Badiou's Lacan and the Beckett-Event

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Abstract: *Alain Badiou, one of the most psychoanalytically informed philosophers writing today, has called Jacques Lacan his "master" yet he also deems him to be an "anti-philosopher". This chapter will do two things with this tension. Firstly, it will explore what Badiou takes from Lacan, especially around his theory of the subject, but also what, as a philosopher rather than a psychoanalyst, he necessarily leaves behind. Secondly however, it will also explore Badiou's very Lacanian encounter with the literature of Samuel Beckett. It will be argued that, just as Lacan's engagement with the writings of James Joyce led him to completely revise his psychoanalytic theory, so Badiou's encounter with Beckett led him to transform his own theory of the subject, pushing it in the direction of an affect that has to do with a preparedness to act: namely, courage.*

Keywords: Badiou, the event, Lacan, the subject, Beckett.

Introduction:

The French philosopher, activist, dramatist, and novelist, Alain Badiou (born 17 January 1937), is widely recognised as one of the most significant philosophers living today. He has almost single-handedly shifted the terms of debate within continental philosophy over the last thirty or so years. Thanks to his work, a number of previously unfashionable concepts have been revitalised, such as the 'subject', 'truth', 'love', and even the 'Idea' (including the Idea of Communism). In what follows, I want to focus on the first of these: the subject.

A number of theoretical movements since the 1950s, from structuralism to poststructuralism and from Derridean deconstruction to postmodernism, forced this concept into the background, or even into the ground (recall Roland Barthes' famous declaration of the 'death of the author' – Barthes, *Image*, 142-148). This was thanks largely to the anti-Humanist orientation shared by these movements. An exception to this was the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who always cleaved to the notion of the subject *within* a critique of Humanism, as he ploughed his own idiosyncratic furrow right through the middle of the structuralist and then post-structuralist 'revolutions' without really belonging to either. Badiou, ever since his early Sartrean existentialism, has shared this commitment to the category of the subject, and Lacan could be said to have passed the baton of the subject on to him. Yet he has been going in his own decidedly philosophical rather than psychoanalytic direction with it since the 1980s.

I want to focus on the extent to which we can discern in Badiou's reconsideration of the subject both a deep indebtedness to, and a profound ambivalence towards, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. He approaches the latter always as a philosopher and *not* as a psychoanalyst, or even as someone who has felt the need to risk its praxis on the couch: he admits that "this experience has remained completely foreign to me" (Badiou and Roudinesco, 18). Notwithstanding the fully acknowledged intellectual debt to Lacan, or perhaps precisely because of it - on the model of Harold Bloom's so-called 'anxiety of influence' – Badiou frames the discourses of philosophy and psychoanalysis as *mutually productive antagonists*. This is spelled out in his frequent references to Lacan as both his "master" and as an "anti-philosopher". How is it, we might rightly ask, that someone so committed to reinventing philosophy can claim as his master a psychoanalytic anti-philosopher?

Badiou's Subject

In order to trace this indebtedness to, and distance-taking from, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, I will first outline a key moment in Badiou's development of his notion of the subject.

First published in 1985 and probably still his best-known work, *Being and Event* makes a novel intervention into the branch of philosophy concerned with the question of being – ontology – by re-founding it on the basis of developments in the field of mathematics, specifically the invention of set-theory by Georg Cantor in the late 19th Century. This surprising move allowed Badiou to argue that the 'being' of 'situations' ultimately depends on a counting operation, just as the axioms of set-theory establish what elements belong to a set and how they are included within it. Beyond mere analogy, Badiou sees set-theory as revealing something fundamental about the nature of being itself, including the type of being in which humans participate. Thus, in social situations individuals are *included* according to innumerable predicates - 'male' or 'female', 'black' or 'white', or indeed 'blue-eyed', 'size 10 feet' or 'fans of Star Trek' etc. - but only because they are already counted as *belonging* to that situation. In set theory, this difference between belonging and inclusion is important enough to have received two separate notations, $\in$ and $\subset$ respectively, and they have distinct operational qualities. For example, inclusion is reflexive, in the sense that every set is always included as a subset of itself, whereas belonging is not, as suggested by Bertrand Russell's famous paradox of the set of all sets that are not members of themselves.

