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Bergson – Beckett – Lotman: A semiotic analysis of Samuel Beckett's "A Wet Night" from *More Pricks Than Kicks*

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Abstract

The article presents a semiotic analysis of a short story entitled "A Wet Night" from Samuel Beckett's collection *More Pricks Than Kicks*. The author attempts to analyse the story using the semiotic tools and the concept of semiosphere proposed by Yuri Lotman. In addition to Lotman's theory, the discussion refers to traces of Henri Bergson's philosophy, correlated with Beckett's interests in this matter and highlighted in "A Wet Night". The aim is to show that both Lotman's and Bergson's theories find their application in the selected story.

Key words

asymmetry, Beckett, memory, semiosphere, semiotics, space, time

Bergson – Beckett – Lotman: semiotyczna analiza opowiadania Samuela Becketta *A Wet Night* z tomu *More Pricks than Kicks*

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza semiotyczna opowiadania „A Wet Night" autorstwa Samuela Becketta, które można znaleźć w zbiorze *More Pricks Than Kicks*. Autor artykułu podejmuje próbę analizy semiotycznej wyżej wymienionego opowiadania, opierając się na koncepcji semiotyka Jurija Lotmana, który zaproponował teorię semiosfery oraz systemów modelujących. Ponadto autor zestawia koncepcję Lotmana z filozofią Henri Bergsona, której echa przejawiają się w opowiadaniu „A Wet Night", w celu sprawdzenia, czy obie teorie znajdują zastosowania w analizowanym tekście.

Słowa kluczowe

asymetria, Beckett, czas, pamięć, przestrzeń, semiosfera, semiotyka

In his 1929 essay entitled "Dante… Bruno… Vico… Joyce", Samuel Beckett writes as follows: "And now here am I, with my handful of abstractions, among which notably: a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of poetics, and the prospect of self-extension in the world of Mr. Joyce's *Work in Progress*" (2010b: 495). The fragment neatly encapsulates the thoughts which occupied the mind of the then 23-year-old artist. Suffice it to say that Beckett's pre-war works can be described, quoting the author himself, as "a synthetical syrup" (2010b: 505). Indeed, the author's early novels and short stories resemble a melting pot of ideas, concepts and thoughts which were to be developed in the course of his artistic career and, eventually, flourished in his late works, creating the so-called *signature* of Samuel Beckett.

To my mind, the short story collection entitled *More Pricks Than Kicks* is an accumulation of artistic experiments and thought processes of the young author in their embryonic

form. Written between 1931 and 1933, and eventually published in 1934, the collection hybridises the areas of literature, art and philosophy which in that period particularly fascinated Beckett. In *More Pricks* one can find traces of Beckett's spiritual mentors, especially Dante, Joyce, Vico, Descartes, and Bergson; a play with literary conventions such as psychological and philosophical story, eclogue, satire, classical tragedy, Bildungs- and Künstlerroman, internal monologue and the stream of consciousness. Moreover, *More Pricks* includes elements of intertextuality, on the one hand, and autobiographical motifs on the other. In addition, the collection is filled with sounds, both of classical composers, like Beethoven or Mozart, and of traditional Irish folk songs, the clatter of the streets of Dublin, the sounds of nature, intermingled with the uncouth hubbubs of burps and flatuses. The cacophony of sounds eventually leads to pauses of silence, which become all the more resounding.

A variety of motifs and concepts borrowed or taken from other pieces of art allowed Beckett to create in *More Pricks Than Kicks* a unique world, or a semiosphere, which reflects the young writer's artistic interests. The present article concentrates upon the short story entitled "A Wet Night" from *More Pricks*, predominantly because it combines two significant subjects of young Beckett's interests, namely the philosophy of Henri Bergson and his fascination with Italian literature, especially with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I will be particularly interested in such theories as the semiosphere, the relation between text and non-text, the asymmetry and importance of a code proposed by Lotman on the one hand, and the relation between mind and body proposed by Bergson on the other.

