

Lynn Brunet

'A COURSE OF SEVERE AND ARDUOUS TRIALS'

BACON, BECKETT AND SPURIOUS FREEMASONRY
IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRELAND



ireimagining land

The artist Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and the writer Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) both convey in their work a sense of foreboding and confinement in bleak, ritualistic spaces. This book identifies many similarities between the spaces and activities they evoke and the initiatory practices of fraternal orders and secret societies that were an integral part of the social landscape of the Ireland experienced by both men during childhood.

Many of these Irish societies modelled their ritual structures and symbolism on the Masonic Order. Freemasons use the term 'spurious Freemasonry' to designate those rituals not sanctioned by the Grand Lodge. The Masonic author Albert Mackey argues that the spurious forms were those derived from the various cult practices of the classical world and describes these initiatory practices as 'a course of severe and arduous trials'. This reading of Bacon's and Beckett's work draws on theories of trauma to suggest that there may be a disturbing link between Bacon's stark imagery, Beckett's obscure performances and the unofficial use of Masonic rites.

Lynn Brunet is an Australian art historian whose research examines the coupling of trauma and ritual in modern and contemporary art and literature. She was a full-time lecturer in art history and theory from 1994 to 2006 and she is a practising artist. She lives and works in Melbourne.

'A Course of Severe and Arduous Trials'

Reimagining Ireland

Volume 6

Edited by Dr Eamon Maher
Institute of Technology, Tallaght



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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Introduction

This study is the product of a developing body of research and a new theory within the creative arts that proposes that particular artists and writers, especially those who appear to express a deep and confusing sense of anxiety and despair, may be representing the traces of initiatory rites found in various fraternities, religious groups, secret societies and cults.

Two of the twentieth century's most important creative figures, the artist Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and the writer Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), both convey in their work a sense of foreboding and confinement in bleak, ritualistic spaces. Gilles Deleuze has suggested that it is in these spaces that Bacon and Beckett 'have never been so close', as Bacon's figures and Beckett's characters 'trundle about fitfully without ever leaving their circle or parallelepiped'.¹ This book provides a reading of Bacon and Beckett's work that demonstrates the many parallels between the spaces and activities they evoke in their work and the initiatory practices of fraternal orders and secret societies that were an integral part of the social landscape of the Ireland of their childhood. As T. Desmond Williams notes, secret societies were probably more a part of everyday life and politics in Ireland than in most other countries and since the eighteenth century new fraternal orders were being formed in Ireland every decade.² Many of these societies modelled their ritual structures and symbolism on the Masonic Order.³

In the modern era the artist's role has often been interpreted as providing an important link to the subliminal currents that underpin the community, revealing those taboo or repressed issues that the society as a whole is unable to confront. Some artists do this by exploring their own struggles and psychological experiences and then externalising these explorations in creative form. The cliché of the tortured artist accompanies this modern concept. By making their struggles visible artists confront their viewers with unresolved issues that some in the public may share.

Often neither the artist nor their audience is fully aware of the implications of their work.

Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett could each be described as driven by a powerful creative force underpinned by a sense of disturbance that has not yet been fully understood. Both have plumbed the darkest levels of their psyches and transferred their responses onto the canvas, be it a literal piece of linen, a theatrical stage or the pages of a novel. Bacon called this process of transference 'the pattern of one's own nervous system being projected on the canvas.'⁴ Beckett's realisation that his literary voice needed to be based on the dynamics of the psyche and on the 'big blooming buzzing confusion' of his own inner turmoil was a decision that marked him as a new voice in theatre and one that was to be representative of his time.⁵

This book asks whether the sense of disturbance created in their work could be associated with traumatic exposure to initiatory rites that were commonly practised by many secret societies in early twentieth-century Ireland. As there is no evidence to suggest that either man ever joined any secret societies this study asks whether they could have been exposed to the rituals in some other context.

As anthropologists explain, the use of initiatory rites applied to children and accompanied by a series of frightening tricks, enacted as rites of passage into adulthood, is a common practice in many cultures. These rites can often be painful and terrifying affairs and are generally conducted by specially appointed ritual elders. Many societies frown on such practices, regarding them as a sign of a backward culture, one steeped in superstition and fear, and claim a more enlightened view where the child is spared such brutal horrors. But what if similar practices lie behind the work of Bacon and Beckett? The reading here suggests that there may be the traces in their work of a clandestine initiation process, one that draws on a combination of Masonic rites, Druidic lore, Irish mythology, and biblical and classical themes, blended together with a liberal dose of cruelty.

Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett share a number of commonalities in their life experiences. Both were born in Dublin, Beckett in 1906⁶ and Bacon in 1909.⁷ Beckett spent his childhood in suburban Dublin while

Bacon as a child lived in the rural county of Kildare not far from the city, interspersed with periods living in London. Both lived through the Irish Civil War. For Bacon this was experienced close at hand, while for Beckett it was a more distant reality. Both left Ireland, Bacon in his youth and Beckett in his young adulthood, to pursue their careers in the wider artistic world beyond Irish shores. Both were raised as Protestants and both rejected their religion proclaiming either an atheistic or agnostic position. Bacon's response to religion and its accompanying hypocrisy was one of vehement disgust;⁸ while Beckett rejected his Protestant upbringing regarding it as 'only irksome and I let it go'.⁹ Both grew up in an environment where Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations were close at hand, providing a sanctuary for the men in a socially sanctioned and exclusively male environment.

Both men carried a burden that informed their artistic work. Bacon was homosexual in an age when it was still regarded as a crime. His incompatibility with the ideals of masculinity shared by his male relatives and much of the Irish community of his childhood led to his rejection of the mores of his day and his claim to an outsider status. The theme of homosexuality, violence and turmoil permeate his images, while the chaotic state of his studio, immortalized in his famous comment, '[t]his mess around us is rather like my mind', reflected the state of confusion that accompanied much of his personal life.¹⁰ Beckett experienced problems with depression, night terrors and anxiety attacks in his young adulthood that led him to undergo a two-year period of psychoanalysis in London. While his relationship with his mother was fraught with tension and may have been the cause of some of his emotional difficulties, his period of psychotherapy proved largely ineffectual with the analyst finding no clear causes for his extreme level of anxiety.¹¹ The theme of mental distress, inner turmoil, and a sense of emotional void is one that runs throughout Beckett's work.

The work of both artist and writer has been interpreted in many ways, among them as representing existential themes and a deep level of angst that surrounded mid-twentieth-century culture. The reading here will suggest that the degree of angst in their work may be associated with the subject of a developing body of research, one that suggests that the

initiation of children by members of fraternal groups and secret societies may be one of the more clandestine practices of western culture.¹²

As Alan Axelrod notes, the whole concept of a secret society is a male institution.¹³ Most secret societies incorporate some form of initiation, utilising the themes of birth, death and rebirth found in the primordial practices of many cultures. These initiatory rites typically express a fear of female power and an appropriation of women's power to give birth.¹⁴ Taking the child from the realm of the mother and 're-birthing' him into the reality of war, toughness and masculinity is the principle upon which the ancient practice of male puberty rites is based. As Paul Nettl suggests, these primordial practices may have been the original basis for the evolution of secret societies, which led ultimately in the eighteenth century to the elaborate and formalised rituals of the institution of Freemasonry.¹⁵

Since its inception in the eighteenth century the Masonic Order has spawned a proliferation of allied secret societies and fraternities that have adopted its ritual structures for their initiation practices. In Ireland, by the turn of the twentieth century, much of the male population belonged to one or more of these organizations. These societies were sites of male solidarity and many of them drew on Masonic rites for the form and symbolism of their rituals; many also infused ancient Celtic beliefs and Druidic practices into their ritual processes. The central practice of initiation in these societies took on a range of forms, sometimes reflecting the Irish warrior tradition as well as classical and Egyptian themes, Christian beliefs and Old Testament narratives.

Freemasonry has attracted a continuing debate between apologists and detractors who have argued for and against its role in western society and of more neutral historians and philosophers who have traced its ancestry and attempted to weigh the opposing positions. At the core of these discussions lies a duality; a duality that anthropologists explain accompanies initiatory practices across cultures. Evan M. Zuesse, for example, suggests that there are two forms of liminality created through initiation: positive liminality, which integrates structure and builds up a divine order and negative liminality, which destroys order and isolates its victims.¹⁶ The tradition of initiation involves knowledge of the human psyche that can be utilized in one of two ways: either in its symbolic form

as a signifier of a legitimate spiritual and moral path for the individual, or for the purpose of power over others. Freemasons have devised the terms 'true' and 'spurious' Freemasonry or 'regular' and 'irregular' practice to address this issue and in the history of the Order a number of eminent Freemasons have debated the nature of these two forms. At the heart of this duality lie the nature of power and the application of metaphysical principles for corrupt or benign purposes.

The formal rituals that were eventually sanctioned by Grand Lodge, those practices regarded by Masons as 'regular', 'pure' or 'true' Freemasonry, took on a highly symbolic and spiritual significance that was originally modelled on the principles and trade union practices associated with the craft of building the great cathedrals of the medieval period. Only to be available to willing adults, these sanctified rituals were intended to symbolically express the soul's journey from birth to death, and initiates were to be taught various spiritual, philosophical and moral principles to enable them on their journey through life.¹⁷ Initiation, in this context, is seen to represent the theme of spiritual renewal and the initiate's progress through various degrees, a symbolic expression of his spiritual progression. All Masonic degrees are aimed at edifying the initiate through a series of allegorical and cautionary tales as well as mythological enactments. A set of high moral principles and philosophical ideals, as well as a set of strict guidelines acknowledged by Grand Lodge, has accompanied the Order's official representation of itself since the Enlightenment.

However, as a number of key Masonic authors note, corruption has been woven into the Order since its inception and is present amongst the vast array of loosely related variations of the basic Craft degrees.¹⁸ Freemasons term those rituals regarded as unacceptable to Grand Lodge 'spurious' Freemasonry or 'irregular practice' and the debates among Freemasons as to when and where these forms originated have been long and much argued. Some Masonic authors claim that the difference was based on geographical concerns, with Britain the site of the genuine Order, while other Masonic authors, such as Robert Freke Gould, claim the character of the Enlightenment itself, despite its rhetoric of reason, to be responsible for the emergence of 'all kinds of strange and disordered fancies, the work of disordered imagination, to an extent probably

never known before ...'¹⁹ Individual characters such as the 'magician' Count Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo, 1743–1795), regarded by many as a charlatan, were deemed responsible for spreading irregular versions throughout the Continent.²⁰ Cagliostro was to revive Gnostic practices that contained elements derived from Egyptian sources.²¹ In the eighteenth century initiation into Cagliostro's Egyptian Freemasonry became a fashionable preoccupation amongst the aristocracy, for both men and women alike.

Masonic authors who connect Freemasonry to a more ancient lineage argue that the pure and spurious forms were present in its earlier incarnations. Among them, C. W. Leadbeater, writing in 1926 stated: 'Masonry, as we have it today, is the only true relic of the faith of the patriarchs before the flood, while the ancient Mysteries of Egypt and other countries, which so closely resemble it, were but human corruptions of the one primitive and pure tradition.'²² Albert Mackey, looking at the philosophical roots of Freemasonry in biblical times, argues that the pure form was that practised by the Israelites and involved a belief in the unity of God and the immortality of the soul.²³ The spurious forms, he argues, were those sets of initiatory rites practised by the pagans, including all of the different cult groups of the Classical world. These pagan versions, he suggests, were based on 'a course of severe and arduous trials ... a long and painful initiation, and ... a formal series of gradual preparations', which the candidate voluntarily underwent in order to seek the enlightenment of a mystical experience.²⁴ Mackey locates the spurious forms in terms of their use of terrifying initiation practices and the use of 'a scenic representation of the mythic descent into Hades, or the grave, and the return from thence to the light of day'.²⁵ These two different forms, he argues, merged during the building of Solomon's Temple to produce an immediate prototype of the modern institution.²⁶

The ordeals of the ancient mystery cults were intended to produce altered states of consciousness, a mystical encounter experienced as a state of bliss or a sense of oneness with the Divine. The methods used involved the exploitation of pain, fear, humiliation and exhaustion.²⁷ Such techniques appear to have emerged from the warrior tradition, where, through the exposure to scenes of brutality and the fear of imminent death, a

warrior could experience a blissful state of release and a sense of immortality. These practices were associated with beliefs in the transmigration of the soul that encouraged warriors to sacrifice themselves in battle.²⁸

The relationship between the feeling of terror and the sense of a 'sublime' experience became one of the key themes of the Enlightenment philosophers, many of whom were Freemasons and therefore familiar with the principles of initiation. Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke were both Freemasons who commented on this theme. Kant had stated that the experience of the Sublime, induced through the feeling of being overwhelmed through terror, is a condition in which the individual's imagination fails to comprehend what is actually occurring.²⁹ Similarly, Burke had argued that the experience of terror had the capacity to produce a set of responses that place the individual in a unique state. This state he called Astonishment, 'that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended', producing 'the effect of the Sublime in its highest degree.'³⁰ Terror, he argues, is the ruling principle of the Sublime, and involves the impulse for self-preservation. Burke mentions the Druids in this context and comments on the obscurity of their rituals in the dark woods and under the oldest and most spreading oaks. 'To make everything very terrible,' he says, 'obscurity seems in general to be necessary.'³¹

In Ireland in the pre-Christian period the Druids, who were the priestly advisors to the Irish kings, were the overseers of an initiatory process that incorporated a set of painful and terrifying practices. In Druidic initiation candidates were locked up in caves, crawled through long tunnels or were sealed into chests or coffins for days at a time, to emerge 'twice-born'.³² These initiatory practices were euphemistically known as the 'mystic fire' and the candidate's eventual release from these torturous trials was sometimes expressed in terms of an emergence into a blaze of light.³³ In Irish lore the peoples who were regarded as bringing these mystical practices to Ireland were known as the Tuatha dé Danann, a mysterious race that was associated with the gods or the 'fairies'. Some believed they were overthrown by another race, the children of the Gail Glas, who had come to Ireland from Egypt *via* Spain, who also brought their initiatory traditions with them.³⁴ As Dudley Wright notes, '[the Druidic] ceremony of initiation was similar to the Egyptian rites of Osiris,

which were regarded as a descent into hell, a passage through the infernal lake, followed by a landing in the Egyptian Isle of the Blessed.³⁵

Writing in 1894 James Bonwick commented on the interest held amongst Irish Freemasons of the day in the magical powers of these ancient peoples. He states: '[e]nthusiastic Freemasons believe the Tuatha were members of the mystic body, their supposed magic being but the superior learning they imported from the East. If not spiritualist in the modern sense of that term, they may have been skilled in Hypnotism inducing others to see or hear what their masters wished them to see or hear.'³⁶ Such practices, while regarded with high esteem in some circles, were perceived with suspicion in others. In the late seventeenth century the Irish freethinker John Toland had aired his views on the Druids, regarding them as deceivers of the people, who through trickery led the people by the nose.³⁷ As Andrew Prescott notes, there is a body of writing going back as far as Jonathan Swift that connects Masonic practices with that of the Druids.³⁸

When Christianity came to Ireland in the person of St Patrick in the fifth century the Druids were to recognise a number of similarities between Christian and pagan practices that encouraged them to convert to Christianity, allowing a relatively easy transition from one set of beliefs to the next.³⁹ The version of Christianity St Patrick brought with him contained Gnostic elements and was a syncretic blend of Greek and oriental traditions.⁴⁰ Among these traditions was the Gnostic practice of initiation. St Patrick's Purgatory, celebrated at Lough Derg in County Donegal in Ireland, was a practice whereby a priest would be locked up for long periods in a cave, known as the Cave of Death. The pilgrim would proceed through the cave and experience a series of frightening trials incorporating terrifying sounds, visions of fiery punishments and an encounter with demons in order to test his faith.⁴¹ Lough Derg was also thought to have been a site of Druidic initiation.⁴²

By the turn of the twentieth century in Ireland, just prior to the birth of Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett, the various threads of these metaphysical traditions had merged and were present in a range of forms amongst the secret societies of the day. Many of the men of the ruling Protestant elite belonged to Freemasonry, while working class Protestants

were likely to belong to any number of the various secret societies that utilised Masonic-style rituals for their initiatory practices. Some men belonged to a number of fraternities. While outwardly respectable church-going men embraced the tenets of Christianity, it appears that behind the closed doors of the lodges and meeting rooms these same men may have been practising initiatory rituals derived from various pagan and classical sources.

Male initiation processes in general demonstrate the ever-present threat that men can impose on each other and the close proximity of death in all relations between men. The terror experienced by the novitiate is the central ingredient of the initiation process and his vulnerability throughout the experience marks the power of the group over the individual. Once safely through this process he is then protected by the group provided he adheres to the strict requirements of secrecy. The cementing of male relations through implied terror – we could kill you but we have chosen not to – is the hallmark of all fraternal initiatory structures. Anthropologists have long recognised that central to the initiatory process across cultures is the use of shock to place the candidate into an altered state in order to be receptive to new information.⁴³ The experience of terror is thus a key ingredient of the initiation process and the symbolism of death and rebirth, to represent the change that the initiate must undergo, accompanies most, if not all, initiatory processes.

Contemporary psychology has, over the course of the twentieth century, developed an extensive knowledge of the effects of shock, terror and trauma on the psyche of the individual. Research suggests that dissociation, memory loss and identity fragmentation are common responses to the experience of trauma.⁴⁴ In psychoanalytic terms dissociation refers to ‘... a compartmentalization of experience ... [in which] traumatic memories are characteristically stored separately from other memories, in discrete personality states.’⁴⁵ They result from an experience of overwhelming threat in which the totality of the experience is not accommodated within ordinary memory. Traumatic shock immerses the individual into a state described as ‘a phylogenetically older psychological mechanism – to freeze or play dead, or ... psychic numbing’.⁴⁶ It is produced through a natural biological response where the brain produces a wave of opiates to numb

the individual to what would otherwise be an overwhelming experience, often associated with an imminent sense of death. Such a mechanism clearly has a protective function, serving the psychic preservation of the individual in the context of a terrifying ordeal. This concept of dissociation seems to approximate the eighteenth century philosophers' views on the Sublime, where the individual fails to comprehend what is occurring in front of them and experiences a state of Astonishment, 'that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended'. In the context of the initiatory ordeal the effect of the brain's natural opiate production can give rise to those sensations associated with the mystical experience such as a state of divine bliss, a sense of going 'into the light' or of blissfully floating away from the body.

Traumatic experiences, if they are repeated often enough, especially in childhood, can remain cordoned off and unavailable to the normal waking consciousness of the individual. This amnesia often manifests as a central and profound absence that is felt as a deep and pervasive sense of confusion. Freudian explanations of this amnesia are that it is 'a defensive process ... in which the memory of the trauma is incompatible with the subject's other conscious ideas'.⁴⁷ While the individual can remain amnesic to the original events, the side effects of traumatic experience can be the serious and debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as anxiety, nervousness and depression, sleep disturbances, the tendency towards addictive behaviours, personality fragmentation, psychosomatic symptoms and so on.

As I will suggest, both Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett demonstrate many of the traits associated with repressed trauma. For a creative individual, the sense of disturbance that underpins traumatic experience can be a powerful stimulus to the production of creative work. While the events and circumstances of the trauma remain repressed they can nevertheless be felt in all their intensity, as Bacon suggests, as an effect 'on the nervous system' experienced by the individual as a series of dissociated images, sounds, bodily responses and tactile sensations and involving a profound sense of confusion. The following discussion will demonstrate that, coupled with a sense of trauma in their work, there appears to be

many traces of Masonic rites, suggesting some form of exposure to ritual practices.

As Ross Nichols notes, Druidic magicians sometimes dipped or annealed children in the mystic fire, a euphemism that implies that, in pre-Christian times, children were sometimes submitted to initiatory ordeals.⁴⁸ Research since the 1980s has revealed the continuation of such practices in the contemporary era.⁴⁹ After preliminary revelations of the ritual abuse of children in Britain, the United States and other first world countries in the 1980s a set of heated public debates ensued, but by the late 1990s the topic had plunged into obscurity.⁵⁰ However, psychologists at the coalface have since documented many cases and a body of research has emerged that confirms the existence of ritual abuse as a contemporary practice. In the American context, for example, James Noblitt and Pamela Perskin were able to provide a comprehensive summary of the data using an anthropological and historical methodology that attempted to put the material into context. They examined the broad range of accounts of religions, cults, and fraternal organizations that used traumatic rituals for the purpose of creating altered states of consciousness.⁵¹ These mental states, they argue, have sometimes been viewed as sacred, but can also be used for psychological control. Their conclusion, like that of others who have explored this field, is that the practices appear to have been going on in an underground form, perhaps for centuries.

A definition of ritual abuse derived in 1988 at the University of New Hampshire and employed in the field states that it is '[a]buse that occurs in a context linked to some symbols or group activity that have a religious, magical, or supernatural connotation, and where the invocation of these symbols or activities, repeated over time, is used to frighten or intimidate the children.'⁵² Ritual abuse is rarely enacted as a single episode but is usually repeated over an extended period of time and can begin in early childhood.⁵³ The psychologist Lenore Terr notes that children who go through such repeated trauma, as opposed to those who only experience a traumatic event once, learn to protect themselves by the use of repression as a defence against remembering.⁵⁴ Many psychologists have observed that survivors commonly report abuse in Masonic contexts, using Masonic ritual and regalia.⁵⁵ In a discussion of this phenomenon

Noblitt and Perskin state that it is ‘possible that such cultists operate within Freemasonry without the knowledge or consent of the majority of its membership ... [and] ... it is also possible that some cultists imitate Masonic rituals during their abusive ceremonies.’⁵⁶ Such a statement correlates with the arguments proposed by those Masonic authors who acknowledge the existence of spurious Freemasonry and the potential for the degradation of the rituals when not practised according to the strict guidelines of Grand Lodge.

The following analysis of the work of Bacon and Beckett will take into account contemporary research into the mechanisms of trauma and the phenomenon of ritual abuse, as it is currently understood. Their work has often been regarded as epitomising the dark underside of the modern experience. This book supports that presumption by suggesting that they may have depicted, in close detail, something of the trauma associated with this dark underside. It will argue that their powerful imagery may be pointing to the continued use in the modern era of an archaic initiation practice that combines the ‘old religion’ of Ireland with the beliefs of the Old Testament and the practices of the Classical period. It will suggest that Bacon’s stark imagery and Beckett’s obscure performances may be two separate artistic responses to a course of severe, arduous and painful trials carried out in Ireland in the early twentieth century.