So, for Badiou individuals are individuated by being counted twice, once at the level of belonging, which he calls *presentation*, and again at the level of inclusion, which he calls *re-presentation*. In another calculated move which brings Lenin and Mao into unlikely dialogue with Cantor, Badiou identifies the 'state of the situation' as the operation that counts all its elements as if presentation and representation, belonging and inclusion, were one and the same thing. The state counts as One all the ones that are elements of its situation, making it a count of the count. Perhaps it is easiest to think of this in terms of liberal democratic politics, and a slogan like 'one man, one vote'? In such a view, the individual belongs because counted (*one* man), but the state's legitimacy rests on the fact that the individual also counts in the political sense of being included and thus recognised (one *vote*). Liberal representational politics effectively claims that belonging equals inclusion in order to construct the body-politic as if it were a quasi-organic whole, a One. Except that, as per George Orwell's famous quip about equality in *1984*, we know that some people count *more* than others. Women, for example, have had to fight to be included in this masculinist universalism of the One. There are even those who, like so-called illegal immigrants, belong to a situation but are not included in it at all, and who therefore exist but count for nothing.

Thanks to this Leninist-Maoist take on set-theory, Badiou brings out the *disjunction* between presentation and representation, the denial of which is the very function of the state. The state does not exist because it represents everything that belongs to and is included within it; rather, it exists because presentation and representation do *not* coincide. To switch to a more Lacanian register which is already in the background here, we could say that the individual is in fact *divided* by the count that claims to represent them, and that the One is in fact not-all. This basic idea, that the individual does not coincide with their representation in the situation, has more than a passing resemblance to Lacan's insistence, ever since his early paper on the mirror stage,

that the ego is not self-identical because it receives its primordial sense of being from the Other. For Lacan too, the ego is divided by its alienation in this pre-existing Other.

However, in *Being and Event* even this divided individual is absolutely not a subject in Badiou's very specific sense. For him, *the individual is the stark antithesis of the subject*. Using a rather pejorative framing, he often characterises the individual as animal, not fully human, because passively determined by their situation. By contrast, the Badiouian subject is dynamic, self-constituting, human in a universal self-affirming sense. For a mere individual, stuck in animal repetition, to be reborn as a subject in this rather exalted sense something literally extra-ordinary is required. This is the meaning of the conjunctive in Badiou's title in fact. The set-theoretical ontology outlined in the first half of *Being and Event* holds open the possibility of the sudden emergence of something unpredictable, unknowable, and thus profoundly disruptive of the ontological count – in other words, an event.

Though never probable, the event is always possible. This is because, for structural reasons formalised by set-theory, every situation must include what Badiou calls 'a void multiple'. This is a generic element that grounds the ontological count and so has to belong to the situation but at the same time cannot be included in it. Lacan might call it 'extimate', meaning at once internal and intimate, yet radically alien (S7, 119). In set-theory itself, the void multiple is usually referred to as the 'empty set' and written ∅. It cannot be included in the set because it has no elements of its own (it is empty), but for the same reason it cannot *not* belong to it (there are no criteria by which to exclude it). From this perspective, the state's job is to dis-count this void multiple in order to render the situation it presides over a supposedly sovereign One; but on very rare occasions, something can happen which reveals an exception to the state's capacity to count its elements, and this something is the event.

Revealingly, many of Badiou's examples come from revolutionary history, though he also identifies others in the domains of love, art, and science. What they have in common is that the world is never the same afterwards. In addition to disrupting the state's *status quo*, events are what enable individuals to become subjects by participating in the novelty they unleash. This is a very strong thesis in Badiou: *it is only on condition that an event has happened that a subject can emerge*. In the absence of one - and they are necessarily very rare - we are only ever dealing with individuals submerged in automatism and a kind of herd-mentality. For the state, individuals are perfectly knowable and predictable because of the predicates that pin them to their allotted places and functions. A *subject*, however, breaks with their situational determination, becoming an unpredictable "excrescent multiple" which the state does not know how to count. Arguably still a Maoist, Badiou's subject is thus constituted in and through *fidelity* to the event, militantly pursuing its transformative implications which he calls - philosopher that he certainly is - its "truth". This knot is a tight one: not only is there no subject without an event, but there is no event without a subject to force its consequences on to the world.

