Journey to Bethickett

Raymond Federman’s Early Fiction

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

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for Chorny
ABSTRACT

Raymond Federman (1928-2009) was known as a Beckett scholar, postmodern theorist and avant-garde fiction writer. Born in Paris, Federman escaped deportation during the Nazi occupation. All members of his immediate family perished at Auschwitz. He immigrated to the United States and in 1965 published one of the first monographs on Samuel Beckett, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction*. He kept writing on Beckett but turned his focus to postmodern theory, coining the terms ‘critifiction’ and ‘surfiction’ to describe his work and that of his contemporaries. Federman’s novels all repeat variations of his own life story. Scholarship on Federman has acknowledged Beckett’s importance, but the depth of this relationship is yet to be explored. This thesis offers a close reading of both the apparent and encoded intertextuality with Beckett in Federman’s writing. In telling his story Federman merges it with the stories of Beckett’s creations, grafting parts of their identity onto his own. These dynamics are especially significant in the early cycle of Federman’s oeuvre, from the 1971 *Double or Nothing* to the 1982 *The Twofold Vibration*. Federman was also, like Beckett, a self-translator. By engaging with Beckett bilingually, he critiques and reveals both his own writing process and his complex relationship to the man he called ‘Sam.’ Behind or beyond Beckett lies James Joyce, his creation and alter ego ‘Shem the Penman.’ Federman arrives at Joyce through Beckett, disrupting the order of literary transmission, to claim the Pen Man as his own. He engages with Beckett and Joyce as novelist and critic simultaneously, leading us to reflect on the complexities of personal identification and scholarly tribute.
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INTRODUCTION

Though Federman spent the vast majority of his adult life in the United States, he never lost his impossibly thick French accent, as several of his friends have remarked. Some even accuse him of playing it up or of “laying it on extra thick” in order to seduce.¹ Considering that Federman only started to learn English well past childhood, at the age of nineteen, this observation has always struck me as odd. There are countless examples of immigrants who arrived at a similar age and failed to progress in native pronunciation after forty, fifty, sixty years or more. What was it about Federman’s accent that seemed to his friends deliberate, a kind of play? And what was it about Federman that made his friends so suspicious?

Perhaps they were only listening to Federman himself, or rather to the suspicious things he had to say about his “self.” His fake-sounding accent might have something to do with his uneasy relationship to autobiography, his refusal to differentiate memory from imagination. To describe this Federman coined the term surfiction, writing which “exposes the fictionality of reality.”² It might also have something to do with his literary bilingualism, his refusal to stick to one native, authentic language of expression. Both of these avenues, self-translation and autobiography, merit further investigation in Federman’s oeuvre. In her 2015 monograph on bilingual life-writing in French, Sara Kippur concludes that even though Federman insists he makes no difference between memory and imagination, “in repeatedly circling back to the same events of his life, he paradoxically recuperates the idea that there is indeed an autobiographical experience to tell.”³ Kippur includes Federman’s work in the category of life-writing and is reticent to adopt Federman’s own neologism, surfiction: “Surfiction is theoretically viable only up to a certain point: reality is only so fictional, as someone as committed as Federman is to a particular (and very “real”) life-narrative indirectly attests to.”⁴ This very “real” narrative is the story of Federman’s survival, his escape from deportation, the loss of his parents and two sisters in the Holocaust. The fact is that Federman was a survivor. The fact that he is willing to “play” with this fact makes critics understandably uncomfortable. Federman knew this, even claiming

¹ “Federman’s accent was as if on a rheostat, which for seduction he dialled to maximum French.” Steve Katz, “TIOLI” in Verbivoracious Festschrift Volume Five: Raymond Federman, eds. G.M. Forrester and M.J. Nicholls (Singapore: Verbivoracious Press, 2016), 149.
⁴ Kippur, Writing it Twice, 60.
that he was once accused at a conference of making up his entire life story. Rather than becoming angry, he started to question his own memories, wondering whether he hadn’t in fact been lying all along.⁵ Seemingly innocuous, Federman’s postmodern conceptual frameworks challenge the reader to take him at his word.

In a French language context, Federman’s work has been described as autofiction, a term pioneered by author and critic Serge Doubrovsky. A 1993 collected edition (and associated conference) brought together Doubrovsky, Federman, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ronald Sukenick and Rachid Boudjedra as writers of “avant-garde autobiography,”⁶ a term broad enough to encompass the entirety of Federman’s oeuvre. The term autofiction is best applied to Federman’s later, less experimental novels such as La fourrure de ma tante Rachel or Shhh: The Story of a Childhood—in both of these he draws attention to this, responding to the critical reception of his work.⁷ Arnaud Genon’s 2012 overview dismisses surfiction as a term limited to specialists and classifies Federman’s work as autofiction.⁸ Philippe Gasparini, in his 2008 Autofiction: Une aventure du langage, wonders whether surfiction isn’t really just the English translation of autofiction. Gasparini concludes that Federman’s work is indeed autofiction, since like Doubrovsky he recounts only strictly factual events.⁹ Marjorie Worthington, in her 2018 The Story of “Me”: Contemporary American Autofiction, uses the French term to describe American authors, grouping Federman’s writing under “trauma autofiction.”¹⁰ Despite critical consensus, it seems Federman’s own attitude towards autofiction (and to Doubrovsky) was conflicted. In a 2005 interview around Holocaust remembrance he explicitly identifies with the term.¹¹ However in the same year, in an interview for Le matricule des anges, he claims not to know what autofiction really means: “C’est un terme malheureux. C’est mon copain Doubrovsky qui a lancé ce mot. Je ne sais pas ce que ça

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⁵ Federman, Critfiction, 99.
veut dire.”¹² In a series of interviews published in 2008, Federman goes further and repudiates autofiction, describing Doubrovsky as “à genoux devant Freud.”¹³ The bitterness behind this remark and Federman’s own relationship to Freud is examined in chapter one of this thesis.

Federman’s recognition in his home country came relatively late. In an English language context he is chiefly associated with American postmodernism and metafiction, with authors such as Steve Katz, Ronald Sukenick, Clarence Major, John Barth and Robert Coover. He was an early member of the Fiction Collective, an author-run press founded in 1974 and based in New York. Federman is emblematic of a generation of writers whose careers were sustained by academia. His writing spans both criticism and fiction, often blurring boundaries of genre—to describe this he coined another neologism, critifiction. The self-reflexive and metafictional qualities of his novels merge “creative writing” (which he also taught) with scholarly criticism. In his 2011 article “Federman, Autobiography and Creative Literary Criticism,” Larry McCaffery highlights the unexamined importance of Federman’s critifictional enterprise:

The relative absence of critical commentary about the critifictional features of Federman’s work is unfortunate because for all their individual and collective brilliance, his books have probably had the greatest impact on literary criticism rather than on fiction per se by providing a more open ended, willfully subjective, autobiographically based model of literary criticism.¹⁴

My work here is partly a response to McCaffery’s observation. A cursory glance at Federman’s scholarly output establishes Samuel Beckett as the formative influence—Federman is the author of a monograph, numerous articles and co-author of two critical bibliographies on Beckett. Federman’s preoccupation with Beckett is also evident in his fiction, particularly in his early novels (1971–1982). These are rife with references to Beckett in the form of allusions, quotations, adaptations of Beckett’s biography and even entire passages lifted from Beckett’s work. Some are made obvious and others require intimate familiarity to be identified. As Melvin J. Friedman remarks in “Making the Best of Two Worlds: Raymond Federman, Beckett and the University,” it seems Federman expects his readers to be as familiar with Beckett’s

work as he is. The interest of my research is in examining how Federman uses these Beckettian fragments to tell his own (surfictional) life story. Rather than using Beckett the author as a model for his own literary career, Federman appropriates the fictional lives of Beckettian characters in order to merge them with his own. Where Federman greatly departs from Beckett’s approach is in his willingness to expose himself and his personal life. This is evidenced in his early adoption of social media; much of Federman’s work is available on his website and personal blog, which also provides a complete bibliography of his oeuvre.

As a self-translator, Federman was less consistent than Beckett. His début novel was composed in English and followed by a second novel composed in French, Amer Eldorado (1974). This was self-translated and greatly expanded into Take It or Leave It (1976). I undertake a comparative study of the French and English versions in the second chapter. Federman’s bilingual novella, the 1979 The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras, is examined in the third chapter. Self-translation is used along with translations of Beckett to blur the boundaries between autobiography, fiction and criticism. The final novel in Federman’s early cycle, The Twofold Vibration (1982), was not self-translated and not published in French until 1998 as La flèche du temps. Federman was unsatisfied with this translation, not least because the title fails to reference Beckett. He was quite happy however with the collaborative translation of La fourrrure de ma tante Rachel into Aunt Rachel’s Fur, undertaken with Patricia Privat-Standley and published in 2001. In the same year an expanded version of Amer Eldorado, incorporating aspects of Take It or Leave It and entitled Amer Eldorado 200/1 was released. Federman’s oeuvre provides fertile ground for investigating different aspects of translation, self-translation and collaborative translation. This study is confined to examining translation within Federman’s intertextual practice, to determine its role in his relationship to Beckett.

Federman understood his approach to intertextuality as a postmodern form of plagiarism; I discuss this in the first chapter. The reader is constantly made aware of the author’s lack of

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16 Federman was also a prolific essayist and poet. See Federman’s Blog (The laugh that laughs at the laugh...), http://raymondfederman.blogspot.com.
18 Federman, Federman hors limites, 88.
19 Federman, 88.
originality. This is very different to the way in which Beckett incorporates other texts into his own. In a preface to C.J. Ackerley’s annotations to *Murphy*, S.E. Gontarski develops a distinction between modernist and postmodernist intertextuality. Indebted to James Joyce, Beckett developed a dense style of allusion, incorporating and “grafting” (a term first used by James Knowlson) “pilfered” fragments onto his own texts. Upon discovering Beckett’s notebooks in the late eighties critics became, according to Gontarski, uneasy at the possibility of “plagiarism,” defending Beckett’s “originality.” Gontarski contrasts this to the “overtness” and “exaltation” of postmodern plagiaristic techniques, rejected by Beckett, who abhorred the “reduction if not the destruction of the agency of the author.” Though Gontarski clearly places Beckettian intertextuality in the modernist camp, in Federman’s view of postmodernism Beckett is both the beginning and the end, “the first and last postmodern writer.” Nevertheless Federman’s practice, as distinct from Beckett’s, fits with Gontarski’s definition of postmodern (as opposed to modernist) intertextuality. His is an “overt” intertextuality, often signalled by phrases such as “my friend Sam once said,” which laughingly declares its own inauthenticity. This does not mean that there aren’t more oblique allusions to Beckett to be found in Federman’s work. Often these come to undermine or question the apparent reference, as clues to some secret or hidden meaning. These dynamics are uncovered in the third and fourth chapters.

Via Beckett Federman reaches for James Joyce, most importantly *Finnegans Wake*. This dual grasping is gestured to in my title, “Journey to Bethickett.” In Federman’s *Take It or Leave It*, we are told that “all good storytellers go to Bethickett on their way to heaven,” a reference to a passage in *Finnegans Wake*: “Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultiest notion what the fairest he all means.” This reference is discussed in detail in the second chapter. Throughout this thesis I examine the interplay of Joycean and Beckettian references, as well as the dialogues Federman creates between Beckett and poststructuralist theory. My guiding principle, however, remains Federman’s own primary and overarching engagement with Beckett. This thesis accomplishes what I hope is only the beginning of a close reading of Federman’s work. I have taken what Finn Fordham (in regard to *Finnegans Wake*) defines as

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22 Gontarski, Preface, 8.
23 Federman, *Critification*, 105.
a philological approach: annotating texts, chasing allusions, elucidating obscurity and clarifying intertextual references. As Fordham so aptly illustrates, this kind of reading is “a game for literary truffle hounds and obsessive devotees.” For Fordham a philological reading opens onto genetic criticism, a privileged method in Joyce (and Beckett) scholarship. Though I make use of some digital manuscripts in my analysis, my contribution here is necessarily focussed on edited material.

There is still a lot of ground work to be done when it comes to Federman. In his introduction to the 2011 collection *Federman’s Fictions: Innovation, Theory and the Holocaust*, Jeffrey R. Di Leo wonders if Federman’s association with American postmodernists of the late sixties and seventies hasn’t excluded his work from other contexts. Di Leo emphasises the particular relevance of Federman’s work in a “postliterature,” “posttheoretical” climate, where literary and cultural studies coincide. In examining Federman’s relationship to Beckett, I make use of scholars whose work reflects this intersection. My initial step was to elaborate on Federman’s self-conscious use of psychoanalysis and French poststructuralism. Chasing up Beckettian references has led me through diverse fields of enquiry—Jewish studies and translation studies, obviously, but also fandom studies, animal studies and queer theory. Eventually, the “reflexive” in self-reflexive turned towards my “self.” I realised that the significance of Federman’s work had everything to do with my own enterprise, with my own feelings as a fledgling Beckett scholar. I became suspicious of Federman’s motives, wondering if in his apparent dedication to the work—Beckett’s work, his own work—there wasn’t something else, something at once more sinister and more light-hearted, a paradoxical something.

This thesis is organised into four chapters, which follow the sequence of Federman’s novels and the ageing of his alter egos. The first chapter, “The Noodle Man,” discusses Federman’s re-staging of the Beckettian “siege in the room” in his 1971 début novel, *Double or Nothing*. I examine Federman’s use of his PhD dissertation, *Journey to Chaos*, along with Beckett’s

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27 Genetic scholarship could be another avenue for Federman studies. Manuscripts, typescripts, letters and other ephemera from 1941–2010 can be found at Washington University in Saint Louis. The Raymond Federman Papers, Washington University Libraries, Department of Special Collections.


29 Di Leo, “Other Voices,” 3.
novels and short stories. This first chapter also establishes the importance of *Finnegans Wake*, particularly the figure of Shem the Penman. My second chapter, “Hombre della Pluma,” looks at how homoeroticism is used to disrupt literary paternity in *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, by expanding on queer elements in Beckett’s work. I also argue that Federman uses poststructuralist theory to undermine the socio-political assumptions of the intellectual class, betraying a certain tension towards Beckett. In the third chapter, “Sam in his closet,” I engage mainly with Beckett’s *Comment c’est/How It Is* to uncover the masochistic dynamics of *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*. By the fourth and final chapter, “The old man,” the existence of a second closet (not just a second voice in the closet) becomes apparent. Beckett literally goes from God to dog, as a Dalmatian called Sam. A reflection on the death camps, *The Twofold Vibration* closes Federman’s early cycle on a note of deep sadness. By 1982, “the decline of the spirit of play in us”30 marks the death of at least one Federman.

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Federman was part of the first generation of Beckett critics including Hugh Kenner, Ruby Cohn and John Fletcher. They called themselves the “Becketteers,” a name still in use.1 These early champions were among the first to recognize Beckett’s genius. According to Federman when in 1959 he announced his intention to write his PhD dissertation on Samuel Beckett, he was laughed out of the room by a circle of stuffy professors, who told him he’d better pick a subject who was already dead.2 Ruby Cohn met with similar resistance, though hers is a more likely story.3 This is difficult to imagine considering the iconic status of Beckett today. In addition to the ever-increasing number of Beckett scholars, there are many “fans” of Beckett, not least of which U2’s Bono, a subject Cameron Reid explores in his essay on Beckett in Irish pop music.4 Reid quotes Bono in 2006, regarding his role in the Samuel Beckett centenary celebrations: “I’m a fan. I don’t know what he’s on about half the time but I have enjoyed not knowing … He blew my mind, that’s all I can say.”5 Bono was asked to perform an homage for the occasion. In the same year, Federman published his own homage, Le livre de Sam, where he describes his first contact with Beckett’s work: “Je n’ai absolument rien compris de ce qui se passait ou ne se passait pas sur la scène … Mais cela m’était égal.”6 Both men express admiration for something they cannot understand, are enraptured by something beyond their comprehension. Federman, however, takes it a lot further than Bono’s mere enjoyment or “blown mind.” On the day he discovered Beckett, his life was forever changed. He experienced a deep, almost spiritual shift: “Quelque chose comme une révélation.”7 Federman came to truly see himself in Beckett’s work, to understand his life through Beckett’s creations. In Le livre de Sam, he compares his moment of revelation to a passage in Watt where Arsène feels everything

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2 Raymond Federman, Le livre de Sam ou des pierres à sucer plein les poches (Paris: Al Dante, 2006), 55.
3 “Ruby Cohn recalls an editorial rebuke to her early efforts to publish criticism about Samuel Beckett’s work: ‘We like your criticism, but we don’t feel your author merits publishing space.’” Gontarski, “Introduction: Critics and Criticism,” 2.
5 Reid, “A mollycoddled little git from Foxrock.”
6 Federman, Le livre de Sam, 49.
7 Federman, 49.
around him “slip”: “C’était un glissement comme ça que j’ai ressenti.” This deep identification inspired his academic work and his fictional engagement with Beckett.

More than a mere fan, Federman is a super-fan, an early adopter and a true devotee. His daughter Simone described Beckett as a God in their house. Federman’s final post on his personal blog, a reflection on his terminal cancer, is dedicated to discussing *Malone Dies*. As one of the founding members of the Becketteers, it seems Federman maintained his devotion to the cause. Nevertheless, he was perceived as something of a defector—as is made clear in John Fletcher’s obituary, published in *The Journal of Beckett Studies*. There is an appreciable difference between scholarship and fandom, but in any discussion of Raymond Federman’s relationship to Beckett the similarities must be considered. Particularly because, as this chapter will demonstrate, Federman merges emotional identification with scholarly critique. What then are the similarities between scholars and super-fans? As I mentioned earlier, the true fans are those who got there first, who liked something/someone before it was a fashionable thing to do. Super-fans like to give themselves names (the Beliebers, the Beyhive) and are on a first-name basis with their idols. Going back to Fletcher’s obituary, and as is evidenced throughout Beckett’s correspondence, many of the original Becketteers had the privilege of calling their subject “Sam.” They met with him in person and were in a sense “friends of Beckett,” as Anthony Uhlmann has pointed out. Uhlmann also describes how the notion of fidelity in friendship can create rivalry among critics—to which Beckett are they being faithful?

Put in this way the question sounds very much like a personal accusation. Put in this way many a Beckett critic might struggle to affirm disinterestedness, to defeat his or her own jealousy and deflect the jealousy of rivals by appealing to the notion of fidelity (“I might wish to possess a thing, ‘Samuel Beckett,’ but only because I am a true friend”).

Fandom is a more passionate, emotional affair than scholarly criticism. Nevertheless there is a raw, emotional element at work, a desire to prove to others one truly “gets it.”

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8 Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 49.
According to Paul Mann, feelings of jealousy, rivalry and intense desire are only thinly veiled by the rituals of academic prose. Underneath it all lies the desire for possession Uhlmann touches on above, and Mann explores in his discussion of masocriticism, a neologism used to describe the complex and highly charged relationship between critic and text: “our service to the text masks a desire to incorporate this ideality entirely into ourselves, to conquer and possess it, to pose it as ourselves, and for no-one’s sake but our own.”¹⁴ In the following description of masocriticism, one recognises the intertextual dynamics present throughout Federman’ oeuvre:

Masocriticism is the doubly bound necessity and impossibility of aggressive identifications with the master text. Critics constitute a kind of primal horde whose identification with their progenitor leads them to destroy him, but in a ritual in which his body must be consumed, introjected, reconstituted as an internal voice whose demands can never be satisfied.¹⁵

From his beginnings as an author, Federman aggressively identifies with Beckett’s literary creations. True meaning is forever deferred, and he can only provide a parroted perversion, a reconstituted internal voice. Federman uses passages and fragments from Beckett’s texts in his own novels and by doing so grafts them onto his life story. He also critiques these fragments, as well as his own use of them. Underlying all of this is an acute sense of his own inadequacy as a writer; the ignorance and vulgarity of his narrators is revelled in. By transposing critical reflections into his novels, Federman exposes what Barret Watten, reviewing Mann’s Masocriticism, calls the critic’s “bad faith.”¹⁶ A blatant example of this occurs in his first novel, the 1971 Double or Nothing, which reproduces a passage from his 1965 monograph, Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction. The passage in question is a summary of Beckett’s short story, “Love and Lethe.” The passage is annotated with ironic asides, and then proposed as a possible ending for a novel that, ultimately, recounts the life of a Beckett critic (Raymond Federman). I discuss this example in detail in section three of this chapter. In perhaps the most obvious illustration of masocritical dynamics, the internal voice of a punishing “Sam” is incorporated into Federman’s 1979 The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras, which reimagines the masochistic scene of Beckett’s How It Is and merges it with his story of survival, the closet episode. In this bilingual text, self-translation doubles the work of the masocritic, who translates his master and himself simultaneously. By undertaking self-translation, Federman is of course following Beckett’s example. Anthony Cordingley has

¹⁵ Mann, Masocriticism, 37.
¹⁶ Barret Watten, review of Masocriticism, by Paul Mann, Textual Practice 14, no.1 (2000): 212.
identified the masochistic and masocritical dynamics in Beckett’s own self-translations, where the translator is positioned according to a master text.\textsuperscript{17} Self-translation as a masocritical practice will be discussed in chapter three.

Mann’s analysis of the scholar’s masochism draws on post-structuralist interpretations of Freudian frameworks; ideas that informed Federman’s entry into literary life in the late sixties. As both a Beckett critic and a native Frenchman, Federman was very much aware of the work of the Tel Quel group. The 1976 \textit{Cahiers de l’Herne}, which Federman co-edited with Tom Bishop, includes Kristeva’s post-Freudian analysis of \textit{Premier amour} and \textit{Pas moi}. Federman’s intertextual practice explicitly engages with Freud, and his sources are often post-structuralist luminaries. This is made explicit in \textit{Amer Eldorado} (1974) and \textit{Take It or Leave} (1976), as I discuss in chapter two. It would seem then that the discourses of French high theory offer a key to understanding Federman’s literary practice. But as Brian McHale has shown, Federman’s links to post-structuralism do not run deep. Although narrative hierarchies are ostentatiously transgressed, they are not essentially dismantled, and the distinction between a real and implied author is ultimately maintained. McHale demonstrates that Federman does not arrive at his own narrative poetics, surfiction, \textit{through} high theory but through engagement with his literary predecessors, Beckett above all.\textsuperscript{18} Though not ignorant, he remains essentially “indifferent” to authors such as Derrida, Kristeva and Foucault.\textsuperscript{19} I would add that this indifference is only relative; relative to his deep involvement with Beckett. Federman admits in an interview that Derrida, for example, was an influence on his work: “il y a sans doute quelques échos derridiens dans mes écrits.”\textsuperscript{20} He qualifies this debt by pointing out that he only read the early works, and that he didn’t understand everything he read, finding it rather boring at times: “je ne comprenais pas tout…parfois je le trouvais un peu chiant.”\textsuperscript{21} This is a very different kind of incomprehension to the one evoked earlier with Beckett. Evidently, Federman was never a super-fan of Derrida—unlike much of the audience in American universities, where he was “venerated like an idol.”\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{19} McHale, “A Narrative Poetics of Raymond Federman,” 94.

\textsuperscript{20} Federman, \textit{Federman hors limites}, 57.

\textsuperscript{21} Federman, 56.

\textsuperscript{22} “(il) était vénéré comme une idole.” Federman, 57.
In his own literary practice, Federman uses Derrida without, in Mann’s terms, serving the master text. It is important here to draw a distinction between scholarly interpretation and artistic use. Umberto Eco points out that to interpret, rather than use, a text, one must necessarily pay respect to the real author, to cultural and chronological fact. A text may be wilfully misinterpreted and used for artistic ends, without any consideration of authorial intention. Jan Baetens, examining the relationship between Federman and critical theory, aptly describes the way in which “traces” of such discourses are “heavily reworked, assimilated, played and laughed with, that is, absorbed into a fictional universe that imposes its own logic.” Though these techniques in themselves are in accordance with the dissolution of the subject, the end result in Federman’s fictions is inevitably a paradoxical assertion of the subject’s/ his own authenticity, or what Baetens terms Federman’s “existential project.” My analysis will examine how these traces of plagiarized discourse, like Freudian traces, are subsumed into a narrative of self-actualisation. As I discuss further in chapter two, this is what Federman does with/to Derrida and other Tel Quel authors, wilfully misinterpreting and undermining their political project.

Though he engages with a wide variety of critical and literary sources, Federman mainly plagiarises Beckett, returning to him extensively and consistently throughout his fictional work. Through enlisting the tools of literary analysis, his practice occupies the space where interpretation and artistic use merge, what Eco describes as “paranoiac” overinterpretation. This approach deduces from a minimal relationship the maximal possible meaning, seeing behind everything the allusion to some secret. The split protagonist of Federman’s first novel, the 1971 Double or Nothing, is explicitly paranoiac and implicitly a scholar. In my analysis of Beckett’s presence in this novel, I illustrate how Federman’s intertextual strategy draws on and overextends his scholarly work. It will emerge that the “secret” Federman sees behind Beckett’s words is the secret of his own life story. In his surfiction manifesto, Federman’s preoccupation with autobiography is revealed. He rails against the category experimental—“true experiments never reach the printed page”—and cites Joyce, Beckett and Borges as

exemplars. Surfiction aims to expose the “fictionality of reality”: “Just as the Surrealists called that level of man’s experience that functions in the subconscious SURREALITY, I call that level of man’s activity that reveals life as fiction SURFICTION.” The reality referred to here is not for Federman a shared or historical reality, but a personal one:

Therefore, there is some truth in cliché which says “life is fiction,” but not because it happens in the streets, but because reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in its fictionalised version. The experience of life gains meaning only in its recounted form, in its verbalized version, or, as Céline said, some years ago, in answer to those who claimed that his novels were merely autobiographical: “Life, also, is fiction… and a biography is something one invents afterwards.”

Susan Rubin Suleiman, in her analysis of Double or Nothing alongside Perec’s W, warns against an overly simple interpretation of surfiction’s stated aims. Suleiman highlights the importance of historical reality in Federman’s work, demonstrating how personal trauma determines strategies of postmodern play. I will be drawing on her analysis in my discussion of Double or Nothing to highlight the ways in which Federman sees his own story of survival in Beckett’s work.

In Double or Nothing an aspiring writer, the second person, locks himself in a room for a year to write the story of a young man (referred to as the third person) and his arrival in America. All this is narrated by a middle-aged man, the first person (Federman was around forty at the time of composition). The characters (first person, second person and third person) correspond to their grammatical categories and are usually referred to as such, though there is often confusion between the first and second persons. Each character also occupies a distinct time. The young man/third person is the Federman of the past. The second person is the Federman of a projected future, the one who will settle down to write. The present of narration belongs to the first person. Like the real Raymond Federman the young man/third person, a French Jew, came to America after the Second World War. To explain the scenario with the room, we are told that the second person/writer has won some money (approximately one thousand dollars) through gambling on a double or nothing bet. He must now calculate his living expenses for the entire year so that he can finally write his novel. The second person has decided that he will

28 Federman, 8.
be cloistered in the room the entire time, dedicating himself only to writing. Since the money he has won is not very substantial and he cannot leave his room to buy food, he decides to subsist solely on noodles. Much of the novel is dedicated to lists and calculations (boxes of noodles, toilet paper, coffee, cigarettes etc.). The rest of the time, the second person is deciding on which parts of the young man’s life he will tell, what his name will be and where the story will end—all this related to the reader by the first person, who is prone to his own digressions.

The first and second persons (I, you) speak simultaneously as both writer and narrator. In doing so they enact the dual role of author and critic, illustrating what Federman terms a critifictional enterprise in his essay “Imagination as Plagiarism”:

The term critifiction is used because the discourse that follows is critical as well as fictitious; imagination is used in the sense that it is essential in the formulation of a discourse; plagiarism because the writing of a discourse always implies bringing together pieces of other discourses; an unfinished endless discourse because what is presented here is open at both ends, and as such more could be added endlessly.  

In Double or Nothing entire passages are plagiarised from Beckett and presented as possible variations of the young man’s story. The first person is critical of his own writing, but he also fails to understand the authors he admires—a performative failure enacting his masocritical tendencies. Imagination is invoked from the first page: “noodles then it is/ Imagine that!” The novel begins with the proposition that if the room costs 8 dollars a week, the second person must subsist solely on noodles. It concludes by observing that if the room cost only 7 dollars a week, then it does not necessarily have to be noodles (191). Double or Nothing is “an unfinished endless discourse” onto which infinite variations could be added. This is reflected in the epigraph by Robert Pinget: “Ce qui est dit n’est jamais dit puisqu’on peut le dire autrement.” In 1970 Federman edited a collection of short stories aimed at students of French, Cinq nouvelles nouvelles, that brought together Beckett, Vian, Robbe-Grillet, Le Clézio and Pinget. These are authors he will frequently return to in his intertextual practice (a possible name for the young man of Double or Nothing is Boris, Vian’s real first name). The choice of Pinget in particular is significant, as he was an intimate friend and translator of Beckett’s. Federman, however, is destined to “serve the master badly.” In the aforementioned edited

30 Federman, Critifiction, 49.
31 Raymond Federman, Double or Nothing (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971). In-text references are to this edition.
collection, Beckett’s name is spelt with only one ‘t’ on the cover. In *Le livre de Sam* he recalls the moment he discovered this error: “Je sors un exemplaire de ce paquet et... je hurle. Horreur.” Though this printing error was accidental, the fact that he chose to remember it in an homage to Beckett, revelling in the “horror” of betrayal, is significant.

There are two distinct narrative strands running through Federman’s work: the story and the discourse. The story never changes, it is Federman’s real life. As McHale argues, the discourse (the “story of the story”) continually undermines and subverts the story, but these transgressions only serve to uphold the status of the real author. The story is all Federman’s (his “real” life) but the discourse is substantially plagiarised, or as Federman puts it, “playgiarised.” Charles Caramello, in his analysis of Federman’s *The Voice in the Closet*, warns that playgiarism is not, despite appearances, a purely joyful affirmation: “if Federman seems more exuberant than Beckett, it is not because he is prepared joyously to affirm the play of the world—in Derrida’s phrase, to “determine the non-center otherwise than as a loss of center.” Caramello highlights the importance of primal loss—the extermination of four members of his family in the Holocaust—in understanding Federman’s narrative poetics, a “continuous deferral of referentiality” that seeks to recover “an impossible centre.” Returning to McHale’s distinction between the discourse and the story, no amount of exuberant, playgiaristic discourse can fill the enduring absence at the centre of his story. Caramello highlights this impossibility, illustrating Federman’s fundamental split: “the culturally marginal Federman, open and playful, does not deny and cannot negate the personally marginal Federman, alienated from his past, seeking to recuperate his primal loss.” Caramello’s reading of playgiarism demonstrates the centrality of the Holocaust in Federman’s poetics.

Mirjam Horn’s expansive study, *Postmodern Plagiarisms: Cultural Agenda and Aesthetic Strategies of Appropriation in US-American Literature (1970–2010)*, includes a section on Federman. Drawing on McHale’s reflections, to which she adds her own theoretical analysis of plagiarism in *Double or Nothing*, Horn dismisses playgiarism as “innocuous” and devoid of political potential. Horn concludes that despite superficial resemblances to Derrida’s concept

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33 Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 47.
36 Caramello, 134.
37 Caramello, 142.
of play, Federman’s novel is a reflection of Harold Bloom’s (patriarchal) theory of influence rather than the more radical postmodern intertextuality. According to Horn, Federman’s playgiarisms are incapable of truly challenging prevailing systems of authority, as he remains stuck in a respectful “tribute” to his predecessors, in particular Beckett. For the purpose of Horn’s broad study, *Double or Nothing* evidently did not merit close reading—Horn repeatedly refers to the protagonist as an “immigrant from Poland.” It is only through close attention to intertextual references that the apparent tribute to Beckett becomes more complex. In any case, as Bloom reminds his readers in *The Anxiety of Influence*, his theory is only concerned with “strong poets”: “Battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads; only this is my subject here.” Though I am definitely a “fan” of Federman, even I recognise that he is in no way Beckett’s “equal,” at least not within the canonical framework Bloom inhabits. In a preface to the 1997 reedition of his seminal study, Bloom displays an interesting aversion to the “literal” and to “literalisation.” In reference to “creative misprision” he writes: “Authentic, high literature relies upon troping, turning away not only from the literal but from prior tropes. Like criticism, which is either part of literature or nothing at all, great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading previous writing.” Federman’s approach performs its own weakness, displaying misunderstanding rather than misprision. His playgiarism has a tendency, like a child might, to take things literally. At another point in his preface, Bloom refers to “secondariness” and “belatedness” as an aesthetic practice, mentioning in passing Borges, Foucault and Tony Kushner who “generously assigns his authorship to many others, a curious literalisation on his part of Brecht’s plagiaristic stance.” Kushner’s move, a kind of anti-troping, undermines Bloom’s vision of creation as an Oedipal battle between father and son. As the following chapter will demonstrate, Federman’s literalising tendency, especially in regards to Freudian discourse, playfully subverts the structures upon which Bloom’s theory is built.

Horn’s dismissal of *Double or Nothing* as devoid of political potential echoes Linda Hutcheon’s earlier dismissal of surfiction, the literary movement Federman named. Hutcheon

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39 Uncle David, the estranged paternal uncle who brought him to America, is from Poland (like Federman’s uncle). The protagonist is from France (like Federman).
41 Bloom, Preface to *The Anxiety of Influence*, xix.
42 Bloom, Preface to *The Anxiety of Influence*, xxv.
43 Marcel Cornis-Pope lists the following authors associated with surfiction and the Fiction Collective (author-run press): Walter Abish, Rudolfo Anaya, Russell Banks, George Chambers, Steve Dixon, Raymond Federman,
reads surfiction as essentially hermetic late modernism. But as Suleiman remarks (in response to Hutcheon), this would be taking Federman “at his word,” believing in his protestations that he is only interested in language play and that his work has no political content. I concur that Federman’s work does have clear political implications; these pertain to the use and representation of the Holocaust in art. Federman’s use of Beckett, his relationship to the master text, also poses ethical, even political, questions about the scholar’s function. A closer look at Beckettian references reveals a self-reflexive strategy of overinterpretation; Federman humiliates his narrator-characters, exposing their ignorance and paranoid desperation. At the same time, by grafting Beckettian fragments onto his life story, Federman’s own impossible centre takes the place of the master text. Rather than simply paying homage to Beckett, these masochistic acts undermine the very notion of scholarly tribute.


45 Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, 198.
ii) After Chaos

Federman’s first novel explicitly draws on his PhD research, published in 1965 as *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction*. Jerome Klinkowitz has highlighted this connection, and the formative role of his research: “what Federman the scholar says about Beckett’s work has been said by critics about Federman the novelist’s work.” In *Double or Nothing* the first, second and third persons occupy a world outside realism in their (and Federman’s) repeated failure to provide a coherent narrative. To reiterate his position, the first person quotes a passage from *Journey to Chaos* in which “most works of fiction” are described as “a logical accumulation of facts,” a progression towards “a definite clear goal” (150). In his scholarly monograph, Federman goes on to say that “Beckett’s novels seem to progress in exactly the opposite direction.” In *Double or Nothing* the first person adds: “Then there’s little hope for HIM or ME” (150). On one level, “him” refers to the second person, and “me” to the first person. But since *Journey to Chaos* has just been cited, “him” could also be Raymond Federman. Finally, “him” could be Beckett—the original passage in *Journey to Chaos* refers to Samuel Beckett. Through this critifictional strategy, the first person equates his own novel with the subject of his PhD research. By acknowledging his displacement from the world of realism, the author undermines the reality, or rather viability, of the critic’s role.

The premise of *Double or Nothing* is reminiscent of the one in which, according to *Journey to Chaos*, Beckett entraps his creatures:

> Like incurable poker players they are committed to their *mise en jeu*, and, win or lose, they cannot withdraw from the game until all cards are played, all the while knowing that the deck of fictional cards can be dealt and redealt endlessly… While dreaming of salvation, or hoping for a quick death, or attempting to disappear into silence, they inflict upon themselves the punishment of having to go on gambling with their false existence.

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47 “Most works of fiction achieve coherence through a logical accumulation of facts about specific situations and more or less credible characters. In the process of recording, or gradually revealing mental and physical experiences organized into aesthetic and ethical form, these works progress toward a definite goal: the discovery of knowledge. The novels of Samuel Beckett seem to advance in exactly the opposite direction, and give the impression of being conscious efforts to reduce or retract all given norms.” Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 4.

Federman’s idiosyncratic gambling metaphor foreshadows the development of his critifictional enterprise. The first, second and third persons are trapped in the same kind of “unfinished endless discourse” as Beckett’s characters. In his own journey as an author, Federman seems to follow in Beckett’s footsteps. This is made more explicit with another reference to *Journey to Chaos* as the third person’s peregrinations and possible fates are described:

Los Angeles and then back East to New York where it all started a kind of circular journey. *Journey to Chaos* remember University of California Press 1965 and finally he dies that’s a beautiful ending he dies of starvation in a crummy furnished room in the Bronx a circular story from beginning to end from room to room

(121)

The third person’s journey is merged with that of the first person, or perhaps the middle-aged Federman, author of *Journey to Chaos*. His “circular journey” brings him back to Federman’s entry into literature, Samuel Beckett. Mirroring this, *Double or Nothing* also begins with Beckett.

After “THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING,” which serves as an introduction (pages 0 to 000000000.0), a “FOOTNOTE” (where an epigraph should be) reveals that in addition to the first, second, and third persons, there is necessarily a fourth person, an “overall looker” who is “above aside and of course underneath the whole set up” (000000000.0). This fourth person is “omnipresent omnipotent and omniscient,” presiding over these “unfortunate beings.” A “WARNING” at the very end of *Double or Nothing* confirms that the fourth person is indeed the author: “The AUTHOR (that is to say the fourth person) is solely responsible.” But in the initial introduction to the fourth person, the “footnote” is directly preceded by an oft-quoted passage from Beckett’s *The Unnamable*, with typographic variations: “Here all is clear…No all is not clear…But the discourse must go on…So one invents obscurities…R H E T O R I C” (000000000).

49 There is no actual footnote, but considering the sequence one could read the passage on the fourth person as a reference for this quotation. Rather than naming Beckett, the “footnote” reveals his identity as “overall looker,” author not only of the preceding passage, but possibly of the “REAL FICTITIOUS DISCOURSE” (000000000.0) that is about to begin. The fourth person is ostensibly the author-God Raymond Federman, whose responsibility it is “to write and present the preceding pages which obviously cannot possibly have been written by any of the three persons involved” (000000000.0). The preceding pages include that

quotation from *The Unnamable*, so in a sense they “cannot possibly have been written” by any of the *four* persons, including the “AUTHOR” Raymond Federman. The goal of “the whole setup” is to transfer the task of writing from Raymond Federman onto the second and third persons—and, possibly, the fourth person, who according to the footnote could also be Samuel Beckett. The idea that Beckett can transfer creative responsibility onto his creations underpins Federman’s argument in *Journey to Chaos*. If Beckett is the fourth person, then the third person (the young man) is Beckett’s creation, his “creature.” This is consistent with Federman’s efforts, throughout his oeuvre, to merge his life story with those of Beckett’s characters.

In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Federman claimed that he was completely unaware of how *Double or Nothing* would turn out, making lists and plans for his own future novel before deciding to make of them the novel itself. It seems that his scholarly reading of Beckett’s *Watt* informed his narrative strategies of multiplication and permutation. In section three of *Watt*, a narrator called “Sam” takes over the narrative. In *Journey to Chaos* Federman elaborates on this strategy:

> By transferring his creative responsibility onto one of his creations, Beckett is able to extend his fictitious universe beyond the limits of traditional fiction, beyond the boundaries of realism...in *Watt*, by pretending to hand over the creative power to an ambivalent narrator-hero, and by hiding behind Sam’s mask, Beckett can render his fiction as irrational and absurd as he wishes.

In *Double or Nothing* the first person takes on the role of Sam; a “madman assuming creative responsibility.” The “whole setup” of *Double or Nothing* is indebted to Federman’s reading of *Watt*. This is confirmed through a reference to *Journey to Chaos* in the footnote discussed above, which begins: “It should be noted here that overlooking the whole intramural setup” (000000000.0). In *Journey to Chaos*, Federman writes of Watt (the character): “it is primarily as a result of these intramural activities that narrative coherence is maintained.” The premise of *The Noodle Novel*—a story (teller) confined within four walls—literalises Federman’s analysis of Beckett’s text. The second person is, like Watt, “the central figure” of Federman’s novel, whose activities drive the narrative. In Federman’s reading, Mr. Knott is a kind of

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50 The first use of creature is on page 4, and the word creature is used interchangeably with creation and character in *Journey to Chaos*. The concept of the creature will be developed further in chapter four.
52 Federman, *Journey to Chaos*, 111.
53 Federman, 97.
54 Federman, 99, italics added.
“grotesque divinity.” Watt, a servant in Mr. Knott’s house, cannot accede to his high level of irrationality. In his interpretation of the Watt/Knott relationship, Federman applies his own theory of a hierarchy of absurd realisation in Beckett’s oeuvre: “He sets out from the world of reality (the human world) in a heroic but clumsy effort to conquer the illusory Knott world, strives to place himself on the same level as Mr. Knott by identifying with him, thereby attempting to achieve the Knott divinity or fictionality.” Federman’s Mr. Knott, a “master” and “elusive deity,” bears a strong resemblance to Federman’s Samuel Beckett. In Double or Nothing, the writer’s efforts follow the above reading of Watt’s trajectory: he “strives to place himself on the same level as (Samuel Beckett) by identifying with him.”

Comparisons to and quotations of canonical authors abound in Double or Nothing, revealing the insecurities of the neurotic and “paranoiac” persons, whose ambition it is to write a great novel. The idea of a year-long lockdown, fully dedicated to writing, is understood in terms of Samuel Beckett’s biography: “Could call it/ A STATE OF SIEGE/ SIEGE IN A ROOM (!)” (4). The “siege in the room” refers to the particularly productive post-War period of Beckett’s career, and is Beckett’s own formulation according to Hugh Kenner. This phrase is cited by Federman in the opening of chapter five of Journey to Chaos. Unlike Beckett however, the second person envisages a literal siege, complete seclusion: “goodby [sic] world goodby people society” (4). To do so he must buy all his supplies in advance, he must think of everything because he will be forbidden from leaving the room. It is only through a great “stroke of luck after all these years” (3), his miraculous gambling win, that the second person is finally able to find time to write. His days, like his resources, are numbered. And though Beckett’s siege lasted five years, the second person has only one year, “365 days to be exact” (3). In his creative engagement with Beckett, Federman’s strategy is to take literally and exaggerate. The post-War “siege” becomes a recreation of wartime conditions and near starvation:

Then in my room (alone) cooking my daily box of noodles every morning (one box for the whole day) I would remember eggs for breakfast (sunny side – scrambled – soft boiled) it would give me visions (hallucinations) and I would suffer like hell and because of the suffering things would come out much better much deeper

(182)

The hunger he will suffer is explicitly linked to the experience of the death camps:

55 Federman, Journey to Chaos, 100, italics original.
I can see myself dreaming of a huge rare steak - - - a filet mignon - - - bloody rare - - - to the point of chewing anything I can get my teeth on - - - paper - - - rags - - - leather - - - pieces of wood - - - dead flies - - - like in the camps

(183)

The second person’s seclusion surpasses the Beckettian “siege in the room” through suffering and desperation. He hopes that things will “come out much deeper” if he can recreate the conditions in which his family perished.

But whatever happened during the war, it is not the subject of this story: “Can’t come into this one…Nothing before the boat” (7.1). On this extra page 7.1, the second person both asserts and negates the primal trauma, his family’s extermination. A swastika is printed at the centre of the page and the deaths of his mother, father and two sisters are represented as “(X * X * X * X)” (plate 1). The four X’s, typographic tombstones, are first introduced on page 0 of Double or Nothing and will recur throughout Federman’s oeuvre. Critics concur that these are central to Federman’s narrative poetics. Caramello’s analysis draws a distinction between presenting and representing: the four X’s represent the unspeakable and anonymity, but also present that extermination as a scriptive event—in its most obvious association, an “X” next to a name indicates death. For Caramello this act of presentation “cancels” the historical event, “makes Federman an exterminator of his past, an intolerable role” and thereby condemns him to constantly reiterate and assert the centrality of that event.

Suleiman’s analysis also uncovers a dual strategy. She employs the term “preterition,” “the rhetorical figure of saying and unsaying,” to describe the four X’s, which are “the perfect example of preterition, for they are signs that indicate both presence and absence.” 59 Suleiman’s reading develops Freud’s observation of two young men who lost their father in early life. Although they refused to acknowledge their father’s death, neither of them succumbed to psychosis. The subsequent splitting of the ego and simultaneous denial/affirmation of the fact mirrors, for Freud, the oscillation of the fetishist. Suleiman contends that, despite rejecting the basic premise of the Freudian lost object (female castration), the structure of denial/affirmation can be applied to the way children of both sexes deal with

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58 Caramello, Silverless Mirrors, 133.
Yes but the POTATOES

P OTATOES on the train (remember) what a story: A
on the way to the CAMP
the CAMP (X * X * X * X)

I

F O L O W E D
M Y
S H A D O W

Can't come into this one...Nothing before the boat...

(Deam good story!) Could sneak the potatoes in...Next time.

The train
The rats
The old man
The farm
The camps
The potatoes...Wow!