Francis Bacon, Royal Arch Rites and the 'Passing of the Veils'

When they first appeared in public the paintings of Francis Bacon were regarded as some of the most disturbing images to have come out of the twentieth century. Terms such as 'sinister', 'alarming', 'violent' and 'nightmarish' accompanied their initial reception.¹ While his audiences may have grown familiar with them their stark subject matter still has the power to disturb; they remain uneasy pictures, sometimes conjuring an inexplicable discomfort in the viewer.² Many of Bacon's images are highly ritualistic and he has even been described as a religious artist, though he espoused a staunch atheism.³ This disparity between the artist's atheism and the presence of both religious and ritualistic themes in his paintings has remained one of the more intriguing aspects of the artist's work. Commenting on this disparity Michael Peppiatt states, '[it] is as though Bacon were doomed to officiate as a religious artist in a world where he and his public had lost all faith.'⁴

Many critics and commentators on Bacon's work have noted that his images are difficult to interpret. The artist himself, as Martin Harrison observes, '[refused] to interpret his paintings, he claimed not to know what they meant himself ... Neither would he discuss his subconscious impulses or the psycho-sexual analysis of his paintings.'⁵ When asked about the sources of his paintings Bacon repeatedly claimed that there was no literal meaning, no story that he was trying to tell, but that the images represented the patterns of his nervous system projected onto the canvas.⁶ On one occasion he said, 'I'm just trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can. I don't even know what half of them mean.'⁷ He claimed that he was lucky as a painter because he said, 'images just drop in as if they were handed down to me.'⁸ The possibility that these images

may relate to childhood in some way may be reflected in his statement: 'I think artists stay much closer to their childhood than other people ... they remain far more constant to those early sensations.'⁹

Bacon's insistence on the relationship between his visual images and his nervous system suggests the possibility that he could have been describing the effects of traumatic experience. As the psychologist Bessel van der Kolk notes, in highly traumatic situations, ones that place the individual in fear for his life, the events are no longer stored in the brain in narrative form, available to verbal recollection, but are stored as a series of dissociated images, sensations, 'bodily memories' and affective states that remain in compartmentalised form and as intense as the original experience.¹⁰ In such cases the narrative of the traumatic encounter can be effectively lost to everyday consciousness and the individual is left incapable of describing the events or the feelings associated with them in verbal form. According to clinical trials, the right side of the brain is non-linguistic, but is the site where traumatic experience is stored in dissociated sensory details. As van der Kolk states, during experiments designed to restimulate traumatic memories, 'there is a decrease in activation of the Broca's area – the part of the brain most centrally involved in the transformation of subjective experience into speech. Simultaneously, the areas in the right hemisphere that are thought to process intense emotions and visual images show significantly increased activation.'¹¹ In contemporary clinical psychology, the concept of images 'dropping in', as Bacon describes them, is commonly known as a 'flashback'. The psychologist David Healey suggests that these inner images held by traumatized patients, once previously regarded in the field as superficial and of no real value, might be important indicators of traumatic contexts. While they often portray only fragments or segments of an incomplete picture, they may nevertheless depict an accurate portrayal of a real situation that should be taken seriously.¹² Judith Lewis Herman cites the role of 'traumatic dreams', which can 'often include fragments of the traumatic event in exact form, with little or no imaginative elaboration.'¹³

Visual artists generally combine many elements to produce their images, including symbolic motifs, fantasy themes, painterly concerns and allusions to the work of other artists. The process of delving into the

liminal realms of the 'unconscious' is one of the strategies incorporated into the working methodology of many artists. However, in the case of artists who might be responding to traumatic material it may be important to acknowledge some of the ways in which they describe their artistic process. Francis Bacon once said to David Sylvester that whenever his paintings worked well, it was because they felt physically right, that the figures captured a gesture that he felt within his own body.¹⁴ This could suggest that some of the positions of the figures in his images may be capturing the position of his own body during a traumatic experience. Some images may also convey an overall 'haptic' response to a traumatic encounter, that is, an entire kinaesthetic and emotional response to a frightening situation, rather than any sort of visual description of an actual scene. Other images may be a combination of these factors.

The following discussion will apply some of the insights from the field of trauma studies to the analysis of Bacon's images. It will suggest that some of his paintings may be a depiction of fragmented scenes from one or more traumatic ritual encounters possibly undergone in childhood. By piecing together the content of his more ritualistic images, along with a number of the comments he has made in interviews, and analysing this in the context of the practices of initiation in early twentieth-century Ireland, it may be possible to unlock some of the narrative secrets that continue to haunt his work.

Francis Bacon was born in Dublin in 1909 to Protestant parents and his early years were spent in the context of the Irish Civil War. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all military men and members of the English gentry resident in one of the prosperous rural districts surrounding Dublin, the Curragh in County Kildare.¹⁵ In the early twentieth century the British military presence in the Curragh reflected the colonisation of the Irish Catholic population by English Protestants. This colonisation had begun over two hundred years before when Prince William of Orange defeated the army of the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.¹⁶ The Protestants held most of the land around Dublin and in the homes of the gentry, such as Francis Bacon's family, Roman Catholics acted as servants in upper-class Protestant households. As

Andrew Sinclair observes, military men like Bacon's father 'knew that a show of force was necessary to keep a potential Irish rebellion down'.¹⁷ A military ethos was applied within the Bacon household and was to have a detrimental impact on the young Bacon's day-to-day existence. As David Sylvester notes, 'Bacon was the son of an army captain who was himself the son of a captain and grandson of a general. He grew up in fear of his father who despised him as a weakling'.¹⁸

The Curragh in County Kildare has had a long involvement with both military and religious practices throughout its history and the many raths and tumuli found within the region recall the ritual practices of the Druids. The region is also known as St Brigid's Pastures after the patron saint of Kildare but was once the sacred site of the goddess Brigid, one of the forms of the great mother-goddess held in much honour in pagan Ireland.¹⁹ A garrison church built for Protestant members of the military in the centre of the military camp was known from 1893 as St Brigid's and a cathedral of the same name was built in 1871.²⁰ Known also as the Church of the Oak, it attested to the transition from Druidic practices to Christianity. As legend has it St Brigid was the daughter of a Druid who in the fifth century came to the Curragh in a horse-drawn chariot from Heaven to Kildare.²¹ The horse in Ireland was regarded as a sacred animal reflecting an ancient belief in the role of the horse to draw the solar chariot across the sky; in the twentieth century this belief translated into a high level horse-racing industry centred in the Kildare district.²² In 1900 Colonel William Hall-Walker purchased a stud at Tully on the Curragh that in 1915 became known as the Irish National Stud where Ireland's leading racehorses are still being bred.²³ Bacon's father, Edward Anthony Mortimer Bacon, was involved with the horseracing industry.²⁴

The region also has a long involvement with secret societies, where initiatory practices from Gnostic Christianity overlapped with those of the Druids. It may be relevant to the theme of Druidic initiation that an ancient tunnel, only large enough for a single human being to crawl through but several miles long, extends from St Brigid's Cathedral to the ruins of the Black Abbey, a Templar Church dating from 1212, situated in the grounds of the Irish National Stud at Tully. The region claims associations with the Knights Hospitaller, one of the knightly orders that were

involved in the medieval Crusades. These knightly orders branched into a number of different streams and the various secret societies that grew out of them shared aspects of their ritual symbolism.²⁵

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, due to the close association between the Craft and the military, the Masonic Order had a strong presence in the region. A number of regimental warrants were granted in this district by the Grand Lodge of Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the United Services Masonic Lodge (No. 215) was formed in the town of Newbridge, one of the towns Bacon knew as a child.²⁶ It is likely, as David Fitzpatrick suggests, that the men in Bacon's family were members of Freemasonry, though the lack of family papers makes this claim difficult to establish.²⁷ The officer class in the region were generally members of the Masonic Order²⁸ and in Bacon's case there was an important ancestral link: the young Bacon's namesake, the seventeenth century philosopher and Lord Chancellor of England, Sir Francis Bacon, was reputedly to have established his own Masonic Order.²⁹

A popular millenarian concept held at the turn of the twentieth century by a number of secret societies was a belief that the Anglo-Saxon race was descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel.³⁰ Between 1899 and 1902 members of the British-Israelites, including a number of key Freemasons and high ranking military men, led an archaeological expedition on the Hill of Tara to dig for the lost Ark of the Covenant, believed to have been brought there by the Lost Tribes in biblical times. The ancient site of Tara is north of Dublin in County Meath and is regarded as an important sacred site where the Irish kings were crowned. As Mairéad Carew argues, many of the British Protestant Freemasons of the day believed that Druidism was the ancient faith of Britain and that Tara was its great Irish stronghold.³¹ Needless to say the archaeological expedition did not uncover the Ark of the Covenant but desecrated the sacred site, which was experienced by the native Irish as an assault on their national identity.³²

The theme of the Ark of the Covenant surfaces in one of the key rituals of Freemasonry. Known as Royal Arch rites, it is based on the Old Testament story of the second pilgrimage of the children of Israel, who were exiled in Babylon, on their return journey to rebuild the Temple of

Solomon, which had been destroyed by pagan forces. The degree's aim is to 'exalt' the initiate towards the experience of a mystical vision and union with the Divine.³³ Masonic Royal Arch rites were known in Dublin as early as 1744.³⁴ These rites have been utilised in different forms by a number of secret societies in Ireland, including the Orange Order, to be discussed more fully in Chapter Two. As the following will outline, many of Bacon's paintings appear to reflect aspects of this ritual.

Bacon produced many images containing curtains and a rectangular structure in the centre of a windowless space. He said, 'I've always wanted to paint curtains, I love rooms that are hung all around with just curtains in even folds.'³⁵ The artist noted that his grandmother's house and that of another relative contained rooms with extensive curtaining, seeming to explain his love of these textures.³⁶ However, his paintings do not convey the comforts of a domestic interior; rather, his curtains frame images of screaming figures, ghoulish popes and painfully contorted bodies suggesting a more frightening scenario.

In Ireland, as the Masonic author A. O. Aspeslet notes, the ceremony of the Passing of the Veils constitutes a very important part of Royal Arch rites and is an elaborate degree, full of symbolism.³⁷ In this part of the ritual the initiatory space is set up to resemble the tabernacle where the Ark of the Covenant was kept during the Israelites' journey across the desert. According to biblical accounts the tent's interior contained ten curtains that were arranged 'so that they could be fastened together along their edges, by fifty loops on one edge of each, and fifty hooks of gold, so that it should become one Tabernacle.'³⁸ In the Royal Arch initiatory space an elaborate system of curtains or veils is suspended from a framework in the centre of a windowless room. There is a blue veil, a purple veil, a scarlet veil and a white veil and 'the altar is placed about two paces east of the white veil leaving sufficient room between the Altar and the dais for perambulations.'³⁹ Instructions suggest that the veils can be plaited around poles or looped over wires. The veils are stretched right across the Chapter room and create a series of cubicles in which different sections of the ritual take place. This curtained arrangement, combined with the intense experience that the initiate undergoes within each cubicle, is

intended to make a lasting impression on the candidate. Three members, known as Principals, oversee the enactment of the rites. They represent Prince Zerubbabel, the prophet Haggai and Joshua the High Priest. The members wear gowns and various headdresses; the High Priest's headdress is similar to that of a bishop or pope.

Many of Bacon's images of popes as well as other portraits and figure studies contain curtains in the colours listed in the rites. These are depicted with vertical stripes of colour and spherical shapes to suggest curtain rings. In *Pope I*, 1951, for example, the curtains are purple, in *Study after Velazquez II*, 1950, and *Untitled (Pope)*, 1950, scarlet and in *Crouching Nude on Rail*, 1952, the curtains are blue. The curtains in a number of these paintings, such as *Study After Velazquez*, 1950, and *Study from the Human Body*, 1949, are more tonally represented but could be read as 'whitish' in colour. In *Man at Curtain*, 1950 (revised 1951), a figure appears to be either opening or closing a set of curtains that are 'fastened together along their edges' with safety pins. In most of the images with curtains there is some sort of frame structure, either a simple rectangular shape or a more complex set of structures that suggest multiple curtain rails, some with curtain rings. Previous interpretations of the rectangular structure have suggested that it is an artistic device to render three-dimensional space or to isolate the figures from their backgrounds.⁴⁰ The above information suggests that the artist may have been referring to an actual physical structure that correlates with descriptions of the Royal Arch initiatory space when set up for the ceremony of the Passing of the Veils.

Bacon had admitted to being fascinated by ancient Egyptian art and had visited Cairo briefly in 1950;⁴¹ however the only visual references he makes to Egyptian art are his depictions of sphinxes. *Sphinx* and *Sphinx III*, painted in 1954, each depict a sphinx set in a curtained space. In the latter image the sphinx is surrounded with a haphazard arrangement of block-like forms. It is perhaps relevant to this discussion that the Grand Royal Arch Room in Dublin's Masonic Grand Lodge is furnished on an Egyptian theme, a popular style for Masonic lodges created across Europe in the late nineteenth century.⁴² The dais contains replicas of two sphinxes, one on either side of a tall rectangular scarlet covered throne and attendant chairs.⁴³ During the ceremony of the Passing of the Veils

the candidates undergo a series of ritual processes before qualifying for the degree. In irregular versions of the rites these processes can be undergone as a series of arduous trials; one of these trials is known as the Rugged Road. Here the blindfolded and barefooted candidate must negotiate a path created around the room comprised of blocks of wood, brambles and sometimes coke and cinders, while his legs are being whipped and kicked, to the accompaniment of hilarious laughter by the fraternal members.⁴⁴ Bacon's *Sphinx III*, where the sphinx is surrounded by scattered blocks, implies the possibility that the artist may have been recording a visual image of such a setting within a Royal Arch initiatory space. Taking David Healey's argument into account, in all of these curtain images the artist may have been representing fragmented scenes, imprinted on the brain, of an environment associated with a traumatic experience. The Royal Arch room in Dublin's Masonic Grand Lodge is one site where such initiations occur, although given the various versions of Royal Arch rites used in Irish secret societies at the time it is possible that similar elements, including models of sphinxes, could have been found within a range of fraternal contexts.

As the anthropologist Victor Turner notes, the tradition of initiation generally involves a profoundly humiliating, terrifying and even painful process which the initiate undergoes before being elevated in status.⁴⁵ He says, '[the] novices are taught that they did not know what they thought they knew. Beneath the surface structure of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn, through paradox and shock.'⁴⁶ The sacred instructions being imparted during the initiation include 'exhibitions', 'actions' and 'instructions' and can incorporate crude gestures.⁴⁷ These can be conveyed through pantomimic displays and scenic representations. Mircea Eliade notes the retention of ordeals, special teaching and secrecy in contemporary initiations, and the pattern of initiatory torture, death and resurrection in ancient practices.⁴⁸

In Royal Arch rites the process through which the candidate is led follows a defined pattern of movement termed 'perambulations', signifying the wandering of the Israelites across the desert. One of Bacon's favourite films was Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*, which he saw many times. The film depicts an uprising of ordinary sailors against their officers

and is a celebration of fraternity in the context of the Russian Revolution. The victims include the women and children and, as many critics have observed, the scene that influenced Bacon the most was that in which the nanny is shot and the woman loses control of the pram and it crashes down the Odessa Steps, endangering the life of the child within.⁴⁹ One of the photographic images Bacon had in his studio was a still from this Odessa Steps sequence depicting the white pram careering down the steps as the central focus of the image.⁵⁰ In the context of the initiatory experience, losing control of the 'perambulator' can signify a loss of control of the rites so that they are not performed according to the stipulations of Grand Lodge but are modified to include any number of bizarre behaviours combined with the traditional rituals. In Masonic circles this misuse of the rites, as stated in the Introduction, is termed spurious Freemasonry or irregular practice. The initiation of children can be one variation and can amount to a criminal application of the rites. As Laurie Matthew notes, 'this usually involves [the children] taking part in forced sexual activity of some kind [and] responding to the abuser's demands in a multitude of different ways, both physical and sexual violence ...'⁵¹

Bacon was interested in forensics, as one of the books found in his studio attests⁵² and comments like 'the scene of the crime' and a 'bed of crime' appear in his notes.⁵³ The themes of ritual and crime appear together, scrawled into the endpapers of one of his sourcebooks, V. J. Stanek's, *Introducing Monkeys*, c. 1957.⁵⁴ Here he refers to the scene of a crime that appears to be taking place in a round space. The notes state:

The bed of crime in centre of circular room
with carpet – non-patterned carpet.

man pulling screaming child in centre of circle
mans figure against tent

Figures fucking in middle of carpet possibly
chair as in Vatican picture at side.

He then goes on to summarise these individual themes into a strategy for painting:

Concentrate all ideas for paintings in back of book into studies
 Images of the human body
 Turn the local image + movement into *ritual image*.⁵⁵

In the context of this discussion, the stanza 'man pulling screaming child in centre of circle, mans figure against tent' is ominous, implying the possibility that the artist may be describing a terrifying process involving a child, that is occurring in a tent-like space. The ritual abuse of children is generally carried out over an extended period in childhood and is comprised of a series of terrifying and sometimes painful events.⁵⁶ Due to these acts of repeated trauma the child's natural defence mechanism of repression is induced, so that he effectively forgets the events that have taken place.⁵⁷ If some of Bacon's work were depicting some form of ritual crime, then it would have been necessary to ensure that the child, even if he does remember, never speaks of the events. Powerful threats would need to be employed so as to ensure that this never occurs.

In various versions of Masonic rites the initiate is confronted with a number of threats, enacted as scenic representations, to maintain his silence about the content of the degrees. At one stage the initiate is required to repeat what he has seen in the rites and the words are: 'Death in all its horrors, staring me in the face, a spear to pierce my heart, a sword to run me through, and a gun to shoot me, should I divulge'.⁵⁸ It is not uncommon for fraternal initiations to go to extreme lengths to trick the initiate into believing that they are literally confronting death face-to-face and the use of blank gunshots to frighten the initiates is not uncommon. Furthermore, cases in which candidates have been mistakenly shot dead during the rites have been noted in the history of the Masonic Order.⁵⁹ In 1980 Bacon painted *Three Figures, One with Shotgun*. The figures are arranged on a scarlet coloured podium set on an orange background. One is looking down the barrel of a shotgun directly towards the viewer; the shotgun is balanced on a tripod. Bacon's painting captures the visual impression of a scenario that reflects the wording found in Masonic initiations.

Bacon's preoccupation with the image of the nanny being shot in the face in *The Battleship Potemkin* could be a response to such an initiatory trial. A traumatic encounter such as this may well have been lost to

consciousness but the sensations associated with it, what Bacon describes as the patterns of his nervous system, appear to have surfaced in his images. His many portraits in particular portray fragmented faces as if they have been damaged, shot or mutilated. In *Three Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1969, each of the three portraits contains a depiction of a hole in the face that could suggest a bullet hole. His series of self-portraits *Three Studies for Self-Portrait*, 1974, and a similar series in 1976 depict his own face distorted and include black oval spaces at various points on the faces that appear to be a response to the oval form of the nanny's glasses in *The Battleship Potemkin*. Mutilated faces and similar oval forms appear throughout his oeuvre implying that the fear of being shot in the face could have been permanently imprinted on the artist's psyche, a constant reminder of a traumatic initiatory experience.

Further to these enactments of the threats, the initiate swears an oath that includes three 'solemn penalties' that he will undergo before divulging the secrets of the rites.⁶⁰ The first two penalties are:

First – That I would suffer my throat cut across from ear to ear, my tongue torn out by its roots, and with my body buried in the rough sands of the sea, two and a half cable toe lengths from where the tide ebbs and flows, about twice in a natural day, before I would divulge. Second – That I would suffer my left breast torn open, my heart and vitals taken therefrom, and with my body given to the vultures of the air, or the wild beasts of the field, as a prey, before I would divulge.

In *Triptych*, 1976, Bacon depicts a black suited figure with a wounded ear in the left panel, while the central panel depicts several dark birds of prey attacking a headless figure with a mutilated chest and exposed organs, illustrating aspects of the first and second penalties.⁶¹ In *Sand Dune*, painted in 1983, the artist depicts an area of dune sectioned off by a rectangular form against an orange background. An arrow points to a particular spot on the dune and a light switch hangs above. An earlier painting, *Landscape*, 1978, portrays a similar concept of an area of dune trapped within a rectangular form, set this time on a blue background. These images suggest a connection between the seaside and the ritual space, linking them to the first penalty. Through the use of the arrows they could be depicting where the hapless initiate's body will lie if he ever

divulges these secret rituals. David Sylvester's response to these paintings of sand dunes resonates with this interpretation. He suggests that the undulating mounds looked like 'mysterious covered bodies moving in their sleep'.⁶²

The third penalty states:

That I would suffer no less a penalty than that of having my body severed in two, one part carried east, the other west, taken to the top of some high hill or mountain, the parts thereof burned to ashes, the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven, so that not a vestige of such a vile or perjured wretch as I should remain amongst men ... should I divulge, part or parts, secret or sign, sign or token, of anything I had received ...⁶³

While an adult may regard such threats as a puerile form of bluff, impressed upon the fragile psyche of a child, and in the context of the reality of death and civil war that surrounded the young Bacon, such threats could have been powerfully imprinted. The animal carcass split in two depicted in *Painting*, 1946 is one of the iconic features of Bacon's work. As Bacon had said of his fascination for butcher's shops: '[i]f I go into a butcher's shop I always think it is surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal' implying some form of identification with these severed carcasses.⁶⁴ It is relevant to note here Bacon's request for his own death, that there be no funeral service and no friends were to be invited and that he be unceremoniously cremated. Bacon had remarked that in relation to the disposal of his remains, that the gutter or a ditch was good enough for him.⁶⁵ While Bacon's atheism has generally been offered as an explanation for this request, in the context of the initiatory material presented here it is possible that his request may have reflected aspects of the initiatory oaths. Perhaps through exposing the themes in his art, he had, in some secret part of his being, become the 'vile and perjured wretch' of the Masonic pledge. Bacon was unable to piece together the narrative in his own lifetime; however, given the transcripts of Masonic rites and the knowledge of ritual abuse available today it is possible to piece together something of the horrifying ritualistic scenario that could be informing his work and make further sense of the nightmarish quality of some of his images.

In the regular practice of Royal Arch rites the candidates are prepared for initiation in the following way.⁶⁶ The Principal Sojourner prepares three candidates by having them take off their coats, supplies them with a veil and slippers and ties a bandage around their eyes as a blindfold. The use of the blindfold in the tradition of initiation is to confuse and disorientate the candidate and to facilitate the effects of a startling vision or visual impression when the blindfold is suddenly removed. The rites state that not less than three candidates can perform the ceremonies and so if there are not three then volunteers from the fraternity must make up the trio.

In the triptych that launched Bacon's reputation, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, the central figure is blindfolded, while the left-hand figure is encased in a veil. As David Sylvester notes, the form of the handkerchief seems to be drawn from Grünewald's *Mocking of Christ* and the figures with their stretched-out necks create a sense of menace and hysterical anguish, like an animal fighting for its life.⁶⁷ None of the three figures in this triptych have eyes: they are either covered with hair, as in the figure in the left panel, or with the blindfold in the centre panel, or are simply non-existent, as in the figure in the right panel. None can see and yet their other senses seem to be alive to some overwhelming horror. As one of Bacon's most successful works this triptych appears to capture the animal sensations of terror in haptic form. The blindfolding and veiling of the figures reflects the preparation of the candidates for a Royal Arch initiation.

