



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature

**REDEFINITION OF PURGATION IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S
*DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLEING WOMEN, MERCIER AND
CAMIER, HOW IT IS***

Fahriye Selvi Danacı

Master's Thesis

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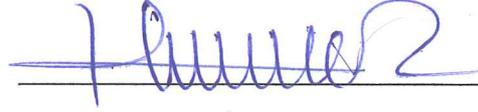
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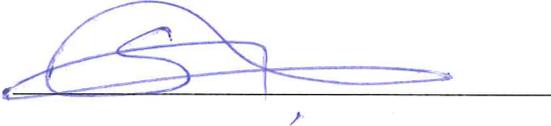
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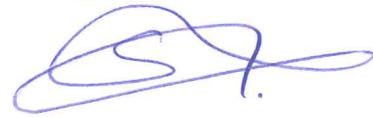
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ETİK BEYAN

Bu çalışmadaki bütün bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, görsel, işitsel ve yazılı tüm bilgi ve sonuçları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, kullandığım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadığımı, yararlandığım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduğumu, tezimin kaynak gösterilen durumlar dışında özgün olduğunu, Tez Danışmanının Ünvanı, Adı SOYADI danışmanlığında tarafımdan üretildiğini ve Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Yazım Yönergesine göre yazıldığını beyan ederim.

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ÖZET

DANACI, Fahriye Selvi. Samuel Beckett'in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, Mercier and Camier* ve *How It Is* Adlı Eserlerinde Arınma Kavramının Yeniden Tanımlanması. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2018.

Dante Alighieri'nin (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy*'sinin (1320) Samuel Beckett'in (1906-1989) edebi kariyeri üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olmuştur. Beckett, *Comedy*'nin ikinci bölümü olan Purgatory (Araf) ile ve Dante'nin bu bölümde arınma ve kurtarılma kavramlarına olan dini yaklaşımıyla özellikle ilgiliydi. Dante'nin Purgatory'sinde, günahları bağışlanabilir olan ruhlar bir dizi cezalandırmadan geçerler ve Cennet'e kabul edilmeye değer olmak için dünyada işledikleri günahların bedelini öderler. Bireyin varoluşuna olan karamsar bakış açısından ötürü Beckett Dante'nin arınma kavramına dini bakış açısını bireyin yirminci yüzyıldaki durumuyla oldukça uyumsuz bulmuştur. Beckett'e göre bireyin ıstırapı sonsuzdur ve sonuç olarak bir kurtarılma sağlayamaz. Bu yüzden, Beckett Dante'nin Purgatory'deki arınma yolculuğunu kendi karakterleri için bir çıkmaz olarak şakacı ve yıkıcı bir biçimde yorumlamıştır. Arınma yolculuğu kavramı Dante'nin Purgatory'deki ruhları için yenileyici bir imaya sahipken, Beckett'in karakterleri için ebedi bir döngü, bir kördüğüm olarak ortaya çıkar. Beckett'in insanının yaşadığı dünya kendisi için kaçamadığı çarpık bir Purgatory'e dönüşür. Böyle bir çıkmazla karşılaştığında Beckett'in insanı kendisini çevreleyen dış dünyada sahip olduğundan farklı bir varoluş arayışına girer. Bu noktada, dış gerçeklikten sıyrılmaya çalışıp zihninde uyuşuk bir varoluş peşinde koşar. Beckett bu arayış için Dante'nin *Comedy*'deki karakterlerinden birini model olarak kullanır: Purgatory'nin alt bölgesi olan Ante-purgatory'deki Belacqua. Dante Belacqua'yı Ante-purgatory'deki durumundan keyif alan ve tüm arınma sürecine karşı umursamaz bir tavır takınan tembel bir ruh olarak betimler. Beckett'in sorumsuz karakterleri Dante'nin Belacqua'sının durumunu yüce bir varoluş biçimi olarak algırlar. Beckett bu durumu 'Belacqua saadeti' olarak adlandırır. Beckett'in aylakları öyle bir varoluşa ulaşmak için çevrelerindeki dış dünyadan kaçmaya çabalayarak bir yolculuğa çıkarlar. Bu açıdan, Beckett'in insanının yolculuğu tersine döndürüldüğü için Beckett Dante'nin Purgatory kavramını altüst eder. Bu yolculuk Dantevari bir Cennet'e doğru değil, Dante'nin Belacqua'sının Ante-purgatory'de tadını çıkardığı uyuşuk bir varoluşa doğrudur. Ancak Beckett'in evreninde böyle bir kurtuluş da imkansızlaşır, çünkü bireyin ıstırapı daimidir. Böylece Beckett'in insanı sonsuz bir arınma yolculuğuna mahkûm olur. Bu tez Beckett'in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), *Mercier and Camier* (1946) ve *How It Is* (1961) adlı eserlerinde Dante'nin arınma kavramına nasıl karşı çıktığını incelemeyi amaçlar. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* üzerine odaklanan ilk bölüm Beckett'in modern insanın dış gerçeklik ve zihninin inzivası arasında bocalamasını, arada kalmış bir şekilde ikisinden birini seçememe durumunu nasıl betimlediğini inceler. *Mercier and Camier*'i çözümleyen ikinci bölüm ise, Beckett'in insanların durumunun, dış gerçeklikten dışlandıkları ve arayışları her açıdan imkansızlaştığı için daha

karmaşıklıştığını ileri sürer. *How It Is* üzerine olan son bölüm ile Beckett'in bireyin varoluşunu nihai parçalanmaya götürdüğü belirtilir. Beckett'in insanı amaçsız, ilerleme umudu olmadan, ancak yine de ilerlemeye mecbur bir şekilde betimlenmiştir. Böylece Beckett her bir romanında artan karamsar bir üslupla arınma kavramını ve arınma yolculuğu fikrini yıkmayı sürdürmüştür.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Samuel Beckett, roman, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Mercier and Camier*, *How It Is*, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, arınma

ABSTRACT

DANACI, Fahriye Selvi. *Redefinition of Purgation in Samuel Beckett's Dream of Fair to Middling Women, Mercier and Camier, How It Is*. Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2018.

Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy* (1320) has a substantial influence on Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) writing throughout his literary career. Beckett was particularly interested in *Comedy's* second part, Purgatory, and Dante's religious approach to the concepts of purgation and salvation in this part. In Dante's Purgatory, the souls, whose sins are redeemable, go through a series of punishments, atoning for their sins on earth to become worthy to be accepted to Paradise. Due to his pessimistic approach to the individual's existence, Beckett found Dante's religious perspective towards the concept of purgation highly incompatible with the condition of the individual in the twentieth century. For Beckett, the individual's suffering is interminable, and cannot bring salvation as a result. Therefore, Beckett interprets Dante's purgatorial journey through Purgatory as an aporia for his characters in a playful and subverting manner. While the concept of the purgatorial journey has a restorative implication for Dante's souls in Purgatory, it turns out to be a perpetual cycle, an impasse for Beckett's characters. The world the Beckettian man inhabits becomes a twisted Purgatory for him, from which he cannot escape. Faced with such predicament, the Beckettian man searches for an existence different from the one he has in the outer world surrounding him. At that point, he attempts to elude the outer reality and pursues a lethargic existence in his mind. For this pursuit, Beckett uses one of Dante's characters in *Comedy* as a model: Belacqua in Ante-purgatory, the sub-territory of Purgatory. Dante portrays Belacqua as an indolent soul, who enjoys his condition in Ante-purgatory and adopts an indifferent attitude towards the whole process of purgation. Beckett's derelicts perceive the condition of Dante's Belacqua as a sublime form of existence, which Beckett calls 'the Belacquian bliss.' In order to achieve such existence, Beckett's vagabonds embark on a journey striving to escape from the outer world around them. In this respect, Beckett subverts Dante's concept of Purgatory, since the direction of the Beckettian man's journey is reversed. It is not towards a Dantean Paradise, but a lethargic existence which Dante's Belacqua enjoys in Ante-purgatory. However, in Beckett's universe, this kind of a liberation is also precluded since the individual's suffering is perennial. Thus, the Beckettian man is condemned to an endless purgatorial journey. This thesis aims to study how Beckett challenges Dante's concept of purgation in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), *Mercier and Camier* (1946), and *How It Is* (1961). The first chapter, focusing on *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, examines how Beckett portrays the modern man oscillating between the outer reality and the seclusion of his own mind, unable to choose either in an in-between condition. The second chapter, analysing *Mercier and Camier*, argues that the situation of Beckettian men gets more intricate, since they become isolated from the outer reality, and their quest is precluded in every aspect. With the third chapter on *How It Is*, it is suggested that Beckett takes the individual's existence to

the ultimate disintegration. The Beckettian man is portrayed without a purpose, or a hope to move on, but obliged to move on nevertheless. Thus, Beckett continues his subversion of the concept of purgation and the idea of the purgative journey in an increasing pessimistic tone in each novel.

Key Words

Samuel Beckett, novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Mercier and Camier*, *How It Is*, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, purgation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KABUL VE ONAY	i
BİLDİRİM.....	ii
YAYINLAMA VE FİKRİ MÜLKİYET HAKLARI BEYANI.....	iii
ETİK BEYAN.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ÖZET	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I: THE FIRST DISSOLUTION OF PURGATORY: <i>DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLEING WOMEN</i>	33
CHAPTER II: AN INTERMINABLE PROCESS OF PURGATORY: <i>MERCIER AND CAMIER</i>.....	59
CHAPTER III: FROM PURGATORY TO INFERNO: <i>HOW IT IS</i>.....	84
CONCLUSION.....	111
WORKS CITED.....	118
APPENDIX 1: Originality Reports	127
APPENDIX 2: Ethics Board Waiver Form.....	129

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett was born on Good Friday, 13th April 1906, as the second child of William and Maria Beckett at Foxrock in Dublin. As one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, whose primary literary motivation had been the meaningless and absurd existence of individual, Beckett owes a part of his inspiration that triggered the path in his literary career to his childhood memories. Beckett was born into a middle-class family with Protestant origins, and had a lonely childhood (Cronin, *Last Modernist* 14). His introverted personality would later affect his whole adult life and his attitude to life itself. However, one memory that Beckett mentioned in several of his interviews certainly had a more substantial influence among the others, and provides an insight into his pessimistic perspective towards the very existence of the individual: remembering his condition in the womb. One of these occasions is his interview with John Gruen for *Vogue* magazine in 1969, in which Beckett claims recalling prenatal memories of himself in his mother's womb: "[e]ven before the foetus can draw breath it is in a state of barrenness and of pain. I have a clear memory of my own foetal existence. It was an existence where no voice, no possible movement could free me from the agony and darkness I was subjected to" (qtd. in Cronin, *Last Modernist* 2). This experience that Beckett claims to have had is in fact a summary of the entire motivation behind his works, and can be regarded as a curse that would haunt Beckett and naturally his characters to the very end.

Life, for Beckett, is based on endless misery that makes itself felt even before birth. In his works, Beckett reflects on the human condition faced with this fact, and on the subsistent incapability of individual to pass beyond this agony, reach some sort of awareness, and find some purpose or meaning in his suffering. On the incongruity of man with his existence on earth in Beckett's universe, Hesla argues that "[...] man does not 'fit' his world. The world is like an overcoat that is much too long, or a pair of boots that are much too small" (*The Shape* 10). In line with this approach, it can be argued that Beckett upholds the idea that the individual's endeavour to achieve unity with life and the universe is impossible since the very concept of life is nonsensical. According to Fletcher, one of the most frequently discussed concepts in Beckett's oeuvre is the subversion of theology and undermining its influence on the explanation of human

existence. For Beckett, Fletcher claims, “[s]alvation is a fairy-tale, [...] [and] [m]an’s only fate is to die; all attempts to soften this harsh fact are lies. [...] Man’s body is split from his mind, and the two carry on an unremitting war: the body crumbles, but the mind is not much more favoured, since true knowledge is impossible and epistemological uncertainty is a constant of our condition” (*SBA* 12-13). Therefore, every individual attempt to seek a *raison d’être* is doomed to fail, and yet, man continues his futile quest simply because there is nothing else to do. This approach to man’s existence is what Beckett’s literary assessment is based on, just like other modernists of the era.

One of the most common images attributed to this predicament of the individual is the concept of Purgatory. Apart from the two chapters, “Inferno,” and “Paradiso,” of Dante Alighieri’s (1265-1321) *The Divine Comedy* (1320), especially the second part, which is “Purgatorio,” had a major influence on many twentieth-century artists, including Beckett. Furthermore, it can be claimed that it became the “poem of the twentieth century” (Quinones 30) given the fact that it provided the artist with the concepts of atonement and progress. While creating his fictional world, Beckett combined the chaotic image of the world he lived in (the twentieth century) with his own impressions of the same world. The outcome of this compound was highly influenced by Dante’s vision of Purgatory of which the part, Ante-purgatory “[...] was a lifelong obsession for [him]” (Wallace 299). Ante-purgatory is the region at the gate of Purgatory, where the late repentant souls wait for a lifetime reflecting on their sins on earth before they begin their purgative suffering, unless the period of their waiting is reduced by the prayers of the living on their behalf (McNair 91). Beckett’s obsession with the notion of waiting for an indefinite time led him to adopt a different interpretation of Dante, particularly “a purgatorial Dante”, as Caselli states, throughout his literary career (“BDA” 29). Coe correlates Dante’s Purgatory with Beckett’s vision, and highlights the significance of the second realm of Dante’s *Comedy*¹ in Beckett’s oeuvre. According to Coe, Beckett’s art is “an art of failure”, which emphasises the futility in human action and nothingness human action asserts, and Coe associates this futile quest with Purgatory:

[...] the condition of man is a kind of Purgatory, but of a very much more complex nature than that imagined by Dante. Man has a vision of Paradise –the ultimate

¹ *The Divine Comedy* will be abbreviated as *Comedy* hereafter.

realisation of the Self in a *Néant* [Nothingness] beyond space and time, void united with void, yet to desire such a Paradise is to be aware of a Self desiring, and a Self desiring is not a void, and therefore cannot enter. The existence of man, then, is not Paradise; but neither is it Hell, for a sort of hope remains, the hope, not of achieving the impossible, but perhaps of discovering [...] some new synthesis of the Self, detached from time and space and above all from language [...] but, without exception, Purgatory is the residence of every different manifestation of Beckett's *moi*: it is the home of Man. (*Beckett* 5)

What Coe observes in Beckett's universe is the inadaptability of man to two absolutes like Inferno and Paradise. Paradise necessitates an existence entirely purged of individuality, which is indicated as desire felt by the Self, whereas Inferno eliminates a similar sensation to desire, which is hope. The impossibility to adapt to these incomprehensible domains necessitates the existence of a third space where man struggles to make sense of his own being. In line with this approach, one may come to the conclusion that the condition of man in Beckett's world is based on his pessimistic attitude towards the very existence of man. According to Beckett, while man is incapable of realising a complete self, he is also not able to eliminate the possibility of this recognition, therefore he is in a never-ending cycle desiring, hoping, yet failing. Man's existence does not simply comply with the divine concept of Paradise, and neither does it with Inferno, since the residents of Inferno are forsaken of hope, as Dante mentions as well at the gate of Inferno, "[a]bandon every hope, you who enter here" (*Comedy* 17). Nonetheless, man's existence on earth is perfectly analogous with the structure of Purgatory. In Purgatory, as well as in the world of the living, man/soul is assumed to exert himself to be a better subject in terms of devoutness. However, Beckett's Purgatory is detached from its religious connotations and its promising revelation due to the dreary realities of the age Beckett was in. As Sperandio advocates, "Beckett exploits the theme, the plot, the narrative impact, and the entire supporting system of the *Commedia* in the form of anxiety and of apparent dismissal of its importance" (168). In this respect, his comprehension of Purgatory and purgation can be considered as a more subversive interpretation of what Dante had in mind.

While Dante describes Purgatory as a place for purgation, a place which encourages humanity to have faith in endless peace in Paradise, Beckett renders Purgatory a vicious circle in which all pursuit of meaning is deemed to nothing, since there is no possibility

of a consequential act. Although Beckett creates his fictional world based on Dante's artistic creation, his Purgatory leads to a reversed direction, thus his world takes a cyclical form as opposed to the linear movement in Dante's realm (McNeil 30). Accordingly, the very act of purgation loses its significance in Beckett's world. To this end, this thesis proposes to analyse the ironic representation of Purgatory and the undermined notion of purgation in Samuel Beckett's three novels, *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), *Mercier and Camier* (1946), and *How It Is* (1961) with references to Dante Alighieri's "Purgatorio" from *Comedy*. After a detailed reading of Samuel Beckett's works, it will be concluded that Beckett subverts Dante's vision of the individual in Purgatory, and redefines human condition in accordance with the modernist approach to the human existence, which is absurd. His works are the results of his subversive redefinition of the idea of purgatory. His ironic and parodic representation of human being's existence is in complete contrast with Dante's medieval precepts. In this respect, to understand Beckett's concern with the plight of the individual, to comprehend 'the' Dante in Beckett's texts, and above all, to recognise the connection between this concern and Beckett's obsessive and twisted interest in Dante's *Comedy*, it is of utmost importance to examine their attitudes towards individual existence.

The ways the human being is portrayed in Beckett's universe and that of Dante differ substantially, which basically derive from their respective understandings of the concept of religion and human element. Sperandio asserts that "[a]lthough Beckett is profoundly aware of Dante's theological, historical and linguistic preoccupations, his employment of Dante is forged on a 'trituration' of Dante (as Caselli calls it), which uses and denies the ancient voice, and –most of all – bends it to the needs of the text being written" (14). In other words, all the positive and moral qualities that Dante attributes to mankind are contradicted by Beckett. Federman draws attention to this characteristic of Beckett's universe as follows:

The fundamental idea behind Beckett's fiction may be termed an affirmation of the negative. This paradoxical artistic undertaking becomes an investigation, an exploitation of opposites. Beckett substitutes ignorance for knowledge, impotence for creativity, lethargy for efficiency, confusion for understanding, lunacy for rationality, doubt for certainty, illusion for reality. (*Journey to Chaos*, 6)

This constant conflict between the opposites underlies the bulk of Beckett's conception of the world. As Hesla argues:

[h]is world is a syzygy, and for every laugh there is a tear, for every position an opposition, for every thesis an antithesis, for every affirmation a negation. His art is a Democritean art, energized precisely by the dialectical interplay of opposites – body and mind, the self and the other, speech and silence, life and death, hope and despair, being and nonbeing, yes and no. (*The Shape* 10-11)

With respect to these opposite qualities, it can be suggested that in Dante's world, these oppositions are reconciled in harmony, while in Beckett's, dichotomy is inevitable, and negation is perpetual.

What is also significant is the fact that Dante depicts the individual as an entity with faith in redemption and the will to achieve it. Therefore, in his representation of Purgatory, the soul of a human being is redeemed from his sins and becomes entitled to enter Paradise, which Virgil explains to Dante at the beginning of *Comedy* as follows:

[...] you will see (in Purgatory) those who are contented
in the fire, because they hope to come,
whenever it may be, among the blessed. (11)

In Beckett's novels, although it is possible to trace Dante's ideas on individual's purgation and redemption, this presence of Dante is an ironic one, that is, "[his] admiration for Dante does not seem to extend to an acceptance of his theology [...]" (Fletcher, *SBA* 115). In that sense, Beckett's approach to the individual's existence does not promise any purification or salvation. This approach stems from the difference between Beckett's understanding of sin and purgation and Dante's. Dante's perception of sin is a Christian one. As Kalt points out, "[a]ccording to Christian theology man is born into a state of sin as a result of Adam's fall. But for Beckettian man, [...] birth itself has inexplicably become the first transgression, the original sin [...]" (6). Thus, it can be claimed that Beckett's primary conflict with Dante's concept of purgation is the sin which necessitates this purgation. While Dante's universe requires purgation to redeem from the seven deadly sins, which man inherits from Adam with his birth, in Beckett's universe, the ultimate sin is the act of being born. The birth itself is the fundamental sin of Beckettian man. Since eliminating the sin of being born is impossible, Beckett's universe eventually precludes the very act of purgation as well.

Therefore, Beckett's vagabonds are destitute of such salvation. In Beckett's world, there is "[...] the refusal of consolations [...]" (Sperandio 15) as opposed to Dante's text. Purgatory in Beckett's oeuvre appears as a perpetual cycle. In *A Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Mercier and Camier*, and *How It Is*, Beckett's protagonists cannot achieve emancipation from their purgatories, and they become the prisoners of their own worlds, wandering as merely existing creatures without any purpose. This kind of approach towards the world we live in and the individualistic existence, however, was not exclusive to Beckett. In the early twentieth century, the general atmosphere of the period drew people, particularly the artists, to develop a similar attitude for the era they belonged to. Similar to Beckett, the feeling of entrapment was a common concern among the moderns.

Early twentieth century was an age of social and political turmoil. The beginning of the century saw the World War I, and the whole Europe was suffering from its consequences. As Wrigley implicates, "[i]mages of trench warfare and of soldiers who experienced sectors of high military activity became widely understood symbols of human suffering and endurance" (502). Mass casualties, political tumult, and social chaos caused trauma and depression. People of the new age witnessed nothing but a great loss. In this respect, Wrigley further states that "[t]he sadness was not only for the deaths of so many relatives, friends and neighbours, but also expressed a sense of the loss of the relative stabilities of the pre-war world combined with some anxiety as to what the post-war years would hold" (512). Along with the waves of the upcoming World War II, the aftermath of the Great War brought with it only an immense sense of insecurity among the citizens of the Western world creating an atmosphere, which Parsons describes as "a crisis of belief and identity" (175). This was such insecurity that there was no hope for safety, no confidence in one's own judgement, and no faith in any kind of authority, or in any institution whatsoever.

Most of the literary tendencies of the first half of the twentieth century had their fair share of this gloomy and depressing atmosphere. As Bradbury explicates, "[...] the war gave writers [of the twentieth century] a specific event to be apocalyptic about, fixed the point in the cycle where transition occurred, a point of severance, social, intellectual, moral, and experiential" (*Possibilities* 88). It was a time of complete destruction,

physical and psychological, which was caused by the war, and the aftermath of the war led the artists to question and criticise the obsolete operation of their societies. Childs states that “[t]he breakdown of the war was reflected in an aesthetic of fragmentation in art, but also in distressing criticisms of society, from analyses of shell-shock, cowardice and psychiatry, to discussions of cultural crises and social upheaval” (164). As Parsons further argues, “[t]he haunting legacy of the war on the process of memory and representation was integral to the emerging cultural identity and imagination of the 1920s. Resisting representation in conventional historical narrative, its trauma demanded expression in new writerly forms and strategies” (177). Many literary figures of the time focused on the disillusionments that the new age inherited from the previous centuries. Among all the obscurities and confusion, there was one distinct fact recognised by the artists, that is, the codes and norms of the previous eras could not be the answers to the conflicts of the new age. As Michael Bell aptly puts it:

The Arnoldian sense of literature as the modern substitute for religion was increasingly realized not, [...] as a source of transmitted wisdom, ‘the best that is known and thought in the world,’ but rather as the active means of questioning and discovering fundamental values, truths, and understandings for which there was no alternative grounding. (29)²

The twentieth century simply needed something new. New codes, new definitions, new solutions for its new problems. Above all, it needed new techniques in art and literature to comply with the mode of the century, which was “[...] an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age” (Lewis xvii). The substance and the purpose of literature had to be redefined. Levine argues that “Modernism arrives in any art or intellectual discipline when practitioners regard the present as the dead end of a long historical tradition. This happens partly because they come to believe that no further progress is possible along traditional lines” (160). Accordingly, poets and novelists of the twentieth century emphasised that they could not carry the old traditions of the previous centuries to an era which was utterly different from them, and that they should abandon the outmoded codes of art. Virginia Woolf, in her article “the Novel of Consciousness,” criticises the materialist technique of the writers of the period, which does not comply with the mode

² “The Arnoldian sense of literature” in this quotation refers to Matthew Arnold’s perception of culture as “the best that is known and thought in the world,” which prevailed most of the Victorian literary understanding (Arnold 6). In this sense, Bell uses the statement “the Arnoldian sense of literature” as the equivalent to the Victorian literary intelligence.

of the century, and she argues that “It is because [the late Victorian writers] are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only to the desert, the better for its soul” (122). Indeed, it was necessary to renounce the materialist mode of the Victorian narrative to create an art form idiosyncratic to the twentieth century. Giving voice to the atmosphere of the century and its impact on the individual required more than the socialist realism of Charles Dickens. Thus, the literary figures of the time sought new ways to narrate their experiences in the surrounding reality, their frustration with the new age, and the obscurity that diffused the world. The artistic codes of the previous century were discarded. As McFarlane advocates:

Older and more traditional definitions of poetry –the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, the best words in the best order- were impatiently dismissed. Obsessive attempts to say ‘the unsayable’ made extreme demands on the mind’s elasticity. Not only literature but all art of the period seemed to be intent on stretching the mind beyond the very limits of human understanding. (72)

Bradbury articulates that “[g]radually there arose a model of artistic creation in which art was the product of creative ferment, analogous indeed to rebellion in other spheres, but distinguishable from it, and the artist was an isolated figure in communion not with his gross and material milieu but with an artistic utopia, hints of whose existence lay in aesthetic consonance, the epiphanies of form” (85). The focus on art itself surpassed the focus on reality, as Bradbury further implies, “[the modernist artist] is concerned not so much with revolution in the world as with revolution in the word” (84). This emphasis on finding a unique form was the principal agenda of the modernist artist. In “Art as Evidence of Order,” E.M. Forster affirms the necessity of a new form to redefine the purpose of art and the artist in the modernist era. He addresses the failure of the political authorities in restoring the social order after WWI (199), and discusses how the idea of “l’art pour l’art” (art for art’s sake) can be an answer to the disorder in the world. He underlines the significance of form in defining the art of a particular era as follows:

[...] form is as important to-day, when the human race is trying to ride the whirlwind, as it ever was in those less agitating days of the past, when the earth seemed solid and the stars fixed, and the discoveries of science were made slowly, slowly. Form is not tradition. It alters from generation to generation. Artists always

seek a new technique, and will continue to do so as long as their work excites them. But form of some kind is imperative. It is the surface crust of the internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order. (201-202)

While the faith in grand narratives and in political, social, and religious authorities disintegrated (Lewis 16), the focus of the artist and literature shifted from social phenomena to the individual. The modern experience of the individual artist was central as Lewis asserts, “[...] most modernists were more likely than the romantics [and the other previous movements] to accept the fragmentation of human life, nature, and society as inevitable, and to expect that art and literature would reflect the fragmentary nature of the modern experience in their own forms” (8). This inward movement of literature brought forth the increasing concern for the individual’s place in the world, the meaning of his existence, while the interest in the dynamics of the outer reality faded away. The main concern was “[...] the individual’s self-realization[...].” (Butler 51). The individual was neither one with himself nor with the universe in the twentieth century, and his significance as “the subject” of the new age was to be restored by the artist.

In an attempt to understand the distorted and fragmented existence of the modern man, many modernist poets and writers, such as T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), James Joyce (1882-1941), and W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), focused on “the expression of subjective experience,” (Lewis 115-116), thus forming the gist and the manifestation of the modernist movement: the individual’s experience of the outer world from the individual’s perspective. They developed new codes to express the trauma of their age. Modernism, whose object Ezra Pound described as “make it new” (Lewis 26), came to be “the movement” of the twentieth century in almost every field of art, from literature to painting. Bradbury and McFarlane confirm this statement, and indicate that

[Modernism] is the art consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions. [...] The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over; and the explosively lyrical, or else the ironic and fictive modes, modes which included large elements not only of

creation but of de-creation, were inevitable. The assumption that the age demands a certain kind of art, and that Modernism is the art that it demands, has been fervently held by those who see in the modern human condition a crisis of reality, an apocalypse of cultural community. (*The Name* 27).

In line with this argument, the modernist artists combined the philosophical teachings of the classics regarding the meaning of life and the role of literature in articulating the existence of individual with their experiments in the techniques of writing to highlight the dissatisfaction they felt with the conventional understanding of the Victorian era of man as an instrument serving the well-being of the society. According to the modernists, what was lost was the realisation of man as an individual, and his disconnected bonds with himself and the universe. McFarlane suggests that

The real hostility was reserved for abstraction and generality. The distinctiveness of select phenomena, the unique essence of individual personality, and the changing relationship between the individual and ‘the whole’ (however variously that might be conceived) constituted the new concern. The wanderer, the loner, the exile, the restless and rootless and homeless individual were no longer the rejects of a self-confident society but rather those who, because they stood outside, were uniquely placed in an age when subjectivity was truth to speak with vision and authority. (82)

Correspondingly, modernist writer questioned the Victorian image of the individual, who was supposed to be a cog in the machine with a single purpose, which was to preserve the integrity of the society. What the writer did in his works was to re-establish the singleness, subjectivity, individuality in human entity, and place the individual as the primary agent in the universal system. The search for selfhood in the twentieth century was a reflection upon the revitalisation of the subjective entity of the individual who was an outcast, thereby, the themes of exile and the search for self were essentially substantial concepts explored in the modernist literature.

One figure that influenced Ezra Pound and his contemporaries greatly was Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), who was one of the most influential rediscoveries of the twentieth-century modernist literature, being “[...] one of the main weapons in modernism’s assault on the insularity of the English tradition” (*Dante Encyclopaedia* 257). As Sperandio aptly puts it, “[...] the text and the plot of the *Commedia* have

journeyed into the imagination of modern men and women and contributed to shaping their artistic production” (2). However, Dante’s influence on most modernist writers was not based on his religious motivations in writing *Comedy*, but his aesthetic concerns regarding the art of poetry and his existential emphasis on the individual. Indeed, many modernist writers considered Dante as an artistic mentor, rather than a religious guide.

Inspiring many literary figures in British history from Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) to Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), Dante first appeared in English literature through Chaucer, who was highly influenced by the poetic style of this Florentine in his works (Havelly 1)³. Dante was brought to light later during the late sixteenth century not for his literary persona, but for his stance against the Catholic Church. Struggling to sustain the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism, the Elizabethans found Dante’s religious and political criticism against Rome and Roman Church, and his support of the division of spiritual and political powers adaptable to their age, and as Wallace eloquently puts it, “[t]he name of Dante, then, could be found all over England in the late sixteenth century as part of the apparatus of Protestant reform” (285). Although the idea of British Protestantism was in conflict with Dante’s Catholicism, Dante was established as a crucial influence in British literature politically, religiously, and literarily. From Milton (1608-1674) to Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), many great poets in the English literature admired Dante, and were inspired by his ideas in their works. John Milton used Dante’s criticism against the papal authority to promote English Puritanism, but he was also influenced by Dante’s *Comedy* in writing his *Paradise Lost*, though with many differences in his perception of religion (Wallace 286-288). Since the seventeenth-century court and literature endorsed French instead of Italian, both the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth century mostly overlooked Dante in the literary field. However, with H.F. Cary’s translation of Dante’s *Comedy* in 1814, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s lecture on Dante in 1818, William Blake’s ninety-eight drawings of *Comedy*, Lord Byron’s *Prophecy of Dante* (1821), and Shelley’s *A Defense of Poetry*

³ Chaucer’s acknowledgment of and references to Dante can be traced back to his *the House of Fame* in which he “[travels] through the heavens in the company of an otherworldly guide” (Wallace 283). Dantean references can also be found in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, and as Wallace also points out: “[...] it is clear that Dante is his master in matters of prosody and intellectual organization” (284).