A TIME OF POTATOES

could have a whole series
could have a whole series

like that 20 or 30 volumes
a kind of Balzacian comedy

THE VEGETABLE COMEDY
no even better than that

THE HUNGER COMEDY
no even worse than that

THE STARVATION COMEDY
20 or 30 volumes in folio.

Plate 1: On the way to the CAMP
Federman, Double or Nothing, 7.1.
traumatic loss.\textsuperscript{60} Suleiman discusses Federman’s experimental approach alongside that of Georges Perec, who disappeared the letter e in \textit{La disparition}. Her treatment of both authors emphasises the strategies they used to write/ unwrite their Holocaust experience: “Doubling, splitting, discontinuity, and absence become not only signs of the work’s formal ambition but signs also imbued with personal and historical meaning.”\textsuperscript{61} Her comparative analysis begins with the biographical (rather than aesthetic) similarities between Perec and Federman; both were sole survivors and spent the war years in hiding. She notes that until the publication of \textit{W ou le souvenir d’enfance}, which revealed Perec’s survivor identity, the public thought of his work as purely formal experimentation. In Suleiman’s analysis a split/doubled figure emerges in both Perec and Federman’s work, that of the writer and the witness. If the writer is “self-conscious, post-Beckettian” and “postmodern” then strategies of approach and avoidance (“preterition”) emerge, as with Federman’s four X’s.\textsuperscript{62} Marcel Cornis-Pope, drawing on Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, links the paradoxical nature of four X’s to the experience of catastrophic events as both survival and destruction.\textsuperscript{63} Federman’s complex relationship to Holocaust memory will be discussed further in chapter four. In \textit{Double or Nothing}, anything that happened before the passage to America is banished or censored from the official discourse, though of course the first person fails to keep this rule. Suleiman’s analysis emphasised Freud’s use of the word “artful” to describe the fetishist’s neurotic way of dealing with reality; the basic structure of affirmation/denial can lead to “ever new verbal and visual inventions.”\textsuperscript{64}

Elements of Federman’s biography, that will not be included in the novel to come, are listed on page 7.1: “The train/ The rats/ The old man/ The farm/ The camps/ The potatoes… Wow!” Everything that happened to the young man/third person before his arrival in America is enough for “a whole series” or “a kind of Balzacian comedy.” Possible titles are proposed: “THE HUNGER COMEDY/ no even worse than that/ THE STARVATION COMEDY” (7.1). Hunger and poverty are consistently returned to throughout Federman’s oeuvre. The reader of \textit{Double or Nothing} is made acutely aware of the young man’s modest origins and outsider status. He describes how, after serving in the army, Boris (provisional name for the young man/third person) eventually goes to college and earns a degree. Fiction writing is “only a

\textsuperscript{60} Suleiman, \textit{Crises of Memory}, 210.
\textsuperscript{61} Suleiman, 186.
\textsuperscript{62} Suleiman, 214.
\textsuperscript{63} Cornis-Pope, \textit{Narrative Innovation}, 196.
\textsuperscript{64} Suleiman, \textit{Crises of Memory}, 210.
matter of patience and determination,” if only “to fail in the end” (150). This doesn’t stop “some people,” however, from writing the following: “It has long been a platitude to assert that the nineteenth century was the golden age of fiction supposedly because this fiction portrayed the middle class and because its audience was chiefly recruited from that same middle class” (150). These people can go on with “even worse stuff,” that’s “the sort of thing people write about fiction” (150). The third person is excluded from the cultural heritage of the middle class, just as the real young Federman was. Focusing in such detail on sordid practicalities, counting every penny, making and remaking lists, the second person/writer elevates strained circumstances and reminds the reader that, if he is writing at all, it is only thanks to his miraculous gambling win, his willingness to take a risk. The young man’s story is also the real Federman’s story; he grew up poor and struggled during his first years in America. The young man/third person’s authenticity is paradoxically revealed in the choice of Boris (Vian), the real first name of a literary hoax (Vernon Sullivan). One year preceding the publication of Double or Nothing, Federman writes of Vian: “sa propre existence ne semble avoir été qu’une suite de dédoublements.”65 Though at the time of writing his first novel Federman was Professor at SUNY Buffalo, he cannot forget the suffering and deprivation he experienced as a young man. In later works Federman will explore the tension between identifying with Beckettian bums and vagabonds and resenting those who, like Beckett, were afforded every privilege he himself lacked. In Double or Nothing tension towards the “bourgeois,” gentile Beckett is explored obliquely, by reframing critical discourse.

65 Federman, Cinq Nouvelles Nouvelles, 37.
iii) A different class of comedy

One striking aspect of *Journey to Chaos* is the championing of Beckett’s youthful alter ego, Belacqua, who “deserves to be remembered.” Federman defends the abandoned hero against the “harsh judgment” of Hugh Kenner. Kenner’s dismissal of *More Pricks than Kicks* is summarised and the following description singled out: “the detritus of the mind of an academic bohemian preoccupied with its own cleverness and inclined toward macaronic effect.”

Looking at the way Federman exploits fragments of text, literary or otherwise, I’m inclined to think that he appropriated Kenner’s dismissal of Belacqua as “macaronic” for his own ends. A possible title for the work in progress in *Double or Nothing* is “A TIME OF MACARONI” (3).

He himself was known as the Noodle Man and since his death in 2009 “Noodle Day for Raymond Federman” is celebrated by friends and former students. Although he defends Belacqua in *Journey to Chaos*, he also recognises his shortcomings. These are similar to the shortcomings of the first and second persons, “very much inclined towards self-exhibitionism.” In Federman’s reading, Belacqua contains “in essence” much of the material refined in Beckett’s later creations, who are his “progeny and heirs.” Belacqua is the more vulgar forefather, belonging to a different (lower) “class of comedy.” His lower class and ultimate failure to reach canonical status is linked to the writer/second person’s own failure in *Double or Nothing*. Federman identifies with Beckett’s characters just as much, or more, as with the author himself—in the end he dies “like Malone,” not like Beckett. In *Journey to Chaos* his defence of Belacqua the character is equally a defence of Beckett’s early work. Federman transforms Kenner’s critique (“macaronic”) into an artistic project. But the noodle novel is a “setup” and the writer can never win. Uneducated, orphaned and exiled, the odds are stacked against him. When it comes to gambling double or nothing is, typically, a loser’s bet.

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69 Federman, *Journey to Chaos*, 34.
70 Federman, 55.
Before he begins (in THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING) the first person acknowledges that, “as it was once said,” “One must have chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star” (000).\(^\text{72}\) This was “once said” by Nietzsche, as may have been apparent to the contemporary readers of Double or Nothing. But the Nietzsche quotation is counteracted by something “better still,” a more obscure line from Beckett’s Murphy: “What but an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of chaos” (000). In the context of Murphy this phrase, far from something “better still,” is actually an example of a bad joke—so bad, in fact, that it has never once been good, according to Murphy’s classification.\(^\text{73}\) The first person of Double or Nothing is taking Murphy’s bad joke seriously, not “getting” that it is of an inferior classification. As such his Nietzschean affirmation falls flat, its value discredited. By misinterpreting Beckett’s Murphy, the first person betrays himself as ill-equipped to play. He belongs, like Belacqua, to a different “class of comedy.”\(^\text{74}\) This is one of the many instances where the first person is victim of a setup by the fourth person (the “author”), who delights in mocking his own creations. In his ironic cruelty, the author Raymond Federman is repeating the abuse of “Sam”/Beckett, described in Journey to Chaos as the “original inflicter of torments.”\(^\text{75}\) According to the dynamics laid out by Mann, the first person is doubly victimised. As a critic, he has failed to understand the master text. As an author, he has foolishly plagiarised. This double failure (before the beginning) announces the ultimate failure of the novel to come.

Beginnings are an important feature of Double or Nothing, where the second person must repeatedly decide on his opening lines. If only he could come up with something like this:

> Mr. H******* turned the corner and saw, in the failing light, at some little distance, his seat. It seemed to be occupied. This seat, the property very likely of the municipality, or of the public, was of course not his, but he thought of it as his. This was Mr H*******’s attitude towards things that pleased him. He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. He knew they were not his, because they pleased him.

\[(81)\]

This opening paragraph is “SUPERB” and “makes you feel like you want to go on” (81). It is from Beckett’s Watt, and Mr. Hackett’s name has been playfully cancelled out in the manner of a nineteenth century novel.\(^\text{76}\) The second person’s appreciation (“makes you feel like you

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\(^{74}\) Federman, Journey to Chaos, 55.
\(^{75}\) Federman, 198.
want to go on”) recalls the closing lines of Beckett’s *The Unnamable*: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on.” But there is another “FABULOUS” opening paragraph, cited immediately after *Watt*, that “really makes you feel like you want to go on and on” (81, italics added):

Yesterday my wife left me. She took her toothbrush and left without a word. Just like that. True, we rarely talked to each other, but still, on such a [sic] occasion, she could have said something, anything: SEE YOU AROUND, SO LONG, GOODBY! [sic] Hell, at least leave a note. It hurts just to think of it. What am I, a stranger? (81)

This is the opening of Raymond Federman’s short story “The Toothbrush,” first published in 1973 (two years after *Double or Nothing*). It “makes you feel like you want to go on and on,” “better still” than the opening lines of *Watt*. “The Toothbrush” tells of an unemployed man, married to an affluent bourgeois woman, who pretends to be at work all day but spends most of his time on a park bench (like Mr Hackett, he has a favourite bench). On one occasion he copulates with a limping, bony old woman of uncertain identity, alluding perhaps to the Ruth/Edith episode in *Molloy*. The narrator of “The Toothbrush” manages to fabricate a profession, writing fake paycheques and showing them to his wife as proof of his employment. This leaves him free to pursue his interests, which include gambling. Before his wife left him the man in “The Toothbrush” had it made, he didn’t have to worry about money or his next meal. He is especially fond of big juicy steaks, like the first person of *Double or Nothing*: “I can see myself dreaming of a huge rare steak” (183). The rich woman is the dream of material comfort and financial security that Federman’s protagonists will return to again and again. This dream is unthinkable in the solipsistic universe of Beckett’s later creations, whose impoverished state is rarefied and absolute—or as Federman puts it, divorced from “social reality.”

As for Beckett’s earlier creations, they (like the author himself) have all the signifiers of privilege and education. In his early collection of short stories *More Pricks than Kicks*, a young Beckett displays his erudition in a fluent and artful manner. Literary references are seamlessly integrated into

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80 Part 1 of *Journey to Chaos* is entitled: “Social Reality: Lethargy, Doubt and Insanity.” According to Federman’s reading, Beckett’s characters move from “social reality” (the remnants of realism) to “Fictional Absurdity” (the title of Part 2).
81 Federman’s appreciation is that “it lapses too much into subtle craftsmanship.” *Journey to Chaos*, 54.
Belacqua’s musings. When the persons of *Double or Nothing* display their learning it is as *parvenus*, jarring fragments of foreign text into the frenetic, circular narrative. Federman’s strategy is to wilfully misunderstand and take literally whichever quotation he chooses to include, highlighting his narrator’s ignorance and placing him even lower than the Beckett of Belacqua days. This masochistic strategy is apparent in his use of Beckett’s early short story, “Love and Lethe.” As possible endings to the young man’s love affair with a rich American girl (on the boat from France) are listed, he raises the idea of suicide: “they decide to kill themselves together” (71). A double suicide is the premise of Beckett’s “Love and Lethe,” where Belacqua convinces his love interest, Ruby, to “connive at his felo de se.” The reader of *Double or Nothing* is guided through Federman’s scholarly glossing of this text: “she has to commit the act of felo-de-se with him” (81). The conclusion Federman reached in *Journey to Chaos* is repeated by way of introduction to the scene: “the sexual act being an ironic substitute for suicide” (81). Federman’s formulations in *Journey to Chaos* are echoed throughout his description of this possible ending.

This is how the plot of “Love and Lethe” is summarised in *Journey to Chaos*:

> In the story “Love and Lethe” the sexual act is presented as an ironic substitute for suicide. Belacqua has managed to convince his girlfriend, Ruby Tough, that she should commit the act of *felo de se* with him. Together they proceed to a deserted spot at the top of a mountain. Belacqua carries, in a bag, a revolver and bullets, some veronal, a bottle of whisky with glasses, and the suicide note … In spite of its implied seriousness the situation quickly turns to grotesque comedy. When they reach the chosen place, Ruby, who has removed her skirt in order to “storm the summit” with more ease, succeeds in pouring half the bottle of whisky down Belacqua’s throat, and she herself swallows the other half. The hero is then incapable of carrying out his suicide scheme, fires the gun “in terram,” and together they find a justification for their failure by indulging in the act of love.

In *Double or Nothing*:

> But the sexual act being an ironic substitute for suicide therefore having managed to convince his girlfriend – PEGGY – that she has to commit the act of *felo-de-se* with him Together they proceed to a deserted spot at the top of the mountain He carries with him a bottle of poison a revolver and a rope But in spite of the implied seriousness of the situation the whole affair quickly turns badly and becomes a grotesque comedy For when they reach the chosen place PEGGY who has removed her skirt in order to (how shall I say?) storm that summit with more ease seduces him and he – the protagonist! – can no longer carry out what he had planned so carefully So together – it’s obvious – they find justification for their failure in a passionate act of sexual indulgence

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Federman’s paragraph on “Love and Lethe” in Journey to Chaos is very nearly reproduced in his description of a possible ending in Double or Nothing. The formulations he has taken from Beckett’s story (“felo de se” and “storm that summit”) are underlined. This may be an indication, or at least a clue, that this ending has been plagiarised. The first person ironically admits as much in the bracketed aside: “how shall I say?”

In “Love and Lethe,” the first-person narrator also appeals to the reader in knowing asides: “Reader, a rosiner is a drop of the hard.” The framework for this conversation is recreated in Federman’s adaptation, as he critiques his previous analysis in Journey to Chaos: “together—it’s obvious!” (71) In this instance the discourse is fully self-reflexive and critifictional, and the fourth person’s tone is punishing. This confusion allows the reader (“you”) to take the place of the second person/writer: “That is if (of course) you decide to use this particular type of ending” (71). The Belacqua in Beckett’s “Love and Lethe” does in fact have a particular type of ending in mind, it is a learned and satirical one:

It will quite possibly be his boast in years to come, when Ruby is dead and he an old optimist, that at least on this occasion, if never before nor since, he achieved what he set out to do; car, in the words of one competent to sing of the matter, l’Amour et la Mort – caesura – n’est qu’une même chose.

This reference to Ronsard is “translated” and commented in Double or Nothing: “LOVE & DEATH are combined at the end into a more effective tragicomic ending” (71). This deflates Belacqua’s erudition and makes for a far less “effective” ending. Unlike Belacqua, Federman’s third person is not so much concerned with répliques as he is with finding a rich wife: “He never gives up. Always hoping he will stumble on a nice rich girl (a bit older than he) and marry her/ marry her immediately (for her money and for love too of course – LOVE & MONEY/ a good substitute for LOVE & DEATH)” (71). “PEGGY” is that rich girl, the girl the third person meets and falls in love with on the boat to America. In an interview many years later, Federman talks about this young woman: “J’ai oublié son nom. Dans Quitte ou double, je lui donne le nom de Peggy. Mais c’était sans doute autre chose.” The name Peggy provides another link to Beckett. More Pricks than Kicks is based in part on Beckett’s youthful love for

84 Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks, 92.
85 Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks, 105.
86 Federman, Federman hors limites, 41.
his cousin, Peggy Sinclair. James Knowlson writes in 1996 that this had long been known, and Federman may have learnt of it in his discussions with Beckett over the manuscript of *Dream of Fairy to Middling Women.* Peggy is a significant name in Beckett’s biography as some years later he had a brief affair with Peggy Guggenheim. Guggenheim may have been on Federman’s mind at the time of writing. In the 1970 *Samuel Beckett: His Works and his Critics* she is thanked for providing a little-known translation Beckett made of Jean Cocteau. If this is indeed the case, and Federman’s “rich broad” is a reference to Peggy Guggenheim, it only highlights the failure of his young man’s journey. Unlike both Belacqua and Samuel Beckett, the third person of *Double or Nothing* never “made it” with Peggy (14, 41).

Though in his monograph Federman argues for the literary value of *More Pricks than Kicks,* he also concludes that “Belacqua’s pedantry, arrogance, egocentrism, and morbidity” prevent the reader from feeling any sympathy for him. He lacks the “wit and humanity” of Beckett’s later creations and so fails to solicit the reader’s compassion. In *Journey to Chaos,* a progression is established from Belacqua to the complete lunacy or heroic independence of Beckett’s French characters. Belacqua is not a fully realised Beckettian hero because he remains “caught in a materialistic environment.” Because of his inability to transcend “social reality” (material reality?) he remains in a lower “class of comedy.” In *Double or Nothing* the writer struggles (and fails) to overcome his obsession with material necessities, trapped in a “materialistic environment” of his own making.

88 Federman, Preface to *Journey to Chaos,* x.
89 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 284–288.
91 Federman, *Journey to Chaos,* 53.
92 Federman, 55.
In a doomed effort to gain some mastery of his situation, the first person loses himself in an infinity of lists, permutations and calculations. As Brian D. Crawford notes, this is much like the protagonist of Beckett’s *Watt*.93 Watt’s calculations, however, are no less than an attempt to arrive at “the ‘root’ of reality,” as Federman acknowledges in his monograph.94 The second person’s calculations are only to do with his material expenses, and the various ways he can distribute his limited funds. Like Watt, he indulges in absurd speculations, for example: “HOW MANY SQUEEZES IN A TUBE OF TOOTHPASTE?” (17) Despite the second person’s best efforts not to speak of his traumatic past, it inevitably arises. After wondering how many squeezes there are per tube, he rails against the deceptive “family size” toothpaste: “an ILLUSION a stinking/ ILLUSION.” Even though they look bigger, “they leave too much space…those bastards” (17). He refuses to be taken in, “anyway I’m not a family” (18). The digression on family size inevitably causes his own loss of mother, father and two sisters, exterminated at Auschwitz, to rise to the surface. He complains that “they” are trying to “push,” “shove” all of “their sizes” onto people: “Gives you a complex. It’s as if they wanted to crush you exterminate you with all their sizes” (18, italics added).

By providing a list of his living expenses, the second person recalls another character in Beckett’s *Watt*, Mr. Ernest Louit. The second-hand, or even third-hand story of Louit, recounts his failed research expedition to County Clare, for his dissertation *The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts*. The expenses of his proposed journey are listed: travelling, boots, coloured beads, gratifications and sustenance, for a sum total of an even fifty pounds.95 Louit ends up losing not only his boots but his manuscript, towards which he had written “no less than five pages, or ten sides, per day.”96 Louit’s findings are never recovered but he does bring back Mr Nackyball, a kind of idiot savant, certainly a “creature”: “A gazelle! A sheep! An old sheep!”97 Mr Nackyball has the uncanny ability of calculating the cubed root of figures as long as six digits, though he has never received any instruction. Further confirming Mr. Nackyball’s animal-like nature, a member of the academic board informs those present that a similar feat

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96 Beckett, 171.
97 Beckett, 182.
was once accomplished by a horse, in “an episode in the Kulturkampf.”

“Kulturkampf” has been identified by Mark Nixon as a reference to the Nazi regime in his study of Samuel Beckett’s diaries. Ernest Louit (a French name?) loses not only his important work, but the memory of all he has seen on his travels. In his judgment before the academic board, he presents in lieu of his findings a dumb yet prophetic beast, an evocation perhaps of the Nazi experiments. Federman’s use of “creature” to describe Beckett’s characters is significant considering his place in post-Holocaust literature. I address his exploration (and overinterpretation) of the creaturely in chapter four, through analysis of more direct intertextual references. In Double or Nothing much of the discourse is dedicated to the calculation of living expenses. Unlike with Ernest Louit, the sum never comes out even and the list is never final. Louit’s list was drawn before his journey, when he still had hope of bringing something back. The first person draws up a list after the fact, after the end of the Second World War.

For the first person the trauma of the Holocaust recurs numerically. Though calculating the second person’s living expenses is merely a digression from the young man’s story, he cannot escape the past he wants to avoid, what happened before the boat to America. The calculations themselves take on a hermeneutic capacity with the recurring appearance of 0.4 in the total sums: “HERE WE GO AGAIN WITH THAT LITTLE 0.4/ Can’t get rid of it and it’s purely accidental I can assure you” (77). The reader is repeatedly told (the first person protesting too much) that in his case 0.4 is “only a coincidence,” that there is “nothing symbolic” about it. Unless, of course, he choses to symbolise it: “I can have the 0 stand for nothing – DEATH/ and have the 4 stand for something – LIFE” (78). This explicitly links 0.4 to X-X-X-X, typographic rendition of his family’s extermination. The moral guilt of the survivor is further embedded in mystical calculations, as he longs for his own death: “0.5 would be much simpler/ 0.5 comes out even when you add” (79). These considerations intersperse a typographic diversion that imagines the second person’s “siege in the room” in wartime conditions: “It’s like when guys are being besieged – assiégé (what the fuck you call it).” In French, assiégé is the correct translation for “besieged,” the language of memory (French) is corrupting the narrator’s discourse. He describes night-time exits through tunnels for ammunitions, provisions and “HELP” (78). This evocation of resistance activities, “(WHAT A RESPONSIBILITY)” (79), confirms the writer’s siege in the room as the survivor’s moral expiation.

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Significantly, the 0.4 in question is the result of the total cost of toilet paper: “52 times 27 makes 14.04” (77). When the toilet paper is returned to, it’s through a different calculation, but with the same result: “7.02 times 2 that’s 14 bucks .04//EXACTLY WHAT I SAID (ORIGINALLY) EXACTLY” (102). The toilet paper is linked, on the facing page, to the activity of writing: “who wants to lock himself up in a room for a year and waste out one’s life on paper” (103). Despite this association, it isn’t until we’re almost at the end of the novel that the first person remembers paper for the typewriter (182). The presence of writing confirms the connection between 0.4 and the four X’s. The idea of writing as excrement foreshadows Federman’s 1979 *The Voice in the Closet/ La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*, focused on the closet episode and chiefly indebted to Beckett’s *How It Is*, as I discuss in chapter three. Part of the story involves the little boy, locked in the darkness of the closet, crouching to defecate onto a pile of newspapers then wrapping his excrement into a neat package. The closet episode is both the story of his survival and the moment of his rebirth, into what Federman frequently referred to as an “excess of life.” The formulation “excess of life” is found throughout Federman’s work and included in his most straightforward autobiographical account, contributed to an anthology of contemporary authors: “I escaped and survived by being hidden in a closet. I consider that traumatic day of July 16, 1942, to be my real birthdate, for that day I was given an excess of life.”¹⁰⁰ In *Double or Nothing* this excess is encoded numerically as what remains, the decimal 0.4. The recurring 0.4 is a sign of both his past (the closet episode, the extermination) and his future as a writer.

*Double or Nothing* entertains an interest in numerology by alluding to Beckett’s seminal essay on James Joyce’s “Work in Progress” (what would become *Finnegans Wake*). The significance of 0.4 is compared to other significant numbers: “with other guys it’s number 3… of course you have guys who believe in number 13 some of them believe 13 is good luck and others bad luck” (77). This passage of *Double or Nothing* is a gesture towards Beckett, perhaps prompted by Ruby Cohn’s analysis in the 1962 *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*: “Given Beckett’s conception of cosmic irony, one can readily appreciate his fascination with the number thirteen.”¹⁰¹ Beckett was born on the 13th of April 1906. In “Dante…Bruno. Vico..Joyce.”

Beckett notes the significance of the number three in Dante, and the number four in Joyce (and Vico). Antonio Borriello highlights the enduring importance of numbers in Beckett’s own works, drawing on his early analysis of “Work in Progress.” A young Beckett understood that “He (Joyce) is conscious that things with a common numerical relationship tend towards a very significant interrelationship.”\textsuperscript{102} The number four is a connection in the Vico-Joyce relationship and \textit{Finnegans Wake} is divided into four books. In his essay on Joyce Beckett refers to “the four speaking through the child’s brain.”\textsuperscript{103} There are four persons in \textit{Double or Nothing}, all involved in telling the story of the young man. Without falling into my own overinterpretation, I have found there is textual evidence to support a connection between Federman’s 0.4 and the number Beckett singles out as Joyce’s, and that this connection is strongly suggested through the use of “X,” as I discuss below.

Joyce’s presence in \textit{Double or Nothing} is made explicit through two references to Stephen Dedalus’ \textit{non serviam} in \textit{A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man}. Towards the beginning of the novel, when the second person is preparing to “enter into the chambers of the mind” (4), the first person declares his ambition with words borrowed from Stephen: “I SHALL NOT SERVE THAT IN WHICH I NO LONGER BELIEVE/ whether it calls itself my race my country/ AMERICA” (5). The passage reappears later on, translated and included in a block of text in French. In this block the third person is speaking for himself, the first person merely quoting him. The young man has had enough and in his “original language” is thinking of going back to France:

\begin{quote}
ET bien MOI je (jjeejje) vais vous le dire ce que je feraietaussicequeneferaiapas: :et bien moi JE ne servirai pas ce en quoi je ne crois plus que ça s’appelle mon cul ma bite ou mes couilles (ma famille (1) mon pays (2) ma religion (3)) tout cela je m’en fou je m’en balance x-x-x- \textbf{AMEN} et \textbf{AINSI SOIT-IL} !
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
(123, \textit{sic})
\end{flushright}

The theological origin of Stephen’s \textit{non serviam}\textsuperscript{104} is clearly indicated in Federman’s use of “Amen” and “ainsi soit-il.” The three X’s parallel the sign of the cross, of crossing one’s self three times. A link is thus established between X-X-X-X, symbols of his family’s extermination, and the crucifixion—link that will be developed further in \textit{Amer Eldorado} and \textit{Take It or Leave It} (discussed in the second chapter). As “X” is the signature of the illiterate,

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\textsuperscript{104} James Joyce, \textit{A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man} (London: Cape, 1965), 121.
\end{flushleft}
it is also the original sign or first letter, one that can only express its impossibility. This is significant considering the above passage is in the young man’s “original language,” and that 0.4 is elsewhere described as what was said “originally” (102). In translating Stephen’s *non serviam* towards the French, Federman gives more clues as to the source of his plagiarism. The first person’s preoccupation with an original language mirrors the Irish Stephen’s realisation that his English will always be an “an acquired speech.” At the same time as he is repeating Joyce/Stephen, the third person/young man is declaring his creative ambition. The entire phrase in *A Portrait* reads:

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile and cunning. 

In a different block of text, but on the same page where the above passage is reformulated in French, the task of writing the young man’s story is explicitly understood in terms of Beckett’s writing practice: “What a journey/ journey to chaos/ a circular journey” (123). Beckett’s “journey to chaos” becomes a “circular journey,” perhaps invoking the circular narrative of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (and Federman’s *Double or Nothing*). On page 123, where Joyce and Beckett are both directly invoked, the young man’s destiny is at stake.

Beckett’s number is thirteen, Joyce’s number is four, and Federman was evidently aware of this. It is significant, then, that the first person’s number is 0.4, a reduction of Joyce’s number—especially significant considering Beckett’s use of the number four to trace a lineage between Vico and Joyce. By adapting the number four to his own story, a connection with Joyce is forged via Beckett. Federman’s enthusiasm for numerology supports this interpretation. In June 2006, he writes on his blog in memoriam of a fellow Fiction Collective author, Marianne Hauser. One of the comments to this entry (by Anonymous, perhaps Federman himself) reveals a connection to another Fiction Collective author, Ursule Molinaro. The anonymous commenter reminds Federman of what he wrote six years ago, that Ursule Molinaro was a fine artist but also an astute numerologist: “Ursule deciphered for you the numbers in your name and she told you the whole story of your life - - past present future.” According to Molinaro’s

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106 Joyce, 251.
guide, *Life by the Numbers*, Federman’s Path-of-Life number is, unsurprisingly, the number four. Molinaro describes the negative principles of Path-of-Life 4’s, including the following: “Penny wise & pound foolish. Spurts of recklessness. Gambling.” Molinaro’s insights evidently impressed Federman and seem likely when considering the persons in *Double or Nothing*. But in *Double or Nothing* it is not so much 4 as the decimal, the remainder. It’s that annoying little 0.4 that the second person can’t seem to get rid of. With “other guys” it’s whole numbers, but not for him. The decimal is especially significant in a Path-of-Life number; revealing not so much a whole life as what Federman called an excess of life.

The remainder 0.4, like the four X’s, literalises the trauma of Federman’s Holocaust experience, recurring uncontrollably in the most banal situations (noodles, toilet paper). As Cathy Caruth elucidates in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, traumatic dreams and flashbacks resist interpretation (and cure) precisely because of their literality, their non-symbolic nature. The first person’s 0.4 means “nothing” (78), just as the four X-X-X-X point to nothing but the cancellation they enact. But by drawing links with Joyce, both through the number four and the three X’s quoted above, Federman’s “excess of life” is given symbolic meaning, pointing to something outside itself. Though X is both the sign of death and the sign of the illiterate, it is also posited as the first, original written letter. Via Stephen, perhaps, the young man may arrive at speaking his original language. By using Joyce, in particular Joyce’s preoccupation with Jewish identity, Federman’s work grafts meaning onto his primal loss. The connection to Joyce is all the more significant considering the fact that, aside from fleeting mentions in the discussion of broader postmodern themes, Federman never addresses Joyce or the Joyce-Beckett connection in his critical work. As the following analysis will demonstrate, Beckett’s literary mentor is a shaping force in Federman’s first novel.

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v) Nightlessons

In *Double or Nothing*, Federman draws extensively from the Nightlessons chapter of the *Wake*, where a pseudo-academic text is commented on by the three children.\(^{110}\) The central text is annotated on either side by the twin brothers Shem and Shaun. Footnotes, at the bottom of the page, are provided by their sister, Issy. Both the footnotes and the list of names are evoked in *Double or Nothing*. The Nightlessons chapter is also Book 2 Chapter 2, in keeping with the theme of Federman’s doubled discourse and preoccupation with the number four. Shaun’s annotations parody those of the good student, whereas Shem’s are playful, bawdy and provocative. Issy, on the bottom, is a subversive force. By the end, the children come together in a rebellion against their parents, playfully foreshadowing their demise. At the start of the chapter, Shem annotates on the left and Shaun on the right in capital letters. At one point Shem overtakes the narrative, occupying the entire page. When the initial format is restored, they have switched places, and Shaun is now on the left. One of Shaun’s annotations (on the left) is a long list of illustrious and mythical names spanning pages 306–308, part of which is below:

\[\begin{align*}
Cato. \\
Nero. \\
Saul. Aristotle. \\
Julius Caesar. \\
Pericles. \\
Adam, Eve. \\
Socrates. \\
Ajax. \(^{111}\)
\end{align*}\]

Shem has taken Shaun’s previous place on the right and is annotating in capital letters. His final annotation, on page 308, invokes scatological and Freudian\(^{112}\) themes:

\[\text{KAKAO-POETIC LIPPUDENIES OF THE UNGUMP-TIOUS}.\(^{113}\)\]

\(^{110}\) Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 260–308.
\(^{111}\) Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 306.
\(^{113}\) Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 308.
This is immediately followed by the “NIGHTLETTER” and the drawing of “skool and crossbuns” on the final page of the chapter. In *Double or Nothing* a column of text aligned to the right (83) lists the following names in capital letters:

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TICKLEBROWN
ABRAMOWITZ
MARANT
PUTAS
SALOPINASSE
BARRETT
MAGARSHACK
HOMBREDELAPLUMA
MUREZ
HUBSCHER
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Though the list of names evokes Shaun’s annotation, in *Double or Nothing* it is aligned to the right of the page and written in capital letters, which is Shem’s format at that point in the Nightlessons chapter (when the list of names appears). The tone of Federman’s list (“PUTAS”, “TICKLEBROWN”) is in line with Shem’s ludic and provocative commentaries. The name HOMBREDELAPLUMA is a variation of another of Shem’s iterations in *Finnegans Wake*, “Maistre Sheames de la Plume.” The reversibility of Shaun/Shem is extended through Federman’s technique, rewriting Shaun’s list in Shem’s style and indicating he has done so through the inclusion of “HOMBREDELAPLUMA.” As I discuss further in chapter two, Federman will go on to appropriate Shem’s name, the Pen Man, as his own nickname. In the *Wake* Shem is explicitly linked to James Joyce the writer. By reversing the order of annotations, the first person is usurping Shem’s place. In this way Federman alludes to Joyce’s own “kakao-poetic” tendencies and his use of psychoanalytic themes. John Bishop has described the Joycean “ungumptious” as both related to and distinct from Freud’s unconscious: “as its spelling implies, the Joycean “UNGUMPTIOUS” has a lot of “gumption” and humour in it.” In his engagement with Freudian themes, Federman follows Joyce’s approach, adding to it his own ironic misinterpretations and clumsy literalisms. As a critifictionist, Federman acts much like Shem (rather than the good student, Shaun) refusing to learn his “lesson.”

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In *Double or Nothing* the use of footnotes is also envisaged, in a clear reference to both Issy’s subversive footnotes in “Nightlessons” and to the use of addenda in *Watt*:

> Could put the list at the end or in footnotes. It’s been done before. Never works of course. It seems modern enough but finally it’s gimmicky. Particularly in footnotes. At the end would be better.

(83)

The use of footnotes “seems modern enough” (83) but putting them at the end, like Beckett’s addenda in *Watt*, might be better—the distinction between footnotes and addenda is clearly too “nice” for the first person. Beckett does provide one footnote to the addenda, by way of explanation: “The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation.” By weaving together footnotes and addenda, Federman creates a dialogue between Joyce’s lesson in the *Wake* and Beckett’s *Watt*. He also places himself firmly in the camp of the bad student, Shem the Penman (aka, Joyce himself). In any case, these strategies are “gimmicky,” they’ve “been done before” and can no longer be original. *Double or Nothing* contains no actual footnotes or addenda. What we’re presented with instead is a footnote at the beginning of the novel that isn’t so much a footnote as an epigraph (0.00000000). The use of a “FOOTNOTE” where an epigraph should be subverts its traditional function through its physical placement and the fact that a footnote is usually numerical, not spelled out or capitalised. Federman’s footnote to Beckett’s *The Unnamable* comes at “not the beginning,” before the discourse has even begun. This casts his novel as a sub-text, both lesser and more illuminating than the master text.

In “Nightlessons” part of the children’s homework involves the construction of an equilateral triangle (Euclid’s first proposition) which is then interpreted as a drawing of the mother’s pudendum. The diagram is reproduced and set at the centre of the page. In *Double or Nothing* a triangle-as-pudendum is also represented visually on two occasions (plates 2, 3). These

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He didn't invent it. He simply heard it or read it somewhere. He's full of crap like that. But I'll translate everything. Except once in a while a few sentences in French here and there to make it look more realistic and a little more genuine. But even then you'll have to give some kind of approximation for people who don't read French. Except when he uses bad obscenities:

: Ah ce qu'on se fait chier ici ! : Quelle saloperie d'existence :
: Quel bordel de putain de pays : : Les américains sont des cons :
: Ah la belle blague l'Amérique : : Qu'ils aillent se faire voir :

Things like that you can't translate, but it's better than nothing. It's a question of style. It's natural if you want to give the story a sense of reality, for instance in the subway he thinks in French. And he sees all sorts of dirty images in his mind and describes them to himself in French. And that's even worse some of these images seem to gather between the girl's legs. Right there in the T spot he's staring at. That gives him a hard-on immediately. R R on the spot. That dark corner where the seam of her I A skirt stops his eyes. It's the rectangular piece A N Q U L of flesh he can see because it seems like a scream on which the images are reflected quite vividly. He sees faces there. E ven his own face. He sees the face of his father. But not Uncle David's face. That would really be indecent. It's as though he could almost touch that screen so real and so palpable it appears. He even sees a little house there. And lots of trees. Lots of vegetation. But can one really remember the touch of flesh under such conditions? I suppose. One can always invent a little. Particularity if it's not possible to remember. Or else one can simply approximate it. For instance: Flesh is like a banana peel.
Flesh is like a piece of white paper.
Flesh is like a dozen eggs in a basket.
Flesh is like a glass of wine at night.

At that point Uncle David folds his newspaper. Dammit! Don't tell me the subway scene is over and they are getting off already even before all those images are finished. Not He settles back in his seat. And this time he really goes to sleep. Boris can see that from where he's sitting but he has to look sideways. Then the subway stops. The man in front of the girl's face leaves. Not He simply gets a seat where somebody else just lets go off. A fat woman. Those damn subways! They go on and on. But we must admit that we've done some of our best thinking in subways. So let's go on. Anyway the guy is not important. He's gone now. Gone out of some way. The view is clear. Boris looks at the girl. She's definitely smiling.

Plate 2: Triangle of flesh

Federman, Double or Nothing. 144.
Plate 3: Black triangle

Federman, Double or Nothing. 90.
pages in Double or Nothing, with their typewriter font, uneven annotations and the diagram on the lower right corner, might have been inspired by the typescripts rather than the edition of Finnegans Wake. Federman’s position at SUNY Buffalo would have given him access to the James Joyce Collection, acquired from 1950–1968. Double or Nothing reproduces some of the aesthetic effect of the Wake typescripts. The layout of the triangle/diagram page in particular (plate 4), bears some resemblance to pages 144 (plate 2) and 90 (plate 3). It may be that through accessing the Buffalo collection, Federman found inspiration for the layout and formatting of his novel-as-manuscript. Double or Nothing is both an earlier version of a novel and a complete fabrication—there is no novel. Whether or not Federman based part of his aesthetic on Joyce’s typescripts, he draws on much of the material around Joyce’s diagram in the Wake.

The triangle appears during the young man’s first day in America, and his first time on the subway. He’s on his way to the Bronx, with his uncle asleep behind a newspaper beside him. He notices a beautiful black girl sitting opposite, her legs spread slightly apart. As he stares at her “triangle of flesh,” he feels himself getting excited. The triangle then becomes “like a screen” onto which images are reflected: “He sees faces there even his own face. He sees the face of his mother. Also the face of his father.” (144) In “Nightlessons” the equilateral triangle is interpreted through “heaving all jawbreakical expressions out of old Sare Isaac’s universal of specious aristmystic unsaid.” By projecting faces onto the woman’s triangle in Double or Nothing, Federman adapts and literalises Joyce’s “jawbreakical expressions.” The triangle as Anna Livia (the mother’s) pudendum becomes a literal triangular piece of flesh. This formulation is significant, because it equates flesh with the screen itself, estranged from a recognisable body. The young man cannot remember the touch of flesh and can only imagine: “Flesh is like a banana peel/ Flesh is like a piece of white paper” (144). And yet the flesh of the woman in question is black, she has “very dark black like coal skin” (89). When we are first introduced to her triangle it is described as a “black forest Black African jungle” (90). This is also represented visually, in a triangle filled out with black (plate 3). By gazing between the woman’s thighs, the young man becomes increasingly excited, “almost loses control” (90). In a moment of sexual excitement, the young man’s traumatic memory recurs as he sees the faces of his dead mother and father projected onto the “screen” between the woman’s legs (144). The horror of this experience is mitigated through humour: “But not Uncle David’s face.

119 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 293:16–18.
Plate 4: Triangle in Wake typescripts

That would really be indecent” (144). It is then forgotten by the next page, where more pseudo-Freudian humour subsumes his traumatic past: “it looks like some kind of furry animal and it scares the hell out of him however he can feel his dick throbbing” (145).

By creating a kind of psychoanalytic dream screen, Boris gains access to the dreamland of the *Wake*. Looking at page 293 of “Nightlessons,” where Anna Liva’s triangle is at the centre, there are further indications that Federman used elements for the subway scene. The idea of the young man beginning a new life can be read in the following lines: “as a poor soul is between shift and shift ere the teath he has live through becomes the life he is to die into.” For the young man of *Double or Nothing*, the death of his family (“the teath he has live through”) is at once his own survival and the condition for his remaining years (“the life he is to die into”). Right below the drawing of the equilateral triangle we find: “’twas one of dozedeeams a darkies in dewood.” Federman’s triangle, described both as a “Black African Jungle” and a “triangle of vegetation” (90), may refer to this particular passage. As the young man of *Double or Nothing* gazes at the woman’s triangle, he grows an erection, which might be read into the following lines on page 293 of the *Wake*: “he or he gazet, murphy come, murphy go, murphy plant, murphy grow.” In the *Wake* the murphys are twelve pub customers who form an audience, a circle of people unified and undifferentiated by their ubiquitous Irish name.120 C.J. Ackerley confirms that the title of Beckett’s *Murphy* contains “a hint of *Finnegans Wake*.” Ackerley refers to page 293 of the *Wake*— “murphy come, murphy go”— in his annotation to the following passage from Beckett’s *Murphy*, where Murphy slips from sleep into consciousness: “When he came to, or rather from.” In Ackerley’s analysis, this expresses Geulincx’s dual motion to and from being, “Murphy thus affirms that he is coming from his mind to his body.”121 For Federman, “murphy” is primarily Beckett’s eponymous hero, and his interpretation of Joyce fits with an overarching tendency to vulgarise and make literal. Parsing Joyce’s passage from “he gazet” to “murphy grow,” he simultaneously incorporates Beckett and Joyce into the young man’s rising erection.

Federman’s intertextual references to Joyce extend a preoccupation with genitalia. His use of the *Wake* emphasises the prevalent sexual imagery through a levelling out or literalisation of the content. Anna Livia’s cryptic pudendum becomes an actual woman’s groin on the subway.

120 Fordham, *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake*, 10.
The first person’s fixation (to use a problematic term) is also revealed in his translation of Stephen’s *non serviam* discussed earlier: “my country, my fatherland or my church”\(^{122}\) is replaced with “mon cul ma bite ou mes couilles” (123). This aggressive identification (to use Mann’s phrase) is especially pointed if one considers the horror the Stephen of *A Portrait* feels towards his “serpent”: “What a horrible thing! Who made it to be like that, a bestial part of the body able to understand bestially and desire bestially? Was then he or an inhuman thing moved by a lower soul?”\(^{123}\) Stephen’s “lower soul” becomes the lowly Shem of *Finnegans Wake*, twin brother to the rational Shaun. Darcy O’Brien developed this hypothesis (which Federman may have been aware of) in a 1966 article: “the split between sordidness and beauty which plagues Stephen’s mind emerges in the transformed but recognisable shape of Shem and Shaun in the *Wake*.”\(^{124}\) Shem is associated with the lower half of the body, and yet he (not Shaun) is the creative force, as Epstein outlines: “Shem, with his diabolical genital knowledge, also possesses truly deep and expressive language.”\(^{125}\) In other words, the original language.


\(^{123}\) Joyce, *A Portrait*, 143.


vi) Loulou

From a single page of Joyce’s intensely evocative text, Federman draws the themes and images of the subway scene in *Double or Nothing*: the pudendum as screen, the dark jungle, the death into life (survival). As Carla Baricz elucidates, the diagram in the Nightlessons chapter “functions as a representation of many of the concepts present in the *Wake* that one would normally assume could not be joined.” On the same page of the *Wake* (293) there is also a clue to something quite different, someone called Loulou: “La, la, laugh leaves alas! Aiaiaiai, Antiann, we’re last to the lost, Loulou!” In *Double or Nothing*, Loulou is the young man’s roommate in New York, several years after his arrival in America (not included in the official story). As he reminisces about Loulou, the first person takes over the role of the third person, speaking as himself and creating confusion: “I loved Loulou and I think Loulou loved me too and Boris too” (122). According to Larry McCaffery’s note in *Federman from A to X-X-X-X: A Recyclopedic Narrative*, Loulou is based on Raymond Federman’s real roommate in New York, before he went to fight in the Korean War. In *Double or Nothing*, Loulou is much more than a roommate. When Boris is working as a dishwasher in New York, he financially supports and takes care of Loulou, an artist who spends his time repainting their apartment. Due to the young man’s meagre salary, they must subsist largely on noodles, living joyfully together to their last penny: “living it up on noodles with less than ten bucks a week…we’ll laugh at the whole thing” (120). This recalls “Loulou” on page 293 of the *Wake*: “La, la, laugh” and “we’re last to the lost, Loulou.” In what is perhaps an acknowledgement of his debt to Joyce, the first person remarks: “Must have been when the whole noodle idea was conceived from my days with Loulou” (120).

Though his time with Loulou was also a “time of noodles” (3), it was punctuated by some very sensual variations. From the diner where he worked as a dishwasher, he was able to steal food to bring back to his roommate/lover:

I would do anything for him smuggle all sorts of goodies for him ham sandwiches he loved ham potato salad too and especially pies apple pies he had a passion for apple pies in my pockets the stuff dripping like hell inside my pants in the subway on my way home to the Bronx juicy crushed apples what a mess……………………what a mess indeed (121)

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The subway scene with the “black girl” is alluded to; he is even going to the same destination (the Bronx). This time instead of throbbing he is “dripping like hell” inside his pants, a sign of erotic consummation. Loulou, after all, has “a passion for apple pies in (his) pockets.” When Boris can’t bring food back from the diner, the pair treat themselves to a hot dog:

we avoided as much as possible eating out unless we couldn’t take it anymore then we would grab a quick hot dog after the movie which we shared equally two bites a piece was all a guy could get but it was delicious with a lot of mustard Loulou always took the first bite I the second he the third and I the fourth but by the fourth bite there was very little left but I didn’t mind because I loved Loulou and I think Loulou loved me too

Both hot dogs and ham sandwiches are forbidden meats for Jews, besides being very metaphoric. The sexualised potential of purloined meats might also have been suggested by Joyce’s “Nightlessons.” On pages 273–274 Shem is annotating on the left and Shaun leaves his side entirely blank. This may be the reticence of the good student towards lewd content. One of Shem’s annotations on page 273 reads: “Old Kine’s Meat Meal.” A passage from the central text of “Nightlessons” might be applied to the young man’s feeding of Loulou in Double or Nothing: “As Hanah Levy, shrewd shoplifter, and nievere anore skidoos with her spoileds. To add gay touches. For hugh and guy and goy and jew. To dimpled and pimpled and simpled and wimpled. A peak in a poke and a pig in a pew.”128 The young Jewish man of Double or Nothing takes on the role of Hanah Levy, whose bounty “adds gay touches” and leads to a peak/pig “in a poke.” Coincidentally, an anachronistic reading of the word “gay” is the very example Eco choses to illustrate the difference between interpretation and use.129 In his use of Joyce Federman wilfully misinterprets this passage, adding “gay touches” to his own story.

