devil had her, she stood in need of a heavyweight afternoon-man. What we mean is she was never lassata, let alone satiata; very uterine; Lucrezia, Clytemnestra, Semiramide, a saturation of inappeasable countesses. An endless treacle-moon at the Porte de la Villette with a chesty Valmont in crimson sweater, tweed casquette and bicycle clips—her tastes lay in that direction. Her eyes were wanton, they rolled and stravaged, they were laskivious and lickerish, the brokers of her zeal, basilisk eyes, the fowlers and hooks of Amourrr, burning glasses. Strong piercing black eyes. Otherwise we think the face ought to have been in togs. But from throat to toe she was lethal, pyrogenous, Scylla and the Sphinx. The fine round firm pap she had, the little mamelons, gave her an excellent grace. And the hips, the bony basin, coming after the Smeraldina-Rima’s Primavera buttocks ascream for a fusillade of spanners, fessades, chiappate and verberations, the hips were a song and a very powerful battery. Eyes—less good, to be frank, than we make out, our pen carried us away—and the body like a coiled spring, and springe, too, to catch woodcocks. And hollow. Nothing behind it. She shone like a jewel in her conditions, like the cinammon-tree and the rich furred cony and Aesop’s jay and Pliny’s kantharis. Another of the many that glare. She was always on the job, the job of being jewelly.

*The Great Devil*: Burton (III. 1. i. 2, p. 471), of love: “Plato calls it the great devil, for its vehemency, and sovereignty over all other passions, and defines it as an appetite”. DN, 117.

*a heavyweight afternoon-man*: Burton, *Preface* 41: “Beroaldus will have drunkards, afternoon-men, and such as more ordinarily delight in drink, to be mad”. DN, 106.

*never lassata, let alone satiata*: Juvenal, Satire VI. 130: “et lassata viris necdum satiata recessit” (“then exhausted by men but unsatisfied she went away”). DN, 64.

*very uterine*: Garnier, 70. DN, 64.

*Lucrezia*: Lucrezia Borgia (1480–519); “neice” of Pope Alexander VI; an infamous poisoner. Praz, 190.

*Clytemnestra*: wife of Agamemnon and lover of Aegisthus, with whom she murdered her husband in his bath on his return from Troy; killed by her son Orestes. Praz, 189.

*Semiramide*: (c. 800 B.C.); an Assyrian princess infamous for her sexual excesses. Dante, *Inferno* (V. 58). Praz, 190.

*a saturation of unappeasable countesses*: unidentified. Byron?

*treaclemoon*: Byron’s description of his early marriage. Praz, 71. DN, 69.

*Porte de la Villette*: a Paris metro station, and *château/hôtel*.

*a chesty Valmont*: seducer in *Les Liasons dangereuses* (1782) by Choderlos de Laclos. Praz, 99–101.

*Her eyes were wanton, they rolled ... laskivious*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 522): “For it is not the eye of itself that enticeth to lust, but an ‘adulterous eye,’ as Peter terms it, 2. ii. 14, a wanton, a rolling, lascivious eye: a wandering eye”. DN, 120.

*stravaqued*: Scots, wandered around aimlessly.

*lickerish*: Burton (III. 2. v. 3, p. 601), citing Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose* (ll. 4261–66), to the effect that all women have faults: “*Every each of them hath some vices, / If one be full of villany, / Another hath a liquorish eye, / If one be full of wantonness, / Another is a chideress*”. DN, 126.

*brokers of her zeal*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 522), of Venus: “she danced with her rolling eyes: they were the brokers and harbingers of her suit”. DN, 120. See also DN, 130, where Beckett notes after “qui non zelat not amat” (Burton, III. 3. i. 1, p. 626) “a zeal for love”.

*basilisk eyes ... burning glasses*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 2, p. 519): “Philostratus Lemnius cries out on his mistress’s basilisk eyes, *ardentes faces*, those two burning glasses, they had so inflamed his soul, that no water could quench it”. DN, 120.

*fowlers and hooks of Amourrrr*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 2, p. 518): “all parts are attractive, but especially the eyes ... which are love’s fowlers; *aucupium amoris*, the shoeing horns, ‘the hooks of love’”. DN, 119.

*in togs*: in swimming trunks; decently covered.

*pyrogenous*: compare DN, 141: “pyrographer”; “hot” rather than “fiery”?

*Scylla and the Sphinx*: cited thus in Praz, 189. Scylla, the Fatal Woman, daughter of Nisus, who murdered her father. Not in DN.

*The fine round firm pap ... gives an excellent grace*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 2, p. 517): “A fine soft round pap, gives an excellent grace”; from a catalogue of the female form. DN, 119.

*little mamelons*: Garnier, 44, as cited in DN, 63, the words of A. Paré, 17th century physician: “He applied a manual prelude to her genital parts and little mamelons so that she might be pricked & titillated, until she fell in with his male desires, so that she might habitate & make a little creature to God”.

*a bony basin*: said of the pelvis.

*Primavera buttocks*: Beckett associated Botticelli with muscular thighs (*Dream*, 15) or forks (“Sanies II”). Praz, 339: “Botticelli’s *Primavera* was at that time considered ‘satanique, irrésistible, et terrifiante’ ”.