(1821) and *Triumph of Life* (1822), which praise Dante's poetry and artistry, Dante was brought back into English literature by the Romantics (Wallace 289-291). While the Romantics "[...] admired authenticity, originality, strength of will, and internal coherence –virtues that they found aplenty in Dante [...]," the Victorians considered Dante as "one of the greatest poets of all time" (Levine 140), although he was not studied by the Victorians as profoundly as the Romantics (Wallace 293). However, never before the modernist era was Dante resuscitated with such unconventional manners and perspective. As Caselli points out, "[t]he 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" ("BDA" 29). Dante 'the exile,' to whom Eliot refers as 'a European'; Pound as 'the master'; and Heaney as 'the aquiline patron of international Modernism,' came to be recognised as "the figure of linguistic and aesthetic innovation" for the twentieth century artist (Caselli, "BDA" 29-30). His masterpiece, *Comedy*, became an essential literary and philosophical inspiration for the modernists to make sense of their age and develop their own artistic voice.

Dante wrote his masterpiece in 17 years, and completed it in 1320, a year before his death. Due to his political stance against the Catholic Roman Church and his criticism of Pope Boniface VIII's interest in worldliness, he was exiled from Florence for the rest of his life, and *Comedy* was written during these exile years (Huse iii). He named his work *Comedy* simply because Comedy, by meaning, "begins with sundry adverse conditions, but ends happily" (*Dante Encyclopaedia* 183). In his work, Dante explored similar issues as the Modernists did, in that, he reflected on the meaning of man's existence, as well as the purpose of the universal order. For Dante, as O'Neill points out, "[t]he primary goal of man, exiled from Eden, is the return home, reunion with his maker", and as a poet whose life is characterised by the concept of exile –physical and artistic-, and "whose craft entails a certain loss of self", reunion of the self became another major purpose in Dante's work (14). He discussed and criticised the political, social, and theological problems of his society, as well. Dante's main motivation was, therefore, to seek the meaning of life and the way to peace in mortal and eternal worlds, and to shine a moral light upon his society, which was unsettled with political conflicts between Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire (Huse v). As Huse states, Dante started to write *Comedy* originally to praise Beatrice, the woman he perceived as

the “representative of Divine Beauty or of Divine Wisdom” (iv). However, throughout his exile years, Dante witnessed the chaos caused by man, and he gave a new purpose to his work, which was “[...] to show the men of his day the road to salvation, to salvation on earth as well as in Heaven” (Huse v). *Comedy* was aimed to offer people a religious and a moral way to follow in order to be peaceful on earth and to prepare themselves for the eternal life. Like his mentor Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Dante found the religious devotion to God and moral impeccancy as the only way for man’s salvation. He believed in an established universal order, and devoted his last years to depict and explain the structure and significance of this holy order. Consequently, *Comedy*, the result of these exile years, “[...] is literally a voyage through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven and, allegorically, a search for understanding of the order and nature of the universe, projecting a moral geography of the soul and a Christian examination of the soul’s wanderings from and return to God” (Brandeis 12). According to Dante, and also the traditional Western theology, this established order depends on God, who is, as Hesla asserts, “the Absolute” (*The Shape* 207). Hesla elucidates the relation of this universal order to God, the Absolute, as follows:

God created the world and man, and he loves what he created. The creation is contingent upon the being of God, but as created it is good, and as good it is loveable by God. Thus the world is “theomorphous”; and as man was created in the image of God, he too is deiform. God, world, and man, therefore, are all mutually congruent with one another. The importance of the geocentric cosmology is that the center of the cosmos is man’s home, the earth. (*The Shape* 207).

In this sense, the world and man can be regarded as the parts of this Absolute owing to the fact that they are the reflections of God’s being. Montgomery suggests that “[*Comedy*] itself is [...] an earthly manifestation of being, analogous to an ideal, complete state of being of the soul. The soul in turn is an existence analogous to, is an image of, that perfect existence which is ascribed to God, the source toward which the soul turns as rose to light” (133). According to Dante’s vision of the creation of this order, man has a substantial function in preserving the congruity. As Hesla also suggests, in Dante’s world, the universe was created by God, regarding three aspects, Divine Reason, Divine Love, and Divine Justice, all of which are comprehensible to man; and with respect to Divine Justice, “[...] man in his freedom may choose whether to obey or disobey the moral law; but he will be held accountable for his choice, and

will be either punished or rewarded” (*The Shape* 222). Accordingly, for Dante, the ultimate unifying agent of the universe was mankind. Eugene Webb highlights this unifying approach of Dante as follows:

Dante’s purpose in the *Commedia* was to interpret the divine plan both in its natural and in its supernatural aspects for his contemporaries. It was a plan which they could understand and which could and, for many, did give a sense of purpose to their lives; they could feel that in both their religious and their social lives they were serving the ultimate purpose of the universe [...] The essential harmony between the natural [worldly] and the supernatural [divinely] applied within men as individuals, just as it did in society as a whole. A man’s body and soul formed a single unit, and their goals were in harmony. The moral order as appointed by God could be discerned by man’s reason and, with the help of grace, pursued by man’s will. (*A Study* 22)

Therefore, what made Dante such an attractive source and authority for the modernists was indeed the fact that he recognised the significance of the individual in restoring the harmony between him and the universe, and considered man’s free will as the crucial means to achieve salvation in this respect. Well-being of the society –and eventually of the universal order- depended primarily on the well-being of the individual, and this could only be achieved through his free will.

In “Purgatory”, Dante emphasises the significance of free will as follows:

You who are living consider every cause
as originating in the heavens
as if they determined all, of necessity.

If this were so, free will would be destroyed,
and there would be no justice,
no joy for good nor sorrow for evil.

The heavens initiate your impulses-
I do not say all, but granting I did say so,
a light is given to you to distinguish good from evil,

.....

and free will which, if it is severely tested
in its first battles with the heavens,
afterward, rightly nurtured, conquers all. (*Comedy* 243-244)

Here, Dante re-establishes the role of the individual's free will in the universe by underlining the fact that there would be no meaning to life if all human beings' actions and doings were determined by the divine power. God granted man free will so as to distinguish the good deed from the evil in the mortal world, and to use one's free will to achieve salvation in the eternal one.

This kind of a perspective was what the modernists were seeking in their struggles to identify themselves with their age. As Montgomery asserts, "[...] Dante set out to turn all knowledge to the service of the spiritual state of the individual soul, [...] [which] was a shift of the materials of art from the public toward the private" (132). In this respect, his interest in the individual agent in the universal order complies with the modernist agenda about transferring the focus of art from social to individual aspect. Although the harmony that Dante found between man's body and soul was missing in the modern age, and the trauma of the time left the unity broken, and the harmony between body and soul fragmented, the focus on the individual can be considered as the key aspect which brought Dante and the modernists together. It was the emphasis on the individual's free will that made Dante such a philosophical mentor for the modernists, since for the modernists, free will, which orientates man in his trajectory and evokes individual freedom, was the key point in modern man's search for meaning and self.

Dante divides his work into three realms, "Inferno", "Purgatorio", and "Paradiso", which Sion compares to the quest of "the estranged soul" in "self-knowledge (*Inferno*), self-renewal (*Purgatorio*) and self-recovery (*Paradiso*)" (2). Dante narrates each realm with powerful depictions for the reader to take crucial lessons from his pilgrimage in the afterlife. In the realm "Inferno," Dante presents the impacts of the earthly sins in powerful depictions in order to show mankind the consequences of their sinful actions on earth. In "Purgatorio," Dante depicts the atonement of the souls, who have repented in their lifetime, purging themselves from their sins in order to be accepted in the Garden of Eden. In the third realm, "Paradiso," Dante visualises where the saved souls reach when they are bestowed the eternal wisdom, which is the wisdom of universal order and God's grace (Huse vii-ix). Each realm contributes to the moral gist of the whole work through the experiences Dante gains throughout his journey. Brandeis outlines this allegorical journey as follows:

A man [Dante], we are told, is lost in a dark and savage wood. He tries to escape – to reach a sunlit hill which is visible in the distance- but is held back by three threatening beasts who silently press him backward and downhill. Miraculous aid comes to him in the ghostly person of a beloved poet and teacher [Virgil]. He learns that he cannot be saved from his predicament except by exploring the whole dark abyss to whose edge he stumbled. With the help of his rescuer he makes this journey through Inferno, observing the conditions of the unrepentant sinners and talking with many of them. He emerges from the darkness and pain of that abyss and climbs upward, with constantly increasing comprehension, along all the paths of correction of error that make up the mountain of Purgatory. Finally, healed through the exercise of reason and imagination, he is reunited with the beloved lady through whom he had caught his first glimpses of truth, and with her help sees the life of perfected being. At the end of the journey he is in a position to look back on human life in the perspective of eternity, and on his own strayings in the light of his goal. (19)

With respect to this progressive structure of the poem, it can be argued that one certain motif was what fascinated the modernists and drew their attention to Dante and his *Comedy*, that is, the quest motif. Setting off on a quest and completing it by having gained a particular knowledge (material prize or spiritual revelation) is likened by Brandeis to death and rebirth, and he describes Dante's quest –with regard to the motif of spiritual journey- as, “[...] the hero's journey through the otherworld, his encounters and lessons, his growth from an abject creature, stupid with fear and wretchedness, to the stature of a man who knows the measure of his motives and his deeds” (20). At the end of his journey, Dante returns home having gained a spiritual revelation. Throughout this spiritual journey, there is the rebirth and the renewal of the human being from a hopeless creature in a chaotic and gloomy condition to the spiritually evolved individual bestowed with the knowledge of his existence and the divine wisdom. The evolving and renewing aspect of Dante's journey “from self-destruction to self-discovery” (Havely 3) underlies the modernist interest in *Comedy*.

Dante portrays the souls who are doomed to eternal suffering, the souls who are obliged to atone for the sins they committed on earth for the sake of salvation, and the souls who are bestowed eternal peace after they are purified from their sins. However, such representations of the other world were not something that Dante introduced to religious narratives. Before him, many Christian theologians reflected on the idea of the other world, and described in their works the features of Inferno and Paradise, and especially Purgatory, as well as the concept of purgation. The concept of redemption after death is

indicated in the New Testament, and the idea of remission of sin through purgative fire in the afterlife was endorsed by the early Western theologians (Morgan 145-146). While Aquinas attributed a “punitive and purgative” fire to Purgatory, Augustine, “the true father of Purgatory,” affirmed that purgation begins after death and lasts until the Last Judgement, and the *Vision of Thurnkill* gives one of the most coherent details about the nature of Purgatory as well as using the image of a mountain to describe Purgatory (Morgan 146-155). Dante’s vision of these realms was originally based on the discourse of these theologians. However, as Morgan argues, “Dante is indisputably the first writer to offer such a morally coherent, and topographically and historically consistent, scheme for the description of the other world, and it has generally been accepted that his originality extends to the adoption of a mountain on which to locate Purgatory” (144-145). Indeed, Dante’s vision of Purgatory owes its ingenuity to the fact that by connecting Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise through the image of a mountain, Dante manages to form “a geographical link between Hell and Paradise” (Morgan 162). His difference from his mentors was this unique representation of Purgatory in the shape of a mountain, which leads to “[...] the conversion of an object of fear and terror into a symbol of blessedness and redemption” (Anderson 281). Brandeis predicates Dante’s originality in this matter on “[...] his concern with the *substance* (rather than the fact, alone) of the theophany [...] a profound concern with ideas equally balanced by an intense interest in the actual world, and above all in the concrete expressions of men’s lives” (16). Similarly, Haughton also states that “[w]hile those earlier ‘classics’ Homer and Virgil included memorable descents into the underworld in their epics, it was Dante who made the afterlife the *donnée* as well as subject of his epic *Commedia*” (141). While his contemporaries consider Purgatory merely as a temporary, hellish phase, Dante attributes the concepts of change and freedom to this realm (Kirkpatrick 79). In that sense, Dante does not merely set the framework of the other world, but he also brings a poetic and sophisticated perception to the vision of afterlife, which makes him “a creator of images –not systems of ideas” (Brandeis 16). Through his lines, one may clearly visualise the three realms, their structures, and the narratives of each realm carry out the gist of the whole philosophy behind his work.

Among these realms, “Purgatory” can be regarded as the focal point in the modernist examination of Dante. According to Dante’s narration, the mountain of Purgatory is created at the same time of the fall of Lucifer and the creation of Inferno:

‘On this side he [Lucifer] fell from Heaven, and the earth here,
through fear, made a veil for itself
of the sea, and came to our hemisphere,

and perhaps the land [Purgatory] which shows on this side,
to flee from him, rushed up
and left this passageway empty.’ (*Comedy* 166)

The fall of Lucifer causes the formation of the mountain, whose summit corresponds to the Earthly Paradise (the Garden of Eden), and whose slopes constitute the shore, the gate, and the seven ledges of Purgatory. Purgatory is composed of three spheres; “Ante-Purgatory, where the late repentant undergo a process of preparation for purification; Purgatory proper, where penitents cleanse themselves of their sinful dispositions on seven terraces [...]; and the Earthly Paradise, where the redeemed soul rejoices in its redemption and prepares to ascend to Paradise” (*Dante Encyclopaedia* 183). The seven ledges of Purgatory proper consist of seven deadly sins in three groups. The first group includes pride, envy, anger, which are the results of “misdirected love”; the second group includes sloth which comes from “insufficient love”; and the third group includes avarice, gluttony, and lust, which derive from “excessive love” (Bergin 48). In Dante’s Purgatory, the souls suffer from the consequences of these seven deadly sins, and they pay the price for these sins knowing that they will be rewarded with eternal peace in Paradise. This process of purification is built on three layers, as Toynbee states, “[...] (1) a material punishment intended to mortify the evil passions and incite to virtue; (2) a subject for meditation, bearing on the sin purged, and its opposite virtue, with examples of persons conspicuous for the one or the other drawn from sacred and profane history; (3) a prayer, whereby the soul is purified and strengthened in the grace of God” (457). On account of the material punishments, however, unlike the case of the eternally damned souls in Inferno, “[...] whatever sinful acts these penitents [in Purgatory] have committed have been forgiven; these righteous spirits, already sure of salvation ‘whenever it may be,’ are here to purge the evil tendencies which led them to commit the acts for which true repentance has absolved them” (Bergin 48). The principle behind

the presence of Purgatory is to recover from the sinful, older self through several penalties until one reaches the Gate of Eden, which makes Purgatory “the realm of liberty” (Bergin 52). As the realm of freedom, “Purgatory” is the essential step from the eternal damnation of “Inferno” to the eternal illumination of “Paradise”, and it is where Dante reconciles the full capacity of human nature with the principle of Divine Order (Kirkpatrick 78). This process of renewal and the promise of liberation play a crucial role in the rediscovery of Dante in the modernist literature.

Dante’s most outstanding lines, with respect to his poetic innovations are in “Purgatory.” It is in this realm that Dante calls the Muses to “let dead poetry be revived” (*Comedy* 171). In this respect, the artistic vision behind this section constitutes a more important aspect for the modernists. Kennedy states that “[...] to the twentieth-century mind, both Dante’s Hell and Heaven seem comprehensible only as extreme cases. [...] Dante’s Purgatory seems –amazingly– a poetic provision of modern psychology” (“Schoolboy Copy” 12). Therefore, “Purgatory” can be considered as the most artistic section of *Comedy*. Regarding this aspect of the second part of the work, one may come to assume that the modernists considered “Purgatory” as a valuable source of inspiration for their artistic journey. Expressing his admiration for Dante’s poetic creativity, T.S. Eliot states that “[...] we must assume that there is literature and literary appreciation; we must assume that the reader can obtain the full ‘literary’ or (if you will) ‘aesthetic’ enjoyment without sharing the beliefs of the author. *If* there is ‘literature,’ *if* there is ‘poetry, then it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet” (“Dante” 727-728). In line with Eliot’s argument, it can be said that Dante’s “Purgatory” was an artistic guide for the modernist writers, including Beckett, to produce a new poetry to comply with the early twentieth century, rather than a religious or moral model. Purgatory is, most importantly, a transitional place in *the Comedy* where the souls, who carry the burden of their sins, free themselves from these sins in the Mountain of Purgatory, and in each ledge, they become purer and renewed. Regarding this suffering process, as opposed to the one in “Inferno”, Eliot further argues that “[i]n purgatory the torment of flame is deliberately and consciously accepted by the penitent. [...] The souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer*, for purgation” (“Dante” 716). If one takes Purgatory as a state of pilgrimage through which the souls recover from their past selves, and enter the

gates of Paradise as purified, innocent creatures, then it can be considered, for the modernists, as a state of pilgrimage for “the recovery of the self that had been divided” and the “sense of personal validation” (Quinones 33). Indeed, for the modernists, this purgatorial practice took on a new significance, as mentioned above, as the transformation of the self was mostly attributed to the condition of the artist. As Quinones suggests,

[i]t is not an accident that Dante’s *Purgatorio* is the primary gathering place of poets, artists and musicians, and that the common background of these exchanges [...] is an abiding sense of disintegration. [...] The purgatorial experience addresses the sources of creativity –and this is the basis of its appeal for Dante’s time as well as for our own; and yet these sources, the world of dreams, the lyric of memory, are involved with a sadly passing and disintegrating world but also with the reconstitution of a newer self, a newer poetic voice on the very bases of death and destruction. [...] As the older self has been beaten down –and this finally is the poetic and sacrificial meaning of the *Purgatorio*- newer selves are permitted to arise and assert themselves. (34-35)

Indeed, this way, the modernists were able to find the right inspiration in their search of a new voice for their age, in Dante’s Purgatory. As Parsons puts it, “The early post-war years, dominated by psychological bewilderment and social and economic uncertainty, were a limbo period in which the intensity of horror and loss could not be integrated into normal understanding” (177). Indeed, Purgatory was the realm where humanity belonged to in terms of the dominant mood of the period. However, in their modernist concept of Purgatory, there could not be found a promise of eternal peace. There was the suffering, but no purgation at the end. Havely states that “[e]arly twentieth-century writers, like Pound, Eliot and Yeats, thus inherited a cultural tradition in which Dante’s ‘dead poetry’ (*Purgatorio* 1, 1.7) had undergone a sustained and *pervasive* [emphasis mine] resurgence” (3). The concept of Purgatory was, then, perceived by the modernists in a rather reversed and subverted manner in a new, non-religious format. Salvation seemed impossible for the twentieth-century individual. Nevertheless, regeneration of the artist as a twentieth-century individual was the ultimate point, and Dante’s Purgatory was the Holy Scripture, so to speak, to follow in this path. Therefore, the modernist approach to Dantean text was unconventional, as Sperandino also suggests; “[i]n these authors [Eliot and Pound] the creative manipulation of the Dantean heritage often produces a totally unexpected, almost unrecognisable Dante, if one considers the

image of Dante in modern scholarship” (3). Therefore, as mentioned above, the modernists’ pessimistic stance against their age was combined with their desire to be reborn from the ashes of the previous century ironically under the roof of Dante’s *Comedy*.

Although the modernists were highly inspired by Dante and his teachings on the role of individual in the universal order, they were quite sceptical and cynical towards the concept of purgation and the idea of Purgatory. While in Dante’s Purgatory, penance and atonement are the key elements in the transitory process of purification and purgation, the modernist understanding of Purgatory is “[...] a state of mind, an indefinite condition of hopelessness” (Sperandio 180-181). There was a Dante whose artistic design was a source of inspiration, and yet, whose religious philosophy was quite impossible to adapt in the modern world. Dante, for the modernists, carried multiple significations, thus Dante and his work were characterised by the modernists individualistically. Every modernist who modified Dante’s religious and artistic discipline adopted a different Dante in their works. While Eliot’s adoption was more of a religious one, and Pound’s more political, both began to use Dante as an artistic inspiration (*Dante Encyclopaedia* 258). The Irish modernists discovered a cultural and identity-based guidance in Dante due to their Catholic descent. For Yeats, Dante was a poetic inspiration, whereas for Joyce, Dante was one of the primary symbols of the Catholic Ireland throughout his childhood and adult life, and he became a national and artistic guide for Joyce to recognise and develop an Irish identity integrated with a universal poetic identity (Wallace 294-298). One of the most intriguing interpretations of Dante in the modernist literature belongs to Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), whose entire *oeuvre* implicates the ineluctable presence of Dante, sometimes from an ironic perspective, and sometimes in an utterly subversive manner.

As one of the most influential literary figures that Ireland has produced, there were numerous influences on Beckett in the process of his literary development and on the evolution of his literary identity, and Dante was a major inspiration on that matter. Considering Dante’s presence in almost all of Beckett’s works –either through overt references, or subtle allusions, it can be stated that among all of the influential literary figures in Beckett’s career, “[...] Dante is the one who most insistently remains [in

Beckett's works], from first to last. As the pagan Virgil was recruited as guide by the Christian Dante, so Beckett recruits the Christian Dante as his guide to the post-theological universe he inhabits" (Haughton 142). His influence is felt not only in Beckett's works, but also in his entire life, from "[...] the Trinity College years during which Beckett's tutor Bianca Esposito guided him through the thicket of Dante's canticles, to his rereading the *Inferno* [...], and to the last period of his life in the old people's home in the rue Rémy-Dumoncel, during which 'Beckett was reading Dante in Italian'" (Caselli 1). Dante's *Comedy*, its representations of Inferno, Paradise, and Purgatory in particular, and his portrayal of the human being and his/her journey from Inferno to Paradise for redemption and salvation, all fascinated Beckett deeply, and traces of his descriptions of Purgatory are found frequently in Beckett's works. Considering his admiration of Dante in his scholar years, Beckett's Italian teacher Bianca Esposito seems to have a significant part in the matter, since she is the one "[who] nurtured his love for Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* (he found the *Paradiso* much less compelling reading)" (Knowlson 68). Indeed, Beckett's academic and literary career, from winning Foundation Fellowship at Trinity College to gaining James Joyce's attention and cultivating their friendship, started taking root through these readings of *Comedy* (Kennedy, "Schoolboy Copy" 11). Through the years of his artistic search to find his own voice, Beckett, just as his contemporary fellows, found *Comedy* intriguing and fascinating, and as stated above, the second part of *Comedy*, which is Purgatory, can be related to most of his fiction (Pilling, *SB*, 30).

The idea of Purgatory is perhaps the most vividly and controversially discussed subject in Beckett's world. Through his studies on Dante and medieval concept of purgation, and as he developed his own literary voice he became obsessed with the concept of Purgatory, and Antepurgatory in particular (Wallace 299). As mentioned above, Dante's Purgatory is a transitional place where people purge themselves of the seven deadly sins after they die in order to reach Paradise. They cleanse their souls and prove themselves worthy enough to be accepted by God in Paradise. Dante's vision is a product of a highly religious medieval philosophy, which suggests that the salvation of humankind depends on the purification of his/her soul. If a human being redeems himself/herself from his/her sins, his soul can and will be saved as well. However, Beckett, like his contemporaries, was not concerned with the religious significance and guidance of

Purgatory. The very concept of renewal was the key point in Beckett's attraction with the realm. As recreation and renaming of the artist's function and that of art was the ultimate necessity for the new age, Beckett found Purgatory a fundamental path to follow. It was a path that Joyce followed as well, yet in a diverted direction. In his article on Joyce's *Work in Progress*, Beckett elucidates the contradictory designs of Purgatory in Dante's world and in Joyce's, thus, in the modernists', as well as in his own. According to Beckett, while Dante creates a Purgatory whose movement is upward and linear, Joyce's is inward and cyclical without any promise of any kind of realisation or completion. Nevertheless, the vivid and creative nature of Dante's Purgatory complies with the artistic pilgrimage of the modern artist. For Beckett, "Hell is the static lifelessness of viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a Hood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements. There is a continuous purgatorial progress at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved [...]" ("Bruno", 22). The sense of movement and progress in Purgatory led Beckett to relate the regenerative form of Purgatory to the modern world. As Pilling also suggests, "[t]he earth may seem like a refuge from the 'hell of stories', but it is remorselessly purgatorial, a world of perpetual 'eruptions'" (*SB*, 133). The analogy between Purgatory and the world of the living was partially based on the fact that all of the human actions and experiences in Dante's work take place in the Purgatory. The atmosphere of Dante's Purgatory involves humanly qualities, as Bergin explicates, "[i]n Purgatory, [...] a human ambience takes the place of the inhuman obscurity of Hell –human not only in being luminous but in the alternations of light and darkness; night and day have their fair share in Purgatory as they do in the hemisphere of the living" (*Dante's* 50). Cambon presents a similar argument and draws an analogy between man's existential pursuit on earth and in Purgatory:

[...] we are in a middle kingdom [in Purgatory], a kingdom of impermanence between two extremes – and as such indeed the ideal kingdom of artists, who significantly abound on the slopes of this island mountain. [...] this transitory stage between two worlds (the one of despair [Hell] and the one of ecstasy [Paradise]) is the more nearly human world, the one where man, although he has left his flesh behind, must labor to transcend its residual heritage. (106-107)

While Dante's experiences and observations in *Inferno* and *Paradise* cannot be comprehended through rational thinking, Purgatory offers a much similar perspective on man's existential pursuit on earth.

Beckett adapts Purgatory with a new sense and awareness towards the demand of the new artist, thus it is a crucial fact that "[...] progression through Dantean authorial relations should lead to anagogy, to another prayer, but the modern prayer is manifestly different from Dante's" (McNeil 14-15). Indeed, the modernist entreaty pursued a rather antithetical interpretation of the purgatorial experience, and as for Beckett, this experience implied foremost the examination and renegotiation of modern reality and individual existence.

In the interest of acknowledging the reformed human condition and the recast experience of Purgatory in the modern world, it is necessary to scrutinise Beckett's understanding of individual existence and the reality that surrounds it. Under the influence of several philosophical movements and thinking, such as nihilism and existentialism, Beckett's primary attitude towards the material world and the inner state of individual was a pessimistic and cynical one. The period he belonged to was a time when people feared the catastrophic impacts of the World Wars, reconsidered their place in the modern world, and questioned the pre-established norms of the society. Having observed the difference between the perspective of the twentieth century individual towards any kind of redemption and that of the medieval period, and having acknowledged how impossible and ridiculous this idea was in the modern world, Beckett portrays the journey of the soul through Purgatory in an extremely ironic manner.

For Beckett, unlike Dante, life itself is Purgatory where individual's struggle to redeem himself is ironically in vain. No matter how hard he tries to purge himself, he cannot move beyond his paralysed status. Kalt states that "[...] Dante's anticipation of Salvation and Paradise is replaced by Beckett's horror at the individual's arbitrary state of helplessness in a perpetual purgatory, with no hope of Heaven" (15). While Dante's Purgatory promises the salvation of the pious and virtuous soul providing that purification is completed, in Beckett's world, as Hesla asserts, "[...] there is 'neither prize nor penalty'. As absolutes, justice and the moral order, Virtue and Vice are absolutely absent" (*The Shape* 224). This frivolousness of human effort for any kind of

redemption consequently draws attention to a nonsensical and indifferent reality. As Nadeau articulates, “[t]he reality which Beckett has tried to apprehend, and which is probably inexpressible, is the region of the perfect indifference and undifferentiatedness of all phenomena” (“Humor” 36). The purgatorial experience in Beckett’s oeuvre is conditioned by a reality of an adiaphorous and incoherent nature. The modern reality cannot co-operate with the Dantean absolute, since, as Mayoux asserts, “[a]lways unreal, reality is, in particular, ambiguous, and the formulae of logic, by which A always remains A at the same time and in the same connections, no longer apply” (“Universal Parody” 78). Then, in what sense is the experience of the individual purgatorial in Beckett’s world? According to Wellershoff, “[l]ife, truth, identity, the forgotten name, silence, they also stand for something lost to which the self wants to return. It wants to return from banishment. It strives for a reunion that is forever frustrated. With inadequate means, with failing strength it painfully searches for something unknown in a sphere of permanent deception” (“Failure” 92-93). Beckett’s Purgatory does not promise a beyond, nonetheless, it is the perpetual cycle of man searching for a meaning that makes the search purgatorial, since, as Lamont points out, “Beckett’s novels and plays are circular in structure, evolving from point zero in limbo, and returning to that point, or its vicinity” (“Beckett’s” 201). To put it differently, what makes the individual existence and human condition on earth purgatorial is the obstinate attempt of the individual to reach meaning (that is the Gate of Paradise in Dante’s *Comedy*) which is supposed to suggest an existential revelation, yet, proves to be impossible. As Hesla suggests, Beckett confronts the Absolutes of the world, since “Absolutes which obtained in the Dantean cosmos – The Beginning and the Ending, the irreversibility of time, causality, purpose, justice, wholeness- no longer govern the work of art”; therefore, ‘Meaning’, as well, is an Absolute that must be eradicated, for it is impossible to attain in modern reality (*The Shape* 227). Correspondingly, the utmost function of man on earth –and that of the artist in his work- is subdued merely to “pass the time”, since “[i]t is what a writer does in the middle of the twentieth century, in the time of the absence of absolutes [...]” (Hesla, *The Shape* 228). This inexpressible attribute of reality eventually shapes Beckett’s perspective towards the purpose and the function of the artist. In a world where any individual contemplation on life is regarded futile, Beckett renounces the traditional role of the artist. While Dante speaks of a

universal order, Beckett indicates a universal chaos in his works. He refers to this chaos as “the mess” or “this buzzing confusion” in his interview with Tom F. Driver: “[t]he form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now” (“Beckett” 506). In this respect, for Beckett, as Hesla suggests, “‘the mess’ is not a tricky intellectual problem to be solved but an existential fact to be dealt with” (*The Shape* 10). Beckett speaks of an art whose primary concern is the doomed human condition as a result of the inexplicableness of surrounding reality. As he asserts in his “Three Dialogues” with Georges Duthuit, “[t]he expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (“Three” 17). This perilous situation of the individual is what makes the artist’s experience of artistic creation conspicuously purgatorial in the modern sense: struggling to recreate himself, to restore art even if there is no culmination or completion. Hesla states that “[i]t is the situation of absolute privation, in which the artist is left with nothing but a disoriented yet unrelenting responsibility to do what an artist does –to express, to make, to produce” (*The Shape* 4). Against the definite and explicit guidance of Dante’s transitional realm, the modernist Purgatory contradicts its own connotation, the process of purgation, leaving the artist –in this case, Beckett- with the obligation to express this exhaustion.