The young man/first person of Double or Nothing will not only financially support, he’ll even cook for Loulou, who refuses to get his hands dirty (120). In this way he mimics the cliché of the hard-working wife supporting a lazy artist. The first person’s time with Loulou is obliquely referred to from the beginning of the novel. To the question “who gets that kind of a room?” he answers in a long line beginning and ending with “queers”:

But 6 bucks for a room TODAY who gets that kind of a room

queersshitheadssliarscommunistsbumsdumbbastardsfakersmaniacsanarchistsjewsqueers

128 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 273: 11–16.
129 Eco, “Between Author and Text,” 68.
“6 bucks” is, funnily enough, the exact price he paid for his room with Loulou (120). The only kind of people who would get a room like that are Jews (stereotypically anarchists or communists) and, most importantly, “queers.” This makes sense since it all began, in a sense, with Loulou—it’s where he got the idea for the noodle novel (122). Highly conscious of circular narrative, Federman begins and ends this list with that particular aspect of marginalised identity. The above line may also recall Joyce’s thunderwords in the *Wake*, though in this case the line is made of recognisable English words and is only seventy-nine (not a hundred or hundred and one) characters long. Nevertheless, the answer to the first person’s question (Who gets that kind of a room?) has the quality of a striking revelation. The line of text also enacts the circular structure inherent in Joyce’s work. Since we later learn that the first person himself paid six bucks for a room, the list of insults must necessarily be directed at him, both “jew” and “queer.” In the previous section I demonstrated how Federman uses Joyce’s triangle as a dream screen and portal to his own past, seeing the faces of his exterminated family members. The triangle itself is also linked, figuratively, to Jewish persecution. The star of David is composed of two triangles, and the inverted triangle was a system of identification in the death camps. The pink triangle, used to identify homosexual inmates, became a symbol of gay liberation from the early 1970s. In Federman’s thunderword, other victims of Nazi persecution (“maniacs,” “communists” and “anarchists”) are invoked, but it all begins and ends with “queers.”

Though Jewishness is linked to queerness, the erotic metaphors for his intercourse with Loulou (hot dog, ham sandwich) transgress Jewish law. The sinful consumption of pork reinforces the forbidden nature of queer sex. But is it also a sin for Loulou, is he Jewish too? In *Double or Nothing*, Loulou’s is a liminal identity. He has no last name and is described as “sort of blondish” but with “an enormous hooked nose” (122). In Wakean terms, at once “hugh and guy and goy and jew.” As the first person consumes ham and hot dogs, it both asserts and negates his Jewish identity. By breaking kashrut, he confirms the sinful nature of his relationship to Loulou, and so understands himself as a Jew/“queer.” But by joyfully consuming pork, he becomes a gentile/“goy.” This doubled identity recalls Shem of *Finnegans Wake*, described by Joyce as a “semi-semitic serendipidist.”

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131 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 191:02–03.
“Loulou” is a common term of endearment in French, and it makes sense that the first person would use his native language in such an intimate context. Loulou is also the name of the parrot in Flaubert’s “Un cœur simple,” a fact that must not have escaped Federman. The Loulou of *Double or Nothing*, with his “enormous hooked nose” and “bushy hair on his chest” (122), paints a bird-like picture. In “Un cœur simple,” the servant Félicité, having lost all her loved ones, becomes enamoured with her pet parrot: “Loulou, dans son isolement, était presque un fils, un amoureux.” Flaubert’s Félicité is illiterate, and her ignorance of the world is mocked by M. Bourais. When she shows her an atlas, she thinks she will be able to see a picture of her departed nephew on the page. Her error is in believing, taking literally, the promise of empty signs. Without interpretative faculties, she is condemned to ridicule—a position in which Federman frequently puts his own creations.

Loulou’s link to Flaubert becomes more significant if one considers his appearance on page 293 of the Nightlessons chapter. Scarlet Baron’s *Strandentwining Cable* has demonstrated the extent of Joyce’s use of Flaubert in *Finnegans Wake*. Baron warns the clue-hunting reader of the “insoluble ambiguity” of intertextuality in Joyce’s final work, which may lead to a “wild goose chase.” Nevertheless Flaubert’s presence is strong, and Baron untangles many of the guiding principles behind Joyce’s reference to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* on page 302 of the Nightlessons chapter. Considering this, the reference to “Loulou” in that same chapter may be read as an evocation of the parrot in “Un cœur simple.” In Flaubert’s story, Félicité finds solace in her jovial parrot Loulou after everyone she loved has perished. Félicité’s story could also be read in the following passage on page 293, quoted above: “La, la, laugh leaves alass! Aiaiaiai, Antiann, we’re last to the lost, Loulou!” On page 122 of *Double or Nothing* the formatting is determined by Loulou’s name (plate 5). On the facing page (123), we find the vulgarized translation of Joyce’s *non serviam* discussed earlier: “je ne servirai pas ce en quoi je ne crois plus.” Federman is indicating his awareness of the Flaubert/Joyce connection by placing Loulou opposite Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s alter ego. But where is this wild goose (or rather, parrot) chase leading?

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133 Flaubert, *Trois contes*, 44–45.
134 Scarlet Baron, *Strandentwining Cable: Joyce, Flaubert and Intertextuality* (Oxford Scholarship Online: January 2012), 246, Oxford eBook.
Plate 5: Loulou

Federman, Double or Nothing. 122.
In repeating Stephen’s formulation of non serviam in Double or Nothing, Federman is mirroring Joyce’s use of Flaubert’s words in his own first novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Baron identifies Flaubert’s letters as the source for Stephen’s pronouncement on the role of the artist: “The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork.”¹³⁶ This passage is echoed in Federman’s description of the fourth person or “overall looker”: “here and not here above aside beside and of course underneath the whole set up” (000000000.0). I demonstrated earlier that, through the use of a “FOOTNOTE” to a passage from The Unnamable, it is suggested that the fourth person is Samuel Beckett. As McCaffery asserts, the modernist notion of an artist as a “neutral” and detached observer is precisely the ideal Federman’s critifictional practice seeks to undermine.¹³⁷ In his role as “overall looker,” the author of Double or Nothing cannot be like “the God of creation,” both “here and not here.” Repeated reference to A Portrait in Double or Nothing confirms another layer of intertextuality, revealing Joyce’s presence “behind or beyond” Beckett’s. The Flaubert-Joyce-Beckett connection may in turn have been inspired by Hugh Kenner’s 1962 monograph, reviewed glowingly in Federman and Fletcher’s 1970 bibliography.¹³⁸

Through Federman’s Loulou, Joyce is connected to Flaubert. But the Loulou of Double or Nothing is also Beckettian, indeed may have his origins in Beckett’s Premier amour. In Beckett’s early novella Lulu/Loulou is the name of the protagonist and narrator’s wife, though at the end he denies having married her at all. She is a “prostitute” who takes him into her house and supports him.¹³⁹ He links the death of his father to the beginning of his time with Lulu: “J’associe, à tort ou à raison, mon marriage avec la mort de mon père, dans le temps.”¹⁴⁰ As Beatrice Marie has emphasized, Premier amour is also a break for Beckett with the language of the father, in his case English.¹⁴¹ Beckett was by all accounts dissatisfied with the story he wrote in 1946, publishing and translating it only after he won the Nobel in 1969 in order to meet demands for his work.¹⁴² Federman completed his own translation into English of this abandoned short story (the manuscript is collected at Washington University). The

¹³⁷ McCaffery, “Re-Double or Nothing,” 80.
¹³⁸ Federman and Fletcher, Samuel Beckett, 147.
¹⁴⁰ Beckett, Premier amour, 7.
¹⁴² Knowlson, Damned to Fame, 562.
following passage in Beckett’s *Premier amour*, a reflection on English pronunciation in French, poses a problem in translation:

Mais pour passer maintenant à un sujet plus gai, le nom de la femme avec qui je m’unis, à peu de là, était Lulu. Du moins elle me l’affirmait, et je ne vois pas quel intérêt elle pouvait avoir à me mentir, à ce propos. Évidemment, on ne sait jamais. N’étant pas française elle disait, Loulou. Moi aussi, n’étant pas français non plus, je disais Loulou comme elle. Tous les deux, nous disions Loulou.¹⁴³

In Beckett’s edited English translation, the problem is resolved simply by omission.¹⁴⁴ This may be because “Lulu” is of German provenance; it’s the title of a 1937 opera by Alban Berg, whom Beckett admired.¹⁴⁵ A native French speaker would hear /ly.ly/, where an English reader hears the correct pronunciation of Berg’s *Lulu*, /lu.lu/. Adding to this German dimension, in French a “loulou de Poméranie” is a Pomeranian, a breed of dog mentioned in Beckett’s work and significant in Beckett’s life. According to Deirdre Bair’s biography, Beckett’s mother was excessively fond of her mean-spirited Pomeranian.¹⁴⁶ Without “questing naïvely” for psychic meaning, Ackerley notes the recurrence of the breed in Beckett’s texts, especially in Molloy’s search for his mother.¹⁴⁷ In Federman’s manuscript, he retains the Lulu/Loulou passage, translating Beckett’s words to the letter: “Me too, since I was not French either, I would say Loulou, like her.” The manuscript also reveals that Federman’s instinct was to write Loulou at the first mention of her name—“the name of the woman to whom I united myself, a short time after, was Loulou”—he then corrects this by writing “Lulu” over his mistake.¹⁴⁸

By referring to Beckett’s Lulu/Loulou, the sexual nature of the first person’s relationship to the Loulou of *Double or Nothing* is confirmed. In a reversal of roles, Loulou is the good for nothing lay-about and the protagonist/first person narrator is the provider. More importantly, Loulou is a man. Lulu/Loulou is not the only instance in *Double or Nothing* where a Beckettian “prostitute” is transformed into a seductive male figure. The final section of this chapter offers further examination of such queer dynamics, illustrating how homoerotic and gender-bending

¹⁴⁵ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 194.
elements undermine the first person’s stated aim of taking his place in a literary canon. This is not to suggest that the homoerotic scenes in *Double or Nothing* serve to subvert Beckett’s “straight” stories. As the following analysis will demonstrate, Federman expands on and exaggerates queer elements already present in Beckett’s texts.
vii) “some kind of queer”

Reading Beckett, and reading Beckett closely, Federman was undoubtedly receptive to the queer erotics present in his “master text.” And yet, as Peter Boxall points out, this aspect of Beckett’s work had been largely ignored, subsumed under heteronormative discourse by the first waves of scholarship.\textsuperscript{149} In Federman’s scholarly output, there is no indication that he was an exception to this trend. It is only in his fiction, or rather critifiction, that his awareness of homoeroticism is revealed. Both Boxall and Paul Stewart take Beckett’s novella \textit{The Calmative} as a prime example for queer readings.\textsuperscript{150} In the salient passage, the protagonist meets a stranger who questions him on his erections. He then kisses this stranger (after much preamble, only on the forehead) in exchange for a phial, the “calmative.” First composed by Beckett in French, \textit{Le Calmant} is precisely the story Federman chose to include in his edited collection \textit{Cinq nouvelles nouvelles}, aimed at students of French literature. Federman provides translations and explications of the more obscure passages in footnotes. For the kiss in question, Beckett’s original French reads: “Je fis la bouche en cul de poule, comme maman me l’avait appris, et la posa sur l’endroit indiqué.” Federman notes the idiomatic expression “la bouche en cul de poule,” literally “my mouth like a chicken’s ass,” and glosses it as “I pursed up my lips.”\textsuperscript{151} Beckett’s translation in \textit{The Calmative} is similar: “I pursed my lips as mother had taught me.”\textsuperscript{152} The English version is a departure in tone from the French phrase, losing both the suggestive imagery of “cul de poule” and the familiarity of “maman.” Federman’s footnotes, summary and suggested questions for \textit{Le Calmant} in \textit{Cinq nouvelles nouvelles} reveal no particular awareness of the homoerotic elements in Beckett’s story. As a scholar (and a teacher), Federman upholds the unspoken taboo. It is only through his critifictional practice that this aspect of Beckett’s writing is explored.

The first person, it turns out, has several queer episodes to recount. Significantly, these happened to him rather than to the young man/third person/Boris (although the two are somewhat confused, as with the Loulou episode). When it comes to homoerotic content, the first person/narrator uses first person (rather than third person) narration to tell the story. He reveals he once handled and caressed a toothbrush for twenty-five minutes in a drugstore: “The

\textsuperscript{151} Federman, \textit{Cinq nouvelles nouvelles}, 32.
guy in the drugstore was looking at me as though I was some kind of queer or something.” He adds that he has extensive experience with toothbrushes: “I have touched them all/ Soft Medium Hard Stiff Curved” (23). On the following page, he tells a story about a friend of his who lost his toothbrush in his apartment. When he came over, he helped him look for it:

We looked all over: under the bed in the closet in the kitchen in the refrigerator in the stairs under the carpets in all our pockets. He looked in mine and I looked in his. What a maniac. Very friendly. He even asked me to take off my clothes to make sure. By then I was becoming very suspicious. No he said it’s just to make sure. Do not trust anybody. Some guys are real fanatics when it comes to their personal properties. And once you get involved with them it’s damn hard to break off.

(24)

He sees the toothbrush search to the end, when they finally find it in the toilet. The first person wanted him to keep it, assured him it would be like new after some strong detergent, but that “dumb guy” went straight out to buy a new one while he waited (inexplicably) in his friend’s apartment. After his friend’s return they part ways, but not before he (touchingly) offers the old toothbrush as a gift: “As a reward He insisted For what the damn thing was worth And also for having wasted my time” (25). But the first person won’t keep this gift, disposing of it in a garbage can as soon as they part ways.

The toothbrush motif recurs later on in the discourse: “Yesterday my wife left me. She took her toothbrush and left without a word.” (81). As I discussed earlier this proposed opening is compared favourably (and ironically) to the opening lines of Beckett’s *Watt*. In either case it is through the toothbrush’s disappearance that the story is made possible: my wife took her toothbrush and left me, my friend has lost his toothbrush and needs my help to find it. Federman’s short story was eventually published a few years later as “The Toothbrush.” But in *Double or Nothing*, he pre-emptively throws it out: once in the toilet, and once again in the garbage can—damning criticism indeed. And in both cases (though more explicitly in the toothbrush search) the absence of the toothbrush creates the conditions for sexual interactions. Neither his story nor his “friend” was worth keeping. They both fail in creating something durable. Page 25 is divided into three columns (plate 6). The homoerotic nature of the toothbrush search is highlighted in the division of the following phrase: “Assuming this is a normal kind of discourse.” The separation draws out queerness, the “ass” of assuming and the “disco” of discourse. If the discourse is a dance, what kind of “disco” are we in? By

it's easier to go out and buy yourself a new one. But not him. Must have been in the poker game the places in the tell that guy what a du use it again. But n t if he uses a str ot that guy he run e immediately whi sme a red one. Supp in case you mispla hy did he say msp something? Finally I for a while I told ll that I told him. But before leaving he that that's a gen ne that had fallen isted. For what the ving wasted my tim as I didn't keep i n I saw down the a ng out of the wind found his toothbru y response sometime credible. Must have had his teeth of cash instead of th one you have to come f one possible versi that happened on he poker game. This for the record. And was this then deer I threw the too worst past the ga e the whole busine en I stumbled into ked me if I wanted amount or so and t k and baler my yself in some kind a bunch of guys wh bad could a game ng a bit here. Los proximately I want d and come loose c (let's forget abou ty bucks the freak s much more import hapend. I shouted around the table la d of nuts or somet o no one. I shouted anything just showing all my dough. Everything in the pot. And hell with it all.

Plate 6: The toothbrush guy
Federman, Double or Nothing. 25.
breaking up the sentence, Federman performs the “pulverisation”154 of an otherwise “normal” line of text. The fragmented line illustrates the broader narrative dynamics at work. Speaking as himself, the first person interrupts the “no/rlmal” discourse with his homoerotic anecdotes.

As mentioned above, Lulu/Loulou is not the only Beckettian “prostitute” who, by passing into Double or Nothing, turns into a man. This is also the fate of Murphy’s Celia. Federman recreates the absurdly specific list of physical attributes Beckett provides for her,155 and applies them to his third person/young man:

He never gives up. Always hoping he will stumble on a nice rich girl (a bit older than he) and marry her

marry her immediately
(for her money and for love too of course – LOVE & MONEY
a good substitute for LOVE & DEATH)

There is indeed a touch of the gigolo in him (I didn’t notice that at first but now it’s quite evident) and a very pronounced CASTRATION COMPLEX.

not the tough guy at all – on the contrary:

shy
not bad looking
dark hair
bright dark eyes
straight white teeth
height: 5’10”
weight: 156lbs.
strong nails
long fingers
size 40
shoe 10 ½
socks 9 ½
arms 33”
neck 15 ¼
a little scar on the left knee
heavy beard
waist 32
20/20 vision

(72)

155 Beckett, Murphy, 10.
Celia’s presence is corroborated through a reference to Beckett’s “Love and Lethe”—the above list immediately follows the rewriting of this story, discussed earlier in section two. It is suggested that the young man, like Celia, is selling his “not bad looking” body as a “gigolo.” The “CASTRATION COMPLEX” is misinterpreted as femininity: “not the tough guy at all.” Rather than fearing emasculation, the first person may desire it. The intertextual gender-bending of Loulou, Hanah Levy and Celia is foreshadowed by a throwaway remark towards the beginning of Double or Nothing. As preparations are made for the “siege in the room,” the first person, addressing the second person/writer, digresses on how one acquires an inner sense of time when cloistered for long periods. He notes that for women it’s much easier, because they have a natural calendar with their menstrual cycle: “TOO BAD YOU’RE NOT A GIRL” (11). But Federman’s treatment of the castration complex is not limited to feminine identity. As revealed during the subway scene, where the woman’s triangle turns into a frightening animal (145), the castration complex is linked to the trauma of the Holocaust and X-X-X-X. We also know that “family size” toothpaste “gives you a complex” (18). As an orphan and a survivor, resolution of the Oedipal scene remains impossible and “normal” psychological growth is impeded. Punishment from the “father” (once again, in a self-conscious and satirical manner) is then invoked through a masocritical treatment of Beckett. Federman’s rewriting of Celia’s list is an ironic answer to Freud’s question: “But if, as happens so often, you meet with masochism in men, what is left to you but to say that these men exhibit very plain feminine traits?”[156]

All three persons involved in Double or Nothing have “all sorts of bad complexes.” Federman’s aggressively superficial use of Freudian themes is a performance; the philistine suspicious of quacks. This is made apparent through the vaudevillesque proliferation of complexes, and through the substitution of “Love and Death,” the libido and the death drive, for love and money (what any “regular guy” would want). But once again the fourth person/author is mocking his own narrator. Money, as Norman O. Brown’s postmodern psychoanalysis (popular in Federman’s seventies milieu) emphasizes, [157] is in fact a good substitute for “shit.” In Critifiction: Postmodern Essays, Federman refuses (protesting far too loudly, but with much humour) the validity of psychoanalysis in understanding the human condition:


Psychoanalysis uses oedipal reduction and substitution to have the patient believe that he is going to speak in his own name, but it is a trap. He will never speak his own personal words, he will never be allowed to speak his own original words. He will only repeat the words put in his mouth. Therefore, he may speak of wolves, cry like a wolf, act like a wolf, but the psychiatrist thinks dogs, and answers DADDY, and the patient repeats DADDY, and believes he has gotten rid of the wolf in him. As long as this imposture works it is called a neurosis, but if the patient cracks, if he refuses to say the words put in his mouth, then it is called a psychosis. At the very moment when the patient believes he is speaking in his own name, the conditions of enunciation are removed.¹⁵⁸

Federman goes on, perhaps disingenuously, to equate psychoanalysis with traditional fiction, working under the assumption of a real author. The language of psychoanalysis can only betray the “original” language and make the subject speak false words. This mistrust and aggression towards psychoanalysis is explicitly illustrated in Double or Nothing through the only instance of heterosexual intercourse in the novel. As McHale elucidates: “Theory is what resists Federman’s practice, what he pushes back against.”¹⁵⁹ McHale refers here to French high theory, and there are also traces of this “resistance” (fitting word) to vulgarised Freudian theory in Double or Nothing, in particular during the episode with his best friend’s mother. Throughout this episode (unlike with Loulou and the toothbrush guy), the narrator keeps to his role. Everything is about “him,” Boris, and the first and third persons remain distinct.

This encounter occurs with the mother of the young man’s best friend. Overcome with emotion as he approaches climax, the third person feels he might finally be able to swear in English, but can only manage a garbled “STOP YOU MOTHER!/ STOP YOU DARLING -c-MAMAN” (175.00). He will say “maman” again: “once more he whispers MAMAN in French as he feels a last drop” (177). By that point the reader already knows that the young man has a “MOTHER COMPLEX,” which accounts for his attraction to older women: “the search for a lost mother” (73). The first person is here subjecting Boris to “cheap psychological crap” (155), making him speak, like Federman’s figural psychiatrist, in a language not his own. The first person admits, however, that he himself does have some kind of “FATHER COMPLEX” (73), in the following disarming reflection:

I could write a whole book about my father. But that does not necessarily mean that what I would write would be about my real father. On the contrary. Everybody invents an image of his father. A legendary father. A mythical father image. A dream father. And when it comes to my father. What a myth my father!

¹⁵⁸ Federman, Critifiction, 59.
Though ostensibly referring to the father he lost to the Holocaust, Simon Federman, the first person’s words equally apply to his literary father, Samuel Beckett. But the “overall looker,” “Sam,” is not a benevolent paternal figure. Like the fourth person/author, he delights in humiliating his own creations. As Mann warns, “father is the name of yet another displacement” in the masochistic scene. And as Federman writes in *Journey to Chaos*:

> Metaphorically, Beckett is the father who furnished “ce salaud de chapeau” to his characters in order to subject them to self-creativity. He remains the original inflicter of torments, the force that launched these creatures on their absurd fictional paths. It is to their fathers, and to all other creators (Beckett included), that the heroes of the stories refer when they curse “ces assassins…ces pourris,” who imposed life and hat upon them, torturing them into fiction.”

As self-styled Beckett creatures, how can Federman’s protagonists arrive at their own fiction, write (or rather fail to write) their own stories? Only by embracing homoerotic disruptions, as the following chapter will demonstrate. Rather than remaining silent, the patient will repeat the psychiatrist’s answer—“DADDY”—but with a difference. By queering his reading of Beckett, Federman’s critifictional practice opens the (im)possibility of saying “DADDY” in his own voice.

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160 Mann, *Masocriticism*, 47.
CHAPTER 2: HOMBRE DELLA PLUMA

i) “I believe my two tongues love each other”

Federman’s misuse of Freudian frameworks informs both his relationship to Beckett and his narrative poetics. His suspicion of the discourse of psychoanalysis, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, is a resistance to a different kind of story, one that does not belong to him. Yet he can’t seem to leave Freud alone, taking delight in vulgarising Freudian ideas in his role of aggressive philistine. In engaging with Freud, Federman takes his cue from Beckett. As Phil Baker’s extensive study has demonstrated, Beckett used “the debris of psychoanalysis” in his writing. Baker concludes that he did so ironically, with a certain “knowingness” that mitigated any underlying sincerity.¹ In his intertextual engagement with Beckett, Federman develops his own emotionally charged, though no more sincere, relationship to Freudian discourse. To elucidate Federman’s use of Freud, I will be drawing on the work of Leo Bersani. Bersani highlights the subversive potential of the Freudian (as literary) text, the “errant speech” that resists the narrativizing force of clinical analysis.² Federman, like Bersani, maintains a paradoxical faith in the primacy of the subject; though he submits it to all the techniques of deconstruction, it remains as if were indestructible, reformulating itself through the very processes that destroy it. As Mikko Tuhkannen has shown, Bersani’s work offers an “alternate genealogy” of deconstruction, where the singularity of the subject is ultimately (though paradoxically) enforced.³ In bringing Bersani and Federman together, I take my cue from Caramello’s Silverless Mirrors. Caramello draws on Bersani’s readings of Artaud and Beckett to elucidate the relationship to language at work in Federman’s The Voice in the Closet (1979). According to Caramello in Beckett, Artaud and Federman language can never be the thing itself, can never express what is beyond or behind textuality.⁴ Caramello uses Bersani’s phrase to illustrate this desire in Federman, as a “yearning for a centre of being behind all centres.”⁵ Bersani’s articulation of self-shattering jouissance, in the context of his work on “homo-ness,” provides as a way of elucidating Fedeman’s narrative and self-translation strategies.

⁴ Caramello, Silverless Mirrors, 135–139.
⁵ Caramello, 135.
In his discussion of Beckett according to Leo Bersani’s concept of “homo-ness,” Calvin Thomas elucidates the ways in which queer dynamics can be used to undermine notions of authority and create new forms of relationality. Thomas draws upon Bersani’s emphasis of “self-shattering” in his description of masochistic “jouissance.” He notes that Beckett’s characters are always already shattered, arrive at their sexual encounters devoid of a stable ego. Thomas demonstrates that Beckett’s characters are fundamentally indifferent, have difficulty in mustering any enthusiasm, and by this extreme indifference (“Man or woman, what does it matter?”) subvert societal norms. In a more exuberant tone, Federman continues the queer subversion of societal norms undertaken by Beckett’s characters. This chapter focuses on two novels where homoeroticism features prominently, the 1974 Amer Eldorado and the (greatly expanded) self-translation Take It or Leave It (1976). At one point (in both the French and English versions) the protagonist escapes from his narrator and has sex with a member of his “real” audience, a very attractive and rather feminine young man. In Postmodernist Fiction McHale briefly acknowledges the subversive potential of this episode as the ultimate narrative transgression. In my discussion of homoeroticism in Take It or Leave It/ Amer Eldorado, I expand on McHale’s observation by considering further Bersani’s notion of self-shattering jouissance.

In The Freudian Body, Bersani focuses on the parts of Freud’s text that seem to undermine Freud’s own theories. Regarding the Oedipus complex, Freud admits that the “normal” or negative Oedipus—identification with the parent of the opposite sex—is in a certain sense illogical, for it does not introduce the abandoned love object into the ego. Bersani illustrates how the inherent bisexuality of children proliferates complications in the Oedipal scheme:

Because of the constitutional bisexuality present in everyone, each child experiences both the positive and the negative Oedipus complex, so that even if he internalizes only his rival, he will have finally internalized both parents. For the little boy, the desired father of the negative complex will, so to speak, have already been identified with in the guise of the rival father of the positive complex, and to this we must of course add the possibility that what Freud rather vaguely calls a certain “feminine sexual disposition” will have led the boy to identify also with the loved father, instead of with the rival mother of the negative

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8 McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, 124.
9 Bersani, The Freudian Body, 98.
complex. No wonder that Freud almost complains of the Proustian turn which his thought has suddenly taken.10

I would like to insist here on the notion of Freudian bisexuality as an expansive, proliferating force. In *Double or Nothing*, the multitude of “complexes” are made possible by the young man’s ambiguously gendered identity. Disruptions to Freudian discourse prove productive rather than conclusive. In the subsequent *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave* bisexuality is both thematised within each novel and textually enacted between the two novels through the process of self-translation. Bersani’s analysis highlights the irreducible, shattering potential of Freudian bisexuality, undermining the very notion of gendered boundaries.

In *Homos*, Bersani defines jouissance as an “erotogenicity” not confined to genital sexuality, that produces “a certain degree of intensity in the organism and in so doing momentarily disturbs psychic organization.” This self-shattering is “intrinsic to the homo-ness in homosexuality.”11 Both Calvin Thomas and Paul Stewart draw on Bersani’s concept of homo-ness in their readings of Beckett, concluding that the undifferentiation of gender allows for the (paradoxical) hope of destroying established norms of relationality. Stewart also uses the work of Lee Edelman, insisting on the sterile and narcissistic aspects of queer identity. Stewart’s reading expands on Thomas’ observations of Beckettian failure, highlighting the hatred of children and reproduction as a defining feature of Beckett’s characters: “To bring Edelman and Beckett together, we might recall Watt’s two outbursts in *Mercier and Camier*: ‘Bugger life!’ and, a little later, ‘Fuck life!’”12 As both Thomas and Stewart acknowledge, it would be difficult to describe any of the sexual encounters between Beckett’s characters as a form of jouissance. Yet as Thomas affirms, Bersani’s inclusion of Beckett at the very end of *Homos* is both justified and rich in suggestion.13

It is always, or rather it is still, difficult to emphasize queer elements in the works of a straight author. As Stewart acknowledges, it is tempting yet misguided to “out” Beckett’s characters in the face of heteronormative critical assumptions, as they cannot simply be ascribed to another category: “the boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual, male and female, may not be

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10 Bersani, 99. As Tukhannen argues, Bersani’s homo-ness necessarily presupposes certain essential and potentially essentialist characteristics, but this is not my purpose here.
sufficiently well-defined to allow a simple crossing of borders.”

One could make this observation of Federman’s work, as the gender-bending episodes of *Double or Nothing* illustrate. In his intertextual engagement with Beckett, bisexual identification becomes a generative force. The playful exuberance associated with homoerotic encounters—Loulou and the toothbrush guy in *Double or Nothing*—affirms the possibility of a liberating homo-ness. Unlike the characteristic lack of enthusiasm present in Beckett’s characters, Federman’s use of homoeroticism is joyful and passionate. And though Molloy is unenthusiastically indifferent to the gender of his companion, in Federman’s first three novels (*Double or Nothing*, *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*) encounters with men are in fact more productive, and certainly more joyful, than any encounter with women.

The 1974 *Amer Eldorado*, written in French, picks up the life story where *Double or Nothing* left off, after the young man’s arrival in America. It is recounted in the first person, and the reader is made aware that this text is in a sense a translation of everything that happened to him in English (just as in *Double or Nothing*, the narrator is translating experiences that occurred in French). *Amer Eldorado* is self-translated and greatly expanded, with some important variations, into the 1976 *Take It or Leave It*. In the English version the narrator splits into “teller” and “told,” a reference to Beckett’s *The Unnamable*: “the story would begin as if nothing had happened, and I still the teller and the told.”

The something that has happened to the voice in *The Unnamable* is indistinct, an internal usurpation: “And still today, as he would say, though he plagues me no more his voice is there, in mine, but less, less.” He, the told, is also of ambiguous identity: “Decidedly Basil is becoming important, I’ll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that, I’m queer.” In *L’Innommable*, the corresponding phrase is less suggestive: “Je vais donc l’appeler Mahood, j’aime mieux ça, je suis bizarre.” When in *Take It or Leave It* the told usurps the role of the teller, what McHale terms the “ultimate narrative transgression” ensues: the told has anal sex with a young male reader.

In both *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, artistic creation is explicitly understood in non-normative, sexualized terms. Federman himself used transgressive sexuality as a metaphor for

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16 Beckett, 311.
17 Beckett, 311.
his bilingual writing. The following text, published online and reprinted here in full, is an apt illustration of this:

The Bilingualist

To answer the question I'm always asked [voyons réfléchissons] No I do not feel that there is a space between the two tongues that talk in me [oui peut-être un tout petit espace] On the contrary [plus ou moins si on veut] For me the one and the other seem to overlap [et même coucher ensemble] To want to merge [oui se mettre l'une dans l'autre] To want to come together [jouir ensemble] To want to embrace one another [tendrement] To want to mesh one into the other [n'être qu'une] Or if you prefer [ça m'est égal] They want to spoil and corrupt each other [autant que possible] I do not feel as some other bilingualists have affirmed that one tongue is vertical in me the other horizontal [pas du tout] If anything my tongues seem to be standing or lying always in the same direction [toujours penchées l'une vers l'autre] Sometimes vertically [de haut en bas] Other times horizontally [d'un côté à l'autre] Depending on their moods or their desires [elles sont très passionnées] Though these two tongues in me occasionally compete with one another in some vague region of my brain [normalement dans la partie supérieure de mon cerveau] More often they play with one another [des jeux très étranges] Especially when I am not looking [quand je dors] I believe that my two tongues love each other [c'est très possible] And I have on occasions caught them having intercourse behind my back [je les ai vues une fois par hasard] but I cannot tell you which is feminine and which is masculine [on s'en fout] Perhaps they are both androgynous [c'est très possible]20

Rainer Guldin, in an article dedicated to self-translation and the construction of sexual identity, draws on the above text. Guldin sees Federman’s writing practice as the prime example of playful bisexuality and gender fluidity in self-translation strategies. His analysis highlights the subversive potential of Federman’s approach:

Even if the languages are attributed a personality of their own and their relationship is seen in sexual terms, Federman deftly avoids the dualistic simplifications of the meta-narrative preeminent in the field, suggesting, however, that the playful intercourse of the two languages taking place outside the writer’s conscious control has a transgressive side to it.21

In “The Bilingualist,” this transgressive aspect is explicitly linked to embracing gender fluidity, the English “I cannot tell you which is feminine and which is masculine” is accompanied by the French: “[on s’en fout]”. The bracketed French comments amplify the sexual tenor of the preceding English. The English parts of this poem appear in Federman’s essay “A Voice within a Voice,” collected in Critifiction: Postmodern Essays. In the essay’s conclusion, the metaphor of children or lovers playing is revisited:

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There is, quite clearly, an element of playfulness at work in my bilingualism. The two languages play with one another, and I am using the term play in its fullest sense—not only in the sense of game, but also in the sense of looseness, as in the expression: *there is looseness in the door*. My French and English play with one another as two children do in a playground, or rather as two lovers (loose lovers) play with one another in order to possess or even abolish one another. Perhaps my French and English play in me in order to abolish my own origin. In the totally bilingual book I would like to write, there would be no original language, no original source, no original text—only two languages that would exist, or rather co-exist outside of their origin, in the space of their own playfulness.²²

In “The Bilingualist” the two tongues are at a further distance from the author, acting against his will or supervision. In this passage from *Critifiction* “my French and English” are working together, playing with one another, but the scene of their game is closer to the author’s consciousness. The “loose lovers” of *Critifiction* are unhinged; “il y a du jeu dans la porte” only makes sense in French, whereas in English “looseness” cannot be replaced by “play” in this expression. They are playing to abolish each other, whereas in “The Bilingualist” competitiveness is limited to the higher realms, “dans la partie supérieure de mon cerveau.” The jouissance (“jouïr ensemble”) in “The Bilingualist” is equivalent to the abolishing of all origins in *Critifiction*. Reading the above passages together, the homo-ness of Federman’s approach can be seen as a way of shattering the boundaries of self. And yet in both cases the doubling of tongue(s) allows for a solipsistic, autoerotic practice, paradoxically reinforcing the primacy and uniqueness of Federman’s voice.

Critic and translator Alyson Waters highlights the narcissistic aspect of Federman’s redoubled writing strategy in her comparative analysis of *Mon corps en neuf parties* (2002) and *My body in nine parts* (2005). Those texts in particular, accompanied by close-up photographs of nine parts of Federman’s body, are apt illustrations of this tendency. Waters’ analysis draws out the essentially narcissistic aspect of self-translation, which “turns voyeur and exhibitionist into one and the same.”²³ Waters emphasizes the redoubling strategy in Federman’s self-translation, and the way writing the second time around is accomplished “in the light” of the first text.²⁴ By analysing differences between the two versions, Waters illustrates how “self-awareness only comes in the second language, the language that is not the mother tongue.”²⁵ I would add that

²² Federman, *Critifiction*, 83–84.
²⁵ Waters, 70.
self-awareness is also self-shattering, and that self-translation further undermines the wholeness of the body/text. Federman’s narcissistic project is one of fragmentation; by cutting up his body into nine parts, the unity of the body/text/self is undermined. But this loss of unity is not a cause for despair—nor is it, ultimately, a real loss.

Though *Mon corps en neuf parties* and *My Body in Nine Parts* have only fleeting mentions of Beckett, these are nevertheless revealing. They show traces of the complex relationship to Beckett so central to Federman’s beginnings as a writer. The narrator (explicitly referred to as Federman by Erica, the name of his real wife) realizes he is losing his hair, or rather that his hair is losing its “fullness.” He reflects that fullness is a nice word, difficult to translate into French, “like Sam’s Lessness.”26 As Federman loses his hair, symbol of virility, Sam’s superior language intersperses his reflection. The narrator then cedes to Beckettian anxiety, wondering exactly how many hairs he had, has lost, are growing.27 The anxiety that Federman feels does not persist, rather he continues enthusiastically telling anecdotes in a playful voice. Significantly, his voice is classified as one of the nine parts of his body. And though the body in *My Body in Nine Parts* is fragmented and redoubled (translated from *Mon corps en neuf parties*), every part is unmistakably his own: “When I speak, whether I say something true or false, or something intelligent or stupid, I am telling myself.”28 On the next page, however, we find another reference to “Sam”: “To conclude, all I can say: I speak therefore I am. But one day, as my old friend Sam used to say, I’ll manage to shut up, barring an accident.”29 “All I can say” is the words of another. Despite this, Federman paradoxically insists on the primacy of his own voice, he insists that his works can only be self-translated: “Je veux qu’on m’entende dans mes deux langues. Donc comment me traduire, si ce n’est moi qui me traduis? Il faut faire entendre ma voix et non pas seulement le son des mots, parce que c’est ma voix qui me raconte en deux langues.”30

As a self-translator, Federman is fearful of betraying himself or his work. His translations aim to “enlighten the original” and confirm his story, as he explains in “A Voice Within a Voice”: “it also reassures, reasserts the knowledge already present in the original text.”31 Through a

28 Federman, 68.
29 Federman, 69.
30 Federman, *Federman hors limites*, 152.
31 Federman, *Critifiction*, 81.
self-shattering and highly sexualized act, Federman affirms the validity of the “original” text. The use of the word “reassures,” with its implication of stability, seems contrary to the transgressive, corrupting action described earlier in the essay. In “A Voice Within a Voice,” Federman confesses to fellow critic Elizabeth (Klosty Beajour): “To tell you the truth, Elizabeth, there is perversity in my bilingualism!” What to make then of reassuring perversity? How is the corruption of self-translation used to confirm his story? The paradox of Federman’s fiction—a shattered self asserting its subjectivity—can be understood in light of his own analysis of Beckett. In a 1970 article, “Beckettian Paradox,” Federman hints at the possibility of approaching, if not finding, some kind of “truth”:

Too often, we are guilty of reading paradoxes into Beckett’s fiction because we cannot accept that which destroys itself as it creates itself—that which is contrary to common sense, or that which points to itself, even though ironically, as paradoxical. And yet, the primary meaning of a paradox is, as defined by the most basic dictionary: “a tenet contrary to received opinion;... an assertion or sentiment seemingly contradictory, or opposed to common sense, but that yet may be true in fact.” This definition can indeed apply to the whole Beckett canon, and more specifically to the narrator-hero’s ambivalent role as a recipient of fiction and a dispatcher of fiction, as a creature that is both, as the Unnamable says of himself, “the teller and the told.”

In Take It or Leave It, the splitting of the protagonist into “teller” and “told” enacts the paradoxical movement Federman describes in Beckett’s fiction: “that which destroys itself as it creates itself.” This narrative strategy is doubled through self-translation and supported by a pronounced intertextuality. Self-translation both “reassures” and undermines the narration, as the following self-reflexive commentary in Take It or Leave It illustrates:

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Originally in fact there was only one person speaking in the
French version — AMER ELDORADO — first draft!
Therefore who can check
      who can make sure
      who can prove that I was there
      that he was there
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Rainier Grutman, in “The self-translator as author: Modern self-fashioning and ancient rhetoric in Federman, Lakhous and De Kuyper,” draws on the “paratexts” of self-translators to illustrate the ways in which an authentic voice is fashioned. Grutman mentions Federman’s essay, “A

32 Federman, Critifiction, 79.
34 Raymond Federman, Take It or Leave It (New York: Fiction Collective, 1976), 167. In-text references are to this edition.
Voice Within A Voice,” highlighting Federman’s rhetorical appeal to credibility: “To tell you the truth, Elizabeth, there is perversity in my bilingualism.”

Grutman sees “A Voice Within A Voice” as providing “ample evidence of self-fashioning,” and concludes that self-translators (unlike mere translators) seek to style themselves as “nobody’s mouthpiece,” “the real deal.”

Federman, with his insistence on “ma voix,” is a prime example of this phenomenon. And yet so much of his prose is Beckettian, and as such inauthentic, indebted (chiefly) to a single source, a single master text. In his letter to Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour (quoted by Grutman) Federman describes how he sometimes abandons hope: “Often I begin such an alternate version, but quickly abandon it, out of boredom, I suppose, fatigue or disgust, or perhaps of what you call “the horror of self-translation,” the fear of betraying myself and my own work.”

In his response, Federman readily adopts Beaujour’s formulation, “the horror of self-translation,” to describe his own predicament. With “fatigue or disgust” Federman is perhaps more obscurely echoing Beckett’s Watt; in a footnote to the Addenda, Beckett explains the failure to include certain material: “The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation.”

Federman’s failure to translate himself, to speak once again in his own voice, is the result of (Beckett’s) fatigue and/or disgust, or perhaps (Beaujour’s) horror.

In the following analysis, I maintain my focus on direct references to Samuel Beckett and his works. It is evident that Federman anticipated a scholarly, comparative reading of Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It. The dialogue between the two versions emerges even from comparing titles. The bitter disappointment of an “amer” Eldorado is met with a very American response: “take it or leave it.” In both the French and English versions, entire passages are plagiarized verbatim from the postmodern canon. On several occasions Federman provides an accurate page number for the quoted passages (though there are no actual quote marks). This is a kind of game he plays with his English reader, as Take It or Leave It is itself unpaginated. If you add your own page numbers (starting from 1 after the epigraphs) you’ll find the following cli d’œil on page 193: “Here let me quote you a little passage… page 193 in my Pléiade Edition (he said to my astonishment).”

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35 Federman, Critifiction, 79.
37 Federman, Critifiction, 79.
38 Beckett, Watt, 247, italics added.
The socio-economic and socio-cultural tensions present in *Double or Nothing* are further developed in *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*. The protagonist of both versions addresses a group of bourgeois intellectuals, who occasionally interrupt him with annoying (and enraging) questions. It is unclear exactly who this audience is made up of, but members of the Tel Quel group including Phillipe Sollers and Foucault are referred to at various points throughout the narrative. The young man is also an avid reader of the existentialists, Sartre in particular. Throughout both versions an insistence on authenticity emerges. This, we are told, is the “real shit,” the real suffering, something the bourgeois audience (and the reader, we’re all “you guys”) don’t know anything about. Though the text itself begs for a scholarly reading, it seems we are only to be rewarded with abuse. In *Double or Nothing* the writer takes Beckett, quite literally, as an example to follow, by recreating his own exaggerated version of a “siege in the room.” In the process of translating *Amer Eldorado* into *Take it or Leave It*, he goes further—by working backwards through Joyce, the writer usurps the (Jewish) identity of Shem the Penman, placing himself at the origin. According to Bersani, “Beckett’s work is an attempt to approach a centre of being which all definition violates.” Federman’s work mirrors Beckett’s approach, as he fails to articulate his own impossible centre, X-X-X-X. Through masocritical intertextuality, Federman places his own “centre of being” at the origin of Beckett’s oeuvre. As the following chapter will illustrate, this is accomplished through a reversal, and perversion, of the order of literary genealogy.

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Continuing the life story of *Double or Nothing*, after some time barely getting by in New York, the young man decides to enlist in the US army. He is stationed with the paratroopers in North Carolina, but finds army life unbearable, and so volunteers for combat. News of his deployment finally arrives, and he is given 30 days paid leave before he must report to San Francisco.\(^{40}\) He decides to use this opportunity to take a road trip across America. In *Amer Eldorado*, his project is understood in suggestive terms: “J’allais me taper tout ça et encore plus…Toute l’Amérique. Je bandais d’avance.”\(^{41}\) As is characteristic in *Take It or Leave It*, this desire is exaggerated and made explicit: “I was going to enter into it —plunge into it the way you plunge into a big fat woman” (53). His plans are disrupted when, due to bureaucratic error, his payment is derailed. Instead of heading south, he must go north to Camp Drum, where his regiment has been stationed. This is the first of many (sexualized) failures. True to his Beckettian ethic, he makes of failure an occasion. His repeated failure to tell the story properly, once and for all, is paralleled by the protagonists’ repeated failure to “penetrate” in a heteronormative sense. The young man consistently fails to transmit. This failure goes both ways, as he is also unable to truly receive—the texts he quotes are misconstrued or interpreted literally. He cannot summon up the (masculine) authority required to either assume responsibility for his story or penetrate its meaning. Incapable of acting seriously, he keeps “jerking around.” Not least, he keeps plagiarising, wreaking havoc on the authority of others. By undoing through repetition, reusing fragments of existing texts, embracing impotence and failure, Federman accomplishes (his understanding of) the Beckettian project. And yet, at times, the protagonist seems to place Beckett among the despised bourgeois intellectuals, a tactic I will explore in the final two sections of this chapter. It is first necessary to examine how this procreative failure is articulated using Beckett’s words.