In *Culture and Explosion*, Yuri Lotman proposes to redefine Roman Jakobson's long-established communication model, namely addresser–language (text)–addressee as addresser–code (text)–addressee. Lotman introduces an important distinction between code and language, suggesting that code is an

artificial structure, whereas language "is a code plus its history" (2009: x). Moreover, he claims that "[t]he term 'code' carries with it the idea of an artificial, newly created structure, introduced by instantaneous agreement. A code does not imply history, that is, psychologically it orients us towards artificial language, which is also, in general, assumed to be an ideal model of language" (2009: 4). The statement can be understood as follows: despite its appeal for many linguists, the ideal act of communication between a model addresser and a model addressee, who fully understands the addresser's message, seems to be pointless, as such communication is insipid and leads nowhere. Instead, Lotman argues that there must be a form of tension and resistance between an addresser and an addressee which makes it possible to create a new space of communication. This, in turn, becomes the essence of a conversation. Such action lies at the origin of the concept of *semiosphere*, where an addressee, a message and an addresser become a coherent system. The term semiosphere, coined by Lotman in 1982, was patterned on Vladimir Vernadsky's biosphere, a closed, self-regulating system containing ecosystems (1990: 123). According to Lotman, a semiosphere is "[t]he semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages" (1990: 123).

The question of the interrelation between a code and a language needs to be addressed here. In Lotmanian categories, a code is a pure message without any background, such as for instance history or culture, whereas a language conveys these concepts within the "semiotic spaces and their boundaries" (1990: 124). Moreover, the notions of code and language may be interpreted in the categories of not only literature, but art as well. Consequently, language does not have to be solely interpreted in the categories of grammar, syntax or spelling, but in the categories of literature, music and film as well. Thus the semiosphere resembles an organism which in its core is built of a natural language which further allows the semiosphere to create a variety of new languages, like artistic, poetic or reli-

gious ones. These languages, or codes, were defined by Lotman as *secondary modelling systems*, and according to his theory, an infinite number of such codes can be created within a semiosphere (1990: x).

Another notion which Lotman's theory introduces is that of the *boundary*. The boundary separates a semiosphere from a non-semiotic space, or a text from a non-text. Intriguingly, a non-text can enter into a semiosphere but it is automatically forced to adjust to the rules of that particular semiosphere. However, it may sometimes happen that frictions, or *explosions* occur between different concepts within a semiosphere. According to Lotman, every explosion eventually leads to the emergence of new phenomena, thus the processes within a semiosphere undergo continuous change. One more aspect which characterises the Lotmanian semiosphere is the concept of time. Time within the borders of a semiosphere is non-linear and multi-dimensional. Thus the process of semiosis involves different dimensions of time, e.g. cultural, historical or political.

Having introduced the basic notions of Lotman's theory, the subsequent point is to find out whether it can be used in practice. Beckett's "A Wet Night" begins with the haunting word "hark" (2010b: 108). It is an old-fashioned word which stands for "listening attentively" and is often used in the imperative form. The word connotes several possible interpretations. Read in Lotman's semiotic categories, it becomes a starting point for the story, "the frame" (Lotman 1977: 209), or the border, which separates the non-text from the semiosphere of the work of art. Moreover, the word "hark" comes to be recognised in the categories of a semiological language upon which the secondary modelling systems, or in other words the messages, are super-structured. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", a famous carol by Charles Wesley, can serve as an example of a non-text transmitted through the "border". Written in 1739, the song may evoke positive connotations with Christmas time, which is the background of "A Wet Night".