The discrepancy that Beckett recognised between the medieval attitude towards salvation and the modernist scepticism –even renunciation- towards any kind of purgation underlies the fundamental presence of Dante in Beckett’s texts. Sperandio emphasises the significance of this incongruity in Beckett’s ironic adoption of Dante as follows:

Dante’s *Commedia* is a journey moving from a state of error to a condition of salvation and bliss through subsequent stages of an upward movement. By the end of the journey knowledge will be perceived not only as a form of participation in the Divine, but also as a positive and necessary task for the human mind. Beckett’s plays, stories and novels are obsessively centred on the impossibility of movement, and on the absolute negation of the very idea of a fabula-journey focussed on (self) knowledge. Yet, for Beckett, knowledge is not simply denied: rather, it is refused

and overcome, in a sort of negative theology, which eventually leads to a very Beckettian peace, where salvation and bliss are totally foreign elements [...] (166)

In line with this approach, Dante's divine philosophy is argued in Beckett's oeuvre not for its compatibility with the twentieth century, but on the contrary, for its disharmony with the reality Beckett experiences. The concepts of purgation and the purgatorial experience in Dante and Beckett are in complete contradiction. As Strauss advocates as follows:

In Dante's world Purgatory is the necessary ascent to perfection and innocence, in which the pilgrim is purged of vices and learns to understand the corresponding virtues. Antepurgatory is a preparation, a trial by waiting before the ascent begins. In Beckett's own words, the difference between Antepurgatory and Purgatory is the difference between real and ideal vegetation; and Beckett saw in the Joycean purgatory the conditions of his own world –no ascent and no ideal vegetation. The heroes of Beckett's universe *really* vegetate, and since this fate is unendurable, they try to vegetate *ideally*, i.e., they persuade themselves that there *is* an ascent and wait for some sort of angel to beckon them on, like Dante's pilgrims. But the angel, the epiphany, never comes, and they finally return to real vegetation. Like the vegetable, they wilt and disintegrate. (260)

The vitality and the sense of movement that Beckett found so fascinating in Dante's Purgatory is utterly alien to Beckett's world. He is impressed by the artistic revelation the realm offers, yet, it is only possible to adopt Dante as an artistic authority by challenging the theological substance that his work bears. Sperandio states that

[for Beckett] Dante, instead of being the reference for a religious, cultural or political establishment, becomes a disturbing question mark over the reliability of cultural traditions. Dante's philosophical construction appears in fact deeply –and almost symmetrically – alien to Beckett's world, but, at the same time, in Beckett's works Dante and his *Commedia* constitute a powerful horizon of reference. Dante's *Commedia* is a journey moving from a state of error to a condition of salvation and bliss through subsequent stages of an upward movement. By the end of the journey knowledge will be perceived not only as a form of participation in the Divine, but also as a positive and necessary task for the human mind. Beckett's plays, stories and novels are obsessively centred on the impossibility of movement, and on the absolute negation of the very idea of a fabula-journey focussed on (self) knowledge. (166)

Correspondingly, to constitute a modern prayer necessitates the absolute subversion of the source of inspiration. The medieval understanding of purgation in Dante's *Comedy* and the very idea of an individual's redemption are challenged ironically in Beckett's

works in the light of the modernist understanding of individual and his/her condition. The problem with Beckett's modern world is the fact that it neither corresponds with Dante's medievalist philosophy or any other existential account of the previous centuries, nor does it coincide within itself. Therefore, modern man cannot restore coherence or association with the world he lives in. In such a world, the human condition reaches a state of contradiction, since the individual is unable to acquire a self, and yet, cannot escape from his inevitable existence, which proves his condition paradoxical (Chambers, "Beckett's Brickmanship" 153). In this respect, this subversion manifests itself in Beckett's texts through distinct forms.

Especially in his early works, Beckett's characters are portrayed in an attempt aiming at a purgatorial movement, and yet, without any satisfaction of achieving unity in themselves. In his novels, Beckett displays the tragic condition of the modern individual in the face of a destructive and terrifying world. Although the sense of exile is the main motivation for the quest for self both in Dante's and Beckett's writings, purgation that is achieved in the former cannot be offered in the latter. As O'Neill explicates, the reason is that "[...] if exile is at the quest's origin, the quest itself perpetuates, even guarantees exile, and this is the paradox central to Beckett's work: in Beckett, the quest never brings the seeker nearer to his goal, but instead, keeps him from it, at some undefinable distance" (106). That is to say, the exile of the soul in Ante-purgatory is a necessary, yet a temporary condition in Dante's world, which promises an eternal divine existence in Paradise at the end of the purgative sufferings. In Beckett's universe, on the other hand, the quest fails to resolve, and the necessary condition of exile becomes the perennial mode of existing. Hesla associates this tragic condition with the absurd situation of the individual as follows:

[...] *being human* and *existing* are mutually contradictory. One could be a human being if one did not have to exist, and one could exist, though not as a human being. But one cannot exist, and be a human being, in the same place, at the same time. [...] man is not congruous with the conditions –the only conditions- provided for his existence. He and his world do not suit with each other, do not make a fit. (*The Shape* 8)

Beckett's people find themselves in such a condition that they neither comply with the social reality around them, nor find a balance between their body and mind. On account of this confinement from the chaotic outer world and the deranged inner state, these

characters embark on a quest in order to extricate themselves from the burden of being. As Federman asserts: “[t]o succeed in this ascetic quest, to reach this apparently blissful condition, these protagonists must learn to exist beyond their own physical and emotional needs, indifferent to the human body, exiled from the society of man” (*Journey* 31). In this respect, Federman further argues:

In their state of anguished expectancy, Beckett’s heroes stand as witnesses for the failure of logic, reason, or whatever mental process man utilizes for the discovery and understanding of the external world. Thus, by pretending insanity, or merely aspiring to such a state, they reject all notions of reality and the sum of human knowledge. This self-imposed alienation produces ignorance, meaninglessness, and mental chaos. (47)

Beckett’s characters are incapable of finding a meaning or a purpose in their existence, hence they become entrapped in their meaningless worlds in a lethargic condition. Lamont refers to these Beckettian antiheroes as “non-doers,” whose condition is in complete contrast with traditional heroism. According to Lamont “[i]nstead of embarking upon a continuous expansion in space and time through conquest and recognition, they contract in an infinite quest of their inner essence. They subtract themselves from the locus of human existence, history, and choose the realm of make-believe, storytelling” (“Beckett’s,” 205). Although they try to make sense of their presence in the universe, and struggle to achieve completeness in themselves, their attempts to fulfil these desires result in failure, and their efforts remain futile. They all have “a tendency to aporia (purposiveness without purpose)”⁴ (Davies 46). As Federman argues, “Beckett’s people begin and end their fictional journey at the same place, in the same condition, and without having learned, discovered, or acquired the least knowledge about themselves and the world in which they exist. Theirs is a journey, without beginning or end, without purpose or meaning” (4). Although they set off so as to acquire a certain knowledge about the essence of the self, Beckett’s world negates such possibility. With respect to Beckett’s approach to Dante and Dantean aspect of quest to knowledge, Sperandio states that “[i]t is [...] a total inversion of meaning: no journey is possible, no wisdom is obtainable, no report on what happened is reliable, and yet all failed and ridiculous attempts are still toward movement and

⁴ The expression “purposiveness without purpose” is first suggested by Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), to describe the artistic domain (Bell 27).

knowledge and communication” (195). Notwithstanding the negation of any possible meaning, purgation, or revelation, Beckettian man pursues his ridiculous quest. In this respect, it can be suggested that Beckett’s idea of Purgatory and purgation is a challenged and reconstructed interpretation of that of Dante.

The pathetic situation of the Beckettian heroes is the situation of the modern man, who is stuck within his confined world, floundering to reach beyond what is in front of him, and yet, failing. Troubled by the devastating effects of the world wars, the modern man is represented by Beckett’s protagonists, who are “[the] survivors of a world that has been lost” (Haughton 144). These heroes wander in their personal purgatories endlessly and desperately without being able to achieve meaning. As Webb also indicates, “[i]n Beckett’s world [...] [t]here is no God and no universal order. Beckettian man does not feel at home in the universe, nor can he feel that any worldly goal serves any ultimate purpose. Man can find no intelligible pattern in the universe, or in his own life” (*A Study* 23). On account of this disharmony and the absence of a universal order, Beckett’s characters seek shelter in the utmost isolation from the outer world. Their Paradise is what keeps them away from “existing” within the mess outside, and allows them to “be” in their reclusion. As Sion argues, “[t]he prevalent darkness and silence of the inner world’s remote strata constitute the most desired refuge for [Beckett’s] protagonists, and the journey to those inaccessible places configures the heroic quest of the Beckettian hero” (*Ontological* 128). In order to experience this existential bliss – which Beckett calls “Belacqua bliss”- the protagonists in Beckett’s fictional world develop particular routines. While in *Murphy* (1938), Murphy ties himself to a rocking chair, Molloy, the protagonist of *Molloy* (1951) sucks pebbles. However, this convergence is unattainable since one cannot simply stop existing. Sion states that “[t]he Beckettian characters suffer from the impossibility of dying, but also of living” (18). The Beckettian man neither accommodates himself within the world, nor can reach the state of non-existence. Thus, he is eternally doomed to wander in his purgatorial zone. With respect to their different perspectives towards Beckett’s reception of Dante and his Purgatory, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), *Mercier and Camier* (1946), and *How It Is* (1961), the first one being his first novel, the second written in the midst of the prose era of his career, and the third one, being his last novel, provide an insight into how Beckett treated the concept of Purgation and the image of Purgatory,

and, thus, give the opportunity to analyse the development (or the degeneration) of the concept throughout his career as a novelist.

Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*⁵ stands in a crucial position, in that, the protagonist of the novel, Belacqua, is the twentieth-century impersonation of the character Belacqua in Dante's *Comedy*, who is depicted as the true representative of sloth. Dante forms Belacqua as a negative example for the medieval man who should avoid indolence in order to maintain physical and spiritual progress. Ironically enough, although Beckett's Belacqua shares similar characteristics with Dante's Belacqua, he is himself the true projection of the modern individual, who is unable to move forward and achieve progress. Beckett's attitude towards indolence and impotence is in complete contrast with Dante's stance. Obsessed with Dante's account of Belacqua, who sits beside a rock in Purgatory waiting to be redeemed from his sins committed on Earth, and who criticises Dante for struggling in vain to reach Paradise, Beckett adapts him for the twentieth century world. While Dante's Belacqua waits idly to be allowed to Paradise, Beckett's Belacqua aspires to retreat into his mind, which seems to reflect his own understanding of Paradise. Beckett recreates Dante's character as a pattern for most of his future protagonists, who, just like Belacqua, wait in their purgatories for eternity for an amnesty that will not come.

Beckett's third novel, *Mercier and Camier* is also discussed in this thesis with its main themes, such as the loss in the sense of progress in time and place, and the loss of aim and meaning. In this respect, the novel conflicts with the ideas that Dante promotes in *Comedy*. In "Purgatorio," souls go through their purgative journey by purifying themselves from their earthly sins. There is meaning in their actions, since they have a certain aim, which is to reach Paradise. However, the pseudo-couple in Beckett's novel, Mercier and Camier do not have any sense of time or place. In their world, their perception of time is not chronological, it is fragmented and obscure. Hence, it brings only futility for their actions. Both characters, who try to escape the land they are stuck in at the very beginning of the novel, begin to lose their sense of time, and their purpose becomes meaningless. Although they, just like the souls in Dante's "Purgatorio," seek to purge themselves, and to reach beyond their purgatories, their journey cannot

⁵ *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* will be abbreviated as *Dream* hereafter.

promise an explicit direction. They lose their focus, and the idea of progression becomes impossible. Neither Mercier nor Camier has the ability to lead the way, and they draw circles recurrently in their purgatories, from which they can never escape.

Beckett's last novel, *How It Is* is an example of the ironic presence of Dante's Purgatory in Beckett's universe. The protagonist of the story is a vague figure, whose name and physical appearance are not known for certain. He is only a body floundering in a pile of mud, oscillating between his purgatory and inferno. One of the main themes of the work is directly related to what Beckett observed in Dante's *Belacqua*, which is the loss of will to proceed or to begin trying. The protagonist tries to free himself from the mud throughout the novel, slowly moving forward. When he realises that his efforts will not bring a solution, he stops moving, and lies aimlessly in the mud. Towards the end of the novel, there is a symbolic reversal regarding the character's movement from his Purgatory to Inferno, whereas in *Comedy* the direction is the opposite, which is towards Paradise.

The presence of Dante, and the subverted idea of purgation, although found in almost all of Beckett's works, are explored in each work with an escalating negation. Haughton articulates that "[...] in the wake of his experience of the Occupation and the European War, Beckett's allusions to Dante begin to acquire a greater existential and historical force, unlike those in the early work" (143). Indeed, the reception of Dante and his Purgatory in Beckett's works seems to have changed throughout his oeuvre from *Dream* to *How It Is*. While in his earlier works Beckett uses Dantean Purgatory as an explicit referential source, in his later prose, especially the ones written after the Second World War, "[...] the Dantean influence operates in subtler, more pervasive ways. [and] the distinction between Dante's hell and purgatory seems to collapse" (Haughton 146). In this respect, to comprehend Beckett's approach to Dantean purgation, and to observe the change in his treatment of Purgatory in the modern world, one needs to look at the reception of Dante in his oeuvre. Beckett's aforementioned three novels, each with its own idiosyncratic symbolisation of the plight of the modern individual, are to be examined from this perspective.

**CHAPTER I: THE FIRST DISSOLUTION OF PURGATORY:
*DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLEING WOMEN***

Beckett's first novel, *Dream* was not published until 1992, although it was written in 1932. After he abandoned his academic career at Trinity College for the sake of literary pursuit, Beckett travelled through Europe, and he wrote *Dream* during his time in Paris (Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, 15). In the summer of 1932, the novel was declined by several publishing houses, such as Chatto and Windus, Jonathan Cape, and the Hogarth Press (Pilling, *ASBC*, 38). As the publishing houses kept rejecting *Dream*, Beckett began to use the manuscript to produce several other short stories, most of which were gathered under the title, *More Pricks Than Kicks*⁶ in 1934, a short story collection published by Chatto and Windus (Fletcher, *The Novels*, 14). *Dream*, among Beckett's more commonly discussed works, remained out of the public eye due to the late publication date, the poor critical appreciation by the critics, and also due to Beckett's reluctance to publish his first novel which he found inferior compared to his later works (Pilling, *Cambridge Companion*, 21; Federman 13; King 133). Thus the first novel that Beckett wrote was kept aside for decades, and regarded merely as a work of an apprentice. Nevertheless, the novel can be acknowledged as a substantial product, "the chest into which I threw my wild thoughts" (qtd. in O'Brien xiii) in Beckett's own words. In this sense, *Dream* contains the essence of Beckett's literary provenience, and also introduces the precursor of Beckett's representations of modern man, Belacqua Shuah.

The novel was considered highly autobiographical by the critics (Cronin 24; O'Brien xii). Owing to the fact that Beckett himself quit his academic career at Trinity College to become a writer, and travelled through Europe in search of a place to belong to so as to produce his works, Pilling describes *Dream* as "[...] an endlessly fascinating document, embodying the *Angst* of a young man who had thrown up a potentially brilliant academic career for the very much less secure world of creative (or, as Beckett

⁶ Many of the stories in *More Pricks than Kicks* are selected from *Dream of Fair to Middleing Women*, and adapted to the chronological story line of the collection. Both works are built on the same protagonist, Belacqua Shuah, whose essential personal characteristics are displayed equally in these works. Due to the fact that *Dream* was not published until 1992, most of the analyses by the critics concerning the protagonist are based on and referred to *More Pricks than Kicks*. In this respect, the parts of this chapter regarding Belacqua Shuah will also include critics' references and analyses of Belacqua Shuah as the protagonist of *More Pricks than Kicks*.

saw it, ‘uncreative’ and ‘discreative’) writing [...]” (*Cambridge Companion*, 21). This autobiographical reflection displayed in the work, with respect to Beckett’s and Belacqua’s similar experiences, is conducted mainly through the protagonist, who shares certain similarities with his creator, yet, whom Beckett seems to criticise and even mock throughout the novel. Presenting a story barely coherent and in unity within itself, the novel focuses on a young man named Belacqua Shuah who is oscillating between the social reality surrounding him “the real” and the territory of his own mind “the ideal” (Cronin 106). Through his relationships with several women in different European cities, Belacqua questions the concepts of love, sexuality, reason, art, and individual existence. Beginning at Carlyle Pier in Dublin with Belacqua sending off his girlfriend, the Smeraldina-Rima, to Vienna, the story follows Belacqua to Paris, Vienna, and Dublin, meeting other women, the Syra-Cusa in Paris and the Alba in Dublin. The story suddenly ends with Belacqua leaving the Alba’s house and sitting in the heavy rain observing and amazed by his hands, later continuing with the story “A Wet Night” and ending with “Yellow” and “Draff” in *More Pricks Than Kicks*⁷, in which Belacqua dies under the anaesthetic in an operation for the tumour on his nape (Fletcher, *The Novels*, 20). Although left unfinished and unpublished, and used as a draft material for *MPTK*, *Dream* holds a valuable place in Beckett’s oeuvre and in Beckett studies, as it is one of his first outputs which reflect his perception of the individual existence, and especially, the purgatorial experience of the individual in the modern world. The novel can be regarded as a prologue in which Beckett introduces his reader with the seeds of his cynical approach to the idea of salvation. Caselli describes *Dream* as “a purgatorial enterprise in that it strives to deny any progression while remaining a literary work, and being therefore obliged to proceed [...]” (*BD* 53). In line with Caselli’s argument, it can be stated that the novel indeed oscillates between being an attempt to dismiss any traditional narrative technique and having the form of an average literary work. However, as the novel negates progression, it also systematically fails to be an orderly work because of the recurring passages and an incomplete ending. In more than two hundred pages, Beckett deliberately avoids creating a conventional narrative through estranged passages, a fragmentary plot, and a final chapter with a loose ending. Bolin argues that “[t]his inconclusiveness is perhaps most significantly due to the fact that

⁷ *More Pricks Than Kicks* will be abbreviated as *MPTK* hereafter.

Belacqua is never granted the ability to ‘make sense’ of his own narrative, to achieve that self-assessment crucial for the hero of the *Bildungsroman* that would allow the narrative to achieve a certain closure” (526). Unlike the traditional coming-of-age stories, the work does not provide any self-awareness which is supposed to be essential for the protagonist to acquire at the end. Not bringing a conclusion to the story is indeed an intended move by Beckett, as it was also a common means in the modernist novel to highlight the individual’s fragmented interior. Bolin states that “[t]he failure of resolution in this new form of novel [also in *Dream*] occurs at two levels: that of the inner life of the character as he searches for the value of his experience, and in the mind of the novelist as he composes his narrative” (522). As in Beckett’s case, all the things that Belacqua encounters and experiences in the story are left incomplete. The journey of the protagonist does not end in a revelation or a fruition since the narrative does not allow such spiritual consummation or psychological fulfilment. With respect to Beckett’s literary agenda, “*Dream* draws on and affirms Beckett’s 1930 argument that the novel cannot resolve but only re-state the problem which confronted it in the modern age. It suggests that, though the novelist must attempt to dissolve conventions to approach an ‘essential reality’, he must ultimately admit failure in the face of an irreducibly complex, ‘incoherent’ universe” (Bolin 537). This incoherency in the universe is what leads to the impossibility of a coherent narrativity, and thus, indicates an inarticulate fiction. This form of fiction, manifested in *Dream*, was what the modernist writer adopted to interpret the purgatorial experience of the individual. In what way, then, can this modernist approach of Beckett towards the incoherent universe alluded through disordered fiction be connected to Dante’s concept of Purgatory and idea of purgation? Commenting on Beckett’s artistic motivations in his twenties, Kenner reflects on a religious expression ‘no sparrow falls without cause,’ which is said by a Jesuit in the story, ‘A Wet Night’ in *MPTK*, and advocates that

[i]t is also the principle of normal fiction, and moreover the fiction-reader’s expectation of the normal world. Motives should be explicit, persons should be complementary or else antithetical, purposes should comply. Beckett in his twenties devoted to such assumptions an energy of destruction that transcends any desire to reform fiction and can only be explained by the fact that they are religious assumptions as well. He exhausted on fiction his outrage at being told, for instance by preachers, that everything comports and harmonizes in a world which the Divine Purpose permeates as the novelist’s purpose permeates a novel. (52)

This “Divine Order”, or “Divine Purpose” in Kenner’s terms, which pervades the world in which all things are in consonance with each other, is contradicted by Beckett through his repurposed universe in which no one possesses a concord existence, Belacqua Shuah being in the first place. This standpoint explicitly contravenes Dante’s theological design in *Comedy*, which is based on the Divine Order⁸. In that sense, as a point of origin, *Dream* can be regarded as the beginning of Beckett’s subversion of Dante and the idea of purgation. That is to say, while Dante promotes the onward and upward motion in “Purgatory”, *Dream* undermines this perspective as the hero of the novel avoids anything regarded as a physical improvement. In Beckett’s world, everything that Dante displays as progress is reversed in order to emphasise the disruption and deformation of the coherent and unified universal system. For instance, Dante introduces Ante-purgatory⁹ as a temporary sphere for the habitants of Purgatory to prepare for the act of purgation on the Mountain of Purgatory. However, the sense of physical immobility and passivity that Ante-purgatory evokes is acknowledged by Belacqua Shuah and Beckett as the ultimate objective rather than a means for purification. Therefore, the very act of purgation in Dante’s vision is negated and undermined by *Dream*, and it is replaced by the protagonist with a reversed purpose which is not to move forward or upward, but to linger eternally. Indeed, what relates *Dream* to Dante and the concept of purgation in his *Comedy* is essentially the protagonist of *Dream*, his personal and spiritual disposition, and his attitude towards the surrounding reality.

The whole story revolves around Belacqua Shuah, who is the namesake of Dante’s famous character, Belacqua, in *Comedy*. Beckett adapts Dante’s Belacqua, the indolent character of *Comedy*, to the twentieth-century modern world. From the early periods of his literary career to the end, he was deeply obsessed with Dante’s Belacqua, whose main objective in Ante-purgatory is to wait for his lifetime on earth to be purged of his sins, since he did not repent until his last days on earth. As mentioned in the

⁸ The progressive and holistic essence of the Divine Order is elucidated in detail in the Introduction chapter of this thesis.

⁹ The word, ‘Ante-purgatory’ is mentioned in some of the sources without the hyphen. As the majority of the sources mention ‘Ante-purgatory’ with the hyphen, it is also preferred in this thesis to use the hyphen in ‘Ante-purgatory.’

Introduction, the atmosphere of Ante-purgatory and Belacqua's presence there serve a substantial function in Beckett's fiction. As Fletcher aptly puts it:

[...] Dante places Belacqua in Antepurgatory with the late-repentant who have through procrastination deferred until their last breath their reconciliation with God. For this they are punished by being made to spend in Antepurgatory a period of idle waiting equal to their earthly lifespan before being admitted to Purgatory proper, unless prayers arise from a heart in a state of grace requesting an earlier release. The tradition that Belacqua the Florentine was utterly idle [...] is respected by Beckett, whose own Belacqua is 'by nature sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence', and lives on unearned income. (*SBA*, 112)

For Beckett, Dante's Belacqua's physical and spiritual condition in Ante-purgatory makes him the ideal inspiration as "[...] a man reliving his whole life at a remove" (Kenner 50). This state of waiting and the mood of indolence shaped and governed the birth of the people in Beckett's world, starting with *Dream's* protagonist. As Kenner also suggests, "[a] drift, beset, holding futile conversations with relentless girls whose territory is the physical world, Belacqua is a first sketch for the heroes of Beckett's mature fictions, bumping round in a cosmos where nothing synchronizes nor harmonizes" (51). Redesigning Dante's indolent Belacqua in accordance with the twentieth-century pessimism and chaotic impression, Beckett revives Belacqua of *Comedy* in a world where he is no longer the antithetical type against a well-ordered universe, but the agent of an inconceivably sublime existence against a defective, diabolic, and haphazard macrocosm. In order to ideate this correlation between the Belacquas and to comprehend Beckett's subversive approach to Dante's ideal concept of Purgatory, and the novel's implication of a redefined act of purgation, one must have an insight on how Dante deals with his character's apathy towards progression and how he portrays this indolence in the light of his religious judgement.

Belacqua, who is believed to be Duccio di Bonavia, a Florentine flute-maker and a close friend of Dante (Raffa 129), also known for his indolence in real life (Toynbee 74), is represented in *Comedy* as an antagonist model against the dynamic and progressive structure of Purgatory. In *Comedy*, Dante encounters Belacqua at the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory, which is named the Ante-purgatory, where the last repentants are forced to wait for a lifetime before they climb the mountain in order to begin the process of purgation. Belacqua is one of the residents of Ante-purgatory, and he is the

true representative of sloth, portrayed as sitting in the shade of a rock “[...] holding his knees with his arms, / and keeping his head low between them” (*Comedy* 188), which is quite a common posture among Beckett’s characters. Noticing Dante and Virgil trying to climb to the gate of Purgatory, Belacqua starts to speak to Dante revealing his indolent disposition, “[p]erhaps first you will have need of sitting down” (*Comedy* 188). Dante’s first reaction to Belacqua indicates the contradiction Belacqua asserts against the physical and spiritual progress Dante displays in his work, “[...] look at that one / who shows himself more negligent / than if laziness were his sister” (188). Indeed, Belacqua seems to impersonate the very concept of lethargy, which is in complete contrast with the active design of Purgatory. When Dante asks Belacqua the reason for his weary and indolent waiting, Belacqua answers him with a question, “[...] Brother, what’s the use of going up? / The angel of God sitting at the gate / would not admit me to the torments” (189), the question that possesses the essential characteristics Beckett endorses in his people. O’Neill interprets Belacqua’s excuse for not bothering to climb to the gate of Purgatory as follows:

This is a strange statement to come from a soul destined for Paradise. [Belacqua] shows none of the great desire seen in the other souls of Ante-Purgatory; he seems defeated or even disinterested. Perhaps the ‘*martiri*’ (torments) are not so appealing to him: after all, having been so lazy during his lifetime, what he undergoes in Ante-Purgatory is something of a paradise for Belacqua. What lies ahead –his many years of purgation – must seem like a step in the wrong direction. (35)

In fact, Belacqua’s answer explains the very reason for his passivity. No matter what he does, he will not be allowed to enter the Purgatory proper to begin his purgation, since he has to wait for a lifetime in Ante-purgatory. He also recognises that he will be granted this purgative process once his waiting period is through, thus he literally does not have to do anything except to wait. The order of the afterlife actually tolerates this passivity. He is guaranteed that he can and will be saved, though he does not know when. Therefore, Belacqua’s lethargic condition can be due to this absolute and supreme design of Dante’s afterlife. However, apart from the promising aspect of Purgatory, Belacqua’s loss of motivation and reluctance to move forward, his disinterest in the purgative torments as O’Neill states in the previous extract, depends, for the most part, on the lethargic comfort of his current position. Slothful through his entire life on earth, Belacqua is, in a sense, content with his temporary condition in Ante-purgatory.

Although a sort of punishment, waiting apathetically is a pleasing state that Belacqua prefers rather than going through the purgative steps of Purgatory up to the gate of Paradise. Sperandio suggests that “Dante’s text deals with the question of zeal and sloth: Belacqua appears in a canto where the human desire for action and knowledge is given a limit and a discipline, and where waiting is a punishment but also the necessary condition for future salvation” (5). As desire for divine revelation does not appeal to Belacqua, the compulsory period of waiting is far from being a punishment; it is a blessing for him. O’Neill compares Dante’s Belacqua to “still water” (33), a condition in complete opposition to the purpose of Purgatory. It is the concept and the act of purification that do not appeal to Dante’s indolent character. According to Kirkpatrick, when Dante passes through the confinement of Inferno, and goes through the purgative steps of Purgatory, “[s]lowly, [he] recognises that the disciplines of purification are not restrictions but the means by which the individual places himself in relation to other beings –both divine and human. Law becomes love; and freedom finally is seen to reside in that interdependence of all beings which is fully enjoyed in Paradise” (79). Therefore, the idea of purification requires a widened perspective towards one’s surrounding, a commitment to be one with the divine and human existences, and the will-power to reach Paradise, the only place where such harmony could be achieved. However, neither commitment nor will-power seems to be dominant in Belacqua’s disposition. In this respect, Belacqua’s presence in *Comedy* is purported as an individual opposition to Dante’s religious, moral, and philosophical agenda, and as Sperandio further argues, “Belacqua is the embodiment of the exact opposite perspective that has made Dante arrive at the same point of the journey: Dante’s movement and zeal are, programmatically and purposefully, in full and open contrast with Belacqua’s sloth and immobility” (178). Dante uses Belacqua to set a negative and a deprecating example for his readers by illustrating an unfavourable situation through him as cast out by the grace of God. However, from a non-medieval perspective, from a Beckettian perspective in particular, Belacqua’s condition can be interpreted as a desired tendency rather than a forced penance. Caselli states that

Dream, which quotes only a portion of Belacqua’s question (‘l’andar su che porta?’ [what’s the use of going up?]), constructs Belacqua as the critical, humorous, and anti-heroic voice which challenges the inherent teleological structure of narration. Through Beckett’s text, we can read Belacqua at one and the same time as a soul

who expiates a divine punishment, as a narratological necessity, and as an element which criticises the progress not only of Dante the pilgrim but also that of Dante the author of the *Comedy*, and, by implication, of literature in general. (BD 47)

In this respect, Belacqua not only relishes the indolence he preserves after his death, but also diverts the purgative objective of the Purgatory. As Cohn asserts, “[u]nlike the damned of the Inferno, [...] whose sin becomes the fulcrum of their punishment, Belacqua’s fault feeds his preference. Indolent in life, he is indolent after death, motionless in the shade of a rock” (*Back to Beckett* 16). Unlike the other residents of Ante-purgatory, Belacqua, who spends all his life indolent, and repents only at the end of his life, and who is subjected to the punishment of merely waiting for a lifetime until the purgation process begins, is quite content with his temporary condition, and reluctant to make an effort to take the purgative steps. It is clear to assume that Belacqua in fact enjoys the passiveness, and the exclusion imposed by external forces (God) leads to an isolation that Belacqua willingly embraces.