The theme of blindness appears in other paintings, sometimes in more cryptic form. In *Painting* 1946, the centre panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, and a number of other images the artist depicts three 'blinds' in the rear of the images, perhaps suggesting the three blind candidates. Many of Bacon's faces are rendered without eyes suggesting the loss of vision that the blindfolded initiate would have experienced. In *Head I*, 1948, a blind cord is touching a meticulously rendered ear while the rest of the facial features are distorted into an image of pain and horror, perhaps as a response to some sort of shock. The perfect rendition of the ear could be implying that the sense of hearing has remained clear and sharp and attentive to the auditory details of the ordeal.

At the beginning of the initiation the Principal Sojourner leads the candidates into the ritual space stating: 'Companions, you will follow me. I will bring the blind by a way they know not: I will lead them in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and will not forsake them. Stoop low, brethren: he that humbleth himself shall be exalted'. Meanwhile, the brethren form two lines facing each other and each locks his fingers with those of his opposite Companion creating a Living Arch. As the blindfolded candidates pass through the Living Arch the brethren knuckle them upon the necks and backs, kneading them pretty hard sometimes, and prostrating them on the floor so that they have a good deal of difficulty in forcing their way through.⁶⁸

Crouching figures appear frequently in Bacon's images and the beatings he received under his father's orders would no doubt have been significant here.⁶⁹ However, accompanied by the signifiers of the initiatory space these crouching figures reflect the cowering position assumed by the initiates as they pass through the Living Arch, symbolising the humbling aspects of the initiatory ordeal. In the left panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, the left-hand figure has a bowed head exposing an exaggerated neck and shoulders. The form of the bent neck and shoulders is repeated in *Figure in Landscape*, 1945, and similar crouched figures appear in *Two Figures in a Room*, 1959, *Figures in Landscape*, 1956, and other paintings. The emphasis on this part of the body suggests that Bacon may have been depicting a 'body memory', not only of the sense of humiliation of the crouching stance, but also of the physical impact of the initiatory knuckling on the back of the neck. In *Study for Nude*, 1951, and *Study for Crouching Nude*, 1952, a horizontal line with numerals, suggesting a ruler, is depicted behind a crouching figure along with the curtains and the familiar rectangular frame. In Masonic initiations one of the symbolic objects presented to the candidate after the initiatory trials is a ruler or gauge. Richard Carlile suggests that it is to remind the initiate to carefully measure his duties, while Albert Mackey suggests it is to represent time well employed.⁷⁰ It could also be read to signify one of phrases used in the rites, to make 'crooked things straight'.

At a certain point in the ritual the candidate's blindfold is removed and a frightening scene confronts him. Afterwards the candidate is questioned by the Principal Sojourner and asked, '[w]hat did you stand in most need of?' The candidate answers, 'light'. He is then asked, '[d]id you get that light?' The candidate answers in the affirmative and is then asked, '[w]hat did you first behold?' and the candidate replies as stated above, 'Death in all its horrors ...'⁷¹ The representation of light bulbs and switches permeates Bacon's images suggesting a preoccupation with the concept of 'illumination'. In more symbolic forms of initiation this concept implies a mystical encounter, an experience of a higher order. However, Bacon's use of such mundane devices as light bulbs and their switches reduces the concept of initiation to its more vulgar components. In *Triptych – March*, 1974, for example, a figure in a butcher's apron appears to be turning on a switch while in the centre panel a figure is recoiling as if away from the light or the vision that is before him.

Painting, 1946, one of Bacon's favourite works,⁷² may be an example of such a vision. It depicts a dark dictator-like figure under a black umbrella, positioned in front of a large animal carcass with what appears to be entrails hanging above. There are two slabs of meat in front skewered by the curved railing, suggesting the piercing of the spear and sword in the words of the rites and what appears to be several pairs of microphones arranged around the central carcass. The three 'blinds' appear in the background. This image suggests the sort of scenic representation or tableau, noted by anthropologists, whose aim is to produce a strong visual impact on the initiate; in this case, as the blindfold is suddenly removed. It also appears to be demonstrating aspects of Druidic rituals. Bull sacrifice in early Ireland is well documented and the Druidic arts involved the foretelling of future events through the examination of the animal's entrails as well as the chewing of raw animal flesh in front of their idols, a divination process known as *Imbas Forosna*.⁷³ In Bacon's painting the figure in front of the carcass has what appears to be blood on his upper lip, suggesting such a practice. As James Bonwick notes, the bull in Ireland was sometimes referred to as the Deity of the Ark.⁷⁴ Beef carcass symbols appear on cairns in County Meath at megalithic sites such as the Hill of Tara.⁷⁵ Tara's sister hill Uisnech, as well as the great burial

mounds at Brú na Bóinne, near the River Boyne, form the mythological centre of Ireland. The legendary Fintan was said to describe the relationship between Uisnech and Tara using the expression 'like two kidneys in a beast'.⁷⁶ If the scenario being presented here is correct, the inclusion of the double microphone shapes in *Painting*, 1946, a motif repeated in a number of Bacon's images, could also be interpreted as pairs of kidneys, perhaps reflecting the words spoken in a version of the rites that included elements from Irish mythology.

In the centre panel of *Triptych*, 1976, discussed earlier in relation to the oaths taken in the rites, the human carcase has what appears to be a bowl of blood in its lap and a chalice full of blood is in the foreground. In her discussion of contemporary ritual abuse in Scotland Laurie Matthew notes that animals are commonly used as live sacrifices to be tortured, mutilated or killed in front of the children in order to enhance the group's power, and that bowls and chalices are used to collect the blood.⁷⁷ Sometimes the children are required to hold the bowls while the blood is being let. It may be that *Painting*, 1946, and *Triptych*, 1976, are both related to this practice. The earlier painting appears to represent a sacrificed bull or cow displayed in front of the initiate, while the latter seems to be conveying the impression that a similar fate will be in store for him if he ever betrays the secret of these practices. If this fate were powerfully impressed on the artist as a child, then this would further help to explain the feelings of identification Bacon had when going into a butcher shop.

Fragment of a Crucifixion, 1950, depicts a mutilated and legless figure draped over the top of a cross and a vaguely owl-shaped figure with an open human mouth beneath. David Sylvester has described the figure on top of the cross as a dead dog,⁷⁸ perhaps illustrating another example of animal sacrifice. Bacon's familiar frame structure implies that the scene appears to be set within the context of the Royal Arch initiatory space while loosely sketched pedestrians and vehicles imply the simultaneous everyday life of passers-by outside the space. The cross depicted here is not that associated with Christ's crucifixion it is the 'T' shape of the Tau cross, the central symbol for the Royal Arch degree.⁷⁹ The Tau cross is related to the ancient symbol of the swastika, the symbol that the Celts called

'fylfot', also present in Royal Arch rites.⁸⁰ Bacon had famously denied that the swastika he depicted on the armband of a figure in *Crucifixion*, 1965, had been intended to denote Nazism, an odd statement that critics have found difficult to explain.⁸¹ However, given the argument here, that we may be looking at a depiction of the irregular use of Royal Arch rites, which uses this symbol, then such a statement is not so out of place.

If, as the argument is suggesting, these scenes were enacted in front of Bacon as a child, involving secrecy, bizarre rituals, and the pomp and ceremony of a group of powerful and important men, their impact would have been far greater and more indelibly imprinted on his nervous system than on that of an adult who may have perceived the rites as exaggerated and even laughable theatrics. Similar rites are used by the Orange Order and as one Orangeman observed, '[t]he initiation is a bit amusing ... when you come home you think it is a bit silly.'⁸² David Sylvester noted that Bacon was concerned with the excessive nature of *Painting*, 1946, but nevertheless felt that it was a serious and important work. Sylvester's comment was that these themes in his work might even prove laughable for future generations.⁸³ Nevertheless, for a child the impact of such an impressive display would have been profound but undoubtedly would have translated as the product of a vivid imagination if he were to describe it.

In the ritual abuse of children the exposure to frightening scenes are intended to shock the child and to silence him. The process involves repeated applications of shock that are graded according to the age of the child. Each shock is more frightening than the last and each is intended to confuse and alarm the child to the point where he or she faints with terror and, in losing consciousness, loses all conscious access to the information. The series of images on the theme of the Crucifixion appear to be representing an even more terrifying layer of experience than that already discussed. As Michael Peppiatt has observed, Bacon had remarked that in painting a Crucifixion 'he was in reality expressing his own private feelings and sensations ... [and that] ... a Crucifixion came almost nearer to a self-portrait.'⁸⁴ The presence of a naked male figure alongside a curtain in *Study from the Human Body*, 1949, could suggest that we may be looking at a very debased form of the rites, where it is possible that sexual behav-

iour has replaced the more solemn and dignified behaviour used in the Passing of the Veils as sanctioned by the Irish Grand Lodge.

If Bacon were, in fact, representing his own crucifixion in these images then his handwritten notes describing a screaming child and copulating figures on a bed of crime suggest that the images could be representing some form of ritual sexual act conducted on a round, carpeted dais. Such a statement could imply that he had either witnessed such an act or experienced it as an act of rape, or even both. The charge of rape would not be inconsistent with the theme of his sexual brutalisation by his uncle and the early sexual encounters with his father's stable hands to which the artist has openly admitted.⁸⁵ Such practices were also woven into his ancestral background. As Andrew Sinclair notes, 'Francis Bacon was always conscious that his ancestor and namesake, the Lord Chancellor of the reign of King James the First, was, in John Aubrey's words, a pederast.'⁸⁶

Bacon's comment that his triptych *Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, was specifically concerned with the role of the Greek Furies in Aeschylus's play *Oresteia*, which he saw as an adult, may confirm a forensic interpretation of his work.⁸⁷ According to Hesiod, the Furies, known by the propitiatory names of Eumenides (the 'kindly') and of Seminae ('the holy'), were primeval beings born of the blood of the castrated Uranus, avengers of crime, especially crime against the ties of kinship.⁸⁸ Bacon had commented on the fact that his father had tacitly allowed his son to be abused by his uncle and so the Furies would have been an apt expression of his justifiable anger. As Peppiatt observes, the theme that appears in the dramatic literature to which Bacon most responded was that in which the hero is not guilty on his own account, but has the sins of the father visited upon him.⁸⁹

In Druidic rites an initiated boy was given a new cloak called a 'brat'.⁹⁰ In *Figure Study II*, 1945–6, a figure is bent over into a plant with an overcoat covering the lower body. The head is partly concealed under a black umbrella and only an open mouth is depicted, suggesting a scream. If this overcoat were to represent the initiatory 'brat' then it would signify the figure's new status after an initiatory ordeal. Here, again, the position of the figure may have been based on the memory of a body position during a moment of trauma; perhaps some sort of sexual encounter. The artist's

rendition of the texture of the coat, which was created by pressing a textured material impregnated with paint onto the canvas, has created the impression of a heavy woollen or tweed garment.⁹¹ It is possible that the need to detail the texture of this coat so convincingly and to create the sense of its weight on the body may have been associated with a vivid tactile 'body memory', that, like the detailed ear in *Head I*, 1948, may have been indelibly imprinted on the artist's nervous system. The painting of the face of this figure, according to Sylvester, was likely to have been based on a combination of the face of the distraught mother in Poussin's *Massacre of the Innocents* and that of the executed nanny in Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin*, which Bacon copied obsessively.⁹² Such visual references reinforce the connection with the concept of damaged childhood and the failure of the women to protect their children. The stooping position of the figure and the fact that his head is thrust amongst the leaves of a plant may also be related to classical themes that are woven into Royal Arch rites.

Royal Arch rites claim to draw on seven mystical systems.⁹³ One of these is the Eleusinian Mysteries, whose initiatory theme is the Rape of Persephone.⁹⁴ As Bruce Lincoln argues, in the classical tradition rape is one of the key ordeals associated with initiation into a patriarchal culture. Persephone was smelling flowers when she was snatched, raped and taken to the Underworld.⁹⁵ One of Bacon's earlier paintings, also depicting a tweed overcoat, *Figure Study I*, 1945/6, suggests a bent over figure, this time with a hat, as if the figure is smelling a bunch of hydrangeas. And yet, as Frank Laukotter and Maria Müller note, there is no evidence of a body underneath implying the feeling of someone who has died.⁹⁶ A preparatory study Bacon had done in 1944 depicts a similar scenario set in a curtained space. Another painting, *Untitled*, 1943–4, depicts a long-necked figure similar to that in the right-hand panel of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, with a bunch of flowers inserted into the figure's mouth.⁹⁷ These arrangements of crouching and howling figures with flowers or foliage combined with the sense of death and despair, along with references to the initiatory space, imply the utter desolation felt by an individual initiated using such cruel methods. These images suggest an irregular adaptation of Masonic rites and an interpretation of the

Eleusinian themes in a highly literal form. In the myth of Persephone the character Ascalaphus, son of Acheron, was turned into an owl for betraying the secret of her plight to Persephone's mother, Demeter.⁹⁸ The small, terrified owl-child in *Fragment of a Crucifixion*, 1950, could be another means of suggesting the dangers of divulging these secret rituals.

Damage to the lower part of the body appears in a number of Bacon's images. In *Crucifixion*, 1965, a distorted figure with a partial human face and legs in splints emerges from the form of a hanging beef carcass. Bacon had called crucifixion, 'an act of man's behaviour, a way of behaviour to another' and noted that animals in abattoirs are 'so aware of what is going to happen to them, they do everything to attempt to escape.'⁹⁹ The only means of escape for a child undergoing such an ordeal would be dissociation, a psychological means of escape from the terror and the pain that the body is undergoing. The child's legs may feel paralysed during such an ordeal, perhaps giving rise to Bacon's preoccupation with Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of a crippled boy. As David Healey suggests, in the course of a rape the victim undergoes 'a submissive quasi-paralysis ... [a] play-dead reaction [that] is a pre-wired autonomic response to stress.'¹⁰⁰ In Bacon's image, the combination of human form and beef carcass, which also appears in the right-hand panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, may relate to legendary Irish stories of the sacrifice of youths and boys. In one late medieval romance involving the Irish king Céadchathach the sacrifice of a boy was replaced at the last minute when 'a strange woman appeared and offered a cow as victim in his stead.'¹⁰¹

A woman and a disabled child appear in *After Muybridge – Study of the Human Figure in Motion – Woman Emptying a Bowl of Water, and Paralytic Child on All Fours*, 1965. Here a child crawls in the foreground around a circular rail while a woman in the rear, also perched on the frame, pours water from a bowl. In Royal Arch rites there is an action performed by the Master of the Third Veil. The Master takes a vessel of water and pours out a little on the floor and explains that it represents the sign given to Moses by God when he commanded him to pour water upon the dry land, and it became blood.¹⁰² The figure of a woman pouring water from a bowl, however, may relate to an important female deity

in Irish mythology. The female companion of Daghdha (the father god or sungod) was often depicted pouring water from a jar or pot to symbolise the role of water as an agent of fertility. As Dáithí Ó hÓgáin notes, all Irish rivers are given female names for this reason and the various titles of the mother goddess such as Boinn (related to the river Boyne) and Brigid evolved from this concept.¹⁰³ As Brigid she was later Christianised as St Brigid, the second most important patron saint after St Patrick. Prior to her Christian form, as noted earlier, the cult of Brigid had its beginnings in Kildare.¹⁰⁴ Brigid had a number of roles in mythology; among them she was the patroness of war,¹⁰⁵ but she was also regarded as a healing goddess, having cured the King of Leinster of a deformity, and still retains this role in Christian form.¹⁰⁶ Bacon's image portrays the deformed child in some form of reciprocal relationship with the woman. Both are positioned on the same round frame located in the ritual space suggesting the 'rounds' associated with Druidic ritual performances. They are however, moving in an anti-clockwise direction, regarded as an ill omen and signifying a demonic use of the rites.¹⁰⁷ As contemporary accounts of the ritual abuse of children note, the children are sometimes referred to as 'the sacrifice', the 'vessel' or the 'offering'.¹⁰⁸

The legs on the frame in this image are shaped like those of the dolmen, otherwise known as the Druid's Altar. Figures perched on awkwardly shaped and altar-like benches appear in *Triptych*, 1974–7, and in *Triptych – Studies of the Human Body*, 1970. Ross Nichols, a former Chosen Chief of a contemporary Order of Druidry, argues that the dolmens may have been an incubation space for male initiation, a 'bed' in which visions were perceived.¹⁰⁹ He suggests that this concept of a site for visionary experience may have gradually been degraded into the concept of 'beds' in the mating sense. The presence of the many round beds in Bacon's images may be relevant here. In the triptych *Studies of the Human Body*, 1970, the three panels are set on an orange background, with the centre panel containing a mating couple on the top of a round grass-coloured bed. As Tony Gray notes, archaic initiations in Ireland followed peasant-agrarian traditions with initiations and oaths administered on hilltops and behind hedges.¹¹⁰ A round dais of this colour may have been a way of representing, in an interior ritual space, the sacred grassy mounds or

tumuli scattered throughout Ireland. As Desmond Swan notes there are many of these raths and tumuli found in the region of The Curragh.¹¹¹ These tumuli were regarded by the early Christians as the dwellings of the pagans who turned 'left-hand' known as *sidhaighi* or 'mound-dwellers'.¹¹² Bacon's written reference to the carpeted bed of crime in the centre of the circular room and his visual representations of coupling figures on round beds suggests a further connection between ritual aberrations and ancient pagan concepts.

All of these images suggest a gruelling and painful experience for a boy initiate that could explain Bacon's extreme aversion towards religion, his hatred of modern mysticism and any form of occultism.¹¹³ And yet, despite such aversion, the artist was fascinated with the practice of hypnotism, as one of his sourcebooks attest. A female subject being hypnotised in front of a curtain seemed to be particularly relevant to his images of curtained spaces.¹¹⁴ As noted previously, the use of hypnotism was a feature of Druidic initiation practices but also featured as a popular practice in Masonic Lodges from the eighteenth century. Amongst those contemporary Freemasons who have commented on the use of hypnotism in the Lodges, J. D. Buck compares initiation in its more spiritual and 'true' form as 'a daily spiritual process of man working out his own salvation' with the use of hypnosis for cruel purposes, which he terms 'black magic'.¹¹⁵ He acknowledges that within the fraternity there has been abuse of this knowledge and states, '[t]he Hypnotist can not reduce the mind of a trusting but ignorant brother to the condition of imbecility without facing the law that counts such a crime as no less than murder'.¹¹⁶ It is possible that Bacon's fascination with the practice of hypnotism may have been due to its use in the initiatory process, which this argument suggests may be the source of some of his most significant imagery.

An important feature of Bacon's artistic process, as a number of critics have acknowledged, was his use of photographic images as subject matter for his paintings. References to the practise of photography also appear in a number of his paintings. In the right-hand panel of the triptych *Studies of the Human Body*, 1970, for example, a figure, seeming to be a reflection in a mirror, appears to be standing next to an object

that looks like a movie camera on a tripod. One of the black and white photographic illustrations found in Bacon's studio was an image of a director standing next to a movie camera suggesting a visual source for the figure in this triptych.¹¹⁷ In *Triptych March*, 1974, the figure in the right-hand panel is holding what appears to be a camera to his face. As contemporary research into the ritual abuse of children notes, the ordeals to which children are subjected can sometimes be filmed and these films circulated for the consumption of paedophile groups.¹¹⁸ It is possible that the inclusion of the figure with camera facing the viewer in these two triptychs could signify a visual memory of such a situation during an abusive ritual process.

Bacon's search for photographic imagery as visual sources for his paintings appears, according to this argument, to be an attempt to find visual parallels in the secular world for a set of traumatic images that appear to have dominated his inner visual world. His obsession with photography and his habit of working from photographs, even when undertaking portrait studies, could also imply the artist's drive to find 'proof' or 'evidence' of a crime that remained lost to consciousness. One of Bacon's favourite sourcebooks was Marius Maxwell's *Stalking Big Game with a Camera in Equatorial Africa*.¹¹⁹ It is possible that Bacon identified with the animals trapped in front of the camera's eye. While dedicated to the medium of photography, however, Bacon took no care to preserve his photographs. Instead, he allowed many of them to be trodden into the rubbish of his studio floor or to be spattered with paint, suggesting a simultaneous attitude of disdain for these photographs and perhaps mixed feelings about the significance of the medium.

There are many more elements in Bacon's idiosyncratic imagery that could be read in terms of the clandestine use of fraternal practices in Ireland and as traces of a traumatic initiatory process. However, to make any direct correlation between the artist's images and any particular group would be an impossible task. As noted previously, a wide range of secret societies in Ireland have incorporated Masonic rites into their ritual practices and use these rites in a range of forms. Many of these forms involve the concept of 'a course of severe and arduous trials' as a test of manhood prior to acceptance into the group. The initiation of children, however,

is likely to be the most clandestine of these practices and, as Noblitt and Perskin suggest, may only be known to a coterie within the fraternal network.¹²⁰ The next chapter examines the parallels between some of Bacon's images and the practices of the Orange Order and suggests that some of his more intriguing images may be associated with the Irish warrior tradition more generally.

Perambulations with the Men of No Popery: Orange Order Themes and the Irish Warrior Tradition in the Art of Francis Bacon

A number of the visual elements in Bacon's paintings, interpreted alongside some of the comments the artist has made, could be read as reflecting the themes, symbols and activities of the Orange Order. The colloquial term for Orangemen is the 'Men of No Popery'. While Orange Lodges were not officially recognised in the Kildare district when Bacon was a child the possibility that, behind closed doors, Orange elements could have been woven into an irregular version of Royal Arch rites is not out of the question. Orange Lodges were prevalent in the British army and membership of the Order was perceived as an expression of loyalty to British values.¹ However, enquiries into individual membership of the Order during the period of Bacon's childhood have proven fruitless as any records from the period in the south of Ireland had been completely lost or destroyed during the Civil War.² Also, as Tony Gray observes, the Order has never made a practice of recording its membership as a means of protecting its members.³

The Bacon household was frequented by many men, among them a soldier who visited the young Francis's nanny.⁴ One of the anecdotes Bacon told in later years was that this soldier would lock him in a cupboard so as to have uninterrupted time with his sweetheart. Anthony Cronin comments on a discussion he had with Bacon over this memory. Cronin states: '[h]e claimed he owed a great deal to that cupboard; and when I quoted Auden's recipe for the upbringing of poets – "As much neurosis as the child can bear" – he was intrigued and delighted.'⁵ It is possible that this memory could have been, in Freudian terms, a 'screen memory'

for more terrifying ordeals that could have taken place amongst soldiers. A number of scholars have already discussed Bacon's sense of identification with the children threatened by soldiery in both Nicholas Poussin's *Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Battleship Potemkin*.⁶ The military environment in the Curragh during this period was known to contain unruly aspects. In a discussion of crime and prostitution in the Curragh during this time a local military historian, Con Costello, states that members of the military were sometimes known to engage in outrageous behaviour, though fails to explain what he means by this comment.⁷

As Bob Purdie argues, the Orange Order was one of a wide range of groups such as peasant organizations, trade unions and revolutionary movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that adopted Masonic forms for their rituals and regalia.⁸ The Orange Order borrowed Masonic Royal Arch rites for the degree they call the Royal Arch Purple. Anthony Buckley describes the Orangemen's Royal Arch Purple ritual as 'something of an ordeal for the initiate. Of all the ordeals through which the Orangeman must pass, it is both the most elaborate and the most terrifying'.⁹ It is possible that within the context of an irregular, abusive and clandestine initiation that Orange sentiments, Masonic content and Druidic themes could have been woven together to create a set of formidable and terrifying initiations. The following will briefly outline the history and practices of the Orange Order and discuss the ways in which Bacon's imagery reflects some of the ritual aspects associated with this group or with related groups. It will then trace the elements in his work that connect his imagery to that of the Irish warrior tradition, providing insights into some of his more puzzling images by analysing them in relation to one of Ireland's most famous epic poems, the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* or Cattle-raid of Cooley.