Masturbation is, in *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, everyone’s preoccupation. This includes the protagonist’s adversaries. In the French he decries: “Mais la vie, la vraie vie! Connais pas! C’est pour ça que vous en êtes restés à vos souvenirs bien minables de

\(^{40}\) In *Amer Eldorado/Take It or Leave It* the protagonist suffers an accident and is never sent to combat. The real Raymond Federman served in the Korean War, which allowed him to enter university on the GI bill. When Delvigne asks him if he killed anyone in Korea, he responds: “Je n’ai jamais vu de près les mecs sur lesquels je tirais. J’ai vu des morts, plein de morts en Corée, mais je ne savais pas si c’était moi qui les avais tués ou si c’était les autres mecs de mon régiment.” Federman, *Federman hors limites*, 243.

masturbation au lycée” (50). In English: “But LIFE, YEA real Life! and Work! and Misery! unknown! That’s for the other guy … you guys are still trying to push on us, to peddle on us your Pitiful memories of High School Masturbation” (104). In the expanded English version, power dynamics are heightened. The intellectual and literary establishment turns their “fucked up Mentalities” (104) into officially sanctioned art. But this art is “old stuff” (105)/ “vieux jeu comme tout” (50); it’s not the “real” stuff. The sexual fantasies of uneducated soldiers, the young man argues, are both more real and more meaningful. Addressing the bourgeois audience, he describes the lonely nights in North Carolina, where the men of the 82nd airborne division, together yet alone, jerked off under their khaki blankets: “pieces of androgynous bodies sloppy orgies and all that drowning into lakes of white sticky gooey liquid! What artists these guys were without really knowing it!” (31). The statement about artists only appears in Take It or Leave It, and it is interesting to note that the bodies in question are androgynous. Overall, the political implications are clarified in the English version. But both novels make a point about the symbolic nature of the soldiers’ experience:

Mes bons péquenots tout con de la 82e, le soir, là sous leurs couvertures kaki, eux aussi ils faisaient du symbolisme – sans le savoir bien sûr -- eux aussi … Et c’était pas du régal, non, c’était de la douleur (50)

Those clumsy stupid farmers of the 82nd at night they too were dealing with symbolism (without knowing it of course) … They too in fact were involved in symbolism and it wasn’t served to them on a shiny silver platter no it was raw suffering from the loneliness the misery the pain of their nightly ejaculations into the desert of military life (105)

For the soldiers, their autoerotic experiences are desperate and shameful. Unlike the bourgeois intellectuals, it’s something they prefer to forget. There is no sense of community despite the somewhat collective nature of their activity, described at one point as an “Olympic relay” (29). In Amer Eldorado, it is described as “Une veritable symphonie d’amour sans amour!” (22). In Take It or Leave It, Federman responds to/agrees with himself by inserting the following phrase in French: “Oui, quelle symphonie d’amour sans amour!” (29). Despite the inherent poetry of their act, it only leaves them ashamed, unable to look each other in the eye the next morning, with “complexes” and “culpability all over the place” (31). Though acting in unison, each soldier is painfully alone. In Amer Eldorado Federman uses the English phrase “sickly looking” to describe their penises, which is retained in Take It or Leave It:
Les pauvres pines ratatinées du lendemain matin! Rouges et saignantes à faire peur (SICKLY LOOKING) comme des morceaux de bidoche en loques.

(22)

the poor pricks in pieces The tattered cocks of the next morning Reddish and bloody to scare the hell out of you SICKLY LOOKING like torn pieces of meat!

(30)

Underlying this is the threat that, eventually, the army will end up making “torn pieces of meat” out of these “poor pricks.”

The teller’s ultimate solidarity with the soldiers is suggested even as he bemoans their stupidity and lack of learning. In the army, it is claimed, our young man (of superior intelligence) read all the existentialist classics, that these “dumb idiots” surrounding him couldn’t have ever understood: “They had no idea what social responsibility towards others ([autrui]) was all about. And the concept of political commitment ([engagement]) was Greek to them” (35). The irony of this remark is amplified in the English version; the double bracketed “engagement” could be read in both French and English. In Amer Eldorado he simply states they had no idea about “l’action” and “la responsabilité” (24). Translation reveals that the young man himself may have no idea about any of this; might be thinking, once again, far too literally when it comes to the “truc de l’existence qui précède l’essence” (24). Although he assures us in both languages that he has read “tout Sartre” (24), “Everything!” (33), in the English version he admits that “L’Être et le néant (remember that one?) that was difficult to understand” (33). He then goes on to illustrate the extent of his difficulty, by taking literally Sartre’s famous maxim. The young man’s philistine incomprehension, his inability to translate concepts, is revealed through a bilingual pun:

and about existence that precedes gasoline
Essence you mean?
Yes essence it’s the same thing. And the concept of freedom! And the notion of self!
They didn’t get any of that when I tried to explain it all in the simplest terms.

(35)

Even as he complains about his regiment, the young man performs his own stupidity, acting like a “dumb idiot.” Perhaps the soldiers cannot comprehend the “notion of self” because they are not real individuals; an undifferentiated mass that always acts and speaks in harmony. Their taunts form a constant chorus: “their blah blah poker and quaqua fucking and always bugging me” (39). In Amer Eldorado the Beckettian reference, “quaqua,” is absent (27). In both versions the soldier’s verbal “marmalade” is the backdrop to the young man’s search for the right words:
“quand je cherchais encore les mots” (27) / “when I was still naïve enough to look for the words” (39).

In the context of *En Attendant Godot*, “quaqua” is the sound of Lucky’s (second) uncontrollable ejaculation, interrupting his pseudo-learned discourse (first he says “quaquaquaqua,” in *Waiting for Godot* he says “quaquaquaqua” twice). “Qua” is also a part of learned discourse itself, a literary and formal preposition used by the master Pozzo in the English version: “What is so extraordinary about it? Qua sky.”42 In the passage to English, Lucky’s “quaqua” becomes both an imitation of the master’s voice and the slave’s involuntary cry. It is unclear whether Federman’s “quaqua” can be attributed to the teller or if he is quoting the soldiers themselves, “their blah blah poker and quaqua fucking.” This uncertainty of attribution is reflected in a passage from *How It Is* that Federman includes in his essay “Beckettian Paradox”: “yes but nothing of all that no all balls from start to finish yes this voice quaqua yes all balls yes only one voice here yes mine yes when the panting stops.”43 Federman addresses the ambiguity of the “muttering creature” of *How It Is*, who insists he is quoting from memory and at the same time asserts he is being made to speak (“I quote”).44 The teller of *Take It or Leave It* invokes *How It Is* when he assures us he is “quoting them exactly as they spoke,” “always the same crap” (39). In *How It Is*, the narrator is lying face down in the mud, “always the same,”45 being made to speak, “I quote.”46 The told/teller of *Take It or Leave It* is a member of the masturbatory corps, though he attempts (unsuccessfully) to distinguish himself through learning. By writing “quaqua,” Federman is “quoting” both the fictional soldiers and the author Samuel Beckett. But like in Beckett’s *How It Is*, there is “only one voice here yes mine.”47

The Beckettian “quaqua” also appears when the young man recounts a far more positive masturbatory experience, a “whild [sic] collective jerking-off session” (152) with a group of jazz players in Detroit. In the lead up to this, he’s at a jam session with the great saxophone player Charlie Parker. At one point, Parker asks to borrow his instrument. The young man is overcome with awe, with a sense of “Glory and Love and Friendship and Pride” (149). After Parker uses his saxophone, he is finally able to ascend artistic heights. Usually he’s a mediocre

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44 Federman, 108.
player, but that night was an exception: “I blew beyond my capacities” (151). His saxophone solo is described as a highly sexualised, self-shattering experience. The men surround him with encouraging cries of “BLOW FRENCHY BLOW” (151). Inspiration is understood as the transmission of bodily fluids between men; we learn that after Parker used his sax, he refused to wipe his mouthpiece for three weeks (150). The creative, autoerotic blowing of the sax is at once a personal and collective experience:

I had blown my one great solo and in front of Charlie Parker, for Charlie Parker but also for all my other buddies my black buddies who were shouting to me BLOW FRENCHY BLOW because they understood that I was blowing my guts out fire and flames for them and against all the shit that life shovels at us from all directions yes that I was blowing because me too sad and lonely slob like them I was hurting inside (152)

Though he does not resemble his “black buddies,” the young man feels the sense of fraternity that was missing in his regiment. They come together in their suffering, in the brotherhood of the persecuted.

This communal fraternity can only be achieved by excluding women. Although we learn that the young man had gone to the jam session with a “lovely little broad… RITA was her name” (149) that’s the last we hear of her. And the teller is affronted by an audience member’s enquiry as to whether women were present: “No! all the broads had left” (152). They all get back to “Ernie’s pad” (Ernest is the young man’s best friend in Double or Nothing) and strip naked, setting a large porcelain dish in the middle of the room “so that our sperms could mix without any prejudice” (154). Queer sex is explicitly understood in terms of creative expression, a continuation of the jam session: “we would pass our dicks to one another stiff jubilant happy juicy so that everyone would share in the pleasure and the improvisation” (153). The penises are passed around the same way as the joints: “we would drag on those yellowish butts slowly deeply and affectionately” (154). Love and friendship banish all pettiness and competition, in an idealised fraternal community: “each time a guy unloaded everybody would shout at his success without any sign of envy” (154).

François Noudelmann, in Pour en finir avec la généalogie, argues that political fraternity is articulated against the logic of genealogy, in a fantasy of self-begetting: “Il ne s’agit pas moins que de refaire l’histoire des hommes en revenant au lieu même de leur enfantement pour y
fonder une nouvelle genèse.” The large porcelain dish in Ernie’s pad literalises this fantasy, a communal genetic soup. According to Noudelmann hetero procreation manifests the need for difference and division, for maintaining a hermetically sealed self. Political fraternity is articulated against heteronormative reproduction. In Federman’s fraternal community of jazz men sperms all mix together, illustrating what Bersani terms “the joy of self dissolution,” the self-shattering jouissance intrinsic to homo-ness. Noudelmann asserts that the resulting “play” of family resemblances can be likened to “grafting” foreign branches. The logic of “original” reproduction is countered by a logic of play where branches ceaselessly multiply. Though his skin is white, as a persecuted and orphaned Jew the young man can graft his identity onto that of his “black buddies.” Despite the different colour of their skin, they’re the same down in the “guts.” Noudelmann also points out that any fantasy of fraternal self-begetting rests on the abolition of the father. In *Double or Nothing*, Boris (a younger version of the told) sleeps with his friend Ernest’s mother. When he confesses, at first Ernest is enraged, but then all is quickly forgiven:

YOU DIRTY LITTLE BASTARD! Boris had never heard such an outburst. But Ernest had hardly pronounced those words that he realized what he had just said. In a way he was the little bastard because somehow Boris had substituted himself for his father (temporarily it’s true). And so they quickly made up and Ernest told his friend: “You know something, man, that makes us almost brothers.” And then for a moment he reflected about what he had just said, and then added quite candidly, “no, that’s not really it, that makes me almost your son.”

Identity, Bersani reminds us, is not serious. In Noudelmann’s terms, “l’auto-engendrement des frères-fils suppose, implicitement, la réappropriation d’une matrice défectueuse.” The scene of collective masturbation occurs in “Ernie’s pad,” away from his father’s (and his mother’s) home. Having abolished the father, the fraternity sets out to abolish maternal origin, in a fantastic parody of impregnation: “Et tout d’un coup, un des gars (un peu paf sans doute) s’est mis à tout boire, d’un trait et d’un seul coup, jusqu’à la dernier goutte. Voilà la camaraderie, que je me suis dit!” (73). In the English version, this gesture becomes a parody of chest-thumping masculinity:

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49 Noudelmann, *Pour en finir avec la généalogie*, loc. 2957.
51 Noudelmann, *Pour en finir avec la généalogie*, loc.2652.
52 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 184.
54 Noudelmann, *Pour en finir avec la généalogie*, loc. 985.
suddenly one of the guys (a mad cat, high as you’ve never seen) let out a wild cry while slapping his chest à la Tarzan picked up the plate and drank the whole mixture (the whole soup in other words) to the last drop without even stopping to take a breath of fresh air.

That’s friendship for you, that’s real love I said to myself. (154)

In the English version, the man who drinks the sperm becomes a hero (like Tarzan). The poor soldiers in the regiment could only dream about such exploits, reading their comic books: “like TARZAN or ZORRO or all sorts of junk of that caliber” (38). In Amer Eldorado it’s “des COMIC BOOKS: du TARZAN (ou toutes sortes de saloperies comme ça)” (25–26). The French “saloperies” suggests a pornographic indulgence. Reading the two versions together, the sexual frustration of the soldiers is revealed as potentially homoerotic. The grand, heroic gesture of the “mad cat” is a travesty of procreation, usurping the absent mother’s role. The young man even wishes he could have thought of it first: “after this glorious, symbolic magnificent gesture I felt somewhat guilty to be quite frank … I should have been the one to perform such a symbolic act” (154). Interestingly, this feeling of guilt is absent in Amer Eldorado. In the English version he elaborates: “after all I was the outsider here, in this noble gathering, yes it should have been me the mediocre white skinned who should have thought of that” (154). The young man is a mediocre saxophone player, of mediocre virility: “at rest theirs was almost the dimension of mine in erection” (152). He feels it is his place, then, to prove his love, in a manly gesture of self-sacrifice, drinking the “soup” and thus submitting to the mother’s role.

The orgy ends in a jumble of bodies and involuntary sounds. The men all fall asleep together, limbs entangled, some talking and singing in their sleep. And this is where Beckett’s “quaqua” comes in, this time in both versions:

Finalement, tout le monde s’est effondré par terre et on a roupillé comme des anges, des bébés plutôt, jusqu’à quatre (ou cinq) heures de l’après-midi. Y avait même des gars qui dormaient en se tenant la jambe ou le bras, les uns les autres, et même le membre (tous les membres en somme), allongé sur le côté, nus, le corps replié en fœtus, pour se sentir plus proche, et d’autres qui riaient, qui parlaient à haute voix, qui chantaient même, dans leurs rêves – bla bla bla, qua qua qua, tra la la, hop-la hop-la hop-la ! C’était magnifique ! (74)
and then we all collapsed, all fell down to the floor, on top of each other pell mell, to go to sleep, like angels, like babies rather, and we slept, we snored together, naked, sweaty, shivering, until about five or six, and even later, in the afternoon, and there were guys who slept clinging to the other guys arms, or even holding on to each other’s penis with delicate fingers, stretched next to each other and on top of each other on the side, face to face, back to back, bodies folded in foetal designs one might say, so that we could feel closer to one another, more secure in each other’s dreams, and some guys were speaking in their sleep, and others were laughing in their sleep, and others singing bla bla qua qua qua and others scatting in their sleep oop bop sh’bam yadoyeca bidobidobido, it was beautiful

(155)

In translating towards Take It or Leave It, Federman’s strategy is to amplify, exaggerate and expand. Four or five in the afternoon becomes five or six or “even later,” a self-reflexive exaggeration that invites comparative analysis. The idiomatic French “replié en foetus” turns into the poetic “bodies folded into foetal designs one might say,” signalling that (some)one has said that before. Beckett’s presence is also amplified in English with “pell mell,” in reference to a passage from Texts for Nothing: “Words, mine was never more than that, than this pell-mell babel of silence and words.”

The collapsed, entangled jazz men and their motley orchestra of sounds literalise Beckett’s “pell-mell babel.” Though theirs is a positive, creative experience, the jazz men make the same essential sounds as the soldiers, “bla bla bla” and “qua qua qua.” In Take It or Leave It these are the sounds of masturbation, and it seems that truly collective masturbation may be the only way of achieving artistic flight, as when the men shouted, encouraging the young man to “BLOW” (151). Through the sharing of bodily fluids (on the saxophone’s mouthpiece or in the porcelain dish) the body becomes porous and the boundaries of selfhood are joyfully transgressed. By opening up to the self-shattering possibilities of homoeroticism, the young man can transcend the lonely nights of his regiment.

At this point a deeper origin for Beckett’s “quaqua” needs to be put forward. This is in the final sentence of the “Shem the Penman” chapter of Finnegans Wake: “He lifts the lifewand and the dumb speak. / —Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiqoi!” That Federman sought to emphasise the link between Joyce’s “quoi” and Beckett’s “qua” is evidenced in his use of the “qua” syllable to form a question (in place of the French “quoi”) from one of the audience of intellectuals. Just as our young man is mentioning all the French authors he’s read, a particularly pedantic audience member exhorts him to be more precise:

QUAQQAQUAQQAQUA ...? [Same guy in the corduroy jacket]

56 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 195:06.
What I mean? What! Everything! What you guys want? Some kind of bibliography?

Chapter III of *Take It or Leave It* then appears to finish half way down the page with “QUOIQUIQUOI…? [With a great deal of restlessness]” (51), just like the “Shem the Penman” chapter of the *Wake*. But this appearance of an ending is misleading, on the next page there is no new chapter, only a response/continuation of the previous question: “Qua Qua Qua Else! What else?” (52) Federman’s “quoi”/“qua” is mobilised in a discussion of preceding texts, figuring its own multiple origins. Like with the soldiers, it is unclear where “qua” originates, with the bourgeois audience or with the teller. Attributed in Beckett to both Lucky and Pozzo, to the tormented “I” and his tormentor in *How It Is*, “qua” is similarly reversible in *Take It or Leave It*. It is also the essential sound of masturbation/creation, be it positive and life-giving (for the jazz men), pompous and impotent (for the bourgeois intellectuals) or negative and life-sapping (for the soldiers). Finally, it is at once learned discourse (a formal preposition) and a pre-verbal sound. As both *cri de cœur* and quotation, Federman’s “quaqua” signals the paradoxical authenticity of the split protagonist. The question raised by Beckett’s “qua” (Who is speaking, Lucky or Pozzo? Tormentor or tormented?) is raised, famously, in Michel Foucault’s essay “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” Foucault quotes Beckett: “Qu’importe qui parle, quelqu’un a dit qu’importe qui parle.” Federman’s awareness of Foucault is playfully signalled in both *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, blatantly so in the French version: “Loufauct parle de “l’archéologie du savoir” (154). As the question of who is speaking is raised, it leads to another question: Who said it first? For Federman to claim authenticity, he will have to travel in reverse, inverting the paternal order of literary transmission.

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iii) “Il y a ceux qui ont fait le chemin inverse”

Federman usurps Beckett’s authority by identifying with Joyce’s alter ego, Shem the Penman, taking the place of his mentor’s mentor. This appropriation was foreshadowed in *Double or Nothing* with the inclusion of “HOMBRE DELA PLUMA” in a list of illustrious names, echoing the *Wake*. Joyce’s close identification with the Penman moniker is evidenced in Beckett’s correspondence, where he is referred to as either Shem or Penman. It is important to note here that Federman, like Joyce, used the nickname “Pen Man” in real life. A 2002 issue of the *Journal of Experimental Fiction* is entitled “The Laugh that Laughs at the Laugh: Writing from and about the Pen Man, Raymond Federman.” This brings Beckett and Joyce together (“the laugh laughing at the laugh” in *Watt*). According to the editor, Eckhard Gerdes, Federman had significant influence over the edition. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce articulates his link to Shem the Penman via his first name, James, which is Shem in Irish: “Shem is as short for Shemus as Jem is joky for Jacob.” Joyce’s Penman is a re-articulation of his literary forbearer, Flaubert, self-proclaimed “homme-plume.” In her study of Joyce and Flaubert, Scarlet Baron emphasizes the importance of intertextuality for both writers. Flaubert scrupulously “digested” the works of others, and Joyce’s approach is a self-conscious continuation of that process. By explicitly signaling his own plagiarisms and including large chunks of pilfered texts, Federman attempts, and fails, to digest printed material. His posture of critical inadequacy—essence as “gasoline”—mocks his own tendency to take things literally. Paradoxically, it is his inability to digest, his literalising tendency, that makes of him an “homme-plume.” Federman is feather-man in German and Yiddish, and “man of the feather” becomes “man of the quill.” Federman is, quite literally, the Penman. As the following analysis will illustrate, by translating *Amer Eldorado* into *Take It or Leave It*, Federman confirms this identity.

58 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 83
62 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 169:01.
64 Baron, *Strandentwining Cable*, 274.
In *Take It or Leave It*, the name Hombre della Pluma is first uttered by a fellow Jew, Captain Cohen: “that much must be said for him he was Jewish (with a name like COHEN it’s clear) and not a bad guy in fact quite a good pear” (37). Captain Cohen is also “a bit queer (I think) around the edges but nobody really cared about his social habits” (27). This is confirmed at the end of the novel, where he is referred to as “the old fag” (501). Captain Cohen, though stern, takes an interest in the young man, and unlike the others in his regiment he at least reads real books, though they are not of the kind to impress the protagonist: “all those contraptions in PSY and PIPI I don’t believe in it. All that stuff bores me to death” (38). And yet, the psychoanalytically informed Captain is the first to recognise his true nature as the Pen Man. When the young man’s orders—that he is to be deployed to the Far East—arrive, the Captain calls him into his office. After delivering the news, he is stupefied by the protagonist’s mad display of joyful exuberance, which includes tap dancing, three backwards somersaults and walking around the room on his hands. He even considers calling the regimental psychiatrist. Finally, though, he simply orders him to leave: “CORPORAL HOMBRE DELLA PLUMA…GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE…AND ON THE DOUBLE!” (94). This is the first time the reader hears of Hombre della Pluma in *Take It or Leave It*. The entire scene is absent from *Amer Eldorado*.

It is important to note here that unlike Hombre della Pluma, the name Federman does not appear in his first three novels (*Double or Nothing, Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*). In his seminal work on autobiography, Philippe Lejeune emphasises the importance of the proper name. The proper name is at the origin of identity, antecedent to the use of the first person: “C’est dans le nom propre que personne et discours s’articulent avant même de s’articuler dans la première personne, comme le montre l’ordre d’acquisition du langage par les enfants.”

Hombre della Pluma precedes Federman, just as Joyce precedes the writer Raymond Federman. The feather-man is posited as the genuine original, the pre-translation Federman. Echoing Flaubert’s pronouncement, “je suis l’homme-plume,” Federman insists that his vocation was inscribed in his father’s name: “Je suis l’homme de la plume. Ce qui explique aussi pourquoi j’écris. C’était dans mon nom.” Again according to Gerdes, Federman took this interpretation to heart. When his wife Erica explained that “man of the feather” probably meant “chicken plucker,” and that this was in all likelihood the occupation of his forbearers, he

responded (visibly upset, but with some humour): “I’d rather be a chicken fucker than a chicken plucker.” It also seems that Federman generally kept silent on the Joycean origin of his name. In a 2006 interview, Marie Delvigne poses the following question: “Que signifie Hombre de la pluma? Moi, j’ai tout de suite pensé à Hombre de la Mancha.” Federman responds by acknowledging the link to Don Quixote and fails to mention Joyce. Delvigne’s guess was partly right. In Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It, the Man of La Mancha is explicitly invoked, but not through direct reference to Cervantes (or to the musical). The text in question is Jorge Luis Borges’ “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote.” A subtle parody of literary criticism, Borges’ short story outlines an author’s impossible task: “Pierre Menard did not want to compose another Quixote, which surely is easy enough, he wanted to compose the Quixote.” Having died before he could accomplish this, all that is left to posterity are “fragments” of Menard’s Quixote (nothing more than quoted passages of Cervantes). From Amer Eldorado to Take It or Leave It, Federman enacts Menard’s absurd, anachronistic task. The critic-narrator in Borges’ story makes the following remark: “I have reflected that it is legitimate to see the ‘final’ Quixote as a kind of palimpsest, in which the traces—faint but not undecipherable—of our friend’s ‘previous’ text must shine through.” In Federman’s case, the “previous” text, antecedent to Beckett’s oeuvre, becomes his own.

Borges’ Pierre Menard may have been suggested to Federman by John Barth’s “The Literature of Exhaustion.” Barth’s essay is collected in Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow (edited by Federman) and is also referenced in Take It or Leave It:

(Ah, I begin to understand what he means by paracriticism!)
(to be sure, writers real and so-called manage to get away with such as)
(this. name some, I dare you! well, there’s Barth, Beckett & Borges. so)
(unds like a vaudeville team. and of course: Sterne, mustn’t forget him)
( and Sukenick, and Nabokov, and Barthelme, and Le Clézio, that guy is)
(fantastic, really, & … & … well, there’s also: Hombre de la Pluma!)

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68 Eckhard Gerdes, email message to author, January 4th 2019. It’s also worth noting that “poule” (literally “hen”) is both an ironic term of endearment and slang for a female sex-worker in French, and that Federman plays with this in Take It or Leave It when he refers to the soldiers missing “their chickens” (31).
69 Federman, Federman hors limites, 181.
71 Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” 95.
The above passage is plagiarized from Campbell Tatham’s (very unserious) essay on Federman, “Crap Lie or Die,” 72 reprinted in Take It or Leave It. The narrator’s comments in italics (not Tatham’s) refer to Ihab Hassan’s Paracriticisms, for which Federman wrote the following book-jacket blurb: “Not only is this book brilliant in what it says, but, in my opinion, totally successful in the way it says it.” 73 This rather humorous, and very succinct, appreciation stands out against the scholarly tone of other contributors. In his own academic career, Federman was embracing a more playful approach. In the 1975 Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow, Federman the scholar lets loose, in the sense invoked earlier of “du jeu dans la porte.” Published between Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It, Surfiction permeates both his English and French novels, just as it brings French and American theorists together. Surfiction also marks a break with the Becketteteers. The following review, by Beckett scholar and Federman’s one-time collaborator, John Fletcher, provides an apt illustration of the extent of this departure:

Let me frank about my prejudices: there are too may capitalized words here for my taste; they convey to the whole enterprise a rather breathless and assertive air which seems to be catching on in academic criticism (Ihab Hassan is another exponent). Apart from brashness there is in this case a high proportion of modishly unreadable prose (by Philippe Sollers and Jean Ricardou in particular) translated from French, and a fair amount of readable but dull or trivial stuff in English (chief culprits Ronald Sukenick and Jerome Klinkowitz). And—last but not least—it is something of a ‘back-scratching’ exercise: Raymond Federman prints (and reprints) rather a lot of Richard Kostelanetz, who in in his turn considers Double or Nothing, Raymond Federman’s experimental novel—sorry, surfiction—a “masterpiece.” It is certainly an intriguing and impressive work, but hyperbole on this scale is bound to sound false. 74

By the time Surfiction appears in 1975, Federman is clearly in breach of the masocritical contract. His aggressive identification with the master text has been taken too far—outrageously, he claims precedence and originality. Federman and his cohort of critics are no longer the jealous and vindictive priests described by Mann. Humor is an important element; like in Borges’ “Pierre Menard,” they revel in the absurdity of their task. Federman’s critification undermines the seriousness of scholarly enterprise. In the back-scratching circle, Hombre de la Pluma takes his place with Barthelme and Sukenick, Beckett and Borges. Like in the episode with the jazz men, they all mix together “without prejudice.” Once again, women are excluded—all twenty contributors to Surfiction are male. The opening up of critical

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discourse allows for new modes of (homo-) relationality, described in the previous section as a form of collective masturbation.

This utopic, self-begetting fraternity allows for an attack on the very linearity of literary lineage. The point is made explicit in part of Tatham’s essay, reprinted in Take It or Leave It: “POSTDATING OUR CRITIFICATION I REINSERT MYSELF INTO YOUR PRICKLY TECTICULE AND THROUGH THE LEAPFROG TECHNIQUE (to be explained later) PURSUE MY JOURNEY INTO THE ABSURD UNENDING” (97). In this perverse, retroactive pollination of texts, the told of Take It or Leave It can take on the various aspects of the authors Federman admired, merging them with his story of survival. He does this chiefly via the figure of Hombre de la/pluma who is both Beckett’s literary son, Federman, and Beckett’s father, the Pen Man (Federman doing to Beckett what Boris did to Ernest in Double or Nothing). This reversal can be read as literalising Noudelmann’s strategies of filial displacement invoked earlier. Noudelmann asserts the essentially simulated nature of filial identity. Resemblance itself can be thought of, radically, as play. The simulated and conventional nature of “grafted” family resemblance is extended to the process of analogy itself. The analogies Federman draws between himself and Beckett or Joyce are dis-analogies, false resemblances, overinterpretations negating the boundary between literal and metaphoric. In the same spirit, and in Federman’s own style of play, I could seriously consider François Noudelmann’s name as a sign that he must have something to say about Federman, aka Frenchy, aka the Noodle Man.

Hombre de la Pluma’s origins are, fittingly, in critical discourse. Towards the end of Amer Eldorado the young man is driving through snow, almost at his final destination (Camp Drum in the North, near the Canadian border.) He comes across a hitchhiker, a crazy looking old man, and offers him a lift. It turns out the old man is a PhD scholar, called Bonvalet (a dig at the profession?) and the subject of his dissertation a certain Abbé Crulx. This is changed completely in Take It or Leave It, but in both versions the scholar, who is almost blind, has difficulty reading from his torn and soiled manuscript. The old man is philosophically resigned to his condition: “C’est la vie, vous savez! Nous naissions tous aveugles, quelques-uns le demeurent!” (153). In English: “We are all born blind. Only a few remain so! He said, evasively!” (343). This is a reformulation of Estragon’s “aphoristic” remark in En Attendant
"Godot/ Waiting for Godot: “Nous naissons tous fous. Quelques-uns le demeurent.”

Bonvalet’s defense of the little-known Abbé Crulx recalls the critic’s absurd and pompous championing of Pierre Menard in Borges’ story. He claims that Racine pales in comparison to Crulx: “Là où je voulais en venir, en vaticinant: Je voudrais que tout ceux qui ont écrit sur Racine refassent le travail sur CRULX (qui savait Athalie par cœur à quinze ans)” (156). The scene is set for anachronistic reversals: “Parliez-vous du classicisme! Nous sommes en plein Moyen Âge! Le Moyen Âge a eu sa période de classicisme comme le Canada français” (157).

At one point in his nonsensical discourse, a lineage of characters from Godot is invoked: “Et l’Esprit-Saint aidant, Pallières suivra son chemin, comme tant d’autres: Lucky, Didi, Gogo, Pozzo, Godot, sur le chemin de Damas” (158) But there is one, who, secretly, has followed the path in reverse: “Chut! Il met le doigt sur la bouche. Il y a ceux qui ont fait le chemin inverse. On me dit que Monsieur Hombre della Pluma…Motus!” (158) The gesture and accompanying sound (“Chut!”) are significant. “Chut!” is the last word Federman heard from his mother, before she pushed him into a closet, saving him from deportation to Auschwitz. Federman’s final novel in French is entitled Chut: Histoire d’une enfance (2008).

In the passage to English, the link between Hombre della Pluma and Raymond Federman is made explicit. The crazy old scholar’s name changes from Bonvalet to Cam Taathaam, in reference to the critic and friend of Federman, Campbell Tatham, mentioned earlier. The subject of his dissertation is Hombre de la Pluma (spelt “de la” not “della” this time).
from Tatham’s essay on Federman, “Crap, Lie or Die,” are reprinted verbatim, except that Federman’s name has been replaced by Hombre de la Pluma, or simply Hombre, and certain dates have been crossed out. Tatham’s essay provides an annotated bibliography of Raymond Federman’s works, in another invocation of Borges’ Pierre Menard. The teller of Take It or Leave It intersperses the old man’s reading with self-reflexive asides: “(The guy is going too far now he’s plagiarizing my life! Or else just inventing facts on the spot!” (351). In the old man’s dissertation there are numerous nods to Beckett. Lucky’s monologue is once again in the background, with a profusion of “quaqua” (355) and a reference to “acacacademic” (359). Hombre’s publications are referred to as “various poems stories essays unnamables” (349, italics added). Federman’s project of writing as cancellation relies nonetheless on reformulating Beckettian sources: “WHERE NOTHING IS EVEN LESS THAN NOTHING WHERE LESSNESSNESS CRUSHES THE VOICE OF THE ONE WHO WRITES” (355). Beckett’s Lessness is here “crushing” the writer’s voice, who can only express his predicament by a variation on a phrase in Malone Dies (itself a formulation from Democritus): “Nothing is more real than nothing.” And after a quotation from Tristram Shandy that ends with “you see, I am lost myself!”:

To be –
Among –
Such –
Lost Ones –
Ask SAM –

(356)

Beckett’s neologism, “lessness,” is also a way of thinking about his minimalist writing, in stark contrast to Federman (and Tatham’s) style. Federman’s word “lessnessness” is either an error in interpretation or an unsuccessful and exaggerated adaptation. It may be that Hombre’s reversal is doomed to fail, as a writer he will be “even less than nothing,” his voice “crushed”

81 “I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. Nothing is more real than nothing.” Beckett, Malone Dies in Trilogy, 193, italics original.
by Beckett’s genius, the voice of “lessness.” Paradoxically, he is “less than nothing” (worthless) as a writer because he does too much, overdoes it. In French, it might be described as surfaît — another way of saying superfiction? Federman can never enter the ranks of authors such as Beckett and Sterne, can never “be among such lost ones.” The Lost Ones is a 1971 novella by Beckett, where nameless bodies are interred in a cylindrical structure, submitted to torturous oscillations of light and temperature, some still seeking a way out and others vanquished. Considering Federman’s view of Beckett as a post-Holocaust writer, in his desire to join “the lost ones” one might read an encoded reference to the tragic loss of his own family. Beckett, his friend “Sam,” is more capable of expressing in words an experience which authentically belongs to Federman.

As a joker and a plagiarist, a vulgar and voluble charlatan, Federman’s Hombre de la/della Pluma is more akin to Shem/Joyce the “notesnatcher”\(^83\) Pen Man than to Beckett. Shem too is a “tragic jester.”\(^84\) Shem’s brother Shaun calls him “Vulgariano” and accuses him of studying “with stolen fruit how cutely to copy all their various types of signature.”\(^85\) “Maistre Sheames de la Plume”\(^86\) is a lowly figure, a “low sham.”\(^87\) Like Hombre, he has also escaped death: “the fraid born fraud diddled even death.”\(^88\) Most importantly, Shem is in part at least a Jewish figure: “a greekenhearted yude”\(^89\) and “semisemitic serendipidist,”\(^90\) as Maren Linett has demonstrated. Linett’s analysis shows how Joyce links his own persecution as a writer to that of the Jews, through the figure of Shem the Penman.\(^91\) Linett’s study of the source materials details how Joyce made revisions during the rise of Hitler, further intensifying Shem’s Jewish identity: “The resulting text paints Joyce, perhaps irresponsibly, as an oppressed writer who, like the 1930s Jew, is marked as a subversive and threatened by an externally imposed and unalterable status.”\(^92\) Shem falls victim as both Jew and writer, and his identity as writer is inextricably linked to his Jewishness. As Linett outlines, Shem writes the letter in his native “Shemish” and his Christian brother, Shaun, is the one tasked with delivering it to a wider audience. Shaun’s duty is to translate and improve, transforming Shem’s letter into a more

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84 Joyce, 171:15.
86 Joyce, 177:30.
87 Joyce, 170:25.
88 Joyce, 172:21.
89 Joyce, 171:01.
90 Joyce, 191:02–03.
orthodox bible, in less incendiary (vulgar) language. Linett demonstrates that Shaun’s persecution of his brother is linked to the persecution of the Jews under Hitler in the *Wake*. Of the two brothers, both arguably aspects of Joyce, it is significant that Joyce himself chose Shem.

James Joyce the author sought to embody certain essential Jewish characteristics, as Ira Nadel concludes in *Joyce and the Jews*: “To call Joyce, as Frank O’Connor does, ‘the greatest Jew of all’ is to identify not just biographical parallels between Joyce and the lives of the Jews, but the habits of mind, cultural values, and form of discourse Jewish history created and projected.” Through Shem, the philosemitic Joyce connects to aspects of Jewish identity, an identity that Federman can authentically claim. In light of this, Federman’s adoption of the nickname Pen Man seems increasingly justified. The “fact” of translation (feather man = pen man) is supported by historical fact: Federman was, quite literally, a persecuted Jew. Shem’s explicitly Jewish identity adds a new dimension to the refusal of literary lineage discussed above, as Lucky, Didi and Gogo follow the “chemin de Damas” (158). Linett has shown that Shem the Penman’s letter is to be translated and expunged by his Christian brother Shaun, who has aspects of Saint Paul. By undertaking the (conversion) journey in reverse, Hombre della Pluma both escapes this fate and retains his Jewishness, his authentic Pen Man status. This backwards movement leads to the original (Jewish) text, the silence (“Chut!”) of X-X-X-X.

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94 Linnett, 274–276.
iv) Bethickett

In Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It, the intertextual landscape is literalised. Bonvalet’s thesis even develops this methodology— “Il en irait donc de la critique comme de la géographie”—in an explicit reference to Foucault (“Loufauct”) and his “archéologie du savoir” (154–155). In Take It or Leave It, we are repeatedly reminded that the teller is only recounting what was told to him, when they were both sitting under a tree (33, passim) This recalls the setting of Waiting for Godot, where Vladimir and Estragon wait under a lone tree for Godot’s arrival. Towards the end of both Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It, the young man veers off the road while driving, only to end up landing in a tall tree, perched precariously over a deep gully. In the French version, the tree he lands in is an apple tree, providing the occasion for a pun. The young man faints (“Je suis seulement dans les pommes”) in “un grand pommier” (161). In translation, the apple tree changes to a “big beautiful Christmas tree” (374). The Biblical echo is reinforced with the addition of the following qualification: “into which I am fallen (or in this case he would have to say into which I am risen)” (375). Considering that the Godot tree has been invoked continuously in the English version, we might relate this to two exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon. At one point, the pair consider hanging themselves from the tree, reflecting that it would give them an erection.97 On another occasion, Vladimir invokes the crucifixion of the two thieves (“One of the thieves was saved”), and suggests that he and Estragon repent.98 The sin they are to repent of, it is suggested, may have something to do with Vladimir feeling “queer”: “Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer.” When Estragon asks what they are to repent of, he replies that they “wouldn’t have to go into the details.”99 Obliquely, Take It or Leave It suggests a link between the Christmas tree the young man lands in and the Godot tree, the teller and told echoing the preoccupations of Vladimir and Estragon.

In both Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It, “Sam” is explicitly called upon to describe his plight:

En tout cas je ne peux pas rester là suspendu comme un con, ou comme disait mon ami Sam dans cette horreur chosesque où je me suis fourré, là à quatre heures trente-sept du matin (faut-il le préciser?) en oiseau nocturne perché sur un arbre!

Or at least one cannot remain there suspended like a jerk or like an acrobat or as my friend Sam used to say of similar situations suspended in this NIGHTMARE THINGNESS into which I am fallen (or in this case he would have to say into which I am risen) at four-thirty-seven in the morning (needless to specify though I did manage to glance quickly at my watch just as my Buick flew over the embankment—but now that good old faithful time piece is also crushed to pieces!). NO! I cannot remain there like some nocturnal bird perched on a tree branch.

Beckett’s “horreur chosesque” is taken from Le Calmant, the short story Federman chose for Cinq Nouvelles Nouvelles. For Take It or Leave It, he uses Beckett’s own translation in The Calmative: “Into what nightmare thingness am I fallen?” In Beckett’s short story, the narrator is in the parapet of a cathedral, pressed against the wall so as not to fall, when he makes this observation—a “similar situation” indeed. Federman’s English version reflects on its own lack of realism, repeating the precise time of the French (“four-thirty-seven”) while at the same time pointing out the unlikelihood of knowing the exact time, of the protagonist glancing at his watch as the car veers into space. Take It or Leave It amplifies the Beckettian echoes in this scene. In both versions, after the protagonist manages to get back on the road, he finds himself in an indistinct snowy landscape:

Il me semblait avoir perdu la notion du temps. Et en fait je l’avais perdue! Et la notion de l’espace aussi. J’étais dans le rien total! J’étais dans la merde quoi!

I seemed to have lost the notion of time. And in fact I had lost it. And also the notion of space. I was in total nothingness! In complete LESSNESSness my friend Sam would say where nothing is even less than nothing.

Yes I felt completely negated. If that’s possible. That’s approximately how I felt and where I was. I was (if I may say so—metaphorically speaking) in SHIT up to my neck!

In Beckett’s Lessness, a hermetic and very short text composed of repeating fragments, a “little body” is surrounded by “all sides endlessness.” The landscape is one of “ash grey” “mirrored earth mirrored sky,” of “sheer white blank planes.” The little body is a “he,” and it is hoped, or supposed, that “he will make it.” In Federman’s novel, the plight of the protagonist literalises the poetic scene of Beckett’s Lessness; surrounded by endless snow, the young man can only wait to see if he will survive. Once again, the teller is incapable of mustering true poetry, can

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only translate into layman’s terms what is going on in Beckett’s text: “I seemed to have lost the notion of time… And also the notion of space.” The teller explains in everyday language, thereby debasing the poetic value of the master text, just as he drags down Beckett’s neologism “LESSNESSness.” Yet again, he is aware of this inadequacy. In *Take It or Leave It*, the more self-reflexive version, he describes himself as “in SHIT up to my neck!” This invokes the scene of Beckett’s *Happy Days/Oh les beaux jours*, where the female protagonist, Winnie, is buried up to her neck in a mound of earth. Winnie, the silly woman, has some learning, but can only repeat fragments of the classics that, ultimately, she fails to understand. The teller/told is, “metaphorically speaking,” in the very position of Beckett’s Winnie.

Obviously, the intertextual geography of *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It* is not purely Beckettian. But in the English version in particular references to Beckett provide a deeper structure—after all, the teller is only repeating the story he heard under the Godot tree. This is especially significant if one considers that, for Federman, *Waiting for Godot* was the first great work of art about the Holocaust. To acknowledge the importance of Beckettian intertextuality, Federman borrows Joyce’s Wakean word, “Bethickett” (only in *Take It or Leave It*). The following extract opens chapter XIV, “laughter & literature”:

> all good storytellers go to BETHICKETT on their way to Heaven and that is why perhaps they are so long in reaching their destination someone said in the back but I ignored him completely why waste time and paper to answer such unfunded statements I told myself?

Okay I’m not going to argue with you!
I’m not going to make you weep / o-o / with all the sad stories he told me and yet if I wanted to tell you all the crap he told me (the trains the camps) if I wanted to describe in details and realistically all the misery and suffering he endured (the lampshades the farms the noodles) we would never get out of here / o-o / ah yes his entire family remade into lampshades (father mother sisters ah yes uncles aunts cousins too) you wouldn’t believe it (wiped out)!

(176)

The teller decides to “ignore completely” the audience member’s remark, “All good storytellers go to BETHICKETT.” And yet he does seem to answer, by invoking the tragedy of “his” past. On their way to heaven, “good writers” must pass through the dreamland of *Finnegans Wake*,

a total world encompassing Beckett. Federman’s use of “BETHICKETT” extends his metaphor of the literary landscape. In the *Wake*, “Bethicket” (with one ‘t’) appears in chapter five of Book 1, “The mamafesta,” which is concerned with the discovery of Shem’s letter. Though the letter is written by Shem and delivered by his brother, Shaun, its origin is the mother/river, as Epstein glosses: “the river of text which is given words and written down by Shem the Penman, and is delivered to the reader by her other son, Shaun the Post, as the copy of the book.”

Anna Livia’s letter is “an untitled mamafesta” praising her lord-husband. The original literary act was praise for the creator, the primacy of Federman’s criticism/praise of Beckett in his fiction only confirms this. Joyce explicitly made the letter stand for *Finnegans Wake* itself, and the pages surrounding the appearance of Bethicket (a clear reference to Beckett, according to McHugh’s annotations) present methods of reading the *Wake*. According to Epstein, Joyce anticipated the confusion and frustration of his readers, in particular the American Ezra Pound. In the following passage, “you” is a direct address to the reader:

You is feeling like you was lost in the bush, boy? You says: it is a puling sample jungle of woods. You most shouts out: Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultriest notion what the fairest he all means. Gee up, girly! The quad gospellers may own the targum, but any of the Zingari shoolerim may pick a peck of kindlings yet from the sack of auld hensyne.

In Epstein’s gloss, the Bethicket phrase reformulates Pound’s criticism, and can be read as “Call me a son of a bitch if I have the paltriest notion what the book means!” To which the narrator responds with a motivating call to action: “Gee up, girly!” As McHugh notes, the Targum are the Aramaic translations of the Old Testament. And though the four (“quad”) “gospellers may own the targum,” any beggar or vagrant (“shoolerim”) may find something to light his fire (“may pick a peck of kindlings”). Joyce seems to both invite scholarly reading and to call for new formulations of literary criticism.