Beckett’s adoption of Dante’s lazy lute-maker in *Dream* in 1932 affects his whole literary career, and contributes to his pessimistic and cynic literary voice, as Sperandio advocates:

For Beckett, the absolute nature of human hopelessness leads to a particularly ironical and subtle inclusion of Dante, chosen through some of his less popular figures and passages [such as Belacqua], often almost unperceivable and never made to resound, but rather to whisper in a sort of hyper-controlled vacuum. [...] Beckett’s characters are all somehow connected to a primigenial Belacqua, the epitome of helpless, comic, tragic, paradoxical immobility [...]. (165)

Beckett sees in Dante’s Belacqua a reflection of the modern man, with no interest or will-power to carry on, and with no faith –in the twentieth-century context – in any kind of redemption or purification. Purgation, as a liberating process in Dante’s vision, has no such credibility in Beckett’s. His people have no longer a divine wisdom or a spiritual freedom to pursue. Thus, they tend to seek peace and comfort in a Belacquan immobility, in which they assume they could enjoy an inner freedom (which is proven unattainable in Beckett’s later works). Dante’s indolent Belacqua’s foetal posture in

which he places his head between his knees is bequeathed to Beckett's people to portray their mental state. Federman argues,

Dante's Belacqua, who has failed to repent, assumes a lethargic fetal position in order to review his former terrestrial life before he is allowed to enter paradise. In moments of drunkenness or depression, the hero of *More Pricks Than Kicks* [and also *Dream*] also adopts "the knee-and-elbow position of the indolent souls in purgatory –not, however, to recapture fleeting memories or to evaluate his life, but to obliterate reality. All Beckett's creatures are described or describe themselves in that position at one time or another. (39)

This position indicates a withdrawal into one's private shell, rejecting the demands of the outer reality that strives to draw the individual into the normality and tidiness of life, which is not, in fact, normal or tidy. At this point, Beckett's fascination and obsession with Belacqua can be comprehended, since almost all of his people aspire or experience temporarily such condition as Belacqua's. O'Neill also suggests that

[i]n the meantime, [Belacqua] is in the strange situation of being both saved yet cast out. Cast out because he is cut off from God, has no direction or reason to move, just the vague knowledge that someday he will move on. He is like Dante, estranged from his home, or the writer estranged from his goal; his fate is to wait for that miraculous moment over which he has no say, which will permit him to attain his goal. [...] like Belacqua, Beckett's characters are also outcasts, with nowhere to go, receiving only faint murmurings rather than the direct light of their creator. (36-38)

Particular characteristics of Dante's Belacqua, indeed, became determinant aspects shaping Beckett's protagonists. Sperandio articulates that "[i]mmobility, absence of any possible design for escaping hopelessness, sloth are most certainly some of the distinguishing features that contribute to the recognisable and enduring pattern of Beckett's characters. Beckett's tramps find it physically difficult to move, their bodies being a burden and an obstacle [...]" (181). Beckett's people ask the same question that Belacqua asks Dante, "[w]hat is the use of going up?" For Beckett, if the aforementioned promises of purification, knowledge, and freedom are merely unachievable illusions in the modern world, then the attempts to move forward are futile. Disassociation from the outer reality, despair in the face of being trapped between two worlds, and confined in one's physical body can be considered as the major motives

that relate Beckett's people to Dante's Belacqua, starting with Belacqua Shuah in *Dream*, to Pim in *How It Is*.

While in Beckett's earlier works, the Belacqua influence can be observed quite distinctly, later in his oeuvre, this influence is dealt more subtly. Nevertheless, from Belacqua Shuah to Beckett's later protagonists, such as Murphy (*Murphy* 1938), Molloy (*Molloy* 1951), Malone (*Malone Dies* 1951), Unnamable (*The Unnamable* 1953), and Pim (*How It Is* 1961), all the Beckettian derelicts seem to be reincarnated from Dante's Belacqua. In line with this argument, Sperandio suggests that "[t]he tramps, the misfits, the unable to move: Beckett's characters progressively assume a coherent design that marks them apart from other modern anti-myths and the Belacqua root seems to belong to them all" (188). However, Dante presents Belacqua's waiting as necessary to acquire divine knowledge, and his theological design presented in *Comedy* promises a higher state of being. Belacqua exercises this necessary waiting ensured that he will transform into another higher state of existence in Paradise. In the light of Beckett's portrayal of his characters as stagnant beings, that state of waiting in indolence is the only possible form of being. In this respect, Strauss advocates that

Samuel Beckett's fascination –even obsession – with Belacqua points up the relevance of the theme of expectancy to the modern spiritual dilemma and at the same time underscores the despair of the modern sensibility in the fact of it. Dante's Belacqua is bound to wait out the duration of his lifetime in the shadow of the rock; Beckett's characters do not even have that much certitude about their spiritual destination, and thus are left in a state of complete disorientation. [...] The waifs in Beckett no longer have a God to seek, not even to wait for; they simply wait for something, because waiting is the only mode of existence possible to them. [...] Their path begins and ends at Belacqua's rock; their movement is, like Zeno's arrow, a state of rest. (251-259)

Although Dante's Belacqua has faith in his salvation –though he does not know when, or does not worry about it – this faith is an unattainable one for Beckett's protagonists; “[n]one of the references that made Dante's journey a viable enterprise are available for the modern Belacquas. Being, moving, finding a path have all become impossible achievements” (Sperandio 191). Among these characters, Belacqua Shuah stands as the first seeker of this unachievable bliss. In line with this approach, Fletcher also argues that “[...] [Belacqua] is also the first in a line of Beckettian heroes whose condition of

exile becomes gradually more painful; he is in fact the natural precursor of the *expulse* of the *Nouvelles*” (23). Since “all his heroes contain within them everything that has gone before them” (Pilling, *SB*, 63), tracking the root of his exiles goes back to Belacqua of *Dream*, whose analysis holds a substantial role to understand how Dantean concept of purgation works –or fails to work – in Beckett’s oeuvre.

The novel opens with a very short first chapter depicting a scene from Belacqua Shuah’s childhood, where he rides his bicycle and suddenly sees a horse whose image terrifies, and at the same time, fascinates him. The second chapter skips to Belacqua’s adulthood, to a particular moment at the train station in Dublin where he sees off his girlfriend, the Smeraldina-Rima who goes to Vienna to study classical music. Belacqua sits at the station crying over the Smeraldina-Rima’s departure and leaves when a warden orders him to get off the pier. After this scene the story continues with Belacqua heading to Vienna to see his girlfriend. He spends his time there arguing with Smeraldina-Rima, avoiding her attempts for sexual intimacy. When the inevitable intercourse occurs, which he calls ‘rape,’ Belacqua leaves Vienna to set off to Paris to escape this unpleasant experience and also to pursue his academic career. In Paris, Belacqua spends his time with his intellectual friends in a bohemian circle where he meets Syra-Cusa. She is presented as one of the ‘fair to middling women’ of Belacqua. Her constant sexual harassments of Belacqua leads him to give her his most precious book, a copy of Dante’s *Comedy*, which she leaves at a café. At this point the narrator expels her from the story, which concludes the Paris episode of the novel. Upon the Smeraldina-Rima’s passionate love letter that tells Belacqua to come and spend New Year’s Eve with her and her family, Belacqua sets off to Hesse, Germany, physically ill and suffering from diarrhea. His visit in Germany is spent mostly lying in bed, reading, and arguing with the Smeraldina-Rima about the course of their relationship. On New Year’s Eve, Belacqua goes out with the Smeraldina-Rima. After another quarrel, he goes to another pub with the Smeraldina-Rima’s father, the Mandarin. They talk about love, sexuality, and brothels. They are interrupted by the Smeraldina-Rima, who invites Belacqua to see a painting of her made by a painter; Belacqua refuses to go, and instead heads for the brothel. The next morning, they meet at a café where they end their relationship

permanently. The next chapter, UND, opens with Belacqua going back to Dublin, contemplating his past with the Smeraldina. In the chapter THREE, Belacqua is introduced to the Alba, the last of Belacqua's 'fair to middling women' by his professor from Trinity College, the Polar Bear. The Alba seems to have many things in common with Belacqua: her tendency for drinking, her interest in intellectual subjects, and her negative approach to sexuality. They meet at a social gathering in a friend's house. After Belacqua gets drunk and feels sick, he leaves the party with the Alba and heads to her house. The novel ends with Belacqua leaving the Alba's without having sexual intimacy, and walking on the street under the heavy rain, fascinated by the sight of his hands; he is later ordered by a policeman to get off, and obeying the order, he leaves.

As the representative of his creator, Belacqua "[...] is a poet and a Dubliner; like Beckett, a scholar, a student of Italian, a lover of Dante [...]" (Coe 9). The first of Beckett's "people", Belacqua possesses the fundamental characteristics that paved the way to the later tramps: idleness, contempt for sexuality, and a longing for an inward existence. As Coe aptly puts it, "[b]etween the great granite slabs which are reality, ambition, competence, there are small black interstices of nothingness –and these are Belacqua's life" (6-7). In the "reality" he lives in, the only state of existence is of a "[...] futile, purposeless movement, leading nowhere" (Coe 8). Passiveness of Dante's Belacqua towards progress, his perception of his current condition as 'ideal', and his preference of this 'ideal' occurs in Beckett's *Dream* as the bifurcation of Belacqua Shuah's own perception of real and ideal.

Belacqua's contradictory perception of the surrounding reality and his inner reality is predicated on Beckett's own interpretation of reality. As mentioned in the Introduction, the outer reality does not conform to the disunited existence of man, like a pair of boots that are too small for one's feet (Hesla 10). The concept of reality in the conventional understanding differs dramatically from that of Beckett's reality. According to a note taken in one of his lectures at Trinity, the problematic nature of reality often preoccupied Beckett even in the thirties, "[a]rtistic statement –extractive of essential real. Reality –unavailable" (qtd. in Bolin 516). With respect to the unattainable essence of coherent reality, Beckett suggests that it is crucial to "[preserve] [the] integrity of incoherence" (qtd. in Bolin 517), since "[the reality of man] is an incoherent reality and

must be expressed incoherently” (qtd. in Kenner, *A Reader's* 53). Correspondingly, the focal point in any kind of modernist narrative must be, for Beckett, incoherence and disorientation. Bolin articulates that “[t]he 1930 art of ‘incoherence’ is the attempt to disrupt any ‘continuity’ of form or content in the novel through addressing the multiple and disjunctive facets of reality –ultimately by allowing incommensurable ‘antagonisms’ into the work. The subjectivity explored in such a novel would not be only multiple [...] but divided against itself” (517). What Beckett does to express this incoherence and vicissitude inherent in the universe is to twist the idea of a coherent individual being consonant with a coherent universe by creating a protagonist in complete contrast with coherence and a narrative which distorts the very essence of its own texture. Belacqua is, indeed, portrayed as both a willing and a reluctant member of the social reality surrounding him. Reflecting on the pattern in the narratives of Beckett’s early fictions, Kenner points out, “[t]hey [Beckett’s early fiction] asserted incoherence by teasing the reader with centripetal cleverness, the foreground filled with epigram, dramatic events passed over in asides, or beneath allusions. They sought to order incoherence by containing anti-climax within our expectations of climax, relying on the reader to supply [...] the contours of the familiar story the author is refusing to write” (53). In light of this attitude, the incoherency in Belacqua’s character and the incoherency in the novel’s narrative accompany each other in *Dream* so as to assert the idea of an incoherent fiction. As Bolin further argues, “Belacqua is dissonant, not ‘harmonious’. He is ‘trine’ rather than ‘one thing’. In addition, the confusion of these elements, and the ‘disintegration’ of the character into the morass of flux and incoherence surrounding him, becomes the fundamental dynamic of the novel” (528). Like Belacqua’s state of mind, the plot of the novel is unstable and peculiar, in that, it does not follow a connected link of stories. King advocates that

[...] there is no normal plot because the idea of narrative ‘design’ in most senses requires meaningful relationships between characters, or else there is nothing emotionally, dramatically at stake; and thus no event [...] would seem casually related to any other event. For such a person as Belacqua, in such a dearth of emotive contexts, nothing really matters. Belacqua fails to establish any relationship that would grant meaning to his future doings. (137)

In that sense, without any ordered action or meaningful relation, it can be suggested that the narrative elements in the story are merely means to expose the fragmented human mind. Beckett's subversive narrative, thus, is an intentional one, "[t]he only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity" (*Dream* 133). An example of the disruption of the notion of a coherent plot, in this sense, is displayed in the second chapter entitled TWO, where Belacqua receives a letter from a French friend of his, named Lucien. The letter is written in French creating a linguistic disunity in the text, the majority of which is in English. As Pilling suggests, "[the] letter breaks the unwritten 'rule' that, in any novel written in English, such direct communication would almost always also be written in English. It breaks another unwritten 'rule' by completely failing to advance or promote the plot" ("Something for Nothing," 176-7). With regard to Belacqua's role in forming a peculiar and precarious narrative, *Dream* provides several encounters and social interactions in which Belacqua feels alien. The emphasis on the ridiculousness of reality manifests itself, for instance, in a part where the shoemakers produce a pair of shoes with the right one smaller than the left, since all people have bigger left feet, except, of course, Belacqua. Having perfectly symmetrical feet, Belacqua is the anomaly in his world, which implies the absurd existence of him. Although, the shoes leave his right foot in pain, and "[...] [fail] to give satisfaction" (*Dream* 133), Belacqua buys the shoes, since "[...] trying to buy fitting shoes elsewhere would be equally futile [...]" (King 145).

This position of Belacqua as an outsider is treated in the novel mostly through his affiliations with people surrounding him, women in particular. *Dream* deals with Belacqua's conflicting relationships with women. His problematic relationships with the Smeraldina-Rima, the impersonation of Beckett's cousin and platonic lover, Peggy Sinclair, whose green eyes inspired the name 'Smeraldina' (Bair 79), the Syra-Cusa, who is believed to be based on James Joyce's daughter, Lucia (Knowlson 150), and the Alba, who represented in *Dream* Beckett's first love, Ethna MacCarthy (Knowlson 151), highlight Belacqua's troubled perception of physical human contact, which he prefers to replace with the abstract impression of a relationship.

After a short opening chapter named 'ONE,' where young "overfed" Belacqua is described as captivated by the image of a defecating horse (*Dream* 1), chapter TWO

begins with Belacqua seeing off his girlfriend, the Smeraldina-Rima, at the Carlyle Pier to Vienna. At the very beginning of the novel, the nature of their relationship is elucidated with the line that describes Belacqua as “[being] in love from the girdle up with a slob of a girl called Smeraldina-Rima whom he had encountered one evening when as luck would have it he happened to be tired and her face more beautiful than stupid” (3). The love that Belacqua feels for the Smeraldina-Rima is less centred on sexual drive than incorporeal admiration. In fact, his repulsion of any physical contact with a woman is often suggested in the novel. He wants his relationship with the Smeraldina-Rima to be “pewer and above-bawd” (18). When he thinks about her as a physical entity rather than her ideal image created in his mind, the feeling of contempt is indicated, “[...] her body was all wrong, the peacock’s claws. [...] Poppata, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mammosse, slobbery-blubberty, bubbub-bubbub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe” (*Dream* 15). Reflecting on Beckett’s earlier relationship with Peggy Sinclair, Cronin reveals a substantial information about Belacqua; “[t]hat Beckett should prefer masturbation to ‘the real thing’ was in [...] his preference for what took place in his own mind rather than in the outer, ‘real’ world [...]” (106). Just like Beckett’s spiritual love for Peggy, which is the ideal form of love for him, Belacqua’s love for the Smeraldina-Rima is only ideal when there is no physical interaction between them. This avoidance of sexuality can be attributed to Beckett’s approach to birth. As Colin Duckworth aptly puts it, “Beckett’s attitude towards loving relationships between men and women is deeply affected by the probability that those relationships will result in another birth, another estrangement from the ideal state of timelessness in which we were before birth” (qtd. in Kalt 5-6). Indeed, sexual intercourse is the initial cause of the plight of all Beckettian men. As discussed in the Introduction, birth itself is the sin that Beckett’s derelicts suffer from and cannot get rid of. As the Beckettian man suffers from his own existence in the first place, he does not desire to prosecute the same plight by conducting to the reproduction of mankind. The restraint from sexual affiliation often manifests itself when Belacqua turns to masturbation with the fearful thought of sexuality involving women. This correlation between Belacqua’s preference for masturbation and his notion of ideal love is unmasked by the narrator in the following extract:

Love demands narcissism, we meant that in a certain case, his, possibly, by all means, an isolated case, a certain quality of loving (as understood and practised by him, by him alone of all lovers if it pleases you to think so, it would not be in our interest to deny it) imports a certain system of narcissistic manoeuvres. [...] Consider him, loving the Smeraldina-Rima, and half the continent removed from smell and sound of her breathing. [...] Absence makes the heart grow fonder is a true saying. In his own way, having her according to his God, as he threatened he would. (39-40)

Love requires the absence of corporeality, since it is the only way to ‘have her according to his God,’ that is, to attain the ideal relationship with a human being, which ought to be in his mind. Physical intimacy, for Belacqua, is not something to enjoy or celebrate, but to feel ashamed of, since he (and Beckett the narrator) refers to this as an act of rape, and the beginning of the end of a relationship: “[u]ntil she raped him. Then everything went kaputt” (*Dream* 18). After their sexual intercourse, Belacqua sets off to Paris to get away from the Smeraldina-Rima, since it is the only way he could love her; in his mind.

Belacqua’s involvement with the Syra-Cusa in Paris is not narrated as diffusively as his involvement with the Smeraldina-Rima. However, it is mentioned that the Syra-Cusa, as well, pursues a sexual relationship with Belacqua: “[t]he best of the joke was she thought she had a lech on Belacqua, *she gave him to understand as much*. She was as impotently besotted on Belacqua babylan, fiasco incarnate, Limbese, as the moon on Endymion” (50). The Syra-Cusa’s attempts to seduce Belacqua fail as he preserves his “Limbo barnacle” (51) disposition against her. Their brief affair ends, as it did with Lucia Joyce, with Belacqua giving his “lovely” copy of *Comedy* to her as a gift, and her leaving it in a bar, as the narrator dismisses her from the story: “[n]ow we seem to have got the substance of the Syra-Cusa. She was a cursed nuisance. Be off, puttantina, and joy be with you and a bottle of moss” (51). After this short stay in Paris, Belacqua goes to Germany to visit the Smeraldina-Rima and her parents, only to recognise that there will be no reconciliation between his idea of true love and the reality. One quarrel they have on New Year’s Eve discloses Belacqua’s lethargic drive to exercise a Limbese existence, and thus, his preference of a love experienced in the mind:

“You couldn’t love me or you wouldn’t go on like that!”

“Go on like what?” he cried, striking the table.

“The way you always go on” raising the note to a pule “indifferent to everything, saying you don’t know and you don’t care, lying about all day in that verdammte old Wohnung, reading your old book [*Comedy*] and fooling around with Daddy”

[...]

“You don’t understand me” he said earnestly “it must be surreptitious.” (94-95)

Neither can Belacqua find a way to keep his love “surreptitious,” nor does the Smeraldina-Rima convince him to come to terms with his corporeality, thereby, the relationship ends at the end of the chapter. In the next chapters, UND and THREE, Belacqua returns to Dublin where the Alba is introduced to the reader.

Among the women in Belacqua’s life, only the Alba seems to offer the closest thing to an ideal relationship for Belacqua, as she has no interest in sexuality, either: “[h]e has not lain with her. Nor she with him. None of the kind of thing here, if you don’t mind” (177). For the first time in the novel, a woman is described by the narrator in an admiring tone. When Belacqua arrives in Dublin, his friend Chas meets him, who pays their way back to Dublin since Belacqua spends his last money on a prostitute (143). Chas starts talking about the Alba: “[j]e la trouve adorable, quoique peu belle. Elle a surtout beaucoup de GOUT, elle est intelligente et douce, mais douce, mon cher, tu n’peux pas t’imaginer, et des gestes, mon cher, tu sais, très désarmants.’ [...] ‘Elle a une petite gueule’ moaned Chas ‘qui tremble comme un petit nuage’” (143-4). Upon hearing this description, Belacqua thinks how ‘lovely’ and ‘remarkable’ she must be (144). The narrator talks about her disposition for pages. In this sense, the Alba seems like the only woman who is thoroughly approved by Belacqua and the narrator. She is frequently depicted holding a drink (151), which is one of the things she has in common with Belacqua. She also has a unique stance regarding sexuality: “[t]rincapollas! Sighed Alba, raising her glass, but all men are homo-sexy, I wish to Christ I’d been born a Lesbian” (154). She expresses her apathy towards the conventional understanding of sexuality. A sexual aversion and an inclination for the intellect is what the Alba and Belacqua have in common in the novel, and also it is what “[...] separated her from the few women he had met and the few more he was ever likely to meet” (192). No matter how much the Alba and Belacqua are similar in this matter, her apathy and dislike towards Belacqua’s ideal world and his disposition makes her a part of the outer reality that does not welcome Belacqua as he is:

[...] but her real opinion the whole time was that there was little hope for him, that he was too irremissibly naïve for her altogether, too permanently selfish, faithful to himself, trying to be like himself as he fancied himself all the time, an irretrievable stickler for his own wretched standard, and wretched was what she thought, and wretched was what she meant. He lay coiled up in the shadow, always the shadow, of the dread of leze-personality, at his own hands or another's. [...] When she would make up her mind finally that all that was so, that he was inextricably Limbese, then that was where she stepped off. He could rot away in his darling gloom if that was what he wanted, she would not be there to listen. *Nolle consolari ab aliqua creatura...!* The filthy blague! To hell with purity, fake purity, to hell with it and to hell with it. (194)

Although the Alba is portrayed as a perfect accomplice for Belacqua, even she cannot grasp Belacqua's struggles in his reckless journey into a utopia-like lethargic place in his mind. As she realises his being "inextricably Limbese," she retracts herself from the idea of a relationship with Belacqua. The women in the novel, including the Alba to some extent, serve the narration with respect to Belacqua's conflict with the social reality, and his oscillation between this outer reality and his mind. The temporary absence of women, and their image in his mind as incorporeal beings, let Belacqua withdraw into his mind and enjoy a spiritual "surreptitious" intimacy with them, but his social and sexual relationships with these women, representing his bonds with social reality, always badger him, dragging him to the physical territory. Although Belacqua constantly tries to avoid such physical intimacies, he cannot help chasing after women. This contradiction implicates his predicament, his in-between condition of neither belonging to the physical reality nor existing merely in his mind without any interruptions. What connects this obsession of Belacqua and Beckett's reevaluation of Purgatory's holistic approach towards man's unity within himself and with the universe is the fact that Beckett's Belacqua cannot come to terms with his own physical being. As Jeri L. Kroll points out: "Belacqua cannot deal with sexual experience because it reminds him that he is, in fact, a creature composed of two seemingly contradictory elements: mind and body" (qtd. in Stewart 30). Although the issue of the conflict between mind and body explicitly addresses a Cartesian reading of Belacqua's condition, Beckett's subversive interpretation of Dante's concept of Purgatory, through which Dante emphasises the restoration of the harmony between body and mind, plays an essential role in the reading of *Dream* and in analysing Belacqua's dualistic inner conflict.

Avoiding any human contact and pursuing women, or suffering the pain of wrong sized shoes and wearing them all the same, Belacqua neither associates himself with the Universal Order, the unity of one with all that surround him, nor renounces it. In that sense, like Dante's Belacqua, he seems to be a pilgrim of the journey of purgation, yet, he does not possess the befitting characteristics that Purgatory requires to make progress, and in his case, there is not a journey nor purgation to go through. Therefore, any attempt to build a meaningful relationship, or to find a proper pair of shoes remain futile and inconsequential. With the futility of presenting a traditional protagonist, the novel is doomed to fail in a way that it no longer follows a typical narrative. At this point, King describes the novel as "[...] a demonstration that the difficult character can no more fit into the structure of a novel than his right foot can fit into a proper shoe. Let the so-called story fail, Beckett seems to say, but let Belacqua be" (146). The novel's failure in adapting to the traditional sense of a narrative is accompanied by Belacqua's failure to fit into his shoes, thus his failure in adapting to the social reality around him. No matter how much he tries to attribute a meaning to his relations with women in his mind, to experience the feeling of love for them in their physical absence, Belacqua is constantly irritated by the surrounding reality in which activities such as sex, parties, and meetings require his physical attendance, which he cannot fulfil properly. The physical reality that these irritating activities form and surround causes in Belacqua an urge to retreat into his mind and resume a constant indolent existence just as *Comedy's* Belacqua in Ante-purgatory. Bouchard comments upon the outcome of this forced participation in society on Belacqua's aspiration of a lethargic existence as follows:

Because of failed attempts to assign identity and sameness to those "inchoate liminal presentation" (33) of life, Belacqua, who has a "fetid head" (17) and is often the object of the narrator's scorn, begins to seek total indifference of the Limbo; a physical and mental state oblivious to referential exteriority. Here, so he believes, it will be possible to escape the ebb and the flow of a temporal, complex macrocosm and his mind will find rest from all attempts to enclose heterogeneous open-ended entities. (143)

This escape from the macrocosm into the indifference of his inner universe, which is, for him, "[...] the emancipation, in a slough of indifference and negligence and disinterest, from identity, his own and his neighbours', suits his accursed complexion much better than the dreary fiasco of oscillation that presents itself as the only

alternative” (*Dream* 121). This inclination to live in indifference is the main motivation behind Belacqua’s attempts to avoid social reality. Since the act of waiting in the physical world has no promise of a higher existence, Dante’s Belacqua’s condition in repose in Purgatory becomes the ultimate possible condition of living, as well as a favourable one, for Beckett’s Belacqua. Cronin asserts that “[s]ome of the most lyrical passages in *Dream* are about descent into the self, into the tunnel, as it is sometimes called, or the dark or, more overtly, the ‘womb-tomb’” (106). The image of the womb, starting with *Dream*, becomes a frequently applicable representation for this inward descent in Beckett’s universe. The womb-tomb is what Belacqua aspires to achieve as a life form: “The third being was the dark gulf, when the glare of the will and the hammer-strokes of the brain doomed outside to take flight from its quarry were expunged, the Limbo and the wombtomb alive with the unanxious spirits of quiet cerebration [...]” (121). Pilling elucidates the use of this image, “[o]nly complete loss of being above and beyond death can guarantee ultimate calm, all things for ever at rest at last. And for that only the restitution of the womb will do. The possibility of attaining womb-like situations in real life is never discounted” (*SB*, 39). Although this state is never to be achieved by Beckett’s later outcasts, it is a bliss that Belacqua Shuah enjoys on a rare basis. In Beckett’s universe this womb-like realm, for Beckett’s derelicts, is “[a] deeper region, which is not the soul’s hell, but its heaven” (Gide 127)¹⁰. Indeed, unlike Dante’s souls who are waiting to be allowed to purge themselves in order to reach God’s Paradise, Beckett’s Belacqua adopts this indolent mood waiting to attain the paradisiacal existence in his mind. In this sense, what distinguishes Beckett’s protagonist from Dante’s lute-maker is the fact that Beckett’s Belacqua aspires to “[...] become even stiller than Dante’s Belacqua” (Caselli, *BD* 44), that is, Paradise for Beckett’s Belacqua is the mood of complete vegetation in the womb-like domain of his mind.

Physical or metaphorical, the distance between him and people is something Belacqua cherishes willingly. This distance allows him to retreat into his mind, enjoying the lethargic bliss, which Beckett speaks of as follows:

¹⁰ Andre Gide, in his *Dostoevsky* (1961), describes a beatified fracture-like place in Dostoevsky’s works as such, an account which Beckett seems to have adopted from Dostoevsky according to Bolin (521).

He lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin, dead to the dark pangs of the sons of Adam, asking nothing of the insubordinate mind. He moved with the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. [...] The mind, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a chapelle ardente, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off. (*Dream* 44)

These interludes in Belacqua's life take place in a Limbo-like realm in his mind, where no earthly zest desired by the body is welcomed. As Cronin asserts, "Limbo is the place in which there is neither salvation nor damnation, where there is no becoming, but only an eternal state of dim being. Limbese was Beckett's word for the state of self-centred, mildly gloomy meditateness and detachment in which he liked to live, with the outer world shut away, its noises meaningless, its struggles pointless" (161-162). Here, the mind detaches itself from the boundaries of the physical body and remains unresponsive to the reality, and to salvation, as well as damnation. As Fletcher points out, "[t]his urge to retreat into the wider freedom of the mind springs from an underlying dualistic conviction, entailing the consequence that the mental part of one's being desires continually to escape from the contingencies of the physical part" (*The Novels* 36). In line with this approach, it can be argued that Belacqua wishes to split his mind from the life in his body entirely in order to relish the unlimited and undisturbed freedom in his mind forever. As Bolin adverts "Belacqua does not seek to define himself against a world of convention, but to attain a state which can only be described as that of non-being in the face of a reality of incoherent values –a state completely without figure and ground, inaccessible to the methods and ends of realism" (527). It is this Limbese territory that Belacqua likens to womb-tomb existence, and this existence necessitates the rejection of the physical body both in terms of social presence and sexual association.

Nevertheless, Beckett's interpretation of the concept of purgation is a twisted reading of Dante's Ante-purgatory. Beckett plays with Dante's representation of this sort of

lethargic existence in a Limbese territory and manipulates this representation in *Dream* according to his pessimistic perception of the world. Fletcher adverts that

[t]o suit his own purposes [Beckett] never hesitates to twist Dante's meaning: Belacqua is conceived to be in an incomparable state of bliss, quite contrary to Dante's real conception, and Limbo, the bleak realm which the poet does not portray as very attractive [...] is regarded by Beckett's hero as an agreeably peaceful place, where one exists not burning with desire but 'purged of desire'. (SBA 113)

While "indifference," "negligence," and "disinterest" are presented by Dante as damaging concepts through Belacqua, they are aggrandised and sublimated by Beckett through his Belacqua. The notion of waiting, for Dante, is not only a necessary phase, but also a temporary one before the prime process of climbing the mountain Purgatory begins, which is the essential route for purgation. This process seems to be avoided by the Belacquas, and discarded by Beckett himself, and instead the condition of indifference is praised in *Dream*. As Belacqua the Florentine refuses movement and the effort to go up since there is no point in trying, and he is content with his passivity; Beckett's Belacqua also tries to reject the social normality and physical vitality. With regards to their shared quiescence, Caselli points out the common characteristic motivation in Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Bel as follows:

Dream's Belacqua [...] shares with Dante's character the characteristic of not observing 'the rule of the road'; Bel is the result of the negative comparison with Belacqua of canto VI; both challenge the theo/teleological progression of narrative from their crouched posture, since Bel refuses to proceed and Belacqua questions Dante's progress along the terraces of the *Purgatorio*. (BD 37)

As he would do in his later works, such as *Murphy* and *Watt* (1945), Beckett attempts in *Dream* to build a purgatorial world, which becomes the modern world in his perspective; that is to say, as McNeil suggests for *Murphy*, in *Dream's* case as well, Beckett "aims to rewrite Purgatory [...]" (28). Belacqua's indifference towards progress in Dante's Purgatory is revived by Belacqua in the form of an avoidance of the social reality in *Dream*. For Belacqua in *Dream*, Paradise, which is the ultimate destination for the souls in Dante's Purgatory, is the form of existence in Ante-purgatory. By attempting to build a purgatorial world aiming at an indolent existence in the

individual's mind, Beckett disturbs the nature and logic of Purgatory by turning the direction upside down. The narrator's depiction of Belacqua indicates the incongruity between the scheme of Purgatory and Belacqua's own existential agenda: "[h]e was bogged in indolence, without identity, impervious alike to its pull nor goad. His third being was without axis or contour, its centre everywhere and periphery nowhere, an unsurveyed marsh of sloth" (121). The aim of purgation in *Comedy* is to get rid of the seven deadly sins and be reborn as a new soul, a pure soul to be accepted at the gate of Paradise; in *Dream*, as well, Belacqua's aim is to get rid of the physical distractions and obstacles that keep him from reaching a higher state of being. However, in Belacqua's case in *Dream*, this higher state of being is not Paradise, but his own mind where he achieves ultimate lethargy, a womb-tomb existence. That being the case, the act of purgation is redefined in *Dream* as an act to reach complete indolence in mind/Antepurgatory, not to achieve Paradise. Beckett presents purgation not as an upward movement, but a static repose.

