LICKING YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Thinking neighbourliness with Beckett

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IT CAN COUNT as a truism among commentators ancient and modern that understanding the precise meaning of the command to love one's neighbour as oneself is an impossible task because of the fluctuating nature of the concepts of *neighbour* and of *love*. We must not overlook, however, that the famous imperative contains a third concept that is just as inexplicable and subject to historical change as the first two: *the self*. Arguably, it is the basis of the others. Without another self, there is no neighbour and no love either. The appeal to neighbour-love thus comes to resemble the mathematical problem of an equation with three unknown variables: neighbour, love and self. Such problems can be solved, but in most cases, there is not just one, but an infinite number of possible solutions. Which do we pick? I understand the search after a poetics of neighbour-love to be rooted in the conviction that there exists a kind of poetic thinking that steps into character where other forms of thinking fail or are in need of a more nuanced approach, and which affords, to paraphrase Kant's concept of the aesthetic idea, much thought without the fossilizing telos of fixed concepts. This would best be achieved through textual complexities.[1] Jesus, when asked about the neighbour, answers not with a definition, but with a story (the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37)—one of an infinite number of possible stories.

Thinking with texts does not exclude conceptual reflection. By way of conceptual preparation, suffice it to say in this context that the notion of the neighbour seems to entail that I can recognize them as more or less like or at least comparable to me. A Victorian gentleman would not have considered another gentleman's servant as his neighbour even though he might have lived next door. And even in

the most democratic society imaginable not everybody I engage with territorially and socially qualifies as my neighbour. The appeal to neighbourly love thus at least potentially implies a universalism that is begging the question and that seems irreconcilable with the social conditions of most actual societies. This is as true for a community based on the competition for land, livestock and wives (the society of the Hebrew Bible) as for the modern neighbour in an anonymous apartment building. Conversely, when people no longer recognize themselves in their neighbourhood—be it, say, through migration or gentrification—they feel threatened, and they feel threatened first and foremost in their selfhood.[2]

Nigh, meaning "near", the etymological root of "neigh" in *neighbour*, suggests in its literal sense not just a spatial, but also a temporal proximity. The neighbour is not only the one next to me, but also the *next one* in time. This also works in other languages, most conspicuously in the term *Nächster*, as the neighbour is called in German biblical language. The Greek *πλησίον* and its Hebrew antecedents have been traced back to a semantics of "joining (others)".[3] My neighbour comes after me, and if only because she is constituted through my perception. By recognizing someone as a neighbour, I welcome them into the community and bestow on them the quality of possessing a self equal to my own.[4] We constantly need to readjust to new neighbours in such a way that a certain structural relationship between independent selves survives. This might be the reason why Leviticus 19:34 broadens the command of neighbourly love from Leviticus 19:18 to include the (resident) stranger as well.[5] The Jews of the Hebrew Bible had of course the most vivid understanding of what it meant to be strangers in a foreign land and to be those who had joined the neighbourhood, as it were, after those that had come before them.[6] This is crucial. If I do not accept my neighbours as selves equal to myself, this might be because I am a colonialist. If, in turn, I do not feel accepted, I might be a member of a suppressed minority. Before I can even begin to love my neighbours, I have to grant them a status of selfhood comparable to *my own* self, independent of accidental features such as cultural tradition, religion or language.

A problem therefore arises when we are no longer certain of what a self is and whether everyone has or is one. How can we even begin to think of loving (whatever that means) an elusive figure as the neighbour if we are unsure of our own selfhood? In that sense, neighbour-love might not primarily be threatened by secularization and the disappearance of religious commitment, but by the weakening of the idea of an autonomous subject in the wake of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and all that happened in their wake. Where modern literature has depicted the neighbour, our volatile philosophical and theological foundations are at stake, from which dangles the concept of the self on a very thin thread (or maybe it is the other way around).

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Imagine being trapped in a small apartment with only two windows towards the outside world and a small kitchen in the back. You are a sick old man, blind, confined to a wheelchair and unable to move. You are not allowed to venture outside, and are forced to spend all day with your ancient parents, half-dead themselves, and a carer—who has heard all your stories and opinions a thousand times before. You want it all to end.