What does Federman mean, then, by “all good storytellers go to BETHICKETT on their way to Heaven”? Firstly, adding another ‘t’ confirms to the reader Beckett’s presence (and perhaps corrects the printer’s error of *Cinq Nouvelles Nouvelles*, where to Federman’s horror his name

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104 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 104:04.
105 McHugh, *Annotations to “Finnegans Wake,”* 112.
107 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 112:04-06.
was spelt “Becket.”) *Take It or Leave It*, as shown above, is concerned with Beckettian vegetation, in a “thicket” of intertextual references. But what of Heaven? Again according to Epstein’s guide, the letter of chapter five is said to come from Boston, “‘the Boss’s town,’ Heaven, as represented by the Mass.” Assuming Federman conducted a close reading of parts of the *Wake*, his use of “Heaven” may indeed refer to the provenance of the letter/master text. All good storytellers must pass through Beckett, the keeper and scribe of the *Wake* (Beckett, as mentioned earlier, assisted Joyce by taking notes). Federman’s Bethickett is between heaven and earth, which places Federman’s friend “Sam” somewhere up above. The idea of Beckett as a keeper of the gate is reiterated by Federman in an interview: “all good storytellers go to the Beckett gate on their way to heaven.” Hombre della Pluma, aka the Pen Man, aka Federman, becomes a Joycean figure via Beckett. Significantly, he is named as such by a member of the audience, someone “in the back” (176). Here Federman, like Joyce, anticipates a close scholarly reading, laying clues to the origins of his text.

To an audience member’s call of “BETHICKETT,” the teller responds with “OK I’m not going to argue with you! I’m not going to make you weep” (176). An invocation of the *Wake* is met with an admission of his sad story, “the trains the camps.” This is the story of the persecuted Jew, a story shared by Shem the Penman and “the Pen Man, Raymond Federman.” Rather than submitting to weeping or crying, the “only sane thing to do” in such cases is “learn to laugh – LAUGH” (176). The laughter in the face of the Holocaust is connected to *Waiting for Godot*, by invoking the master Pozzo’s discursions on the theme. In *Take It or Leave It*:

Laugh: ah ah ah! oh oh oh! Laugh: yes because when one guy weeps somewhere in the world there is always some other guy who laughs somewhere else: happy balance! Never fails its normal equilibrium: laugh or cry comes out the same in the end! After all humanity is like a well with two buckets: when one goes down to be filled the other comes up to be emptied: humanity is like a deep hole!

(177)

In *Waiting for Godot*:

POZZO: (...) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. [He laughs.] Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not unhappier than its predecessors. [Pause.] Let us not

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speak well of it either. [Pause.] Let us not speak of it at all. [Pause. Judiciously.] It is true
the population has increased.\(^\text{112}\)

Pozzo, the master and slave driver, cautions not to “speak ill of our generation” in 1953 (year
of the first production of *Waiting for Godot*, and less than ten years after the end of the Second
World War). In *Take It or Leave It*, Federman the survivor repeats Pozzo’s words as well as
his laughter: “ah ah ah! oh oh oh!” In section two of this chapter, I discussed how “qua” is
spoken by both Pozzo and Lucky in *Godot*, and attributed to the jazz men, soldiers and
intellectuals in *Take It or Leave It*. Here Federman reformulates the wisdom of the slave driver
Pozzo, taking it to its horrifying conclusion: “humanity is like a deep hole!” (177) By parroting
Pozzo, the teller invites the reader to look for a different kind of clue.

In both *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, the narrator is antagonistic towards his
audience. Part of that antagonism is intense suspicion, what might even be called (taking our
cue from *Double or Nothing*) a “paranoiac” suspicion. This paranoia is partly centred on Jewish
identity. The young man was a victim of overt anti-Semitism in his army regiment, when a
“guy from Maryland” called him “a dirty KIKE” (37). In *Amer Eldorado* the English insult is
kept: “un sale KIKE” (25). It is on this occasion that Captain Cohen asks him if he is Jewish,
and solidarity is established. But the way this brotherly feeling is articulated is quite strange,
as an anti-Semitic stereotype is invoked. In French, it is limited to the following observation:
“nous les Juifs on s’en fout pas mal de la guerre - - on préfère rester pénard chez soi!” (25). In
English, the stereotype is elaborated on: “us Jews in general we don’t give a shit about wars
we prefer to stay home nice and cozy take care of our business eat our delicious kosher food
and once in a while for the good of humanity screw our plump dark-haired Jewish women hop
là!” (37) By repeating the prejudices of his (imagined) adversaries, the teller also disproves
them, since the young (Jewish) man is the only one in his regiment to volunteer for combat.
The idea that Jews are less likely to enlist held particular currency in France. Is the narrator,
who has read “tout Sartre” (24) thinking of *Réflexions sur la question juive*? And is Sartre’s
(very suspicious) essay partly the cause of his paranoia? It is clear in any case that he does not
trust his audience. Just as he is describing Captain Cohen’s rows of books, an audience member
kind?” (37–38). In French, the interruption is less suggestive: “(Sournoisement derrière une
barbe blonde) Quel genre?” (25). I noted that the English insult, “KIKE,” is kept in the French.

“YOUP” may be merely a yelp, or it could very well be a shortened form of the French equivalent, “youpin.” These gentile French intellectuals, the teller suggests, may not be politically kosher: “your little wooden cross (and iron cross too) still bug the shit out of you” (113). Their insinuating questions (especially coming from blondes) seek to degrade and insult the teller/told. In Federman’s Bethickett, enemies are lurking.

Beckett himself may not be above suspicion. This is suggested in Take It or Leave It by the use of a passage from Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (not in Amer Eldorado). In chapter VII “interruptions & vociferations” the teller attempts to go on with his story but becomes enraged by the audience’s pretentious questions about capitalist structures. He clearly attacks members of the Tel Quel group, in particular Philippe Sollers’ Une curieuse solitude: “your pitiful memories of High School Masturbation or your messed up First Piece of Ass in your Curious Solitude as you say so well” (104). This is despite the fact that Federman evidently respected the work of Sollers, having chosen to include an essay of his in Surfiction a year earlier. In posing questions about capitalism, the audience is attempting to “frame” the teller by both explaining and falsely accusing him. They (the Tel Quel group?) are attempting to drag him into their own discourse. The question and answer format, used to expound the group’s Marxist positionings (by Sollers in particular) appears towards the end of their collective publication Théorie d’ensemble. The teller hears the group questioning his engagement in the U.S. army (in service of American capitalism) and responds defensively, pointing out how little they know about real life and real hunger. In these paranoid projections, his friend “Sam” may also be a bourgeois enemy. Towards the beginning of chapter VII, the teller announces that it is best, in some cases, to let more qualified people speak. He then quotes excerpts from Beckett’s Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, replacing the word “paint” with “SPEAK” and providing an accurate page number for the last plagiarised phrases:

The realisation that art has always been bourgeois... is finally of scant interest...The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot SPEAK, since he is obliged to SPEAK...The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event SPEAKS, since he is obliged to SPEAK... I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion—a new term of relation—and of the

113 “ah vos petites croix de bois ET DE FER vous emmerdent encore,” Federman, Amer Eldorado, 53.
act which, unable to act, obliged nonetheless to act, he makes an expressive act even if only of itself an impossibility, of its obligation. (P. 125)

The choice of this passage may have been suggested to Federman by Hugh Kenner’s observation in *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett*: “If for “paint” we substitute “write,” we have exactly the situation of the man in *Comment c’est*.” In the following chapter, I examine Federman’s *The Voice in the Closet* and its recreation of the masochistic scene in Beckett’s *Comment c’est/ How It Is*. In Beckett’s original pronouncement above, “he” is the artist Bram Van Velde, a painter Beckett admired. By speaking through Beckett, the teller is suggesting that “he” is in fact the told, or the unsplit protagonist of *Amer Eldorado*. This ventriloquises Beckett for his narcissistic ends. Beckett’s observation that art has always been bourgeois, however, is certainly not of “scant interest” to the teller. The belief that (good) art has always been bourgeois was decried in *Double or Nothing*, and the teller has a vested interest in insisting that “real” art must come from real suffering, the kind of suffering that most intellectuals have never experienced. In chapter VII Beckett is spared the more overt attacks, but his own language is used against him.

After the question on capitalism and the army, the teller goes on an angry rant, calling his audience “a bunch of perverts!” It seems these “perverts” are also condescending: “Of course I understand your question! What do you take me for!” (102). He then counters with a question/accusation of his own: “you guys would have liked to have had his experiences…His bitchy existence! N’est-ce pas?” (103). These bourgeois intellectuals would have liked to have “suffered his misery/ and all the shit that went with it!” (103). The scatological element is then developed, with another reference to Beckett:

The Universal Crap
up to the waist and above!
But for you guys there is
always a solution as it was once suggested:
You simply contrive a little
kingdom in the midst of the universal muck and then shit on it.
Is it not
what you guys do most of the time?

(103)

This is from Beckett’s short story “The End”: “To contrive a little kingdom, in the midst of the universal muck, then shit on it, ah that was me all over.” Federman’s use of it here expands on the suggestion implicit in Beckett’s remark in Three Dialogues: Beckett himself is a bourgeois artist. Once again, Winnie from Beckett’s Happy Days (who is buried up to her waist in Act 1, and to her neck in Act 2) is invoked. Scatological confusion draws on Beckett for both defecation and its opposite, constipation. Samuel Beckett’s preoccupation with this digestive ailment recurs throughout his oeuvre, and is central to Krapp’s Last Tape, a play biographer Diedre Bair describes as “one of his most autobiographical writings.” The old man Krapp is preoccupied with his own failing health and rejoices in scatological humour—much like Beckett, who once described himself in a letter as “a constipated Eurydice” returning to the “shades of shit.” The teller and the told, however, do not suffer from this problem: “he and I, we have crapped on life left and right, and without Reservation, without Constipation, we have other problems, left and right. Human Misery!” Throughout Take It or Leave It, the bourgeois audience is accused of being “constipated,” uptight and impotent. In chapter VII it is suggested that Beckett the author (speaking as himself with Georges Duthuit) is in a sense collaborating with his enemies. And yet the true nature of the teller/told is undoubtedly Beckettian, and we are reminded in the same chapter that his “REAL IDENTITY” is in the Godot-scene: “his somewhat incoherent and at times even delirious recitation there under that tree where we sat many years ago on several occasions as he transmitted to me orally the essential facts and elements of his miserable life” (107). As Cornis-Pope has pointed out, “recitation” is a concept Federman borrows from Beckett, that can be described as “a self-conscious histrionic activity that combines memorization with invention, oral performance with a preexisting script, production with reproduction.” The teller/told’s “real identity” can only be expressed by reproducing the words of others, most of all Beckett. Though attempting to speak authentically, he fails to find his true voice, lost in a Bethickett of his own making.

119 Bair, Samuel Beckett, 87.
v) C’EST MOI!

In the previous section I examined how, in chapter VII of *Take It or Leave It*, Beckett becomes associated with the teller’s numerous enemies. These enemies are treated in an undifferentiated manner — no respect is paid to the difference between Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus, or between *Les Temps modernes* and *Tel Quel*. It is unclear exactly who the teller’s adversaries are, only that “you guys” (audience and readers) are all bourgeois intellectuals. And the reader cannot assume that only the French are targeted, since in translating to *Take It or Leave It* specific mention is made of the American bourgeoisie, with their “Shopping at Saks I presume” and their “Cozy Country Houses in Connecticut” (104). The main accusation coming from this privileged audience is centred on the young man’s enlistment in the army (his service to “American capitalist imperialism”). The teller is also accused of ignorance and vulgarity by his more refined and learned auditors. It is precisely this lack of coherence between Marxism and intellectualism, where the privileged defend and speak for the working class, that forms the basis of the teller’s own inchoate counter-accusations. Just as his enemies are numerous and undifferentiated, so too are the texts on which he draws. In Federman’s intertextual practice, an enormous amount of material is incorporated without being properly digested. In what follows I address how, as the teller’s counter-accusations heat up, Derrida and Nietzsche are directly invoked, and Sartre and Eco are alluded to. Though these choices may appear arbitrary, I aim to show how disparate authors are used to confirm the teller’s “REAL IDENTITY” (106) as both Beckett creature and Pen Man.

In *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, the “paranoiac” protagonist of *Double or Nothing* is taken out of his room and into direct engagement with his readers. The second person, “you,” no longer refers to an aspect of the split protagonist (the writer) but to the audience both within and without the novel. In his study of the use of the second person in Federman’s fiction, Cornis-Pope describes the “setup” of *Take It or Leave It* as designed to pit the narrator and his addressees against each other.122 Cornis-Pope aptly summarises the paranoid fear I am referring to: “in Federman’s novel the second person is perceived by the teller as a threat to his authority.”123 This fear is generalised and undifferentiated, as “all of you” are perceived to be enemies. It is to them (and us) that his paranoid accusations are levelled. For its importance in

123 Cornis-Pope, “From Cultural Provocation to Narrative Cooperation,” 423.
queer theory and literary theory more broadly, the term paranoia merits some comment. For David Spurr (writing in 2011), paranoia has become “nothing less than a paradigm” for the re-evaluation of modernist writers, including Joyce.\textsuperscript{124} Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the evolution of the concept of paranoia has led to paranoid or “suspicious” reading becoming mainstream textual analysis.\textsuperscript{125} Sedgwick points out Freud’s own admission that his systems of analysis bear an unsettling resemblance to those of the paranoid Dr. Schreber, a repressed homosexual.\textsuperscript{126} Federman of course plays with the Freudian cliché that his “paranoiac” protagonist is “some kind of queer” in \emph{Double or Nothing}, only to prove him as such in \emph{Take It or Leave It}. However, the kind of paranoid reading that Federman engages in cannot be compared to the “systems” of Dr. Schreber. It can perhaps best be understood as a “bad” form of interpretation. To clarify Eco’s idea of overinterpretation, Jonathan Culler uses the following counter-example: “One might imagine overinterpretation to be like overeating: there is proper eating or interpreting, but some people don’t stop when they should. They go on eating or interpreting in excess, with bad results.”\textsuperscript{127} Overeating might very well describe Federman’s intertextuality in \emph{Amer Eldorado} and \emph{Take It or Leave It}. Without taking the time to digest material, the protagonist takes things literally, absorbing them into himself without properly processing them. The result of his overinterpretation is that he sees himself (and “shits himself”) everywhere. Federman’s critifiction is, in a sense, paranoid without being suspicious, and as such intrinsically unscholarly, since it is suspicion and rigour—“anality”—that characterise scholarly enterprise. As the protagonist frequently reminds us, he is unlike us intellectuals, a “constipated race” (206).

According to Spurr, Joyce’s persecution complex also extended to real life, as his exaggerated reaction to a misattributed short story demonstrates. Spurr describes Joyce’s paranoia as a “paranoia of the signature,” which takes an innocent mistaken attribution for a forgery.\textsuperscript{128} In the same article, Spurr compares this incident with an anecdote in Kafka’s diaries, about a writer named Reichmann who, unlike Joyce, suffered from severe psychosis. Reichmann’s paranoia is also centred on attribution, he mistakes an essay entirely distinct from his own as plagiarised. When Kafka points out the differences between the two essays, Reichmann replies

\textsuperscript{126} Sedgwick, \textit{Touching, Feeling}, 125.
\textsuperscript{127} Jonathan Culler, “In defence of overinterpretation,” in \textit{Interpretation and Overinterpretation}, 111.
\textsuperscript{128} Spurr, “Paranoid Modernisms,” 185.
that though it is “disguised” by “foreign elements,” in essence “everything is copied.”

Similarly, in *Amer Eldorado/ Take It or Leave It*, the protagonist accuses Derrida of using “richer and cleaner” words to “subtly and metaphorically hide” his true self (107), “ma (véritable) existence non ma véritable identité oui” (51). In Federman’s texts, the protagonist’s paranoia of attribution is twofold; he believes not only that he is the author, but the *subject* of the work, exaggerating the inherent narcissism of the disorder. This is apparent in his use of Borges’ short story, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” to characterise Hombre della Pluma. Though we have seen that Hombre della Pluma is the Pen Man, Joyce, he is also the Man of La Mancha—the protagonist, rather than the author, of the *Quixote*. When asked about the meaning of Hombre della Pluma in an interview with Marie Delvigne, Federman replied by explicitly identifying with the mad knight: “tu as compris que je me battais contre d’immenses moulins.”

Is this an admission of the role of paranoia in his own poetics, as his mad heroes fight against imaginary foes?

Within multiple layers of intertextuality, Federman’s punctual engagements with a text remain doggedly literal. This is especially evident in *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It* when the protagonist is addressing his adversaries. In chapter VII of *Take It or Leave It*, the teller is angrily responding to the audience member’s question about capitalism. We have seen that this audience is not to be trusted, and may even contain some collaborationist, anti-Semitic elements. As part of his response, the teller quotes almost a whole page from Derrida’s “La Pharmacie de Platon.”

This passage appears in both the French and English versions, in *Take It or Leave It* the teller informs us it is his own translation (106). The audience, and by extension the reader, are told: “I’m quoting him without reference because I’m sure you guys will immediately recognise.” Derrida is, apparently, one of their “buddies” (106), “un de vos petits copains” (51). The chosen excerpt (taken literally) is about writing being a “phantasm,” “a thief,” “himself unrooted, anonymous” (106). Derrida’s metaphoric description of writing as a “living dead” and a “bum” could very well describe a Beckettian character, who “repeats the same thing when questioned at street corners.” It could also apply to Federman’s own experience after his family were deported: “like someone who does not know where he is going but also like someone who has lost his rights.” As Derek Alsop notes, between Federman’s life story and the “story” of Beckett’s fictional characters, there are many similarities. According

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129 Spurr, 185.
130 Federman, *Federman hors limites*, 181.
to Alsop “the themes of Beckett’s work are Federman’s own.”

Could it be, then, that his claims over Beckett (and Derrida) are justified? Does “Federman’s own” life story, the fact of his survival, give credence to the teller’s paranoid rant? His own escape made of him, in Derrida’s words, “a living dead, a dead in reprieve, a differed life” (106)—another way, perhaps, of saying “excess of life.” In French, the narrator cries: “C’EST MOI!” (51). In English, the teller asserts: “it is HE” (107). In both cases, the paranoid accusation is that Derrida’s text is concealing this fact, by using “a vocabulary much more elegant,” “beaucoup plus sérieux” than that of the teller/first person narrator. This likens him to the poor soldiers of his regiment, whose sexual fantasies are lost in lonely nights, unable to find expression. The audience, “you,” have the “vocabulary” to express, but not the “real stuff.” Their education allows them to have an “aesthetic distance” towards their experiences. As Federman elsewhere asks, does that mean that “a life in itself cannot be aesthetic, that a life has to be fictionalized in order to acquire an aesthetic quality?” Embedded in the teller’s exaggerated and playful rant are some very serious questions. What is the intellectual’s role, and under whose authority is he speaking? This question will be turned inwards in the 1979 *The Voice in the Closet*, where the boy Federman once was accuses the Federman of the present, bourgeois writer and scholar, of betraying his story with clever words.

The reader will learn more about the “TRUE SELF” and “REAL IDENTITY” of the told in *Amer Eldorado/Take It or Leave It* when Federman takes megalomania to its extreme conclusion. In *Amer Eldorado* the passage from “La Pharmacie de Platon” is divided into four squares, so that a cross is formed by the blank space in the middle (51). The quoted passage from Derrida is divided by two axes, horizontal and vertical, literalising Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality with “l’axe horizontal sujet-destinataire” and “l’axe vertical texte-contexte.” — “lakristeva” [*sic*] appears in good company in the French version a few pages later (53). In *Take It or Leave It*, the cross is filled with Derrida’s name, with a question mark at the centre (plate 7). Typographically, Federman crucifies Derrida, a fellow Jew, according to the “laws” of intertextuality. By reading himself into Derrida’s text in *Take It or Leave It*, the protagonist enacts his own crucifixion, to rise from the dead in the following chapter, “VIII: superman and real life.” The typographic crucifixion is repeated in the final chapter, “XXIII: crucifixion and cancellation,” where the young man ends up in hospital in a “neat little human

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133 Federman, *Critifiction*, 88.
In fact, I think it’s one of your buddies (he works in pharmacy, or something like that, I believe) who said (I’m quoting him without reference because I’m sure you guys will immediately recognize where it comes from) in one of those texts much discussed these days and which struck me so much at first gleaning that I learned it by heart (not all of it because it’s more than 50 pages but the following passage which I am now quoting [in my translation] integrally & without changing either style punctuation signification and / or lovely syntax)

Writing is not an order of inde
enfeebled utterance, not at all
deal in reprieve, a differed li
phantom the phantasm the simu
ot inanimate, is not insignifi
and always identically; this si
se without great respondent, is
Having lost the straight path,
y rectitude, the norm, it rolls
does not know where he is going
out his rights, like an outlaw,
adventurer. Wandering in the st
DER
he is, what is his identity, if
his father. He repeats the same
corners, but he does not know h
know from where one comes and
rse without respondent, is not
state of infancy. Himself warro
th his country and his home, th
is at the disposal of everyone,
incapable, of those who under
of those who have no concern in
theless affect it with imperti
l, offered on the sidewalk, isn
pendent signification, it is an
da dead thing; a living dead, a
fe, a semblance of breath. The
lacrum of living discourse in n
ant, it simply signifies little
guifier of little, this discou
like all phantasms: wandering!
the right direction, the rule o
here and there like someone who
but also like someone who has l
a bad lot, a thief, a bum or an
reets he does not even know who

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Plate 7: Derrida crucifix

Federman, Take It or Leave It, 106.
cross” (plate 8). The chapter title “superman and real life” is an apt summary of the main argument: the protagonist gave birth to himself, pulled himself out of the death-womb of the closet, and as such is the “real” Nietzschean superman/antichrist. Unlike these bourgeois intellectuals, who had everything served to them on “a silver platter,” the protagonist is self-created, he has pulled himself “out of the cemetery,” not his “mother’s thighs” (116). As such he is not only the ultimate author-God, but the first (and last) Nietzschean übermensch, freed of any guilt or pity: “Scorn and contempt and hatred that’s what one learns from that ZSCH…One must piss and shit on all human weakness” (115). In Amer Eldorado Nietzsche’s presence is amplified: “vous laissez à peine glisser votre belle langue sur le Z et le S et le Ch, petit glissement à peine senti mais délicieux de vos langues bourgeoises (comme disait Nietzsche)” (54). In both versions, the crucifixion of Derrida leads to the creation of the superman, just as the sacrifice of a Jew lead to Christianity. As a result of the Nazi use of the term, übermensch recalls the Aryan race; Federman hinted at this earlier with the description of a “blonde Aryan mustache” (38). The “wooden cross” (the crucifix) is also linked to the “iron cross” (113), Nazi military decoration. Just as he took up Pozzo’s wisdom, the teller takes up the Nietzschean (and Nazi) rallying call to “piss and shit on all human weakness” (115). The result is a reversal of salvation (a rejection of Christian compassion) and the usurpation of the übermensch by a Jew.

By crucifying Derrida and giving birth to a superman, the teller is responding to the limiting narratives around Jewish identity, specifically the much-invoked Sartre, who claimed in Réflexions sur la question juive that any “authentic” Jew must abandon hope of achieving universality.135 The idea of Jewish authenticity, or realness, runs through the teller’s rant to his audience. As Stuart Charmé has demonstrated, Sartre’s work engaged in a dialectics of othering, where out of the “devalued identities of the vulgar Other,” he created a “model of personal authenticity.”136 According to Charmé, Jewish identity in particular was formative for Sartre: “Above all else, ‘the Jew’ represented for Sartre the negation and subversion of the central values of bourgeois society that he too had rejected.”137 In Sartre’s view, the Jews did not share the Christian disdain for the body or uphold the same hierarchy of bodily functions.138

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137 Charmé, Vulgarity and Authenticity, 106.
138 Charmé, 140.
After four hours and fifty-seven minutes of surgery (that's how long it took to fix him up he was told later) there he is all plastered up from neck to toes vertically and fingers to fingers horizontally in a neat little human cross.

Both legs broken (one at the talus the other at the femur) both arms broken (one at the humerus the other at the radius) neck out of joint plus several other less serious broken bones bruises cuts etc. in other words a complete human mess!

You should have seen him! It was not a pretty spectacle! Lying there on that white hospital bed both legs in one huge cast (the doctors thought it would be better to squeeze both

*Plate 8: Neat little human cross*

Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 410.
Federman’s text exploits these dichotomies, by fittingly drawing on the (Jewish) Freudian concept of anality: “he and I, we have crapped on life left and right, and without Reservation, without Constipation” (103). The teller is very aware of the fact that he is the “envy” of these bourgeois: “you guys would have liked to have had his experiences…His bitchy existence! N’est-ce pas?” (103) The use of the word “existence,” followed by a French question, seems likely a reference to Sartre. Once again intellectual authority is attacked by the brandishing of “real” identity and experience. Federman’s aggressive identifications serve to undermine the validity of the critical enterprise, reclaiming the authority he sees as threatened by the second person(s).

In English, “superman” also invokes the comic book hero, as the teller acknowledges in Take It or Leave It: “no not a COMIC BOOK HERO” (115). The double meaning of superman points to Umberto Eco’s analysis of comic-book heroes and Nietzschean supermen, “Le mythe de Superman,” first published in 1962. Federman was evidently aware of this essay and the Nietzsche/comic book relationship is exploited along similar lines. Eco draws a progression from Tarzan (the reading material of the soldiers in Amer Eldorado/Take It or Leave It) to the more overt homoeroticism of Superman.¹³⁹ Federman, like Eco, highlights the physical strength and beauty of the superman: “touch those muscles,” “look at this face” (116). Further to this, Eco’s reading of the Superman universe provides a useful framework for understanding the nature of Federman’s protagonist and the impossibility of concluding his story. Eco’s analysis encompasses homoerotic elements, the doubled nature of identity, and the repetition/cancellation of narrative. According to Eco, homoeroticism becomes avowed with the arrival of a young sidekick in Superman.¹⁴⁰ In Take it or Leave It, the told takes control of the narrative just as he is driving away from the uncivilised Tarzan-land of the barracks. He picks up the sexy young Claude, a member of the audience who becomes a sidekick of sorts (the told/first person is, like Superman, in the driver’s seat). Eco reads the temporal world of Superman, with its repetition of the same (Superman saves the day) as a disruption of linear time and narrative progression.¹⁴¹ Each episode of his adventures can only add to or elaborate on the same idea; as a mythical being Superman remains essentially unchanged. To capitalize on their creation, his writers proliferate instalments of “untold tales” or “imaginary tales,” either adding detail or fabricating what could have happened. These narrative strategies, also

¹⁴⁰ Eco, De Superman au Surhomme, 111.
¹⁴¹ Eco, 123.
employed throughout Federman’s novels, are according to Eco a common thread between pop culture productions like Superman and the more conscious narrative experimentation of *Finnegans Wake*. By abandoning any notion of character progression, the reader is unable to identify the time of the novel, inextricably stuck in the present of narration. The structure of both *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It* mirrors Eco’s analysis of the temporal worlds of *Finnegans Wake* and Superman. It is striking that both texts are, in a sense, Jewish creations. Joyce, though not technically Jewish, was once called “the greatest Jew of all.” The creators of the Superman universe, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, were actually Jewish. The “superman and real life” chapter proves that Judaism precedes “gentility,” in the fullest sense of the word. Usurping the Aryan übergrechsch, the Jewish writer is posited as the original author-God.

Once again, we are led to the Shem narrative of *Finnegans Wake*. In the antagonistic rant on authenticity, the opposition of intellectualism and real life, Beckett has not been spared. But what of Joyce? Do some of the issues raised justify Federman’s use of the Pen Man moniker? Was Joyce’s use of it justified? As Linett has shown, Joyce’s late revisions to *Finnegans Wake* added historical specificity to Shem’s persecution as a writer, with references to Hitler and the Nazis. Linett wonders if Joyce’s revisions can be seen as “responsible,” pointing out the oppression necessarily inherent in such appropriations: “Not only does Christian culture makes over the Hebrew bible in its own image—as Shaun’s usurpation of Shem’s letter demonstrates—but Joyce himself makes over the figure of the Jew in his own image.” Through Shem the Penman, Linett writes, Joyce the persecuted writer equates himself with the persecuted Jew. This recalls Sartre, who once said in an interview that in *Réflexions sur la question juive*, he was really writing about himself. In light of these considerations, Federman’s use of the Pen Man moniker takes on a political significance. Cornis Pope’s work has highlighted the politically subversive potential of direct address and the socio-historical import of Federman’s fiction more generally. In the playful and exaggerated polemic of *Take It or Leave It*, very real issues are raised as to the “subject” of history.

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142 Eco, *De Superman au Surhomme*, 127.
143 Eco, 124.
146 Linett, 276.
147 Charmé, *Vulgarity and Authenticity*, 105.
Federman’s intertextual project—to reclaim his place as the subject of Beckett’s fiction—is an impossible task, at least as impossible as that of the fictional Pierre Menard. In his engagement with Beckett (and via Beckett, Joyce) he doubles this impossibility, insisting that he is both author and subject, father and son. His “original” language has been distorted by the more civilised words of others. In the 1979 *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras* he will attempt to redress this by engaging with Beckett bilingually, providing his own translations. In contrast to the expansive landscape of *Amer Eldorado* and *Take It or Leave It*, the reader is drawn into a claustrophobic space, the closet of Federman’s rebirth. The “you” is now the middle aged writer “federman” or “féderman,” who betrays the boy’s experience with clever words. As the “story” goes, a twelve, thirteen or fourteen-year old boy (Federman was in fact fourteen at the time) escapes deportation to Auschwitz by hiding in a closet. *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras* recounts the time he spent waiting in the dark. The reader hears three voices: the boy, the writer and “Sam.”

Considering the homoerotic content of Federman’s novels thus far, the “closet” may very well have a double meaning. That Federman was aware of this is evidenced in *Take It or Leave It*, where the young man is (unsuccessfully) accosted by “a fag who had stepped out of his closet,” telling him “with tears in his eyes all about the loneliness of life and the sadness of his little furnished room” (205). In this passage the closet is clearly equated to the protagonist’s small furnished room in *Double or Nothing*. The closet is both the site of the protagonist’s survival (his identity as a Jew) and the loneliness of the room (his closeted queer identity). It was through the closet that he was able to pull himself “out of the hole out of the cemetery” (116) and grant himself an “excess of life.”148 In *The Voice in the Closet* a queer self-creation is enacted with “Sam no less midwife to rebirth.”149 This provides “proof,” as it were, for the claims made in “superman and real life” and for the promise of Federman’s “thunderword”: true creation is the stuff of “jews,” “queers,” “liars” and “dumb bastards.”150 Federman’s hermetic, bilingual text is considered by his critics to be the core of his oeuvre, the “inaugural scene” of his fiction.151 Curiously, a survey of Federman’s writing reveals that after the 1979 return to the closet, there is no more talk of “queers.”

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148 “I consider that traumatic day of July 16 1942 to be my real birthdate, for that day I was given an excess of life.” Federman, *Critification*, 95.
150 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 5.
“My life began in a closet.” This is the first line of the first poem in *Among the Beasts*, Federman’s début fiction.¹ The closet episode, as it later came to be known, takes place in Montrouge (on the outskirts of Paris) during the Nazi roundups of 1942, on a summer’s day in the early morning. The Federmans share a small apartment on the top floor. The parents are Simon and Marguerite, the children Sarah, Jacqueline and Raymond Federman. Raymond awakens to a threat, to men coming up the stairs. His mother pushes him into a closet, “Chut!” He keeps quiet, hears his mother telling the men he isn’t home. Raymond stays in the closet until nightfall, sucking on pieces of sugar he finds there. At one point, he defecates onto a pile of old newspapers, wrapping his excrement into a neat package. Before he leaves, he will place the package on the roof of the building. As he runs out into the night, fearful of collaborating neighbours, he almost falls down the stairs. The basic elements of this story appear in Federman’s bilingual novella *The Voice in the Closet/ La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*, first published in 1979, where the narrating I, the little boy, rails against the writer “federman”/“féderman” for failing to tell his story. In 1983, Federman described the distance he felt from his own story when composing *The Voice in the Closet*: “Later, years later and still today when I reflect on that closet and see that figure, that boy sitting there on a pile of newspapers, it feels like a game.”² As Derek Alsop affirms, Federman’s closet episode also sounds very Beckettian: “The story that inspired *The Voice in the Closet* is full of echoes of Beckett.”³ Not least because, through the boy’s neat package of excrement, Federman literalises Beckett’s preoccupation with the cloacal theory of birth. With *The Voice in the Closet* Federman fulfils the promise of *The Unnamable*, who will “get (his) own back”: “I’ll curse them yet … I’ll let down my trousers and shit stories on them.”⁴

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I concluded the last chapter by observing that the closet can be linked to queer identity. In *Take It or Leave It* the “closet” is the lonely furnished room of a “fag,”5 in *Double or Nothing* the furnished room (for 6 bucks a week) is shared by Loulou and Boris. Occupying a liminal zone similar to that of Beckett’s characters, Federman’s “fags” are hidden in plain sight. What remains to be determined is their role in Federman’s intertextual project, beyond the overt homoeroticism of the first three novels. A passage from *Take It or Leave It* can serve to elucidate this, as it foreshadows the sexualised, masochistic (and masocritical) translation strategies Federman will engage in within the closet space. In *Take It or Leave It* the told takes over the narrative (the teller having gone AWOL) and so an audience member is sent to take notes and report back to the relevant authorities. This audience member is the sexy young Claude, who is more than “a bit effeminate,”6 referred to at one point as “Claudine.”7 Before the told (who is now the narrator) goes on with his story, he begs Claude to listen to him carefully, to do his best to transcribe him faithfully:

—Listen! Before I go on with the anecdote, you have to promise me one thing. It’s very important to me. When you get back above, I mean back up in the present, among the potentials, I want you to tell them how I’m trying my best to keep things going down here. How difficult it is, how unbearable it is to be alone all the time inside my stories, down at the bottom, speaking in a void. And especially, promise me, swear it, cross your heart, you will report everything I say faithfully. Word for word! Just as I say it. And without distorting anything. It’s a matter of authenticity, you understand? I am quite finicky about that, because if you guys start believing things I have never said. Lies, or false stories. Then I’m really going to be in trouble. It’s a question of verisimilitude, you dig?8

This verisimilitude can never be achieved, for the simple reason that Claude cannot speak a word of English. In *Take It or Leave It*, we are informed that for the whole time, the two have been speaking together in French—what we’re reading is a translation.9 The told’s plea for “authenticity” is a lie, since by taking on the role of the teller/narrator he is already betraying himself; it is just as impossible for him as it is for Claude to transcribe “word for word.”

They spend the night in a motel before Claude departs from the narrative, abandoning him by writing an “inauthentic” letter full of “fake excuses” that isn’t even signed, “not even an inscription” or the “pretence of a signature.”10 The narrator laments that Claude has used

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5 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 205.
6 Federman, 268.
7 Federman, 275.
8 Federman, 270.
9 Federman, 281.
10 Federman, 289.
“cheap lipstick”; “If at least he had used his blood to write it!” Enraged and dispirited, he reviews their night of passion as totally meaningless:

All the sad beautiful stories I told him, all that for nothing! All that wasted in his poor memory of a whore! Up his ass and down the drain! Lost forever! Those damn potentials they knew what the fuck they were doing when they sent him down her [sic] that cute delegate and his yellow sweater! Maybe I fucked him up the ass, but in the end it’s me who is fucked up. Doesn’t pay to fool around with potential critics!11

Any form of writing is a form of translation, and as such a betrayal—though the greatest betrayal is not to tell the story at all. Claude’s letter is reprinted in full, however we must assume that what we are reading is a translation from the French. The told, having taken over the role of the teller and entered into the realm of writing, narrating and translating his own experiences, can now “fuck” and be “fucked” over by potential critics.

In After Babel, George Steiner traces the “sin” of translation to the work of God. A translation is a form of death, of passing from one realm to another. This observation is expanded on by Lori Anne Chamberlain in her doctoral dissertation on translation as postmodern poetics, which includes a section on Raymond Federman. Chamberlain highlights the metaphysical portent of translation: “The ‘motion’ at the root of the word’s etymology is associated rather literally with metaphysics, the body which transcends mortal limitations to reach heaven.”12 Only by the hand of God can the chosen ones, like Enoch, be “translated” into Heaven without bodily death.13 According to Steiner, mistrust of translation is rooted in ancient doubts on whether there ought to be any passage from one tongue to another.14 Rather than a new text, a translation produces a sinister double, undermining the wholeness, and sacredness, of the original. In the episode with Claude, the sin of translation is explicitly linked to the sin of sodomy: “Up his ass and down the drain!” What’s more, it is articulated against heterosexual, sanctified desire. Before the told leaves the motel, he reflects that there would be a way for him to end this entire “masturbatory recitation” by going back and trying his luck with a sexy blonde woman. Engaging in hetero sex would be the “End of the road!”15 Instead, he chooses to keep going

11 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 289.
15 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 290.
with all this “wordshit”—a Beckettian neologism. 

Take It or Leave It announced his intention to go on perverting the discourse: “I can say to you MERDESHIT in two languages.”

In The Voice in the Closet/ La voix dans le cabinet de débarrasses, Federman recreates the scatological, homoerotic scene of Comment c’est/ How It Is. In Beckett’s text, the narrator is both victim and tormenter, the scribe and the body onto which the text is inscribed. He and the others below are crawling in the mud/shit, murmuring words and swallowing the muck, “quaqua on all sides.”

The narrator assures us that he can only “quote,” “I say it as I hear it.” And yet, in the end we learn that he is “alone in the mud.”

In his review of Comment c’est (published in 1961, How It Is in 1964) Federman provides the following plot summary:

The novel is divided into three parts: before Pim, with Pim and after Pim. In Part One, a human being (human being since he has preserved the faculty of speech) is crawling in the mud toward Part Two where he will meet Pim and establish a cruel relationship with him. In Part Three Pim is now in motion toward a certain Bem—or Bim or Kram or someone else. It is not quite certain who the new victim will be. The only certainty, in this novel, is that each character must in turn become tortured and torturer. It is a vicious cycle, a limbo where man exists only because he remembers a lost world: a lost reality which lies somewhere above in the light. And yet, Beckett ends his novel with a new twist: by having the narrator pretend that it was all an illusion, a lie, and that therefore nothing exists, except naturally the novel which Beckett has written.

Federman’s review foregrounds two aspects that will be explored in The Voice in the Closet: the reversibility of roles in the sadomasochistic relationship, and the notion of fiction as a “lie.” The light above and the darkness below is also an aspect he retains, foregrounded in Take It or Leave It where Claude and the audience belong to the world “above,” “in the present,” whereas the told is “down here” in the past. This reverses the situation of How It is, where the narrator recalls memories of his “life above.” Rather than having experienced a fall from above, Federman’s past, his origin, is below, as he explicitly states in a 1983 interview: “Though there are some similarities between my writing and Beckett’s, naturally I don’t write like him, nor can I. Beckett is an angel. He is from above. I’m from the cave. From below. From the mud.”

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17 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 186.
18 Beckett, How It Is, 1, passim.
19 Beckett, 1, passim.
20 Beckett, 111.
22 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 270.
In this astounding statement, Federman declares he is a native of *Comment c’est/How It Is*, world of darkness and mud. Though Beckett is an “angel,” he is also the creator of “The Fiction of Mud”—title of the introduction to Federman’s *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction*. In *How It Is*, the narrating I claims to be merely a scribe, taking orders from an “ancient voice” above, in the light. Federman reverses this situation in *The Voice in the Closet* where the voice of the past, coming from below, rails against the one(s) responsible for telling his story: “he would like it to be my fault if his words fail to save me I resist curious reversal of roles whereby the rustle of lies above my head leave me storyless.”

Marcel Cornis-Pope, in his analysis of narrative strategy in *The Voice in the Closet*, emphasises Federman’s “backwards” approach: “The logical sequence of past self and present self, narrator and protagonist is thus reversed with the protagonist (as the ‘first person’) talking back to his creator (as the ‘second person’).” Addressing him as either “you” or “he,” the little boy hurls abuse at his tormenter, whom he nevertheless is dependent on and wants to keep near. When the possibility of the writer disappearing is invoked, the text itself starts to fragment with blank spaces (61). Just as he reverses narrative roles, becoming both addressee and addressee, the little boy engages in the dual role of tormenter and tormented, threatening to destroy the writer, “his head crushed against the wall I will step out of my reversed role” (59). These sadomasochistic dynamics are played out within the claustrophobic, solipsistic space of the closet, affirming the possibility invoked in *How It Is* that the voice is, ultimately, alone.

In Federman’s reading of *Comment c’est*, Part Three describes a motion towards a new sadomasochistic configuration; a configuration pursued in *The Voice in the Closet*. Federman explicitly frames his own text as a continuation of *How It Is*, by reprising the opening lines of Parts Two and Three. In Beckett’s text, these begin with: “here then at last.” *The Voice in the Closet* begins (and ends) with “here now again.” It is as though the little boy’s story was made possible by the admission in *How It Is* that a fourth part might be necessary: “to this third part now ending at last a fourth should normally be appended.”

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25 Raymond Federman, *La voix dans le débarras/ The Voice in the Closet* (Paris: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2008), 53. In-text references are to this edition. Though page numbers refer to the 2008 French edition, the English version is chronologically precedent and the original 1979 bilingual edition was published as *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*. I preference the original title to maintain the chronological precedence of the English and the scatological “cabinet.”

26 Cornis-Pope, “From Cultural Provocation to Narrative Cooperation,” 424.

27 Chamberlain also notes this in “Afterwords,” 168.

there must be at least four people involved in the circle of abuse, though he himself would only know of his direct victim and abuser, making his text “three quarters of our total life only.” Federman also takes his claustrophobic style from a description in How It Is: “unbroken no paragraphs no commas not a second for reflection.” The little boy still hopes to speak in an authentic voice. He will attempt to redress the dispossession of self described by Beckett: “I don’t say anymore I quote on is it me is it me I’m not like that anymore they have taken that away from me.” The “I” of The Voice in the Closet responds in kind and with hope: “now that I may speak say I the real story from the inside” (23). Yet in order to do so he relies almost exclusively on quotation. In the Federman edited Surfiction, Jacques Ehrmann states: “To write would be first of all to quote. The ‘writer’ would not be the one who ‘listens to a voice from within,’ but rather one who quotes, who puts language in quotes, who both sets it off and calls it to himself, who, in a word, designates it as language.” Beckett’s How It Is begins with “how it was I quote” and the narrating I will constantly assure us that he is only repeating or quoting a voice coming from above or without. The essential paradox of Federman’s fiction is that he is both quoting from above and without (the words of “sam”) and listening “to a voice from within.” Sam’s words, not his own, can also best describe this paradoxical situation, foregrounded on the first page of How It Is: “scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine.”

In How It Is the crawling narrator vomits and defecates into the mud surrounding him, mud that he will also swallow as he speaks. The little boy of The Voice in the Closet doesn’t consume his own waste, but the text itself re-digests phrases from Federman’s previous publications. For Jerzy Kutnik, the little boy’s desire to speak in his “own voice at last” is doomed to fail from the beginning, since The Voice in the Closet is an “utterly plagiaristic” text: “it is possible to trace virtually every single word spoken by the voice back to its original source in some earlier text, novel or poem, written by Federman.” The literary “waste” incorporates various other references, from Beckett primarily but from wide-ranging and eclectic sources such as the I Ching, creating (in Beckett’s words, as quoted by Federman) a “universal muck.”

29 Beckett, How It Is, 98.
30 Beckett, 51.
34 “contrive a little kingdom, in the midst of the universal muck.” Beckett, “The End” in The Complete Short Prose, 98. Federman quotes this in Take It or Leave It, 103.
The presence of “sam” is established from the very first line: “here now again selectristud makes me speak with its balls all balls foutaise sam says in his closet upstairs” (23). The “selectristud” refers to Federman’s IBM Selectric typewriter, and it is unclear whether “sam” is the one typing or whether he is the critic placed above, denigrating what is being written (“balls foutaise sam says”). The narrating I, the voice of the little boy, is brought into being by a sexualised use of the typewriter: “while he stares at his selectricstud humping paper” (35). In French, “sa machine baisant le papier” (35). In his vision of the typewriter as a generative machine, Federman refracts his own misreading, and literalisation, of Freud’s Wunderblock via Derrida. A passage from “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” can be made to describe the scene of The Voice in the Closet: “Le contenu du psychique sera représenté par un texte d’essence irréductiblement graphique. La structure de l’appareil psychique sera représentée par une machine d’écriture.” Psychic content is created by a writing machine, and as Derrida observes the action of this machine, its “frayage,” is inherently violent, creating ruptures in order to pierce a pathway—Derrida uses the term “voie,” for Federman a voix or voice. The French “frayage” recalls the action of “frayer,” which is both to clear a pathway and, in a more precise biological context, to “spawn.” Importantly, “frayer” describes the actions of both male and female poissons. Rather than a magic slate, Federman used an electric typewriter (IBM Selectric) notable for having typeballs rather than typebars. Through a sexualised use of the typewriter, Federman frays a voix/voie.

Sam is both the author Beckett and a character in Watt; this twofold identity was explored in Federman’s first novel, Double or Nothing. He is the one charged with reporting Watt’s story, at one point translating his backwards speech. Federman’s reading in Journey to Chaos is that “Sam’s narration is an attempt to begin to recapture the initial reality from which Watt began his fictional journey.” Sam fails at truly completing his task and their relationship rests on imperfect communication. Stewart, noting the ambiguous tenor of this relationship, describes their difficulties: “First, Watt’s reversal of letters and words means that Sam (as he repeatedly insists) missed ‘much of great interest,’ or, when Watt and he were pubis to pubis, that these words were ‘so much balls’ to Sam.” The first line of The Voice in the Closet recreates the

36 Derrida, L’écriture et la différence, 298.
37 Federman, “Genèse de La voix dans le débarras” in La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet, 81.
38 Federman, Journey to Chaos, 97.
situation of *Watt*, where Sam fails to fully understand (“balls”) the subject he is to report on. It also harks back to the last few pages of *How It Is*, where “balls” is a frequent interjection of dismissal: “all balls yes.”40 In the first published *Comment c’est*, it’s “de la foutaise oui.”41 Alsop shows how Federman, after having translated *Comment c’est* for scholarly purposes (before the English version was published), chose Beckett’s translation for “foutaise,” balls, rather than his own translation (“bullshit”) provided in *Journey to Chaos*.42 *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras* uses “foutaise” in both French and English, though also (mis)translating “balls” as “boules.” The phrase “makes me speak with its balls all balls foutaise sam said” becomes “me fait être devenir avec ses boules orgueils foutaise dit sam” (23/22). Federman has identified “boules” as a reference to the French dish of bull’s testicles, “orgueils de bœuf.”43 With the French and English side by side, writing becomes (re)birth: “me fait être devenir.”