Nevertheless, it is all-too easy for the subject to return to being a mere individual by recoiling from such a demanding task if they lack the fortitude to continue with it. By definition, there can be no *ontological* guarantee for subjects: they can easily be sucked back into the gravitational pull of their world's banality. Badiou has several names for this reneging of subjective commitment to the truth of an event, such as 'disaster', 'betrayal', and even 'evil'. The theological tenor of this opposition, between the grace-like event and the evil of its

betrayal, indicates how prohibitively high the bar is set for the subject in Badiou's thought. We will come back to this issue later in this chapter.

Not-All Lacanian

There is much in Badiou that *appears* very 'Lacanian,' but we should be cautious: these superficial 'family resemblances' can obscure some crucial differences. By considering the different phases of Lacan's teachings - moving from the Imaginary to the Symbolic and on to the later difficult notion of the Real - two areas of this deceptive resemblance emerge: firstly, around the aforementioned distinction between the individual (or ego for Lacan) and the subject; and secondly, regarding the opposition between truth and knowledge.

I will take these in turn. Although the ego is certainly not the same as the subject in Lacan, the link between them is arguably more topologically complex than the stark, ruptural model Badiou insists on in *Being and Event*. As Lacan's early distinction between empty and full speech in the 'Rome Discourse' of 1953 (Lacan, *Function*, 197/237) suggested, in which one cannot arrive at the latter without going through the former, the relation between the ego and the subject of the unconscious is less an abrupt cut, and more akin to the figure of the Möbius strip (a loop with a twist in it which has but a single surface): far from one being a radical break with the other, the ego and the unconscious are each other's accompanying lining. Moreover, for the Lacan of S11, although the ego is indeed alienated through its determination by the Other, there is nevertheless a remainder left over: the famous *objet a* which can provide the basis for the subject's separation from the Other and thus a certain trajectory for the end of analysis. By contrast, for Badiou there is no equivalent to the *object a* in the individual, and the only thing that brings about separation proper is a completely contingent event. Since events are so rare, it is quite possible, indeed probable, that individuals remain in animalistic docility for their whole mundane existences, earning them evident contempt in Badiou's eyes.

Yet from a psychoanalytic perspective, especially a clinically grounded one, I would suggest that the ethical proposition must be the exact reverse of this Badiouian principal of subjective rarity, namely, the hypothesis that *there already is a subject*. To give the analysand their dignity in the treatment from the outset, analysis begins with the supposition that the event of the subject has always already taken place, and that it will be possible to construct some knowledge about it through speech under transference. However, with this word 'event', we are evidently *not* referring to the same thing in both cases. For Badiou, the event is a profound rupture with the given that signals the emergence of nothing less than a world-historical novelty in one of four realms (politics, science, love, or art); whereas in psychoanalytic practice, the event of the subject can be seen - no doubt much more modestly - as the traumatic encounter between a body and the effects upon it of the signifier, to which the subject is a creative and absolutely singular response. As we will see, this ethical supposition that *there is already some subject in the individual* is what Badiou's philosophy of the event must reject.

Regarding the second 'family resemblance' around the truth-knowledge opposition, this is indeed pivotal in both *Being and Event* and early Lacan. In his 1932 thesis on Aimée when he was still a psychiatrist, Lacan argued that conscious knowledge has a paranoid character due to its origins in the Imaginary relation, implying the delusional aspects of *connaissance* (Lacan, *Psychose*, 43). Then, as a psychoanalyst in the 1940s and 50s, he came to see egoic knowledge as a neurotic defence against the truth of Symbolic castration, and thus as a form of *méconnaissance* (or misrecognition) of this truth. Knowledge even became linked by him to a

"passion for ignorance" (see S1) vis-à-vis the inconvenient truth of castration, with effects of repression and resistance during analysis. Nevertheless, this unconscious truth could still be discerned in irruptive formations such as dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, and pre-eminently symptoms. Over the course of an analysis then, this 'truth' might be experienced by the analysand - in a lightening flash with bodily effects rather than as a 'lightbulb' moment of merely cognitive 'insight' - but Lacan did not believe it was a truth amenable to full symbolisation within language. Like Freud's uninterpretable "navel" of the dream, Lacan came to argue that unconscious truth can never be wholly articulated. Increasingly, it was linked to the concept of the Real as an impasse within the Symbolic. By S17, he argued that psychoanalytic truth can only ever be 'half-said' (*mi-dire*) due to its relation to this Real that is outside sense.