The Orange Order and Bacon's Paintings

The Orange Institution was established in 1795 after a battle near Loughall.¹⁰ It derives its name from the Protestant Prince William of Orange and commemorates the earlier Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and William's deposition of the Catholic James II from the throne.¹¹ The Order began amongst the labouring and poor working class Protestants in Ulster but from 1797 lodges for the nobility were established in Dublin that attracted senior figures from the militia as well as the rural gentry.¹² After the Home Rule Bill of the Gladstone Liberal Administration of 1886 the gentry, clergy and the business and professional classes became more heavily involved. Then, according to the members, it became a completely respectable and exceedingly powerful religious political organization.¹³ Since the Irish Civil War it has returned to its Ulster roots. While the Orange Institution borrowed much from Freemasonry the purposes of the two institutions were quite different. As Hereward Senior notes, 'Masons existed for the sake of Masonry ... [while] the Orange Order was specifically directed towards the suppression of Catholics and the maintenance of Protestant ascendancy'.¹⁴

The Orange Order contains a number of degrees, the original Orange degree and the Purple Marksman, Royal Arch Purple, Scarlet, Black and others that developed over time.¹⁵ The first meeting of the Grand Royal Arch Purple Chapter of Ireland was in 1911 when Bacon would have been two years of age.¹⁶ One Orangeman describes the rites as 'a heady mixture of folk memory, rural Ulster Protestant tradition and ancient ritual', which Ruth Edwards claims is for many, 'a moving experience, a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, the admission to an historic brotherhood bonded by centuries of blood, fire and persecution and a spiritual experience couched in terms of the language of deliverance and pilgrimage of the children of Israel'.¹⁷ During the nineteenth century and until the Civil War the Orange Order's Grand Lodge was situated in Dublin, and Dublin City and Dublin County hosted a large number of Orange Lodges.¹⁸ The Orange Order was known to hold some of its proceedings within round-shaped rooms, among them the Round Room of the Rotunda, one of

the feature rooms of the Rotunda Lying-In Hospital in Parnell Square in Dublin.¹⁹ As James Stevens Curl notes, round spaces retained their significance as holy places amongst Orders and Brotherhoods.²⁰

Among Bacon's works that represent ritualistic themes are many with stark orange backgrounds. The artist's favourite colour was orange and he used it as a background colour in many images, although he says, 'I couldn't explain in any satisfactory way the reasons why I find it such a beautiful colour.'²¹ Those with orange backgrounds include the triptych that launched his artistic reputation, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944. Circular rooms and round dais shapes appear in many of his images. In *Study from Innocent X*, 1962, for example, a Popish figure sits atop a round red dais against a scarlet background. The symbolic colour associated with Chapters of Royal Arch is scarlet.²² Bacon's *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, depicts an orange floor and scarlet walls in a round shaped room. It is possible that these stark coloured backgrounds and rounded rooms could be associated with the interior of an Orange Lodge and be further examples of fragmented memory.

Orangemen are distinguished by their dress, which they proudly wear during the Twelfth of July marches that commemorate William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne. This includes a dark business suit, bowler hat, black umbrella and an orange sash. Men in dark business suits are scattered throughout Bacon's paintings such as in *Study for Portrait*, 1953, *Three Studies of the Human Head*, 1953 and *Two Seated Figures*, 1979. As the artist says: 'I hope to be able to do figures arising out of their own flesh with their bowler hats and their umbrellas and make them figures as poignant as a crucifixion.'²³ The central figure in *Painting*, 1946, discussed previously as evocative of a sacrificial tableau, has his head partially hidden under a black umbrella and in a second version done in 1971 the figure has a bowler hat on his lap.

Black umbrellas feature in a number of the most ritualistic of Bacon's images. In *Figure Study II*, 1945–6, an umbrella frames the scream of the bent over figure; in *Three Studies of the Human Body*, 1970, the central contorted female figure is framed by a black umbrella and in *Triptych*, 1974–7, two umbrellas frame contorted figures on awkward benches in the left and right hand panels. The use of the umbrella as a framing

device, while acting as a powerful design element, seems to accentuate the symbolic significance of the figures' poses. If these images are indeed a reference to Orange rituals then it is possible that the Orangemen's umbrellas were used to make a visual statement, even acting as a form of trademark claiming the ritual tableaux for the Orange Order and distinguishing their rituals from those of the many other fraternities that used Masonic rites. The black rectangle in the centre of *Triptych*, 1974–7, may simply be a design element or it may also have symbolic significance as a reference to another branch of the Orange Order.

The Black Institution was a very secretive form of Orangeism regarded along with the Purple as the inner circle of the Orange Order. Formed in Ireland in 1797, it claimed a connection with the crusading knights, the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, otherwise known as Knights Hospitaller,²⁴ whose Black Abbey, as mentioned previously, is situated in the grounds of the Irish National Stud. Black degrees were known to be more religious than the Orange Order, with an emphasis on the Old Testament stories of the Israelites as well as Christian themes.²⁵ Of all of the three organizations, the Orange, Purple and Black, the Black was acknowledged as containing the most extensive symbolism.²⁶ Many ordinary Orangemen regarded the extreme ritualism involved in the neo-Masonic rituals used in the Purple and Black with abhorrence, perceiving these rituals to be incompatible with Protestantism and Orangeism. As a consequence members of the Black and the Purple kept their ritual activities secret, even from ordinary Orangemen, for fear of expulsion from the Order.²⁷ As Jarman and Bryan note, the Black Institution reflected the more middle class, rural, religious, even elite elements of Orangeism.²⁸ This Order is comprised of eleven degrees; the ninth is called the Crimson Arrow degree. It deals with the Old Testament theme of Jehu's purge against the worship of Baal. As the contemporary Masonic author, J. A. Penny notes, 'the Orange and Black like to equate the worship of Baal to the Roman Catholic litany.'²⁹ Bacon depicts arrows in many of his paintings: crimson arrows appear in *A Piece of Wasteland*, 1982, a response Bacon made to T. S. Eliot's famous poem, and in *Diptych: Study from the Human Body – From a Drawing by Ingres*, 1982–4, as well as in other images. A number of cut-out arrows were found in the rubble of his studio. As Margarita Cappock points

out, small arrows appear in paintings from the 1940s such as *Head II*, 1949 and *Untitled Figure*, 1950–1, while larger arrows appear in *Figure in Movement*, 1976 and *Study of the Human Body*, 1987.³⁰

While these higher degrees claimed to have religious significance the initiations were not always an expression of Christian values. As the anthropologist Victor Turner notes, one of the aspects of the initiatory process is the ‘trickster’ element and displays of puerile humour, along with the use of cruel and inhuman practices, accompany the more serious aspects of the rites.³¹ It is possible that Bacon’s images of suited men, such as *Three Studies for the Human Head*, 1953, could have been an attempt to capture the visual image of a group of onlookers at an initiation, caught in poses of uproarious laughter at the candidate’s hapless situation. Bacon said that he didn’t accept the idea that his open-mouthed subjects are all necessarily screaming but that their open mouths could also represent other expressions such as yawning, laughing, talking or sneezing.³² Such a comment suggests that he may have been depicting the image of men’s open mouths held in his mind’s eye, but without the narrative context that could explain what these open mouths were doing. Thus these paintings may represent another fragment of a visual memory implanted during a traumatic encounter in the non-linguistic centres of the artist’s brain. He also remarked, ‘the dark, blurred pictures of suited male figures set in claustrophobic interiors were generally done of somebody who was always in a state of unease ... very neurotic or almost hysterical.’³³ Such neurotic and hysterical behaviour could well be associated with the taboo-breaking practices involved in the initiations being discussed here. It is perhaps relevant that in the 1980s allegations of the sexual abuse of boys by senior members of the Orange Order came to public attention, suggesting the possible presence of similar practices in previous periods.³⁴

As Dominic Bryan notes, despite the pledge undertaken by the Men of No Popery to abstain from all uncharitable words, actions or sentiments towards their Roman Catholic brethren, the mockery of Catholicism and an openly anti-Catholic distrust or hatred of Catholics has been one of the less respectable features of Orangeism.³⁵ The Twelfth of July marches have historically included papal mockery as part of the sideshows accompanying the celebrations and date back to practices during the

Restoration period where Apprentice Boys hauled effigies of popes and cardinals to the stakes.³⁶ In the context of a hidden and unlawful initiation it is not hard to imagine that papal mockery could have been a part of the proceedings. Bacon's paintings of popes from the 1950s and 1960s depict papal figures within the curtained cubicles of the initiatory space articulating a range of gestures. While his popes have traditionally been interpreted as screaming, it may be that some of them, such as in *Study After Velazquez*, 1950, *Study for Pope*, 1961, and others, could be seen as engaging in raucous laughter.³⁷ *Pope and Chimpanzee*, 1962, conveys the sense of mockery typical of such anti-papal displays.

The artist was interested in the depiction of monkeys and his studio contained a number of photographs of these creatures; in 1953 he painted *Study of a Baboon*.³⁸ This preoccupation may reflect further aspects of the initiatory tradition. In very early Egyptian theology there was a baboon-god called Hedj-war, a prototype of Thoth, patron of scribes and inventor of hieroglyphs. Thoth was the guardian of sacred knowledge that could only be passed on to the initiated. As James Stevens Curl points out, Thoth was associated with the rites of Isis and Osiris and hence with Freemasonry.³⁹ In *Pope and Chimpanzee*, 1962, the artist could have been recalling some reference to this Egyptian theme within the rituals. Furthermore, the Irish Masonic author J. A. Penny notes that a skeleton of a Barbary Ape had been found at Tara, the mythical centre of Ireland and seat of the High King.⁴⁰ In an earlier painting, *Untitled (Figure)*, 1950–1, a smudged figure is positioned inside the initiatory space; as David Sylvester notes, the figure has faint human traces as well as vaguely simian features.⁴¹ It is possible that this image could be reflecting some reference to apes in the ritual or even some sort of enactment within the initiatory cubicle involving an individual acting in mocking, ape-like ways. Alternatively, it could represent the presence of a monkey mask. The custom of using animal masks or suits to frighten children is commonly acknowledged in the literature of ritual abuse.⁴²

An ancient Orangemen's ditty that appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for August 1896 may be relevant to Bacon's images of popes. Expressed in the harsh language typical of Orangemen's songs and its

sentiments directed towards the Catholic Church it may nevertheless account for the atmosphere of many of his papal portraits. It states:

Scarlet Church of all uncleanness,
Sink thou to the deep abyss,
To the orgies of obscenity,
Where the hell-bound furies hiss;
Where thy father's Satan's eye
May hail thee, blood-stained Papacy!⁴³

As the artist himself observed, his preoccupation with Velazquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* of 1650 was based on a feeling of being 'overcome' and 'overwhelmed' by the image. He commented to David Sylvester that he felt 'hypnotized' by this painting saying, '[it] is one of the greatest portraits that have ever been made'.⁴⁴ This pope's nominal relationship to innocence may have been significant, as a reminder of innocence lost. As David Sylvester pointed out, it was after he had seen Poussin's *Massacre of the Innocents* during his early sojourns in Europe that Bacon had felt compelled to embark on an artistic career.⁴⁵ Bacon's written comment, 'figures fucking in middle of carpet possibly chair as in Vatican picture at side', might be relevant here. Such a statement could imply that some form of sexualised initiatory aberration may have been carried out in the presence of an image of the pope. The artist's obsessive rendition of popes may therefore suggest a form of transference of the child's pain and confusion onto the accompanying Vatican picture, possibly with the assistance of an indoctrination process that laid the blame for his plight onto Catholicism. Such experiences could well have translated into the sense of being hypnotised by images of popes and the need to depict the scenes and colours associated with a traumatic initiatory process.⁴⁶

Bacon's paintings of popes were initially described as 'snapshots from Hell'⁴⁷ and may have represented another set of visual images imprinted on the artist's brain of popish figures enacting bizarre behaviours in the context of an irregular initiation. Bacon's obsession with Velazquez's portrait and its hypnotic effect could therefore have been one motif amongst others through which to access an initiatory experience and to temporarily relieve the accompanying emotional strain through a cathartic artistic

process. However, it is important to note that the artistic process, on its own, does not necessarily facilitate the memory of traumatic events.

The above argument suggests that there may be an association between Bacon's images and the practices of the Orange Order. It is perhaps coincidental that when I viewed Bacon's famous triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, at the Tate Britain in 2005 it was positioned facing the work of the British artist Richard Hamilton (b. 1922) through the archway of an adjacent room. Hamilton's images were comments on the Northern Irish conflict. The image that directly faced Bacon's triptych was a large lithograph entitled *The Orangeman*, 1990. It depicted an Orangeman in full regalia. The placement of these two works captured the resonance between Bacon's work and the Orange Order being explored in this chapter.

The Irish Warrior Tradition

While it may be difficult to firmly establish which particular organization could have provided the initiatory context that appears to inform Bacon's imagery, what would have been a common thread between all of the organizations mentioned, in the military milieu into which the artist was born, would have been the blend of initiatory practices with military principles. The artist's military background may therefore provide a key to the interpretation of a number of his more obscure paintings. In Ireland this military tradition has its roots in the ancient past. As the Irish Masonic author J. A. Penny states, '... we Irish have both feet in the past, not the past of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but that of pre-history'.⁴⁸ As Tony Gray notes, the warrior mythology of early Ireland forms the background to the creation of the Orange Order and related fraternal associations.⁴⁹ Paul Elliott, in his discussion of Celtic warrior cults, notes the cruel practices used in such organizations. He states:

... horrible rites took place in the temples, including ritual brandings and tortures. Bloody swords are reported and depicted, to be used in a ritualised mock murder ... staged murder ... to create fear for fear's sake ... Again, this was military reinforcement, somewhat similar to the harshness of basic army training, seemingly so cruel, pointless and brutal, but for a purpose.⁵⁰

In the context of a warrior elite the cult of Mithras, the Persian god of light, had historically been interwoven with Druidic practice. This military cult was popular amongst Roman soldiers in the first and second centuries and was a mystery religion in which the candidates had to pass through numerous degrees. It also involved bull sacrifice.⁵¹ Lewis Spence suggests that it closely resembled Freemasonry and cites Algernon Herbert, who suggested that the late flourishing of paganism in Britain and parts of Europe involved a mongrel blend of Druidism, Mithraism and modern Freemasonry. Herbert also suggested that Mithraism was a parody of Christianity.⁵² In Bacon's work the scenes of crucifixion involving a blend of animal carcasses and human figures, in particular paintings such as the right-hand panel of *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, may be relevant here. Bacon had commented to David Sylvester that he felt that Cimabue's *Crucifixion* (1280–3) reminded him of a worm crawling down the cross and as Sylvester observes, the upside-down figure in the right-hand panel of Bacon's 1962 triptych closely resembles the form of an inverted image of Cimabue's famous painting.⁵³ This sense of inversion of the Christian symbol and its incorporation into the form of a sacrificed bull in Bacon's painting captures the parody of Christianity to be found in military cults such as Mithraism. Given Bacon's comment that his crucifixion paintings were partly a self-portrait one wonders whether the sense of an inverted body, like a worm crawling down a cross, might have been associated with another body-memory. One of the practices associated with contemporary forms of ritual abuse is the hanging of the children upside-down.⁵⁴

In the Celtic tradition it was the custom to take the sons of the warrior aristocracy to train them either to become a warrior or to take one of the other key roles honoured amongst the Celts. As the display in St Brigid's Cathedral in Kildare outlines, male members of the pre-Christian Celtic aristocracy were members of one of three main categories, the

kings or chieftains, the warrior nobility and the ‘Men of Art’, comprised of the Druids or magicians, the craftsmen and the bards. Bardic poetry in the Celtic tradition celebrated military history and the mythological exploits of famous warrior heroes and was woven through with a belief in a powerful battle-magic designed to stir the warriors into a frenzy. Elliott describes members of Celtic warrior cults as ‘touched with the “warp-frenzy”, which turned them into twisted and distorted monsters capable of great feats.’⁵⁵ He likens this to the Viking Berserkers. Bacon’s *Untitled (Marching Figures)*, c. 1950, depicts what looks like a battalion of soldiers marching into a rectangular cage structure that, based on the argument in Chapter One, appears to be representing the Royal Arch initiatory space. Sitting on top of the cage is a large bear framed by a series of blue vertical stripes conveying Bacon’s familiar curtains. The Druids were known to call upon the blessings of the Great Bear in order to fill their warriors with its powerful magic.⁵⁶ This image captures the concept of a troop of soldiers being inspired, through initiation, by the Great Bear.

In his study of initiatory rites Mircea Eliade states:

For a time, the initiate steps out of being simply himself or herself and becomes an ancestral dreamtime hero or heroine re-entering the origin stories of the culture. By shedding the skin of their limited sense of self, marked by the time they were born into and the family they were born amongst, the initiates encounter the sacred. Temporarily, they walk in the footsteps of heroes and heroines engaged in elemental struggles, touched by mystery, learning to sustain life and face death.⁵⁷

Here the exploits of the most famous warrior of Irish mythology, Cú Chulainn, may be of significance. Cú Chulainn’s story is told in the epic poem *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, the Cattle-raid of Cooley. The *Táin* is the longest and most important heroic tale of the Ulster Cycle and was first recorded in its written form in 1100 AD, though it has arguably existed since the middle of the seventh century.⁵⁸ A particular scene from the epic may have important connections to the rendition of figures and faces in many of Bacon’s images. Cú Chulainn was depicted as undergoing a profound physical change when preparing for battle, a magical distortion that was to incite terror in his enemies. It was described in the following terms:

Then his first distortion came upon Cú Chulainn so that he became horrible, many-shaped, strange and unrecognisable. All the flesh in his body quivered. He performed a wild feat of contortion with his body inside his skin. His feet and his shins and his knees slid so that they came behind him. His heels and his calves and his hams shifted so that they passed to the front. The muscles of his calves moved so that they came to the front of his shins, so that each huge knot was the size of a soldier's balled fist ... Then his face became a red hollow. He sucked one of his eyes into his head so that a wild crane could hardly have reached it to pluck it out from the back of his skull on to the middle of his cheek. The other eye sprang out onto his cheek. His mouth was twisted back fearsomely. He drew the cheek back from the jawbone until his inner gullet was seen.⁵⁹

Cú Chulainn is called The Distorted One and described as 'the blow-dealing, feat performing, battle-winning, red-sworded hero.'⁶⁰ In Bacon's work there are a number of examples of distorted figures that appear to match this description of Cú Chulainn's magical transformation. *Figure in Movement*, 1976, may be one such example. It depicts a figure on a round orange podium in the centre of the initiatory space. One distorted limb (it is unclear whether it is an arm or a leg) extends over the figure's head while the encircled face depicts what appears to be the bone structure underneath, suggesting the transformed features of the hero's visage. A small white circle, which could be read as an eyeball, appears near the figure's jaw while a black circle enlarges the figure's buttocks, drawing attention to this part of the anatomy, and a black arrow points to the figure's head. A curious bird figure appears to be departing the scene on the right-hand side of the image. Bacon referred to these creatures in his paintings as Furies and they appear in a number of his works. In *Three Figures and a Portrait*, 1975, one of Bacon's Furies sits in the foreground accompanied by a white 'eyeball' shape along with two distorted and twisted figures behind it, that are similar to the description of Cú Chulainn's body, and a portrait in the rear that is reminiscent of the hero's deformed visage. In the triptych *Two Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants*, 1968, both right and left panels contain figures with distorted jaws. The right-hand figure has a small white 'eyeball' shape near his left wrist and in the left panel a crane is flying from the rectangular initiatory structure towards the two lying figures in a bed in the centre panel, recalling the reference

to the wild crane in the description of Cú Chulainn's eyeball. A 'blind' is centrally placed behind the bed, another reminder of the initiate's blind-folded status and the description of the hero's temporary blindness as he twists his body into its warrior form.

In *Triptych*, 1976, the right-hand panel depicts a large face with a red hollow in the background and a distorted figure in front, like raw, red meat lying in what appears to be a pink pool of flesh and with prominent heels, calves and hams. A pink pool attached to many of Bacon's figures, a common motif in his imagery, has been interpreted by some critics as a shadow.⁶¹ However, given the interpretation offered here it could be seen as representing Cú Chulainn's pool of quivering flesh and the process whereby the hero's body transforms inside his skin. It could also reflect Mircea Eliade's observation where the initiate temporarily sheds his own skin to walk in the body of the hero. A description by another major creative figure of the mid-twentieth century, Antonin Artaud, may also be relevant here. Artaud uses the term *Bardo*, the Tibetan term for the liminal state associated with the process of dying, to name the state of mind he experienced after electric shock treatment. He says, 'Bardo is the death throes in which the ego falls in a puddle, and there is in electroshock a puddle state through which everyone traumatized passes. I went through it and I won't forget it.'⁶² In the context of the shocks of initiation Bacon's pink 'puddles' capture a similar concept of a fluid, liminal state where the initiate's ego is transformed through identification with the mythological hero.

A number of Bacon's portrait studies capture the description of Cú Chulainn's distorted face. In *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne (on White Ground)*, 1965, the centre and left-hand panels depict the sitter's face with distorted features while the right-hand panel depicts an arrow moving across her left cheek as if to suggest the movement associated with drawing back the cheek from the jawbone. In *Study for Self-Portrait – Triptych*, 1985–6, the artist represents one side of his own face distorted and red arrows point to the site of the deformed jaw. In *Three Studies for Portraits including Self-Portrait*, 1969, the right panel or self-portrait has one side of the face grossly distorted, as is the right side of the face in *Self-Portrait*, 1973. Similar distortions occur in many of his paintings.

The way in which Bacon depicts his Furies may also be related to Cú Chulainn's warrior distortion. In *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus*, 1981, one of Bacon's Furies is depicted in the left panel. As Cappock notes, the form of the creature in this triptych appears to be based on a photograph of a diving bird.⁶³ However, the artist has made no attempt to describe this creature purely in terms of its avian anatomy. Instead the shape of the body and wings seem to convey the concept of Cú Chulainn's 'fluttering lungs and liver' and the bird's beak has turned into a long curved spike. What appears to be a trail of blood is disappearing into the background behind a door. An accompanying section of the *Táin* describes the warrior's chariot as having hooks and hard spikes; the hero is also said to have spouted a trail of dark blood that arose from his forehead.⁶⁴ It appears that Bacon may have woven these elements into his depiction of the Furies in this triptych.