For some of us, this might not be a thought-experiment, but lived experience during or living memory of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the sake of this essay, I have borrowed this scene from a literary text that will provide me with the material, form and nuance for an attempt at poetically and textually thinking about the notion of neighbour-love. I am referring to Samuel Beckett's theatre play *Fin de partie* or, in its English version, *Endgame*, set in a post-apocalyptic world after some sort of pandemic or nuclear disaster—or perhaps just in a mental asylum or an old people's home, with Hamm the character in the wheelchair, and Clov his carer. The exact nature of their relationship is unclear; in the background, Hamm's parents briefly contribute to the conversation. Hamm likes to tell stories and needs an audience. Clov is far more than a servant and displays a fine sense of irony. The action is circular, and despite the title, there is no real ending, only a return to the same old routines. Beckett's *End-*

game, I will argue, is a penetrating analysis of the neighbour precisely because it understands the interdependency of neighbourliness, love and selfhood.[7]

Selfhood is a topic that fascinated Beckett from the beginning of his writing career, especially the problems and paradoxes of monadic self-containment, where the self is pictured as cut off from the world and other people. In his first novel, *Murphy*, published in 1938 and written in English, the main character, after whom the book is named, imagines his own self as a "large, hollow sphere", deliberately removed from the world and its inhabitants:

> This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it.[8]

Murphy's Cartesian fantasy has taken a big step towards the all-encompassing idea of subjectivity in the German Idealist tradition, where the world, like a victim of a collective stroke, cannot escape the cage of its own subjectivity as hard as it may try. Murphy does not take the monistic road, however, but confirms the Cartesian split between the substances:

> The mental experience was cut off from the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the physical experience, the agreement of part of its content with physical fact did not confer worth on that part. [. . .] Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other.[9]

In his favourite position, Murphy is tied up to a chair, naked, abandoned in thought. He is in some ways the archetype for Hamm from *Endgame*; like the later character he also has a nurse whose name begins with the letter C, Celia, herself resembling an archetype of the good prostitute, all body and care. Explicitly, she serves as Murphy's "body",[10] and she also feeds him. Murphy later becomes a nurse in a mental asylum himself and thus represents the two sides that are split into the two characters in *Endgame*. At the end of the novel, the impossibility of a pure, solipsistic and bodiless mental existence becomes apparent in the hapless fate of the deceased's ashes, which fall victim to a pub brawl:

> By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greyened the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit.[11]

In a reversal of Murphy's self-understanding from the book's beginning, the body is not so much virtually present in the mind, but the mind actually disappears with the body.

Halfway through working on *Murphy*, Beckett discovered the Flemish 17th-century philosopher Arnold Geulincx, who subsequently became a lifelong inspiration, a fact that is still to make the impact on Beckett research it deserves.[12] Beckett's extensive notes on and excerpts of Geulincx show how he could fit him into a framework already under development before the discovery, but re-enforced and sharpened by it. Geulincx was a so-called occasionalist, who represented a heterodox hybrid of Cartesianism and Spinozism. To put it briefly, Geulincx taught an absolute distinction between mind and body: no causal relation whatsoever between them could even exist in theory. Man is an ethical being only in the interior world of thought and will. Everything relating to the body is part of the universe of nature that cannot be influenced by either. It is, as Han van Ruler has argued, a proto-existentialist philosophy-of-being for which man is a conscious entity imprisoned in or thrown into a material world. Life

is the task of coming to terms with integrating the drives of nature with the social character of human existence.[13]

Beckett took copious notes from the chapters on causality in Geulincx' magnum opus. To paraphrase one example from it: imagine an infant in a cradle crying because she wants to be rocked. When the mother finally rocks her, she does so because she wants to, *not* because of the crying. God happens to move her body right at that moment when her will to do so appears, but *not* because of it. The conclusion is that, ethically, we are not masters of our bodily actions, but only of our mental acts of willing in, as *Murphy* has it, the "universe inside". As we shall see, it is precisely this kind of proto-existentialism, which sounds slightly counter-intuitive to our modern scientific ears, which helped Beckett to overcome the fashionable existentialist philosophy of his own time.

Traditionally, God had been convenient as a source of both origin and telos, but in order for that mechanism to function, man had to observe God and make sense of His mysterious ways. What happens if God is removed from the Geulincxian universe, while the strict denial of causality between the mental and the physical is retained? I believe that this thought experiment is one key to Beckett's work.