In what follows, I analyse specific intertextual instances and the dynamics of Federman’s (mis)translations in *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*. As is clear from the first few lines, the bilingual text Federman describes as “le cœur de mon œuvre”44 foregrounds his relationship to “Sam” and is thick with quotation. In his analysis of Beckettian quotation in Foucault’s work, John Mowitt questions the function of literary homage. Mowitt describes homage as “a literary vestige of feudalism,” where the vassal publicly recognised his responsibility to his Lord.45 According to Mowitt these dynamics underscore contemporary homage, which is “as the term implies, all about ritualizing the recognition of a man.” He posits homage as a “site for the cultural construction of masculinity,” a way of affirming “the feigned reproductive power of men.”46 For Mowitt, Foucault offers a way of rethinking quotation as “an occasion where one man discovers his own manhood in the mouth of another man.”47 The fantasy of literary paternity is rearticulated as a transgressive mode of relationality. Federman’s queering of literary lineage in *Double or Nothing* and *Amer Eldorado/ Take It or Leave It* exploits the possibilities uncovered by Mowitt. These are present in *The Voice in the Closet*, though in no explicit terms—the return to the “closet” is definitive. This masturbatory

44 Federman, “Genèse de *La voix dans le débarras*” in *La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet*, 87.
46 Mowitt, “Michel Foucault and Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable,*” 143.
47 Mowitt, 143.
recitation is one of relentless suffering, quite unlike the joyous circle jerk of *Take It or Leave It*. The essentially reversible relation between master and servant that Federman touched on in his analysis of *Watt* is enacted between creature (the little boy) and writer and paralleled in translation between “sam” and “federman.” In this homage to Beckett, the first-person narrator is a rebellious and resentful vassal, locked in a cycle of endless suffering, beginning and ending “here now again.”

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ii) Shem in his closet

The original 1979 Coda Press edition of *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras* is now quite difficult to acquire, which is a shame as the formatting, illustrations and inclusion of “Échos” by Maurice Roche make for a much richer reading experience. For Chamberlain, the inclusion of a text by Roche radically expands Federman’s poetics of plagiarism. Her dissertation offers an analysis of the dialogue between Roche and Federman’s texts, a lost “voice” in subsequent editions. The Coda Press edition has two covers, English on one side and French on the other (flipped) side, making it “reversible.” The English text was written first, and then arranged into “squares” of text with a typewriter—a formal constraint before the invention of the word processor. The translated French, necessarily longer, was fitted into rectangles. Instead of page numbers, each section is preceded by a blank page where a square, or rectangle, is progressively drawn by adding a single line. Each version is twenty pages long. The final page of *The Voice in the Closet* is preceded by five squares within squares. The use of squares displays Federman’s continuing awareness of the Life-Path number four, represented by the square according to Molinaro’s guide. Molinaro draws extensively on the Richard Wilhelm translation of the *I Ching*. Federman’s Life-Path number is associated with the fourth hexagram, “Meng” or “Youthful Folly.” Its inherent action is “Try Again” (try again, fail better?) and the hidden influence is the return, “go back.” Federman’s awareness of the *I Ching* is evidenced in *The Voice in the Closet* where he clearly refers to the fourth hexagram, “Youthful Folly.” The associated image is of a spring welling up at the foot of a mountain, which Federman alludes to as well as reformulating part of the commentary. As it appears in the *I Ching*:

“If someone asks two or three times, it is importunity. If he importunes me, I give no answer.” To importune is folly.  
To strengthen what is right in a fool is a holy task.

In *The Voice in the Closet*:

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50 Federman, “Genèse de *La voix dans le débarras*” in *La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet*, 80–81.  
52 Molinaro, *Life by the Numbers*, 83.  
young boy with hope asks again but to ask again is importunity here he who importunes receives no answer to importune is folly to strengthen in a fool what is right is holy task as spring wells up at foot of mountain

This reformulation displays Federman’s continuing effort to merge his own Life-Path with Joyce’s number four. His own story completes Beckett’s How It Is by adding a fourth part, and also takes it back (“go back”) to its origins in the Wake. Beckett and Federman write after Finnegans Wake; in 1978, they both contributed to a collection of short fiction entitled In the Wake of the Wake. This is the only time Federman’s name appears alongside his mentor’s as an author rather than a critic. An extract from Beckett’s Fizzles is directly followed by part of Federman’s The Voice in the Closet—which begins, fittingly, with “sam in his closet upstairs,” as though referring to the preceding pages. Federman’s use of the fourth hexagram, “Youthful Folly,” suggests that the writer is inadequate to his task of writing “in the wake of” Beckett. In The Voice in the Closet, the little boy exhorts the “featherman” (37) to achieve the vocation of his (Joycean) name, in a passage that paraphrases the opening of Beckett’s “Fizzle 5”:

aside from what is said there is nothing silence sam again what takes place in the closet is not said irrelevant here if it were to be known one would know it my life began in a closet symbolic rebirth in retrospect as he shoves me in his stories whines his radical laughter up and down pulverized pages with his balls mad fizzling punctuation question of changing one’s perspective view the self from the inside from the point of view of its capacity its will power federman achieve the vocation of your name

“Fizzle 5” begins with “Closed place. All needed to be known for say is known. There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing.” In the passage above, taking place in the “closed space” of the closet, sam’s words are attributed but then “he” merges into sam with “his balls mad fizzling punctuation.” The little boy is being “shoved” into federman’s stories but also seems to encourage the writer with motivating advice; it’s a question of “will power,” of “changing one’s perspective.” The featherman is, of course, ultimately doomed to fail. Federman articulates this in relation to How It Is, by failing to “translate” Beckett’s words. In Comment c’est/ How It Is, the narrator imagines condescending to a youngster:

mais progrès proprement dit ruines en perspective comme au cher dixième cher vingtième de quoi pouvoir dire à par soi à un bleu de rêve ah si tu avais vu il y a quatre cents ans quels bouleversements

ah mon jeune ami si tu l’avais vu je pouvais à peine le traîner et maintenant regarde mon vertex en touche le fond et moi pas une ride pas une 56

but progress properly so called ruins in prospect as in the dear tenth century the dear twentieth that you might say to yourself to a dream greenhorn ah if you had seen it four hundred years ago what upheavals
ah my young friend this sack if you had seen it I could hardly drag it and now look my vertex touches the bottom and I not a wrinkle not one 57

In The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le débarras, the writer is searching for words to describe a foolish youth, but is unable to (re)find Beckett’s “greenhorn” or “bleu.” The words he does find, “callow” and “blanc-bec,” draw on the imagery of hatchlings and undermine his identity as the featherman:

how idiotic what did he expect callow it says after so many years banging his head against the wall rattling the old stories ah what’s the use watch him search in his dictionary callow unfledged youth almost hit him in the face federman featherless little boy

quelle connerie à quoi s’attendait-il à un miracle blanc-bec que ça dit après vingt ans de se heurter le crâne contre le mur vingt ans de solitude claquetant les vieilles histoires et pourquoi ah regarde-le fouiller dans son dictionnaire oui là ça dit blanc-bec petit oiseau sans plumes presque frappé dans la gueule fèder man verte jeunesse que ça dit débutant déplumé

After twenty years of searching, federman/féderman remains stuck in “youthful folly,” a “débutant déplumé,” “unfledged” and “featherless.” And yet his failure only proves his authenticity, just as the told/teller of Take It or Leave I is unable to master the “clean” and sophisticated words of his adversaries. Though inadequate in his role as a writer or “homme de plume,” the little boy’s story nevertheless authenticates his identity as the Joycean Shem the Pen Man. Federman’s closet episode has significant similarities with Shem’s imprisonment in the Wake. This is described by his brother Shaun, in a chapter-length diatribe where Shem’s lowliness is linked to impure racial identity.

When Shem is imprisoned, he is denied light and writing materials. Alone in the darkness, he makes ink “out of his wit’s waste,” his excrement, using his own body as a parchment. 58

56 Beckett, Comment c’est, 27, italics added.
57 Beckett, How It Is, 13–14, italics added.
58 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 185:07.
Michel Rabaté remarks of Beckett's *How It Is* that the novel “literalizes Joyce’s conceit that the writer of the *Wake*, Shem the Penman, is penning his text (the text we are reading) with ink made from his own excrement.” Federman’s closet episode further literalizes excremental creation, where the little boy derides the writer, “crapping me on his paper what a joke” (31), in the closet of his rebirth. This recreates the narrator’s action in *How It Is*: “I pissed and shat another image in my crib.” Federman’s little boy is “abandoned in the dark with nothing but my own excrement to play with” (57) and he refers to writing in “ink-blood” (61). Both Shem and Pim (the victim in *How It Is*) have words carved onto their bodies. In *How It Is*, mud, excrement and words mix into a single substance, “quaqua on all sides.” The mud, foregrounded in Beckett’s version of excremental creation, was claimed by the writer Federman in an interview as his own legitimate origin: “I’m from the cave. From below. From the mud.”

What does it mean to be “from the mud,” to claim mud as an identity? And what does this have to do with Shem? Clues can be found by returning to “featherman.” Federman uses bird and feather imagery throughout *The Voice in the Closet* to forge links between the musical expression of Charlie Parker, also known as Bird or Yardbird, and Shem the Penman. More obliquely, the presence of birds recalls Malone’s musings on the stories he will tell: “One about a man, another about a woman, a third about a thing and finally one about an animal, a bird probably. I think that is everything. Perhaps I shall put the man and the woman in the same story, there is so little difference between a man and woman, between mine I mean.”

This passage closely follows Malone’s observation that he is “abandoned, in the dark, without anything to play with.” The bird is a privileged animal in Federman’s fiction, closely linked with sexual hybridity. I explore this further in the following chapter, but first examine how “featherman” becomes a sexually ambiguous bird in *The Voice in the Closet*.

Federman provides a pseudo-etymology of the name featherman, described as a “decomposition” (37). In the introduction to *Journey to Chaos*, “The Fiction of Mud,” Federman cites Ruby Cohn on Beckett’s writing practice, where “composition takes place

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during decomposition.”63 In *The Voice in the Closet/ La voix dans le cabinet de débarras* a being “from the mud” emerges from the “decomposition” of his “real name”:

made me anonymous nameless choose for yourself he mutters a name among infinite possibilities I tried to protest gives us blank spaces instead while he hides inside his own decomposition homme de plume hombre della pluma reverses his real name namredef between the lines in the corners featherman sings his signs anticipating his vocation

This passage illustrates the reversal of roles identified by Cornis-Pope, untangling the fictionality of the writer himself as opposed to his creation. Singing his “signe jaune” (étoile jaune) in the French version, he recalls *Take It or Leave It* where the young man was able to express his pain, and the pain of his “black buddies,” through music.

A connection has already been established between Flaubert, “homme de plume,” the Joycean Penman and “hombre della pluma.” In *The Voice in the Closet*, Federman returns to the saxophone scene in *Take It or Leave It* for another articulation of the featherman, “yardbird”:

I am speaking of me shhh it’s summertime lies again we must hide the boy shhh mother whispering in her tears hurts to lose all the time in the courtyard bird blowing his brains out on alto guts squeaking lover man hey can you hear it now yellow feather cam sent it to me at his fingertips plagiarizing my life

Here the little boy speaks of himself, “I am speaking of me,” only to admit that he is perhaps one and the same with federman, since “cam sent it to me,” a reference to Federman’s friend and scholar Campbell Tatham. The “yellow feather” evokes the yellow star, a “sign” for the pain of persecution shared by Hombre della Pluma and his “black buddies.” This association

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is also made by Joyce (who followed the emergence of jazz) in the “Shem the Penman” chapter of *Finnegans Wake*. Shaun’s diatribe against Shem invokes African American identity, as Finn Fordham describes. Fordham identifies encoded references to the Klu Klux Klan on page 186, where Shem is subjected to a “lynch law.” He observes that on one level, “Shem is black, Shaun is white” and that “Shem’s writing darkens the norm of the clean white body.”

Federman’s claim that he is “from the mud” recalls designations used by American White Nationalists, “mud people” and “mud races,” encompassing all non-whites, notably Jews. In the mythology of the Christian Identity Movement—a broad movement encompassing various racist organisations and reaching its apogee in the early seventies—there are various explanations for this distinction. Perhaps the most popular one is that “mud people” are the descendants of an animal-like species, which God created before (Aryan) humans. In thematic consonance, the 1972 James Ivory film *Savages* brought to the screen a lost tribe of “Mud People,” who after learning the ways of civilised society, decide to return to their primitive state.

In claiming his origin in the mud, Federman strengthens his fraternal bonds with the jazz men, placing himself below the more civilised Shaun/Sam. He uses a translation game, Feder-man into feather-man, to claim family resemblance with Yardbird. In doing so he parallels Joyce’s gesture, who translated his first name, James, into the Irish equivalent, Shem, encoding Semitic identity via homonym. One might point out the problematic nature of such a gesture, in both Joyce and Federman. As Len Platt has demonstrated, Joyce’s aesthetic engagement with the racialized other is “critically charged.” Platt contends that Joyce’s staging of otherness, emphasising its performance and function within Western norms, served in his critique of linguistic and racial purity. He also recognises that contemporary engagement with racialized identity in the *Wake* is, necessarily, a politically charged form of criticism. The autobiographic nature of Federman’s work presents a different challenge, particularly as it intersects with queer dynamics. The representation in *Take It or Leave It* of “black buddies,” with their beautiful, strong black bodies, merits further scrutiny. Since these considerations fall outside the scope

64 Fordham, *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake*, 43.
65 Fordham, 42–43.
of this study, we’ll have to take Federman at his word and accept the utopic brotherhood of jazz men “without any prejudice.”

“Lover Man” is a jazz standard famously played by Parker while he was intoxicated. The young man’s solo in *Take It or Leave It* is not on “Lover Man” but on “Ornithology,” so-named by Bird himself. The “courtyard bird” of the English becomes “cour yardbird” in French, giving both Parker’s nicknames. In American English, “yardbird” is a new military recruit confined to a training camp. It can also refer to a prisoner or ex-con. In the passages above, the English “bird blowing his brains out” becomes, in French, “yardbird having his brains blown out,” so that the saxophone solo morphs into an execution. The French “bande” can refer to a tape recording or to “il bande,” “he has an erection” (perhaps longing for his “lover man”). According to Clyde Bernhardt, Parker explained “he got the name yardbird because he was crazy about eating chicken … Down there in the South, all chickens are called yardbirds. Every house had some.”

Federman’s “chicken plucker,” the thematic richness of these birds is worth exploring. “Chicken” comes to signify both greatness and its opposite. In *Take it or Leave It*, the young narrator is at first too “chicken” to participate in the jazz improvisations on “Ornithology.” He will then ascend to great heights by expressing his pain, blowing his (chicken) guts out for the great Yardbird. Federman also uses “chickens” as a mistranslation of “poules” when turning *Amer Eldorado* into *Take It or Leave It*. And in *Double or Nothing*, the young man himself took the place of Beckett’s “poule” or “prostitute” Celia. The feather *man* turned into a hen. Amid the relentless suffering of *The Voice in the Closet*, chasing up Federman’s yardbird offers some small relief. No comic reprieve or lightness is afforded here without intertextual engagement. In this sense Federman’s text differs from *How It Is*, taking a narrower scope. It is as though the realm of experience has been reduced to Beckett’s victim, Pim. Pim’s entrapment in a toxic relationship— “DO YOU LOVE ME CUNT”—makes one wonder what happened to the lascivious Mrs. Penny-a-hoist Pim in *Watt*.

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68 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 155.
70 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 148.
71 Federman, 30.
In Book 1 chapter five of *Finnegans Wake*, “The mamafesta,” it is the hen (associated with the great mother, Anna Livia Plurabelle) who uncovers Shem’s letter from a muck heap. Margot Norris describes her in terms that illustrate her importance in Joyce’s intertextual project: “She is a scavenger, acting not as a destroyer but rather as a primitive recycler, picking up bits and pieces of trash and using them for various purposes.”74 Joyce describes her, as she sifts through the trash, in glowing terms: “in her genesic field it is all game and no gammon, she is ladylike in everything she does and plays the gentleman’s game.”75 This feathered postmodernist understands that gender is a performance, a play. Through reference to the *Wake*, Federman’s featherman becomes the “original hen,”76 uncovering the truth by scavenging through waste. Federman already quoted part of “The mamafesta” in *Take It or Leave It*, reformulating Joyce’s aside and nod to his protégé with Bethicket(t).77 By embracing the shameful truth of his name, “chicken-man” rather than “pen-man,” Federman digs deeper into the Wakean muck heap, uncovering his self.

74 Margot Norris, “The Animals of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*,” *MFS* 60, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 530.
75 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 112:15-16.
76 Joyce, 110:22
77 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 176.
iii) “the original inflicter of torments”

In *Journey to Chaos*, Federman prepared the ground for his usurpation of the Beckett creature, the literary son of a cruel author-God. McHale describes Federman’s 1965 monograph as “pre-theoretical.” Though confined to more “traditional” analysis, *Journey to Chaos* offers glimpses of Federman’s future critifications. In the following passage, taken from the conclusion of *Journey to Chaos*, Federman sets the scene of his intertextual project under the watchful and malevolent gaze of the author-God Beckett, or “sam in his closet above”:

Metaphorically, Beckett is the father who furnished “ce salaud de chapeau” to his characters in order to subject them to self-creativity. He remains the original inflicter of torments, the force that launched these creatures on their absurd and endless fictional paths...if the father is responsible for his offspring’s birth and expulsion from the womb, he is also responsible for having committed them to fictional alienation, for subjecting them to the slow death in progress that fiction represents. The father Beckett condemns his creatures to endless torture, to a death-in-life in which they can only strive towards his own transcendental status. The more the Beckett creature “probes his inner self the greater the meaninglessness of his discovery.” Though this search eventually opens unto a “quasi-mystical experience,” it falls short of “transcendental revelation.” It is useful at this point to question Federman’s foregrounding of the word creature. From his unique perspective as Holocaust survivor, he attaches the word to his own condition in *The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*: “teller told creature,” (49) “créature raconteuse racontée” (48). Eric L. Santner’s *On Creaturely Life* offers an analysis of the concept within a German-Jewish tradition, focusing on W.G. Sebald and using psychoanalytic frameworks. In Santner’s reading of Freud, the drive (as opposed to the instinct) is the privileged expression of the creaturely, for it is both animal-like and uniquely human in its perversity. Drawing on Carl Schmitt to elaborate a bio-political definition of the concept, Santner emphasizes that a creaturely condition emerges from a state of emergency or exception, when one is “ex-cited” from the creator’s “juris-diction,” thereby outcast from the human condition and yet affirmed in one’s human-ness. For Santner, German-Jewish writers display a special concern for this

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78 McHale, “A Narrative Poetics of Raymond Federman,” 94.
80 Federman, 200.
paradoxical state of belonging and not-belonging. The paradoxical figure of the creature provides a way of thinking about the “voice” of Federman’s fiction, the wordless story of his survival. In *The Voice in the Closet*, the realm of creaturely life is confined to the claustrophobic scene of torment.

The little boy’s creaturely condition is articulated against the master/creator, the third-person “sam” or “federman” responsible for his existence. Julia Lupton’s work, which examines the “creature” Caliban in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, can help define what is at stake in Federman’s own identification with the creature. Lupton emphasises the suffix in *creat-ura*, giving a sense of “continued or potential process.” The creature’s “continuously subjected subjectivity” eternally subjugates it to its creator—and to the *language* of his creator. Unlike Adam, Caliban-the-creature does not discover the names of things for himself, he must be taught: “Caliban’s language lesson places him within creation, as one creature among others, a creature who bears no obvious resemblance to his Creator.” Lupton defines the *creatura* as a created thing who is always on the edge of creating for himself. This describes the situation of the little boy in *The Voice in the Closet*, always promising to “step into the light” and tell his “own story from the inside” (59). Lupton highlights three “defining oppositional forces” in Caliban: “symptom, curse and counternarrative.” Caliban’s stitches in his side are both the result of a spell by his master Prospero and the symptom of his own defiance. Federman’s little boy, too, is being made to crap his story by the guiding hand. This action, “crapping himself,” is also a symptom of the fear instilled by his author-God. The little boy undermines the writer federman/féderman’s narrative—“what a joke” (31)—and threatens to “end” him in curse-like language: “his temporary landscapes frozen” (59). *Temporary Landscapes* is the title of a 1965 translation by Raymond Federman of poems by Yvonne Cartouche. In the little boy’s curse he lists parts of Federman’s critical bibliography on Beckett, *Journey to Chaos* becomes “his journey to chaos ended” (59). There is a conflation between “sam” and “federman” in his attack.
After cursing his master, the creature promises his own counternarrative to *Double or Nothing* and *Take It or Leave It*, citing the subtitles of each ("a real fictitious discourse" and "an exaggerated second-hand tale"): "his real fictitious discourse denounced I will be relentless his exaggerated second-hand tale retold anew with correct accent" (59). Forever entrapped in the master’s language, Federman’s little boy remains “on the edge” of creation, “sam’s pell mell babel object” (55). The “object” comes from Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing*: “Words, mine was never more than that, than this pell-mell babel of silence and words.”90 Nothing more than sam’s object, the truth of the little boy, of Federman’s memory, is negated. As a scholar, Federman insists that Beckett doesn’t “need” the “support” of memory to write his fiction. Defending this viewpoint, he quotes the very same passage from *Texts for Nothing*, ending with “pell-mell babel of silence and words.”91 James Olney noted the unusual vehemence of Federman’s insistence of his appearing to “defend” Beckett against any accusation of autobiographical writing in his review of *Company*.92 Federman choses the same Beckettian formulation, “pell-mell babel,” to speak of his own autobiography (the little boy in the closet) and to argue for the absence of autobiography in Beckett’s *Company*. According to Federman Beckett is not speaking of his own past (as Father in Heaven, he has no need of a past) but of Federman’s own story.

Federman’s ideas concerning the Beckett-father evolve as, following Molloy and the others, he explores his own “inner self” through fiction.93 This exploration includes a dialogue (or *dialogues de sourds*) with French poststructuralists and with criticism on Beckett, as Federman subsumes parts of his own broad reading into his engagement with the Beckettian master text. In 1976 (during the composition of *The Voice in the Closet*) Federman co-edited with Tom Bishop a *Cahier de l’Herne* dedicated to Samuel Beckett. This edition includes an essay by Julia Kristeva, “Le père, l’amour, l’exil.” Just as the protagonist of *Take It or Leave It* identifies, in a literal sense, with Derrida’s “phantasm,” the narrator of *The Voice in the Closet* may “recognise” himself in Kristeva’s post-Freudian description of the exiled son. Kristeva identifies the Other, the father, as the “père 3ème personne,” synonymous with “la Mort.” The little boy’s neat package of shit is his own attempt at Beckettian creation, a “rebirth into death”

manqué, literalising Kristeva’s description of “objet cadavérique” and “action cloaque.” In Kristeva’s essay the exiled writer occupies the void between Death, the transcendental Father, and detritus. In this formulation, Federman may have seen his own conception of the creature’s “quasi-mystical experience” alluded to in Journey to Chaos. The Voice in the Closet reflects Kristeva’s reading of the scatological and the sacred in Beckett’s work. In Federman’s own use of these ideas, he insists on the attachment to the third person. It is only through this attachment to the father, “cette obstination à ne pas lâcher la troisième personne,” that in Kristeva’s critique the act of writing is made possible. Federman’s little boy certainly doesn’t “let go” of “him,” il ne le lâche pas, in the sense that he also never “gives him a break.”

Kristeva’s essay focuses on the link between “Premier amour,” where the protagonist dates his marriage to the death of his father, and Pas moi, where a disembodied female mouth takes centre stage in one long cry of suffering. For Kristeva Beckett’s writing itself tends towards the “sacred” and “unnameable”; an observation that both begins and concludes “Le père, l’amour, l’exil.” She contrasts Beckett with Joyce, seeing in the latter a celebration of maternal incestuous jouissance. The man of “Premier Amour” and the disembodied female voice of Pas moi remain enthralled by a ravaging love of the father, a yearning for his Death that excludes any yearning for a woman, be it wife or mother. Articulating her vision through foundational monotheistic myths, Kristeva sees the Christianity of the Renaissance as an attempt to save the religion of the Father through jouissance produced by incest with the mother. She presents the sacred vision of mother and child as a displacement of the Death of the father, an attempt to move beyond his law. For Kristeva, Renaissance and its humanism offered avenues of escape through “l’Homme et sa perversion,” allowing for an “explosion sexuelle” that emphasised homosexual desire. These forces could push aside the cult of the child, offering, “à travers la dérision du culte de la natalité, une issue.” Beckett’s oeuvre confronts Renaissance Christianity, with its emphasis on maternal love, through a desacralized devotion to the Death of the father. This devotion is what Catholicism has borrowed from outside (from Judaism) and rejected (in Protestantism). It would follow, then, that the admirers of Beckett’s work are themselves exiled and other.

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95 Federman, Journey to Chaos, 200.
97 Kristeva, 266.
98 Kristeva, 267.
undid the maternal image through polymorphous, polyphonic jouissance. Beckett, however, works within narrow limits, stubbornly remaining among the father’s remains, “le récit déçu mais obstiné.”

In Kristeva’s post-Freudian formulation, Beckett presents no possibility of Oedipal normality via sublimation, since the totemic meal (the father’s body) has been replaced by the excrement of the father. Beckett’s creatures are condemned to remain under the father’s control, fascinated and terrified, forever looking to him for meaning in their “existence de déchets.” Detritus has replaced the totemic meal; no real communion is possible for the sons of Beckett. Oedipal failure results from an unwillingness to “let go” of love of the father, preferring instead to feast on his waste. In The Voice in the Closet this perversion of Oedipus’s story is alluded to: “how I crouched like a sphinx falling for his wordshit” (33, italics added). The Beckett “creature” becomes half- animal, beguiled by and enamoured with Beckett’s neologism, “wordshit.” The riddling sphinx is disarmed by Beckett’s superior linguistic play. In La voix dans le cabinet de débarras, this line is transformed to confirm the little boy’s own failure: “moi foireux m’accroupis en sphinx piégé nul dans ma merdaille” (32, italics added). The reference to Beckett is omitted, the little boy having “arrived” in his final piège. More obliquely, the appearance of a sphinx along with excremental writing may point to Joyce’s Wake. Rabaté has emphasised two aspects in Shem the Penman that are relevant here to Federman’s practice: the excremental and the bisexual. During Shaun’s denunciation of his brother (the “Shem the Penman” chapter) he poses a riddle: When is a man not a man? The answer to this is provided by Shem: When he is a “Sham.” Shaun immediately continues his tirade: “Shem was a sham and a low sham.” A man is not a man when he is a sham/Shem. For Rabaté, this riddle is akin to the one posed by the sphinx to Oedipus, and “one can say that a man is not a man when he is both man and woman.” In Freudian terms, one can say that a man is both when he is not yet a man but a child, in a state of primary bisexuality. Federman’s little boy is still “falling for” his (sam’s) wordshit, unable to let go of his initial homoerotic attachment: “blushing sphinx defecating the riddle of my birth” (51).

100 Kristeva, 264.
102 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 170: 25.
103 Rabaté, Joyce Upon the Void, 179.
The reduction and derision of the mother’s role, that Kristeva also observes in Beckett, must be noted here. Federman himself admitted that, though his own father is an important figure in his work, he is incapable of writing about his mother:

As you know, the father image, and sometimes the father himself, reappears in my fiction in many different ways. It’s an important presence in my work, whereas my mother (or the mother image) is not, or at least not until now. For some reason I cannot deal with her—I’ve probably blocked her out, except for a vague vision of her face, her dark eyes.  

The above was recorded by Larry McCaffery in 1980, edited and published in 1983. In The Voice in the Closet, the word mother appears twelve times in twenty pages. In Double or Nothing the protagonist sleeps with Ernest’s mother, in Amer Eldorado and Take It or Leave It he is mothered by the Jewish Marilyn and assaulted in his sleep by a wealthy wasp, a devouring mother figure. And yet in none of these texts does Federman feel like he has “dealt” with the mother. The mother’s (textual) existence is all surface, or unrealised potential: “at least not until now.” Federman’s protagonists remain pre-Oedipal; he articulates this in an unpublished part of the same interview with McCaffery:

Somewhere in his work Proust raises a most interesting question about masturbation: the first time a child masturbates he/she doesn’t do it in order to reenact the sexual act since he/she doesn’t know what that act is. It is therefore a pure act, an act of discovery, of invention, of creation … Later the act of masturbation becomes a substitution for the sexual act itself. It is between these two acts that I’m working in my fiction.

Federman’s fiction imagines a return to a pre-Oedipal state, acceding to transcendence and the Death of the father by reversing the primal gesture of creation, “a pure act.” The little boy of The Voice in the Closet, by claiming his own voice, rejects the reproductive logic of Oedipal law. Federman’s fully derivative text embraces Beckett’s own repulsion towards the logic of reproduction, a repulsion Stewart qualifies as “misopedia.” Stewart draws on Lee Edelman’s No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive to emphasise the underlying queerness of the hatred of children in Beckett’s work, coupled with the “sterile, narcissistic enjoyment” of Beckett’s characters. Edelman takes Lacan’s concept of the sinthome, an expression of jouissance that is forever writing itself, to forge his avowedly awkward neologism:

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sinthomosexual. This is a form of queer sexuality that refuses identity and exposes the presence of the death drive: “Sinthomosexuality, like the death drive, engages, by refusing, the normative status, the immobility of sexuation to which we are delivered by the Symbolic law and the promise of sexual relation.”¹⁰⁸ For Edelman the future, represented by the child, maintains the fantasy of totalisation supported by a reproductive logic. The sinthomosexual embodies the rupture in family dynamics projected onto homosexuals but is not itself defined as homosexuality. In Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds, Edelman posits, non-human forms come to express the death drive that both disrupts and is inherent to traditional family dynamics.¹⁰⁹

In The Voice in the Closet, Federman’s feathered/featherless little boy reverses (and perverts) the child, representation of futurity. He does so by giving voice to something that should, to keep the endless potential that futurity holds, stay silent.

The child can only represent the future in its innocence, an innocence that as Ehrmann notes psychoanalysis does much to dismantle.¹¹⁰ Federman’s little boy belongs to the past, not the future. What’s more he refuses the sentimental, redemptive potential of the mother’s tears he repeatedly invokes. He can only observe the betrayal of his real experience, “makes me forget my mother’s face,” in his subjection the third person: “he thinks his words will make me” (53). In Kristeva’s terms the child cannot let go of the third person, but the detritus of his totemic meal (redoubled excrement, the neat package of shit) provides a paradoxical hope for his escape. It is the transcendental aspect of “sam,” his position above, that also makes this escape, via his death, impossible. The Father (in Heaven) is both father and “midwife to rebirth” (63), keeping the “I” forever enclosed (“here now again,” “ici encore”) in his own excremental universe (the fourth part of Comment c’est/How It Is). In the text he describes as the core of his oeuvre, Federman plays out the fantasy that Beckett, “the original inflicter of torments,” is the one behind the guiding hand that “doodles him up and down” his “pages of insolence” (39). Federman casts Beckett as both father and Father in Heaven, with himself as his son. In characteristic surfictional fashion, “exposing the fictionality of reality,”¹¹¹ he admits as much in conversation with McCaffery: “He (my father) had grey eyes. He looked a bit like Beckett. At least that’s what I have come to believe now, looking at old photographs.” This is the same interview where he describes Beckett as an “angel.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Edelman, No Future, 149.
¹¹¹ Federman, Critifiction, 37.
¹¹² Federman, “An Interview with Raymond Federman,” by Larry McCaffery, 304.
is trapped in the Father sam’s world, where he remembers the real disappearance, and imagines the real death, of his own father along with his mother and two sisters: “my mother crying softly in the night my father coughing his blood down the staircase they threw sand in their eyes struck their back kicked them to exterminate them” (47). Incapable of recovering the truth of that experience, he remains between the mud and the light, reliving the tortures of Pim: “I remain suspended from his ink-blood” (61). If the “I” of The Voice in the Closet has any hope of telling the “real” story, he must usurp the power of the third person above, in “a curious reversal of roles.” This would mean a literal reversal, giving authority to the voice below, in the dark and the mud. Following Joyce, Federman posits that the truth, the original letter, is to be found buried at the bottom of a muck heap. In doing so, he emphasises the inherent reversibility of the sadomasochistic relationship in How It Is, where the “source” above could also have its origin below.

Federman’s translation strategies in The Voice in the Closet illustrate this reversal of power. He turns Beckett’s words into the voice of his own past by attributing them to the little boy and by providing the “original” French version of key Beckettian concepts. This is perhaps best illustrated by Federman’s use of Beckett’s phrase “the reverse of farness.” In The Voice in the Closet: “mother was crying softly as the door closes on me I'm beginning to see my shape only from the past from the reverse of farness looking to the present can one possibly into the future even create the true me invent you federman” (31, italics added). The “true” Federman is to be invented in the language of the master, sam (Beckett). The “reverse of farness” comes from number 5 of the Texts for Nothing: “Out of the corner of my eye I observe the writing hand, all dimmed and blurred by—by the reverse of farness.” In the chronologically precedent Textes pour rien, it is “le contraire de l’éloignement”: “Du coin de l’œil je surveille la main qui écrit, toute brouillée par – par le contraire de l’éloignement.” As early as Journey to Chaos, Federman singles out this passage to describe the writer/ “inflicter of torments”:

Yet even though they appear to control the world in which they exist, they cannot escape the hidden creator who drives them on, shapes them into further illusions, tortures them into further miseries, all the while watching from the corner of the eye “la main qui écrit, toute brouillée par - par le contraire de l’éloignement.”

115 Federman, Journey to Chaos, 111.
In translating from English to French (in the opposite direction to Beckett) Federman takes some liberty in guiding the writing hand, replacing Beckett’s “le contraire de l’éloignement” with his own translation in *La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*: “ma mère pleurait doucement la porte se referme sur moi oublié je n’arrive plus à deviner les dimensions de mon corps du passé *l’envers du loin* regardant vers l’avenir pour créer peut-être le vrai moi t’inventer fèderman” (28,30, italics added). Federman’s French, “l’envers du loin,” is indeed a more accurate translation of “the reverse of farness,” more accurate than Beckett’s French “le contraire de l’éloignement.” Federman treats the later English *Texts for Nothing* as the “original” version, and so “corrects” the expression of his “original inflicter of torments.” Though one cannot strictly speak of an “original” version in Beckett’s bilingual oeuvre, the chronological appearance of texts must be considered when it comes to Federman’s strategy of reversal.

One of Federman’s favourite Beckett-isms is “wordshit,” from number 9 of the *Texts for Nothing*: “That’s right, wordshit, bury me, avalanche, and let there be no more talk of any creature, nor of a world to leave, nor of a world to reach, in order to have done, with worlds, with creatures, with words, with misery, misery.” The “I” yearns to be buried in a muck-heap of words, an image that foreshadows Beckett’s *Happy Days* where Winnie, buried in a mound of earth, repeats fragments of forgotten classics. In (the first published) *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, the passage from number 9 has “fatras” instead of wordshit. Beckett’s neologism appears only in the later English version. Federman will “rectify” this by providing his own (clunky) translation in *La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*: “mot-merde” (64). Federman’s “mot-merde” both reverses the natural order, taking the place of the original, and provides a pedantic overcorrection, an aesthetically unsuccessful but accurate translation of Beckett’s neologism—the kind a scholar might provide. Federman is acting as a Beckett critic, or masocritic, would. According to Mann, however much the masocritic poses as subordinate he ultimately seeks mastery through reversal. He also believes in his own superior understanding of the master text, greater than that of the author himself. Federman’s “mot-merde” is an inherently aggressive translation, illustrating the dynamics sketched by Mann.

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Anthony Cordingley, in his study of Beckett’s *Comment c’est/ How It Is*, has demonstrated the masochistic aspect of self-translation. Applying Mann’s concept of masocriticism, Cordingley’s premise is that self-translation is a form of literary criticism, drawing on Mann’s conflation of “the critic, the interpreter, the translator.” He notes that Beckett himself appeared to regard self-translation as painful, a form of suffering, and subordinate to the “real work” of writing. Cordingley reads *Comment c’est/How It Is* as displaying Beckett’s “knowing masochism,” observing the obviousness of Freudian symptoms and showing how Beckett flaunts his mistranslations. According to Cordingley Beckett’s master text is his own previous version, just as in *Comment c’est/How It Is* the “other above” is merely the “ancient voice” of the one below. How does Federman recreate these dynamics? Would it be possible to compare him to Beckett, whom Cordingley describes as “purveyor of the masocritical arts”? Cordingley calls Beckett’s masochism “knowing”; Phil Baker, in his 1997 monograph, also emphasised the “knowingness” of Beckett’s engagement with psychoanalytic themes. How does Federman, whom as we have seen loves to take things literally, engage with such knowingness?

I’ll refer once more to the interview with McCaffery. By way of introduction, McCaffery asserts that there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Federmans, including “the meticulous scholar,” “the blasphemous, playful, obscene author” and the “vulnerable, anguished survivor.” The scholar and the author merge in Federman’s critifictional approach, where meticulous academic knowledge is made to serve obscene, blasphemous claims. Federman’s “knowingness” is on the side of the author, who like Beckett (as Cordingley has demonstrated) understands that criticism is a masochistic game. Federman’s contribution to the scene, however, is not so much knowingness as what he calls “a kind of truth”: “I know that maybe out of a series of lies that deny themselves, one may reach a kind of truth. In other words, I use the word lie, the lie of fiction, in the sense of the paradox of fiction.” The central paradox of Federman’s fiction (and of his life) emerges from his conviction that, unlike Beckett or Proust, experience rather than genius made of him a writer. His words can only betray the real story,

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120 Cordingley, “The Passion of Self-Translation,” 82.
121 Cordingley, 84.
122 Cordingley, 93.
123 Cordingley, 93.
126 Quoted in Welch D. Everman, *Who says this? The Authority of the Author, the Discourse and the Reader*.
the truth of the little boy, who without words ceases to exist. Like Beckett’s creatures he remains in a state of suspense, never quite reaching “transcendental revelation.” Federman’s (quasi-)mysticism, his paradoxical faith in language, is founded on the assumption that a life, even a fictional life, can be “aesthetic” without being written.  

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iv) “rebirth into death”

In his early monograph on Beckett Federman described the journey of Beckett’s creatures as “quasi-mystical,” speaking of their yearning for “transcendental revelation.”\textsuperscript{130} Identifying so strongly with Beckett’s creations, how does Federman express a desire for transcendence in his own fiction? And what mystic truths does the master text, Beckett’s œuvre, reveal? Any scholarly treatment of the last question, at least, must be highly contentious, almost as much as determining the “humanism” of Beckett’s vision. Shira Wolosky’s 1993 study of what she terms Beckett’s “negative mysticism” is in large part a corrective to the assumptions made by Beckettians including Kenner, Cohn, Fletcher and Federman. For Wolosky, these critics are unanimous in their misunderstanding. They err in accepting “the premise of some reality prior to language and ultimately beyond its grasp.”\textsuperscript{131} Wolosky uncovers the “central thesis” in Beckett criticism, that “the self is said to represent a truth that language necessarily betrays.”\textsuperscript{132} She counters this with the view that Beckett’s fiction ultimately presents the search for a “true self” as “both quixotic and undesirable.”\textsuperscript{133} Wolosky concludes: “Only in language does the self, in Beckett, even exist; without linguistic expression, there is no self at all.”\textsuperscript{134} This is the meaning of Beckett’s “negative” mysticism, a mysticism of language. In dealing with Federman, Wolosky limits herself to the 1965 Journey to Chaos. More than ten years later, does The Voice in the Closet provide any evidence that Federman’s central thesis has changed, that he has abandoned any faith in the existence of a self beyond language? Whatever his views on the self, Federman never abandons his faith in Beckett’s œuvre. Here is how, in the 1993 Critifiction, he engages with the primacy of language in his own autobiography:

“In the beginning was the word.” Thus begins one of the ancient texts that still governs how we relate to the world. In the beginning was the word, that is to say language, and when we say language of course we immediately mean story and story-telling: fiction, fable, myth, theology.

Yes, everything (life, history, experiences, even death) is contained in language. Everything is language, language is everything. Whether we think of language as a blessing or a curse, we cannot escape it. But we must accept the fact that it is both a means of communication and an obstacle to communication, or as Samuel Beckett once put it: “Language is what gets us where we want to go and prevents us from getting there.” It is in this sense then that

\textsuperscript{130} Federman, Journey to Chaos, 200.
\textsuperscript{132} Wolosky, Language Mysticism, 82.
\textsuperscript{133} Wolosky, 74.
\textsuperscript{134} Wolosky, 84.
an autobiography, or for that matter a novel, can never reach its destination, never achieve its purpose: tell the complete and truthful story of a life.135

“In the beginning was the word” is glossed in the second paragraph with a quotation from Beckett: “Language is what gets us where we want to go and prevents us from getting there.” Beckett’s pronouncement is provided as a variation or translation of “one of the ancient texts that still governs how we relate to the world” and treated as equally important. Both phrases are italicised and placed in quotation marks. Beckett’s pronouncement, however, is itself a kind of lie. It is nowhere to be found in Beckett’s interviews, letters or fiction, the reader must rely on Federman’s testimony, on his role as scribe. Federman is here reformulating or inventing, offering his (somewhat jarring) interpretation of a Beckettian sentiment. The opening phrase of the “ancient text” he uses to bolster his argument, the Gospel of Saint John, can (in the King James translation) be read as a rewriting of the more authoritative Genesis. “In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth” becomes, in the Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word (of Beckett) is God, and yet has been rewritten, rephrased and misappropriated by Federman’s false quotation.

Does Federman’s false quotation undermine the proposition of a “sacred” master text? Some light can be shed by returning to his use of Borges. Federman was evidently aware of the Argentine’s interest in Judaism and the Kabbalah. In Take It or Leave It, he engaged with Cervantes via Borges to posit the primacy of Jewish identity. It is likely, then, that Federman’s intertextual approach was also informed by Borges’ essay “Defence of the Kabbalah.” Borges explains that in a sacred text, written by an infinite intelligence, nothing is contingent and everything is significant.136 He takes the counter example of journalism, where a fact is communicated in a thoughtless form, the sounds necessarily accidental. At the other extreme, poetry’s “usual law” is the subjection of meaning to euphonic needs. Borges draws a third category, that of the “intellectual” writer: “In his handling of prose (Valéry, De Quincey) or of verse, he has certainly not eliminated chance, but he has denied it as much as possible and restricted its incalculable compliance. He remotely approximates the Lord, for whom the vague concept of chance holds no meaning.”137 Beckett’s extremely precise writing, where no room is left for chance and nothing is more than words, certainly fits this category. The notion that

135 Federman, Critifiction, 89, italics original.
“everything is significant” is also reflected in Beckett’s oft-quoted admiration of Joyce: “Here form is content, content is form.”138 This breaching of the gap, with its consequent elimination of all contingency, may describe Beckett’s language mysticism. In the sacred text, everything is significant. Federman believes and/or performs his belief in Beckett’s divinity, and so approaches Beckett’s oeuvre as a kabbalistic approach, as a text of “infinite purpose,” written not by an “approximation of the Lord” but by the Lord himself.139 If Beckett’s oeuvre is literally “the Word,” perfect and all-encompassing, then Federman can (like the author/s of the Gospel) rewrite it to serve his own purpose. For Wolosky, Beckett presents the search for a self beyond language as “quixotic” and erroneous.140 But what if, instead of “language” in general, Federman saw Beckett as the author of the Word? Search for a true self beyond the Word of God is indeed erroneous, gravely so. It makes sense (if we take things literally) that in a text of “infinite purpose” Federman sees the story of his own genesis. His “quixotic” task is thus redefined as commentary rather than usurpation, as a supplement (a fourth part) to the master text.

Federman’s awareness of Borges via John Barth is also indisputable—Barth’s “Literature of Exhaustion” is included in Surfiction and referenced in Take It or Leave It.141 For Barth, Borges views all literature as essentially “derivative,” more or less faithful expressions of “spirit.” By refusing to claim “originality,” Borges’ “metaphysical vision” paradoxically creates new and original literature.142 In an almost alchemical process, derivative material is transformed. As Ehrmann illustrates (in “The Death of Literature,” also collected in Surfiction) meaning is produced via consumption, consummation: “It all comes down to the same thing: fire and shit; a childish, childhood game—but without innocence as psychoanalysis teaches. It is neither pure nor impure; and yet joyful!”143 Literature is constituted via its interpretation/consumption just as the truth, the Word of God, is made manifest here on earth. The fourth part, the little boy’s excrement wrapped in paper, is transformed into “original literature,” a book-object. In the original 1979 Coda Press edition this is particularly apparent, as McHale describes: “in order to compare the two texts, the reader must flip the book over and turn it upside down—an arrangement which guarantees the reader’s continuing awareness of The Voice in the Closet as

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139 Borges, “A Defence of the Kabbalah,” 85–86.
140 Wolosky, Language Mysticism, 74.
141 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 346.
physical object.” McHale emphasises the self-generative nature of Federman’s bilingual text. Though essentially arbitrary, the quadrangular form is inescapable and as such made to signify its own constraint. For McHale, “the closet shape, in one sense, generates the world of this text, just as, in an analogous sense, the closet experience generated the writer Federman and everything he has written.” And yet the world of Federman’s text is essentially Beckettian, not only in the text itself, largely made up of quotation, but because it completes the quadrangular form alluded to in Comment c’est/How It Is by adding a fourth part.