While Bacon's emphasis on the Furies was consciously derived from his attendance at performances of Aeschylus's plays and from his reading of translations of Aeschylus's *Oresteian Trilogy*,⁶⁵ it should be noted that the Furies also appear in Irish history and mythology. The Roman writer Tacitus describes both male and female Irish Druids who were known to weaken the enemy in battle with their 'magic showers of Druidry'. He writes that the female Druids dashed between the ranks, 'in black attire like the Furies, with hair dishevelled, waving brands' and all of the Druids made such a frenzied display as to frighten and paralyse the enemy.⁶⁶ Amongst the Irish goddesses of war were three sisters Neman, Macha and the Morrígan who were described as Furies, being able to confound their victims with madness, inspire fear and incite warriors to deeds of valour.⁶⁷ A number of scholars have suggested that the creation of the *Táin* was a deliberate attempt to provide Ireland with an epic comparable to the *Aeneid*. In the *Táin* the character of the Morrígan is equated with the Fury Allecto.⁶⁸ It seems that Bacon's intense response to Aeschylus's play could have been underpinned by an awareness, through the initiatory process, of similar material derived from Irish mythology that parallels some of the themes in the Greek mythological tradition.

The term 'the furies' also appears in manuscripts associated with the Orange Order. A poem entitled *A True Dream* written in 1864 by a

member of the Order, John Ferguson, uses the term in a description of initiation as a mystical experience. The poem begins:

With strange emotions I was sent into an unseen land ...
The cherubim were stationed near to aid me by their sway
But whirlwind furies seized my soul when I was winged away ...⁶⁹

Bacon's depiction of the Furies in his images was always as winged creatures. In *Seated Figure*, 1974, one of these winged Furies appears to be exiting the right side of the canvas as if flying away. The creature is framed in purple and a seated figure with the Cú Chulainn's distortions has his head framed in black; a light switch is positioned centrally between the two figures. The purple and black could, again, be a symbolic reference to the Royal Arch Purple and the Black Institution, while the central placement of the light switch, as discussed in Chapter One, could be a reference to the light of the mystical experience.

The Orangeman's poem above describes more of the mystical journey, and concludes with:

Received there the key of truth, the knowledge and the light,
To guide me through the paths of youth, to teach my mind aright.

A number of Bacon's paintings with distorted figures and faces are accompanied by the motif of a key. *In Memory of George Dyer*, 1971, has a distorted figure in the centre panel putting a key in a lock and a light globe hangs above, while in the left and right panel the figures are defined by the distortions and ejected eyeball that describe the hero of the *Táin*. In *Painting*, 1978, a contorted figure unlocks a key with his toe. Next to the key is a light switch. The figure's head is framed by a black square and a red arrow points to the shoulder of another figure below. Again, the Cú Chulainn theme seems to be accompanied by symbolic references to the Black Institution and the Crimson Arrow degree.

The *Táin* is filled with references to blood and gore and sections of the epic are dedicated to describing the wounds that Cú Chulainn and other warriors both inflicted and suffered. Even as a lad Cú Chulainn was a fearful opponent and boasted about an enemy:

I will put my hand to the lath-trick for him, namely, to the apple of twice-melted iron, and it will light upon the disc of his shield and on the flat of his forehead, and it will carry away the size of an apple of his brain out through the back of his head, so that it will make a sieve-hole outside of his head, till the light of the sky will be visible through his head.⁷⁰

The many holes depicted in the heads of Bacon's portrait studies, discussed in Chapter One as possibly relevant to the use of firearms in initiations, may also relate to this boastful language that accompanies the boy hero's exploits. At one point Cú Chulainn has his hips mangled by a character called Loch, described as a 'shaggy, russet she-wolf'.⁷¹ Cú Chulainn's name means Culand's Hound because as a boy he viciously slaughtered a prize bloodhound owned by the warrior Conchobor.⁷² Cú Chulainn became known as the Hound who mangles all flesh.⁷³ The dog-like figure draped over the Tau cross in Bacon's *Fragment of a Crucifixion*, 1950, has its right hip mangled and may be a reference to these various canine themes in the *Táin*. The Tau cross may also be related to the Celtic warrior tradition. According to Masonic tradition it was placed as a sign on the foreheads of returned soldiers, possibly to free the warriors from visitation by the spirits of those whom they had slain.⁷⁴

Some of the elements in *Triptych*, 1976, may be related to a section of the *Táin* called 'Cethern's Bloody Wounds'. This triptych depicts two large male portraits in the left and right panels. The left-hand portrait merges into a black suited figure that is reaching into a bag reminiscent of a doctor's bag. In the tale a warrior named Cethern consults Fingin, a prophet physician, over his many and various wounds. The physician looks into each wound and divining from them, describes several pairs of handsome youths who have attacked him.⁷⁵ These pairs of young warriors are variously described as 'of splendid, manly appearance' and as 'two fair-faced, dark-browed youths' and, on one occasion, as 'huge'. One couple's hair is described as being 'smooth, as if licked by a cow'. The suited figure in the left panel of *Triptych*, 1976, appears to be like a physician reaching into his bag, while the two large portraits reflect the superhuman size of one of the sets of young warriors who attacked Cethern. The brushstrokes used to depict the hair of these figures describes it in a smooth arc like a 'cowlick'.

All of these images suggest that verses from the *Táin* could have been recited during a ritual process, implanting ancient warrior values in the course of the initiate's terrifying ordeal. A number of Bacon's images from the 1970s such as *Triptych*, 1976, *Figure at Washbasin*, 1976, *Figure Writing Reflected in a Mirror*, 1976, and *Painting*, 1978, represent a piece of paper on the floor containing a jumbled text. Bacon based the depiction of these pieces of paper on the many scattered papers on his studio floor and used Letraset to imprint partial letters in order to create indecipherable messages on the paintings.⁷⁶ The sacred language associated with Druidic Ireland, found at various ancient sites, is called Ogham and appears today to be a simple arrangement of cuts in wood or stone. In the *Táin* there are references to Ogham inscriptions in Cú Chulainn's boyhood exploits.⁷⁷ Bacon's text in these paintings vaguely suggests such a language. But the motif of the crumpled text could also be read as a comment on the confusion and loss of language that can accompany traumatic experiences, implying that the narrative is no longer available to the conscious mind.

The confusion of the initiatory ordeal can be created through a range of techniques, among them the practice of spinning the initiate. The use of spinning to promote altered states of consciousness has been a part of the mystical tradition for many centuries; note the case of the Whirling Dervishes. In the *Táin* Cú Chulainn spins around inside his body in a miraculous twisting feat that radically alters his persona into that of the fierce warrior. A contemporary personal testimony from a former Orangeman from Northern Ireland describes his initiation into the Orange Order's Royal Arch Purple degree when he was in his twenties. Among other trials he was led, blindfolded, up some steps and then spun round and round until he was dizzy. Suddenly he was pushed and fell from a height where he sensed he was caught in a blanket and tossed up and down several times. He said 'I knew that I had been ritually abused – and never ever, from that night onwards, had anything more to do with the "Orange"'.⁷⁸ Bacon depicts the theme of spinning in many of his images. A number of his figures are accompanied by a circle and an arrow indicating a turning or spinning motion, such as in *Three Studies*

for *Figures on Beds*, 1972, and the visual impression of a spinning motion is created in *Landscape Near Malabata, Tangier*, 1963.

Swivel chairs, connoting the potential for a spinning action, also feature in many of Bacon's images. In *Seated Figure*, 1977, a central figure is positioned against a black background and is seated on a chair that sits on a circular base. A black bird spreads its wings in front of the figure suggesting the act of flight, while a piece of paper with illegible text is at the base of the chair under the figure's feet. The bird accompanied by the illegible text again suggests the theme of dissociation implying another situation in which flight from the psyche might have been the result of some sort of terrifying ordeal. In *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944, the central figure is perched above a swivel table and in a later version, *Second Version of Triptych*, 1944, painted in 1988, there appears to be a button attached to the right-hand side of this piece of furniture. Spinning chairs have been associated with the practice of brainwashing in the twentieth century.⁷⁹ It is possible that Bacon's swivel chairs could be associated with such a spinning action.

Recent research into the practice of ritual abuse suggests that deliberate techniques aimed at actively promoting memory loss have been practiced in situations of extreme abuse. The practice of 'spin programming' is one such method. According to the psychologist John D. Lovern, in this practice the child is placed on a device that spins him around until he falls unconscious and effectively forgets the experience that has just taken place. There are various forms of spinning used in such practices, including horizontal spinning on a table, similar to a record player; horizontal spinning about an axis, similar to being turned on a spit; vertical, 'wheel-of-fortune' type spinning; and vertical spinning about an axis, on a pole, hanging upside down by the feet, or inside of a cylinder.⁸⁰ The concept of spin programming implies that while the child is spinning, and of necessity dissociating in order to deal with this torture, messages are being simultaneously implanted.

One of the more puzzling motifs in Bacon's oeuvre is a circular rail that is present in many images. While a number of critics have commented that this rail could be related to various structures in his childhood such as the fencing around the racecourse on the Curragh or the steel framed

furniture that he created as a young interior designer,⁸¹ I would argue that Bacon's images suggest a far more ritualistic context for this device. In *Painting*, 1946, a round rail surrounds the sacrificial beef carcass and supports the sides of meat. When asked about the rail in this painting Bacon had stated: '[t]hey're devices so the reality of the figure can be wound up and displayed, they're vehicles of display. It was a logical way to display meat and articulate the figure in space.'⁸² The image of sides of meat on a circular steel frame, perhaps slowly revolving or being 'wound up and displayed' suggests some sort of butcher shop arrangement such as a window display. The circular rail in *Painting*, 1946, could therefore have been a visual depiction of a similar butcher's display set within the initiatory tableau, creating a further confusing effect on the initiate. This rail is also included in many paintings that seem to be associated with the initiatory experience. In *Study for Crouching Nude*, 1952, the circular rail is set in the context of the initiatory space while the crouching figure may be a reminder of the initiate's humiliating travel through the living arch. In *After Muybridge: The Human Figure in Motion: Woman Emptying a Bowl of Water/Paralytic Child Walking on All Fours*, 1965, the rail is supported by legs reminiscent of the Druid's Altar.

This circular device may have various meanings. Bacon's unusual use of language in his response, 'so the reality of the figure can be wound up and displayed' suggests that it may not only be sides of meat that could be placed on a revolving display, but that a human figure might also be set on such a device. In a sketch found in his studio the artist has drawn a circular rail structure on three legs with a platform on which a figure appears to be lying. The upper portion of another figure seems to be standing upright next to the first.⁸³ This platform on the side of a circular rail appears in *Three Studies of the Human Body*, 1970. In *Triptych – In Memory of George Dyer*, 1971, Bacon poses a horizontal boxing figure in the distorted Cú Chulainn pose while in the right panel the profile of George Dyer, with the Cú Chulainn distortions to his face, is lying on the table attached to the circular rail and another upright portrait mirrors the first. It is possible that Bacon's repetitive use of the circular rail form, associated with all of the other elements of the initiatory process, could be a visual reminder of some sort of revolving device. One wonders

whether one of the artist's activities as an adult, his nightly addiction to the hypnotic effects of roulette, could have been a means of restimulating a spinning sensation so as to tap into the wealth of visual iconography stored in his subconscious mind, furnishing him on a daily basis with an endless source of material for his paintings.⁸⁴

One of the themes that seemed to be a source of endless fascination for Bacon was the subject of birds and he depicted them in a number of his paintings. As Harrison notes, Bacon was especially interested in birds of prey and exotic avifauna, among them 'the umbrella birds of Central America ... named for their black, umbrella-like crests, raised during courtship display'.⁸⁵ In the Druidic tradition the priests were known to have dressed up as birds, 'with bull's hide coats and bird caps with waving wings'.⁸⁶ In the old Irish religions the deities were thought to be able to transform into birds;⁸⁷ and the presence of ravens on the battlefield was thought to be a manifestation of the war-goddess.⁸⁸ Given the previous discussion regarding the role of umbrellas in the Orange Order and the relationship between Freemasonry, the Orange Order and Druidic practice, Bacon's fascination with umbrella birds could be a response to such connections.

Bacon's comments about the construction of *Painting*, 1946, may be associated with the role of augury in the Orange Order's history. The artist had commented that this image, which he refers to as 'the one like a butcher shop' had come to him as an accident. His much-quoted statement was, 'I was attempting to make a bird alighting on a field. And it may have been bound up in some way with the three forms that had gone before, but suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different ... It suddenly suggested an opening-up into another area of feeling altogether'.⁸⁹ The stories that accompany the Battle of the Boyne have become legendary to Orangemen. One was set on the morning of 1 July 1690, when William went out of his tent at five o'clock in the morning. As one Orangeman describes it, '[the] moment he appeared on the field a lark rose not far from the tent, and over his head poured forth a melody'.⁹⁰ The lark then flew across the river to the enemy's camp. William interpreted the bird's movement as an omen and followed its direction leading eventually to the defeat of the Irish army. The bird was

thereafter known as 'King William's bird – the bird of the Orangemen'. In the process of creating *Painting*, 1946, it appears that by tapping into one minor aspect of Orangeism (the King William bird stories that may have been common knowledge to Irish schoolboys) the artist appears to have suddenly elicited a set of graphic images of more secretive aspects of the Order.

Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, 1944, also contains a bird-like form in the centre panel. This blindfolded long-necked creature has tripod legs and is perched above a swivel stool. In Irish history the Flight of the Wild Geese was a term used to describe the exodus of defeated Irish soldiers after the Battle of the Boyne who fled to France to serve under the Catholic James II and Louis XIV.⁹¹ From a Protestant point of view the term Wild Goose was derogatory and anti-Catholic. In the context of the initiatory process the use of the term might have been another way of humiliating the blindfolded candidate. The goose-like figure in the centre panel of this painting, combined with the swivel-stool and tripod, could therefore suggest the artist's painful identification with such a creature under the duress of a traumatic initiatory process where 'flight' from the self could have been associated with the Flight of the Wild Geese.

The warrior cults, such as the Orange Order and related groups in Ireland, were conceived in the context of a history of ongoing struggles between two sectors of the Irish community. According to Orangemen, the various battles and skirmishes as well as attacks on civilians were enough to justify the formation of a counter-revolutionary force to protect the interests of the Protestant community and to foster a history of resentment towards Catholicism over many generations.⁹² Bacon's images suggest that one of the strategies used in the context of this resistance may have been the indoctrination of the young through a cruel process of initiation aimed at toughening them according to an ancient set of warrior values. Amongst these values appears to be the intention to create hardened individuals who can dissociate from pain as a survival strategy and confront scenes of death dispassionately, disconnecting from their emotional impact. As Peppiatt notes, '[s]tories abound of the artist's capacity to withstand physical pain' and he is famously quoted

as admitting that he failed to see the horror that others perceived in his images.⁹³ As a form of ‘battle magic’ ritual abuse practices are not meant to be remembered by the initiate but the values they embody are intentionally embedded into the core psychic structure of the individual and foster attitudes that are aimed at maintaining an ongoing resistance to the enemy across the generations.⁹⁴

Bacon actively resisted this cruel form of indoctrination and rejected in every possible way the examples of masculinity that surrounded him in his youth. But the price of this indoctrination process can be a profound form of psychic fragmentation that Bacon captured in his images. The style of painting he developed in his portraits and self-portraits, while artistically a response to the work of Picasso and other European Modernists, may have been, as this argument suggests, derived from a deeper socialisation experience that had its roots in ancient Irish practices.

Bacon’s relationships and the effects of extreme abuse

The psychic fragmentation that Bacon’s work depicts elicits strong reactions from his audiences, and critics such as Ernst van Alphen have discussed the profound sense of loss of self that the work can produce in the viewer.⁹⁵ Bacon’s friends have also observed the fragmentary nature of the artist’s personality and his ability to be all things to all people. As Michael Peppiatt states, ‘Bacon could not be pinned down. The closer you got to him, the more likely he was to turn nasty or simply disappear – to go through a wall into a life where you could not follow.’⁹⁶ These characteristics are typical of victims of extreme abuse as are the relationship difficulties that plagued the artist throughout his adult life.

Bacon frequently used his friends and lovers as subject matter for his paintings, often setting them within the initiatory space and imbuing their figures and faces with the contortions that appear to be related to the heroic tales of *Cú Chulainn*. Isabel Rawsthorne, for example, is positioned inside the Royal Arch frame along with a bull and the three

blinds in the background in *Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho*, 1967. It is possible that in his trips to Spain, where the bull still retains some of its sacred status, that Bacon may have intuitively connected to this creature's numinous associations and associated them with the initiatory process. In *Three Studies of Isabel Rawsthorne*, 1967, the sitter's face is grossly distorted along the lines of Cú Chulainn's battle transformation. George Dyer appears in many images contorted into the Cú Chulainn pose. Images such as *Three Studies of Figures on Beds*, 1972, which Michael Peppiatt argues may refer to Bacon's violent sexual relationship in Tangiers, depicts the faces of the lovers mutilated along with a floating white ball shape reminiscent of Cú Chulainn's ejected eyeball.⁹⁷

Other portraits of his friends may be associated with the Gnostic initiatory tradition maintained by the chivalric Orders. In *Two Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer*, 1968, the distorted figure in the painting within the painting is pierced by four nails and in *Lying Figure with Hypodermic Syringe*, 1963, the figure's arm is pierced with a syringe. Bacon had commented that this object was used to pin down the 'flesh onto the bed'.⁹⁸ Bacon was thought to have been influenced by a passage from T. S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which describes the sensation of being 'pinned and wriggling on the wall'.⁹⁹ By using the visual image of a syringe Bacon seems to have been trying to find a contemporary image that would convey a similar impression. In the Irish initiatory tradition a famous Medieval knight named Owen was to undergo his initiation into the Cave of Death at Lough Derg and there experienced various trials including witnessing tortured human beings lying naked and pinned to the ground with hot nails.¹⁰⁰ In the practice of ritual abuse children are frequently exposed to scenes that appear to be the torture of other human beings, but that are generally theatrically staged in order to place the child into a state of shock. The child is often made to feel responsible for these acts of torture as if something he had done warranted the punishment of another human being.¹⁰¹ As the memory is then wiped from consciousness, the child then carries a heavy burden of inexplicable guilt into adult life. Bacon has used both his lover George Dyer and his friend Henrietta Moraes as the subject of such an image of torture,

perhaps illustrating feelings of guilt transposed onto his friendships that, in the case of George Dyer, played out as a destructive and ultimately tragic relationship.¹⁰²

One of the more distressing long-term effects of ritual abuse can be the impact on the survivor's ability to maintain healthy relationships, leaving the survivor emotionally isolated despite the presence of well-intentioned friends. As Martin Harrison suggests, while Bacon was sporadically gregarious, he remained, like the subjects of most of his paintings, essentially solitary and private, even furtive in his nocturnal habits.¹⁰³ The artist's sexual relationships were fraught with tension, violence and masochistic tendencies and his experience of sexual abuse as a child, which he openly acknowledged, may have had an influence here. The theme of coupling men, based on his experience of a violent form of homosexuality, was to be an endless subject for his paintings.¹⁰⁴ Identifiable motifs, such as the striped Moroccan-style bed associated with his time in Tangier in the 1950s, locate these images in terms of his fraught relationship with lovers such as Peter Lacey.¹⁰⁵ However, a number of these images of coupling men, such as *Untitled (Two Figures in the Grass)*, c. 1952, depict these figures within the curtained confines of the initiatory space. By interpolating his friends and lovers into his paintings of the ritual space and posing them in ways that reflect attributes of the initiatory ordeal, the artist might have been signalling that the feelings associated with a traumatic ritual experience were a constant, though unrecognised presence in his life. Traumatic events such as those described above can feel to the survivor as intense as if they happened yesterday; and yet, while they are not fully grasped by the conscious mind their effects on the nervous system can never fade, as in the case of ordinary memories. By inserting his friends into images of his interior space the artist may have been flagging the degree to which this turbulent inner dimension permeated many aspects of his everyday life.

Bacon's famous working method in the midst of chaotic confusion is a classic representation of the confused psyche of a victim of ritual abuse practices. As he said himself of his studio, '[t]his mess around us is rather like my mind; it may be a good image of what goes on inside me, that's what it's like, my life is like that'.¹⁰⁶ As trauma studies tell us the information

about the traumatic events are stored as separated details that, until such time as the memory is retrieved, remain in a state similar to the mixed up fragments of a jigsaw puzzle. For an artist working from traumatic material the artistic process involves dipping into this chaos to draw out elements that can become familiar motifs used in the imagery. In Bacon's case the colour and texture of curtains, the geometric forms of the curtain rails, the popes, the round dais shapes and the texture of carpets perpetually resurface along with visual interpretations of concepts. These include the candidate's blindness symbolised by window blinds and their cords, and his need for 'light' represented as light switches and light bulbs; while memories of body positions during the trauma are translated as figurative poses. The artist repeatedly draws on these motifs in multiple attempts to piece together the fragments of the initiatory puzzle and, contrary to the original pain and humiliation, draws much pleasure from this repeated artistic process and the sense of agency it permits. As Bacon said, 'I like working in all this mess ... In the end, I like my paintings to look very ordered, but if they are going to be any good I think they have to come up very freely out of chaos.'¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, the chaotic confusion of Bacon's life and studio might have even been related to some of the expressions found in the language of the fraternities. Another verse from an Orange ditty cited above goes as follows:

Harlot! Cease thy midnight rambles
Prowling for the life of saints,
Henceforth sit in hellish shambles
Where the scent of murder taints
Every gale that passeth by-
Ogre – ghoul of Papacy!¹⁰⁸

Bacon's nightly wanderings, sometimes wearing make-up and fishnet stockings, and his daily struggles with the canvas amidst the shambles of his studio, where he seemed to be grappling with the memories of his own 'soul murder', as well as the many years of his preoccupation with ghoulish images of popes, suggest that Bacon may have lived this verse on a daily basis.¹⁰⁹ As Michael Peppiatt suggests, the state of tension the

artist lived with never abated and even in his later years, 'Bacon stayed unusually alert and tense, as if never out of the grip of extreme internal contradictions.'¹¹⁰ Indeed, it appears that the sins of the fathers, not just of his personal family but also of the collective fathers of the fraternities of his childhood, have been visited in full measure on Francis Bacon, accounting for much of the anger and rebellion that he exhibited throughout his life and work. Such ordeals would have undoubtedly formed his attitude of disdain towards religion generally, even though consciously he was unable to explain in any satisfactory way the reasons for his continued depictions of religious themes and ritualistic imagery.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, by remaining true to the imprints on his nervous system Bacon may have provided us with an insight into a hidden practice of initiation of the young that appears to have survived centuries of contrary religious teachings. Concealed behind the closed doors of fraternal organizations and contrary even to their own professions of regular initiatory rites lies the opportunity for members to resort to 'left-hand' pagan practices for the purpose of brainwashing their own young in the service of particular ideologies. In the context of the Anglo-Irish troubles in Bacon's youth such brainwashing appears to have been intended to indoctrinate the young with the core values and beliefs of the Protestant fraternities. Bacon resisted such an indoctrination process in many ways, but in translating his experience into art it may be that his art was, and still is, endorsing the power of these ancient practices over the individual psyche. The result of his resistance, as we know, was a unique vision that was to alter the direction of contemporary art in Britain and have a lasting impact on western art practices generally. As suggested here, the artist's legacy may not only be an artistic one but also one that asks the viewer to address the historical and social conditions that have allowed these hidden initiation practices to continue.