The reference to music and sounds is not coincidental in this fragment. The word "hark" not only attracts the reader's attention, but may also be considered as the starting point of the "existence" of the text. If we assume a retrospective view of Beckett's mature writing, we can notice the similarities with such works as *Breath* (1969), *Not I* (1972), *Company* (1980), and *Worstward Ho* (1983). Intriguingly, it seems that every protagonist of the above-mentioned works starts to develop his, her or its self-awareness through sound. In the case of *Company* it is "[a] voice [which] comes to one in the dark" (2010b: 427), in *Worstward Ho* "On. Say on. Be said on" (2010b: 471). A sound of inhaling air symbolising the dawn of a new life can be traced in *Breath*. The opening sentence of "A Wet Night" refers to sound as well. It is worth evoking here the concept of *incipit*, borrowed by literary theory from medieval manuscripts. In the Middle Ages, an incipit was an initial sequence of signs which started a text; in other words, it was the first sentence of a story whose aim was to indicate the beginning of a work of art. Literary theory equips this notion with additional features; the incipit's aim is to engage the readers and inform them about the world of a novel, answering three basic questions: "who?", "where?" and "when?" As far as classical novels are concerned, in the majority of cases it would not be difficult to answer these questions, but in the case of Beckett's incipits the answer would be more challenging. The word "hark" does not describe any circumstances of the story, it rather functions as if it were an ornament which decorates the beginning or an incipit of a medieval Irish volume. According to Del Lungo, there are two major ways of entering into a narrative: either in "I) *medias res*" or "II) progressively, deferring the action to the heart of the story" (qtd. in Adamo 2000: 59). In addition, Del Lungo proposes additional sub-categories of the incipit, namely static, progressive, dynamic, and suspended. The last one is based on the "rarefaction of information and delayed dramatization" (Adamo 2000: 59), which in the case of the word "hark" seems to be the most relevant.

The story's incipit may also be interpreted in the categories of Christianity, namely the birth of Christ.[1] Reading further the first passage of the story, one may observe that the early imperative tenor is smoothly transformed into a monologue addressed to an unknown person: "Hark, it is the season of festivity and goodwill. Shopping is in full swing, the streets are thronged with revellers, the Corporation has offered a prize for the best-dressed window, Hyam's trousers are down again" (2010b: 108). The opposition of the high- and lowbrow themes presented in this fragment automatically creates, according to Lotman's theory, possible new messages based upon, deceptively, the same code. The structure of the semiosphere begins to work on several different levels simultaneously and the inner oppositions (high-lowbrow subjects) structure the text and make it more cohesive. Among oppositional pairs one can find, for instance, silence-sound, seriousness-irony or spirituality-reality.

When we take a closer look at the end of "A Wet Night", a certain kind of frame can also be noticed. As in *Breath*, where the play begins and ends with the sound of inhaling and exhaling air, eventually leading to silence, a similar compositional principle is used in the story under discussion. The final passage introduces once again "a voice, slightly more in sorrow than in anger this time", a voice that "enjoined him to move on, which, the pain being so much better, he was only too happy to do" (2010b: 138). What deserves particular attention is the word "enjoin", meaning "order or strongly advise somebody to do something" (Oxford Dictionary). The pair hark-enjoin thus becomes the *limes*, the frame of the story.

In *Universe of the Mind*, Lotman introduces another crucial feature of each semiosphere, namely its asymmetry:

> The structure of the semiosphere is asymmetrical. Asymmetry finds expression in the currents of internal translations with

[1] The topic of Christianity in Samuel Beckett's works has been discussed in detail, for instance by Erik Tonning in his *Modernism and Christianity* (2014) and by Chris Ackerley (2013).

> which the whole density of the semiosphere is permeated. Translation is a primary mechanism of consciousness. To express something in another language is a way of understanding it. And since in the majority of cases the different languages of the semiosphere are semiotically asymmetrical, i.e. they do not have mutual semantic correspondences, then the whole semiosphere can be regarded as a generator of information. (1990: 127)

The difficulties which this term involves are connected with the exuberance of languages actively working within a semiosphere and the lack of "semantic correspondences" (Lotman 1990: 127) among them. Furthermore, the asymmetry of languages leads to the generation of information. The generated information is a processed output of the languages which can be found in a semiosphere. It follows that the generated information, in its specific way, can be treated as something new, yet at the same time it includes traces of the original languages. Lotman illustrates this phenomenon using the example of cinema, which developed from street peep-shows to a fully-fledged art (1990: 124). Moreover, Lotman points out that the languages which are in the centre of a semiosphere are "[t]he most developed and structurally organized" (1990: 127), contrary to those which are on the periphery.