Badiou borrows several aspects of these arguments in *Being and Event*. Thus, the event makes a truth emerge which breaks with the dominant apparatus by which the situation knows itself, termed by him its 'encyclopaedia of knowledge'. Truth constitutes a rupture with this encyclopaedic knowledge, much as the Lacanian unconscious wakes us from what we think we know. There is even something of Lacan's logic of the half-said in Badiou's notion of evental truth, since, by definition, this truth cannot be articulated within the existing terms of the situation. Instead, truth is a procedure testifying to something that ex-sists but cannot be fully said. Like the events that condition them and the truths they force, subjects are inexplicable from the point of view of encyclopaedic knowledge. For example, a protest movement uniting people across classes, ages, ethnicities, and sexualities around a single militant cause, irreducible to any one of those identity-markers, might well constitute a subject for Badiou (if faithful to an event). Such a subject would not 'make sense' from within any existing sociological division of people into discrete, knowable groups. Thus, the Badiouian subject bores a hole into 'doxic' knowledge, confronting the situation with a truth akin to its repressed unconscious.

However, there is a further elaboration of this truth-knowledge opposition in later Lacan which Badiou arguably refuses to follow. The concluding piece in the *Écrits* of 1966, 'Science and Truth', already complicates this earlier opposition. There, truth is no longer an effect of signifiers to be deciphered from knowledge as méconnaissance; rather, truth become an obscure yet *Real* material cause about which psychoanalysis can produce a knowledge inspired by, though distinct from, the formalist reductions of science. Three years later in S17, Lacan criticised philosophical versions of truth, for example the Hegelian fantasy of "Absolute Knowledge", as a mode of mastery and expropriation, contrasting them to a specifically psychoanalytic concept of truth which cannot be mastered, only "half-said", due to its growing link to the unsymbolisable Real. However, by 1976, when Lacan is writing his preface to the-then new English translation of S11, this reworking of the category of truth is pushed further still, towards a definite discrediting. He refers there to the unconscious as a "lying truth" (S11, p.ix), indicating that the final meaning implied by *any* concept of truth, philosophical or otherwise, necessarily obscures the dimension of the Real that should propel an analysis to its conclusion. His previous opposition is therefore inverted: 'truth' had been the positive Symbolic term compared to a derided Imaginary 'knowledge'; now 'truth' becomes the deceptive term and 'knowledge' - the singular knowledge an analysis can produce for the analysand, as well as for the wider analytic community via the mechanism of the pass – becomes the positive term. This notion of a "lying truth" pointed *beyond* the interpretable

Freudian unconscious Lacan had spent decades reconceiving using structural linguistics and the primacy of the Symbolic. It implied something completely different which he announced in that same preface by asserting that "the unconscious, I would say, is real" (SXI, vii). This Real unconscious is not reducible to the logic of the S1-S2 signifying chain, of which the subject had been the decipherable effect, as in Lacan's oft-repeated definition of the subject as that which one signifier represents for another. Instead, the Real unconscious is characterised by what Lacan calls in S20 - mobilising the homophony between *essaim* and 'S1' in French - a "buzzing swarm" (S20, 143) of S1s. These S1s have much more to do with *lalangue*, the meaningless rhythms of sonority which strike and resonate within the body, than with the language linguists concern themselves with: the S1s of the Real unconscious thus cause a jouissance which is beyond an S2 of articulated knowledge, beyond the pleasure principle once imposed by the Oedipal norm. Thus, at the end of Lacan's teachings it is no longer the case that "truth has the structure of fiction", implying that it could be read between the lines of the Imaginary speech of the analysand. Rather, truth itself becomes a kind of fiction, the last delusion of meaning supported by the signifier when mistaken for a signified, the final semblant we use to veil the Real.

As a philosopher whose very currency is truth, it is little wonder that Badiou refused to follow late Lacan towards its radical devaluation, despite the 'family resemblances' that arise from his use of earlier Lacan.