*a fusillade of spanners*: a series of blows. Cooper, 343. DN, 56.

*fessades, chiappate and verberations*: modes of chastisement (rods, slaps, lashes) “on the breech”; Cooper, 25–26. DN, 50. In *Candide* (Cooper’s reference), “fessoit”.

*the hips were a song*: see below, *a very powerful battery*, for “burden” (refrain).

*a very powerful battery*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 4, p. 534): “To kiss and be kissed, which, amongst other lascivious provocations, is as a burden in song, and a most forcible battery, as infectious, Xenophon thinks, as the poison of a spider”; footnoted: “osculum ut phylangium inficit”. Combined in DN, 122: “osculation is a most forcible battery” (imprecise reference).

*the body like a coiled spring*: unlike the Smeraldina’s *Primavera* (“Spring”) buttocks?

*a springe, too, to catch a woodcock*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 522): of art annexed to beauty, “they set us a longing, ‘and so when they pull up their petticoats and outward garments,’ as usually they do to show their fine stockings, and those of purest silken dye, gold fringes, laces, embroiderings ... ‘tis but a springe to catch woodcocks”. DN, 120.

*shone like a jewel in her conditions*: “jewel of gold in a swine’s snout” (*Proverbs* 11:22); a fair woman lacking discretion. DN, 79.

*the cinammon-tree and the rich-furred cony*: Burton (III. 2. ii. 3, p. 526), of those enamoured of outward garments: “as with rich-furred conies, their cases are far better than their bodies, and like the bark of a cinnamon tree, which is dearer than the whole bulk, their outward acoutrements are far more precious than their inward endowments”. DN, 121.

*Aesop’s jay and Pliny’s Kantharis*: Burton (III. 2. v. 3, p. 596): “Follow my counsel, see her undressed, see her, if it be possible, out of her attires, *furtivus nudatam coloribus*, it may be she is like Aesop’s jay, or Pliny’s cantharides, she will be loathsome, ridiculous, thou wilt not endure her sight”. DN, 126.

*being jewelley*: flashy, but lacking discretion; see above, *shone like a jewel*.

This portrait lacks any sub-text of remorse. It is an exorcism, a goodbye to all that; and one can only wonder what might have happened, had the novel been published, to Beckett's *rapprochement* with Joyce. As an exercise in verbal marquetry, its link with Burton is clear; and teasing out the references is intriguing. However, in a novel that insists on an involuntary (Proustian) principle of unity, the technique is curiously un-modern. The spliced details lack any sense of montage, of the cinematographic principle that Eliot and Pound were cultivating as a poetic dynamic, to create a kinetic sculpture rather than a catalogue.

The most vicious portrait is that of the Fricas, mother and daughter, hostesses of the soirée (a parody of Proust's *matinée*) in "A Wet Night" and the corresponding part of *Dream*. The narrator of the latter wonders (180) what name to give a new presence, unexpectedly entering the quiet pages of his cadenza: "Lilly, Jane or Caleken Frica? Or just plain Mary?" This was dropped in "A Wet Night", probably because the satire was based too closely on Mary Manning and her mother Susan, an identification made by Beckett to MacGreevy (18 Aug. 1934), and confirmed by Knowlson (154). In the story the distinction between mother and daughter is blurred, and the satire made less specific. Similar evenings were held by other Dublin doyennes, so the effect there is more of an exercise in Swiftian caricature, "Not saeva, fabricated" (*Dream*, 216), than a *roman à clef*.

The Frica, a nightmare harpy "singing Havelock Ellis", clutches in her talons several depraved volumes; her equine features distended. The books are borrowed from Praz:

1. Giuseppe Portigliotti, Italian scholar and author of several studies of the Borgias. His *Penombre* [sic] *Claustrali* (Milan: Treves, 1930) is described by Praz, 49. DN, 36.

2. Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814); found guilty of unnatural offences, he was in 1778 committed to the Bastille where he wrote plays and obscene novels, before being removed in 1789 to the Charenton Asylum. Praz, 102–06. "A Wet Night" (56) corrects "hundred" to "120 days".

3. Antonio [sic] Guido Brignole-Sale; 17th century author of *Erotica* and *Mystica* who alternated lascivious with pious writings. After his wife died he entered the Jesuit Order and practiced such severe flagellations that he was often rebuked by his fellow priests. Praz, 49. DN, 36. This composite reference includes Ronsard's "anteros" and the saintly Aliosha from Dostoievski's *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The tone is vicious, and only partly excused as a “striking exercise in grotesque caricature” (Knowlson, 154). Dressed for her party the younger Frica creates an effect of “throttled gazelle” (*Dream*, 214), then she and her mother are pilloried (180):

What shall we call it? Give it a name quick. Lilly, Jane or Caleken Frica? Or just plain Mary? Suppose we make it Caleken to please the theologasters and Frica to please ourself, and of course whatever comes in handy for short.