John 4:12 famously proclaims: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us." The imperative to love one's neighbour is supposed to capture the essence of God. We can conclude that if we can no longer observe God in order to make sense of our mental and physical acts, we must make do with observing our neighbour. "He is as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain", says Chesterton, already no longer speaking of God, but the next-door neighbour, the "accident" that is actually "given us", i.e., whom we have not constructed from our own subjectivity.[14] Trying to make sense of the neighbour replaces trying to make sense of God. And trying to make sense of the neighbours means to make sense of other minds and bodily actions as much as of verbal utterances that might or might not relate to them.

In France, Beckett's adopted country, the human condition was understood as the predicament of "l'homme", an essentially solitary

being thrown into an empire of contingency. In a thoughtful essay on the "hero" of existentialism, the British philosopher turned novelist Iris Murdoch got to the paradoxical heart of this movement: "We are told that we are lonely individuals in a valueless and meaningless world. Yet it is also hinted that, when placing our own values and meanings, certain moves are preferable to certain others."[15] In other words, even though "l'homme" can only rely on himself (and is indeed usually thought of as a man) in order to create meaning, this creation inherently contains a comparison to other, maybe less successful attempts at artistically coping with meaninglessness.

The insistence on individual experience in existentialism was to a large degree indebted to phenomenology; in many ways, it represents a vulgar version of it (in the sense that one would speak of vulgar Marxism). In an interesting essay, published only recently from his posthumous papers, Hans Blumenberg reflected on the reason for the phenomenological privileging of the subject and, at least implicitly, this subject's relative poverty. While phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition proceeds through eidetic reduction, the object of pure intuition that is being reduced has no equivalent subject because the phenomenologist subject remains "a piece of the factual world". As a way of compensating "for the inequality between the world of the subject and of the object", this subject turns on itself and practises eidetic reduction of itself as if it was an object. The result is a kind of "self-purification from the world" by way of which the phenomenologist becomes a mere "functionary of transcendent subjectivity", deleting the most important property of his or her belonging to it: their being in the world as one among others, in both multiplicity and individuality.[16] In other words, the phenomenologist is, like Murphy, all mind and no body and forever concerned with the problem of the inscrutability of other minds and actions.

In some sense, Beckett, and in particular his theatre, reads like an anticipation of Blumenberg's insight. It also stands for a kind of literary alternative to phenomenology that at one and the same time counters the eidetic reduction of the object and dissolves the individualistic interpretation of subjectivity into a dividualistic one that acknowledg-

es both its multiperspectival nature and the fact that human subjects even in a post-human dystopia only exist by virtue of their relation to other subjects, whatever the nature of both the subject and of that relation might be. While constantly informed and parodistically in touch with existentialism, Beckett's texts refuse the limitations of the singular "homme" by focusing on pairs and unlikely companions. If one still wants to read them as heirs to eidetic reductions, as Beckett's aesthetic minimalism might suggest, then one has to read them as reductions of a very special kind, namely of types of *relationships* instead of singular beings, e.g., between master and slave, father and son, mother and child, patient and nurse, human and animal—all of which not only feature in, but represent the core of *Fin de partie/Endgame*.

Hamm is, among so many other things, an allegory of Man (capital M) who lays claim to the centre of the universe—note, for example, the repeated scenes where he orders Clov around to wheel him into the centre of the room.[17] God-like despite his physical failings, he is all intellect and stories. He is also a neighbour from hell. It transpires during the course of the play that he was responsible for the death of a neighbour who had come to ask for some lamp oil. Even though he had some left he could have shared, he, in Clov's words "told her to get out to hell", where she quite literally died of darkness.[18] Hamm is also indifferent about his parents' death and wants to get rid of everybody who might come near his house. At some point, Clov sees a boy outside, a "potential procreator", a horror vision for Hamm. In the French version he even proposes to exterminate him—using the same language which he before had reserved for rats and parasites.[19] Hamm only observes decay all around, he is longing to "be finished" and to take everything down with him on the way. With a nihilistic contempt for his own body and his own pain, dulled by painkillers, Hamm is a cynical naturalist who constantly mocks and rages against the stumps of religious heritage present in his memory. In a parody of the biblical story of Noah's ark—Ham is the name of Noah's son whose descendants are supposed to have peopled Egypt—Hamm in *Endgame* suggests building a raft in order to escape southwards, in search of "other mammals".[20]