Anti-Philosopher?

These differences become clear in the final meditation of *Being and Event*, where Badiou identifies the point at which he must leave Lacan behind, with a grateful but decisive wave. Entitled 'Descartes/Lacan', this meditation essentially argues that Lacan remains too much of a Cartesian structuralist for Badiou to retain within his own emerging theory of the subject, which is explicitly both anti-Cartesian and anti-structuralist.

The general logic of this argument is not actually new. Badiou's experience of May '68 already led him to develop a political critique of structuralism as reformist at best, reactionary at worst. This is most fully developed in his 1982 book, *Théorie du sujet* (Badiou, *Theory*), where the main target is Althusser's structuralist Marxism rather than Lacan's structuralist re-reading of Freud. Indeed, Lacan is Badiou's primary inspiration and ally (alongside Mao) in *Théorie du sujet*, so much so that the style of its presentation is self-consciously 'Lacanian', complete with mathemes and graphs. What *is* new by *Being and Event* is that it is Lacan himself – or a certain version of him – that is pulled into the orbit of this critique of structuralism. What Badiou no longer wants from Lacan is the link to Descartes that implies a universalizable philosophical anthropology that would deprive the subject of its rarity: "What Lacan still owed to Descartes, a debt whose account must be closed, was the idea that there were always some subjects" (Badiou, *Being*, 434). As I have already suggested, this idea, that in the individual there is already some subject, can be linked to an ethical position of the analyst responding to the peculiar 'human condition' of the *parlêtre* (a neologism of late Lacan's that invokes the 'speaking (parle) being' but also that entity which obtains its being *through* (par) speech). However, this ethic fits poorly with the completely different programme of Badiou's evental philosophy.

Nevertheless, even this apparent parting of the ways with Lacan remains obscure and incomplete. In the reflection on what philosophy must henceforth be in the closing paragraphs

of *Being and Event*, Badiou advocates "an intersection without fusion with psychoanalysis" (Badiou, *Being*, 435). This odd phrase, combining proximity and distance, remains enigmatic, following as it does on the heels of a strong critique of Lacan. However, it does prefigure Badiou's characterisation, around ten years after *Being and Event*, of psychoanalysis as an "anti-philosophy", and of Lacan, his former master, as an "anti-philosopher" (Badiou, *Lacan*, 8). Far from being a total rejection, this designation situates Lacan as a formidable thinker to whom all philosophies worthy of the name must henceforth be capable of responding, primarily with a defence of the concept of truth.

In his 1994-1995 seminar, Badiou describes "the basic gesture of every anti-philosophy [as involving] a destitution of the philosophical category of truth" (*Ibid*.), but also as emphasising the singularity of an "act" which is subjectively grounded in "the anticipated certainty of victory" (Badiou, *Lacan*, 3). He names a number of anti-philosophers, often by pairing them with the philosophers whom they pillory: Pascale for Descartes, Rousseau for Hume, and Kierkegaard for Hegel. Other anti-philosophers oppose not a specific thinker but the entire Western philosophical tradition, such as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. Moreover, their relation to this tradition is not one of critique per se (especially after Kant, the philosophical tradition *is* a practice of critique), but rather a therapeutics: both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein present their thought as an antidote to civilization's metaphysical sickness. The fact that some names on this list would be referred to simply as philosophers shows the close and productive dialectic between the two discourses, each spurring the other on rather as Sophism did Platonism in Ancient Greece.

So, it is among this group of rival anti-philosophers that Badiou will come to include Lacan, albeit in a very particular way. Lacan is an anti-philosopher not only because he embarked upon a psychoanalytic critique of the philosophical notion of truth, but also because he too emphasised the power of the subjective *act*. This is evident in the seminar Lacan devoted to the act between 1967 and the turbulence of 1968 (S15), which took as the paradigm of the act Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, not in order to valorise political voluntarism as might Badiou, but to develop an analogy with the psychoanalytic act by which an analysand passes to the status of an analyst. In fact, this seminar built on the previous *institution*, quite literally, of this notion of the act through his 'Act of Foundation', the text by which he inaugurated his own School in 1964 (Lacan, *L'acte*). In a related 'institutional' text written alongside S15 in 1967, Lacan proposed the mechanism of the pass as an act by which analysts might authorise themselves rather than look to an external Other (Lacan, *Proposition*). So, Lacan was certainly an advocate of the transformative power of the act which Badiou associates with anti-philosophy.