Can the writer Raymond Federman, “generated” by his rebirth in the closet, at the same time be Beckett’s creature? Alsop’s analysis, mentioned earlier, points to this central impossibility in Federman’s fiction. If we concur with Alsop that the themes of Beckett’s work are the themes of Federman’s life, then the significance of Beckett’s “work” is beyond Federman’s knowledge or understanding of Beckett, predating his encounter with the Word. Can there be life before the Word? As The Voice in the Closet clearly states, in the beginning was the Word: “aside from what is said there is nothing silence sam again what takes place in the closet is not said irrelevant here if it were to be known one would know it my life began in a closet a symbolic rebirth in retrospect” (27). Beckett’s text reads: “There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing.” Life was created from the Word, and the Word was created from nothing. The Voice in the Closet occupies the cosmology of How It Is, where the voice above is “the voice of us all that was without on all sides then in us.” The writer and his work, the writer and the little boy are surrounded by the presence of “sam” who, God-like, is “above all, and through all, and in you all.” Yet Federman’s little boy yearns for the original, pre-verbal condition of his former (wordless) life, before his rebirth as a survivor. To express this hope, he (paradoxically) reformulates a passage from Malone Dies: “I am being given birth into death beyond the open door such is my condition the feet are clear already of the great cunt of existence” (45). In Beckett’s original: “I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence.” Federman’s near quotation emphasises the physical reality of the little boy’s

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144 McHale, Postmodernist Fiction, 195.
145 McHale, 195.
149 Eph. 4:6 (AV).
situation: he will emerge from the “open door” of the closet and his rebirth into death is a “condition” of his survival rather than a mere impression.

As Beckett’s creation, the little boy’s existence depends on language, on the “teller” ranting his tale again. His desire for extinction is literalised when the writing hand abandons him, and the block of words becomes full of holes. Without the writer(s) the text dissolves and gaps—literal blank spaces—appear. The return of the “selectristud” typewriter, the textual generator, once more places words on the page (61). The little boy’s existence depends entirely on the writer above, or rather the voice above, that is through and in all things. His attempt at self-creation, the neat little package of excrement, is subsumed by “him”: “crumbling into his nonsense on the edge of the precipice leaning against the wind I placed my filthy package on the roof” (47). In the French version: “m’effondrer dans son non-sens wordshit au bord du précipice appuyé contre le vent mon sale petit paquet merdeux sur le toit” (46). The little boy’s being dissolves into “nonsense” or “wordshit,” Beckett’s neologism defining the very heavens into which he is subsumed. Beckett provides a total world, a “gigantic mythocosmic edifice of words integrating space figures inside rhetorical perfection” (71). “Rhetorical perfection” refers to Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric, where Federman’s article “Samuel Beckett: The Liar’s Paradox” is collected. Beckett’s words have the power to bring into being, “as uttered with balls foutaise,” and he is beyond time in “an implausible future-past region” (71).

Like the package of excrement, the text we are reading is only a mockery of creation, made of purely “digested” material. Overabundant quotations repeat not only Beckett, but Beckett as cited by Federman in previous works. The Voice in the Closet gives cloacal birth to itself in an action that is doubly derivative, repeating the “birth into death” of Malone Dies as a rebirth into death. The Freudian cloacal theory of birth, whereby a child imagines that the baby is evacuated like a stool from the mother’s body, is “knowingly” employed throughout Beckett’s oeuvre. Federman explicitly reformulates the cloacal theory within his own survivor narrative, as Caramello notes. In his reading of The Voice in the Closet Caramello identifies the same “symbolic nexus” as in Bersani’s reading of Antonin Artaud: “like that of Artaud and Beckett, preference for the American version may have been influenced by his break with Fletcher, who translated the French phrase in his 1955 article as “birth to into death.” See John Fletcher, “Malone ‘Giving Birth to Into Death,’” in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable, ed. J.D. O’Hara (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1955), 48–60.

the excrementalism of his ‘verbal delirium’ creates while evading the ghostly self of his past: the self who was not exed out.”

Bersani’s articulation of cloacal birth provides a way of framing the little boy’s experience in The Voice in the Closet. Bersani states that “giving birth and moving one’s bowels are both concrete illustrations of that ‘miracle’ by which one substance becomes two substances. In both processes, being separates from itself.” Though birth brings forward life, defecation brings forward only waste. It is interpreted in infantile fantasy, Bersani continues, as a “loss of life”: “In this fantasy the faeces are the visible, externalised form of the body’s death while we are still alive.” Federman’s death/rebirth, his “excess of life,” takes externalised form in the neat package of excrement, a sorry “miracle” whose failure only betrays the true miracle of divine creation.

This is perhaps too “neat” an explanation. After all Federman admits that, looking back on the closet episode after so many years, it all feels “like a game.” He goes on: “I cannot tell how I felt then. Except that I was scared. And on top of that, in the middle of the afternoon I had to take a crap. And why not? So I unfolded one of the newspapers and took a shit on it. Made a neat package of it and later, when I left the closet, I placed the package on the roof.” Real or not, the package of shit becomes part of Federman’s game. He admits as much in The Voice in the Closet by reformulating Beckett’s Malone; “abandoned in the dark without anything to play with” becomes “abandoned in the dark with nothing but my excrement to play with” (57), an apt description of the creature’s situation in How It Is. By choosing to recount his survival through Beckett’s fiction, Federman necessarily undermines the “truth” of his experience. This is affirmed in The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras through the bilingual space between the two versions:

his doodling words mimicry of my sad condition which repeats sam’s pell mell babel object

son barbouillement singerie mimique de ma condition qui répète sans cesse le pêle-mêle de ma survie sans jamais dire le vrai nom

152 Caramello, Silverless Mirrors, 139.
153 Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 264.
154 Bersani, A Future for Astyanax, 264.
Reading the English and French together, it emerges that his survival (“ma survie”) and sam’s word(s) are equivalent, both a pell-mell object. At yet another instance, however, the ultimate or “actual” truth is gestured towards:

in his chamber where everything happens by duplication and repetition displacing the object he wants to apprehend with fake metaphors which bring together on the same level the incongruous incompatible whereas in my paradox a split exists between the actual me wandering voiceless in temporary landscapes and the virtual being federman pretends to invent in his excremental packages of delusions a survivor

(51, italics added)

The above passage is once again invoking Federman’s 1976 article on Beckett's narrative strategy, “Samuel Beckett: The Liar’s Paradox.” He (Beckett?) is “in his chamber” (as opposed to the more modest “closet”?) manipulating incongruities “on the same level,” bringing them together with a guiding hand, working only with “objects.” The “I” however is dealing with an “actual” me. The use of the word actual, as opposed to the oft-repeated “real,” is a marked choice. The little boy is here acknowledging the difference between federman and sam, linking himself (his actual survival) to the writer federman, and defending himself from “the threat of becoming just another (Beckettian) paradox” (59). For sam there is no incongruity, no split to be healed—Beckett doesn’t “need” autobiography and all objects exist on the same plane, being no more than words. His suffering is, by extension, equally unreal.

Federman the “actual” writer both denies and affirms the truth of his story, stating that fiction precedes life and admitting that there is no way to verify the truth of the closet episode.157 In 1992, he reflects that his entire oeuvre could be based on a lie: “From an early poem published in 1957, entitled “Escape,” to my most recent novel, To Whom It May Concern, I have been using the same closet experience, the same old story, the same obsession, and yet there is no way to know if it truly happened to me.”158 It is important to note here the difference between Federman’s treatment of his past and the scandal surrounding the fake Holocaust memoir of Jerzy Kosinski, who was associated with Federman and his cohort.159 Kosinski’s deception was revealed in 1982, the same year that Federman published The Twofold Vibration, marking the

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157 Federman, Critifiction, 91, 96.
end of postmodern effusion and the beginning of a more sober reckoning with his past. The year 1982 is otherwise significant, but I will return to this in the following, final chapter. Though Federman never “defends” the closet episode, he nevertheless sticks to his story and provides supporting documentation during his final years, on his personal blog and in 

Federman hors limites: Rencontre avec Marie Delvigne. Paradoxically asserting his truth, Federman refuses to reduce his story to facts.

For the Beckett scholar and one-time collaborator of Federman’s, John Fletcher, the closet episode is entirely fabricated. He claims this in a somewhat bizarre obituary for Raymond Federman in the Journal of Beckett Studies. Fletcher is confident that Federman changed his survival story to the closet episode only after the publication of his first novel. He cites the dust jacket of the 1971 Double or Nothing, which describes Federman’s escape on a freight train, as evidence of this.160 This is demonstrably untrue, as there are numerous references to the closet episode in Double or Nothing, and the very first line of the 1967 Among the Beasts/ Parmi les monstres reads: “My life began in a closet.” 161 This line is even quoted in Double or Nothing, with the following comment: “Particularly in my case (and in his case too) closets have a very special (symbolic) meaning.” 162 Even without textual evidence, Fletcher’s contention that there are two separate, contradicting survival stories doesn’t stand scrutiny, since after being hidden in the closet Federman had to somehow make his way to the zone libre. Though Fletcher doesn’t deny Federman’s survivor identity, he does seek to qualify it by introducing an element of doubt. In the same manner, Federman’s very Jewishness, though undeniable, is also qualified: “He was born on 15 May, 1928, into a lower-class Jewish family in the Paris suburb of Montrouge. This in itself was unusual: native French Jews tend to be upper class, part of the establishment, holding key positions in politics, finance and publishing.” 163 His friend Raymond, Fletcher suggests, falls short of being both a genuine survivor and a genuine French Jew. But most importantly of all, perhaps, he is not a true Beckettter: “Raymond ... stood out as one of the more unusual people in the worldwide circle of Beckettters.” 164 In masocritical terms, Federman is accused of betraying the master, and as a defender of Beckettian orthodoxy Fletcher must punish him. It is only fitting, then, that to do so he invokes the undisputed authority of the master’s word. He claims that Beckett himself

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161 Federman, Among the Beasts/ Parmi les monstres, 7.
162 Federman, Double or Nothing, 35.
164 Fletcher, 109.
told him the “earlier” version of Federman's survival. Finishing his summary of the freight train story, Fletcher ends with the following phrase, an uncanny echo of *The Voice in the Closet*: “That, *Sam said*, saved his life.”165 Balls, all balls, foutaise!

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165 Fletcher, 110, italics added.
CHAPTER 4: THE OLD MAN

i) “A voice within a voice”

*The Twofold Vibration*, published in 1982, marks the end of the first cycle of Federman’s fiction. Federman himself saw it as a turning point, remarking in a 1988 interview: “My characters do not reflect, they endure. Reflection only begins with *The Twofold Vibration*.”¹ By “reflection” Federman might mean his more direct engagement with political themes. A critic and friend of Federman, Jerome Klinkowitz, sees the start of the Reagan era (1981) as a turning point for the surfictionist and Fiction Collective cohort. Klinkowitz reflects on the “sense of the apocalyptic” that permeated the atmosphere of the early eighties. This feeling, he writes in a 2016 Festschrift for Federman, resulted in a turn away from formal experimentation and a new focus on content and message.² After *The Twofold Vibration*, Federman’s fiction certainly becomes more readable. It also becomes a lot less queer. The “sense of the apocalyptic” that emerged in 1981, which also saw the beginning of the AIDS crisis, may have influenced Federman’s turn towards more conventional modes of expression and away from homoerotic themes. By the eighties Federman seems to have lost faith in the capacity for language games to renew life; lost faith in the idea that, as Beckett wrote of the *Wake*, form is content, and content is form.³

A mirrored, redoubled vision of form and content is reflected in the titles of Federman’s first five novels: *Double or Nothing, Amer Eldorado, Take It or Leave It, The Voice in the Closet/La voix dans le cabinet de débarras, The Twofold Vibration*. His sixth novel, the 1985 *Smiles on Washington Square: A Love Story of Sorts*, is significantly more conventional. Melvin J. Friedman makes this departure clear in his review, where he also notes that there is “far less of Beckett” than in Federman’s previous work.⁴ *Smiles on Washington Square* centres on an “almost meeting” between a man and a woman, as the writer imagines what could have happened if Moinous, the impoverished French Jewish immigrant, and Sucette, a wealthy

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Bostonian, had done more than smile at each other during a rally. Moinous’ sexual activities remain relatively tame, perhaps in response to the threat of punishment implicit (though nowhere made apparent) throughout The Twofold Vibration.

The Twofold Vibration must also be understood in relation to The Voice in the Closet. Federman worked on the two concurrently and originally intended to publish the twenty pages (in English) of The Voice in the Closet “in the middle” of The Twofold Vibration. The closet at the centre of the novel would double the old man’s room in the hall of departure, the “final closet” of his earthly life. This old man—another of Federman’s alter egos, whose wife’s name is Erica Hubscher, the name of Federman’s real wife—is to be deported to the space colonies. The year is 1999, and the writer “Federman” is merely transcribing the old man’s story as relayed to him by two emissaries, Moinous (me-us) and Namredef (Federman backwards). These two, who affectionately call each other “Moimoi” and “Namnam,” have travelled to the future and are now recounting all this to Federman in the present. By 1999, the world is a very different place. In the United States of Planet Earth, peace and prosperity is maintained by a benevolent computer, “Onselacouledouce” (4). The computer’s cute name, that could be translated as “Wetakeiteasy,” masks the threatening presence of “Death’s Calculator,” the IBM Hollerith Machine linked to the IBM typewriter of The Voice in the Closet. In the future there are no wars, no famines or natural catastrophes. All forms of racism have been abolished. Yet every year, a group of “undesirables” is sent to the space colonies:

- you know criminals and perverts, madmen or those who are considered physically or mentally abnormal, social derelicts, the useless ones, the good-for-nothings, and others too, isn’t it a tremendous idea, old folks and sick people are also sent there, the incurables, that solves the problem of the aged, social security and medicare, and it also wipes out crime and unemployment, not to mention sexual perversions
- artists too are sent there, yes especially experimental artists whose work is found totally unredeemable according to new idealistic social and aesthetic norms now in vogue

The reader is assured that if the old man is deemed “undesirable,” it is not because of the fact that he’s Jewish: “that would be too simplistic, too old-fashioned, too obvious even” (6). And yet the link between the space colonies and the death camps is suggested throughout. The

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difference in 1999 is that we don’t know why the old man’s name is on the list of the deportees. Federman will try and find this out, with the help of Moinous and Namredef, by going back into the old man’s past. This past is a reflection of Federman’s real life and features a visit to a Holocaust museum at Dachau. In fact, Federman visited the Auschwitz Holocaust museum on a trip to Poland in 1981. The old man of The Twofold Vibration (whose family also perished at Auschwitz) visits only Dachau in Germany and is struck by the level of organisation on display. He is reminded of the Ford museum: “it’s the principle of the corporate museum built to show the history of making a product,” only that “the whole Nazi machine has produced nothing, nothing but an absence, it was invented to fabricate death” (101). The possibility is invoked (echoing Beckett’s “lessness”) that there are no space colonies, and that the deportees are to be released into space: “like human garbage, detritus, and the bodies float, they float away into gaslessness” (148). The reader never learns why the old man’s name is on the list; we never even learn the old man’s name. When the time comes, his name fails to be called, and he is left alone in the hall of departure, having once again survived deportation.

The “twofold vibration” is a reference to Beckett’s novella The Lost Ones, self-translation of Le dépeupleur. A passage from The Lost Ones serves as epigraph: “But the persistence of the twofold vibration suggests that in this old abode all is not yet quite for the best.” In La voix dans le cabinet de débarras Beckett’s French for “the twofold vibration,” “la double vibration,” is used in the following passage: “me griffonne de travers du haut en bas de ses pages d’insolence construit deux cagibis répliques au troisième correspondance naissance éloignée dans le temps coïncidence double vibration cherchant le rapport juste.” In English: “doodles me up and down his pages of insolence two closets on the third floor separate correspondence of birth in time seeking the right connection.” The “double vibration” of the French text dialogues with the “two closets” of the English, foreshadowing the intended format of The Twofold Vibration, with The Voice in the Closet reprinted in the middle. The “correspondence of birth” also foreshadows Federman’s strategy in The Twofold Vibration, a strategy that is linked to his father’s extermination: “that coincidence, that doubleness of the old man, becomes acceptable and even explainable, historically and genetically, when one realizes that my young dead father, he was 42 when they exterminated him” (10). Le dépeupleur/The Lost Ones depicts a closed world, a “cylinder,” where some “bodies” search for a way out and some are

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8 Federman, La voix dans le débarras/ The Voice in the Closet, 37/38.
vanquished. The “twofold vibration” describes the extreme oscillations of light and temperature to which the inhabitants are subjected. Antoinette Weber-Caflisch, in *Chacun son dépeupleur, sur Samuel Beckett*, illustrates the presence of the death camps in *Le dépeupleur*, identifying echoes with Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo— Si c’est un homme* in French. The phrase “si c’est un homme” appears twice in the final paragraph of *Le dépeupleur*; “if a man” twice in *The Lost Ones*. It is from this paragraph that Federman choses his epigraph, which in *Le dépeupleur* is followed closely by “si c’est un homme”: “Mais la persistance de la double vibration donne à penser que dans ce vieux séjour tout n’est pas encore pour le mieux. Et le voilà en effet ce dernier si c’est un homme qui lentement se redresse et au bout d’un certain temps rouvre les yeux brûlés.” In Beckett’s English: “But the persistence of the twofold vibration suggests that in this old abode all is not quite for the best. And sure enough there he stirs this last of all if a man and slowly draws himself up and some time later opens his burnt eyes.” Federman may or may not have identified the reference to Levi in the French, but certainly privileges *The Lost Ones* in his engagement with the death camps.

For McHale, the hall of departures in *The Twofold Vibration* (where the deportees await the space ship) invokes the cylinder prison of *The Lost Ones*: “The milling crowds, the coercive but invisible social authority exercised over them, the cavernous space, the yellow light, the seamless grey surface, the controlled climate, and so on—all strongly recall Beckett’s space.” Federman’s old man comes to occupy the space of Beckett’s novella, along with others including “Ramon Hombre della Pluma,” Federman’s wife (Erica Hubscher), scholars Larry McCaffery, Ihab Hassan and Jacques Ehrmann. The list also includes Federman’s uncle David Naimark (who brought him to America) and his old friend from *Double or Nothing*, Loulou Jacobson (169). On the last page of *The Twofold Vibration*, the writer “Federman” will repeat the epigraph taken from Beckett:

> hours pass, I must have dozed off, it’s still dark outside, a barrage of unresolved events confronts me, I shiver, it is cold, what now, then I remember the words I scribbled, so long ago when I first thought of this project, those enigmatic words which kept circling in my head, But the persistence of the twofold vibration suggests that in this old abode all is not

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yet quite for the best, and sure enough, now I understand, I understand, there is nothing else to do

I close my eyes again

Well, goodnight you guys, you can go back to sleep now

Taken in isolation, it appears that Federman is blatantly misattributing Beckett’s words to himself, “I scribbled.” This confusion may be due to the night, the sleep, the dream-like quality of the novel itself which travels between future and past. Yet to “scribble” is not to write, to author in any official way. The word “scribbled” is used to denote two other instances of playgiorism against Beckett.

The old man suffers a manic episode after having won a huge sum of money gambling in Germany. He takes the money, in small bills, back to his hotel room. Moinous and Namredef watch him as he laughs hysterically, rolling around naked in the bills spread on his bed. They leave him be, “there was something painful in watching this pale body twist in the paper money” (85). On their return they find him gone and a note with “two words scribbled in red, almost illegibly, on a piece of toilet paper, Moinous thought it said, Temporarily Saved, but Namredef argued that it really said, Temporarily Sane” (88). Those two words are also found “scribbled” on the floor of the hall of departures by Moinous and Namredef, while they wait for the old man to be deported. Once more they have a double meaning; Namredef reads “Temporarily Sane” and Moinous “Temporarily Saved” (170). “Temporarily Sane” is a reference to Beckett’s early short story, “Love and Lethe,” already playgiorised in Double or Nothing. Belacqua presents Ruby with a “palimpsest,” an old number plate painted over with the words “TEMPORARILY SANE.”

The old man of The Twofold Vibration is forever on the brink of the death or madness, always managing to escape both. Temporarily sane, temporarily saved, only by occupying an “extemporaneous” space. Within this space, identities “converge”: “we are all extensions of another, the living as well as the dead, we all overlap within the twofold vibration of history” (2).

The twofold vibration contains the duality of the voice itself, of The Voice/La Voix in the closet/cabinet. Federman describes his bisexual bilingualism in an essay entitled “A Voice

13 Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks, 102.
Within a Voice”: “A voice within a voice speaks in me, double-talks in me bilingually.”\[^{14}\] This “double-talk” is another way of saying the “lie” of fiction—consider the title of an essay on autobiography in Critifiction, “Federman on Federman: Lie or Die.” The sexualised voice (“my two tongues love each other”) is located in an androgynous, eroticised mouth; a theme developed in The Twofold Vibration where the “lie” of fiction is explicitly associated with sexual expression. Just as there is “a voice within a voice,” in The Twofold Vibration there is a closet “within” a closet. In both closets, the old man is alone with “Sam.”

\[^{14}\] Federman, Critifiction, 76.
ii) June Fanon

The old man of *The Twofold Vibration* is explicitly heterosexual, a womaniser and an unfaithful husband. His major conquest is a thinly disguised Jane Fonda, “June Fanon.” The love affair is not as simple as it seems, however, as is suggested by the explicit reference to psychoanalyst and post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon. Federman’s use of Fanon’s name, perhaps an allusion to the “mask” in *Peau noire masques blancs*, once again raises issues around the author’s identification with “black brothers,” questions that remain outside my present scope. The old man’s meeting with Jane Fonda/June Fanon reads like an adolescent fantasy. It all starts with his involvement in the antiwar movement, back when he was a professor in Buffalo. He is arrested during a rally, wrongly assumed to be a leader. He then attends another rally where June Fanon addresses an enthusiastic crowd of supporters. Still mistaken for a leader, he gets pulled onto the stage. Mayhem ensues and as the police break up the crowd, he and June escape: “holding hands as they ran away from this ugly scene” (19–20). It is winter, and June is wearing a mini skirt under an oversized coat. As they get into a cab together, the driver mistakes June for a man: “looks like you’re freezing your, your peanuts out there.” She corrects him, and accepts his apology: “Don’t mention it, I’m used to it” (37). Then “the old guy looked at June inquiringly, she put her index finger on her mouth” (38). In “the sort of love affair most of us fantasize about,” June walks “into his life as though he were a script,” in order to “play a part” (34). They decide that the revolution can wait and spend several weeks together in Southern France and Italy (on June Fanon’s money).

June is able to keep up with the old man’s intellectual digressions, displaying a good knowledge of Beckett’s oeuvre. Early on in their affair he calls himself a “seedy solipsist,” a reference to *Murphy* which the actress immediately identifies (42). Moinous remarks that “Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat” (the intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself) could aptly describe the old man under a different situation (43). June laughs at the old man’s self-designation: “that makes one wonder what the hell you’re doing here with me, doesn’t it” (43). People’s fantasies about celebrities are often projections of an idealised self. It is this truth which grounds the work of Kristina Busse, collected in the 2017 *Framing Fan Fiction: Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities*. Interestingly, Busse’s 2002 PhD thesis, *Imagining Auschwitz: Postmodern Representations of the Holocaust*, includes a

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short section on Federman and Beckett. But though she recognises that “Federman’s engagement with Beckett exceeds the purely academic,” her study does not explicitly reflect later research interests. In turning towards fan fiction, which she sees as a quintessentially postmodern genre, Busse identifies different sub-genres. A sub-genre called “popslash” imagines a relationship with the famous object of desire, drawing not on fictional portrayals but on media images and elements of the real celebrity’s reputation. Popslash can be either an observer fantasy (entirely voyeuristic) or an insertion fantasy, where the author enters the story and (usually) becomes romantically involved with the pop star. The June Fanon story in *The Twofold Vibration* may well be considered a form of popslash. Federman draws on the iconic Jane Fonda, referencing her activism, her movies and even her famous aerobics routines. As Busse writes: “The questions of truth and reality are central in popslash writing, which consciously fictionalizes a reality that itself is already performed and choreographed.” Through June, the writer Federman expresses his own crisis of identity, his inability to inhabit a real self. This is encoded in her name. Federman replaces the “a” of her first name with “u,” a letter which sounds exactly like “you.” Her last name is a combination of “anon” and the first letter of Federman’s last name. The old man is after all a “seedy solipsist,” June being only a projection of his self. Like Federman, June confuses herself with fictional characters: “Oh what’s the damn difference, real life, real world, the movies, fiction” (42). This central postmodern concern is, according to Busse, at the core of popslash: “Popslashers, well aware that they can never achieve real agency, instead strive for the best any postmodern subject can have: the simultaneous embracing and disavowing of the belief in a pop star’s realness as much as their own.”

Within the Jane Fonda insertion fantasy, Federman references Beckett’s work and the work of Beckett’s critics. June and the old guy are well matched: “at times he would keep on like this, almost irrational in his intellectual fervour, but she stayed right with him” (60). Their dialogues are reminiscent of the absurd back and forth between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, a similarity reinforced through the use of quoted fragments. The old man becomes serious, quiet and thoughtful. When June asks him what’s wrong, he admits he is thinking about

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18 Busse, *Framing Fan Fiction*, 44.
19 Busse, 56.
his wife. This is followed by a pseudo-philosophical dialogue on life and death. The old man remarks: “thinking is not the worst, what is terrible is to have thought” (60). This merges two bits of Vladimir’s dialogue, from the following passage:

VLADIMIR: Thinking is not the worst.
ESTRAGON: Perhaps not, but at least there’s that.
VLADIMIR: That what?
ESTRAGON: That’s the idea, let’s ask each other questions.
VLADIMIR: What do you mean, at least there’s that?
ESTRAGON: That much less misery.
VLADIMIR: True.
ESTRAGON: Well? If we gave thanks for our mercies?
VLADIMIR: What is terrible is to have thought.
ESTRAGON: But did that ever happen to us?
VLADIMIR: Where are all these corpses from?
ESTRAGON: These skeletons.
VLADIMIR: Tell me that.
ESTRAGON: True.
VLADIMIR: We must have thought a little.
ESTRAGON: At the very beginning.
VLADIMIR: A charnel house! A charnel house!20

As the old man turns sombre, apparently thinking about his wife, he is at the same time recalling a passage in Waiting for Godot where the horrors of the Holocaust are almost made explicit. He continues in this vein a few lines later: “to have lived is not enough, to have loved is not enough, one must talk about it constantly” (61). This again reformulates fragments of Vladimir’s dialogue. In Waiting for Godot:

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like sand.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
[Silence.]
VLADIMIR: They all speak together.
ESTRAGON: Each one to itself.
[Silence.]
VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
VLADIMIR: They murmur.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
[Silence.]
VLADIMIR: What do they say?

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ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives.
VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them. They have to talk about it.
VLADIMIR: To be dead is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON: It is not sufficient.
[Silence.]
VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like ashes.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.21

In the old man’s gloomy digressions, fragments of *Waiting for Godot* point to his central loss. Ostensibly he becomes pensive because of his wife: “someone I loved very much, and still love” (60). His lover June succeeds in distracting him: “come, let’s go back to the hotel and make love” (61). But in between are echoes of “ashes” and “charnel houses,” suggesting that is not so much his wife’s voice, but “all the dead voices” he hears. When the old man muses “to have lived is not enough, to have loved is not enough,” the writer Federman silently completes: “To be dead is not enough.” The surrounding fragments of *Waiting for Godot* make a noise like ashes.

As they return to the hotel, Beckett continues to interrupt their happiness. The old man quotes from a review by Northrop Frye featured in *Samuel Beckett: His Works and Critics*, co-edited by Federman and Lawrence Graver. June warns him that if he continues on like this, he will be shipped to another planet:

he put his arm around her waist as they walked back to the hotel, suddenly he stopped and pointed to the lake, and to the mountains beyond the lake, The universe is a vast autoerotic ring

Here you go again, she teased, you’re incorrigible

but he ignored her, Yes a serpent with its tail in its mouth, it knows no difference between beginning and end

Yes I know I know, she said with a touch of deliberate sarcasm in her voice, it merely vibrates in a twofold manner, you know I’m beginning to worry about you, seriously, if you go on like this one of these days you’re going to be shipped to another planet, upside down, and then you’ll really be sorry

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In the above dialogue with June, two phrases are taken from Frye: “The universe is a vast autoerotic ring” and “a serpent with its tail in its mouth.” Frye formulates these images to describe Molloy:

Molloy, like many of Beckett’s characters, is so crippled as to resemble the experiments on mutilated and beheaded animals that try to establish how much life is consistent with death. He is also under a wandering curse, like the Wandering Jew, and is trying to find his mother. There are echoes of the wandering figure in Chaucer’s “Pardoner’s Tale,” who keeps knocking on the ground with his staff and begging his mother to let him in. But Molloy does not exactly long for death, because for him the universe is also a vast autoerotic ring, a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and it knows no difference between life and death.22

The old man, a “seedy solipsist” and quite literally a wandering Jew, will be punished for his autoerotic activities: “one of these days you’re going to be shipped to another planet” (61). The above paragraph in Frye’s review brings together some disturbing images. First Molloy is likened to an animal, victim of some cruel experiment. Then his plight is associated with that of the Jews: “like the Wandering Jew.” One cannot help but think of the Nazi experiments on “human animals.” In his first novel, Double or Nothing, Federman alludes to a passage in Watt where Ernest Louit brings back an idiot savant, a creaturely being associated, obliquely, with the Nazis. The old man, who through Frye’s words becomes identified with Molloy, is threatened in a similar vein. Like Molloy, the writer Federman wishes he could die: “I have invented the space colonies so I can be sent there, imaginatively speaking” (148). In the same review Frye refers to Beckett’s characters as a “gallery of moribunds,”23 a phrase he borrows from Molloy: “Oh the stories I could tell you if I were easy. What a rabble in my head, what a gallery of moribunds.”24 The old man claims to have reached this state: “I think I’ve reached moribundity” (61). Thinking back to Journey to Chaos, we could wonder whether Federman isn’t here declaring a victory, the ascension of his characters, like Beckett’s later heroes, into the realm of “fictional absurdity.” And yet this ascension is towards death, towards the final deportation.

iii) Moinous

Federman’s fictional universe, “a vast autoerotic ring,” indeed knows no difference between life and death. One of his alter egos, Moinous, dies in *Take It or Leave It* only to be resurrected in *The Twofold Vibration*, keen to tell the story of his own death. *Take It or Leave It* first introduces Moinous as “my little buddy Bobo Robert Moinous,” “he was some kind of guy Bobo, the kind of guy I dig.” Robert moi-nous, in French me-us, is a play on Robert Pinget’s “Noyou” in “Journal,” included in the *Cinq nouvelles nouvelles* edited by Federman. Pinget’s “Noyou” is “le pronom réfléchi pléonastique nous nous à nous même.” No-you becomes moi-nous, “nous nous à nous même,” or the author of “Journal” and intimate friend of Beckett’s, Robert Pinget. Pinget’s closeted homosexuality is inscribed in Robert Moinous, deflecting suspicion from the teller/told in *Take It or Leave It*: “MOINOUS appeared to take upon himself some of those elements one may find incongruous or inconsistent,” he is “a vehicle which may at some point (though temporarily) be able to carry upon himself those vague neurotic complexes which cannot (and shall not) obviously be attributed only to the teller of this retold tale (standing here on his platform all alone)!" “Moinous” echoes both the French word for sparrow, “moineau,” and the gallic term of endearment “minou.” “Minou” can be used with children, “mon minou” being something like “my little kitty cat,” but can also mean (like in English) the obscene term “pussy.” Moinous’ animalistic echoes point to Pinget’s closeted desire. As a little sparrow (moineau), he takes his place in the lineage of feather-men. As a little pussy cat (minou) he continues the legacy of the gender-bending hen of the *Wake*.

In *Take It or Leave It* Moinous is assassinated in a filthy bar in San Francisco. He dies by a knife wound in the chest: “*dans les côtes* yes dammit that Moinous got the knife.” The teller theorises that it must have been some dumb argument, and that “we’ll never know what really happened. Not only in Frisco.” In *The Twofold Vibration* we learn the bar was called “The Blue Bird, ah do I remember that dive” (86). *The Blue Bird* is a 1976 film directed by George Cukor, whose own homosexuality was an open secret. *The Blue Bird* was a critical and

25 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 47.
26 Pinget, “Journal,” in *Cinq nouvelles nouvelles*, 81.
28 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 49–50.
29 Federman, 136.
commercial flop, a real “dive,” damaging Cukor’s illustrious career and by all accounts shattering his confidence.\(^{31}\) An American-Soviet musical fantasy aimed at children, it stars Elizabeth Taylor as the Queen of Light/Mother/Witch/Maternal Love and Jane Fonda as, simply, Night. Night’s two children are called Sleep and Death—an association which brings to mind Molloy’s dual quest for death and the mother.

In *The Twofold Vibration* we also learn that Moinous didn’t die after all; he came back to life in the morgue and was then transferred to a hospital. The stabbing incident is elaborated on by Moinous himself:

> they caught the person who stabbed me by the way, he was just a kid, not even sixteen years old, sort of blondish and freckled, I can still see his face, with a sweet mouth, what the hell he was doing in that bar I’ll never know, they brought him to my room in the hospital and I asked him between two guffaws, Why did you do it, and do you know what he answered, that lousy kid, I don’t know Sir, I really don’t know, I couldn’t stop myself, maybe it was because of the way you were looking at me Sir or something, goddammit I don’t even remember looking at the bastard, didn’t even notice him in that crowded bar, I was minding my own business, I was on my second or maybe third beer, wondering where the hell the old guy was when, swish, right in the chest, just like that

> Yes we know that story, I say to Moinous, it’s been told before, by the old man in Tioli, we all stood over your dead body in Tioli

\(^{87–88}\)

Like in Frye’s vision of Molloy’s universe, death is an unachievable end goal. Moinous’ near-death by knife, “*dans les côtes,*” recalls a significant episode in Samuel Beckett’s life. Walking home with friends one night in Paris in 1938, Beckett was stabbed in the ribs by a pimp named Prudent. Though he was severely wounded, the author displayed remarkable good humour. This incident is recounted in Deirdre Bair’s 1978 biography: “When Coffey and Joyce visited him at the same time and found themselves standing on either side of his bed, he introduced them ‘over my dead body.’”\(^{32}\) Basing himself on Bair’s biography, Federman has Moinous mimic Beckett’s good humour at the hospital in an exaggerated manner and then counters (in the writer “Federman’s” voice) with a hint at Beckett’s joke: “we all stood over your dead body.” In Bair’s biography of Beckett, the meeting between victim and assailant occurs as they wait outside the courtroom:


\(^{32}\) Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, 279.
Beckett asked Prudent what he had done to inspire such drastic behaviour. Prudent drew his shoulders up and with a Gallic shrug replied indifferently, “I don’t know.” Critics have often pointed to this incident as the basis for much of the futility, despair and meaninglessness they find in Beckett’s writing. At the time, however, it amused Beckett enormously and became a story which he enjoyed telling his drinking companions for years to come.33

Bair also specifies that Beckett recognised Prudent as a pimp from his neighbourhood.34 Unlike the critics Bair mentions, Federman doesn’t quite believe the story of a “random incident.”35 His own use of it highlights not only the absurdity but the unlikelihood of such a tale. Those close to Beckett knew that he frequented “ladies of the night”—Knowlson’s euphemism in his authorised biography.36 In his appropriation of the stabbing incident, Federman adopts two of his favoured postures: the paranoiac and the philistine. Both read Bair’s biography and mutter to themselves: “A likely story!” Of course Prudent’s real motivations, and Beckett’s relation to him, will forever remain a mystery.37 Or in Federman’s more parochial terms: “We’ll never know what really happened. Not only in Frisco.”38

In Moinous’ version of the stabbing incident the assailant and the object of desire, the pimp and the prostitute, are combined into a single figure, a young blonde man with “a sweet mouth” (87). This recalls the “cute blondinet” Claude in Take It or Leave It,39 and links the boy to June Fanon who also has an especially superb mouth (42). In the 1976 Take It or Leave It, Bob Pinget/Moinous was foreshadowed as a “vehicle” for deflecting “incongruous” elements, those “vague neurotic complexes” the teller couldn’t handle “all alone.”40 A poem about Moinous interrupts, seemingly randomly, the narrator’s discourse shortly after Claude arrives. Entitled MOINOUS OR ME TOO, it contains such lines as: “I play hide and seek with myself,” “I disappear,” “I mask my mask.”41 In The Twofold Vibration Moinous is wounded, made to pay for an obscure, possibly sexual crime. What is his presence masking?

The cute blonde kid, when faced with his crime, parrots the pimp in Beckett’s story: “I don’t know, Sir” (87). In the apocalyptic atmosphere of the early eighties, this answer takes on the

33 Bair, 283.
34 Bair, Samuel Beckett, 277.
35 Bair, 279.
36 Knowlson, Damned to Fame, 108.
37 In Knowlson’s biography, Beckett didn’t recognize the pimp at all. He cites his 1989 interview of Beckett to support this. Knowlson, Damned to Fame, 281.
38 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 136.
39 Federman, 269.
40 Federman, 49–50.
41 Federman, 271.
air of tragedy. Federman may have recalled Belacqua’s blithe quotation of Ronsard in “Love and Lethe”: “l’Amour et la Mort – caesura – n’est qu’une même chose.”\textsuperscript{42} In Double or Nothing, he “translated” this as a possible ending for his love affair: “LOVE & DEATH being the same thing in the end That is if (of course) you decide to use this particular type of ending for this particular type of story in which LOVE & DEATH are combined at the end into a more effective tragicomic ending.”\textsuperscript{43} The duality of tragedy/comedy is invoked in The Twofold Vibration by June Fanon, as she stands naked on the bed: “either we go on talking nonsense and make comic fools of ourselves, or else we make love immediately and avoid becoming tragic figures” (62). The old man turns to June Fanon and responds with an allusion to Waiting for Godot, A Tragicomedy in Two Acts: “Why can’t we simply be tragicomic” (62). In the end, June does become a tragic figure. She is deported to the space colonies in 1997. It is only by chance, browsing a newspaper in a dentist’s office, that the old man sees her name and so learns of her death: “his throat tightened for a moment, many years had passed since those memorable days, those fleeting passionate weeks they spent together, he even wept a little” (43).

If June’s identity is ambiguous (she’s used to being mistaken for a man) how much should we read into this future projection? Or into Moinous’ death by stabbing, his assassin a beautiful young boy? Can Jane Fonda’s role as Night, mother of Death in Cukor’s The Blue Bird elucidate Moinous’ role? The Twofold Vibration encourages the reader to hunt for clues, to participate in the search for answers with Moinous, Namredef and the writer Federman. The whole premise of the novel is to determine why the old man’s name is on the list of deportees. What crime is he being punished for? We are explicitly invited to engage in our own paranoid search. Consider Moinous’ remark: “don’t look for hidden meanings in what I report, this is not a do-it-yourself Tantalus kit” (33). This has the completely opposite effect; its real intention revealed when we trace “do-it-yourself Tantalus kit” back to its source in Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage. The image is used in a review of No’s Knife by Christopher Ricks, to describe the “ceaselessly allusive” nature of Beckett’s prose, forcing the reader to “stoop and pick up the allusions,” “commanding the reader up a cul-de-sac.” According to Ricks “Beckett forces upon you a do-it-yourself Tantalus-kit. He requires you to seek and not to find—it is another of the frustrations which he puts upon his reader, frustrations some of which have a

\textsuperscript{42} Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks, 105.
\textsuperscript{43} Federman, Double or Nothing, 71.
Ricks immediately illustrates this with Beckett’s “tantalising hint” at Miss Wade, “the lesbian in *Little Dorrit*.” Moinous’ warning, as he repeats Ricks’ words about Beckett, acts as an invitation for us to follow him down the cul-de-sac.

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Towards the end of *The Twofold Vibration*, the old man’s three friends (Moinous, Namredef and Federman) come tantalisingly close to finding the truth. Moinous and Namredef recount the experience (to the writer Federman) of their final moments with the old man, as he sat waiting in the antechamber of departure, on New Year’s Eve 1999. The old man speaks of the last ten years of his life, of his inability to produce any new work: “there was something which destroyed my mental process, something which prevented me from being what I wanted to be, and which left me, how shall I say, in suspense” (156). The old man describes his ordeal, citing fragments from *The Voice in the Closet*:

I had become cataleptic, a scary condition for a man like me, only once in a while fragments, pieces of language, would burst out but which seemed totally meaningless and useless to me, you know fractured sentences that could not be connected, things like, Bird into head flew, or this one, Voice never apprehended entirely echoes space of future, yes fragments like these, Bird in retrospect for remade self caught in unself present, Region of ruins full circle into fingers back to voice, I remember these pieces so clearly, they still haunt me, but what the hell can you do with crap like that

(157)

Moinous remarks that this “sounds like a confession” (157). Federman reflects: “It occurred to us that perhaps he was giving us the reason for his being there, that he was in fact telling us, indirectly, in that twisted manner of his, why he was among the deportees, that he was at last admitting his uselessness” (157–8). The old man’s “uselessness” is understood as his inability to produce any new writing, his “inactivity” over many years. Exactly how this makes him one of the “useless ones,” “undesirables” (3) is left unclear. Moinous and Namredef dismiss this possibility; they were always there with him, were witnesses to his activity, “unless of course he was pretending.” But “how can you pretend to be active, how can you hide inactivity by pretending to be active” (158). Federman counters that “there have been many such cases lately, cases of people pretending to live an active life when in fact they secretly wallow in lethargy, and this to keep up with the maddening rhythm of our time, out of fear of old age” (158). Namredef retorts that the old man made a mockery of old age with his physical prowess, still “screwing a young chick like he was twenty years old.” The old man himself admits his uselessness, though he is convinced that “no one suspected anything, quite the contrary” (158–159). In a roundabout way, he confesses that his writing activity was a mockery, an act. Perhaps the only truth lies in the fragments that came to him, bursting forth in his cataleptic state. These
are fragments, sometimes rearranged, from *The Voice in the Closet*, and lead us back to the “Bird” (157).

The first fragment that breaks from the old man, “Bird into head flew,” points to a passage in *The Voice in the Closet*: “among the beasts and writes one morning a bird flew into my head.” This in turn leads to *Among the Beasts/Parmi les monstres*, Federman’s 1967 collection of poems. The first poem, “Escape,” begins with “My life began in a closet.” Bird imagery is developed in the final two stanzas of the poem:

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But through a crack in the wall
I saw a tree the shape of a leaf
and one morning a bird flew into my head

I loved that bird so much
that while the blue-eyed master
looked at the sun and was blind
I opened the cage
and hid my heart in a yellow feather
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The third fragment spoken by the old man also begins with a bird: “Bird in retrospect for remade self caught in unself present” (157). This time the line is almost intact, only one word has been replaced, “bird” instead of birth. In *The Voice in the Closet*: “birth in retrospect for remade self caught in unself present.” The two other fragments foreground “voice,” alluding to the title of the work from which they’re taken: “Voice never apprehended entirely echoes space of future” and “Region of ruins full circle into fingers back to voice” (157). In *The Voice in the Closet*: “present retroactive quite never apprehended entirely echoes space of future,” “an implausible future-past region of ruins full circle fingers back to voice.” Why do these repeated fragments sound to Moinous “like a confession” (157)?

The old man points to *The Voice in the Closet* instead of answering their questions. Federman, Moinous and Namredef all believe the old man himself knows why he’s being deported, that he can provide the reason for his being there, but that he refuses to do so in a straightforward manner, instead communicating the truth in that “twisted” way of his (157). Moinous, it seems,

45 Federman, *La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet*, 33.
46 Federman, *Among the Beasts/Parmi les monstres*, 8. “Escape” appears only in English.
47 Federman, *La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet*, 65.
48 Federman, 63.
49 Federman, 71.
has privileged access to the old man’s secret. He was invented in *Take It or Leave It* to deflect from the teller’s own incongruous behaviour and in *The Twofold Vibration* seems to have greater insight into his motivations. In *The Voice in the Closet*, “moinous” is an enigmatic figure. His name is mentioned in what appears to be an argument: “how I crouched like a sphinx falling for his wordshit moinous ah but where were you tell me dancing when it all started where were you when the door closed on my shouting I ask you when I needed you the most letting me be erased in the dark at random in his words scattered nakedly.”

Where were you when I needed you the most, when the door closed on my shouting, naked in the dark?

This does sound like a confession, though one that can “never (be) apprehended entirely.”