Of particular interest for the topic of neighbour-love is one of Hamm's monologue rants where he seemingly confronts himself with his past failings in the face of time running out:

> All those I might have helped. [*Pause.*] Helped! [*Pause.*] Saved. [*Pause.*] Saved! [*Pause.*] The place was crawling with them! [*Pause. Violently.*] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! [*Pause.*] Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself! [*Pause. Calmer.*] When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets. [*Pause. Violently.*] Out of my sight and back to your petting parties!"[21]

In the French version, the expression for "use your head" is "réflechisséz", which both stresses the reflective-intellectual imperative and the fact that Hamm addresses those whom he might have helped (he does not address Clov with the polite "vous").[22] His contempt for them seems to grow out of a resentment particularly inspired by the disgust vis-à-vis those who do not just use their intellect, but crave human touch and bodily contact ahead even of food.

Hamm tries to expose and deride the longing for human company as the animal practice of licking and petting, which, at the same time, homogenizes a species whose only redeeming factor would have been its underused ability of rational reflection and thus conceptual distinction. Where the "head" distinguishes, the body brings together. Full of resentment, Hamm is Nietzsche's last man who has replaced smugness and complacency with self-hate, its next logical step. The parallels are conspicuous. Note, for example, the flea episode, where Hamm urges Clov to exterminate the last flea that seems to have survived in the apartment. In the preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the last man is compared precisely to a flea, and as just as ineradicable. In the same context, the last man has the herd animal's need for the body heat of other animals: "One still loves the neighbour and rubs oneself against him: because one needs warmth."[23] This provided the basis for the modern critique of the neighbour since Nietzsche, who explicitly

and almost throughout his whole work, attacked the figure of the biblical neighbour (*Nächster*) for its homogenizing effects. To put it radically: to *lick* my neighbour makes me *like* (in the sense of *as*) my neighbour (and vice versa).

This is not as far-fetched as it may sound. Hamm's corruption of Leviticus 19:18 into "Lick your neighbour as yourself" hides a delicious and revealing word play almost reminiscent of *Finnegan's Wake*—Beckett had not been James Joyce's private secretary for nothing. The verb *lick* shares the same root as the verb *like* and also the preposition, conjunction and adjective *like*. The Germanic word **lik* originally meant "body"—it is still present in the German word *Leiche*, for "corpse"—after several sound changes of course. The word *gelic* literally meant "with the body of", i.e., "similar to". It is still present in the German word *gleich*. At the origin of these interconnected notions lies the intuition that to be like somebody was to resemble their body in the sense of "being in the body of" or "having the same shape". The verbal phrase "to like somebody" developed semantically from this, too—we *like* people, one could say, who are *like* us, who possess bodies that are *similar to* our own. The same goes, incidentally, for the French verb *lécher*, which Beckett used in the French version.[24]

Ironically, Hamm's attempt at eidetically reducing neighbour-love to its supposed visceral essence that he distances himself from is contradicted by his own behaviour and bodily needs—he truly is a model of the phenomenologist forgetful about his own self—or better: suppressive of his own failing and decaying body. He has a constant desire to be touched, caressed and even kissed:

> HAMM: Kiss me. [*Pause*.] Will you not kiss me?
> CLOV: No.
> HAMM: On the forehead.
> CLOV: I won't kiss you anywhere.[25]

Hamm compensates for the lack of licking (as it were), in this scene and in others, with a constant outpouring of stories that try to force Clov to engage with him in other ways, but communication repeat-

edly breaks down. This has often been mistaken as the central theme of Beckett's work and of *Endgame* in particular:

> HAMM: Clov!
> CLOV: [*Impatiently*.] What is it?
> HAMM: We're not beginning to … to … mean something?
> CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh*.] Ah that's a good one![26]

The joke that is no joke only confirms the impossibility to cooperate on the representational level.[27] The deep fissure between the You and the I does not allow for a We. However, there is a different level, seemingly cut off from all verbalization, where this We exists and where cooperation does take place. This is the level of action, of gesture, of doing rather than saying. Hamm can only rarely *say* "We", but Hamm and Clov *do* "We", and they do so all the time. Without cooperation and without Clov's care for Hamm and Hamm's attachment to Clov, nothing would happen or even move on stage.