Yet once again, even as Badiou situates Lacan in this category, he seems uncertain about just what kind of anti-philosopher his "master" is. He recognises that Lacan progressively discredits the notion of truth, but also that he does so without ever giving up on the category of *knowledge*, since - as his strenuous efforts with topology demonstrate - Lacan is very far indeed from some kind of mysticism of the noumenal real, that is to say, from positing an unknowable realm beyond the transcendental categories of possible knowledge. On the contrary, he aimed to produce a de-imaginarised knowledge of the effects of the real. Ultimately then, Badiou is impressed by Lacan's use of the matheme to formalise an integrally transmissible knowledge about the real, even as Lacan asserts that there can be no true *concept* of the real. Indeed, Lacan's formalism coincides very strongly with Badiou's own asserted Platonism, whereby

mathematical objects such as those described by geometry are contrasted to context-dependent perceptions of 'worldly' things. It is perhaps for this reason that Badiou presents Lacan, again ambiguously, as "someone who brings contemporary anti-philosophy to a close" (Badiou, *Lacan*, 2), meaning that although he derides truth, unlike previous anti-philosophers such as Nietzsche, he does not relativise knowledge.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that Badiou's distancing from Lacan, at the end of *Being and Event* and then with this concept of "anti-philosophy", left him with a significant problem within his own theory of the subject. Does the insistence on the rarity of the event and thus of its faithful subject not imply a certain quietism which flies in the face of Badiou's Maoist militancy? For if we must wait for an event for the subject to appear, are we not condemned to what he will later call "atonal worlds" (Badiou, *Logics*), completely devoid of points of potential change, and peopled overwhelmingly by individuals? What are we 'mere' individuals meant to do as we twiddle our thumbs in anticipation of an event? What of pre-evental resources for resistance and change, of the glimmerings of subjective potential within the individual?

Almost despite himself, Badiou will stumble on some answers to these sorts of questions not in philosophy, or indeed in Lacanian psychoanalysis, but in literature.

The Beckett Event

In the 1990s, Badiou wrote a series of four pieces on the work of the Irish/'French' writer Samuel Becket, which have been collected in English in the volume *On Beckett*. In one of them, aptly entitled 'Tireless Desire', he characterises the experience of discovering Beckett's work in the mid-1950s as "a real encounter, a subjective blow of sorts that left an indelible mark" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 37). I want to argue, in closing, that this encounter with Beckett constituted a kind of event within Badiou's own thinking on the subject, one that parallels Lacan's transformative encounter with the work of another Irish writer, James Joyce.

Already moving in avant-garde circles in Paris in the 1920s, Lacan met Joyce in person at Adrienne Monnier's famous bookshop, *La Maison des Amis des Livres*, first when he was only 17, and again when he was 20 at the first reading of the French translation of *Ulysses*. However, it was not until 55 years later that he would really engage seriously with Joyce's work. In 1975, Lacan was invited by the French Joyce scholar Jacques Aubert to give the inaugural address of the annual Joyce Symposium held at the Sorbonne. That talk then fed into Lacan's own seminar the following year (S23), in which he outlined an idiosyncratic reading of Joyce that was simultaneously entangled in an experimentation with the mathematics of knots. Ostensibly, this 'reading' diagnosed the itinerant Irish author as a psychotic whose 'sinthome', or stabilising symptom, was his writing, in his case a practice of the letter rather than of the signified or even the signifier, one which 'knotted' the registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real together. At first glance, Lacan's endeavour sounds like the crass psychobiographical reductionism of which psychoanalytic literary criticism has sometimes been guilty. And yet seen in the context of his wider work, S23 suggests the exact reverse: Joyce's texts were the occasion for Lacan not to 'apply' his pre-existing theory but to completely reinvent it on the basis of the singular relation to language he found therein. Where his classical structuralist theory had privileged the Symbolic and thus the signifier known as the 'Name of the Father' (inscribed for the neurotic, foreclosed for the psychotic), in S23 the Symbolic had the same importance as the Imaginary and the Real thanks to the 'flattened' surfaces of topology. For