CHAPTER THREE

Samuel Beckett's Plays: *Waiting for Godot*: A Parody of Royal Arch Rites?

Samuel Beckett's plays have intrigued and delighted their audiences since they first appeared on stages in Paris and London. At the time of their creation his plays were significant for their rejection of a naturalist portrayal of characters and instead portrayed characters that were more like abstracted fragments or aspects of the psyche.¹ The curiously repetitious, ritualistic and circular behaviour of these characters, the bleak and oppressive spaces in which they enact them, as well as the combination of the profound and the comic in the dialogue have provoked endless scholarly discussion and have resulted in multiple interpretations. Beckett's plays have been located within the context of the Theatre of the Absurd and interpreted as existentialist writing. They have been analysed in terms of their literary connections and also with a view to their psychological dimensions. The sense of despair that pervades the work has, as in Bacon's case, been attributed to the effects of war, in particular, Beckett's experiences in the Resistance movement and the sense of disorientation, danger, deprivation and exile that formed part of this period in his young adult life.² As a number of scholars have identified, many autobiographical elements and aspects of Irish life are woven throughout Beckett's writing.³

The plays have also been interpreted as an expression of religious themes, especially those of Christian mysticism.⁴ In relation to a religious interpretation Beckett had a similar reaction to Bacon, insisting on his rejection of the trappings of organised religion despite the critics' responses to his work. Also like Bacon, Beckett claimed to not be aware of the source of his subject matter. He said, 'I don't know where the writing has come from and I am often quite surprised when I see what I have committed to paper.'⁵ He also refused to become involved

in the exegesis of his plays.⁶ Given these factors and the themes of psychological fragmentation, ritualistic movements, repetitive actions and confined spaces in his plays, it is possible that we may also find traces of ritual trauma in his work.

As James Knowlson points out, Beckett was interested in the effects of trauma, particularly after undergoing psychotherapy for depression after his father's death in 1933.⁷ Beckett associated his own feeling of trauma with the experience of birth. He once said to the young writer Charles Juliet, 'I have always had the feeling that somebody inside me had been murdered. Murdered before I was born. I had to find that person and try to bring him back to life.'⁸ As Anthony Cronin notes, the phrase he used to describe this feeling was "existence by proxy", the inability to take a step without feeling that someone else was taking it. In most situations, [he said,] one went through the motions while having a feeling of "being absent" ...⁹ Such a sense of absence and depersonalisation are classic symptoms of clinical states of dissociation as described by psychologists.¹⁰ He also complained of a profound sense of confusion, not unlike Bacon's admission about the state of his mind. In a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy Beckett wrote: '[t]he real consciousness is the chaos, the grey commotion of mind, with no premises or conclusions or problems or solutions or cases or judgements. I lie for days on the floor, or in the woods, accompanied and unaccompanied, in a coenaesthetic of mind, a fullness of mental self-aesthesia that is entirely useless.'¹¹

A short story he wrote in 1933, *A Case in a Thousand*, refers to the theme of trauma. The story concerns the death of a boy. As Knowlson suggests, there are clear autobiographical references in this story: the sad character Dr Nye, whose 'heart knocked and misfired for no reason known to the medical profession' reflected Beckett's own psychosomatic condition; the boy's mother's name is Mrs Bray and in the story the young doctor discovers she is his old nanny.¹² Beckett's own nanny's name was Bridget Bray.¹³ The story ends with a revelation between the doctor and his old nurse, after the boy has died, that there was 'some trauma at the root of [their] attachment'.¹⁴ The subject of this trauma is never revealed in the story, though it is said to be 'connected with [Dr Nye's] earliest years, so trivial and intimate that it need not be enlarged on here, but from the

elucidation of which Dr Nye, that sad man, expected great things'.¹⁵ The connection between childhood trauma, often of an inexplicable nature, and adult feelings of grief, sadness, confusion and depression is a theme that runs throughout Beckett's oeuvre.

When interviewed about his childhood Beckett claimed that he had an uneventful and happy childhood, but that he himself had little talent for happiness.¹⁶ As Deirdre Bair points out, this statement seems only partly truthful and she contends that it masks quite a different situation in which his father was very distant and his mother a tyrannical disciplinarian and moody presence. Much emphasis has been placed on the uneasy relationship between Beckett and his mother, as it was clearly a difficult one fraught with tension that contributed to his depressive states. These states included extreme levels of anxiety, night terrors and psychosomatic symptoms that kept him in bed, curled up in a foetal position, for long periods during his young adulthood.¹⁷ The outcome of his two years of therapy in London was that the analyst was unable to trace the reasons for his anxiety and recommended that his patient pour himself into his writing and try to focus away from his own worries onto the needs of others.¹⁸ While the depressive condition lasted throughout much of his adult life his writing became an outlet for the creative expression of these dark states and he developed a reputation for generosity and attention towards others.

While Beckett's relationship with his mother may have been difficult on a day-to-day basis the following discussion will propose that the profound sense of confusion, deep sense of soul loss and ritualistic elements that permeate his work might not be a result of the impact of one parent, or even of the internal dynamics of the family, but rather may be a product of a set of clandestine practices and group behaviours buried within the fraternal structures that underpinned the Irish culture of the day. The discussion will argue that Beckett's strong sense that his own trauma was located somehow in the experience of his birth and associated with the feeling that somebody inside him was murdered before he was born might not be attributed to the birth process undergone by a newborn infant, but rather to the profound experience of ritual death and rebirth associated with the initiatory process.

Samuel Beckett came from a well-to-do middle-class Dublin family living in the suburb of Foxrock. Originally named Becquet, the family were thought to be French Huguenots who migrated to Ireland in the late seventeenth century.¹⁹ The Beckett men were highly regarded businessmen. His father, Bill Beckett, and grandfather, William Frank Beckett, were in the building trade. They were both Freemasons.²⁰ Bill Beckett was a well-respected quantity surveyor and described as ‘clubbish’ belonging to a number of gentleman’s clubs, which was customary for men of his class.²¹ His office was located in Clare Street, close to Trinity College and a few minutes’ walk from the Masonic Grand Lodge in Molesworth Street. As Anthony Cronin notes, Bill Beckett was not averse to making good use of the ‘Masonic handshake’ for business deals.²² William Frank Beckett was a master builder and his firm was responsible for several important civic buildings in Dublin such as the National Library, the Science and Art Museum and parts of the Adelaide Hospital. Samuel Beckett’s great grandfather, James Beckett, a weaver of silk, was extremely well-to-do and regarded as a pillar of Dublin society. He was also a long-standing member of the Liberal Friendly Brothers Society and served as their secretary for many years.²³

As Buckley and Anderson note, there was an explosion of brotherhoods in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century that became a traditional form of social organization, an ‘authentically Irish form of life’ that was to spread internationally.²⁴ The Friendly Societies were fraternal organizations that were originally devised to benefit members and their families at times of sickness or death and were the precursors to insurance companies. However, most of them also performed secret rituals, had regalia, signs, handshakes and passwords, some of them directly imitating aspects of Freemasonry.²⁵ The attachment to fraternal organizations in Beckett’s family, which would have been standard male behaviour in Ireland at the time, may, as the following discussion suggests, be profoundly significant in terms of deciphering the ritual elements in Beckett’s work.

The Masonic term for the child of a Freemason is *lewis*. The term has a double meaning and is one of the key symbols of Freemasonry. In operative Freemasonry (the ritual practices based on the craft of the Medieval

cathedral builders) the *lewis* is a tool, a type of bolt, which attaches the heavy stone to the pulley to allow the stone to be raised and set in place. It carries the weight of the stone and is the central symbol related to the ritual of Laying the Foundation Stone, Freemasonry's foremost civic duty. Alexander Piatigorsky notes that the term *lewis* is a modern corruption of Eleusis, reflecting Freemasonry's adoption of the Eleusinian Mysteries into its ritual practices. He also notes that it is a term that means 'strength'.²⁶ Sometimes the term 'MacBannai' or 'my poor son' is used instead and a similar word 'Makbenak', a Hebrew password used in the Masonic rituals, means, 'he lives within the son'.²⁷ It may be that Samuel Beckett's writing can tell us something about the 'weight' that the *lewis*, the son of a Freemason, may be carrying. As in the case of Francis Bacon, the reading here will suggest that traces of Masonic Royal Arch rites as well as elements from the Knightly Orders may be found in Beckett's work. The interpretation will advance the argument that aspects of Christian mysticism pervade Beckett's work, but will suggest that these elements appear to be couched in traumatic terms that, as in the work of Bacon, may be associated with initiatory practices. Such an interpretation may not only account for the sense of nihilistic or existential despair in Beckett's work but also for the absurd and pantomimic elements as well as for its religious and psychological aspects.

The ritual elements in Beckett's plays that correspond with those in Masonic rites fall into a number of categories: the characters' costumes and demeanour and how these represent the various roles of the Masonic members in the initiation process; the layout of the space, including the lighting and sound effects; the ritual movements and character locations; and aspects of the wording and characterisation that reflect Masonic oaths and pledges. Many of these elements appear together in the longer plays and suggest an interpretation of the rites that implies their irregular or abusive use rather than an accurate rendition of the formal procedures in the Lodge. Some of the shorter dramatic pieces contain one or two of the elements in isolation. The reading here will suggest that the traces of initiatory practice and the sub-stratum of ritual bodily actions throughout Beckett's plays encapsulate an abortive use of the rites that leaves the initiate in a permanent purgatorial state of terror and existential despair. The

theme of memory loss and the sense of a perpetual present, where such ritualistic behaviours are repeatedly enacted, are key elements in Beckett's plays. Such themes reflect two of the salient features of post-traumatic experience: amnesia towards the full narrative of the original event, but also the accompanying sensation that the traumatic experience is constantly present in the psyche in all its original intensity, as if it were still happening or happened only yesterday. This sensation can be experienced as affective states, bodily 'memories', anxiety and other symptoms.

Waiting for Godot, written firstly in French in 1949 and then in English in 1952, was said to spring 'full blown from Beckett's head in a very brief time',²⁸ suggesting the presence of an intuitive force active in the work's creation. Beckett intended the play to capture a sense of expectation for something important that was about to happen and for it to be vaudevillian in atmosphere. The form of repartee throughout the play, as Deirdre Bair observes, is reminiscent of the exchanges between the author and his partner Suzanne and draws partly on their experiences in wartime France.²⁹

The discussion here will suggest that many of the elements that contribute to this intuitive, free-flowing creation appear to correlate with those found in the Masonic degree of Holy Royal Arch. In Ireland it is known as the seventh degree and is recognised widely to be the completion of the spiritual knowledge presented in the first three degrees of Freemasonry. As stated in the discussion of Bacon's work, its aim is to 'exalt' the initiate towards the experience of a mystical vision. However, the discussion will suggest that *Waiting for Godot* does not relate to the section of the ritual discussed in relation to Bacon's work, the Passing of the Veils, but to another section of these elaborate rites.

In Royal Arch rites one of the principal leaders from exile is Prince Zerubbabel who led the Jews out of Babylon towards Jerusalem where they intend to build the second holy temple of Solomon after the first had been destroyed by pagan influences.³⁰ The two other Principals represent the prophet Haggai and Joshua, the High Priest. Zerubbabel is known in the rites as Z or PZ or PPZ.³¹ The Principals carry a wand or sceptre, tokens of their office and signifying their entrance to the Grand Sanhedrin.³²

The candidate enters the initiatory space wearing the Cable Tow (a long rope tied in a noose around either his neck or waist) as a symbol of his previous initiation into the three degrees of Craft Masonry.³³

One of the most memorable scenes in *Waiting for Godot* is the appearance of Pozzo and Lucky in Act 1 when, after a cry heard offstage, Lucky appears with a long rope passed round his neck, tied in a noose, and is followed by Pozzo, his cruel master. Pozzo cracks his whip, jerks the rope, and Lucky falls over with all of his baggage.³⁴ Pozzo's cruel treatment of Lucky throughout the entire play and his frequent use of abusive language towards him alerts us to the fact that we may be looking at a debased form of the rites. The use of title abbreviations for convenience, which is standard practice in Freemasonry, in this case, Prince Zerubbabel to PZ, is here treated even more casually with the Principal being called Pozzo, a linguistic diminutive of the correct term and a further signifier of the debasement of the strict guidelines of regular Masonic practice. When the initiate is finally invested in this degree it is as a prince or ruler of the Order and to signify this theme there are a number of royal personages portrayed in the rites.³⁵ The character Pozzo appears to be a conflation of a number of these princely roles.

Pozzo's entrance and introduction to Estragon and Vladimir is pompous and self-aggrandising. 'I am Pozzo!' he says, and claims that the land they are on is his.³⁶ One of the royal personages referred to in Royal Arch rites is Cyrus, King of Persia, who in the first year of his reign decreed that the Jews be freed. The Principal Sojourner recites the history of these events and speaks on behalf of Cyrus saying, 'all the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of Heaven given me'.³⁷ Pozzo's claim to own the land they are on reflects the Principal Sojourner's wording. When Pozzo observes that the strangers he meets are indeed human, he bursts into an enormous laugh and exclaims '[o]f the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!'³⁸ In the regular practice of Royal Arch rites the Z and PZ are said to be 'mysterious names of the Divinity'.³⁹ Pozzo's burst of laughter implies a mockery of this concept.

Pozzo's demeanour, as lord and master, is one of self-satisfied wealth and self-interest as well as patronising behaviour. After a conspicuous display in which Lucky assists Pozzo in robbing him in his greatcoat, Pozzo

sits on a small stool and proceeds to drink from a bottle of wine and voraciously devour a piece of chicken in front of his less fortunate fellow creatures.⁴⁰ During the formal rites the Principal Sojourner enters the Chapter, is ceremonially robed and then sits on his chair.⁴¹ In some tracing boards used for these rites the chairs are illustrated as small stools, suggesting the 'movable furniture' used by the migrating peoples as they crossed the desert.⁴² Pozzo's actions resemble this ritual entrance.

Pozzo makes comments on the fact that Lucky, Estragon and Vladimir all smell, and occasionally uses his vaporiser.⁴³ When he first meets Vladimir and Estragon he warns them of coming too close to his slave saying, '[b]e careful! He's wicked. With strangers.'⁴⁴ In Royal Arch rites Cyrus is said to have enlisted the aid of a successful Jew named Jacob Egibi to return the slaves to Jerusalem, who is also referred to in the rites. He is described as 'fat with good living', as is the character Pozzo, and is accompanied by slaves, one of whom beats back the screaming poor, as does Lucky who fends off Vladimir and Estragon. Egibi holds a jar of sweet scent to his nose to fend off the smell of the refuse and the beggars who cry, '[a]id, mighty one, give aid to the starving.'⁴⁵ Pozzo's demeanour and behaviour closely approximates these characteristics.

The characters of Vladimir and Estragon illustrate further aspects of the rites. Beckett had originally named the character Estragon 'Levy'.⁴⁶ In the Old Testament the priests associated with the Ark of the Covenant were known as the sons of Levi.⁴⁷ All invested members of the Royal Arch are known as Princes and the rites state: 'we hereby constitute you as princes and rulers of the Order'⁴⁸ They are also known as Companions, understood in the Latin sense as 'bread sharers', referring to the breaking of bread amongst Knights Templar, as it was through Royal Arch Masonry that an individual could enter the knightly Orders.⁴⁹ Early in the performance Vladimir refers to Estragon as His Highness and later shares with him his humble carrots and turnips.⁵⁰ Royal Arch members often share the Principal roles, even swapping roles throughout the ceremony. In the play, when Pozzo is preparing to move on and leave the company of the others he forgets his chair. Vladimir fetches it and throws it to Pozzo who then passes it to Lucky. The term 'Passing the Chair' in Royal Arch rites refers to the practice of installing temporary Masters

and then immediately resigning them from office so as to process many members through the degree.⁵¹ As Neville Barker Cryer notes, '[a] full participation in our secrets is not possible until one has passed those several chairs'.⁵² The elaborate exchange of hats between Vladimir and Estragon in Act II also reflects the practice in Royal Arch rites where the Principals wear hats, a practice borrowed from the Jewish custom of worship. These principal roles are frequently exchanged.⁵³ Vladimir and Estragon's conversation about the two thieves and the four evangelists at the beginning of Act I clearly links the play to Christian themes. But it is relevant to note that the symbols for the four evangelists, the Lion, the Man, the Ox and the Eagle, were originally used to delineate the four major tribal divisions of the children of Israel. These symbols are displayed on banners in the Royal Arch Chapter room, along with banners representing the twelve tribes of Israel and a central banner representing the symbol of the Triple Tau.⁵⁴

Vladimir and Estragon's role as poor vagabonds in the play is one of a number of examples where Beckett focuses on the struggles of the underdog, the poor or the afflicted in his writing, reflecting the author's awareness of the poverty in Ireland that existed alongside his own more privileged upbringing. As James Knowlson notes, these two characters may have also reflected Beckett's admission that he owed a great deal to J. M. Synge and his depiction of tinkers and beggars.⁵⁵ In the case of this argument it may be relevant to note that in Masonic rites the initiate is described as 'a poor candidate in a state of darkness' and when asked as to why he comes dressed in poverty he answers, 'that the humility of poverty is more favourable to the pursuit of useful knowledge, than the possession of riches that may inflate our natural pride'.⁵⁶ The portrayal of the initiate as a figure of poverty, as Victor Turner notes, is standard practice in initiation rites across cultures.⁵⁷ The initiate's state of darkness is signified by the candidate wearing a blindfold. In *Waiting for Godot* this is reflected in Act II where Pozzo re-enters the stage as a blind man. Pozzo's reversal of fortune and the character's downfall could here be a demonstration of one of the moral lessons of the Masonic degree: the dangers of overblown pride to the moral development of the individual. Vladimir's insistence that they are not beggars, despite Estragon's beggarly

behaviour in Act I, may also be a reminder that the initiate's task is to steer a course between overweening pride and self-abasement.⁵⁸

However, in the irregular use of initiation rites the humiliation of the candidate plays a central role. In Royal Arch rites those members whose responsibility it is to get the equipment from the store and set up the Chapter room prior to the meeting are known as Janitors and Porters.⁵⁹ Lucky acts as a porter throughout the play. He is meek and browbeaten, demonstrating the degradation and humiliation of the candidate when he performs to jerks of the rope, cracks of the whip, commands and derogatory remarks. Vladimir's response to this behaviour is a comment on the immorality of his treatment. He is appalled and, noting that on the back of Lucky's neck is a running sore that is due to the chafing of the knot, he explodes with, '[i]t's a scandal! ... To treat a man ... like that ... I think that ... no ... a human being ... no ... it's a scandal!' Estragon adds 'A disgrace!'⁶⁰ Pozzo's treatment of Lucky is a contravention of the role of the PZ in Royal Arch rites, which is to 'exalt' his neophyte and impart to him the sense of the mystical union.⁶¹ As Victor Turner argues, one of the chief purposes of the initiation process is entrance to an elite.⁶² In the play the name Lucky reflects the candidate's chosen status. However, Beckett's explanation: 'I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations',⁶³ underlines the degraded aspect of this version of initiation, one in which the initiate is reduced to the lowest level of human existence, the role of the slave.

As Deirdre Bair notes, Beckett bestowed on his characters the afflictions he was plagued with in his youth and that appeared as an accompaniment to his most severe mental depressions. A boil at the back of his neck was one such affliction.⁶⁴ His friend, Dr Geoffrey Thompson, was convinced that these eruptions were psychosomatic as, at their worst, they were accompanied by night terrors and severe heart palpitations, and recommended psychoanalysis.⁶⁵ Psychotherapy did not reveal the cause of his affliction but the sublimation of his emotions into his writing seemed to quell the sense of terror.⁶⁶ His character Lucky appears to be one of the carriers of this terror. A victim of cruel treatment, his innate intelligence has been scrambled and his once exuberant energy has been drained. 'He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the

fandango, and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy'.⁶⁷ Now, he thinks he's entangled in a net and his attempts at intellectual discussion become a bizarre tirade.⁶⁸ The dance that Lucky calls the Net may be a reference to another biblical quote found in the rites, '[l]et the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape'.⁶⁹

Lucky's bizarre speech in Act I may contain elements that inform the reading here. In an unpunctuated mockery of religious beliefs, sporting themes and bureaucratic-speak Lucky begins: '[g]iven the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly ...'.⁷⁰ As Mary Junker notes, the terms 'apathia', 'athambia' and 'aphasia' mean respectively: insensibility to suffering, imperturbability and an inability to communicate or inarticulateness.⁷¹ Such characteristics can be associated with a trauma reaction where the individual dissociates from the pain or shock of an overwhelming experience and is unable to speak of the events. A divine form of these symptoms may well be associated with the initiatory process, where the candidate enters the metaphysical realm *via* the shocks created deliberately by the initiatory elders. As Junker also notes, much of Lucky's speech concerns a particular scenic spot in Ireland, Connemara, or the 'abode of stones', where Beckett had made a walking tour in 1931.⁷² This region and some landmarks such as the Turoe Stone were associated with Druidic magic and fairy rings; St. Feichin's Stones are still regarded as the most famous and effective cursing stones in the country. As Junker observes, Lucky's cursing frenzy is accompanied by four references to the 'abode of stones',⁷³ suggesting that Lucky has some association with the Druidic tradition and Irish magic.

Here it may be useful to note the language used in contemporary discussions of ritual abuse. Noblitt and Perskin define the term 'spirit slave' in the following way:

[in ritual abuse] the spirit slave is a dissociated identity within the individual who, at some level of awareness, remembers being traumatised by the sorcerer and will do anything the sorcerer commands, often including suicide ... We propose that this is how black magic works. When a spell is cast or a curse, or a signal is given, the 'spirit slave' is effectively called out.⁷⁴

Lucky's demeanour and behaviour suggests the condition of the 'spirit slave' as defined above. In contemporary discussions of Masonic ritual abuse, some Christian groups regard the effects on the children of Freemasons as a result of inter-generational curses.⁷⁵

But Lucky is not the only carrier of initiatory pain in the play. As Deirdre Bair points out, Beckett had suffered from recurring trouble with his feet since childhood, walking with a curious gait, legs stiff and feet turned out; the playwright appears to have endowed Estragon with a similar affliction.⁷⁶ In the opening scene Estragon is sitting on a low mound on a country road and is struggling to take off his boots. It is a painful process, and when Vladimir addresses him Estragon admits to being beaten again, by 'the same lot as usual' and dragged through the mud.⁷⁷ In regular Masonic rituals the removal of the shoes is regarded as a symbolic act implying entry to a sacred space. The abusive use of the rites, however, can involve painful and humiliating treatment sometimes associated with the feet. As noted in Chapter One the Rugged Road is the term used for the humiliating travel of the blindfolded and barefooted initiate around the perimeter of the lodge on a path strewn with obstacles such as blocks of wood, brambles and branches. The candidate's legs can be whipped or kicked to the accompaniment of hilarious laughter by the members.⁷⁸ Later in the play Lucky violently kicks Estragon in the shins. Having forgotten this experience by Act II Estragon is reminded and says, 'I remember a lunatic who kicked the shins off me. Then he played the fool!'⁷⁹

Beckett had recounted a similar practice from his schooldays at Le Peton's English public school where sadistic seniors taunted the junior boys.⁸⁰ The 'Dancing Class' was conducted in the basement and small pieces of stones or concrete were thrown at the younger boys' feet to make them dance. Clearly Beckett had no problem remembering these practices, unlike his character Estragon, who suffers from amnesia. It is

possible that, like Bacon, Beckett's recollection of his schooldays acted as a 'screen memory' for the more ritualistic and clandestine Royal Arch rites. The replacement of Estragon's boots by another pair in Act II may also relate to one of the biblical themes referenced in the rites, the custom of leaving shekels or shoes for the poor.⁸¹ Being dragged through the mud could also be associated with a biblical theme noted in the rites: the plight of the Hebrew slaves when they laboured to produce bricks in the mudpits of Egypt.