To apply Lotman's theory to the analysis of Samuel Beckett's "A Wet Night", one needs first to determine the core of the story's semiosphere, remembering that the semiosphere is recognised as a structure. It is well known that Beckett regarded Dante Alighieri, along with James Joyce, as the most important and influential of writers. Numerous references to *The Divine Comedy* can be found, for example, in his letters (2009: 25, 35, 82, 185). Thus it is no surprise that references to Dante's masterpiece can be noticed in "A Wet Night" as well. Moreover, the intertextual allusions in the short story refer not only to figures from *The Divine Comedy* but also to its plot. However, the plot of "A Wet Night" is a variation on the original story, and thus can be analysed in Lotmanian categories of asymmetry. In the first part of the story, Belacqua, whose name is

taken from *The Divine Comedy*, is wandering around Dublin, which he perceives as if it were Dantean Florence. The topographical description of places and streets of the city allows the reader to reconstruct Belacqua's night-time wandering around Dublin. The story mentions such places as "Lincoln Place", "Pearse Street", "the Queens", "the Dental Hospital", "Johnston, Mooney and O'Brien's clocks" (2010b: 109, 127). At the same time, Belacqua's mind produces images of Florence and the city's famous places, such as "Piazza della Signoria" or "Palazzo Vecchio" (2010b: 109-110), which are superimposed upon the topography of Dublin. Belacqua's journey into the dark resembles Dante's travels through hell and purgatory. For example, the protagonist perceives trams not as a means of transport but as "monsters, moaning along beneath the wild gesture of the trolley" (2010b: 109). Additionally, in the central scene of the story, namely the party at Calikan Frica's house, a passionate discussion about literature takes place. The Professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovoidology brings up the topic of Ravenna, which is subsequently echoed by other guests. Suddenly, the Man of Law remarks that "Dante died there [in Ravenna]" (2010b: 124).

It is also worth analysing how Beckett processes Dante's oeuvre for his artistic purposes, bearing in mind that *The Divine Comedy* becomes the core of his story. A far as the setting is concerned, the space of Dante's hell is superimposed upon the topography of Dublin. Moreover, motifs used in *The Divine Comedy* are presented in "A Wet Night" in an ironic manner. *The Divine Comedy* starts as follows: "Half way along the road we have to go, / I found myself obscured in a great forest, / Bewildered, and I knew I had lost the way" (Inferno I, 1-3). The subject finds himself in an unknown place, which is the beginning of his journey; then he meets Virgil, who eventually becomes his guide. In "A Wet Night" the situation is reversed: Belacqua first meets his friend, Jean du Chas, a poet, and afterwards he sets off on his journey into "the dark". The irony is fully captured in the scene where Jean du Chas goes with

Belacqua to a bar. There, the poet orders the protagonist to drink, saying the command "in a voice of thunder" (2010b: 111). Afterwards Belacqua "waddled out of the bar and into the street and up like a bit dirt into a Hoover" (2010b: 112), which can be interpreted as the symbolic start of a journey. However, Belacqua's guide, Jean du Chas, does not follow him, which paradoxically means that the protagonist, who is arguably drunk, sets out on the journey without a guide. These two scenes in their asymmetry of events correspond with Lotman's theory. Since these two texts (languages) cannot be translated in a literal way, they start to function as an "asymmetrical translation", which in fact opens "A Wet Night" up to a variety of new meanings, symbols and motifs.