Beckett is famous for working meticulously with stage directions. Most careful spectators or readers of Beckett's plays have noticed certain forms of achronicity between what is being said on stage and the movement of the actors. The opening scene of *Endgame*, for instance, is a silent slapstick set piece by Clov, mysterious to the spectator. It represents the art of the theatre proper, understood as the autonomy of movement, gesture and props.[28] Beckett's theatre is not so much "absurd", but the missing link between epic and post-dramatic theatre, i.e., a rediscovery of theatre's true potential beyond the dramatic text and long suppressed by it until its resurgence in the early 20th century.[29]

There has never been a convincing theory of the origin of Beckett's gestural theatre. I would argue that we can trace it back to his radical appropriation of Geulincx' occasionalism. If no God or pre-established harmony ensures the connection between mind and matter, speaking and acting, drama and theatre, and if we have unmasked a primitive naturalistic epiphenomenalism as a symptom of bodily

resentment, we need another strategy for making sense of the fact that we are affected by the action without being able to draw any conclusions about their causal origins in the mind—just as the words of the actors do not necessarily explain their actions. In short, we will have to let the body and the action speak for themselves rather than to deduce them from some sort of assumed external or internal essence or telos.

Here is another monologue by Hamm, spoken, according to stage directions, with "prophetic relish":

> One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me. [. . .] Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. [*Pause*.] Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone left to have pity on.[30]

In this nightmarish vision, being *like* Hamm refers to an immobile, purely contemplative mode of existence whose care for others in the form of pity is only a form of diversion and exercise of power. For Hamm, who fancies himself an artist, the problem of being would consist first and foremost in the absence of an audience. We are back in the "hollow sphere" of Murphy's imagination of himself, where the body is virtualized and, at the end, despised and ridiculed—or misunderstood as the expression of destructive drives.

Clov, however, represents an opposite understanding. During the course of the play, he is unable to sit down, he can hardly even stop and is constantly on the move. He is action personified, not, like Hamm, the constructed result of fiction, storytelling and prose. In the opening scene of the play, we are, as it were, inside a skull, with the two windows resembling two eyes. Clov opens their lids, just as he takes the blindfold off Hamm's blind eyes. He breaks out of solipsism because solipsism is only a problem for the purely contemplative

stance. He replaces it with observation and with caring action. This includes us, the audience. By looking at us and speaking directly to us right from the beginning and throughout the play, Clov not only tears down the fourth wall, but erects, so to speak, a fifth wall, a space surrounding both the action on stage and the audience. We are all in it together. But are we all inside Hamm's head? Or in God's mind? Through his actions and gestures, Clov demonstrates that these questions are irrelevant. They are, in the Geulincxian sense, independent of any mind anyway. We need to observe and interpret them not by way of relating them causally to another mind or even God's mind, but by relating them to our own bodies and gestures. This includes language gestures, i.e., language understood as gestural rather than as purely semiotic representations.[31]

There is a deep lesson about neighbourliness to be learned here. How many neighbours does one speak with on a regular basis? Most likely not too many. We observe our neighbours through their actions and gestures. We perceive and react to them with and through our bodies. Maybe we hold the door for them, maybe we nod. Granted, there are not many sociably acceptable situations for licking one's neighbour, perhaps only infants as yet unable to walk or speak are excused in such instances. With our neighbours, we become performers in a play without words, *Actes sans paroles*—which, as it happens, is the title of Beckett's play published immediately after *Fin de partie*.[32] Most importantly, we need to relate to our neighbours' "acts without words" with our own acts, and not with the attempt to read their minds. There is no causality. This means observing and trusting the body or the smile, both our neighbours' and our own, on the occasionalist assumption that bodily actions are not necessarily symptoms of contemplated goalsetting, but that they just as well might be spontaneous acts of empathy, solidarity and sociability. There is no guarantee that they are, of course, but even God, when He was still alive, was unable to issue such a guarantee.