For Estragon then, the painful removal of his boots at the beginning of the play marks the entry to the sacred as a painful and humiliating experience. Such treatment corresponds with the ordeals of the ancient mystery cults, which, as David Stevenson argues 'exploited pain, fear, humiliation and exhaustion as aids to changing attitudes, just as modern brainwashing techniques do.'⁸² The theme of memory loss, a theme that permeates Beckett's writing, and the suggestion that the same events are continually being revisited day after day in *Waiting for Godot*, underlines the role of repressed memory and repetition of trauma that are the salient features of the post-traumatic stress experienced by victims of ritual abuse. A hint that this may be due to childhood trauma is conveyed in the play when Pozzo asks Estragon, '[w]hat age are you, if it's not a rude question. Sixty? Seventy?' He then asks Estragon what age he thinks Lucky would be. Estragon answers '[e]leven.'⁸³ The age of eleven could imply that the cruel initiatory treatment being suggested here may be the basis for a set of puberty rites. Beckett refers to the age of eleven in a number of his writings.⁸⁴

Towards the end of Act I a boy of such an age enters the stage with a message from Mr Godot, saying Mr Godot won't be coming today but surely tomorrow. Vladimir asks him '[w]hat do you do?' and he answers, 'I mind the goats, sir.'⁸⁵ The trials of initiation are sometimes called 'riding the goat', a term used for the rough horseplay enacted on the initiates where the members sometimes imitate goat bleats as they mock the candidates.⁸⁶ Ruth Dudley Edwards states that in Irish fraternal Orders the word goat in 'riding the goat' is a backwards acronym for 'The Ark of God', implying a mockery of the religious sentiments of the Masonic degree and relating it to pagan practices.⁸⁷ In the play Vladimir asks the boy if

Godot beats him. The boy replies that Godot beats his brother who minds the sheep, but is kind to him. Vladimir comments, '[e]xtraordinary the tricks that memory plays'.⁸⁸ When the boy reappears in Act II he seems to have forgotten the events of the previous day. The shepherd boy may be a reference to the biblical character of David, from whose bloodline the Royal Arch Principals are said to have descended.⁸⁹ A song from the Royal Black Institution, for example, relates initiation in terms of a dream that takes the initiate along 'some rugged paths' where he meets the young shepherd boy David.⁹⁰

The boy's comment on his brother being beaten, along with Vladimir's observation about the tricks of memory, appears to be a reference to the dissociation, memory loss and splitting of the psyche that can occur for victims of ritual abuse, where parts of the psyche remember the abuse, while the everyday conscious mind remains oblivious to these painful experiences.⁹¹ In Act II, just prior to the second entrance of the boy, Vladimir questions his own memory and the possibility that he may have forgotten the cruel treatment suffered by others. He says, '[w]as I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now?'⁹² Vladimir also comments on the repetitive nature of traumatic memory; that it plays itself over again and again in liminal parts of the mind. He predicts that when Estragon wakes he will know nothing of the day's events and they will be re-enacted with all of the confusion of the day before.⁹³ Vladimir's comments on the tricks of memory demonstrate that Beckett appears to have been aware of the role of memory as it relates to abusive experience.

One of the chief aims of the official Royal Arch rites is to prepare the candidate for an experience of mystical illumination or exaltation, a sense of oneness with the Divine. The initiate is told that his task is, 'to uncover the true Holy Name of the true and living God Most High. This is the aim and end of all his searching'⁹⁴ One of the places where the Companions gather in the Chapter is meant to symbolise the Wilderness of Sinai.⁹⁵ In some Royal Arch Chapters the ceiling is painted to represent the sky. In the rites there is much attention paid to the heavenly bodies as an understanding of the movement of the stars or the Zodiac was one of the most important sciences in biblical times and was crucial knowledge for travellers.⁹⁶ In *Waiting for Godot* the sparse and minimal set conveys

an outdoor setting. Beckett had claimed that the visual source for this play was Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Zwei Manner betrachten den Mond* (*Two Men Contemplating the Moon*) from 1819.⁹⁷ In Act I Pozzo draws the others' attention to the sky at twilight. 'Ah yes! The night,' he says and proceeds to discuss the qualities of the firmament.⁹⁸

During the rites the blindfolded candidate symbolically travels along the path taken by the Hebrew sojourners and is led around the room to contemplate a number of symbols.⁹⁹ One of these is the Burning Bush, before which Moses was commanded by God to take off his shoes.¹⁰⁰ It is generally the only prop used in the Chapter room. While the relevant biblical verses are being recited, one of the members, impersonating the Deity, hides behind the bush and calls out 'Moses! Moses!' at the same time as the candidate's blindfold is removed.¹⁰¹ In *Waiting for Godot* a tree is the single prop in the set's landscape. When Vladimir and Estragon first discuss where they are to wait for Godot Vladimir says that it is near the tree, but notices that the tree looks dead. Estragon says, '[l]ooks to me more like a bush'.¹⁰² The barren appearance of the tree suggests that the experience of mystical illumination is not about to happen here. As Vladimir says to Estragon, '[w]hat are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?'¹⁰³ Their clumsy imitation of the tree later in the play while doing their exercises suggests that the form of the rites being portrayed here are a poor imitation of their true purpose: the preparation of the initiate for mystical illumination through a series of spiritual exercises.¹⁰⁴ In Act II when they hear the arrival of the strangers Vladimir, hoping that it is Godot coming, tells Estragon to hide behind the tree. But the tree is again ineffectual and Vladimir says, '[d]ecidedly this tree will not have been of the slightest use to us'. He then scans the horizon with his hand screening his eyes.¹⁰⁵ The raising of the hand to screen the eyes is a Masonic gesture used in the rites known as the Royal Arch Due Gard and Sign, representing the Companion's need to shield his eyes from the intense light emanating from the Tabernacle.¹⁰⁶ Stephen Knight suggests that Freemasons also use this pose as a sign of grief and distress.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the formal rites there are many references to the God of the fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob and so on. As the name Pozzo appears to be a diminution of the PZ, so

the term Godot can be read as another example of linguistic diminution, a further reflection on the trivialisation and corruption of the Masonic ritual. The confusion as to who Godot is throughout the play, and in particular Estragon's confusion between Godot's name and Pozzo's, as well as his continual need to be reminded of their purpose in this place, emphasises the failure of this version of the rites to achieve anything like a state of mystical enlightenment. As Estragon says, '[p]ersonally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him'.¹⁰⁸

Whenever critics attempted to interpret Godot as God Beckett would always react with annoyance. He preferred to suggest that the French slang word for boot 'godillot, godasse' more closely related to the name Godot because of the importance of the motif of feet in the play.¹⁰⁹ In the Masonic rites the ritual removal of shoes is to signify the initiate's entrance into the sacred presence of God, however the rites being enacted in *Waiting for Godot* are far from the solemn experience that true Masonic practice attempts to evoke in its participants. They appear to be a mockery of the rituals. Lucky's ridiculous speech in Act I parodies Masonic ritual speeches, which are generally long and tedious, but are intended to impart some knowledge of the historical, moral and mystical purposes of the degree.¹¹⁰ The exaggerated and rather foolish display of a group of ordinary men pompously referring to each other as princes and making grandiose statements and gestures from biblical sources, as well as their aspirations towards the higher dimensions of mysticism, is clearly in the realms of the absurd. Vladimir and Estragon's comment on the slapstick performance in front of them, '[i]t's awful ... Worse than the pantomime ... The circus ... The music-hall', highlights this absurdity.¹¹¹ Such a display is also indicative of the problem for the ordinary man who enacts these rites without any real understanding of their deeper purpose. Through familiarity with the rites, and particularly if the member has worked his way through to the 'sublime' degree of the Holy Royal Arch, then it may seem that the member who joins the Order has some grasp of its true purpose, as Vladimir seems to think he knows Godot. But in reality, the truth is more along the lines of Estragon's remark: he wouldn't know a mystical experience if he saw one.

A further parody of the Masonic symbolism within the rituals is demonstrated by the long noose-like rope that Lucky wears throughout the play. In Freemasonry this long rope is known as the Cable Tow or Cable Tau. In the First Degree the candidate wears it around his neck as he enters the ritual space and is led around the room by it. At one point the rope is pulled so that he falls backwards, illustrating the close proximity of death in his initiatory trial. The Cable Tow has various symbolic and moral purposes. During the First Degree the candidate is asked, '[w]hy was a cable-tow placed around your neck?' and the candidate replies, '[t]hat if influenced by fear, I should attempt to fall back, all hopes of retreat might be cut off'.¹¹² One Masonic author, W. L. Wilmshurst, states:

In the Entered Apprentice Degree the aspirant is taught the useful lesson that he who has once felt within him the impulses of Light, and been moved to seek it, should never retreat from this quest, and, indeed, cannot do so without doing violence to the highest within him, a violence equivalent to moral suicide.¹¹³

At the beginning of the play Vladimir and Estragon discuss the theme of suicide. Their comments, however, make a mockery of the serious moral intent implied by the Masonic rites. 'What about hanging ourselves?' says Estragon, and Vladimir adds, '[h]mm. It'd give us an erection!'¹¹⁴ At the very end of the play this suicide scenario is repeated and the mockery taken even further. Without a rope to hang them from the tree Estragon uses the chord from his trousers so that his trousers fall down.¹¹⁵ In Royal Arch rites a piece of rope is present on the floor of the Chapter room to signify the rope that was tied around the priest's waist, which was used to pull him out of the Holy of Holies should he collapse inside the inner sanctum.¹¹⁶ The tradition of Hebrew priests wearing cords around their waist was to be a reminder of the rope's sacred purpose. When Estragon removes the cord from his waist and his pants drop to the floor the absurdity of his role as High Priest emphasises the very flawed nature of the rites being presented here.

The Cable Tow has other meanings of a more mystical nature, which are particularly appropriate to the plight of Lucky and of a victim of the abusive use of the rites. Masons are told that the Cable Tow, on a mystical level, represents the fine thread of matter that connects the individual's

physical, emotional and intellectual body to their spiritual self. It is the 'silver cord' spoken of in the Bible that allows the ego to temporarily travel away from the body during the normal state of sleep or during more disturbing states of dissociation in times of illness or violent shock or through the inducement of drugs or alcohol.¹¹⁷ The ability to consciously master the power to dissociate and 'travel' away from the body is one of the aspirations of the mystical trainee. However, the deliberate application of shock in the abusive use of ritual practices is also based on an understanding of the dissociative role of the Cable Tow. In Lucky's case it acts as a signifier of his ongoing entrapment in a torturous process.

Waiting for Godot, then, appears to be more than just a comment on the foolish display of pseudo priests enacting a comic version of the rites; it also seems to be the context in which abusive practices are enacted on the initiate in a series of tricks and cruel behaviours. Vladimir's philosophical reflection in Act II sums up the gravity of the initiate's experience: '[a]stride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps.' Then he says, '[a]t me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on.'¹¹⁸ The death and re-birth of the initiate is the subject of virtually all Masonic rituals, as it is the subject of initiation practices across cultures. In some versions of the rituals the candidate is lowered into a coffin as a symbol of death and then pulled out by his fellows in a joyful reunion with his brothers. Beckett's reference to the function of the gravedigger and midwife represents the two processes involved. If the rites are practised correctly the rebirth is intended to be a joyous moment, an experience of 'illumination' or 'exaltation'. However, *Waiting for Godot* depicts a difficult delivery, in fact a birth that never actually occurs. Rather than the initiate being received in welcome by the brothers and reconciled to them, thus completing the process, he is left sleeping, that is, unconscious of the true nature of the trickery and cruelty used against him. In the ritual abuse of children this literally means pushing them into altered states by denying them sleep and then shocking them with a range of cruel treatments and tricks until they fall unconscious. Among these shocks they can be placed in coffins or lowered into graves.¹¹⁹

When they later struggle with the feelings associated with the initiation, they remember it only as some terrible and horrifying dream.

The symbolic rebirth of the initiate, known in Masonic terms as the raising of the initiate, is referred to in *Waiting for Godot*, but again this ritual process is treated with mockery and disdain. It is enacted twice during the play. In Act I this occurs when, after his speech, Lucky collapses to the ground once his hat has been removed. Estragon says, '[p]erhaps he's dead'. Pozzo kicks Lucky, saying '[u]p pig ... Up scum' and then tells the others to raise him up.¹²⁰ They hoist him to his feet but he collapses again. This failure to raise the initiate the first time reflects the raising of the body of Hiram Abiff, which first appears in the Third Degree of Freemasonry. Hiram Abiff, according to Masonic legend, was the master builder of King Solomon's Temple who was murdered by three traitors, his fellow craftsmen. The body was roughly buried and then disinterred. Due to the fact that the corpse was rotting, the first attempt to grasp the corpse's hand failed and the body slipped back into the grave. The second attempt retrieved the corpse.¹²¹ In *Waiting for Godot*, immediately after Lucky is finally raised, Pozzo loses his watch and Vladimir and Estragon position themselves on either side of him in an exaggerated triangular pose to listen for the ticking in his fob pockets.¹²² In Royal Arch rites this positioning reflects the role of the three Principals who, immediately after the initiate is raised, form a triangle with their sceptres to reflect the significance of the triangle in Euclidean geometry as well as its role as an ancient symbol of God.¹²³

In Act II both Lucky and the blind Pozzo fall over and Vladimir and Estragon consider whether they should raise them. Vladimir ponders at length the value of helping the two men. He says, '[l]et us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed'.¹²⁴ One of the initiate's oaths is to help all poor and distressed Master Masons, 'without material injury to myself and family'.¹²⁵ After a number of attempts when all of the characters fall over, they eventually raise Pozzo who crawls away and then collapses again. The raising of the initiate in Royal Arch rites takes a number of attempts; in the rites it is stated as five distinct efforts.¹²⁶ Vladimir and Estragon call Pozzo by the names Abel and Cain. When he responds to both Estragon says, '[h]e's all mankind'.¹²⁷ The use of

the Old Testament names relate to widely known biblical stories, but they also have particular significance in a discussion of spurious Freemasonry. The Masonic author Albert Mackey attributes the development of the two forms of Freemasonry, true and spurious, to the two races of men descended from Adam, the virtuous race of Seth (or Abel) down to the descendents of Noah, who retained the true values of Freemasonry, and the wicked one of Cain, whose descendents perverted the rites for profane purposes. He then claims that these two systems were blended after the building of the Tower of Babel.¹²⁸ Pozzo's response to being called Abel and Cain reflects the blending of these two systems. After calling 'Cain' Estragon looks to the sky. He says, '[l]ook at the little cloud ... There in the zenith.'¹²⁹ This comment may be a reference to the cloud that appeared over the Tabernacle in the Wilderness of Sinai. When it was present the children of Israel were to refrain from their journey.¹³⁰

The exchange of names, roles and subject positions throughout *Waiting for Godot* may not only reflect religious characters and their ritual significance but also the psychological attributes associated with a torturous experience of initiation. If these characters do, in fact, represent aspects of the psyche, as some scholars have proposed, then it is a psyche fragmented due to the blurring of boundaries between the torturer and his victim. At first this relationship is clearly depicted in the bond between Pozzo and Lucky, with Pozzo enacting the role of the corrupt Principal and Lucky showing all the symptoms of the pain, fear, humiliation and exhaustion associated with the candidate's role. But as the play progresses all of the characters depict similar traits: Estragon experiences a recurring sense of being beaten, Pozzo becomes blind and dependent in Act II and Vladimir furiously kicks Lucky towards the end of the play.¹³¹ This confusion for a victim of ritual abuse can be a result of a loss of boundaries between the victim's identity and the more powerful and aggressive identities of his persecutors. The internalised initiatory trial, experienced in the psyche as one of ongoing torture, thus becomes a confused blend of actions and character traits that, in the context of their aesthetic expression, can be transposed from one character to another.

From the above account it appears that Beckett may have been exposed to a parodied and clandestine form of Masonic initiation that

has resurfaced in detail to form the underlying structure of *Waiting for Godot*. Using his literary skill Beckett has given aesthetic form to this material producing one of the most significant plays of the twentieth century; some have even called it one of the most important plays of all time.¹³² The version of the rites that Beckett shows us in this play appears to be aimed at ridiculing the formal procedures outlined by the Masonic Grand Lodge as well as the concept of mystical illumination and the biblical content that forms the narrative elements of the degree. In the context of Irish Protestantism and the central practice of religious worship in Ireland at the time, it may be that a clandestine ritual process provided an opportunity for some men to exercise a secret disdain for the emasculating effects of too much Christianity, as well as for the high moral expectations associated with the formal Masonic procedures. Accompanying this ritual travesty there appears to be traces of abusive techniques including the humiliation, exhaustion and physical abuse of the candidate, such as is found in the classical initiatory tradition. Such techniques, if practised on the young, can result in a state of traumatic memory loss and confusion, a condition that this argument suggests is played out in dramatic form amongst the characters in *Waiting for Godot*.

Beckett appears to have revisited similar themes throughout his creative career. Many of his other plays contain similar elements and motifs that appear to involve lingering traces of an initiatory process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Samuel Beckett's Plays: Ritual Movements, Subjective States, Torture and Trauma

While *Waiting for Godot* may be the play that expresses the clearest relationship between the official Royal Arch rites and their irregular use this chapter will suggest that many of Beckett's plays contain Masonic elements and probe further aspects of the initiation process. *Endgame*, for example, can be interpreted as alluding to one of the pledges made by the Masonic candidates and containing further references to Royal Arch rites as well as to those from the Knightly Orders, also known as Christian Masonry. A number of the short plays, especially those that display strange ritual actions such as *Act Without Words I*, *Come and Go* and ... *but the clouds ...* appear to replicate specific ritual movements conducted during the rites. A category of plays, including *Happy Days*, *All That Fall* and *That Time*, contain some elements of Masonic ritual but the emphasis is on subjective states as they explore feelings of grief and depression and the theme of childhood. A further category deals with the subject of torture and is found in plays such as *Rough for Radio II*, *Rough for Theatre II* and *What Where*. The following traces a range of Beckett's plays demonstrating the Masonic and initiatory themes that are woven through each one.

Endgame (Fin de partie)

Written in French in 1954 and first performed in English in Great Britain in 1957, *Endgame* is a one-act play that involves an exchange between four characters: Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell. There is minimal action in the play other than a range of ritualistic behaviours. The character of Hamm is a blind invalid who sits in an armchair on castors. Nagg and Nell, the parents of Hamm, are both invalids and remain embedded in ashbins, and Clov is the attendant or carer who waits on them all.¹ The exchange between the cantankerous and demanding Hamm and his long-suffering attendant Clov typifies the boredom and frustration associated with the decrepitude of advancing age, one of the themes for which Beckett is well known. The title *Endgame* reflects this latter period of life and the potential for it to be acted out in senseless, exasperating and manipulative interpersonal behaviour. As Beckett had himself noted, the title and the moves in the play also denote the final stages of a chess game and Hamm's opening words 'Me – to play' introduce this theme, although Beckett was clear to point out that this was not the limits of the imagery in this play.² As in *Waiting for Godot*, the curious ritualistic movements and unusual references throughout *Endgame* may also have their source in Masonic rites. This play appears to be referring to further aspects of Royal Arch rites including the Passing of the Veils, though in a different manner to that of Francis Bacon, and may also be referring to one of the rites from the Knightly Orders. The theme of chess in *Endgame* may therefore be associated with the black and white mosaic pavement, the symbolic floor around which Masonic rituals are woven, as well as the presence of 'knights' in the higher degrees. Also, as James Bonwick notes, the chessboard often served the purpose of divination in the Druidic tradition.³

The character of Hamm has biblical and Masonic significance. Freemasons regard Noah as the original founder of the Order and themselves as sons of Noah. Ham was one of Noah's sons who was accursed by his father for his wickedness and, according to the theories of the Freemason, the Revd George Oliver, introduced spurious elements into

Masonic ritual in the post-diluvian world; in Royal Arch rites the names Shem, Ham, and Japhet are counted as passwords given to the Principal as he takes the blindfolded candidates through the First Veil.⁴ It is interesting that Beckett had called the opening of this play an 'unveiling'.⁵ The character of Hamm at the beginning of the play is covered with an old sheet and wears black glasses, a dressing gown and thick socks, reflecting the dressing of the candidate in veil and slippers.⁶ In some versions of the rites the candidate is described as having 'a lovely sock' on his left foot.⁷ Hamm also has a large bloodstained handkerchief on his face. In Royal Arch initiations the candidate wears a napkin on his head, neatly folded, which is unfolded and wrapped around his face as a blindfold. Then it is removed and 'he rises in light'.⁸ The dirty sheet and bloody handkerchief employed in *Endgame* as the symbolic veil and blindfold imply that we may, again, be looking at a degraded form of a Royal Arch initiation. Nagg and Nell are at first both covered in sheets and for the entire play stay in their ashbins. Later in the play Nagg claims, '[o]ur sight has failed' and then, '[o]ur hearing hasn't failed'.⁹ As mentioned in Bacon's case, the blindfolded initiate can hear what is happening but cannot see. Hamm also stresses his tiredness, which could be another reference to the exhaustion of the candidate in an irregular initiation.¹⁰ Hamm, Nag and Nell thus appear to represent aspects of the three initiatory candidates.

The character of Clov may also represent aspects of the initiate's role. One of the pledges made by the Masonic candidate is:

That I might thence learn as a Mason to practice universal beneficence, to be as eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, that, whenever in my progress through life, I should meet with a worthy man, particularly a Mason, in that state of distress, the appearance of which I then voluntarily assumed, I should stretch forth my right hand of Fellowship to comfort and protect him.¹¹

Clov's role as carer of the blind and lame Hamm and the incapacitated Nag and Nell reflects the role of the candidate undertaking his pledge.