Moreover, "A Wet Night" bears similarities to Lotman's theory of the asymmetrical relationship involved in translating a text from one language to another. Lotman indicates that when one translates a text from one language (for instance English, or T_1) into another one (for instance French, or T_2) and then he or she tries to translate it back from T_2 into T_1, he or she will not obtain T_1 or even T_1' but T_3, a completely new text (1990: 14-15). The reason seems to be clear: different natural languages very often do not have symmetrical equivalents for certain words or expressions, hence such a translation is asymmetrical. This model can also be applied to the analysed fragments of "A Wet Night" and *The Divine Comedy*; they represent samples of dissimilar languages which cannot be translated word for word. In addition, Lotman also proposes the theory of a text's capacity for memory, based on *Hamlet*. He suggests that "*Hamlet* is not just a play by Shakespeare, but it is also the memory of all its interpretations, and what is more, it is also the memory of all those historical events which occurred outside the text but with which Shakespeare's text can evoke associations" (1990: 18-19). Thus the text of *The Divine Comedy* is not interpreted by Samuel Beckett only, as it already contains the memory and interpretations of many generations of readers who have preceded him. Moreover, Beckett's

interpretative difficulties may derive from the fact that both Dante and Beckett lived and created in completely different realities and represented different cultural and intellectual backgrounds.

The suggestion that Belacqua is heading towards hell rather than heaven appears immediately after he leaves the pub, when he buys "a paper of a charming little sloven" (2010b: 112). This paper deals with the topic of the female body and fuels Belacqua's obsession with "the scarlet gown" (2010b: 112), especially whether the back of the gown is open or not. On the one hand, the symbol of the scarlet gown becomes associated with eroticism and sexuality, which increases the oneiric, dense atmosphere of "A Wet Night"; on the other, the symbol has Biblical connotations, similar to those in the passage from Joyce's *Ulysses* where Leopold Bloom is accused of being "a worshipper of the Scarlet Woman" (1961: 492). In both examples, i.e. Beckett's and Joyce's, the motif alludes to the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation.[2] The above-mentioned example of the "scarlet gown" shows how a common physical object (a gown), placed within a semiosphere, comes to be encircled by a variety of motifs and possible interpretations, such as Dante's hell and the birth of Christ, on the one hand, and erotic crudeness on the other. The interrelation of the contradictory metaphors only reinforces the structure of the artistic text, in keeping with Lotman's theory of mutual opposites (1977: 37).

The asymmetry of languages is also noticeable in another scene from "A Wet Night", namely the meeting of Belacqua with a Civic Guard. At this point, it should be mentioned that it is the first time we meet Belacqua after he has left the bar. Standing by the Dental Hospital, Belacqua, possibly still drunk, begins to look at his dirty hands. Suddenly he notices that:

[2] The topic has been presented in a variety of publications: e.g. Daniel R. Schwartz, *Reading Joyce's Ulysses* (1987) or Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995).

> The next thing was his hands dragged roughly down from his eyes, which he opened on the vast crimson face of an ogre. For a moment it was still, plush gargoyle, then it moved, it was convulsed. This, he thought, is the face of some person talking. It was. It was that part of a Civic Guard pouring abuse upon him. (2010b: 127)

This passage draws on a well-established literary convention, namely the moment when the protagonist is near his or her goal, but in order to reach it, he or she needs to overcome a final obstacle, very often personified as a monster or a villain. There are numerous examples of this convention in literature, such as Scylla and Charybdis in the *Odyssey* and *Jason and the Argonauts*, or the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In "A Wet Night", Belacqua's destination is a party held at Lincoln Place, but first he has to fight with a "monster": a creature who is described first as a fantastic "ogre" and "plush gargoyle" and then transforms into a substantial "Civic Guard" (2010b: 127). The comparison of the Civic Guard to an ogre may be interpreted in terms of the asymmetry of languages of art proposed by Lotman. Lotman argues that "[i]n secondary modelling systems, […] we also encounter the convergence of not two but many independent structures; here the sign no longer constitutes an equivalent pair, but a bundle of mutually equivalent elements drawn from various systems" (1977: 36). On the basis of this theory, one can notice the equivalent for the pair ogre-Civic guard in *The Divine Comedy*, Inferno, Canto XXI, which not only describes a similar pair, but also, as a different system, or text, presents the scene in an asymmetrical manner:

> I saw there was a black devil behind us,
> And he was running in our direction up the crag.
>
> Ah, and how ferocious was his appearance!
> And in his bearing, how much cruelty,
> With his wings open, and his light-footedness!