The Frica had a mother, and thereby was partially explained: a bald caterwauling beldam of a ma with more teeth than toes. As a young mare she had curvetted smartly, lifting the knees chin-high, and had enjoyed a certain measure of success in certain quarters. And if the dam trot, as the saying runs and we all know to our cost, shall the foal then amble? She shall not. Nor did. For did she not caper caparisoned in those nightmare housings and in her absinthe whisnny notify Belacqua that her darling ma bade him to a party with back-stairs, claret-cup and the intelligensia. Belacqua uncovered cautiously his face.

*Caleken*: a victim of Cornelius Hadrien’s whipping institution. Hadrien, a Franciscan priest, disciplined his naked female penitents, and instructed Caleken Peters in “holy obedience”; but when she questioned the need for private discipline she was denounced and excommunicated by him (1558). Cooper, 122–23. DN, 53.

*Frica*: as in Jonson’s *Volpone* IV. ii, “A base harlot, a lewd fricatrice” (Knowlson, 732). Beckett’s source is probably Garnier, 448. DN, 67.

*the theologasters*: Burton (II. 2. iii, p. 329): “But why should the sun and moon be angry, or take exceptions at mathematicians and philosophers? when as the like measure is offered unto God himself by a company of theologasters”. DN, 113 (imprecise reference).

*a bald caterwauling beldam*: Burton (III. 2. i. 2, p. 501): “a crone, a beldam, she can neither see, nor hear, go nor stand, a mere carcase, a witch, and scarce feel; she caterwauls, and must have a stallion, a champion, she must and will marry again, and betroth herself to some young man”. DN, 118.

*more toes than teeth*: Burton (III. 2. iii, p. 577): “Yea many times will make old men and women that have more toes than teeth, dance”. DN, 124.

*if the dam trot ... shall the foal then amble*: Burton (III. 3. iv. 2, p. 657): “‘If the mother be dishonest, in all likelihood the daughter will *matrizare*, take after her in all good qualities’ ... ‘If the dam trot, the foal will not amble’ ”. DN, 136.

Beckett's friendship with the Mannings somehow survived, but the President of the Immortals exacted an exquisite revenge a few years later. Married to Mark de Wolfe Howe of Boston, Mary came to Ireland in the summer of 1936 because her play, *Youth's the Season ...?* was to be produced at the Gate Theatre, if parts were rewritten. She asked Beckett to help, and he suggested several changes (in *Plays of Changing Ireland*, ed. Curtis Canfield [N.Y.: Macmillan, 1936], 322–404). Beckett rebounded from an unrequited crush on Mary's friend Betty Stockton (for whom "Cascando" was written), and he and Mary embarked on a frantic affair, which lasted until Mary caught the boat back to Boston in early September (Knowlson, 227–29). Beckett wrote to Mary from Germany, 1936–37; those letters (now at the Harry Ransom Center, Austin) reveal considerable feeling. Mary visited him in Paris in 1958, and they kept in touch until Beckett's death (the last letter, dated 11 Aug. 1989, was written "from an old crocks' retreat").

A rumor maintains that Mary's daughter Fanny (born June 1937) was fathered by Beckett that summer of 1936. This lacks foundation, but the "summerhouse" memories in *Company* (53–59) and "Heard in the Dark II" invoke one awaiting a woman to join him in the little hexagonal log house, of larch and fir, as in the garden of Cooldrinagh. The woman is "late", and that pun links her big breasts and abdomen to a fear of pregnancy. The episode undoubtedly embraces Beckett's restructuring in memory of the affair with Mary Manning.

Speculation is risky, and perhaps unwise, for the evidence is not as compelling as that which determines the originals of the fair to middling women of *Dream*; but with those caveats a short coda might be ventured. Among the Leventhal papers at the Harry Ransom Center is a short unpublished poem by Beckett, entitled "To My Daughter". Its fifteen lines revisit "Hell Crane to Starling"; but the poem is condensed and recast, and the tone has changed from irreverent wit to considerable bitterness:

Aholiba charm of my blear eyes  
there is a cave above Zoar  
and a comely donkey is there  
do not bother bringing wine  
he is no connexion of ours

child of my sorrow Belacqua will never  
swim before your rut in vermillion on the walls  
never will you see that glabrous cod  
flaunting a Babylonian belt

and even supposing you did  
he would not be worth sending to fetch

and I tell you there is a fed ass  
lepping with impurée of cantharides  
in the hill above Zoar

what more do you want

Given the hints from the much later *Company* and “Heard in the Dark II”, the memory of waiting for the woman not pregnant with the daughter Beckett did not have, then the provocative title “To My Daughter” may suggest a reaction (however muted in Beckett’s life, and in his letters to Mary) to a loved one pregnant to another, to whom she has returned. As the poem says, “never will you see that glabrous cod [Belacqua] / flaunting a Babylonian belt”; that is, being called from afar, as in *Ezekiel 23: 14–16*, where the whore Aholiba sees on the wall images of the Chaldeans “pourtrayed with vermilion”; and, doting upon them, “sent messages unto them into Chaldea”. Instead, this Aholiba will remain content with her comely donkey and aphrodisiac-fed ass; for, as the poem finally states: “what more do you want.”

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