Since all the world's a stage, Beckett's new post-dramatic and post-epic conception of the theatre in the tradition of the mime also presents a new understanding of the world and its inhabitants in their

relations to each other. The fact that I as a theatregoer experience my neighbour as well as the actors as bodies that can be likened to me leads to a subtle recalibration of the original principle of neighbour-love. If my self is not an authentic essence, but part of an endless play or game—the *Endgame* never ends, Clov says he cannot finish Hamm—then this necessarily has repercussions on the other two variables. Only stories have beginnings and ends, including the biggest stories of them all, the biblical ones. Theatre only has time constraints. Tomorrow the same play will be enacted again, with different players playing similar roles. "Love your neighbour as yourself" is the opposite of constructing a neighbour in my image, but refers to the need to accept their givenness as a rule of the game.

This does not allow us to reduce them to an object of physical gratification or an instrument of our need for domination, including domination by way of pity. Rather, we could turn the Beckettian "licking" into a symbol of the common basis for a pre-reflective "minimal self" identified in recent phenomenological attempts to salvage the self from the onslaught of various centrifugal powers.[33] This kind of self is first of all an experiential self "that precedes the mastery of language and the ability to form full-blown rational judgements and propositional attitudes".[34] Although it does not yet solve the problem of forgetfulness of the phenomenologist's own body, it manages quite elegantly to overcome the potential solipsism of the first-person perspective because its whole point is that the for-me-ness at its heart is a common or even universal experience. Even though we can only experience it for ourselves, we are in principle aware of it because we can all relate to it. The social, narrated or otherwise constructed self does not exclude the experiential self's for-me-ness, but builds on it.[35] Furthermore, the minimal or pre-reflective self is even shared with beings that do not have language and linguistically rooted sociability. Licking and the experience of being licked constitutes, in many animal species, a form of bonding and attachment—not just between members of the same family or species (think of dogs licking their human owners) but also between complete strangers, to use an anthropocentric metaphor. Everybody who has ever walked a dog on a street can

testify how touch, gestures, sniffs and indeed licking creates very specific kinds of relations that are arguably no less "social" than linguistically constructed or even verbalized relations in the human sphere.

Perhaps Hamm has, to his dismay, realized that the mute or silent nature of neighbourliness and neighbour-love, its independence of voice, narration and interpretation are his own preferred domains. After all, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) also enacts neighbour-love as wordless. The Samaritan, being a stranger, does not share the same language with the man he helps. Disinfecting and bandaging the wounds and taking the injured to safety are mute forms of bodily care that are immediately understandable as rooted in a form of empathy that presupposes that the Samaritan knows what it is like to be in the place of the one he helps. Licking, touching, petting, giving a hand and so on do not need to seek legitimation in mental reflection in order to be validated as ethical acts that are constitutive of a We.

Licking or loving your neighbour, it has to be added, do not exclude all sorts of other actions, including verbal ones. Just as neighbours are not reducible to one another, the minimal self does not exclude the reflective self, although this seems to be a widespread logical fallacy. Body and mind are themselves neighbours, as it were. Love your neighbour as yourself is, with Beckett, the imperative to acknowledge that we are all of us both Hamm and Clov, forever reliant on one other, with no superior mind designed to regulate our internal conflicts. Yet which comes first? This seems to be a central question. It is reminiscent of the temporal dimension of neighbourhood sketched in the beginning. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he who acts with mute care as neighbour to the victim of assault came last, after the priest and after the local Levite. Yet he was the first to help. Interestingly, he, who is called the neighbour, would then, according to the second greatest command, be the *object* of neighbour-love from the perspective of the victim. The reciprocity between the two seems to be achieved in spite of the fact that they come from different cultural and linguistic communities. It is not a common language or religion that makes a neighbour, as the Levite and the priest prove when

they pass the victim without helping him. Rather, neighbourliness is established by emotional empathy. Just as in *Fin de partie/Endgame*, cooperation functions by doing rather than saying, by engaging two bodies without a causal link to mental deliberations and verbalizations. If the neighbour is the one who comes after me, neighbour-love denotes the process of intuitively acknowledging him or her as being like me on the level that counts in the respective situation, as a being in need of wordless attention.