His shoulders which were pointed and seemed proud,
Were burdened with the two legs of a sinner,
And in each hand he grasped the nerve of a foot. (ll. 29-36)

The grotesque description of the devil, who is responsible for punishing frauds and corrupted politicians, is contrasted with that of the Civil Guard who upholds public order. Belacqua's misdemeanour can in no way be compared with the ones punished in hell. In fact, he is treated by the guard as a prowler whose very existence disturbs public order. Belacqua's sense of being insignificant corresponds with his name, a name which evokes associations with *The Divine Comedy*. While Dante only travels through hell as an observer, Beckett's Belacqua seems to live, if not in hell, then at least in purgatory. It is also worth noting that Belacqua's namesake appears in *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatorio, Canto IV and is described by Dante as the one who "[w]as sitting, with his hands clasped round his knees, / And his head bowed down and touching them" (ll. 107-108). In *The Divine Comedy*, Belacqua epitomises laziness and indolence. When Dante asks him what he is waiting for, he only answers "[b]rother, what is the good of going up?" (l. 127).[3]

If one compares Belacqua's behaviour in Dante and Beckett in semiotic categories, similarities appear. Beckett's Belacqua shows indolence, which eventually leads to his being detained by a civil guard. Instead of heading for the party, he stands in the middle of a street, analysing his hands. He repeats the same action at the end of the story when "he began to try would they work, clenching them and unclenching, keeping them moving for the wonder of his weak eyes" (2010b: 138). A similar ending appears in Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling*

[3] The vast range of detailed studies focusing on the importance of Dantean texts in Samuel Beckett's oeuvre can be found in the research of Antoni Libera, for instance in "*The Lost Ones:* A Myth of Human History and Destiny", Libera and Pyda *Jesteście na Ziemi, na to rady nie ma! Dialogi o teatrze Samuela Becketta* [*You are on earth. There's no cure for that! Dialogues on Samuel Beckett's theatre*] (2015) or S. E. Gontarski *Samuel Beckett. Humanistic Perspectives* (1982).

Women (1932, first published 1992), a novel which Beckett wrote at the same time as *More Pricks*, but was not able to publish (Beckett 2009: 102-108, 121).

In terms of Lotman's model, the above-mentioned sentence involves several layers; the first layer refers to the sign, namely to language which creates the space and the boundary of the sentence, or semiosphere. Secondly, the layer of the secondary modelling system is superimposed on the first layer; the secondary modelling layer filters non-texts, in this case *The Divine Comedy* and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, and begins to function in new contexts, simultaneously creating new meanings. The ending of both scenes in "A Wet Night" and *The Divine Comedy* is similar as well; the Guard orders Belacqua first to "hold on there" and then to "move on" (2010b: 128). Dante is told by Malacoda, a devil commander, to "keep up upon the ridge above the bank" (l. 110). Both events create a kind of frame for the scenes; Belacqua can continue his journey to the party, Dante his journey through the circles of hell.

Before moving to the significance of Bergson's philosophy in "A Wet Night", it is worth mentioning Beckett's interest in this matter. In *Creative Involution: Bergson, Beckett, Deleuze*, Stanley E. Gontarski observes:

> Samuel Beckett's lifelong interest in, if not his preoccupation with, the relationship of mind to body (much generated through his interest in and critique of the work of René Descartes – his focus on, presumably, 'Descartes' errors' as well) is well if often uncritically detailed in the critical discourse. (2015: 24)

Then, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, Gontarski claims that

> He [Samuel Beckett] had read Henri Bergson closely, however, since he was teaching him at Trinity College, Dublin (1930-1931), where he drew a distinction for his class between Proust's sense of time and that of Bergson, Proust's more dualist and relative,

> Bergson's an absolute time, at least according to notes recorded by one of his students in that class, Rachel Burrows. (2014: 4)

Beckett's interest in Bergsonian philosophy is evinced in his early writings. In *Murphy* we read that "[Murphy] felt himself split into two, a body and a mind" (2010a: 68). The 1930 essay *Proust* deals with a similar topic, and the construction of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* presents a concise study of mind and body, especially in the chapter *Und*. The Bergsonian spirit is equally present in "A Wet Night".