However, neither the macrocosm, that is, the outer reality, nor Belacqua himself as a part of that macrocosm tolerates this isolated form of existence –or in other words, non-existence – in the novel (Bouchard 143). These occasional lethargic and at the same time blissful descents into his inner territory are continually interrupted by the extroversive forces:

All that can be said for certain, that as far as he can judge himself, the emancipation, in a slough of indifference and negligence and disinterest, from identity, his own and his neighbour's, suits his accursed complexion much better than the dreary fiasco of oscillation that presents itself as the only alternative. He is sorry it does not happen more often, that he does not go under more often. He finds it more pleasant to be altogether swathed in the black arras of his sloth than condemned to deploy same and inscribe it with the frivolous spirals, ascending like the little angels and descending, never coming to head or tail, never abutting. (*Dream* 121)

The descents are his intermissions from the reality around him, in the absence of which he feels "he [is] cheating and denying his native indolence" (*Dream* 122). In this respect, King suggests that "[w]orse than his loneliness (or his desire for loneliness, implying a distant desire for desire) is his alienation from his own interiority, a difficult disassociation caused by an insubordinate mind" (138). Belacqua cannot isolate himself from the outer reality. He is still a citizen of the world, as Federman says. This dilemma

between the physical reality and inward existence in mind is highlighted by Federman so as to draw attention to the fact that Beckett's Belacqua is the first character in Beckett's world who encounters this sort of conflict, and compared to the later Beckettian people, Belacqua is a worldlier and less wretched figure. Federman argues as follows:

As the firstborn of Beckett's family of outcasts, Belacqua stands as the prototype for all his successors. His actions, obsessions, and idiosyncrasies prepare the personalities of the later eccentrics. Compared, however, with Beckett's French derelicts, most of whom spend their absurd existence vegetating in some nameless, moribund landscape, Belacqua is a normal and traditional hero. Primarily concerned with the physical self, he functions as a social man who has to cope with all the trivialities of life in society. [...] However, being thus concerned by social, physical, and marital impositions, Belacqua assumes a lethargic, sardonic, and particularly a cowardly posture in all his actions. (33-34)

Haunted by the physical and social forces, Belacqua cannot be a complete member of the society, as he cannot be a complete part of a relationship. As a Protestant, educated Irishman, Belacqua does not fit in Catholic "low publics" of Ireland, and stands as an "outsider" (Fletcher, *The Novels* 23). Therefore, as he views the people around him from a great distance, he is perceived by his lovers, by other people, and even by the narrator as a peculiar man. He is "naïve and a dull vain dog" for the narrator, for the Alba "he was too irremissibly naïve for her altogether, too permanently selfish, faithful to himself ... he lay coiled up in the shadow, always the shadow, of the dread of leze-personality...", for the Smeraldina-Rima he is, "indifferent to everything", and for other people "live-and-let-live anchorite on leave", and "a compound of ephebe and old woman" (Fletcher, *The Novels* 24).

However, as mentioned earlier, the womb-tomb condition that Belacqua aspires to is an existence that is impossible to accomplish, since in Beckettian universe the conflict is perpetual. Therefore, as Tajiri also suggests "[...] the obsession with the womb and the concomitant avoidance of the woman are both salient, and these underline the mechanisation of the body in *Dream* [...]. The attempt at mechanical control is tied up with fundamental disorder or uncontrollability in Beckett. And very often, nearly always, the former fails and gives in to the latter" (202). Belacqua is still a citizen of the world, who is invited to parties, attracts women, and gets involved in intellectual

conversations. He attends the social gathering in his friend's house in Dublin, debates with his intellectual friends in Paris about music and literature, talks to the Smeraldina-Rima's father, the Mandarin, about love. Although he prefers to avoid them all, he cannot –or does not –separate himself from this aspect of life. As the firstborn of Beckett's people, this is what makes Belacqua more human and life-like than the forthcoming tramps. He is one of the few Beckettian people who are more or less able to accommodate themselves in the social reality, and one of the few who meet a definite end to their lives (since he dies in *More Pricks Than Kicks*). Federman elucidates Belacqua's being relatively a less damned citizen of Beckettian universe as follows:

Because his life is finite he is able to toy with the notion of physical reality, and he boasts of having achieved mental freedom. In this respect he is *de mauvaise foi* [in bad faith] in his claims, and his anguish remains strictly intellectual, for he can always end his discontent –either by resuming a normal life among his fellowmen, or by committing suicide. His distress is self-imposed even though unjustifiable: his attitude is hypocritical because he can choose an alternative to his condition. He exists within a system that provides him with safety margins: the reality of physical life on the one hand, and that of death on the other. (43)

Thus, Belacqua, although he is the first seeker of an unattainable and inverted purgation in Limbo, is still a part of the social reality whether he enjoys it or not. He cannot tolerate this outer reality; he cuts his ties with the women in his life; gets bored and leaves social gatherings all of a sudden; unable to contain himself in Dublin, he travels around European cities, however, his time and suffering in the world of the living are temporary. In this respect, *Dream* stands as an introduction to Beckett's evolving representation of Dante's Purgatory. As the outcome of his early period, the novel demonstrates how Beckett starts and develops his intimacy with the idea of subverting Purgatory. Although it is not as complex and dreary as the later French works in terms of his approach to purgatorial journey and perpetual wandering, *Dream* sheds light to Beckett's emerging pessimism regarding the predicament of the individual. At this point, Belacqua in *Dream* represents the image of the modern man that Beckett envisaged in his mind in his twenties. Like Belacqua of *Comedy*, *Dream*'s Belacqua tries to spend his time in indolence knowing / hoping that the reality he lives in will have an end at some point, “[...] whereas the waiting and the suffering of Beckett's more recent and tragic heroes are infinite in their absurdity. The heroes no longer hope

for a quick death and a blissful afterlife, nor do they return to social reality” (Federman 43). Indeed, at the beginning of his career, Beckett provided his characters with sudden and quick deaths (Belacqua dies in an operation, and Murphy is killed by the gas heater), or refuge in lunacy (Watt is confined in an asylum), and with occasional experiences of blissful Limbese, which Belacqua enjoys on random occasions, though he never attains it permanently. However, from *Mercier and Camier* on, the mortality of the characters gives way to a perpetual waiting and agony. The condition of Beckettian man gets more dramatic and tragic as neither Belacqua bliss nor social reality is approachable, let alone being procurable.

CHAPTER II: AN INTERMINABLE PROCESS OF PURGATION: *MERCIER AND CAMIER*

Sharing the same fate with *Dream*, *Mercier and Camier* (*Mercier et Camier*) was detained by Beckett until he let it be published in 1970¹¹, although the work was written in 1946. The reason it was kept out of sight for so long is, according to Federman, that Beckett used the manuscript as a sort of outline for his later works, notably for the most known and celebrated one, *Waiting for Godot* (1952) (136). Despite being an earlier version of Beckett's most popular work and regarded by him merely as an "apprentice work" (Knowlson 360), *Mercier and Camier* holds a substantial place in Beckett oeuvre, in that, it is his first French novel and one of the first attempts of Beckett in using French in his post-war writing. In fact, it is Beckett's second work in French, after *La Fin* which was written in March 1946, whereas he started working on *Mercier and Camier* in the following months of that year (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 128). In this respect, it can be regarded as the beginning of Beckett's second era, that is, his early French fiction through which he abandons traditional writing for a more experimental style.

Beckett gave lectures in Trinity College for a short period in the 1930s, to which Pilling aptly addresses from Rachel Burrow's notebooks as follows: "[...] English had 'more flower value' whereas French was 'more of a work language'. For the young Beckett, apparently, English was a matter of 'looking well', French not. [...] 'because in French it is easier to write without style'." (BBG, 201). His comments on the two languages foreshadow his preferred shift from English language to French after the Second World War. As discussed in the earlier chapter, Beckett's fiction after the war became more pessimistic and chaotic in terms of the characters' plight and the interminable predicament of the environment they inhabit, and this led to a need to reform the medium that he adopted to depict this imbroglio. The analogy between Beckett's increasing pessimism and cynicism towards the world and his adopting French in his fiction is discussed in Knowlson's biography. As he states that "French offered [Beckett] the freedom to concentrate on a more direct expression of the search for

¹¹ Beckett permitted *Mercier et Camier* to be published by Les Éditions de Minuit in 1970 in its original language, French. It was only in 1974 that the work was published in English, translated by Beckett himself, and published by Calder (*Mercier and Camier* xx).

‘being’ and on an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence” (357). Beckett’s perception of the modern man represented by his characters who are deprived of assigning a meaning to their existence required a different agent which could indicate the characters’ estrangement as well as that of the narrative. To this end, Cohn suggests that “[...] Beckett views French as a way to strip his language to the bare essentials of his vision” (*Back to Beckett*, 59). His vision is, in that sense, concerned with the failure of the search for one’s being and the failure of fiction expressing this search. Indeed, writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue necessitates a linguistic alienation that bears with it the defamiliarisation of the language one employs, which serves Beckett’s literary agenda thoroughly. O’Neill comments upon this shift as follows:

The change from English to French affects the work and the author’s approach to it in many ways. For one, it accentuates the inherent split between the idea and its expression. Also, in spite of Beckett’s writing being more of a stream of consciousness than following a rigidly outlined plot, apparently wandering with no itinerary, he is by no means interested in “automatic writing”. To the contrary, he labors over each word and phrase, submitting the thoughts which surface from his unconscious to the careful translation of his rational mind. Avoiding his native language, Beckett can more easily eliminate the automatic expressions and create a more cerebral art. (107-8)

Beckett’s English fiction in the 1930s and early 1940s was dominated by his inherent linguistic craftsmanship in his native language, and as Beckett eliminated the elaborate style of English, he began to focus on the expression of the inexplicable through French, which provided him with the ability to play with the words and dismantle them from their intrinsic connotations. In other words, the transition from English to French gave Beckett the opportunity to evade a traditional form of writing and experiment with the linguistic prospects of fiction. As Federman points out:

[Regarding the language in early English fiction] Beckett delights in abusing the vocabulary, distorting the syntax, torturing the diction, until linguistic complexities are made to demonstrate the inadequacy of language as an intellectual and artistic means of communication. By contrast, the language in Beckett’s French works is strikingly simple and fluid, in spite of its apparent incoherence. A colloquial tone replaces the eloquent and affected diction of the English prose. The failure of language is now revealed through subtle usage of clichés and verbal banalities. (139)

Indeed, there is a more simplistic and fluent tone in Beckett's French writing as opposed to the ostentatious and complex style of the English works, as can be observed in *Mercier and Camier*. The works of both eras have an underlying emphasis on the deteriorating function of language, yet, French language served this purpose from a completely different aspect.

At this point, this salient shift in language also gave way to a distinction between the makings of the French and English Belacquas. Along with the change in language, the creation of the characters underwent a gradual transformation, and it contributed to the increasing absurdity of Beckett's fiction. According to Beckmeier, "[t]he transition from English to French is a transition from a literature still partly dependent on realistic elements to one where an inner reality takes over" (130). As the language turned more experimental, the Beckettian man and universe became more incoherent and occupied with the inner struggles of the individual to find a meaning or a purpose in his existence. Federman argues that "gradual disintegration" is what determines the evolvement of Beckett's fiction, from his first novel (*MPTC / Dream*) to the last (*Comment C'est / How It Is*) (16). Indeed, there is a dramatic change, in terms of character evolution, or degeneration to put it more accurately, between his early English novels, covering *Dream*, *Murphy*, and *Watt*, and his French era, beginning with *Mercier and Camier*, followed by *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Meurt (Malone Dies)* (1951), *L'Innommable (The Unnamable)* (1953), and *Comment C'est (How It Is)*. It can be suggested that this transformation was enabled through an interrelation between these works, a continuity of a certain theme, which is the theme of the quest. As Cohn points out, "Belacqua's aimless wandering leads to Murphy's movement toward stasis, which leads to Watt's service at Mr. Knott's house, which leads to the futile journey of Mercier and Camier, which leads to the writing/speaking of the other French heroes" (*Back to Beckett*, 60). Regarding this change, Federman further argues:

This disintegration is only sketched in his English novels, and such figures as Belacqua [...], Murphy, and Watt, despite their eccentricities, are reasonably motivated by and humanly concerned with daily life. [...] While [they] strive to reach some refuge away from the fiasco of society, and temporarily attain such asylum, the heroes of the early French works, after having enjoyed a brief stay in what appears to have been a bourgeois home or a mental institution, are suddenly expelled. Yet they do not return to life in society among their fellowmen, but rather

face a much more distressing existence outside reality, within the solitude of their incoherent minds, within the unpredictable world of fiction. (18-21)

In the light of this argument, it can be suggested that *Mercier and Camier* stands in the middle of this transition. While the early stories take place in realistic settings with somewhat lifelike characters, though with incongruous dispositions, the later works dwell on almost surreal territories and characters with nonhuman qualities such as Pim in *How It Is*, and the Unnamable in *The Unnamable*, who cannot be, in any way, associated with the social reality. Between these two edges, *Mercier and Camier* provides a bridge for the Beckett reader to comprehend these two different, yet connected, universes. Although the characters occupy a place in a seemingly realistic setting, both the trajectory of their journey and the preposterous atmosphere of the city they are plunged into become more and more absurd as the redundant attempts of the two derelicts to leave the city are deferred constantly. In this respect, one of the major motives for this increasing absurdity that separates *Mercier and Camier* from its predecessors is the theme of recurrence.

The original title of the novel was *Le Voyage de Mercier et Camier autour du Pot dans les Bosquets de Bondy* (The Voyage of Mercier and Camier Around the Bush in the Grove of Bondy¹²). As Cohn points out, “‘Tourner autour du pot’ is colloquial French for ‘to detour,’ and the voyage of Mercier and Camier is a series of detours from their undesignated destination. [...] The original title thus suggests that life is a detour towards an arbitrary salvation or damnation” (*Back to Beckett*, 61). Indeed, this is exactly what *Mercier and Camier* is written for. Shidlo interprets the title as a reference to Beckett’s intended literary evasion: “[...] the significant idiomatic phrase (tourner) autour du pot (to not come to the point) seems to qualify (1) the protagonists’ journey i.e. the narrated (2) its narration (3) or, more likely, both narrated and narration” (232). Accordingly, Beckett avoids coming to a conclusion in his protagonists’ story as if the quest could go on forever. In *Dream*, although the protagonist Belacqua aspires to dissociate himself from the outer reality, he is still a recognised member of the society he lives in. With *Mercier and Camier*, the situation of the Beckettian man approaches a state of being rejected by the society irreversibly (which is to be forged meticulously in

¹² Translation mine.

the later works), and a cyclical oscillation in a pseudo-real setting with neither a determined undertaking nor any hope for the restitution to the status of Belacqua as an indolent citizen of the world. This certain characteristic of the novel directly addresses Beckett's deepening concern with Dante's Purgatory. Fletcher asserts that "[i]f [Beckett's] early works in English contain the larger number of Dantean quotations and allusions, the mature works in French are the more permeated with the atmosphere of the *Divine Comedy*" (SBA, 106). Unlike the relatively realistic settings, events, and characters of *Dream*, *Murphy*, and *Watt*, in which the protagonists are passive, but more or less recognised members of the society; both the distorted atmosphere of *Comedy* and the subverted theme of the purgative journey in Purgatory as a futile quest are limned in *Mercier and Camier* rigorously in a variety of ways.

The novel begins with an opening remark by the narrator: "[t]he journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time" (3). Although the presence of the narrator as a character in the novel is never mentioned, both Mercier and Camier address an observer whose vague existence is felt dimly throughout the novel "like the presence of a third party" (83). The narrator is noticeable mostly due to his observations and comments about Mercier and Camier's actions. At the beginning of the novel, he gives information about the gist of the couple's journey:

Physically it was fairly easy going, without seas or frontiers to be crossed, through regions untormented on the whole, if desolate in parts. Mercier and Camier did not remove from home, they had that great good fortune. They did not have to face, with greater or less success, outlandish ways, tongues, laws, skies, foods, in surroundings little resembling those to which first childhood, then boyhood, then manhood had inured them. (3)

With such a description, it is immediately made sure that the quest Mercier and Camier undertake will end in failure. The narrator specifically emphasises that they did not even leave the neighbourhood where they spent their whole lives. Considering the fact that this is supposed to be a story about two men who decide to embark on a journey, it is a strange statement coming from a narrator who squeals on the people and the story he ought to narrate on the very first page. Regarding that the novel begins with the acknowledgment that the whole story will end in a fiasco, it might be thought that the narrator/the author deliberately seeks to clarify the aporia that circumvents the

characters and the fiction itself. In this sense, *Mercier and Camier* can be considered as a distorted interpretation of Dante and Virgil's journey through Purgatory. Dante's journey in Purgatory bears a religious significance and assures consummation, whereas what Mercier and Camier undertake is an endless circle of repetitions, failures, and uncertainties. In fact, starting with the first page, the entire narrative urges on the themes of inconclusiveness emanating from obscurity and impasse.

After the narrator gives away the barren course of their journey, he starts narrating their story. It begins on the day Mercier and Camier meet to go on their quest to leave the city for an unknown destination. As the narrator reveals, "[t]hey had consulted together at length, before embarking on this journey, weighing with all the calm at their command what benefits they might hope from it, what ills apprehend, maintaining turn about the dark side and the rosy. The only certitude they gained from these debates was that of not lightly launching out, into the unknown" (3). The problem with the pursuit they planned so elaborately is the fact that it does not have a definite objective. The focus of their journey seems to be more on leaving than on arriving. In this respect, the journey that is introduced presents itself as malfunctioning from the very beginning. What is more, the meeting of the protagonists is procrastinated redundantly due to their untimely arrivals and departures from the meeting point. Kern draws an analogy between *Mercier and Camier* and its descendent, *Waiting for Godot* by addressing this deferred rendezvous: "[I]ike the protagonists of *Godot*, [Mercier and Camier] move on the fringe of society and, though waiting is not their main concern, they frequently wait for each other, meet, and separate –always returning to their point of departure and thus never advancing in any specific direction [...]" (463). Not being able to meet is one of the recurrent confusions in the novel as seen in the beginning. Camier is reported first to arrive at 9.15, but it turns out that Mercier came first at 9.05, waited for five minutes, then went for a walk. When he arrives at the meeting point fifteen minutes later, he cannot see Camier, since Camier also waited for five minutes, and went for a walk. This preposterous delay lasts for forty-five minutes, and the couple meet at 9.50, at last:

	<u>Arr.</u>	<u>Dep.</u>	<u>Arr.</u>	<u>Dep.</u>	<u>Arr.</u>	<u>Dep.</u>	<u>Arr.</u>
Mercier .	9.05	9.10	9.25	9.30	9.40	9.45	9.50
Camier .	9.15	9.20	9.35	9.40	9.50		(4)

Even the narrator/author implies the self-reflexive and self-exposing effort of the author to emphasise the absurd situation Mercier and Camier are in, “[w]hat stink of artifice.” (4). Indeed, the heroes’ situation is quite absurd since neither of them is sure of the time or the place they arranged to meet the day before (7). This incoherence in the characters’ minds and actions, and also the underpinning fallacy in their entity make their journey a fictional delusion. Campbell highlights the elements which are fundamental in completing a fictional quest, which are absent in *Mercier and Camier*: “[...] certainty about the goal; resolution, a determination in achieving it; faith in the achievability, and a clear sense of how it might be achieved” (211). Considering these major qualities in a physical/spiritual journey, it is quite possible to say that Beckett attempted to create a subverted quest. What they seek, or the reason why they try to retreat from the city is never indicated in any part of the novel; they constantly suspend their parting, and they often come to a point where they surrender to despair considering their obscure destination; and finally, they have no motivation to pursue their goal and no judgement on how to achieve it.

This reversed and vain quest manifests itself even in the beginning of the novel. After Mercier and Camier finally meet, it starts raining, and they take refuge in a shelter, only to be harassed by a ranger. The two derelicts are so ambivalent about their undertaking and about their doings that they cannot even be sure if a woman’s bicycle outside the shelter belongs to them, when asked by the ranger: “[l]et us suppose this alleged bicycle is ours, said Mercier. Where lies the harm? / A truce to dissembling, said Camier, it is ours” (10). This sort of disorientation in their actions reveals itself throughout the novel. When they decide to begin their journey, there often emerges a sudden redundant need or excuse to linger: “[t]he day has dawned at last, said Camier, after years of shilly-shally, when we must go, we know not whither, perhaps never to return... alive. We are simply waiting for the day to lift, then full speed ahead. Try and understand” (10). Right

after this motivational speech, the couple start to talk about the ranger, quarrel with each other for some time, comment on the situation of the two dogs which are stuck to each other after mating in the shelter, and discuss whether to eat something or not, which causes them to spend their whole day in the shelter, rather than beginning their journey. This example of a delay in the first chapter is what prevails in the whole novel, and summarises the bulk of their journey, as Brater also points out, “[t]he journey in fact consists only of words” (262). Although there is action in the novel, there is no prominent movement in terms of fulfilling the quest.

When they finally leave the shelter, they wander around the city with a bicycle they don’t own, an umbrella that seems to break down often, and a sack containing toilet requisites, a few pairs of socks, and some food (21). Carrying the bicycle instead of riding it, they stop at the first pub they see. Here, they decide to spend the night in the house of Helen, a prostitute. Helen represents a kind of refuge for Mercier and Camier throughout their journey since they often convince each other to go to Helen’s, and although they are not sure about the direction to her house, somehow all routes “lead there with equal success” (*MC* 17). After they leave her house the next day, they realise that they lost their sack and umbrella, about which they have no recollection. Camier leaves Mercier to buy some food. This brief separation, which is the first of several others, reveals their vulnerable nature; Mercier begs Camier not to leave him, and they start fighting. It is only the sudden accident, in which a woman is hit by a car and dies in front of them, that brings them to their senses and reminds them of their purpose. At the end of the second chapter, the narrator gives a brief summary of the journey so far. He does this in every two chapters, reminding one that the journey consists of mere words and vain actions. The next two chapters recount the short trip Mercier and Camier take to the South by train, and how they end up lodging at an inn to spend the night until they find the strength and motivation to carry on the next day. At the inn, we find out some information about Mercier and Camier’s identities; Camier is a private investigator, “[a] big bony hank with a beard [...] hardly able to stand, wicked expression,” while Mercier is “[s]mall and fat [...] red face, scant hair, four chins, protruding paunch, bandy legs, beady pig eyes” (43). After they leave the inn, they get rid of the raincoat for good and head for their destination once more (52). The following chapters concentrate on their repetitive routine; returning to Helen’s, spending a few

days, leaving Helen's, wandering the streets, conferring at the bars. In one chapter, we learn that Mercier is married with children: "[t]he last time I abused that term [the word 'yes'] was at my wedding. To Toffana. The mother of my children. Mine own. Inalienable. Toffana" (69). At one point, they kill a constable brutally upon his attempt to arrest Camier when they ask him the way to the brothel. After they escape from the scene, they go outside the city to the bog where they abandon each other again going separate ways. Upon this separation of the two derelicts, the narrator merely says, "[u]nstuck at last" (88). Here, he ironically refers to the two dogs stuck to each other in the first chapter. As Herbert suggests, "[...] unlike the two dogs, who received satisfaction from their temporary union, Mercier and Camier failed to achieve the goal for which they were united" (128). Throughout the novel, Mercier and Camier are like those dogs, stuck to each other, following one another in search of a resolution for their hopeless condition. However, in the case of Mercier and Camier, although they manage to leave each other's company, they do it without fulfilling their purpose for which they came together in the first place. The last chapter opens at a pub where Camier sits alone, later greeted by Watt, Beckett's previous derelict. Watt unites Camier and Mercier, who happens to be at the same pub. With Watt leading, they go to another pub where Watt starts a fight with the pub owner, and Mercier and Camier sneak out together. The novel ends with them contemplating their failed journey on a bridge, and departing for the last time, both of them still being unable to leave the city. Taking their actions into consideration, one may come to the conclusion that they are far from reaching that unidentified terminus, since the whole story consists of several cyclical attempts to leave the city; they always find an excuse to return to the city, and delay their journey until they feel ready to resume it from the start and wander erratically until they feel lackadaisical enough to go back to the city.

According to Federman, this journey can be interpreted on two layers. First, it is indeed the physical journey of Mercier and Camier from the city to an unknown place accompanied by the descriptions of the streets, the canals, the countryside, the pubs and secondary characters they come across on their way. On the other hand, their journey can be rendered as a metaphorical quest to cut their ties with the social reality, and cease to exist in the physical world, which is represented by the city (142-143). Indeed, the physical journey that Mercier and Camier undertake around the city and the countryside

underlines the spiritual journey they embark on to reach an indolent existence in their minds, which turns out to be impossible. Beckett manipulates the exterior outline of the story and the setting to expose the plight of the protagonists. Concordantly, Rabinovitz argues that “Beckett’s descriptions of the outer world are often the raw materials for metaphors depicting inner reality” (317). The physical movement of Mercier and Camier is intertwined with the whirling oscillation of their minds, as Campbell also suggests, “[t]he circling, doubling back, and meandering of the mind’s movement is externalized in the outer journey of the narrative and reflected in the narrator’s manner of representation” (214). While Mercier and Camier wander through the streets of the city towards an unknown destination which they have no knowledge of, they also vacillate in the imbroglio that narrative, in fact Beckett, creates for them. The setting of *Mercier and Camier*, in this sense, plays an essential role in depicting the dreary state Mercier and Camier are in. The location of the city they wander in is never revealed, neither are the names of the streets they go past or the public places they stop by. However, certain characteristics of the city, such as constant raining, presence of bogs and the abundance of canals surrounding it, suggest that the setting might be Dublin (Brater 262; Waters, 177). Beckett frequently refers to his hometown in his works as a stalemate which his characters strive to elude. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the two derelicts attempt to leave the Irish soil. In the seventh chapter, after they kill the constable, they end up arriving at the countryside, in the bog. The description of the setting indicates their plight stuck between the bogs and the city, without moving away from either:

A road still carriageable climbs over the high moorland. It cuts across vast turfbogs, a thousand feet above sea-level, two thousand if you prefer. It leads to nothing any more. A few ruined forts, a few ruined dwellings. The sea is not far, just visible beyond the valleys dipping eastward, pale plinth as pale as the pale wall of sky. [...] The city is not far either, from certain points its lights can be seen by night, its light rather, and by day its haze. [...] And the islands and promontories, one has only to stop and turn at the right place, and of course by night beacon lights, both flashing and revolving. It is here one would lie down, in a hollow bedded with dry heather, and fall asleep, for the last time, on an afternoon, in the sun, head down among the minute life of stems and bells, and fast fall asleep, fast farewell to charming things. It’s a birdless sky, the odd raptor, no song. (81)

This setting is the Purgatory of Mercier and Camier. This land is as far as they could reach in their journey. They are surrounded by the sea, the mountains, the city, and the bog, with nothing beyond. It is this territory that Mercier and Camier strive to escape

and fail to do so throughout the novel. When they wake up in the same bog next morning, the narrator affirms that there is nowhere beyond their confines, “[h]ere would be the place to make an end. After all it is the end. But there is still day, day after day, afterlife all life long, the dust of that is dead and buried rising, eddying, settling, burying again” (86). While Beckett clarifies the fact that this is the furthest they could come from the city, he also emphasises that it does not end here, since there will be the days after the days they have, and it will continue this way forever. As Levy also points out: “[t]he elaborate and repetitious journey of Mercier and Camier is simply an alternative expression of this experience of interminable dissolution in which the notions of beginning and end or definite self and world no longer apply” (129). Dying, burying, settling, and burying as a form of a futile penance or punishment will repeat for Mercier and Camier perpetually. It makes the act of dying impossible in this sense, considering that the whole ritual becomes a ceaseless circle occupying a lifetime of immortal derelicts.

Throughout their journey, Mercier and Camier often find themselves in pubs, shelters, and Helen’s house. Rabinovitz interprets these pauses in Beckett’s works as “[...] a refuge from the harshness of existence, an interlude in a journey of inner exploration, or a retreat from the rigors of the creative process” (320). As the intended direction of the journey of Beckettian man can be inferred as a Belacqua Paradise as discussed in the previous chapters, these interludes, in Mercier and Camier’s case, provide them with brief recesses to concentrate on their purpose, Belacqua bliss, which they aspire to achieve for good at the end of their journey. They even get the position of Dante’s Belacqua, as they take their heads between their hands crouching (22). In this respect, it can be claimed that, like Belacqua in *Dream*, Mercier and Camier pursue a womb-tomb existence, which ultimately suggests that the direction of their journey is towards their own secluded perception of themselves in their minds. According to Herbert, the journey that Mercier and Camier undertake is “a journey to selfhood” (111). The physical journey towards an unknown destination is, then, the metaphorical journey into the refuge of the mind; the Belacqua retreat. However, since the narrator foreshadows the ultimate failure of this quest from the very first page, Beckett eliminates the possibility of a Belacqua bliss for his two derelicts permanently, as Federman also articulates, “[b]ecause their quest is marked from the start with the seal of absurdity, and

because they are incapable of distinguishing the real from the illusory, all their actions result in confusion and failure” (143). At several points in their journey, Mercier and Camier forget the course and the objective of their quest: “[w]hat exactly did we decide? I remember we agreed, as indeed we always do, in the end, but I forgot as to what. But you must know, since it is your plan, is it not, we are putting into execution” (47). It is through this predicament that Beckett subverts the concept of purgation and the gist of Purgatory.

The Purgatory that Beckett creates for his vagabonds in *Mercier and Camier* is a setting stripped from its purifying and purgative implications. What Mercier and Camier perceive as Paradise is the Belacqua state in their minds, that is the womb-tomb existence in indolence. Therefore, they embark on a journey, a purgatorial journey whose direction is overturned, and they consider this lethargy as the true salvation for their constant suffering of being. This suffering of being, as mentioned in Introduction, is the fundamental sin of Mercier and Camier. The fact of being born is what they are striving to escape. That is why, their journey from the outer world into a lethargic form of existence seems like reversing birth, attaining a nonexistence. Mercier reveals this desire to reverse being born in despondency: “[t]here are days, said Mercier, one is born every minute. Then the world is full of shitty little Merciers. It’s hell. Oh but to cease!” (24). To cease being in the world outside, in other words, to get rid of life, is the purpose of their purgatorial journey. However, what they discern as a purgative journey is, in fact, an endless circle, which is the Beckettian impasse. This predicament is obvious, but the characters continue to ramble expecting to reach a revelation in their own terms. Mercier and Camier, the Beckettian man in general, are no longer a part of their surrounding reality, nor do they find an abiding lethargic state. They do enjoy temporary interludes at Helen’s, however, as Rabinovitz articulates, “[d]escriptions of being evicted from a room in a house owned by a woman [...] are at times associated with the idea of being expelled from the womb” (327). Since Mercier and Camier can only spend a few days at Helen’s and always find themselves on the streets after their visits, the metaphorical comfort of the womb that Helen represents cannot be granted to them permanently. This situation leaves Mercier and Camier in a futile search for an unattainable Paradise, drifting through a subverted Purgatory with no rationality or meaning in their actions. In this sense, what is explained about the image of Purgatory

recreated in *Dream* can apply to *Mercier and Camier*, as well; Beckett, indeed, attempts to create a purgatorial world in *Mercier and Camier* too, and rewrite Dante's Purgatory from a distorting perspective.