Precisely the wordlessness of this bodily engagement, based on generalizable experiential for-me-ness, protects it against potential reproaches for being ideological. It can neither be the effect, nor cause, nor object of resentment in the Nietzschean sense as it does not dress up in moralistic discourse. Hamm is a figure of resentment precisely because he cannot step out of the sphere of language and narrative. He wants it all to end because his basic metaphysic understanding of the world is a narrative one, which hence needs a proper beginning and a proper end. "Fini, c'est fini."[36] The poetics of neighbour-love is a poetics of muteness and of endlessness. It is the end of the story that never ends—and it needs to be told over and over again. And talked about. And enacted without words.

NOTES

1 "I am pushed to pieces of literature to discover the problem of the other", writes Stanley Cavell (Cavell 1979, p. 476). Literature seems to present a distinct mode of relating to other minds and selves, as a philosophical approach in itself. This essay is therefore based on the kind of literary philosophy developed in Benne & Abbt 2021 (pp. 80–105). It argues amongst other things that thinking in and with (literary) texts differs from mainly conceptual and propositional thought. Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is an important point of departure. Cf. also the chapter on Beckett in Benne & Abbt 2021 (pp. 164–207) with a different focus, but including more background material than could be provided in the present article.

2 Cf. the arguments about the weakness of the self in Adorno *et al*. 1950.

3 See the article "*πλησίον*" in Friedrich 1959, pp. 309–316, on joining others (*sich zugesellen*), cf. p. 309. The entry is a formidable source for the ambivalence and constant reinterpretation of the concept of *the neighbour* already in the mosaic legal tradition and the later Christian context.

4 Cf. Irina Hron's article in this volume.

5 Cf. Friedrich 1959, p. 313: the limitation of neighbour-love to Israelites vs its uni-

versalization has been an ongoing debate since the earliest time.

6 Cf. Bosman 2018.

7 Quotations are from Beckett 1957; 1990, pp. 89–134.

8 Beckett 1963, p. 76.

9 Beckett 1963, pp. 76–77.

10 Beckett 1963, p. 31.

11 Beckett 1963, p. 187.

12 Geulincx 1891–1893; 2006.

13 Cf. Geulincx 2006, p. xxv.

14 Chesterton 1986, p. 140.

15 Murdoch 1997, pp. 108–115, esp. p. 110.

16 Cf. Blumenberg 2018.

17 Beckett 1990, pp. 104–105.

18 Beckett 1990, p. 129.

19 Beckett 1990, pp. 130–131; cf. 1957, pp. 103–104.

20 Beckett 1990, p. 109.

21 Beckett 1990, p. 125.

22 Beckett 1957, p. 91.

23 Nietzsche 1988, p. 19; my translation.

24 This section is based on standard etymological knowledge and standard reference works such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*.

25 Beckett 1990, p. 125.

26 Beckett 1990, pp. 107–108.

27 Cf. the following dialogue: "CLOV: Things are livening up. [*He gets up on ladder, raises the telescope, lets it fall.*] I did it on purpose. [*He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium*] I see … a multitude … in transports … of joy. [*Pause.*] That's what I call a magnifier. [*He lowers the telescope, turns towards* HAMM.] Well? Don't we laugh?/ HAMM: [*After reflection.*] I don't./CLOV: [*After reflection.*] Nor I. […]" (Beckett 1990, p. 106).

28 Craig 1957.

29 Cf. Lehmann 2001.

30 Beckett 1990, p. 109.

31 Cf. e.g. Kommerell 2004; Benne 2018.

32 Symbolically, they were bound together in one volume (as the one used here).

33 Zahavi 2014.

34 Zahavi 2014, p. 14.

35 Zahavi 2014, p. 11. A pre-reflective, non-egological state can even still be self-conscious, i.e., a pre-reflective state does not exclude self-consciousness (p. 48). Interestingly, Zahavi illustrates some of his points by way of a thought experiment involving the twins Mick and Mack, who both stare at the same white wall. The argument is that only their first-personally experienced life is differently given in comparison to a third-person description of their otherwise identical experience (p. 22–23). If we swap Mick and Mack with Hamm and Clov and project the phenomenological problem back into Beckett, we can not only detect some structural similarities but also understand why and how an actual literary text adds infinite nuance and complexity to the thought experiment.

36 Beckett 1957, p. 15.

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