It seems that a sense of existing in two systems plays a significant role in Beckett's oeuvre. One can find profound reflection upon this subject not only in the above-mentioned examples but also in later works. In *Memory and Matter*, Bergson attempts to capture the moment when a subject, who perceives his mind and body as an independent, separate identity, finally realises that besides him/her there exists an external world in which there are other entities, places and phenomena. The act of the subject's awakening eventually leads to a kind of interaction in which the subject is involved. Moreover, treating the subject, in semiotic categories, as a separate semiosphere, which comes to be influenced by non-texts or other semiospheres, also allows us to recognise the dualism of the world. In *Memory and Matter* one can find several examples describing the dualistic system:

> *How is it that the same images can belong at the same time to two different systems, the one in which each image varies for itself and in the well-defined measure that it is patient of the real action of surrounding images, the other in which all change for a single image, and in the varying measure that they reflect the eventual action of this privileged image*? (2007: 13, original emphasis)

And:

> Now no philosophical doctrine denies that the same images can enter at the same time into two distinct systems, one belonging to

> *science,* wherein each image, related only to itself, possesses an absolute value; and the other, the world of *consciousness*, wherein all the images depend on a central image, our body, the variations of which they follow. (2007: 13-14)

In Lotman's model, the border between the semiosphere and non-semiosphere is the place where external information is, on the one hand, recycled and adapted to the semiosphere, while on the other, it changes the inner structure of the semiosphere. The equivalent of the Lotmanian border in Bergson's philosophy may be the body. In *Memory and Matter* Bergson argues:

> Here are external images, then my body, and, lastly, the changes brought about by my body in the surrounding images. I see plainly how external images influence the image that I call my body: they transmit movement to it. And I also see how this body influences external images: it gives back movement to them. My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement [...] (2007: 4-5)

In this fragment, it is worth pointing out how Bergson recognises the importance of the body, which he treats as a kind of filter that both transmits, and has an influence on, internal and external images. At this point Bergson's argument resembles Lotman's concept of a non-text (an external image) which, filtered through the border of a semiosphere (a body), becomes part of this semiosphere (an internal image), simultaneously changing its structure, or, in Bergsonian categories, its image. The notion of the body as a filter between the external and internal world, or a non-text and text, can be observed in Beckett's works as well. In his early short story *The Assumption* (1929), the role of silence and sound is indispensable for the subject to recognise his position and confirm that the external world is real and does not exist only in the subject's mind, while in the final scene of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*

Belacqua begins to feel pain in his arm – a symbol of physicality. The complex, mathematical instruction on how to suck pebbles presented in *Molloy* (1951) similarly works as the subject's attempt to become anchored in reality.

The Bergson-Lotman model can also be applied in the analysis of "A Wet Night". For instance, according to Lotman's theory, the characters' predilection for enumerating apparently unnecessary items in their dialogues, an action which in its deceptive pointlessness resembles the pebble sucking in *Molloy*, plays an important aesthetic role. Lotman recognises that these "external stimuli" "act on our organs of sense, we continue to see, hear, feel, and experience joy or suffering, regardless of whether we understand what these things mean or not" (1977: 57). Similarly, in Bergsonian theories such references may directly correspond with the memory of the subject. If one compares Bergson's theory of pure memory and perception with the apparently nonsense interjections in Beckett's oeuvre, such as names of places, people or items, one may better understand why they appear suddenly, apparently in places where they should not. They may also serve, in Lotman's categories, as textual elements which build the fabric of the artistic text. In this sense, one can recognise an intriguing correlation between Bergson and Lotman's theories, a correlation that is made present in Beckett's short story. The following fragment describing a party in "A Wet Night" may be used as an illustration:

> "Allow me" said the rising strumpet: "a sandwich: egg, tomato, cucumber."
> "Did you know" blundered the Man of Law "that the Swedes have no fewer than seventy varieties of Smoerrbroed?"
> The voice of the arithmomaniac was heard:
> "The arc" he said, stooping to all in the great plainness of his words, "is longer than its chords."
> "Madam knows Ravenna?" said the paleographer.
> "Do I know Ravenna!" exclaimed the Parabimbi. "Sure I know Ravenna. A sweet and noble city."