More submerged in a subverted purgatorial setting than *Dream*, *Mercier and Camier* limns the atmosphere of Purgatory, yet it eludes its reassuring and purifying aspects with the descriptions of the streets the couple drift on, and the mood of the city viewed by the protagonists as follows:

I sense vague shadowy shapes, said Camier, they come and go with muffled cries.

I too have the feeling, said Mercier, we have not gone unobserved since morning.
(12-13)

In the show windows the lights came on, went out, according to the show. Through the slippery streets the crowd pressed on as towards some unquestioned goal. A strange well-being, wroth and weary, filled the air. Close the eyes and not a voice is heard, only the onward panting of the feet. (15)

In Dante's Purgatory, the souls, who do not have shadows since they are dead, go through the tormenting purgative steps of Purgatory and suffer to be purged from their sins. Their movement in the mountain of Purgatory is of a teleological and theological underpinning. Their journey is upward and progressive since their ultimate motivation is salvation. Both Mercier and Camier feel the presence of these souls on the streets, apparently suffering "with muffled cries," though it is not explained why. Unlike Dante's Purgatory, whose upward motion promises Paradise as the result of a tormenting journey, the journey that Mercier and Camier take is doomed to be a fiasco, with no rewarding terminus, or any upward or forward movement, but a cyclical one. Federman describes the city which Mercier and Camier strive to escape as "the city of man," since it still has the elements of real, such as pubs, streets, and square names, similar to the earlier works. However, it is "a city with streets that form a labyrinth of impasses" (142). No matter how much Mercier and Camier contemplate on finding an exit, the city entangles them in its streets and local pubs. They wander the streets hoping to reach some sort of an end, yet they get distracted and retrogress as their movement becomes repetitive and cyclical. Comparing *Mercier and Camier* with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Campbell suggests that "[i]f *Mercier and Camier* is read as a kind

of Pilgrim's Regress or Stasis, the work becomes a comic re-evaluation of the possibility of pilgrimage or even the possibility of being able to set a meaningful goal towards which to progress" (217). Correspondingly, Mercier and Camier's distorted pilgrimage denies the actuality of a moral, religious, and an existential purpose. In this case, the journey of Mercier and Camier becomes a subverted re-enactment of Dante's Purgatory. There is the journey, but it is interminable; there is suffering, but without salvation, only with "the horror of existence" (*Mercier* 16). While the souls in Purgatory renew themselves by taking the purgative steps, each of which corresponds to a deadly sin, to be bestowed the right to ascend to Paradise, Beckett's derelicts wander recursively through the labyrinth of their prison, which is their world, without gaining any sense of wisdom or satisfaction. Levy makes an intriguing remark on this re-enactment as follows:

Imagine Dante and Virgil traversing Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven a thousand times, with no memory of their entrance, no hope of an exit, no means of judging those they meet, and no way of evaluating their own experience. Eventually, the stage would be reached where there is nothing in Dante to distinguish him from Virgil and vice versa. That is the starting place for Mercier and Camier. [...] Most of the novel [...] relives the *Purgatorio*, because it is here that we can best gauge the utter futility of their striving. [...] Mercier and Camier can make no progress; they pass no fewer than four times through the same purgation for the same sin. [...] Life itself is Purgatory for Mercier and Camier, who do again and again what they have already done, what they can never do for good. (119-122)

Along with the comparison between Dante and Virgil's journey through Purgatory and Mercier and Camier's false quest through the streets of their city, Levy's commentary invokes another significant motif in Beckett's fiction; the concept of pseudo-couple.

Mercier and Camier is the first novel in which Beckett practises the use of couples as protagonists. Beckett, in *The Unnamable*, refers to this creation as 'pseudo-couple' due to the fact that these duos are not really two separate personas, but split parts of a single entity. That kind of a bond creates a co-dependence between the characters. That is why even the brief separations have extravagant effects on the couple since one feels vulnerable in his surroundings in the absence of the other. According to Levy, this co-dependence between Mercier and Camier exists due to the fact that "[...] each of [them] needs the other to remain a subject [...]. Each makes the other's relation to the world a little more secure" (119). Accordingly, it can be claimed that the one needs the other in

order to confirm his own existence. In this regard, Coe distinguishes the stance of the narrator of the novel from the preceding characters; “[f]rom the ‘I’ which bears witness to the essential Self to the ‘I’ which needs the Other to testify to its own existence, and out of this need breeds a relationship which might – almost – give a reality to friendship [...]” (82). This need for another being to confirm one’s own existence starts with the relationship of Mercier and Camier, providing them with some kind of a reality to hold on to. The fact that they cannot operate properly without each other implies their inability to form a ‘couple,’ and instead, remain as a ‘pseudo-couple.’ Their coexistence can be interpreted as a subversion of the accompaniment of Dante and Virgil. In *Comedy*, Dante the writer presents Dante the pilgrim as the representative of mankind, with his sins and worldliness. Through his journey from Inferno to Paradise, he needs a guiding figure to lead him to redemption. This figure is Virgil, who represents reason and philosophy (Huse vii)¹³. The fact that Virgil is given the role of the guide and the mentor of Dante in his journey through Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise is parodied in *Mercier and Camier*, as the role of the guide shuttles between Mercier and Camier. Throughout the novel, Mercier mainly serves as the mind of the couple. He thinks and finds something to do, and Camier submits (6). While it is Mercier who reflects on their current situation, Camier tries to fulfil the needs of the body:

What are you musing on, Mercier?

On the horror of existence, confusedly, said Mercier.

What about a drink? Said Camier. (16)

Between them, the one who suffers from physical pain is mostly Camier:

I fear for my cyst, said Camier.

What you lack, said Mercier, is a sense of proportion.

I don’t see the connexion, said Camier.

Just so, said Mercier, you never see the connexion. When you fear for your cyst think of your fistula. And when you tremble for your fistula consider your chancre.

(46)

However, as the mind of the couple, Mercier cannot function properly, since he suffers from his head (84). Together, they form an existence, which is crippled, decaying in

¹³ Dante chooses Virgil as his guide in his journey from Inferno to Paradise, because he considers Virgil as his “master” and “author,” whose poetry influenced Dante to a great extent (*Comedy* 10).

body, decaying in mind, “[t]heir progress was now no better than a totter. They overflowed on the bog, with risk of fatal consequences, to them, but nothing doing. Soon falls began to enter into play, now Camier accompanying Mercier (in his fall), now the reverse, and now the two collapsing simultaneously, as one man, without preconcertation and in perfect interdependency” (85). The pseudo-couple strive to continue with their journey with “[...] the body in bits, the mind flayed alive [...]” (89). Cohn explicates their pseudo being: “[...] because Mercier and Camier may be viewed as the uncomfortable conjunction of mind and body” (*A Beckett Canon*, 140). Although Camier is given the role of corporeality, and Mercier the role of intellect, their characters are interchangeable, “[i]t so chanced that Mercier, up to now, had shown himself the live wire, Camier the dead weight. The reverse was to be expected at any moment. On the less weak let the weaker always lean, for the course to follow. They might conceivably be valiant together. That would be the day. Or the great weakness might overtake them simultaneously” (12). For instance, while in the first three chapters Camier is the carnal disciple Mercier governs (6, 16), in the fourth chapter it is Camier who undertakes the responsibility of thinking at one point (47, 48). What is ironic about their rotating mentorship is that neither of them manages to take the other towards their objective. In line with Levy’s argument, unlike Dante and Virgil, who pass through the purifying paths of Purgatory and reach the gate of Paradise, Mercier and Camier replicate the same journey through the same Purgatory repeatedly, which continues throughout the novel:

The town lies far behind, said Camier. Little by little night overtakes us, blueblack.
We splash through puddles left by the rain. It is no longer possible to advance.
Retreat is equally out of the question.

He added, some moments later:

What are you musing on, Mercier?

On the horror of existence, confusedly, said Mercier. (16)

They frequently sink into despair grasping the predicament they are in (Mercier particularly feels desperate, because he represents mostly the intellectual part of this pseudo-couple). Mercier, while waiting for Camier to get something to eat, sees a boy and a girl, who call him “Papa” and ask for attention, and he calls them “my children”

(23). Here, the narrator gives away a detail about Mercier's past; that he is a father. What the narrator presents at first as a reunion of a father and his children turns into an unpleasant encounter for Mercier, who boorishly scares the children and sends them away. This encounter demoralises Mercier and shatters his belief in carrying on: "I'll start crawling any minute" (24). However, this despair is circumvented when a fat woman is hit by a car and dies in front of their eyes. Someone else's bloody death somehow restores Mercier and Camier's faith in their quest: "[I]et this be a lesson to us, said Camier. [...] Never to despair, said Camier, or to lose our faith in life" (25). It is quite an unusual statement for the two Beckettian characters, who try to escape from the outer reality. The lesson they take from this death contradicts with their general perception of life. It is perhaps the possibility of an end to life that restores their faith. In the Beckettian universe, where death is only granted to Belacqua in *MPTK* and Murphy in *Murphy*, Mercier and Camier might regain their hope to achieve nonexistence through the fat woman's death. All the same, this faith in life cannot be interpreted as an optimistic approach on life, since it is life itself that they strive to escape when they decide to get rid of the raincoat:

We didn't leave anything in the pockets by any chance? said Mercier.

Punched tickets of all sorts, said Camier, spent matches, scraps of newspaper bearing in their margins the obliterated traces of irrevocable rendez-vous, the classic last tenth of pointless pencil, crumples of soiled bumf, a few porous condoms, dust. Life in short.

Nothing we'll be needing? said Mercier.

Did you not hear what I said? said Camier. Life.

Regaining their enthusiasm to continue their journey after witnessing the accident, they wander and waver perpetually, oscillating between the pubs and canals of the city. They manage to leave the city for a short time in a few attempts, always recant on their decision, find an excuse to return, and repeat this detour without any self-awareness. Indeed, what Fletcher describes as "the purgatory-without-purgation" (*SBA*, 120-121) is present in *Mercier and Camier* as an endless journey that begins, halts, lingers, and begins again for nearly a hundred pages. Federman analyses their cyclical journey, that is, their dysfunctional quest in the following extract:

These outcasts seem to be preparing themselves for a journey, an obscure quest the purpose of which they do not understand, but which they feel compelled to undertake. [...] While relating the sad and often obscene story of their existence, they wander through the streets, the parks, the outskirts of an unidentified city in which they feel completely out of place, and where they encounter people (members of an organized society) with whom they can no longer identify as human beings. These wandering derelicts have indeed been expelled from the world of man and are now condemned to exist in the illusory world of fiction, whose rules are not necessarily rational. (21)

Alienated from the outer reality, and at the same time, striving to escape from this reality for good, Mercier and Camier fail in their efforts. They attempt to leave the city / the outer reality uncountable times, reach the countryside, and somehow decide to go back to the city, “[...] return to the world of men – that is, the world of conventional fiction” (Federman 21). Although they are no longer recognised members of the outer world, they still try to wander on its streets, stay in its houses, and drink in its pubs. However, they always find themselves expelled from these houses and pubs, and harassed by the authoritative figures of this outer world like the constable. They no longer fit in their surrounding reality. They can neither live in nor leave the limits of their fictional universe. This oscillation between the city and the countryside situates them in an in-between position. The wandering of Belacqua in several European cities in *Dream* experiencing brief moments of Belacquan bliss is transformed into the straggling wanderings of Mercier and Camier through the streets of a city with little or no rational thinking or acting, reliving the same Purgatory without reaching a destination. Belacqua, as well, engages with the outer reality by attending parties, courting women, and participating in intellectual discussions. However, he has the choice to be a part of this reality, no matter how peculiar his character is. In Mercier and Camier’s case, these returns to the city, lingering in pubs, talking to strangers do not indicate a return to social reality, since the ‘horror of existence’ predominates over the actions of these tramps. Being a member of the reality is not granted to Mercier and Camier, but it belongs to their past lives as a part of Belacqua’s life in *Dream*: “[t]hey should have felt the better for this glow of distant days when they were young, and warm, and loved art, and mocked marriage, and did not know each other, but they felt no whit the better” (6). The world outside does not tolerate them, and it is now impossible to move forward or go backward. Neither their acts nor contemplations on

their journey is coherent. The outcome of their reciprocal meditations regarding ‘what to do,’ or ‘where to go next’ unmasks the nonsensical operation of their minds:

1. It would be useless, nay, madness, to venture any further for the moment.
2. They need only ask Helen to put them up for the night.
3. Nothing would prevent them from setting out on the morrow, hail, rain or shine, at the crack of dawn.
4. They had nothing to reproach themselves with.
5. Did what they were looking for exist?
6. What were they looking for?
7. There was no hurry.
8. All their judgements relating to the expedition called for revision, in tranquillity.
9. Only one thing mattered: depart.
10. To hell with it all anyway. (17)

The first claim indicates their reluctance for any sort of movement and serves them as an excuse to linger their stay at the bar, whereas the third claim entirely contradicts with the first one due to its enthusiastic and determined tone regarding their journey. While the fifth question is asked in order to confirm or question the existence of an aim, the next one points out the confusion of the protagonists about the gist of their journey, which they decided to undertake themselves in the first place. As the seventh and eighth entries suggest a desire to halt, the ninth one claims the opposite. Finally, the last statement displays the tedium and the lethargy that inhere in Mercier and Camier, and all the other Beckettian derelicts. The result is a bulk of inconsistency. Their acknowledging the necessity and the urgency of the journey contradicts with the withdrawal from any kind of movement: “[i]t was imperative to go, and yet at the same time stay” (32). Campbell asks the questions which are essential to understand Mercier and Camier’s struggle: “[h]ow can one speak without really saying anything; how can one seek without finding; progress without moving?” (215). These questions about the journey of Mercier and Camier divulge the absurdity dominating the whole quest. The absurdity is exposed when the couple suddenly start to talk about their walking pace after questioning their existence and their purpose. While they procrastinate, spending

their time at the pubs or on the street, even they start to question the point of their quest: “[w]hat kind of a trip is this?” (35), and the narrator admits once again the anticipated failure of their toil: “[a]t this point the journey of Mercier and Camier seemed likely indeed to founder” (35). Although both the narrator and the reader are aware of the futile striving, it is Mercier and Camier who still believe in a sort of redemption: “[f]rom the intuition, said Camier, if I remember right, that the said sack contains something essential to our salvation” (47). The sack they disposed of earlier, which they do not remember doing, is actually filled with daily items, such as toilet papers and socks. They are in such a condition that they assume their salvation depends on trivial needs. Kalt articulates that “[s]inking into formlessness, swirling in timelessness, prey to the calmative action of codification, Beckett’s characters clutch material objects as a means of defining themselves in time and space.” (30). This commitment to physical objects like the sack reveals that although it is the material world which Mercier and Camier try to escape, they also need to cling to material possessions to confirm their own existence, just like they need each other for this confirmation. That is why, they constantly lose their sack, umbrella, and raincoat, and find them after some time. Camier’s word “salvation” at first invokes a religious connotation. However, there is no religious motivation in Mercier and Camier’s journey. In fact, they even ridicule the concept of an omnipotent God. Mercier gets delirious when their umbrella is stuck as the rain pours heavily, and he starts cursing Camier and the umbrella: “[a]nd to crown all, lifting to the sky his convulsed and streaming face, he said, As for thee, fuck thee. [...] Is it our little omniumni you are trying to abuse? Said Camier. You should know better. It’s he on the contrary fucks thee. Omniumni, the all-unfuckable” (19). As Herbert also points out: “[i]t is not [...] salvation in a religious sense which is the goal of their quest, but rather the salvation of knowledge of the self” (113). This ‘self’ they search for is of a lethargic creation, which demands this physical and metaphorical journey, yet, dissuades them from all sorts of progress. The lack of movement combines with the exaggerated meditations on movement, and the result is a pedantic inanity, leaving the couple “[...] alone, ill, in the cold, the wet, old, half mad, no way on, no way back” (49). They continue their wandering, with “all hope abandoned,” yet without any recollection of abandoning.

Beckett provides his vagabonds with a journey which is a twisted version of the one Dante undertakes. In a sense, he attempts to re-write Dante's Purgatory, as mentioned earlier. However, what Mercier and Camier undergo is not a course directed to the bright future of the characters in the afterlife, but the repeating cycle of their present "forever absent" (23). The lack of recollection for their earlier actions and the absence of a direction present a complete contradiction with the motivation that the souls in Dante's Purgatory have: "What exactly did we decide? I remember we agreed, as indeed we always do, in the end, but I forgot as to what" (47). They can neither figure out what their plan is, nor they seem to know what their goal is. After a brief contemplation about the thing that is essential to their salvation, Camier endeavours to find their main motive:

It boils down then to some unknown, said Camier, which not only is not necessarily in the sack, but which perhaps no sack of this type could possibly accommodate, the bicycle itself for example, or the umbrella, or both. By what token shall we know the truth? By a heightened sense of well-being? Unlikely. [...] Most unlikely, said Camier. No, but perhaps rather a gradual feeling of relief, spun out in time, reaching its paroxysm a fortnight or three weeks later, without our knowing exactly to what it was due. An example of bliss in ignorance, bliss at having recovered an essential good, ignorance of its nature. (48)

Although they sometimes catch a glimpse of what their purpose might be, it slips through their minds and mouths, either because they cannot think further, or they get distracted by something else. These blockings are a part of their plight in their twisted purgative journey. Even when they feel determined and hopeful about their so-called arrangement, they are prevented by the narrative from naming their journey:

So they raised their glasses and drank, both saying, at the same instant or almost, Here's to you. Camier added, And to the success of our -. But this was a toast he could not complete. Help me, he said.

I can think of no word, said Mercier, nor any set of words, to express what we imagine we are trying to do. (68)

Do you not know where we are going? said Camier.

What does it matter, said Mercier, where we are going? We are going, that's enough (73).

Beckett leaves his pseudo-couple with nothing to wait for, and his story on which there is “nothing to be done, nothing to be said” (71). The sense of movement is rendered into mere motion aimlessly. Unlike Dante’s souls in Purgatory, Mercier and Camier move only due to the fact that they do not have anything else to do in their limited narrative territory: “Mercier said, Let us resume our –. At a loss he gestured, with his free hand, towards his legs and those of his companion. There was a silence. Then they resumed that indescribable process not unconnected with their legs” (72). In Dante’s afterlife, the souls in Purgatory embrace their sufferings knowing that the sufferings will pave the way for purgation and salvation, “[they] are contented / in the fire, because they hope to come, / whenever it may be, among the blessed” (*Comedy* 11). Mercier and Camier do not even have the privilege to identify their motion with a divine cause, let alone actualising it. The narrator does not refer to their movement as a progress, but rather as an indescribable process that has something to do with their legs. At this point, their journey is mocked in the sense that the narrator deliberately avoids using the word “quest,” here and undermines the whole idea by rendering it as a movement caused by one’s feet. Not only the logic of Purgatory, but also its atmosphere is subverted in *Mercier and Camier*. In Dante’s poem, the souls who go through purgative punishments welcome their suffering by singing religious songs: “‘In exitu Isreal de Egypto,’ All with one voice together sang [...]” (*Comedy* 183). Dante and Virgil witness this willing suffering accompanied by singing as they move in Purgatory:

In front people appeared divided
 into seven choirs who made one sense (hearing)
 say “no,” the other (sight), “yes, they sing.”
 Likewise at the smoke of the incense
 shown there, the eyes and nose
 disputed between “yes” and “no.” (*Comedy* 215)

Beckett ridicules this self-complacency with an absurd dialogue between his vagabonds as follows:

Do you feel like singing? said Camier.
 Not to my knowledge, said Mercier.
 The rain was beginning again. But had it ever ceased?
 Let us make haste, said Camier.
 Why do you ask me that? said Mercier.
 Camier seemed in no hurry to reply. Finally he said:
 I hear singing.

They halted, the better to listen.
 I hear nothing, said Mercier.
 And yet you have good ears, said Camier, so far as I know.
 Very fair, said Mercier.
 Strange, said Camier.
 Do you hear it still? said Mercier.
 For all the world a mixed choir, said Camier.
 Perhaps it's a delusion, said Mercier.
 Possibly, said Camier. (18)

Since Mercier and Camier cannot ascribe a meaning to the singing, they come to the conclusion that it must be a 'delusion.' Unlike Dante's devotees in Purgatory, Beckett's derelicts do not seem to understand the logic in embracing the suffering, for their anguish does not lead to a higher existence. The aftermath of their struggling is the same plight they were in in the first page, thus they wander arbitrarily in the ever-lasting rain. As the narrator indicates in the first page, that the two protagonists passed by the city and the countryside "[...] through regions untormented on the whole" (3), it can be argued that theirs is a deviated purgatorial journey (Acheson 177). However, the fact that they went through this journey 'untormented,' unlike Dante's souls in Purgatory, does not mean that they were physically and mentally a whole. As mentioned earlier, both characters suffer from physical and mental decay. What separates their quest from that of Dante in Purgatory is that the term 'salvation' is a devitalised concept in their case. As Acheson aptly puts it, "[u]nfortunately for Mercier and Camier both, 'thirsting in the dark'—yearning, in other words, for the answers to unanswerable metaphysical questions—is an unalterable feature of the human condition. Though the 'essential salvation' the two of them appear to be seeking may well be a wish to be saved from the need to seek, that wish will always be denied them" (181). Although it is not specified throughout the novel, the essence of their search can be attributed to the self-knowledge, or the need to have a need, as they imply in one of their lists:

5. There are two needs: the need you have and the need to have it.

...

10. Contrary to a prevalent opinion, there are places in nature from which God would appear to be absent.

...

12. Soul: another four-letter word.

13. What can be said of life not already said? Many things. That its arse is a rotten shot, for example. (58-9)

However, this motivation, the need to have a need, cannot lead them to set up a spiritual purpose, since it is rendered, as Acheson asserts, as an aporia in the case of Mercier and Camier, and also because theirs is the condition of the modern man in Beckett's universe where there is no resolution whatsoever. This is also where Beckett's story diverges from Dante's. In Dante's Purgatory, there is a definitive terminus in the characters' agonising journeys, whereas in *Mercier and Camier*, the protagonists pursue a salvation, which is unknown and not bestowed to them, and they are inherently oblivious to the whole process, which perpetuates their plight:

These illustrations did not blind them to the goal they had in view. This appeared to them, however, with ever increasing clarity as time wore on, one to be pursued with calm and collection. And being still just calm and collected enough to know they were no longer so they reached without difficulty the happy decision to postpone all action to the following day and even, if necessary, to the next but one. (59)

They can never achieve a "calm and collected" state to conclude their journey. As Boulter asserts, "[t]he teleological purposefulness of Dante's [Comedy] highlights the essentially aleatory world of Mercier and Camier" (76). The two outcasts only seem to have a purpose rather than actually having one. They enthusiastically suspend their operation merely because they do not feel confident enough. In this sense, the determination which prevails in the actions of Dante's souls in Purgatory is deficient in the actions of Beckett's vagabonds whose wanderings are the outcome of spontaneous and trivial arrangements. Waters's comparison between the quest of Mercier and Camier and a traditional quest displays this spontaneity and triviality:

Mercier and Camier indeed prepare to go on a quest, but unlike in traditional quest narratives, they have no conscious goal. And unlike traditional quest narratives, the hardships they must overcome, far from being of heroic dimension, are quite mundane: getting from one pub to the next, dealing with inclement weather, wondering whether to turn left or right (they throw an umbrella in the air and decide to follow the path to which it points upon falling) [...]. (169)

It is in this context that *Mercier and Camier* becomes a playful subversion of Dante's Purgatory. Since they are not bestowed an identifiable purpose, they stroll around the city and the countryside, suffering from the carnal and mental pains, the rainy weather,

and a confused, disconcerted, and anxious being. Beckett re-writes Dante's Purgatory in a way that the whole process is overturned, and the journey is rendered impossible to finalise. The situation of Mercier and Camier is an exile rather than a purgative journey (Waters 169).

Behind this playful rewriting of Purgatory, lies the ultimate tragedy of Beckettian man. Fowlie predicates that "Purgatory is indeed the home of Beckett's characters," but in their recreated Purgatory, Beckett's outcasts "wait without knowing what they wait for" ("Dante and Beckett" 141). This is what makes the story of Mercier and Camier pathetic. They stand between their relatively earthly predecessors, -represented by Belacqua, Murphy, and Watt, who somehow manage to find an exit from the endless plight of Beckettian universe by death or insanity, - and their irretrievably despondent successors, represented by Molloy, Malone, the Unnamable, and the narrator of *How It Is*, who struggle to preserve what is left from their past lives, confused in their world which is mingled between Purgatory and Inferno. *Mercier and Camier* represents this transition in Beckett's writing. The characters are no longer a part of the outer reality. They constantly find themselves expelled from pubs, Helen's house, and scolded by authoritative figures, such as the ranger and the constable. Surrounded by uncertainty, they wander through the city and the countryside, gradually losing sense in their actions and judgements. In this way, they relive the same purgatory, pursuing an indescribable and unachievable goal, occasionally realising that there is no such thing, yet, not knowing any better, pursuing howbeit. Theirs is a journey which is doomed to fail on the very first page. Their salvation, may it be a Belacquan bliss or the discovery of selfhood, is precluded by Beckett in order to underline the futility of such quest and the plight of the individual in search of such a salvation.

CHAPTER III: FROM PURGATORY TO INFERNO: *HOW IT IS*

One of the most challenging works Beckett wrote throughout his literary career, *How It Is* took more than a year for him to complete, when he was “[...] ‘struggling to struggle on from where the Unnamable left [him] off, that is with the next next to nothing’” (qtd. in Knowlson 461). Continuing to work on the absurd existence of man, Beckett took this issue one step further with each work, and *How It Is* became the last novel where he plunged in the subverted purgatorial journey the man takes towards the concept of nothingness. In *Dante Among the Moderns*, Wallace Fowlie expounds Dante’s presence in Beckett’s texts as follows: “[a]t times Beckett ‘uses’ Dante deliberately and thereby enriches the tone and meaning of his passage – whether it be verse or prose. At other times Dante is an affinity, an echo, almost an atmosphere so native to Beckett that there is no need to distinguish it as a literary or historical atmosphere” (“Dante and Beckett”, 129). In Beckett’s prose career under Dante’s influence, *How It Is* asserts its difference from Beckett’s earlier works in the way it revives Dante’s Purgatory. Written after the trilogy, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, Beckett’s last novel, *How It Is*, completes the vicious circle that Beckettian man suffers perennially. As he mentions in his letter to Kay Boyle, with *How It Is* Beckett attempted to cut off all his ties with Dante’s Belacqua, who is “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’ [...], and I hope that’s the end of him” (qtd. in Caselli, “Beckett, Dante and the Archive, 32). As Knowlson also points out, the essence of the novel is “[...] the exploration of ‘being’ to which the text is devoted, asking the question what remains when everything superfluous is taken away” (463). The atmosphere of *Comedy*’s first and second parts, Inferno and Purgatory, whose moods are based on suffering, is projected upon the tone of the novel. In the earlier period of Beckett’s prose writing, including *Dream*, *MPTK*, *Murphy*, and *Watt*, Dante’s presence and the influence of Purgatory are felt more on the realistically portrayed characters, who have more or less the capacity to adapt to social reality, or to end their existence by death or madness. In Beckett’s second period of prose, consisting of *Mercier and Camier* and novellas, “the Expelled” (1946), “the Calmative” (1946), and “the End” (1946), the theme of a reversed and twisted purgatorial quest is depicted through the helpless vagabonds who wander around the same circle searching for something they do not

know and can never attain. In the third and last period of Beckett's prose, which covers the trilogy, *Textes pour rien* (1956), and *How It Is*, Dante's Purgatory, and Inferno to some extent, prevail over the deformed bodies and shapeless echoes without a tangible being, who strive to claim an existence in hellish settings through subverted purgatories, yet doomed to fail finding an existence.

Throughout these periods, the Belacqua characteristics, such as lethargic disposition, Belacquan posture, contempt for sexuality, indifference to the outer reality, and the pursuit of an existence in the mind, were adopted by Beckett as the central tone of his protagonists from Belacqua Shuah to the narrator of *How It Is*, who are governed by indolence, waiting, and a willingness for stillness. This affinity displays itself mainly in the characters' physical postures, as in *How It Is*, the protagonist is depicted as: "knees drawn up back bent in a hoop I clasp the sack to my belly" (6), the pose Dante's Belacqua is associated with. In the preface to *How It Is*, O'Reilly contemplates on the novel as follows: "[w]e have a character alone, in constant darkness, able to subsist. Which is all that is needed for the narration to proceed and, in the end, is all we are given. This is How It Is. Realism, causality and explanation are written out of the text. The narrator crawls through mud and darkness without knowing where he comes from or where he is going, and certainly not why" (sic.) (viii). This is what Beckett's last novel is composed of; an endless purgatorial journey to reify oneself without any realistic setting, corporealised protagonist, or cause or effect for his actions. The atmosphere and the logic of Dante's Purgatory is played upon in this incoherent, fragmented, and absurd narration. In order to understand the influence of Dante and his *Comedy* on Beckett's writing, it is very important to track Beckett's literary journey from *Dream* to *How It Is*. Dearlove explicates the shift in Beckett's focus in his works regarding the subject matter, that is, the human mind: "[*How It Is*] marks a turning point in Samuel Beckett's career from an exploration of the limitations of the human mind and an emphasis upon definitions of the self, to an identification of the self with the voice and an acceptance, if not a celebration, of the life of the imagination" ("The Voice" 150). In line with this argument, while Beckett examined the gradual disintegration of the mind from the external reality in his works before *How It Is*, here he explores the aftermath of this disintegration, a life alienated from the outer reality, but abandoned in its own emptiness. In his first novel, *Dream*, Beckett introduces the

modern man through Belacqua Shuah, pursuing a purgatorial journey, which has no realistic sense of arrival, and portrays the desire to be still and indolent in a womb-tomb existence which Belacqua Shuah enjoys momentarily. In *Mercier and Camier*, this desire is depicted as an impossible terminus, and the journey of the modern individual is rendered as an aporia, which he still struggles to consummate. In *How It Is*, this struggle for this impossible destination leaves the modern man in a nameless, shapeless, shiftless, and wretched situation. Fowlie asserts that “[f]or the early characters of Beckett no voyage in supernatural sense is possible, and for the later characters in his writings – after *Molloy* – there will be no moving ahead, no voyage possible in even the natural sense” (131). In this sense, *How It Is*, as Beckett’s last novel, encapsulates the narrational and philosophical changes in his writing over the years since *Dream*. The extent of the journey is transformed from a palpable perspective regarding the futility of such journey into a convoluted and extensive form of predicament both in the man’s actions towards his impossible objective and narrative process towards an ending.