related reasons, neurotic structure was no longer assumed as the 'norm' by which to measure the 'deficit' of psychosis, in response both to Joyce and to the broader decline of the Name of the Father in a culture less and less like the Oedipal one Freud had known. Indeed, Lacan's reading of Joyce was instrumental in his inversion of the primacy of neurosis over psychosis, encapsulated in his later proposition that "we are all mad, in the sense of delusional", suggesting that the belief in meaning as such is but a defence against the real (see Miller). Like Joyce himself, late Lacan was engaged, in the form and content of his theoretical articulations, in a 'littering of the letter', an emptying of meaning in favour of the nonsensical cadences of *lalangue*. The concept of the letter has a long and complex trajectory in Lacan's work which there is not space here to outline, suffice it to say that the essentially cybernetic version that appears in 'The Purloined Letter' (1955) or indeed 'The Instance of the Letter' (1957) is not the same as the one that is developed in later texts such as 'Lituraterre' (1971), where it is linked to a rubbishing of meaning. This might appear to have been anticipated in an earlier pun, *poubellication* - which combined publication (*publication*) with the dustbin (*poubelle*) to express Lacan's disdain for the printed word over speech - yet the letter-litter allusion in 'Lituraterre', effectively reverses the previous valorisation of living or full speech over the dead letter of writing, instead giving a priority to a conception of writing, explicitly indebted to Joyce, which concerned not the Symbolic-Imaginary nexus of meaning, but a more direct tracing of the non-sensical Real of jouissance. This is developed in complex detail between 1975 and 1976 in S23 which turned many Lacanian concepts on their head. We are therefore justified in calling this encounter with Joyce's writings a kind of event within Lacan's thirty-year elaboration of psychoanalytic theory, in so far as, truly, nothing was the same thereafter.

Something very similar can be said of Badiou's 'encounter' with Samuel Beckett. He has referred to a "forty-year passion for this author" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 40), but it was only in returning to him in the 1990s, after writing *Being and Event*, that the philosophical framework developed there could be shaken precisely through its application to Beckett's unique oeuvre. For as with any encounter proper, both parties emerged from it somewhat altered. On the one hand, just as Lacan could be accused of psychobiographical reductionism regarding Joyce, so Badiou could be deemed guilty of the philosopher's indifference to the nuances of writerly style or literary critical reception. He does not deal with the structure of whole works or their intertextual relation to other works, let alone with debates within literary criticism. Instead, he extracts terse and largely contextless quotes and treats them like the axioms of a literary thought akin to philosophy. Nor does he situate his own decisive intervention within Beckett Studies as such, apart from to refute the critical tradition - associated with Martin Esslin's 'Theatre of the Absurd', but also with Bataille and Blanchot - that aligned Beckett with existentialism, nihilism, and pessimism in the 1950s and 60s. Badiou admits that as a "young cretin" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 38) he was himself persuaded by this existentialist account of Beckett, but his later philosophical framework leads him to refute it almost dismissively. In all these ways, his is very much a philosopher's reading of Beckett that borders on hermeneutic violence. On the other hand, however, and conversely, Beckett's consistent preoccupation with the darker side of the Cartesian cogito, with its mediation by language and thus the repetitive question of Being, forces Badiou up against a version of the subject he had attempted to leave behind when settling his debt to Lacan, and via Lacan to Descartes, at the end of *Being and Event*. That is to say, Beckett makes Badiou rethink the link between the subject and language, central in Lacan of course, but incompatible with the Badiouian subject. What Beckett brings to this problematic of the subject and language is an additional factor, namely, a *pre*-evental courage, which to

some extent leads Badiou to qualify the absoluteness of the rupture between individual and subject. Surprisingly then, Badiou finds a tenacious optimism in Beckett largely missed by other commentators - "all of Beckett's genius tends towards affirmation" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 41) – which in turn stretches Badiou's own account of the subject.