> "You know of course" said the Man of Law "that Dante died there." "Right" said the Parabimbi, "so, he did".

A pure memory, which may have come from the author's personal experience, in this case Beckett's, is gradually being recycled and placed in new contexts, vicariously by the memory-image and perception. The memory A is transformed into A', A" etc., finally becoming only a mirage of the original, and starting to function as an autonomous element of the fictional world. The author can consciously, or unconsciously, refer in his work to the concept of Bergsonian memory; for instance, in the sentence, "'Did you know' blundered the Man of Law 'that the Swedes have no fewer than seventy varieties of Smoerrbroed?'", the information about the Swedes might come from the author's personal experience and might have been heard in another context, but in the text of "A Wet Night" it functions as a part of the Man of Law's monologue. Suffice it to say that the paleographer's question about Ravenna works in a similar manner. The context of this fragment of "A Wet Night", namely the house party, is a typical example of a situation where people are chatting and switching from one subject to another, which creates a sense that everyone is talking but nobody is listening.[4] Moreover, the repetitions correlate with Bergson's theory, in which repetitions, especially mechanical ones, are the basis of a distinction between *remembrance* and *acquisition*. The purely nonsense sentences come to play a completely different role when they are put in the context of the house party: this part of "A Wet Night" begins to function as a separate semiosphere, and its sentences, as they have lost their informational context, begin to function in artistic categories.

Moreover, the spirit of Bergsonian philosophy is discernible in the story in the scene where Belacqua finally appears at the party and is forced by the guests to say something. After a moment of silence, he says: "When with indifference I re-

[4] It is worth pointing out that the motif of talking as the confirmation of the existence of the subject is a recurring element of Beckett's signature, e.g. *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1963) or *Not I* (1972).

member my past sorrow, my mind has indifference, my memory has sorrow. The mind, upon the indifference which is in it, is indifferent; yet the memory, upon the sorrow which is in it, is not sad" (2010b: 135-136). Belacqua's apparently nonsense utterance evokes the concept of memory presented by Bergson in *Matter and Memory*. In Bergson's view, memories are not stored in any specific place in the brain, but they are mingled with the present of the subject. The so-called pure memories can be provoked either by the senses or by mechanical memory. Seen in this light, the construction of "A Wet Night" resembles Belacqua's memory, which consists of fragmentary recollections, evoked by impulses rather than by the chronology of events.

In *Creative Involution*, Stanley Gontarski notes "Samuel Beckett's lifelong interest in, if not his preoccupation with, the relationship of mind and body" (2015: 24). This interest, ranging from the works of Descartes to Bergson and Proust, eventually resulted in Beckett's essay on Proust and in the poem *Whoroscope*, dealing with Descartes' philosophy, both published in 1930. The bipolar relationship between the "outside" and "inside" or between the "mind" and "body", combined with the idea that the external world influences the constitution of the body, evokes, in my opinion, the semiotic model proposed by Lotman: the model where non-texts, filtered by the border of the semiosphere, finally create a new entity, or a semiosphere. The present textual analysis of "A Wet Night" bears out the proposed Bergsonian-Lotmanian model. The basic structure of the story is built of signs, which create the language of the text. Subsequently, the author's, in this case Beckett's, borrowings from other texts (languages) begin to multiply, and build the semiosphere of the work, eventually leading to the creation of the text's fabric. Bergson's philosophy, in this instance, becomes the core of the work, contributing to the artistic and philosophical enhancement of the semiosphere of "A Wet Night". In this way the three ingredients create the "synthetical syrup" of Samuel Beckett's work.

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