In between two of the fragments the old man quotes from *The Voice in the Closet*—“Voice never apprehended entirely echoes space of future, yes fragments like these, Bird in retrospect for remade self caught in unself present” (157)—Moinous’ name occurs twice:

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never apprehended entirely echoes space of future reinstated in stories only from past images presumed shape reverse of farness stifling faces federman now confront much moinous wordshit start there to provide single voice long dodge closet yet a single word failed logos draws map of journey to chaos evoked a bird here where moinous rendered speech burns out to better question fear realize aspects cancel life digressively movements to touch hands or allow feelings propelling words eventually confront mother now beast father now sisters too from other side stars burning the felt atrocity in furnace as necessary alchemical fire or both let it burn or neither erased let it go here now again featherless risk of death ultimate helplessness startling puppet fails to fly crafty dodger by props replays old tale artificer of fledgling birth in retrospect for remade self caught in unself present
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The hermetic nature of *The Voice in the Closet* solicits overinterpretation and at the same time prevents the reader from reaching any satisfying conclusion. *The Twofold Vibration* can be seen as a critifictional exposition of this central text whose physical absence from its own centre (supposedly under publisher’s demands) reproduces the primal absence in Federman’s oeuvre, X-X-X-X. Considering Moinous’ privileged access to the old man and his seniority as fictional creature (born in *Take It or Leave It*), it may be through him that the truth of the old man’s deportation from his “final closet” (28) can be approached. In the above passage the emotions Moinous incites—“movements to touch hands or allow feelings”—eventually lead to X-X-X-X, “stars burning the felt atrocity in furnace.” In his role as a “crafty dodger” he will “cancel life,” “stifling faces” as “rendered speech burns out.” Moinous is the starter of this “necessary

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50 Federman, *La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet*, 33.
51 Federman, 63/65, italics added.
alchemical fire,” burning words (and feathers) until the Pen Man featherman is “featherless.” The fire that consumes words (“let it burn”) is “necessary” yet mirrors the “atrocity in furnace” of “stars burning.” As foreshadowed in Take It or Leave It, Moinous’ role is to deflect, to create a “dodge closet” and paradoxically provide a “single voice” (stifling the voice within the voice, the closet within the closet). Moinous’ presence is linked to the bird (“evoked a bird here”) and to the Beckettian neologism “wordshit.” This invokes the package of excrement, symbol of rebirth “in retrospect.” In The Twofold Vibration “birth” becomes a “Bird in retrospect for remade self” (157). The old man tells us the package was left on the roof “for the birds, I suppose, or to disintegrate in the wind and become, years later, the symbol of his strange rebirth” (69). In The Voice in the Closet the excremental writer, the Pen Man/featherman, is alternately iterated as “Bird” or “Yardbird” (Charlie Parker) and the hen of Finnegans Wake. In The Twofold Vibration Federman suggests another iteration of featherman/Bird by linking Moinous to the bird(s) of The Voice in the Closet and staging his death at a bar called “The Blue Bird” (86).

The “yellow feather” of The Voice in the Closet is also an expression of Jewish identity (the yellow star). In reference to Charlie Parker’s lover man, it appears in the following line: ““lover man hey can you hear it now yellow feather cam sent it to me plagiarizing my life.”52 Cam is “Cam Taathaam” of Take It or Leave It or Campbell Tatham, postmodern critic, jazz enthusiast and close friend of Federman’s. According to critic Matthew Robinson in Federman from A to X-X-X-X, Campbell Tatham is intimately linked to Moinous: “Since, in French, Moinous means roughly “me/us,” or “the me in us,” it’s hard not to imagine that Moinous refers to RF and Tatham, or at least the character of their relationship. Me and Us. Mine and Ours.”53 The closing line of “Escape” is also repeated in The Voice in the Closet: “I opened the door and hid my heart in a yellow feather.”54 Yellow feather appears a third and final time in the following: “two refuges alive yet afraid yellow feather boy confined manchild symptom rarely fatal.”55 “Two refuges” suggests two closets and two refuge(e)s, both hiding “in our closet after so many false names foisted upon me evading the truth.”56 Throughout The Voice in the Closet the little boy undermines the validity of the closet episode as it is told by “federman,” whom he

52 Federman, La voix dans le débarras/The Voice in the Closet, 25.
54 Federman, La voix dans le débarras/ The Voice in the Closet, 55.
55 Federman, 61/63.
56 Federman, 27.
consistently accuses of betraying the truth. The writer, masochistic servant of his own memory, is doomed to repeatedly betray the reality of the little boy’s experience.

His position is akin to one described by Beckett in his early essay, Proust. Federman makes explicit use of this in The Voice in the Closet, reformulating Beckett’s description of an episode where Marcel surprises his grandmother reading: “He surprises her reading her beloved Mme De Sévigné. But he is not there because she does not know that he is there. He is present at his own absence.” According to Beckett in that moment Marcel realises that his grandmother exists only through projections of the past, “by the solicitude of habitual memory,” that the woman before him is both dead and a stranger. Federman will reformulate Beckett’s description in The Voice in the Closet, though reversing or “inverting” the terms; Beckett’s “present at his own absence” becomes “pretending to set me free at last in the absence of my own presence.” This type of reversal is also performed in The Twofold Vibration on the words of Jewish mystic poet Edmond Jabès:

as it is asked in The Book of Questions, Old man tell us the story of your country, and speaking for us all he would answer, as Yukel does, I have no country, I am an old man, and my life is the story

in my case, however, were I in his place, I suppose I would have to answer, making a crucial inversion of the terms, The story is my life, me there, me here, what’s the difference

(150)

Operating through reversal or “crucial inversion” (invoking Proust’s “inverts”), both statements describe the old man’s fictional condition: Absent in my own presence (for “present in my own absence”), the story is my life (for “my life is the story”). Through intertextual association—Jabès and Proust—both are linked to Jewish and queer identity, brought together in their inversions.

The principle of textual inversion was also applied to Beckett in The Voice in the Closet, where Beckett’s English phrase “the reverse of farness” was translated backwards to “l’envers du loin.” Proustian identity informs Federman’s bilingual practice here, his “crucial inversion of the terms.” The man who is really a woman, or the woman who is really a man—Boris becoming Beckett’s Celia in Double or Nothing or June Fanon’s peanuts—is located at the site
of the androgynous “sweet mouth” of the kid in The Blue Bird (87). In Federman’s bilingual poetics, “two tongues love each other” and one cannot tell masculine from feminine. As he translates from the French, he inverts the natural order of Jabes’ “la vie est l'histoire” into “the story is my life.” Federman goes one step further and inverts the “invert” Proust (via Beckett) with “absence of my own presence” for “present in his own absence,” and so corrupts both tongues/genders.

In *The Twofold Vibration*, Federman will also absorb the following translation of Proust in Beckett’s essay:

“We imagine that the object of our desire is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! It is *the extension of that being* to all the points of space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess contact with such a place and with such an hour we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points.”

The emergent cosmology in Beckett’s *Proust* sets the scene for the science-fiction-like universe of *The Twofold Vibration*: “We are all *extensions* of one another, the living as well as the dead, we all overlap within the twofold vibration of history” (2, italics added). In his essay “Federman on Federman: Lie or Die,” Federman elaborates on his understanding of Proust: “*A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is not simply a work of fiction that looks backwards to retrieve the past, it is above all a novel that looks forward towards its own future, towards its own making, as it reflects on its creative process.” This creative process is the “lie” of fiction, the fallibility of memory and the unreality of all beings, living or dead. Proust’s creatures have no solidity, no inherent qualities as they are subjected to the relentless assault of time. They are according to Beckett victims of “Time,” “victims as lower organisms,” “victims and prisoners.” Each extension, each lie, occupies a point in time and so resists death, though each extension, all of us, belong to the past and as such are already dead, already unreal—absent in our own presence. The old man will claim that “the reading of Beckett’s work was as crucial an experience for me, as important in my life, as having survived the concentration camps, by extension” (34). The “extension” is here the “lie” of fiction, the lie of autobiography, extending to both past and future.

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60 Federman, *Critifiction*, 79.
v) Sam the Dalmatian

“Samuel Beckett,” described as a God in the Federman house, was also the name of the family dog. Raymond Federman’s dog Sam, a handsome Dalmatian, literalises the God/dog inversion suggested in *Waiting for Godot*. This inversion is also found in the “Nightlessons” chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, a chapter Federman draws from extensively in *Double or Nothing*. In the central text annotated by three children, the phrase “Dog’s vespers are anending” blasphemes against the evening prayer and God’s unending love. In Isy’s extended footnote on page 279, the God/dog inversion is suggested amidst a description of her sexual forays; “ay loved have I on my back spine.” She provokes her teachers and boasts of her sinful conquests: “Wasn’t it just divining that dog of a dag in Skokholme as I sat astrid uppum.” According to Ackerley, the spiritual potential of the dog-God inversion informs the man-dog coupling which may be the essence of all Beckettian pseudo-couples: “all the twinned pairs in Beckett's world, the Luckys and Pozzos, the Vladimirts and Estragons, who are ‘tied’ to one another as to Godot, in whose image mankind may have thus been begotten and made.” In *Le livre de Sam*, Federman describes his moment of revelation the night he saw a production of *Waiting for Godot* for the first time. Writing in French, Federman notes the Godot/Todog inversion in English and argues that Beckett’s work must be read bilingually. He pinpoints the moment where Lucky enters, a rope tied to his neck, followed by Pozzo: “que c’est beau et que c’est horrible.” He highlights this moment in particular when recounting the experience of watching Beckett’s play, an experience which would determine the rest of his life. Though in *Waiting for Godot* Lucky is Pozzo’s slave, Pozzo says of Lucky: “But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of common things.” Federman could say the same thing of the creature he keeps on a leash, Sam.

In *The Twofold Vibration* Sam the Dalmatian is the old man’s faithful friend. The old man dotes on Sam, “You spoil that dumb animal, his wife would say” (31). Sam and the old man

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65 “I grew up in an atheist household, at least that is what I was told. I knew that to be one of many lies that I would later discover to be only fictions. There was a God in our house, at least that’s what my father, Federman told me and his name was Sam.” Simone Federman, “Making Godot Wait” in *Le livre de Sam*, 119.
66 See photograph in Fletcher, “An Obituary for Raymond Federman.”
68 Joyce, 279.
69 Ackerley, “Despised for their obviousness,” 179.
70 Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 52.
71 Federman, 53.
have “a most intimate, a most delightful relationship,” “not that of master and servile companion, but rather that of platonic lovers” (32). Is Sam the Dalmatian another iteration of Loulou in Double or Nothing, whose name alludes to a Pomeranian or loulou de Poméranie? Like Loulou, Sam is his constant and affectionate companion, whom he houses, feeds and takes care of. Two aspects of the future United States of Planet Earth determine the relationship between Sam and the old man: the Dismarital Law, in which all monogamous (human) couples were forcefully separated, and animal life-extensions (32). By 1999, they have been together for 51 years. Sam is first introduced “crouched like a sphinx at his feet” as the old man waits in his final closet, the antechamber of departure (28). The phrase “crouched like a sphinx” is used in The Voice in the Closet to describe the little boy in his relationship to Sam, through the Beckettian neologism “wordshit”: “how I crouched like a sphinx falling for his wordshit.”\footnote{Federman, La voix dans le débarrass/The Voice in the Closet, 33.} The Twofold Vibration reverses these roles and has Sam crouching at the old man’s feet during an oration on the rights of animals.

Their “exemplary relationship” (29) is touted by the old man in a public speech, on the occasion of a trial. The accused is a “depraved-looking man” charged with the brutal rape of a poodle. In this “controversial case of animal rape by a human” the old man makes a forceful argument in defence of animal rights. He is so convincing that the attorney for the defence throws his papers on the floor in disgust, “upon which Sam promptly took a leak in front of everyone” (30). Sam’s gesture of defiance mirrors the rewriting of the little boy’s excremental gesture, as told to Moinous and Namredef by the old man: “he unfolded one of the newspapers with pictures of victorious soldiers marching into the city, and crouching like an animal, like a sphinx, he defecated his fear” (69). In his closet the boy crouches “like an animal” to complete his symbolic gesture against his oppressors, the “victorious soldiers,” mirroring the action of the Dalmatian during the trial. The old man and his dog, Sam and the little boy, become interchangeable. In the words of Pozzo: “I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine.”\footnote{Beckett, Waiting for Godot, 32.}

The poodle trial is not the first instance of bestiality in Federman’s oeuvre. In Among the Beasts the titular poem includes the following: “While the old man stood on a stool/loving the cow with a dirty smile/his trembling hand clutching his heart.”\footnote{Federman, Among the Beasts/Parmi les monstres, 10.}
and plant life are equally animate and threatening. In “Among the Beasts” the old man’s “love” of the cow questions the boundaries of the human. It also echoes disturbingly with the poodle trial and with the old man’s description in *The Twofold Vibration* of Sam and himself as “platonic lovers” (32). The old man is defending the rights of all animals by drawing on his “exemplary” relationship with Sam (29), as though the relationship itself was on trial. Animal rights is framed as a liberal cause; the attorney for the defence is “obviously bigoted” and mumbles during the old man’s speech: “have you ever heard anything more outrageous, seen anything more disgusting” (30). The political issues in the trial scene reverberate via associations with other “liberal” causes, drawing especially on anti-homophobic rhetoric. The psychological “normalcy” of animals is insisted on: “our animal therapists now tell us that animals are different from us only in degree” (29). These recent “psychological discoveries about animals” may refer to the recognition of homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation, rather than a psychological disorder, from 1973 onwards. Regardless of their “uselessness to humanity,” the old man asserts, animals “have a right to walk our streets in safety and enjoy their animal freedom” (31). Gay liberation is exactly the kind of liberal cause June Fanon/Jane Fonda campaigned for and that the old man (by “extension”) was “fiercely involved in” (29).

The presence of an “obviously bigoted” attorney also suggests the homophobic equation with bestiality, an equation hinted at in the description of Sam. As he elaborates on the perfection of their platonic love, the writer Federman offers the following information: “Sam had been so overprotected for half a century that he had never had occasion for sexual intercourse, not even with a member of his own species” (32). The qualifying “not even” opens up the possibility of love between animal and human, or between Sam and the old man/Federman. The insistence on the word “species” echoes a seminal passage in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*:

> We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterised (…) less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species.\(^{76}\)

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Federman’s use of the word “species” is a characteristic literalisation of Foucault’s “espèce,” as he conflates animal rights with gay liberation in the trial scene. This new species is defined by the 19th century (and Proustian) notion of inversion, “a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in one’s self” which Federman draws on in his bilingual and intertextual practice. By playfully misunderstanding the concept of a new “species,” Federman engages in an oblique manner with the political concerns of his age. This conflation however points to a darker reality, one from a less recent past, where homosexuals suffered the fate of other “human animals” in the death camps.

In *The Twofold Vibration* Sam, though accompanying the old man in the antechamber of departure, is not to be sent to the space colonies: “the dog will not be permitted to go with him, dogs are not deported to the space colonies, not yet, they are still considered inferior creatures, of little use in space, I suppose the poor animal will be exterminated once the spaceship leaves the launching pad” (28). The use of the word “exterminated” invokes the horror of the Holocaust. And though in the end the old man’s name will not be called, though he will be saved, Sam will not. He is taken away by two attendants in a pathetic scene recounted by Namredef:

One of them had a leash, you know the kind that slips over the animal’s head into a choker, without saying a word he put it around Sam’s neck, the old dog sensed that something was going on and started pulling away but without barking, just whining as if he had been wounded, he tried to plant his claws into the floor but it was so slippery, so hard, that plastic floor, he was sliding along as the attendants pulled him toward the door, the old man bent down to pat the dog on the rump and Sam looked up at him imploringly with those droopy bloodshot eyes of his, the old man turned his head away, and you won’t believe this, suddenly he kicked the dog in the ribs, oh no not hard, no, but just enough for poor Sam to groan, and then the dog quietly followed the attendants out into the corridor (165–166)

Oscillation between “Sam” and “the dog” confuses the reader’s points of reference and adds to the disturbing nature of the scene. It is “the dog” who is kicked in the ribs, but Sam who groans. It is Sam/the dog, the “animal,” who is led away to be “exterminated.” The old man’s actions both prove his love for Sam and his ultimately “inferior” status. Like Namredef, Moinous and the writer Federman, the old man doesn’t really grant Sam full equality, despite his vociferous claims to the contrary. During the poodle trial the audience is full of people with their own

various pets, interspecies pseudo-couples cheering on the old man. Yet his performance is just that, he doesn’t truly care, as he admits to Moinous and Namredef as soon as the trial is over: “What do I care about animalistic welfare, he said shrugging his shoulders, I have enough difficulties taking care of my own survival” (31). The writer “Federman,” too, is a fake when it comes to liberal causes. Moinous rails against him: “what about your phony cultural and political radicalism, don’t make me laugh Federman” (124). Despite the “perfection of his relationship with Sam” (31) the old man is unwilling to fight for the rights of his species. The old man and the writer “Federman” are both “phonies,” for whom political allegiance is nothing more than a performance—a lie.
vi) Temporarily Saved

In *The Twofold Vibration* the message “Temporarily Saved” (or “Temporarily Sane”) appears twice to Moinous and Namredef. In the first case the old man is on the brink of madness, in the second on the brink of deportation. “Temporarily Sane” is the inscription on Belacqua’s “notice” or “palimpsest” (a number plate roughly painted over) in Beckett’s short story “Love and Lethe,” amply playgiarised in *Double or Nothing.* Beckett has Ruby, Belacqua’s lover, scoff at his puerile artistic effort. By choosing Belacqua’s “real” failure—so different to Beckett’s aesthetics of failure—Federman aligns himself with the “macaronic” hero and once again plays with his own feelings of inferiority. When the doubled notice (Temporarily Sane/Saved) first appears, it follows one of the old man’s manic episodes. After the old man wins an enormous sum of money in a casino in Hamburg, he goes back to the hotel with Moinous and Namredef. The two watch as the old man undresses and spreads his loot, in small bills, into “a nest” (84). He starts crawling around in the money “like a giant worm,” “laughing hysterically.” Moinous and Namredef leave him, as “there was something painful in watching” (84–85). They return to a horrifying scene:

> he had jerked off wildly in the Deutschmark, masturbated and crapped in that money like an animal, like a little boy enraged by the pain of unfulfilled desire, and as we stood there we heard him laugh again, yes laugh and giggle in his sleep as he tossed, we watched him for a few moments, embarrassed at first, somewhat horrified, and then we too started laughing, like two clowns, what else could we do, yes like two dejected clowns who have messed up their act

(85)

This mad, mirthless laughter is the laughter of real failure. Charles Bernstein, in an interview with Raymond Federman, compares his laughter to that of Beckett’s. He observes that his humour, unlike Beckett’s, isn’t exactly black humour but “more sort of hysterical and more histronic.” Federman concurs and offers a helpful illustration. Unlike Beckett, who is an acrobat performing somersaults to land on his feet, he is “the acrobat who falls down on his face, so you don’t remember the somersaults.” Federman goes on to explain how this failure, when performed by a clown or acrobat, solicits a laugh, and that this is the kind of laughter he hopes to achieve. Like an acrobat falling on his face, like two dejected clowns messing up

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78 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 71.
their act—real failure, real unhappiness. Moinous and Namredef find themselves laughing at the old man’s condition, at the fact that he “had crapped in that money like an animal, like a little boy.” By extension, they are turning the closet episode—where the little boy crouches “like an animal” to defecate (69)—into a joke. However, equally by “extension”—“we are all extensions of each other, the living as well as the dead” (2)—they are laughing at themselves.

Simon Critchley’s *On Humour* examines laughter through a Beckettian lens. When the animal becomes human, Critchley writes, the effect is pleasing but “when the human becomes animal the effect is disgusting and if we laugh at all then it is what Beckett calls the ‘mirthless laugh.’” The mirthless laugh is described in *Watt* as the highest of laughs: “the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout—haw!—so. It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy.” The highest of laughs, the intellectual laugh makes one animalistic; “down the snout.” In *The Twofold Vibration* laughter is part of the fascistic future on The United States of Planet Earth. It was through an unexplained great burst of laughter, including members of the animal kingdom, that U.S.P.E. was made possible. A year after the laughter revolution the space colonies were established and those who “refused or were unable to laugh” were “found guilty of obstructing the shape of the new hilarious society” and deported (138). This “still unexplained burst of universal laughter” happened on “the very day the great Samuel Beckett celebrated his 87th birthday,” April 13th 1993 (137). The dog/God inversion is inflected through Federman’s treatment of laughter, as Sam is at once a great man of celestial import and the owner of a “snout.”

The highest of laughs is at once the cruellest of laughs, laughing at that which is unhappy. The cruelty of Arsene’s “laugh laughing at the laugh” (a phrase Federman frequently repurposes to describe his own poetics) is acknowledged in *The Twofold Vibration* by the writer “Federman,” as Moinous and Namredef recount the old man’s episode with the Deutschmarks. He does so obliquely, by quoting a passage from Sartre: “The order of the world conceals intolerable disorders, I say to my two narrators as they go on with their report” (85). The Sartre reference is to a particular moment in *Words*, a childhood memory. He remembers how his governess complained of low pay and her inability to find a husband. Feeling empathy for her plight, he

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reports her grievances to his grandfather. The latter laughs heartily, observing that she is too ugly to marry. As a little boy Sartre was not amused: “I did not laugh; could you be born condemned? In that case I had been lied to; the order of the world concealed an intolerable disorder.” Sartre’s question—“Could you be born condemned?”—makes one wonder about the old man’s name on the list. Why was he condemned? Why is he finally pardoned? The cruel laugh is both the laugh of the “dejected clowns,” Moinous and Namredef, and of Sartre’s self-satisfied, heartless bourgeois grandfather. The writer “Federman” does not partake in it, positioning himself instead as compassionate judge by parroting the words of Sartre. By bringing together Sartre and a consideration of laughter in Watt, Federman may be obliquely referencing Ruby Cohn’s 1962 Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut, cited throughout Journey to Chaos. In the opening of her chapter on Watt, Cohn quotes from Sartre’s Literary Essays: “‘Human ends are contingent; they are simple fact which the angels regard as we regard the ends of bees and ants.’ And what is the reaction of the angels? Jean-Paul was sure that it was laughter: “The angel laughs at man, the archangel at the angel, and God at all of them.” Federman’s laughter is distinct from Beckettian laughter. Beckett’s is a laughter from above, which as Critchley notes requires certain distance and maturity, most of all the ability to laugh at one’s self. This can only occur, according to Critchley, after “a certain maturation of the superego,” certainly not achieved by any of Federman’s creatures or narrators. Is this what Federman means, then, when he claims that Beckett is “an angel, from above”? Eventually the old man stops rolling around in the bills and falls asleep. When Moinous and Namredef return to the hotel room they find a note scribbled in red on a piece of toilet paper, perhaps recalling Claude’s farewell note written in “cheap red lipstick” in Take It or Leave It. Did the old man use his blood to write it, as Claude should have? His note is only two words long: “Temporarily Saved” (according to Moinous), though Namredef argues that it really says “Temporarily Sane” (88). It is typical of Namredef, the more scholarly of the two, to take this view. Understandable also that Moinous, having escaped death in a similar fashion, would focus on a life “saved.” As he is about to embark on the story of the stabbing episode (“his voice suddenly becoming melodramatic”) he insists that “I myself have experienced such madness, such hilarious madness” (86). The old man paradoxically cures himself (escapes

86 Critchley, On Humour, 103.
87 Federman, “An Interview with Raymond Federman,” by Larry McCaffery, 304.
88 Federman, Take It or Leave It, 289.
death and becomes sane) through “hilarious madness.” Federman describes his characters (including the old man) as “beings who have been turned loose in the world … and who are never sure whether they are going to become rational or if they are going to remain irrational. Like Beckett’s creatures, they are all born mad, and some of them will remain so.”

The old man’s laughter is connected to yet beyond the Beckettian *risus purus*; it is simply “mad laughter” (85) or in Bernstein’s words “hysterical” and “histrionic.” In one episode he laughs himself back to health, an ironic literalisation of the cliché “Laughter is the best medicine.” Moinous and Namredef recount how “it was in Sicily, when he had tuberculosis, just like his father” (67). As the three of them look out from the balcony of the Pensione the old man starts telling the entire closet episode, from the soldiers in the courtyard to the package of excrement placed on the roof “for the birds, I suppose” (69). Namredef and Moinous reflect on the importance of this story and refer directly to “The Voice in the Closet” (70). After the old man finishes telling the story, something shifts and he starts to laugh at himself:

> Sometimes it amazes me, he said quietly, how I have managed to become a character in my own stories, and how that boy has become a character in my own life, and suddenly he started to laugh, to laugh while coughing, but vigorously, almost hysterically, as if something had snapped inside him (71)

He continues laughing hysterically and “ranting like a lunatic” “night after night” (72). Moinous and Namredef hear him talking to himself: “This fucking world is saturated with false hopes, he was screaming,” “it’s all shit, de la merde molle et fumante” (71). Once his miraculous laughing cure is accomplished, the old man becomes “ferocious in his sexual indulgence,” getting himself kicked out of a hotel for having three “filles de joie” running around naked (73–74). This pornographic scenario is an exception in Federman’s early novels, not for its explicit content but for the “normalcy” and heteronormative “success” of the encounter—Temporarily Sane? The old man’s histrionic laughter, laughing at that which is unhappy—“this fucking world is saturated with false hopes” (71)—connects his plight to the brutality of the U.S.P.E. regime, where laughter is used as an instrument of oppression.

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The “notice” Temporarily Sane/Saved appears a second time at the end of The Twofold Vibration. As he waits in the antechamber/“final closet” with his Dalmatian Sam, the old man starts parroting Winnie from Happy Days: “Oh earth, you old extinguisher,” “Ah well, can’t complain, no no, mustn’t complain, so much to be grateful for” (155). The writer Federman recognises these fragments and writes them down so as to check the page numbers later. He remarks that the old man was always full of literary junk, “always full of classics, but what good did it do him” (156). This again recalls Winnie, who with pathetic irony gives thanks for the fragments of “classics” she still remembers. Belacqua’s literal piece of (literary) junk, an old numberplate painted over, finds its ghostly reiteration “scribbled” on the floor of the hall of departures, with an accompanying illustration of five playing cards, “you know gambling cards” (170). By bringing Beckett into a poker game Federman is accomplishing in fiction an image used in his criticism; in Journey to Chaos he described Beckett’s characters as “incurable poker players” who “cannot withdraw from the game until all cards are played, all the while knowing that the deck of fictional cards can be dealt and redealt endlessly.” Getting down on their hands and knees (like dogs?) Moinous and Namredef attempt to decipher this message sent by “someone,” someone who’s obviously been following the old man’s story enough to make a gesture at his gambling win, when these words first appeared. Once again they argue about their meaning (sticking to their original positions); Moinous reads “Temporarily Saved” and Namredef “Temporarily Sane.” “Quite a different meaning, don’t you think” Moinous remarks (170). Moinous and Namredef wonder if “perhaps it was a sign, even the answer to the whole situation.” Next to them another pseudo-couple, also on their hands and knees, are deciphering a different message: “we even heard them argue in a whisper, No I tell you, it says Free Village, one of them was saying, but the other insisted, You’re wrong, it says Free the Village, quite a different meaning” (170). Free the Village People? Free “the Village” as in Greenwich Village? Moinous and Namredef “were tempted to get involved in this interesting discussion which may also have had something to do with the present situation” (171). These “foolish distractions,” however, had made them lose sight of the old man.

91 “Ah earth, you old extinguisher” after her parasol alights in Beckett, Happy Days in The Complete Dramatic Works, 153. “Ah well, can’t complain, no no, mustn’t complain, so much to be thankful for” towards the opening, 140 in The Complete Dramatic Works.
92 Beckett, Happy Days, 164.
93 Federman, Journey to Chaos, 202.
vii) The twofold closet

There are indeed “two closets.” Why wasn’t this immediately apparent? In *Double or Nothing* the room/cabinet d’études (like the “cabinet de débarras”) is a space for “jews” and “queers,” also a space for love with Loulou. At one point, the protagonist of *Take It or Leave It* is accosted by “a fag who had stepped out of his closet.” He too has broken free from his room/closet and unto the open road, where he meets the beautiful young Claude. *The Voice in the Closet/La Voix dans le cabinet de débarras* sees him return to the closet, tortured into fitting into “boxes” with only dim recollections of a “lover man.” This text forms an absent-presence at the centre of *The Twofold Vibration*, where the old man waits in the “final closet of his earthly life” (28), all his friends and lovers dead. From 1986 onwards, Federman partly achieves what the old man’s wife asks of him in *The Twofold Vibration*: “why don’t you tell the story straight and stop playing games” (55). Gathered in such a manner, all signs point to a second closet. That this was not immediately apparent proves how deceptively “readable” Federman’s prose really is. Seeming all surface, his writing accomplishes the impossible goal he sets for himself: “I want to write a novel that cancels itself as it goes along.”

Campbell Tatham comes closest to addressing this second closet in his review of *The Twofold Vibration*. According to Tatham Federman’s fiction displaces the power of the father by asserting the shaping power of the imagination. His portrayal of women, however, betrays his inability to engage with the mother image, with his own “mother with her poor dark eyes always full of tears,” something “right out of Dickens.” Tatham judges Federman’s portrayal of women in *The Twofold Vibration* as “overly self-conscious and unconvincing.” This applies equally to his dutiful wife and to the “polymorphously perverse play with prostitutes.” Tatham notes that in the affair with June Fanon “the old man seems most secure,” though even there he “shifts uneasily between tenderness and parody.” For Tatham these “unconvincing” portraits bespeak “an anxious displacement. Of something.” He concludes that *The Twofold Vibration*...

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94 Federman, *La voix dans le débarras*/ *The Voice in the Closet*, 38.
95 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 5.
96 Federman, *Double or Nothing*, 122.
97 Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 207.
101 Tatham, review of *The Twofold Vibration*, 226.
Vibration both invites and forbids such psychoanalytic speculation, and that he “does not care to go” any further, focusing instead on the “delight” Federman’s writing solicits.  

Simultaneous inviting/forbidding places the reader in a delicate situation, a situation Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her seminal Epistemology of the Closet, elucidates. Writing on Proust, Sedgwick remarks that “the novel seems both to prohibit and to extort from its readers such a violence of interpretive uncover against the narrator, the violence of rendering his closet, in turn, as spectacle.” Proust’s narrator Marcel is a spectator to the unfolding dramas between Charlus and Jupien. Hidden from view, the observing narrator traces the play of masculine/feminine gestures, the oscillations of gendered identity involved in their courtship. For Sedgwick these “destabilised gender configurations” are further estranged by Proust’s use of botanical and bird imagery, “sex/gender difference and species difference keep almost-representing and hence occluding one another.” Charlus and Jupien are on one level symmetrical mirror-images, equivalent in their inversion. At the same time, Sedgwick notes, Proust figures their dance in male/female terms: “one might have thought of them as a pair of birds, the male and the female.” A pair of birds—Loulou, Flaubert’s parrot? “The Blue Bird?” The gentlemanly hen of the Wake? These intertextual strands are too thin to offer support. Federman’s engagement with the Proustian universe in The Twofold Vibration nevertheless justifies further observations.

Sedgwick’s analysis of Proust can elucidate some of the unease Tatham identifies in The Twofold Vibration. For Sedgwick, “the way figures of women seem to preside, dumbly or pseudo-dumbly, over both gay and homophobic constructions of male gender identity and secrecy is among the fateful relations dramatized in and around À la recherche.” The “omnipotent” yet “unknowing” mother silently watches over the narrator’s own oscillations. Sedgwick emphasises the enduring relevance of such a figure in the “homophobic insistence, popularized from Freudian sources by Irving Bieber and others in the fifties and sixties, that mothers are to be ‘blamed’ for—always unknowingly—causing their son’s homosexuality.” This is played out in Double or Nothing with Boris’ “mother complex” and inflected through 

102 Tatham, review of The Twofold Vibration, 226.
104 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 219.
106 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 251.
107 Sedgwick, 249.
Federman’s repurposing of Kristeva in *The Voice in the Closet*. Ultimately “the closet episode” is about his mother pushing him into the closet, saving him from the Nazis but also forever casting him as *from* the closet, the space of his rebirth. Without the mother, there would be no closet. Yet her all-determining role is constantly evaded, as not only Tatham but Federman himself acknowledges. The mother’s “unknowing” power is in stark contrast to the “phallologocentric authority” (Tatham’s terms) of the father. These two kinds of authority are played out in the construction of Federman’s Jewish identity. Though a feather-man through the name of the father, it is only through the mother’s womb (closet-space of his rebirth) that he becomes a Jew, Judaism being of matrilineal descent. The “dumb or pseudo-dumb” mother ultimately presides over both closets.

These two closeted identities are expressed, in Proust, by a masking of the voice. Drawing on Sedgwick’s work, Jonathan Freedman investigates the function of the “Jewish closet” in *À la recherche*. Freedman compares Charlus, the closeted homosexual, with the narrator’s friend Bloch, a second generation Jew attempting to enter high society. Both Charlus and Bloch mask their true identity by professing to despise their own people. Freedman notes that “Charlus’ attempts to ‘pass’ as a straight man are compared by the narrator with reference to the most aggressively self-hating tactics of the Jews.” Freedman singles out an incident where Marcel and Saint-Loup, sitting outside a canvas tent, overhear a “voice” railing against the “swarm of Jews” at Balbec. The voice deridingly mimics a Jewish accent to illustrate his point. When the man emerges, Marcel recognises his old friend Bloch, with his unmistakeably Jewish features. According to Freedman “the tent provides a precise image of self-enclosure,” at once an “oriental” image of Jewishness and an emblem of the aristocratic leisure class. The anonymous voice attempts to pass as non-Jew precisely by mimicking the Jew’s broken French, their characteristic “voice.” In Proust’s world the voice at once exposes and conceals, a privileged vehicle of the closet. In *Sodome et Gomorrhe* the narrator claims that, like a clinician, he is able to expertly discern a man’s hidden pathology only by listening to him.

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108 For some reason I cannot deal with her.” Federman, “An Interview with Raymond Federman,” by Larry McCaffery, 289.
109 Tatham, review of *The Twofold Vibration*, 225.
111 Freedman, “Coming out of the Jewish closet with Marcel Proust,” 346.
speak. Despite the invert’s skill in imitating the intonation and manners of his milieu, his “voix fausse” ultimately betrays him.\textsuperscript{112}

As a spectator to his own life, Marcel is in Beckett’s words “present at his own absence.”\textsuperscript{113} In \textit{The Voice in the Closet} the little boy Federman once was, the voice of the past, accuses the writer by inverting Beckett’s formula: “pretending to set me free at last in the absence of my own presence.”\textsuperscript{114} The writer federman is reducing him to the condition of Marcel, also the condition of the Unnamable: “To make me think I was a free agent. But it would not be my voice, not even in part.”\textsuperscript{115} This other voice belongs to one called “Basil” or “Mahood”; “I’ll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that, I’m queer.”\textsuperscript{116} He finds that if he must speak, it is “in this voice that is not mine,” for he has no voice: “I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know.”\textsuperscript{117} In \textit{The Voice in the Closet} the writer federman pretends to set the little boy free to speak in his own voice at last but only tortures him out of silence, into a “voix fausse.” A false voice, a lying voice to tell the “lie” of fiction, “Federman on Federman: Lie or Die.”

For Federman fiction is a lie because the past can never be retrieved, it must be invented. In his essay on autobiography, he insists on the Proustian equation of memory with imagination. Parts of “Federman on Federman: Lie or Die” are self-plagiarised from an early review of Deleuze’s \textit{Proust et les signes}. In this very favourable review, Federman insists (through Deleuze) that Proust’s work is as much about the future as the past, not so much time retrieved as “eternity.” Federman glosses: “It is not the rediscovery of past experiences through the function of memory, voluntary or involuntary, it is an inventive effort to interpret, translate, explain what Mr Deleuze calls ‘les signes ou hiéroglyphes’ of the various worlds in which the narrator circulates.”\textsuperscript{118} Likewise, the role of Federman’s reader is not to search for the truth of his past (his true voice) but to decipher the signs that appear to us on our journey. These signs point towards two closets, towards birds and mouths and dogs and Gods, towards absent mothers. Ultimately, all signs point to the crucial four signs, absent in their own presence: X-X-X-X.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Proust, \textit{Sodome et Gomorrhe I}, 133.
  \item Beckett, \textit{Proust}, 27.
  \item Federman, \textit{La voix dans le débarras/ The Voice in the Closet}, 57.
  \item Beckett, \textit{The Unnamable in Trilogy}, 312.
  \item Beckett, 309.
  \item Beckett, 309.
\end{itemize}
CONCLUSION

Though laughter plays an important role in *The Twofold Vibration*, the novel is less funny than *Take It or Leave It*, and much less so than *Double or Nothing*. Examining what I term Federman’s early fiction, from 1971 to 1982, one traces the emotional trajectory as Federman circles ever closer to X-X-X-X. In *Double or Nothing* the first, second and third persons were let loose, the “overall looker” relegated to a few ironic asides. Some of the scenes—Ernest’s mother, the toothbrush guy—are laugh-out-loud funny. Though Beckett and Joyce are used to mock the writer’s aspirations, the first person is left to go on joyously perverting the discourse. *Amer Eldorado/ Take It or Leave It* sees the rise of paranoia and aggression. The sexual episodes have a violent edge to them,¹ as do the teller/told’s anti-establishment rants. The spirit of play expands, however, into the mystical realm, with the development of Hombre della Pluma. This is checked by a return to the closet, as the “original voice” is boxed in by sam/sam and federman/fèderman. In *The Voice in the Closet/ La voix dans le cabinet de débarras*, the masochistic scene affords no comic reprieve. This bilingual text is the absent centre, the core of Federman’s 1982 novel. Federman once said that “reflection only begins with *The Twofold Vibration.*”² There is a note of deep sadness to this reflection, to the resignation of the old man:

> there is some truth in what Moinous is saying, we do live our lives with a sense of inner emptiness, boundless repressed rage and frustration, and unsatisfied oral cravings, we’re not blaming you, but look how calculating and devious we have become, doesn’t make sense anymore, notice also the decline of the spirit of play in us, the deteriorating relations between us, and then tell us that there is still hope, that everything is fine, that eventually our undertaking will turn out for the best, who are you kidding³

I have observed that “the decline of the spirit of play” is correlated, in Federman’s fiction, with the closeting of queer dynamics. Though these certainly merit further analysis (particularly in their intersection with racialized identities) the aim of this thesis was to examine Federman’s use of Beckett. In Federman’s impossible intertextual project, the words of Sam come from both above and below, within and without. By absorbing Beckett’s words into his own, Federman reverses the order of attribution to find his “original language.”

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¹ A particularly disturbing “funny” story is told to Claude, about an ugly man working behind the scenes in an automated canteen. See Federman, *Take It or Leave It*, 273–277.
As the old man of *The Twofold Vibration* awaits in the antechamber of departure, stroking his faithful dog, he reflects: “Words are both what help us get where we want to go and prevent us from getting there.”\(^4\) As often happens with Federman, fiction and criticism will eventually corrupt each other. In “The Writer as Self-Translator,” a scholarly essay on Beckett published in 1987, Federman reformulates the old man’s aphorism: “For as Beckett knows so well and has often suggested throughout his work: Language both gets us where we want to go and prevents us from getting there.”\(^5\) In *Critifiction*, published in 1993, this statement is presented as a direct quotation of Beckett (though no true Becketteer would be fooled).\(^6\) All this makes one wonder to what extent the real “Sam” was aware of Federman’s use of him. Did he ever read *The Twofold Vibration*? What did Samuel Beckett, the man, think of Federman’s own God-dog inversion? Should it matter?

According to Knowlson’s biography, Federman and Beckett were indeed friends and saw each other occasionally.\(^7\) In *Le livre de Sam*, Federman recounts a particular instance of Beckett’s generosity. After he told him that his father, Simon Federman, was a surrealist painter before the War, Beckett made some enquiries with artist friends to see if they could locate any of his works (the search never proved fruitful).\(^8\) That Beckett did make at least one enquiry is attested to in his correspondence.\(^9\) The two were not on intimate terms, however, as Federman himself readily admits.\(^10\) Again according to *Le livre de Sam*, Beckett was a little embarrassed after Federman sent him a copy of *Amer Eldorado*, dedicated “pour SAM”: “Je ne savais pas si cette dédicace était pour moi, ou pour Uncle Sam, ou pour ton chien.”\(^11\) There is no way of knowing if Beckett really said this. Perhaps Federman is only using “Sam” to gesture at something else, just as he does throughout his work. All of this makes Becketteers feel very uncomfortable—myself included. Why did Federman need to do that? And what do I mean by “that”? Are there grounds for plagiarism? Surely not, Federman’s playgiarism never seeks to pass off Beckett’s

\(^6\) Federman, *Critifiction*, 89.
\(^7\) Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 654.
\(^8\) Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 105.
\(^11\) Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 27.
work as his own. It’s more like a kind of reverse plagiarism—an “inverted” plagiarism? A paranoia of attribution? Reading Beckett and Joyce, Federman sees himself, his own real experience. Using Mann’s terminology, I described this as “aggressive identification.”¹² By exposing his own insecurities and petty jealousies, Federman brings the scholar’s masochistic aggression into the light, into laughter, laughing at himself and his own unhappiness with “the laugh that laughs at the laugh.”

It is of some comfort to know that Raymond Federman was not the only one to overstep the mark. Beckett was also mentor to another Raymond—Raymond Cousse—a convicted criminal who, like Federman, belonged to the French working class. He is known for _Stratégie pour deux jambons_, a monologue from the perspective of a self-satisfied, conservative pig awaiting slaughter. Cousse himself played the part of the bourgeois pig in the 1980 début production.¹³ Raymond Cousse took his own life at the age of forty-nine, on the 22nd of December 1991, the anniversary of Samuel Beckett’s death.¹⁴ Karine Germoni describes him as Beckett’s “fils naturel,”¹⁵ his natural and illegitimate son. Did the “misopedic” Sam (Stewart’s formulation) give birth to two Raymonds? Are there many more illegitimate children? Are they, as in Kristeva’s reading of Beckett, coming together to take part in the “detritus” of the totemic meal? If Cousse and Federman are bastard sons, then where do the Becketteers fit in? Surely we are not legitimate? Like Campbell Tatham reviewing his friend’s novel, I prefer not to take this psychoanalytic line of enquiry any further.¹⁶

Researching this thesis has brought up a lot of unexpected things. When I first read Fordham’s phrase about philological work being “a game for literary truffle hounds,”¹⁷ I pictured a pig, not a dog. I didn’t know that dogs could even do that kind of work. I’d heard about truffle hogs, and always wondered how you could stop them from eating the truffles before they could be collected and sorted. They must be kept on a leash, by an exacting master. When the hog makes a mistake, hesitates in his decision, is he reprimanded like Lucky in _Godot_: “Think, Pig!”¹⁸ Lucky responds to Pozzo’s command with his famous monologue, a parody of the learned

¹² Mann, _Masocriticism_, 37.
¹³ Début production at the Lucernaire in 1980, with Cousse in the title role. See Raymond Cousse, _Stratégie pour deux jambons_ (Monaco: Groupe Privat/Le Rocher, 2007).
¹⁶ Tatham, review of _The Twofold Vibration_, 226.
¹⁷ Fordham, _Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake_, 31.
¹⁸ Beckett, _Waiting for Godot_, 41.
discourse of the “Acacacademy” interrupted by the scatological *cri de cœur*, “quaqua.”  
Repeating Lucky’s words and styling himself as Beckett’s creature, Raymond Federman attacks and undermines academic values—in other words, bites the hand that feeds him.  

In the process of writing this thesis I too have, more modestly, been led to appreciate the limits of academic criticism. In Federman’s surfictional vision, our relationship to a text is so much projection and fetishization, or at best a kind of literary mysticism. In *The Twofold Vibration* Federman claims that “the story is my life.”  

In *Critifiction* he has an antagonistic critic (after accusing him of fabricating the closet episode) declare that “though I may be suspicious of the facts of your life, I trust your stories.”  

By playing with his survivor status, he forces us to recognise the inadequacy of criticism as just another kind of story. As we are repeatedly told in *Take It or Leave It*, this isn’t the “real stuff.” The real Pen Man, the featherman/Federman, was forged outside of fiction and has experienced the kind of suffering most writers and intellectuals haven’t. Yet he relinquishes even the authority of his primal loss, emphasising his own lack of originality: “that’s all it is, a story, anybody’s story, one story among millions of others just like it.”  

Though as Alsop remarked the themes of Beckett’s work are the themes of Federman’s life, the reverse is also true. Federman’s story belongs to Beckett, is best told in the master’s words.  

I hope if anything this thesis has shown that Federman’s writing rewards close and active engagement. Federman refuses to take responsibility for his own life story or to guide the reader towards meaning. Instead he invites us fellow creatures to play with him, leaving us clues along the way. As much as his texts seem to shout, there is always a “voice within a voice.” With Federman things tend to be hidden in plain sight. When I made one of my most important “discoveries,” that there are two closets, I could only laugh out loud—to myself, for of course there was no one else around. Writing a thesis is lonely work. When Federman was writing, he liked to imagine a benevolent Sam watching over him. I never got the chance to meet Raymond Federman, the man his friends called Ray. But I like to think that, along this journey, he’s been laughing with me.

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20 Federman, *The Twofold Vibration*, 150.
24 Federman, *Le livre de Sam*, 64.
WORKS CITED

1. FICTION BY RAYMOND FEDERMAN


2. CRITICISM BY RAYMOND FEDERMAN


3. GENERAL