Divided into three parts; before Pim, with Pim, and after Pim, *How It Is* follows the nameless protagonist / the narrator crawling through the mud, eating things he finds in his sack, which is filled with fish cans, a cord and a can opener (7), defecating, and commenting on his past and his current situation, and searching for someone called Pim. In his letter to Donald McWhinnie, Beckett outlines his work in progress, which was later to be *How It Is*:

[a] ‘man’ is lying panting in the mud and dark murmuring his ‘life’ as he hears it obscurely uttered by a voice inside him. This utterance is described throughout the work as the fragmentary recollection of an extraneous voice once heard ‘quaqua on all sides’. In the last pages he is obliged to take the onus of it on himself and of the lamentable tale of things it tells. The noise of his panting fills his ears and it is only when this abates that he can catch and murmur forth a fragment of what is being stated within. The work is in three parts, the first a solitary journey in the dark and mud terminating with discovery of a similar creature known as Pim, the second life with Pim both motionless in the dark and mud terminating with departure of Pim, the third solitude motionless in the dark and mud. It is in the third part that occur(s) the so-called voice ‘quaqua’, its interiorisation and murmuring forth when the panting stops. That is to say the ‘I’ is from the outset in the third part and the first and second, though stated as heard in the present, already over. (qtd. in Knowlson, 461-2)

Throughout his time in the mud, the narrator murmurs what he hears from a source inside him. He hears things regarding his own past, and then he narrates these memories as though he remembers having them. Although the novel ends at the end of part three, it could go on for an infinite number of chapters, “whereas the voice as we have seen peculiar to part three or seven or eleven or fifteen so on just as the couple to part two or four or six or eight so on” (101). According to Federman, this constant murmuring indicates the narrator’s need to continue, as he keeps repeating his actions: “[h]is only concern is for the story to continue, regardless of its absurdity. For this reason, he concentrates on Pim, on his quest for Pim, on his relationship with Pim (even if Pim is an illusion), and finally, in part three, on his own futile existence as he now replaces Pim and awaits the coming of Bem or Bom, or an alter ego, who supposedly progresses slowly toward him in the mud” (11). In this regard, it can be said for the narrator that he struggles to continue to tell his story, as he merely wants to confirm his own existence. It makes the whole novel an utter attempt to affirm a narrative, no matter how inconsistent and futile it may seem to be. As Sinoimeri aptly puts it, “[l]ike the sack, which forestalls the encounter with the other, Pim’s body sustains the narrator and keeps him alive. Narration, for those who listen in *Comment C’est/How It Is*, is as necessary as food. Equally, telling stories represents the essential link to life for those who utter them” (329). As the sack, which he describes as “the sack my life that I never let go” (28), enables the narrator to live on, Pim, the character fabricated by the narrator, is also an essential factor for the narrator to keep on with his story, a motivation to continue. In that event, the novel renders the concept of a quest to a vain undertaking towards the self. However, in Beckett’s universe, this existence is beyond attainable, leaving the journey infertile.

The first chapter of the novel opens with the narrator reflecting on the beginning of his life in the mud. Although he does not remember how he got there, he has some recollections about his past life told him by the voice inside him: “life life the other above in the light said to have been mine on and off no going back up there” (4). The life he had before, in other words, the life Beckett’s earlier characters had, is no longer attainable for him. Apart from crawling through the mud searching for Pim, he spends his time recalling his past lives and commenting on his current situation. Like Mercier

and Camier, he has a sack which he holds and cherishes: “the sack sole good sole possession coal-sack to the feel small or medium five stone six stone wet jute I clutch it it drips in the present” (4). Sometimes, he empties the fish tins out of the sack and puts them in again one by one (4). When he feels hungry, he eats fish, and when he feels thirsty, he lies his face down in the mud, opens his mouth – or “the mouth opens the tongue comes out” – and drinks the mud (5). While remembering some images from his past, all of a sudden, he decides to go. He explains this sudden urge as follows: “when the great needs fail the need to move on the need to shit and vomit and the other great needs all my great categories of being” (9). The formation of his being is no longer dependent on a search for a better existence, but simply a need to move. He finds a motivation to move on, which he describes as “a witness I’d need a witness” (13). Here, he begins his journey towards Pim, a witness for his own existence. As the first chapter comes to an end, and as the narrator comes close to Pim, he loses all his corporal functions: “I don’t eat any more then no I don’t drink any more and I don’t eat any more don’t move any more and don’t sleep any more don’t see anything any more and don’t do anything any more it will come back perhaps all come back or a part I hear yes then no” (32). This loss of physical faculties corresponds to the loss of hope at the end of his journey towards Pim: “when the last meal the last journey what have I done where been that kind mute screams abandon hope gleam of hope frantic departure the cord round my neck the sack in my mouth a dog abandoned here effect of hope that hangs together still the eternal straight line effect of the pious wish not to die before my time in the dark the mud” (39). With the end of the first chapter, the act of moving leaves its place to a state of staying still in the second and third chapters. The hope to move is now abandoned in his life this time, since he reached the destination he was hoping to reach. From now on, the tone of the novel acquires a deeper sense of Inferno.

The second chapter focuses on the narrator’s time with Pim. The whole chapter is about a sadistic relationship between a tormentor and his victim. The communication between the narrator and Pim is carried with the narrator’s digging his nails into Pim’s back, carving what he wants to say or ask on Pim’s flesh. Herbert states that “[p]ain is identified with existence. If there is no pain, there is no life; where there is life, there is pain. Hence it is necessary for Pim to experience pain. His suffering is his credibility and his life” (230). This statement highlights the narrator’s need to affirm his existence.

If he can hurt Pim, then it means Pim exists. If there is an existing witness, then it means the narrator exist. The narrator describes this process as follows: “smartly as from a block of ice or white-hot my hand recoils hangs a moment it’s vague in mid air then slowly sinks again and settles firm and even with a touch of ownership already on the miraculous flesh perpendicular to the crack the stump of the thumb and thenar and hypo balls on the left cheek the four fingers on the other the right hand therefore we are not yet head to foot” (43). Here, Pim is presented as no more than a flesh owned and tormented by the narrator for a reciprocal communication between himself and Pim. The narrator carves words on Pim’s back, and Pim nods, speaks (48), and sometimes sings (50). It is, as the narrator confirms, “sadism pure and simple” (54). While the narrator talks about his torments on Pim, at one point, he informs his victim that he has given him a name:

no more than I by his own account or my imagination he had no name any more than I so I gave him the name Pim for more commodity more convenience it’s off again in the past

it must have appealed to him it’s understandable finished by appealing to him he was calling him by it himself in the end long before Pim Pim ad nauseam I Pim I always say when a man’s name is Pim he hasn’t the right and all the things a man hadn’t the right always said when his name was Pim and with that better from that time out livelier chattier

when this sunk in I let him know that I too Pim my name Pim there he has more difficulty a moment of confusion irritation it’s understandable it’s a noble name then it calms down (51)

Here, he not only names his victim as Pim, but also he names himself as Pim. Sharing the same name indicates the novel’s cyclical trajectory. As the narrator also foreshadows: “but first have done with this part two with Pim life in common how it was leaving only part three and last when I hear among other extravagances that he is coming ten yards fifteen yards who for me for whom I what I for Pim Pim for me” (52). It is understood from this comment that the whole novel is a perpetual cycle, throughout which the narrator searches for a Pim, meets and tortures that Pim, and after Pim leaves, replaces Pim and waits for another Pim to find him and be tortured by him. Like the narrator’s statement, the French title of the novel presents this perpetuity ironically.

Comment c'est (how it is) phonetically bears a resemblance to the word 'commencer,' which means 'to begin' in French. Cohn states that "[...] just as 'how it is' is a perpetual beginning that can never be extrapolated all the way back to point zero, so the ubiquitous mud is a perpetual end that never terminates at a given goal; 'bout' ('end') is implicit in and denied by 'boue' ('mud')" (*The Comic Gamut*, 190). The underlying irony in the title and the lack of punctuation marks indicate that although the novel ends after 129 pages of words, it is a loop of beginnings, which does not actually manage to end. Beckmeier addresses this cyclical journey as follows:

The Beckettian character seems to have finally become reconciled to his inability to transcend his own individual Self. Watt's tears before the picture of the broken circle in Arsene's room mark a turning point in the character's relation to reality. An "imperfect sense of humour" has made "a mess of chaos" (*M*, p. 65), the circle has let the point escape from its center, and the point, forever exiled in "endless space" and in "endless time," having lost all hope for re-integration with the center, can do nothing but seek for its own center, for a Self "somewhere in the depths of the microcosm." (136)

The naming ceremony is followed by the narrator giving himself another name, Bom. The torments continue as the narrator, Bom "stab[s] him simply in the arse that is to say speak and he will say anything what he can whereas proof I need proof" (61). The narrator reveals his prime intent. As Mitchell aptly puts it, "Bom's sadism is neither 'pure' nor 'simple,' as it both signals and enforces Bom's desire to be recognized by Pim" (60). It is this recognition of his existence that leads the narrator to torture his victim, as a master would do to his slave to impose his authority. While the narrator forces Pim to say what he wants him to say, at one point he can only make Pim sing or speak a few words. Towards the end of the second part, the narrator attempts to restore the pseudo-couple relationship between him and Pim asking him "DO YOU LOVE ME" (65). The answer he gives himself is simply "no." This so-called dialogue, or monologue more appropriately, implies the futile efforts of the narrator to find someone, a company, to witness his existence. As Pim's role cannot fulfil the need for recognition utterly, the narrator makes up new characters like Kram and the scribe Krim: "all alone and the witness bending over me name Kram bending over us father to son to grandson yes or no and the scribe name Krim generations of scribes keeping the record a little

aloof sitting standing it's not said yes or no samples extracts" (69). However, these creations are merely piteous efforts to share the dark and the mud with another being, who may keep records of their enigmatic reality. The narrator inwardly acknowledges that he is "all alone there is left all alone alas" (69), since he has never met Kram, and Krim "vanished never seen again" (71). Throughout the novel, the narrator constantly says that "something wrong there" (11). He senses that his efforts to build a master-slave relationship with Pim, to create Krim to keep accounts of his story, to go on talking / quoting are merely wrong and futile. As Abbott also adverts, "[...] finally, the whole thing is its own punishment, a terrible burden that its creator cannot wait to be rid of" ("Beginning Again," 114). In these moments, the narrator occasionally recalls his past lives: "my life above what I did in my life above a little of everything tried everything then gave up no worse always a hole a ruin always a crust never any good at anything not made for that farrago too complicated crawl about in corners and sleep all I wanted I got it nothing left but to heaven" (67). The "heaven" in this contemplation is not the Dantean sense of Paradise, as mentioned earlier, but rather the anticipated relief of Belacqua bliss. While the earlier Beckettian men strived to achieve this condition by alienating themselves from the outer world, the narrator of *How It Is* failed to attain this relief, isolated from the outer world for good, all alone in the mud. He emphasises his connection to the earlier Beckettian characters as follows:

Never anyone never knew anyone always ran fled elsewhere some other place my life above places paths nothing else brief places long paths the quickest way or a thousand detours the safest way always at night light a little less A to B B to C home at last safe at last drop sleep [...] B to C C to D from hell to home hell to home to hell always at night Z to A divine forgetting enough (68)

Here, he remembers Belacqua travelling from one European city to another, Mercier and Camier circling around the city in detours without reaching their destination, and he also reflects on his own condition, in which he cannot separate home from hell. After deluding himself that he is not alone, but accompanied with Pims, Krams, and Krims, he acknowledges towards the end of the second chapter that there is no more Pim and no more Bom, but him alone (83). Although his narration in the second chapter proves that there is actually a Pim, the narrator constantly negates this existence by intermingling

his identity with Pim's: "if he remembers how he got here no one day he found himself here yes like when one is born yes manner of speaking yes if he knows how long ago no not even a rough idea no if he remembers how he lived no always lived like that yes flat on his belly in the mud yes in the dark yes with his sack yes" (83). After presenting the illusion that there are two separate characters: a tormentor and a victim, the narrator reveals that these are the two parts of the same person, changing the roles of the tormentor and the victim, the journeyer and the expecter, Pim and Bom. With this revelation, the second chapter ends. Pim leaves, the narrator becomes Pim and waits for his tormentor, Bom.

In the third chapter, the narrator is half sunk in the mud. The movement is now impossible and unnecessary since it is time for the narrator to wait. All he can do is to reflect on his previous journey to Pim, his time with Pim, and his connection with Pims, Boms, and Bems¹⁴. He comments on the replacements among these characters as follows:

two there were two of us his hand on my arse someone had come Bom Bem one syllable m at the end all that matters Bem had come to cleave to me see later Pim and me I had come to cleave to Pim (95)

at the instant Pim leaves me and goes towards the other Bem leaves the other and comes towards me I place myself at my point of view migration of slime-worms then or tailed latrinal scissiparous frenzy days of great gaiety (98)

the same voice the same things nothing changing but the names and hardly they two are enough nameless each awaits his Bom nameless goes towards his Pim (99)

The narrator realises that the journey he, Pim, Bom, and Bem undertake is innumerable. Since he does not remember how he got in the mud, or how long he has been there, he assumes that the journey is undertaken perpetually by countless number of journeyers, "and how there are three of us four a million and there I am always was with Pim Bom and another and 999997 others journeying alone rotting alone martyring and being

¹⁴ These one syllable names ending with 'm' reminds one of the name 'Sam,' a sort of a contraction for Samuel.

martyred” (110). Abbott describes the novel as “[...] not a turning-point or a brand new beginning but a recommencement” (“Beginning Again,” 115). In the novel where nothing in the mud is certain, one thing is clear that a Bom is journeying towards the narrator “right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen yards” (114), just as the narrator journeyed to Pim in the first chapter “right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen yards” (20). Although the names and the roles change, the human fate is the same. As Sage also asserts, “[t]here is no change from the mud, only the pathetic illusion of a change” (96). The mud prevails in the narrator’s existence perpetually, that is why, his actions and murmurings echo one another as he crawls. In the third chapter, he acknowledges this fact and submits to his inevitable fate.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator turns his narrative upon his creator, the writer himself:

of him to whom we are further indebted for our unfailing rations which enable us to advance without pause or rest

of him who God knows who could blame him must sometimes wonder if to these perpetual revictuallings narrations and auditions he might not put an end without ceasing to maintain us in *some kind of being without end* and some kind of justice without flaw who could blame him (italics mine, 122)

The narrator (given a voice by his creator) questions the possibility of an end to his journey through the mud. He concedes that he and his species can never end ‘being,’ by negating the possibility of an end of his journey, “while it is in our interest as tormentors to remain where we are as victims our urge is to move on” (125). While he knows that whatever the pursuit of his journey may be, it will be “without hope” (125), he still feels forced to move on, which is, in fact, the ultimate plight of the Beckettian man. The need to move on surpasses the undeniable futility of the journey.

Considering the gist of *How It Is*, the trajectory of the journey that Beckett’s protagonists embark on is quite noticeable. Federman traces this journey backwards from *How It Is* to *Dream*, from 1961 to 1932 as follows:

[...] one notices how the fictional setting becomes more and more familiar, more recognizable and rational as it regains the many realistic features Beckett has systematically removed, destroyed, or juggled away in the course of his creative journey. Proceeding backward along this literary path, one observes how the characters recover those physical and human attributes that had been gradually eliminated from their existence, and how these figures regain a functional position in social reality. It is as though they were returning from a descent into the infernal limbos of their own extravagant minds – the region of irresponsibility and unreality. At the same time, their environment, the external world, and society acquire a semblance of order and stability. (13)

Accordingly, when one pursues this journey forwards, one can recognise the gradual deformation and dissolution in characters' bodies, minds, and environments. Fletcher highlights “[...] the steady decomposition of the Beckettian hero from the Belacqua of *Dream* to the man in the mud of *How It Is*, a breakdown that reflect, and is reflected in, the corruption of the fictional medium” (sic.) (“In Search of Beckett,” 33). The narrator of *How It Is* does not have the same realistic attributes as his precursor Belacqua Shuah. He lacks the physical and mental characteristics which were present in his past lives:

in the sack then up to now the tins the opener the cord but the wish for something else no that doesn't seem to have been given to me this time [...] (7)

no the wish to be less wretched a little less the wish for a little beauty no when the panting stops I hear nothing of the kind that's not how I'm told this time (7)

The narrator of *How It Is* does not pursue the same motivation as the early Beckettian men. While Belacqua in *Dream* seeks a form of existence where he can enjoy a complete lethargic existence for good, Mercier and Camier also go after a similar cause, though they are now alienated from the outer reality and do not know where to go or how to get there in order to acquire this sort of existence. However, in the case of the narrator in *How It Is*, he does not possess the physical qualities, which allowed the former protagonists to maintain their corporeal assets in their journey to the unknown and unattainable, since he is merely described as a deformed body struggling to move.

He also cannot procure the mental predisposition to move forward for a preferable form of existence. He is only given the impulse to prove his own existence, let alone a better one. He is not even granted the desire for a Belacqua bliss, or a womb-tomb existence, in that matter. He repeats the same false purgatorial journey over and over to make sure he still exists.

In this respect, the journey of the narrator of *How It Is* is the final stage of the individual's plight which Beckett adverts in his literary quest: the journey of the modern man towards an indolent existence in his mind is futile and absurd, since he cannot stop the decay in his mind, which is reflected upon his physical being and the absurd reality that surrounds him. The imbroglio he is in brings forward the perpetual purgatorial journey that Beckett's characters have all taken. Nevertheless, as Beckett's universe gets darker and more impassable, so does the journey his protagonists take.

Throughout *How It Is*, the narrator gives information about his condition in the mud. His habitat is a place where "one doesn't die" (81). It is described as a place of oblivion, a sort of nowhere. Although he does not know how or when he got here, or how long he has been here, he knows that he is in the same condition "ever since the womb" (81). As discussed earlier in the Introduction, the ultimate sin of the Beckettian man is being born. Since birth, he strives to find a way to go back to the womb. In the case of the Beckettian man, it is the Belacqua lethargy which provides a womb-tomb existence. However, Beckett does not allow his derelicts to achieve such existence. Belacqua in *Dream* redeems himself from his sin of being by dying in *MPTK*. As for Mercier and Camier, they can neither reach a womb-tomb existence nor die in their futile journey to their indescribable purpose, since the Beckettian universe does not provide them with such solution. However, the narrator of *How It Is* not only acknowledges that he cannot reach a womb-tomb existence, but also knows that there is no chance of dying in his life this time. He "wishes to die yes but doesn't expect to no he expects to stay where he is yes flat as a cowclap on his belly yes in the mud yes without motion yes without thought yes eternally yes" (84). This is where the novel subverts Dante's concept of purgation. Dante's souls in Purgatory climb the ledges of Purgatory step by step recovering from the seven deadly sins, and they are accepted to Paradise as purified souls. The narrator of *How It Is*, on the other hand, cannot overcome the sin of birth,

and he is not granted with death. While Dante's purgatorial journey comes to an end, which allows him to enter through the gate of Paradise and be bestowed the universal wisdom, the narrator of *How It Is* recapitulates the same phases without even getting a sense of salvation.

At this point, Beckett's literary journey goes under a gradual disintegration, in that, the purgatory he created for his early characters turns into a limbo¹⁵, even a sort of Inferno. In Dante's *Comedy*, Dante and Virgil enters the first circle of Inferno, Limbo, where the souls, who are not baptised or lived before Christ, inhabit. As Virgil, also a resident of the same circle, explains, "[f]or such defects, not for other faults, / are we lost, and afflicted only / in that we live in longing without hope" (*Comedy* 23). In the opening of the canto, Huse explicates this passage as follows: "[t]heir damnation is an article of faith, beyond man's understanding. Here there is no torment other than a sense of unfulfillment, a feeling that expresses itself in melancholy, in suspense, in a vague longing for knowledge of God and for a solution of the mystery of life without hope of ever having either" (*Comedy* 22). The narrator of *How It Is* is in a similar condition in the mud. He is damned to the dark in the mud without knowing the reason. Suspense prevails in the whole novel as he tries to reach Pim, finds him, and then waits for another being to find him. Kenner outlines the vicious circle that the narrator of *How It Is* experiences in the mud as follows:

And Pim got that life from someone else before, and I shall transmit it to someone else later on; for there are beginning to be premonitions of a day when I shall lie like Pim, and a certain Bom, with sack and can-opener, will come rudely to me and serve me as I serve Pim now. And a single life-story will be transmitted, passed along the unending series, modified by each in accordance with his preferences and needs. (*A Reader's Guide* 141-142)

It is, indeed, the narrator's fate to crawl in the dark and the mud repeating the same phrases over and over again without any hope for salvation. The concept of salvation in Beckettian universe corresponds to a Belacqua condition, in a lethargic and indifferent existence. However, the narrator of *How It Is* is not bestowed with the desire for such

¹⁵ Although the concept of 'limbo' is referred in Dante's *Comedy* as one of the circles in Inferno (*Comedy* 21), in Beckett's texts, the word is reassigned the meaning of an ambiguous, in-between place, neither a hell nor a heaven, where his characters wait for an indefinite period, perpetually in their case.

existence. He describes himself as “clasped to my belly the knees drawn up the back bent in a hoop the tiny head near the knees curled round the sack Belacqua fallen over on his side tired of waiting” (18). Although he shares the same physical posture with Dante’s Belacqua, he does not share the same aspiration for this existence. He has completed his isolation from the outer world, which his predecessors crave to a great extent. However, this isolation is not a Belacquan bliss. It does not provide him with such salvation. On the contrary, the state he finds himself in is the opposite of the Beckettian man’s perception of Paradise. In this sense, it can be claimed that the journey of Beckett’s men is in a reversed direction contrary to that of Dante’s concept of purgation. There is no promise for emancipation or a stable indolent position. This situation is due to Beckett’s evolving idea on hope throughout the years of his writing career. When asked by one of his friends about his perception of hope and life, he quotes Dante, replying: “I would have written over the gates of Heaven what is said to be written over Hell – abandon all hope ye who enter here. [...] That’s what I think of hope” (qtd. in Cronin, 568). This line belongs to the part where Dante and Virgil are about to enter the gate of Inferno, where the doomed souls with no hope of redemption inhabit and suffer for eternity. *How It Is* represents exactly this perspective of Beckett towards life. There cannot be a progressive movement in the narrator’s case, as “[he] never walks, only crawls on the surface of the mud, into which he is never allowed to sink [...] and suffocate, however much he may yearn for such a death” (Fletcher, *The Novels*, 211). Throughout the novel, the narrator does not move, as in the sense of walking, running, or changing locations. The novel begins and ends in the mud. The narrator cannot carry out a movement. He merely puts one leg in front of the other, and still ends up in the mud, reaching nowhere. Indeed, there is no way out for the narrator such as death or insanity, which were the end of earlier heroes like Belacqua, Murphy, and Watt. In this way, the narrator of *How It Is* shares a similar destiny as the characters of Beckett’s second and later prose. Even in Beckett’s second prose period, which includes the early French heroes such as Mercier and Camier, there is a sense of past and present, and a vague sense of outer reality, although this reality does not tolerate the characters’ existence. The past of the narrator of *How It Is* is merely a recollection of Beckett’s past protagonists, and his present is only whispered to him through a voice inside him. In this sense, it can be argued that not only his outer surroundings, but also

his mind is not his own. While with Beckett's earlier heroes, one could be familiar with the environment, whether it is Dublin, London, or another European city, there is no such possibility with the narrator of *How It Is*, since the mud he occupies does not look familiar at all. In Beckett's earlier novels, the outer reality is out there, but is too cruel to tolerate his vagabonds in a way that the characters find themselves expelled from places most of the time (Mercier and Camier always find themselves on the street after their short visits to Helen's or pubs). However, in the case of *How It Is*, there is no recognisable, solid outer reality to tolerate the existence of the narrator.

At that point, one comes to look for the concept of 'pseudo-couple' which occupies an important role in Beckett's writing since 1947, with *Mercier and Camier*. Beckett created the pseudo-couples in order to analyse the division between the body and the mind of the individual. The reason why Beckett's couples are pseudo-couples is that they do not form two separate beings, but two contrasting parts of the same being. In *How It Is*, this division is achieved through the discovery of Pim whom the narrator makes up so as to affirm the existence of another creature in the mud apart from his. According to Coe, "Pim is the promise of human contact, of a need satisfied, of communication, of companionship. And as the crawling, nauseating journey continues, Pim seems a haven, a beacon of hope in an eternal void of hopelessness, a goal: the goal of communication" (84). The need for human contact is the underlying indicator for self-actualisation. Throughout the novel, the name of Pim changes to Pem, Bem, Bom and so on. In Beckett's universe, the protagonists have the need to prove another existence in their surrounding so that they can confirm their own. In *How It Is*, it is managed through the discovery of Pim, to whom the narrator strives to reach. Pim is the very motivation for the narrator's journey, since he asserts that "all I hear is that a witness I'd need a witness" (13). Indeed, Pim is the witness that enables the narrator to claim an existence of his own. The main motivation of the narrator's journey is based on finding Pim, since Pim is the one "[...] who will situate him in space and time" (Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, 200). The very structure of the novel is formed upon the phases: before Pim, with Pim, and after Pim even on the first page of the novel: "how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say as I hear it" (3). The narrator tries to acknowledge his own existence parallel to the possible existence of Pim. In this respect, the role that the narrator attributes to Pim indicates the connection

of *How It Is* to Dante's Purgatory. O'Reilly advocates that the novel has been read "[...] as an allegory of earthly existence or of writing process as such, as the description of a *Purgatorio*-like afterlife, or as an investigation into the nature of God as by turns a purveyor of victuals and a disengaged witness" (xiii). The novel has, in fact, a *Purgatorio*-like atmosphere where the narrator seeks to attain something which is beyond his current situation, the evidence of his own being. However, this time the objective is not the Belacqua bliss, which earlier Beckettian men strive to acquire, but it is the gist of the modern man's struggle in the twentieth-century world: the meaning of one's own existence.

In this respect, the novel oscillates between Dante's Purgatory and Inferno. As Beckett's approach to the individual's existence gets more pessimistic, the Dantean influence on his works becomes more profound, and the wall between Inferno and Purgatory is intertwined leaving the later Beckettian protagonists in a predicament between the penance of Purgatory and the punishment of Inferno (Haughton 146). This argument evokes the statement Beckett made about this world in his essay on Joyce's *Work In Progress*: that this world is Purgatory ("Bruno," 22). While the stories of the worldlier characters take place in more realistic settings, which resemble Beckett's modern world of the twentieth century, the settings of the later stories become more unfamiliar and alien. As the characters' impasse gets more desperate and irreversible, so do the characters' physical conditions and surroundings. Belacqua in *Dream* is the resident of a familiar world which includes real cities, such as Dublin, Vienna, and Paris. However, the setting of *How It Is* is depicted by the narrator regularly: "[...] the mud the dark I recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude nothing else for the moment" (4). The place he inhabits cannot be associated with any realistic surrounding. Therefore, the Purgatory he lives loses its attribute as "[...] the flood of movement and vitality" as Beckett once suggested ("Bruno," 22). The mud does not shelter the living, only the protagonist and some shadows, whose existence he cannot be sure of. Although the narrator attempts to move his body throughout the novel, there is not a significant sense of movement, as he always ends up in the mud reaching nowhere. In this sense, the concept of journey, which is associated with the purgatorial movement, loses its validity in *How It Is*. After *Mercier and Camier*, the Beckettian man completely loses his sense of direction and objective, which he more or less had in

the early novels. Beckett explains Dante's concept of purgation as a journey from the real vegetation, which is Ante-purgatory, towards the ideal vegetation, which is Terrestrial Paradise ("Bruno," 21). His subversion of this purgative journey lies in the fact that the ideal vegetation for the Beckettian man is, in fact, Belacqua's indolent position in Ante-purgatory. This way, Beckett's vagabonds strive and suffer throughout their journeys to reach this status, just like Dante's souls struggle in Purgatory to reach the Gate of Paradise. Belacqua in *Dream* enjoys this vegetation from time to time and seeks to attain it for good. His journey ends with a tragicomic death. When it comes to Mercier and Camier, since they lose their sense of direction, they do not even know what they are supposed to look for. They spend their time wandering the streets and the bogs endlessly with little touch with the outer reality, and without a definite ending. In *How It Is*, a subverted sense of purgatorial journey merges with an Inferno-like atmosphere, rendering the narrator in oscillation between two realms. Rather than focusing on moving and reaching a point, the narrator seems to be occupied with the voice talking about his past lives, and echoes those past memories, like the souls in Dante's Inferno and Purgatory. In one of his interviews, Beckett recalls a conversation with Joyce, where Joyce makes a comment on Dante's Purgatory: "[w]hat runs through the whole of Dante [...] is less the longing for Paradise than the nostalgia for being. Everyone in the poem says 'lo fui' – I was, I was" (qtd. in Knowlson 723). This statement is one of the aspects that connect *How It Is* to Dante's Purgatory, highlighting the fact that the narrator constantly recalls his past lives, narrating visions from his memories. However, there is no enthusiasm in Beckett's narrator to move forward, unlike the souls in Dante's Purgatory. He no longer believes in a sort of salvation. When he tries but fails to sleep, he reflects on the souls (presumably the ones in Dante's Purgatory): "prayer in vain to sleep I have no right to it yet I haven't yet deserved it prayer for prayer's sake when all fails when I think of the souls in torment true torment true souls who have no right to it no right ever to sleep we're talking of sleep I prayed for them once if I may believe an old view it has faded" (29). The determination of the souls in Purgatory and their persistent efforts to reach Paradise lack in the narrator of *How It Is*. This determination does not hold a place in his life this time.

The past memories, which are told to the narrator by the voice, bring about certain images, which he calls "life in the light" referring to his earlier existence as a member of

the society, like Belacqua. When quoting these images as he hears them, the narrator falls into repetition and self-negation:

life in the light first image some creature or other I watched him after my fashion
from afar through my spy-glass sidelong in mirrors through mirrors at night first
image

saying to myself he's better than he was better than yesterday less ugly less stupid
less cruel less dirty less old less wretched and you saying to myself and you bad to
worse bad to worse steadily

something wrong there

or no worse saying to myself no worse you're no worse and was worse

I pissed and shat another image in my crib never so clean since

I scissored into slender strips the wings of butterflies first one wing then the other
sometimes for a change the two abreast never so good since

that's all for the moment there I leave I hear it murmur it to the mud there I leave
for the moment life in the light it goes out

on my face in the mud and the dark I see me it's a halt nothing more I'm
journeying it's a rest nothing more (5)

After the narrator's uninterrupted stream of memories and his constant conflict with himself, the voice stops, and the narrator stops quoting the memories. He begins to reflect on his current situation in the mud. He believes that he is journeying, in other words, proceeding towards an objective, but at the same time, he confirms that his condition is nothing more than a permanent rest. He still has the motivation to move, which is an essential element of Purgatory, but he also acknowledges that he is stuck in the mud for good, which is the hopeless fate of the souls in Inferno. This contradiction in his perception situates the narrator shifting between Purgatory and Inferno.