In order to contest the conventional view of Beckett as a "writer of the absurd, of despair, of empty skies, of incommunicability and of eternal solitude" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 38), and to make the alternative case for him as a writer of stubborn hopefulness, Badiou constructs a clear division within Beckett's oeuvre. This conforms, suspiciously conveniently, to the basic schema organising *Being and Event*, as if the Irish author also moved through a trajectory that began with an interrogation of the limits of Being and ended with an intimation of the dimension of the event. So for Badiou, the famous 'Trilogy' of novels written in the 1950s – *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable* – and the short prose works collected in *Texts for Nothing*, represent the first phase of Beckett's work, in which he focussed obsessively on the problem of the "grey black of being" but also the speaking subject's tortuous yet inescapable relation to that being. With a darkly Cartesian method of merciless reduction, Beckett in this period whittles the subject of enunciation down to its irreducible suspension from a question, until there is nothing left but the anxious repetition of that question, an "imperative of saying" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 81) which refuses even the respite of silence. In the famous concluding lines of *The Unnameable*, "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on", Badiou sees a conceptual but also personal crisis for Beckett which represents the unbearable culmination of this "Cartesian terrorism" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 55). For several years after the 'Trilogy', Beckett struggled to write anything at all.

The caesura in Beckett's oeuvre, the break that helped him to move beyond this Cartesian impasse, comes, according to Badiou, with the 1961 text *How It Is*. This was first written in French and its original title, *Comment c'est*, involved a homophonic pun with *Commencer*, thereby announcing the thematic of the emergence of the new. Moreover, the very structure of *How It Is* implied something like the commencement, but also the passing, of an event. The narrator's unpunctuated monologue, as he crawls across an endless expanse of black mud with nothing but a sack of tins of food, is divided into three parts: 'Before Pim', 'With Pim', and 'After Pim'. The narrator encounters Pim, another creature likewise slithering across the mud, completely by accident, but after tormenting him and yet sharing odd moments of tenderness too, Pim abandons the narrator to his previous solitary state; except that, on Badiou's reading, this aleatory encounter with an Other suggests some release from the tortuous solipsism of the Cartesian subject otherwise trapped in the prison house of language, namely, the Two of a (potential) couple which punctures the infinite solitude of the One. Without conflating this with the romantic weight Badiou elsewhere gives to the "scene of the Two" when writing of love, what he stresses here is Beckett's grasp of radical contingency as the potential catalyst of an exit from the hell of eternal sameness.

However, what I want to emphasise here, in concluding, is less this 'evental' reading, and more what Badiou is forced by his 'encounter' with incredible texts by Beckett, such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Worstward Ho* and *The Lost Ones*, to acknowledge: namely, the *pre*-evental subjective resource, within the individual, of *courage*. To the extent that this complicates the rupture between subject and individual, I find in this concept a partial rapprochement with Lacan. Badiou had in fact appealed to this affect in his most 'Lacanian' work, *Théorie du Sujet* (Badiou, *Theory*), but there it was a more Maoist, voluntarist concept linked to what he called

"confidence in confidence": courage was thus a willingness to act decisively and without anxiety despite doing so completely in the dark. That version of courage can therefore be seen as a precursor of the notion of post-evental fidelity developed in *Being and Event*. In the later reading of Beckett however, courage clearly becomes a subjective disposition *prior* to an event: it is the ability to keep going in the ungrounded, unreasonable, indeed irrational anticipation of an event – or an encounter - that *has not yet happened*. This not an empty and therefore absurd faith that Godot will finally arrive one fine day, since beyond an affective disposition, Beckettian courage is also *an urgent and ongoing labour on and through language itself*. It is a work, to use Beckett's terms from *Worstward Ho*, of 'lessening' or 'worsening' of language's promise of meaning and correspondence (and we might say truth, though Badiou understandably does not). This courageous work on language, not unconnected to Lacan's Joycean "littering of the letter", prepares the way for an openness to the radical non-meaning that is the chance encounter. Under Beckett's sway then, Badiou finds himself conceding what he refused in *Being and Event*: "we can say that every event admits of a figural preparation, that it always possesses a pre-evental *figure*" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 111). In a way that brings his notion of the subject back down to earth, and that also emphasises his proximity to, rather than distance from, Lacan, Badiou seems at this point to share Beckett's "powerful love for human obstinacy, for tireless desire, for humanity reduced to its stubbornness and malice" (Badiou, *Beckett*, 75).

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