Beckett's adoption of Inferno along with Purgatory in his later works is quite evident considering the settings, the characters' predicaments, and the language. In *How It Is*, Beckett distorts the functionality of language by eliminating all punctuation marks from the text, leaving every word the narrator utters vulnerable to misreadings or multiple interpretations. Haughton affiliates this intended distortion with a vision from Dante's Inferno. Dante and Virgil come across the muddy people in the swamp called Styx:

The water was darker than purplish-black;
 and, accompanying the murky waves,
 on a rough path, we reached the place below.

This dreary stream forms a marsh, the Styx,
 when it has reached the foot
 of the gray, malignant banks.

And I, who remained intent on looking,
 saw muddy people in that bog,
 naked, and with angry looks.

They struck each other not only with their hands,
 but with their heads, chests, and feet,
 and tore each other with their teeth, bit by bit.

My good master said, "Son, now see
 the souls of those whom anger overcame;
 I wish you to believe also

that under the water there are people sighing
 and making bubbles on the surface
 as your eyes tell you wherever you look.

Fixed in the slime they say, "Sullen were we
 in the sweet air gladdened by the sun,
 keeping within us the fumes of spite;

now we are sullen in the black mire.'
 This hymn is gurgled in their throats,
 for they cannot speak in clear words."

Thus we covered a wide arc around the filthy slough
 between the dry bank and the swamp,
 with eyes turned to those swallowing the mire. (*Comedy*, 39-40)

This horrific atmosphere that Dante describes with terror is the natural habitat of Beckett's narrator. As the souls suffer in decay in the mud and try to tell their stories, their past and present, so does the narrator of *How It Is*. Like these souls, the narrator torments his victim, Pim, using his nails to torture him by ripping his back. However, it is not anger that makes the narrator torture Pim, but a need to communicate. As Haughton aptly puts it:

The theological structure of the fourteenth-century poet's hierarchical cosmos and its progressive narrative [...] have collapsed, or been rendered redundant. The rattling staccato speaker of *How It Is* speaks to us, not as Dante does as a voyager and voyeur, travelling on through hell to higher regions, in the company of a serene

classical guide, but as an inmate of one of the circle of Dante's inferno [...]. The breakdown of language noted by Virgil in the speech of the sullen Stygian bogmen who can't speak 'parola integra' [fully formed words] inflects the whole of Beckett's text. The text is composed of whole words alright, but whole words composed into unpunctuated syntactical groupings in which the relations between words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs are perpetually unsettled and re-articulated. (149-150)

By writing from the perspective of the damned rather than the all-seeing authority, Beckett undermines Dante's journey as his character cannot achieve the sort of revelation as Dante does at the end of his work. Kenner regards *How It Is* as "[...] Beckett's Inferno, told from the inside, not like Dante's from the standpoint of a privileged tourist, and in its starkness, uncertainty, and paradoxical intelligibility a very twentieth-century hell" (*A Reader's Guide* 146). The damned souls in Dante's Inferno do not have Dante's privilege to enter through the gate of Paradise and acquire divine knowledge. Instead, they can only reflect on their past lives while suffering in Inferno for eternity. Sharing quite a few similar qualities with the muddy people of Styx, the narrator of *How It Is* is closer to be an inhabitant of Inferno than the earlier Beckettian derelicts. In fact, this thematic affinity with Inferno predominates most of Beckett's later stories. According to Fowlie, "[f]or the early characters of Beckett no voyage in the supernatural sense is possible, and for the later characters in his writings – after *Molloy* – there will be no moving ahead, no voyage possible in even the natural sense" ("Dante and Beckett" 131). Indeed, physical movement for the narrator of *How It Is* is an extreme challenge, since he is crawling rather than walking in the mud, "right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen yards towards Pim" (20). This physical strain prevents the narrator to form a journey out of his forced movements. In this sense, the novel seems to find a place more in Inferno than Purgatory, the realm which requires motion. However, what makes the atmosphere of the story still a part of Purgatory is that the narrator struggles to reach someone called Pim, and after Pim leaves, he waits for someone to reach him despite all (Fowlie 150). Since the whole novel plies between moving and waiting, neither the narrator nor the narrative can completely fit in Inferno, but rather oscillate between the two realms, and his narration amplifies this situation.

As mentioned earlier, Beckett did not use any punctuation marks in the text, but extravagant paragraph indentations in irrelevant spots as breath pauses, hence, the narrator tells the story as if he is talking ceaselessly, interrupting his speech merely to breathe. Thus, the whole novel can be considered as a single speech. Throughout his speech, the narrator speaks of scattered images and reflections of his past. Meanwhile, he constantly negates his own narrative, contributing to his oscillating situation, “what about it my memory we’re talking of my memory not much that it’s getting better that it’s getting worse that things are coming back to me nothing is coming back to me” (10). The disorganised and incoherent bundle of words reflect the chaos in theme, and in technique. After several attempts of writing the typescript of the novel, Beckett, as O’Reilly recounts, “[...] inserted forward slashes throughout, at points where he decided to sub-divide or fragment the prose. Rather than units of meaning, these fragments re-configure the narrative as units of breath. Occasionally the narrator stops to ponder what he is saying, but mostly he pauses only to take breath before continuing” (ix). In line with this statement, one can argue that the narrator’s difficulty in his physical movement parallels with his narration, which is also fragmented and incoherent. Andonian suggests that the narrator lacks physical “coordination,” that “the parts of his body are seen as separate entities and will no longer work in coordination and normal sequence” (“After the Trilogy” 24). This physical incapability complies with his narrating the story. On the very first page, the narrator states that he is “quoting” rather than telling the story (3). This choice of word implies that the words do not come from him, but to him from someone else: “in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine” (3). The source of the voice is not identified in the novel. However, one can claim that it is the very voice of Beckett muttering the words while writing the text. This self-exposure highlights the failure of the narrative, that is, the knowledge of the narrator’s inability to speak his own words, to narrate his own narration deems the whole novel as a failure. Thus, the narrator is able to neither move coordinately nor narrate accurately.

However, the constant urge to speak (even when it obstructs his movements) indicates the same pursuit for which the narrator invents and tries to reach Pim: to prove his own existence. The narrator can only exist as long as he continues to talk. This is the only endowment Beckett provides for his character. Losing all physical attributes and

connection to the outer reality (which Beckett's outcasts from the earlier and transition periods could enjoy to a degree), the narrator of *How It Is* has nothing but a voice to tell him what to say. In a sense, like the Unnamable, the narrator can be considered as a sort of echo of what is left from Belacqua, Murphy, Watt, Mercier, and Camier. As mentioned earlier, *How It Is* was written as a sequel to *the Unnamable*. Coe pinpoints this continuity as follows:

The situation of the "I" of *Comment C'est* is simply that of The Unnamable who has failed – and knows that he has failed – to escape from time into the *Néant*. He has evaded time as a continuum, only to fall into time as a series of cycles. He has achieved his instantaneity, but at a cost. Or rather, all time, past, present and future, has resolved itself into an instantaneous present [...] because past, present and future are cyclical, and every series of act in time repeats itself to infinity. All past, all future (for future is merely past repeated) exist simultaneously, but in the form of disconnected fragments of present consciousness: each "block" of words, in fact, is a fragment of time extracted from eternity, realised provisionally in the present in one of its infinite repetitions [...] (82-83)

Most of the earlier characters had physical and mental inconveniences. Belacqua had troubles with his belly; Camier had a cyst; Molloy had limping etc. These physical deformations are transformed into the narrator's crawling. The gradual dissolution in physical integrity indicates the descending hope, which causes the mind and the narrative to become fragmented and abject. Like his predecessors, the narrator of *How It Is* wanders in a timeless cycle; however, unlike them, he is aware of his situation and no longer yearns for a way out. He recalls or is reminded by the voice of certain memories / images from a place which he names "life in the light" (5). By this term, he refers to his past lives, the lives of the earlier Beckettian men, and recognises the loss of those parts of his lives: "I say it my life as it comes natural order my lips move I can feel them it comes out in the mud my life what remains *ill-said ill-recaptured* when the panting stops *ill-murmured* to the mud in the present all that things so ancient natural order the journey the couple the abandon all that in the present barely audible bits and scraps" (italics mine, 15). Indeed, the remains of his past are merely "bits and scraps," whispered by another voice, other than his, and he acknowledges that the journey and the motivation to pursue that journey in search of a better existence are no longer the subject matters of his present life. He also approves that his life is what remains from

his past lives, “ill-said” and “ill-murmured,” a poor echo. Here, he only has the drive to confirm his existence by talking/quoting, and the impulse for his existence to be confirmed by someone else. To achieve this, he searches for Pim, whose existence one cannot be sure of, since the narrator himself negates his own search by claiming “Pim, he does not exist” (21). Still, only through the existence of Pim and the continuity of the narration can the narrator preserve his own existence. As Dearlove also points out, “[l]ike a tree falling in an uninhabited forest, does a voice speaking in the eternal present need some ‘other’ to hear its words and confirm its existence? [...] The actual reality of a witness is less an issue than are the images and theories resulting from the narrator’s felt need for one” (“The Voice” 160). Indeed, unlike most of Beckett’s earlier derelicts, who do not doubt their existence, and who spend their time in the texts to discover a better existence, or to find new mediums and territories to fulfil their desire for a Belacqua bliss, the narrator of *How It Is* recognises that his existence will continue as long as the text / the voice continues. Dearlove articulates this plight of Beckettian man as follows:

The shift in Beckett’s framework begins with the reduction of everything to a voice speaking in an eternal present. Whereas *Mallow*, *Malone Dies*, and even *The Unnamable* contains vestigial characters with bits and scraps of a plot still clinging to them, *How It Is* reduces even those fragmentary characters and plots until there remain only the archetypal elements of the panting, the murmur, the dark, and the mud. Of these elements, only the murmur in the mud has the capacity to differentiate, to individuate, to create. This imaginative murmur, then, is the source and substance of the universe – of the Pims and Boms, the sacks and tins, the memories and images. Only through our reading of the voice’s whey of words does the narrator assume an identity or existence. Indeed, as the initial and final ‘stanzas’ reveal, the book itself is literally a quotation of the voice’s narration. Instead of a three-part division of eternity, we have the perpetual present formulation of a voice creating itself in the here and now. When the voice ceases, so does *How It Is*, and our journey through its bizarre world ends. (“The Voice” 154)

While the earlier characters in Beckett’s universe sought a way to isolate themselves from the outer reality and retreat into a womb-tomb existence in their minds, *How It Is* deals with the question, “what happens when the mind loses all its connection with outer reality?” The underlying answer is: “Godot has come, and nothing essential has been changed” (Coe 83). The result is a chaos. The mud, then, chosen as the only setting

in the novel, has a significant function in highlighting the narrator's impasse and pinpointing Beckett's perception of the universe. Herbert suggests that the mud can be considered both as a "[...] metaphor for the excremental quality of human existence," and "as the end result of the entropic forces of the universe upon matter"¹⁶ (221-222). Accordingly, the mud in the novel symbolises the vicious and wretched condition of the individual faced with the chaos that the universe imposes upon him. The mud, for Herbert, is "[...] what would result if the matter of all we know on earth were left to break down to its elemental state; it is the end of order. [...] Chaos, in one view, is the natural state of the universe; order of the enforced" (222). Indeed, the mud in *How It Is* is what is left from the history of Beckettian man. As the characters decompose physically and mentally, the result is the narrator of *How It Is*, crawling naked in the mud, his mind fragmented, and his body uncoordinated and deformed; and as the outer reality disintegrates gradually and the settings get less realistic and more pseudo, the result is the perpetual mud, addressing the chaotic form of the universe. In this sense, the novel can be regarded as an opposition to Dante's perfectly formed, coherent, and harmonic universal order. As Kalt also points out, "[in] How It Is the dictates of divine order in a balanced cosmos have become senseless screamings in a chaotic void" (31). For the narrator of the novel, there is no promise of an order or a better existence in mind, since the mud he resides in reflects the chaos of the universe he is subjected to. The very motivation that relates Beckett's vagabonds to the individual quest provided by the concept of Purgatory, no matter how subverted it may be, is no more present in *How It Is*. The narrator acknowledges that the derelicts from his past lives strived to achieve his current state. However, as opposed to their expectations, this absolute isolation from the outer world is not a Paradise, but an eerie Limbo: "stay for ever in the same place never had any other ambition with my little dead weight in the warm mire scoop my wallow and stir from it no more that old dream back again I live it now at this creeping hour know what it's worth was worth" (32). As mentioned earlier, the narrator is the last reincarnation of Belacqua in Beckett's novels. As Coe aptly puts it, the narrator is still a version of Belacqua, but "[...] a Belacqua who knows that his purgatory will have no end; and having abandoned all hope, save that of reaching Pim, he begins to savour his very indifference, to derive from infinitesimally small variations

¹⁶ Herbert defines entropy as "[...] the tendency for form to reduce itself to chaos" (222).

of comfort and discomfort within the unbroken circle of infinite futility, a kind of happiness” (*Beckett* 84). The vicious cycle of impossible purgation which began with Belacqua in *Dream* is completed with the narrator of *How It Is*. Kenner summarises this single journey throughout Beckett’s works as follows:

A man (first version) is thrown out of the house by his upright family (“L’Expulsé”), and slowly loses the capacity for human intercourse; [...] wanders for some years on the continent [*Dream*] and in London (*Murphy*), puzzling over the realities of the Irish world in which he once participated (*Watt*); has for a while a companion (*Mercier et Camier*) with whom, having become a twilight man, he is never able to achieve a satisfactory intimacy; rediscovers a need for his mother (*Molloy*) but does not prosecute it; lapses into telling himself endless stories (*Malone Dies*) and so into an inferno of words (*The Unnamable*) in which the last shreds of his identity dissolve; then stirred at last by a hunger he has never admitted (*Godot, Embers*) for the presence and succor of other persons, some other person, excogitates out of his now irremediable darkness (*Comment C’est*) a myth of his hopeless situation and a fiction of what release into memory another presence might bring to it. (*A Critical Study*, 201-202)

The narrator of *How It Is* is abandoned in a perpetual present, and when the very evidence of his own existence is in disturbance, he cannot even find the self-delusion to begin such journey. The playful subversion of Dante’s Purgatory leaves its place to the confusion of the mind when it is stripped off its ties with everything it had connection to. The result is a chaos leaving the narrator mumbling random words revealing the uncertainty of his own existence. This perpetuity is told to the narrator by the voice inside him throughout the novel. The voice says: “then go for good and no goodbyes that age will be over all the ages or merely you no more journeys no more couples no more abandons ever again anywhere hear that” (18). The voice affirms the futility of the notion of journey, which occupies all Beckettian men. Self-negation now prevails over the narration rendering the whole concept of purgation and purgative journey impossible, and the urge to preserve the echoed existence futile, since the narrator’s existence ends when the voice ends, and so does the text:

alone in the mud yes the dark yes sure yes panting yes someone hears me no no
one hears me no murmuring sometimes yes when the panting stops yes not at other
times no in the mud yes to the mud yes my voice yes mine yes not another’s no
mine alone yes sure yes when the panting stops yes on and off yes a few words yes
a few scraps yes that no one hears no but less and less no answer LESS AND LESS
yes

so things may change no answer end no answer I may choke no answer sink no
 answer sully the mud no more no answer the dark no answer trouble the peace no
 more no answer the silence no answer die no answer DIE screams I MAY DIE
 screams I SHALL DIE screams good

good good end at last of part three and last that's how it was end of quotation after
 Pim how it is (128-9)

With his last novel, Beckett aggregates the plight of all his previous derelicts. As Brée asserts, “[w]ith *How It Is* Beckett seems to have emptied his imaginary world of all that is not essential to a fundamental image of man’s fate, arriving at a sort of diagram of his own intimate drama: a dumb mortal committed to physical disintegration, headed for death, but who is at the same time possessed by a voice, ‘not his own,’ which he is unable to annihilate” (86-87). Through the futile journeys of his vagabonds, Beckett presents how he himself sees life. At one point, the narrator addresses his creator as “namely first to have done with this not one of us” (124). He points out the very origin of the Beckettian men, the writer himself. Not having a voice of his own, the narrator is obliged to ‘quote’ what his creator utters. Beckett imposes the rules of his universe upon the characters he creates. In Beckett’s universe, nothing functions properly. The movement of the individual is always a regression, his body cannot escape deterioration, and his mind is fragmented like the narrative. In the life that is bestowed to the Beckettian derelicts, “[...] a couple may be formed, and then the voyage continues in solitude, until there is another brief coupling, with the partners reversing their roles. In spite of that reversal, in spite of a straight-line momentum, and although he may deny it, man keeps going round in circles, repeating a few ridiculous phrases, a few ridiculous gestures” (Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, 206-207). Therefore, Beckett’s last novel, *How It Is* predicates the ultimate plight of the modern man. Unlike the reformatory and purgative form of Dante’s Purgatory, Beckett’s universe provides his vagabonds with impasse of a cyclical Purgatory merged with the aspects of Inferno. Beckettian man is no longer a member of the outer world, and he cannot enjoy the lethargic Belacqua state in his mind, since it turns out to be a hell-ish Purgatory rather than a Paradise. The journey that begins with Belacqua’s idle wanderings in several European cities in search of an escape from the outer reality represented by women in *Dream* continues with Mercier and Camier’s pathetic wanderings in a vaguely realistic surrounding towards an

indescribable destination with an increasing sense of disengagement from the outer world. The journey is completed (or continued as far as possible) in *How It Is*, in which the Beckettian man is damned to oscillate between Purgatory and Inferno without the privilege to decide for himself. He does what he is told to do. For him, “the life above in the light” is no longer an option, but he cannot enjoy the Belacqua bliss either, because the Beckettian universe never allows its people to achieve such fulfilment or revelation. *How It Is*, thus, remains as another failed attempt to Belacqua bliss in Purgatory, leaving the narrator in a permanent aporia.

CONCLUSION

Samuel Beckett's interest in Dante was a life-long obsession, from his childhood when he read Dante as a schoolboy to the last days of his life when he kept Dante's *Comedy* on his desk. The ground of this obsession can be found in his novels, as well as his other works, where he rewrote Dante's Purgatory in a more playful and subverted manner. Beckett's perception of purgation drastically contradicts with Dante's approach to the concept from a religious perspective. In Dante's *Comedy*, the theme of purgation is quite essential for man's salvation. Unlike the souls who are beyond redeemable due to their sins and damned to suffer for these sins in Inferno eternally, the souls in Purgatory are the ones who are worthy for Paradise. They go through several ledges in the mountain of Purgatory being punished and atoning for their sins on earth, and eventually they enter through the gate of Paradise, and are bestowed with the divine knowledge and peace. Beckett found this religious system of indemnification quite uncongenial with the situation of the modern man in the twentieth century. His mindset regarding the modern man was of a more pessimistic perspective. This divine existence in Paradise as a result of severe punishment seemed to Beckett implausible and impossible. For him, the world he lived in was a twisted Purgatory itself. According to Dante's vision of Purgatory, the soul is punished for his sins and is rewarded with Paradise for his atonement. However, in Beckett's world, the individual suffers but cannot attain a recompense for his suffering. At this point, Beckett's contradictory understanding of sin is notable. While Dante's souls in Purgatory are responsible with the cardinal vices, in other words, seven deadly sins, Beckett's man is condemned to the sin of being born, his birth itself. The meaning of purgation for the Beckettian man is to redeem from being born and regain his state in the womb. That is why, most Beckettian characters take a foetal posture, like that of Dante's Belacqua, their heads between their hands bending. Moreover, that is why they yearn for a womb-tomb existence in their minds, since it is the closest they can get to their prenatal condition. However, since the Beckettian man cannot redeem from having been born, his suffering on earth (his own Purgatory) becomes frustrating and his life on earth is deemed futile.

This conception prevails in most of Beckett's literary agenda. His characters are the representative of the modern man. Since the life of the Beckettian man on earth, in the outer world, consists of mere flounder and absurd anguish, he embarks on a quest to an existence outside of the boundaries of the physical world. It is a journey towards a lethargic existence in the mind. Beckett grounds this ideal existence on Dante's Belacqua, an indolent resident of Ante-purgatory. Belacqua's indifference to the concept of purgation in Purgatory and to the very idea of a purgative journey influenced Beckett to form his outcasts in his works. As Hassan aptly puts it, "[...] Dante's Belacqua, reclining in *Purgatory*, becomes the archetype of all Beckett's heroes who delay their salvation through spiritual indifference. [...] The shadow of Belacqua [...] falls on all the heroes of Beckett – from Murphy strapped in his rocking chair to Pim crawling through the mud – in testimony of the vanity of human effort" (qtd. in McNeil 127). The direction of their journeys is always towards the state of Dante's Belacqua. This indifferent existence is what Beckett's characters consider as their Paradise. However, in Beckett's universe, such existence is also impossible, since the fate of the Beckettian man is subjected to futility and despair in an endless Purgatory. Dante's perception of the universe dominated by Divine Order is challenged by Beckett's interpretation of the universe prevailed by chaos and meaninglessness. Considering this pessimistic approach to man's existence, Beckett's literary trajectory holds a paramount importance, since one can only understand the evolution of Beckett's redefinition of purgation and subversion of Purgatory by tracing his novels from the first one to the last.

In his first novel, *Dream*, Beckett introduces the journey to a lethargic existence in the mind by following his protagonist, Belacqua Shuah, travelling through several European cities, trying to cut his ties with the outer world, represented by the women in the novel. Belacqua in *Dream* pursues a Belacquan existence like the one of Dante's Belacqua. However, as a recognised member of the society and a part of the outer world he lives in, Belacqua cannot achieve such existence permanently. He can only enjoy this condition momentarily when he is away from the women in his life. Belacqua's obstacle to this existence is his dilemma of both being a traditional character and striving to

escape that traditional order. He is a young scholar who holds a place in the society, and a physical being in his relationships with several women. His presence in and dependence on the outer world prevents Belacqua from isolating himself from that world. It is the predicament of Beckett's first wanderer: belonging to the very outer reality which he struggles to escape. Belacqua's in-between situation in *Dream* indicates Beckett's newly emerging approach to the concept of a subverted purgation. Beckett wrote *Dream* when he was an amateur writer in the 1930s. Therefore, his writing was more traditional than his later works. Both the technique and the theme of *Dream* were created in an orthodox method. As a writer who did not cut his ties with the traditional writing yet, Beckett's creation of Belacqua and his approach to the concept of a subverted purgation were no different in terms of his writing style. In line with this argument, Beckett grants his outcast a way out, which the characters in his later periods cannot attain. Belacqua dies in Beckett's short story collection, *MPTK*. Death provides Belacqua with a release from his predicament, if not an emancipation. Although his futile journey towards an indolent existence is not fulfilled, he does not go through Beckett's subverted Purgatory perpetually, unlike his descendants. It is possible to claim that Belacqua is the first project through which Beckett experiments with the concept of impassable purgation. He attempts to surpass the physical reality for the sake of a Belacquan bliss, which he retains temporarily, but not for good. Since he remains as a member of the outer reality, his quest to an indifferent existence is deemed hopeless and vain. This pattern of quest is resumed by Beckett's later derelicts in his early English period, like Murphy and Watt. Sharing a similar fate with Belacqua, Murphy and Watt also strive in vain to retreat into the secluded territories of their minds, but fail. As Murphy dies and Watt becomes insane, their futile journeys are also granted an end. With Beckett's transition period, his early French writing, these merciful endings leave their place to perpetual wanderings of the protagonists, whose purgative journeys are neither fulfilled nor ended.

Mercier and Camier, as Beckett's first novel in this French period, is the first example for this interminable wandering in a twisted Purgatory. *Dream*'s realistic atmosphere is replaced by *Mercier and Camier*'s pseudo-realistic world. While in *Dream*, the places

and the cities are clearly named and visualised, the setting in *Mercier and Camier* is not transparent. Although it resembles Beckett's hometown, Dublin, due to the constant raining, the presence of the bogs, the pubs, and the countryside, the location where the two vagabonds are wandering is not identified. Furthermore, Belacqua's position as a member of the outer reality is superseded by Mercier and Camier's alienation from their surroundings. They are no longer a part of the outer reality. As they strive to sever their connection with the outer world, they are also rejected by the same world, since they always find themselves on the streets expelled from places. Unlike Beckett's earlier derelicts, Mercier and Camier cannot name the principle of their journey. They wander through the city and the countryside searching for something which they do not know, and whose existence they are not sure of. The journey, which is indescribable and incessant in *Mercier and Camier* underlies Beckett's increasing subversion of Purgatory. Mercier and Camier suffer physically and mentally, but their suffering cannot promise a salvation for them. They are obliged to make the same journey over and over again without any resolution or end. Dante's souls in Purgatory have the determination in completing their quest and the faith in achieving the divine knowledge and spiritual emancipation. They embrace the punishments of Purgatory knowing that their suffering will end eventually. Mercier and Camier, on the other hand, do not possess such determination, as they constantly change their minds to go back to the city, idle around the city contemplating on their so-called journey until they feel decisive enough to pursue their quest. Even unable to identify their objective, Mercier and Camier often feel desperate and hopeless in fulfilling their quest. Therefore, there is no determination or faith in the case of Mercier and Camier. Occasionally realising their own plight, these two vagabonds pursue a journey without willpower, self-confidence, or aspiration. Moreover, unlike Belacqua, they are not bestowed with the prospect of death. They are stuck in their cyclical Purgatory perpetually, for a sin they cannot redeem from, in search of an existence unattainable and indescribable. In this regard, Beckett increases his tone of inversion of purgation in *Mercier and Camier* compared to *Dream*. The aporia he puts his characters into becomes more absurd and intricate as his attitude towards the individual's existence gets more pessimistic. His characters are more subjugated to the futile and recurring cycle of their own purgatories. After *Mercier and Camier*, Beckett's his later fiction abandons the playful subversion of Dante's

Purgatory, and the trajectory of his novels become more concerned with the damnation of the Beckettian man between a purgatorial and a hellish condition and setting.

How It Is, as Beckett's last novel, holds an essential place in Beckett's writing regarding his relationship with Dante's Purgatory. Here, Beckett furthers his perception of the individual in a chaotic universe, without any divine knowledge or order. The setting of the novel is unlike the atmosphere of the earlier works. The outer reality and reason is abandoned in *How It Is*, replaced by an unfamiliar and perplexing background: the mud. While the ambiances of the earlier novels create a sense of familiarity, the mud does not provide such impression at all, symbolising the narrator's ultimate separation from the outer world. Also, the condition of the narrator in the mud indicates his isolation from the world of physical reality in every sense. He is crawling through the mud without the aim of a better existence, which Beckett's earlier derelicts crave for. He is simply struggling to move on in the mud, narrating his situation, reflecting on his past lives, trying to continue his narration to prove and maintain his existence, let alone searching for a better one. Beckett's portrayal of the individual through the narrator of *How It Is* pinpoints his ultimate judgement regarding man's purgatorial journey and his inevitable failure. Having lost almost all his physical functions and his connection with the outer world, the narrator of the novel represents the condition of the modern man when he finally abandons the outer reality and is stuck in his mind for eternity. Although the narrator's journey towards Pim and his struggles to prove his existence creates an atmosphere of Purgatory, his condition is hellish, leaving him in a state of nowhere, between Purgatory and Inferno, which Beckett describes as Limbo. The purgatorial journeys of Beckett's earlier outcasts turn into the desperate crawling of the narrator of *How It Is*. As a despondent and a mentally and physically disoriented creature, the narrator relives the same hellish Purgatory innumerable times. Belacqua's erratic travels in several European cities, and his vacillations between the world of his fellow men and the indifferent existence in his mind are merely old luxuries, now unattainable for the narrator of *How It Is*. Likewise, the arbitrary wanderings of Mercier and Camier in the city and the countryside are no longer possible for the narrator, since he cannot go back to the outer world, no matter how pseudo it may be. The mud is his permanent residence

now, his past, his present, and his future. Beckett subverts the concept of purgation in a way that his crawling creature is no longer moving towards a redefined image of Paradise (which is the state of Belacqua bliss for the earlier Beckettian men). The concept of Purgatory, no matter how twisted it may be, provide Beckett's earlier derelicts with an explanation for their existence. However, the possibility of purgation is so obliterated in *How It Is* that the only motivation for the narrator to keep moving is to confirm his own existence. Beckett's portrayal of the modern man in *How It Is* amplifies his predominant pessimism about the individual existence, which is damned to ceaseless suffering beyond which there is no meaning.

In conclusion, considering Beckett's literary journey from *Dream* to *How It Is* within the context of Dantean influence, it is important to state that Dante's afterlife, Purgatory in particular, takes place in Beckett's texts through an evolving process. The Purgatory represented in *Dream* is not the same Purgatory represented in *How It Is*. With each text following the previous, Beckett develops his own perception of purgation, and inserts his pessimistic attitude regarding the promising implication of Purgatory into his works. This pessimistic attitude invalidates any purification or consummation. However, though it is impossible for Beckett's man to purge from being born, to return to the womb, he still strives to achieve this status in the lethargy of his mind. Therefore, his journey becomes a futile quest in search of a purgation that is unattainable. This constitutes the whole Beckettian aporia: a Purgatory in vain.

Beckett deals with his characters' absurd purgatorial journeys in a less troubled way in his earlier fiction by forming more familiar atmospheres and down-to-earth protagonists whose struggles and conditions are more or less compatible with their current existence in the outer reality. With his early works in French, Beckett focuses on the predicament of his characters in a more cynical manner. His derelicts become more alienated from their surroundings. They lose mental stability and start decomposing physically and spiritually. The disintegration in their physical and mental conditions underlies their deviation from their quests. Occasionally they realise the absurdity and futility of their purpose and journey, but they continue pursuing it nevertheless. The concept of quest loses its meaning as the characters oscillate between enthusiasm for such quest and

despair in the face of a probable failure. Since they lose the sense of time and space gradually, and death is now impossible, they end up reliving the same purgatorial journey. As Beckett moves further with his subversion of Dante's concept of purgation, he reaches a point where his protagonists, voiceless creatures rather than human beings, no longer wish for such purgation, acknowledging their plight. They simply attempt to move on and narrate to pass the time that is spared to them. In this sense, Beckett redefines purgation, as oppose to Dante's, as a perennial repetition which the Beckettian man cannot surpass, does not expect to surpass, and recognises his failure, yet, feels forced to resume since there is nothing else to do.

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İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 25/06/2018

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