The play begins with Clov engaged in a curious ritualistic performance.¹² There are two small windows with drawn curtains at the rear of the stage. Clov begins by looking up at the left window then moves to look up at the right; then he gets a small step-ladder and ascends it to

each of the windows to draw back the curtains. He takes measured steps between each window and briefly laughs when he has climbed the ladder and is looking out of the windows. In Royal Arch rites the Principal and the candidates take a number of ritual steps marking the journeys of the Jews as they returned from Babylon.¹³ The two windows may suggest the presence of the two 'great lights' represented in many Masonic rituals, the sun and the moon; the drawing of the curtains, a reference to the Veils ceremony as well as to the removal of the candidate's blindfold. A stepladder is also used in some of the rituals to symbolically represent the stages of spiritual development required of the candidate. In the Eighteenth Degree (in Ireland its full title is The Excellent and Perfect Prince Rose Croix of Heredom and Knight of the Eagle and Pelican) the candidate must 'prepare to ascend the mysterious ladder' in order to discover the Lost Word, achieved by the application of Faith, Hope and Charity.¹⁴ In irregular versions of the rites a ladder is sometimes used in conjunction with the tricks played on the initiate. For example, the blindfolded initiate can be required to climb to the top of the ladder and fall backwards into a blanket. He is then tossed in the blanket in a version of 'riding the goat', accompanied by much hilarity from the members.¹⁵ Clov's calculated movements and brief laugh reflect some of these ritual elements.

Clov's initial words imply a broad philosophical comment on life and the role of time, but may also reflect aspects of Masonic ritual. He begins, '[f]inished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished'.¹⁶ A number of critics have noted the references to Christ's crucifixion in this play. Clov's opening words parody Christ's words on the cross. As Ackerley and Gontarski point out, the names Clov in French, Nagg in German and Nell in English are all names for nail and Hamm, an abbreviation of hammer, a further reminder of the crucifixion theme.¹⁷ The Masonic Eighteenth Degree may be significant here.¹⁸ For this degree the Lodge is set up to remind the initiate of the state of darkness induced by Christ's impending death and the rites state: '[a]t the moment a strange confusion exists among us and over the face of the universe. The veil of the temple is rent. Darkness covers the earth. The sun is obscured'.¹⁹ When Hamm asks Clov to wheel him towards the window and tell him about the sun and the state of the sky Clov, in exasperation, replies: 'Grey. Grey! GRREY!

... Light black. From pole to pole'. He then states: '[w]hy this farce, day after day?'²⁰ Nell, in her conversation with Nagg earlier in the play, asked this same question, emphasising the farcical tone of this performance.²¹ Throughout the play the interaction between the characters is one of frustrating miscommunication and bizarre repetitive enactments creating 'a strange confusion' enacted within the realms of the tiresomely mundane that parodies the more deeply religious significance of the period surrounding Christ's crucifixion.

Clov's opening speech continues: '[g]rain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. I can't be punished any more. I'll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me. Nice dimensions, nice proportions. I'll lean on the table, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me.'²² Here Clov appears to be referring to the hourglass, a common sign for time passing, but also one of Freemasonry's most important symbols. Clov's statement that he will go to his kitchen to wait to be called parallels the period of contemplation that the candidate undertakes in an adjacent room or 'chamber of reflection' before he is called in for the initiation.²³ The reference to 'nice dimensions, nice proportions' reflects the special role of geometry and of the craft of building in Masonic rites. There is also a reference to the perambulations or 'rounds' undertaken around the perimeter of the Lodge in this play. Hamm asks Clov, '[t]ake me for a little turn ... Not too fast... Right round the world! ... Hug the walls, then back to the centre again'²⁴ Then, the complicated process of finding the exact centre in the middle of the room where Hamm's wheelchair is to be placed may be another farcical enactment of the positioning of the Master of the Lodge according to the important Masonic symbol of the Point within a Circle, where the Master is regarded as the solar orb and the Lodge itself, the world or the universe, reflecting the sun worship of the Ancient Mysteries.²⁵

One of the most nonsensical parts of the play involves a little toy dog with one missing leg and a gaff that Hamm uses to push himself around the room, which he then throws on the floor.²⁶ When the candidates enter the First Veil in Royal Arch rites they are given the password accompanied by a sign: the casting of a cane onto the ground to represent the

commandment God made to Moses to cast his rod on the ground where it turned into a serpent.²⁷ Hamm's actions with the gaff parallel this ritual movement. Later in the play Clov hits Hamm violently over the head with the dog and Hamm protests: '[i]f you must hit me, hit me with an axe. Or with the gaff, hit me with the gaff. Not with the dog. With the gaff. Or with the axe.' He then says, '[p]ut me in my coffin.'²⁸ When the candidates have passed through all of the Veils they are given a pickaxe, a shovel and a crow-bar, known as the working tools of a Royal Arch Mason. Incorporated into some versions of these rites is the ritual murder of the master builder of Solomon's Temple, Hiram Abiff, first introduced in the Third Degree.²⁹ Hiram is hit on the head with the Masonic tools. He then sinks back into a coffin. Clov's actions and Hamm's comments parallel this section of the Royal Arch ritual.

The raising of the initiate is then completed 'by means of the eagle's claw and the lion's paw', a hand grip in which one or more brothers and the initiate grasp each other's wrists to pull him from the coffin, thus signifying the return of the initiate to the brotherly fold.³⁰ Clov's actions, using the three-legged toy dog with which to hit Hamm, parodies the ritual death and raising of the initiate with the lion's paw. The fact that the toy dog is broken may be a reference to the wording in the Eighteenth Degree which, along with the renting of the Temple veil, includes the statement, '[o]ur tools are broken.'³¹ After the candidate is accepted into the degree the members break bread and eat salt together 'according to the oriental custom'. They share a piece of bread or biscuit in a form of communion, saying '[t]ake; eat, and give to the hungry!'³² In *Endgame* Nagg knocks on Nell's dustbin lid to rouse her and they share a biscuit that Clov has given Nagg earlier in the play.³³ Throughout all Masonic rites the members make a number of knocking sounds, known as Masonic knocks, which are used to separate different sections of the ritual.

In the Eighteenth Degree the candidate pauses before the fourth step of the ladder and is reminded of the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as well as the story of the crucifixion. In *Endgame* Hamm tells a story and notes that it took place on Christmas Eve. Hamm's story introduces a boy into the plot, as in *Waiting for Godot*. It tells of a destitute man who appealed to him for bread for his small boy and for him to be taken into

Hamm's service. In a callous and impatient tone Hamm refers to the possibility that the child may not even be alive, but then talks of reviving a little brat with a bowl of porridge and of the child being left in deep sleep.³⁴ Nagg also reminds Hamm of when he was a small boy and frightened of the dark.³⁵ Later Hamm bemoans his predicament if left alone. He says he will be plagued by all kinds of fantasies, '[t]hen babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark.'³⁶ These references to a boy and to childhood states are interspersed with ongoing miscommunication between Hamm and Clov implying further confusion and disorder.

The practice of taking children of indigent Masons into the service of more wealthy brethren or into orphanages run by Masonic groups where they were regarded as 'orphans of the Craft' was known in Ireland and England from the 1790s.³⁷ Hamm's story reflects this theme but may also be commenting on the use of Masonic rites for the initiation of a child. His use of the term 'brat', while a common colloquialism, may, as in the case of Bacon, be related to the initiated boy. The fact that he has to be revived, along with the splitting of the child's psyche into various parts, could be alluding to the experience of shock and its accompanying states of dissociation and fragmentation. Immediately after their discussion of the boy Clov begins to put things in order, to clear everything away. He says, 'I love order. It's my dream.'³⁸ In Royal Arch rites the candidates are directed to 'repair to the northeast corner of the ruins of the old Temple, with orders to remove the rubbish, preparatory to laying the foundation of the new Temple.'³⁹

Endgame thus appears to contain Masonic references incorporated into a frustrating interchange between the characters, associated with one of the pledges made by the initiate: that of caring selflessly for a fellow brother in need. References to both Royal Arch and the Degree of Knights of the Eagle and Pelican suggest that Beckett may have been exposed to irregular versions of both of these degrees. Acted out as a game between Hamm and Clov of which Clov eventually grows tired the ritual elements in the play parody the formal Masonic rites, as they do in *Waiting for Godot*. However, rather than the characters remaining totally entrapped, as in the former play, there is some sense of release when Clov

decides to leave Hamm's service, thus breaking the endless round of senseless enactments. The conclusion of the play, however, demonstrates the continuing impact of a disturbing initiation process when Hamm ends his soliloquy and unfolds his handkerchief, placing it over his face.⁴⁰ In the regular enactment of Royal Arch rituals the final removal of the blindfold is to symbolically demonstrate the state of exaltation and enlightenment that the brother has gained through the initiatory process. However, in *Endgame* the reverse occurs suggesting a darkening of the light and implying the perpetual darkness of an incomplete initiation process.

Act Without Words I (Acte sans paroles I)

Mimed enactments and strange ritual movements occur in a number of Beckett's short plays and these enactments may connect to further aspects of Masonic ritual. *Act Without Words I*, written in French in 1956, is a comical, even slapstick, mime with one male character. It is set in a desert lit by a dazzling light. After the man has made a series of exits and entrances to the right and left wing in response to whistles, being thrown back on stage on each occasion, a little tree descends from above and lands on the stage. The man takes some shelter from the harsh light under its palms until they close up like a parasol. From the setting of desert, tree and dazzling light, it seems that this may be another attempt to portray a section of Royal Arch rites acted out as a mysterious parody. Beckett had called this play a codicil to *Endgame*⁴¹ and in Royal Arch rites an additional section of the ritual takes place within an underground crypt.

In *Act Without Words I* a pair of tailor's scissors, then a tiny carafe labelled WATER, three cubes and a knotted rope descend from the flies above, and are raised and lowered as if teasing the man and preventing him from gaining access to the much needed water. He tries various arrangements of the cubes to reach the carafe that is dangling above, but on each occasion the cubes fall over. He then climbs the rope to reach the carafe but the carafe is then pulled up out of reach. He then begins to cut the

rope with the scissors but while he is doing so the rope pulls him up and when he finally completes the cut he falls to the ground with a length of the rope. With this he then makes a lasso and tries to lasso the carafe. After being whistled from the right and left wing and being flung back on stage several times the carafe is pulled up out of sight. He becomes despondent and considers cutting his throat with the scissors. All of the props are then pulled away and the carafe is lowered and comes to rest a few feet from his body. He is whistled from above but sits looking at his hands and does not move. The curtain falls.

In order to pass the Fourth Veil of the official Royal Arch rites the candidates must give the password 'Haggai, Joshua and Zerubbabel' and a sign, which is to pour a little water from a small vessel. In *Act Without Words I* the tiny carafe could be said to be a similar vessel. Then '[t]he Veils are now drawn aside, and the candidates enter amid a dazzling light ... The light is usually made by igniting gum camphor in an urn upon an altar'.⁴² After passing all of the Veils the candidates are taken to the ruins of the Temple, represented in one corner of the Chapter room by a pile of stones, and there find a keystone that reveals a secret underground vault. This vault contains a representation of the Ark of the Covenant. One of the candidates must retrieve the sacred book held within the Ark and in order to do so is lowered into the vault by a rope around his waist.⁴³ In some Chapter rooms the vault or crypt is literally constructed as an underground space, sometimes with a number of trapdoors, creating a realistic setting into which the candidate can be lowered.⁴⁴ An altar made of two cubes, one on top of the other, is present in the vaulted space.⁴⁵

In *Act Without Words I* the desert setting and dazzling light, combined with the lowering of the props, could be seen as a combination of the elements associated with the passing of the Fourth Veil and the search within the crypt. The man appears to be trapped in his desert setting while others manipulate him from above. In the rites, when the candidate is lowered into the vault with the rope around his waist, he is told that he can signal to those above to be raised or lowered by pulling the rope in different ways, suggesting that he can trust his Companions above to rescue him if need be.⁴⁶ In *Act Without Words I*, however, the hidden characters above appear to be using their power over the initiate in order to tease

and torment him. The props and setting associated with the ritual thus appear to supply the context for another arduous trial associated with an irregular version of the rites. Combined with the rough physical treatment (the man is flung back on stage whenever he exits right or left) this psychological torment conforms to the tradition of hazing rituals where the initiate is controlled by the group and subjected to rough horseplay and trickster humour.

Beckett had stated that he drew directly on Wolfgang Kohler's *The Mentality of Apes* for this play, which he read in the context of an early interest in behavioural psychology.⁴⁷ Monkeys are referred to in a number of his works. On the occasion of the publication of his novel *Murphy*, for example, he chose an image of two chimpanzees playing chess for the front cover.⁴⁸ The Mosaic Pavement of the Masonic Lodge is composed of black and white tiles similar to that of a chessboard. In the Masonic context the image of monkeys playing chess conveys a mockery of the symbolic purpose of the ritual space and the ritual behaviours enacted within them. Here, it may be relevant to recall Francis Bacon's painting *Pope and Chimpanzee*, 1962, the role of Thoth in his early incarnation as a baboon god, as well as the trickster behaviour found within irregular versions of the rites. Given the emerging case here concerning ritual trauma in a Masonic setting, it is possible that Beckett may have based this play on a repressed experience that could have involved either witnessing or undergoing malicious teasing in the underground crypt of a Royal Arch chapter. As the conclusion of the play suggests, this teasing is intended to produce a state of hopeless submission to the will of others in the mind of the hapless candidate.

Come and Go

A very short theatrical piece or 'dramaticule' written in 1965, *Come and Go*, is a conversation between three identical looking women.⁴⁹ Three female characters, Flo, Vi and Ru, are sitting very erect, side-by-side, centre stage and come and go from the stage according to a pattern as follows:

Flo	Vi	Ru
Flo	...	Ru
...	Flo	Ru
Vi	Flo	Ru
Vi	...	Ru
Vi	Ru	...
Vi	Ru	Flo
Vi	...	Flo
...	Vi	Flo
Ru	Vi	Flo ⁵⁰

When the characters speak it is in a low voices as if they are exchanging intimate gossip about each other. After a brief exchange in which silence is emphasised (Ru states 'let us not speak' and puts her finger to her mouth) Flo suggests, '[j]ust sit together as we used to in the playground at Miss Wade's'. Then, after further exchanges and intervening silences they join hands as follows: Vi's right hand with Ru's right hand. Vi's left hand with Flo's left hand, Vi's arms being above Ru's left arm and Flo's right arm. The three pairs of clasped hands rest on the three laps.⁵¹ As Knowlson notes, Beckett's female cousins attended a school in Dublin known as 'Miss Wade's'.⁵²

The speech and action in this short play parallels a particular section of Royal Arch rites. At the opening and closing of the Royal Arch ceremony each of the three candidates takes his left-hand companion by the right-hand wrist, and his right-hand companion by the left-hand wrist, forming two distinct triangles with the hands, and a triangle with their right feet, amounting to a triple triangle. They then pronounce the following words at the close of the ceremony, each taking a line in turn.

As we three did agree
 In peace, love, and unity
 The sacred word to keep
 So we three do agree
 In peace, love and unity
 The sacred word to search
 Until we three
 Or three such as we, shall agree,
 This Royal Arch Chapter close.

The right hands, still joined as a triangle, are raised as high as possible, and the word Jao-Bul-On, given at low breath in syllables in the following order, so that each Companion has to pronounce the whole word. This performance is in keeping with the long tradition of a ‘triple-voice’, or sharing to form the Mason’s Word.⁵³

Jao	Bul	On
...	Joa	Bul
On	...	Jao
Bul	On	...

Beckett appears to be representing an aesthetically interpreted variation of these rites, substituting intimate gossip for the quietly spoken wording of the Masonic ritual, but his reference to the playground at Miss Wade’s reaffirms the connection between the rites and childhood. Beckett had written to his friend Bram van Velde about the three characters in *Come and Go*. ‘They are “condemned” all three’, he said.⁵⁵ Beckett’s comment to van Velde suggests that he was relating these actions both to childhood and to some inexplicable sense of doom.

... *but the clouds* ...

In a number of plays the layout of the theatrical space is reminiscent of the layout of the Masonic Lodge. ... *but the clouds*... is a short piece for television which Beckett wrote in 1976.⁵⁶ The theme of the play seems to be that of 'love lost'. The positions on the stage are described in terms of the points of the compass. The west is associated with the roads, the north with the sanctum, the east, with a closet. There is no south position, but the standing position is marked in the centre between east and west. The play consists of a series of entrances and exits by the character M1 and vague and unexplained references to 'walking the roads', 'vanishing into my little sanctum', begging for a woman to appear and watching clouds. The character M1 emerges from the west shadow, advances five steps and stands facing the east shadow, exits back to the east closet and reappears dressed in long robes and a skullcap. He makes another exit to compass point north, which is his sanctum, then back again to the west. The pattern of five steps and waiting periods of five seconds and two seconds occur throughout the piece.

As Richard Carlile points out, the layout of the Masonic Lodge is always aligned with the path of the sun from East to West and is an elaborate form of primitive sun worship, along with 'the common paganism of the human race'.⁵⁷ In the rituals much attention is paid to the significance of what occurs at each point of the compass. In Royal Arch rites heavy emphasis is also placed on the significance of left and right and in the raising of the Master's degree the five steps taken by the candidate are interpreted as symbolic of the five days of Saturnalia, 'when all sorts of irregularities were sanctioned'.⁵⁸ While some of the spoken elements of this play are not easily interpreted (Katherine Worth, describes this television play as 'infuriatingly arcane')⁵⁹ the references to the compass points, the advancement in steps, the road, the sanctum and geometry,⁶⁰ imply a sub-stratum of Masonic ritual elements underpinning a more mystifying dialogue between M and M1.

The ritual elements in these particular plays reaffirm the argument that Beckett was drawing on Masonic rites in some way. Given the body of evidence that is emerging, the use of such specific ritual forms could not be purely a matter of chance but suggest that Beckett must have seen these rituals at some point. While today, transcripts of the degrees are freely available on the Web and many Masonic Lodges are concerned to dispel the aura of secrecy that has surrounded the Order, at the turn of the twentieth century in Ireland the opposite would have been the case: the rituals would have only been acted out in extreme privacy and, officially, amongst men only. Given that there is no evidence to suggest that Beckett ever joined the Order, coupled with his claim that he did not know the source of some of his writing, the likely explanation is that he was exposed to the rituals at some stage and that the memory of these experiences was to remain repressed. Some of Beckett's plays focus on an exploration of depression, grief and a sense of entrapment as well as the theme of trauma in childhood. The following will demonstrate that accompanying these themes are references to initiatory practices and point to the playwright's attempt to try to grasp the connection between disturbing emotional states, the realm of childhood and a set of strange ritual forms.

Happy Days

Entrapment is the central theme of *Happy Days*. First published and performed in 1961 this surreal two-act play depicts the perpetual entrapment of Winnie and Willie, a middle-aged couple, in what, on one level, appears to be a clever comment on the banal and quotidian aspects of marriage. Throughout the play Winnie is embedded in the centre of a mound and fills the silence with her endless prattle, while Willie spends his time beside her, interpolating with occasional minimal remarks and sometimes crawling back into his hole. Again, there may be Masonic elements as well as Druidic themes woven throughout this play. As the

discussion of Bacon's work has already outlined, one of the penalties suffered by the candidate if he betrays the secrets is having his body buried in the rough sands of the sea. The theme of being buried in sand is the primary image in *Happy Days*. It is interesting that this play was written after Beckett had paid a visit to Bacon's studio.⁶¹

The setting depicts a mound with scorched grass in the centre of the stage and a *trompe-l'oeil* backcloth to represent an unbroken plain, illumined by a blazing light.⁶² As in Bacon's work, the use of the mound appears to be a culturally specific reference to the raths and tumuli of pagan Ireland and call to mind the belief in *sidhaighi* or mound-dwellers, an ancient Irish race of people who practised initiatory rites.⁶³ The illumination of the stage in blazing light again recalls the setting inside the Fourth Veil of Royal Arch rites as well as the Druidic concept of initiation.⁶⁴ The setting is also reminiscent of a desert and here the wanderings of the Old Testament tribes and Royal Arch rites may again be the source. Winnie and Willie could thus be interpreted as 'mound-dwellers', another way of referring to the experience of the candidates of an Irish initiation process.

Beckett made particular comments about the set for *Happy Days* that may, again, be significant in relation to a Masonic interpretation. He said, '[w]hat should characterize whole scene, sky and earth, is a pathetic unsuccessful realism, the kind of tawdriness you get in third rate musical or pantomime, that quality of *pompier*, laughably earnest bad imitation.'⁶⁵ In *Waiting for Godot* a similar sense of third rate theatre is conveyed when Vladimir and Estragon discuss the scene in front of them as 'worse than the pantomime ... the circus ... the music-hall ...'⁶⁶ Masonic rituals are theatrical affairs, but can be decidedly amateurish from a dramaturgical perspective. It is possible that Beckett's requirement for a tawdry setting could have reflected the amateur standard of set design likely to be found within Masonic meeting rooms. An amateur rendition of a desert scene might not be an unfamiliar sight within a Royal Arch Chapter.

Throughout Act I Winnie is embedded up to her waist in the centre of the mound and in Act II she is buried up to her neck. She has an umbrella and a shopping bag containing a gun beside her, another similarity with Bacon's work that might represent the frightening use of gunshot in

irregular initiations and possibly the use of umbrellas as props.⁶⁷ Everyday rituals, such as the morning's ablutions, become endowed with unusual significance as the days contain so little else. 'Ah yes, so little to say, so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself', she says.⁶⁸ Referring to the sun, she addresses the blazing light directed on the mound as 'holy light – bob up out of dark – blaze of hellish light'.⁶⁹ Holding up her parasol as protection from the sun she complains, 'I cannot move. No, something must happen, in the word, take place, some change, I cannot, if I am to move again.' Then the parasol bursts into flames and she throws it away. She then says, 'I presume this has happened before though I cannot recall it.'⁷⁰ As the play is set in a wilderness, the parasol bursting into flames parodies the Burning Bush as well as the concept of the 'mystic fire' of initiation. Winnie's vague sense that this had happened before recalls the amnesia and repetitive nature of traumatic experience suffered by the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Her state of permanent entrapment and her ritually repetitive acts may again be a reminder of the permanent presence of the ritual processes in the psyche of a victim of abusive rites. And yet, to be released from this entrapment requires an ability to be able to face 'the fear so great ... of finding oneself'.

At the beginning of the play Winnie reaches in her bag and pulls out her revolver, kisses it and puts it back: the option of suicide is there if life in the mound becomes too oppressive. She then finds a bottle of red medicine in the bag, a tonic for the symptoms 'loss of spirits ... lack of keenness ... want of appetite'.⁷¹ Despite her bubbly personality and constant prattling, depression might not be far away.⁷² After taking a swig she tosses the bottle in Willie's direction and it hits him on the head. Willie's baldhead emerges trickling with blood; he spreads his handkerchief on his head and disappears. As in *Endgame*, this comic routine, verging on slapstick, emulates the ritual blow to the head that the initiate receives and the role of the napkin in Royal Arch rites. In her musings Winnie refers to the feeling of dissociation: '[y]es, the feeling more and more that if I were not held – in this way, I would simply float up into the blue. And that perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all round me and let me out. Don't

you ever have that feeling, Willie, of being sucked up? ... Yes, love, up into the blue, like gossamer.⁷³

Dissociation is one of the body's natural survival strategies in times of great fear. Beckett's description here accurately depicts such a feeling, suggesting he had some awareness of the dissociative state. In Winnie's case, being locked into the rituals of everyday life in the mound, while restrictive, nevertheless serves to ground her and has some preservative function. In Act II Winnie is more deeply embedded in the mound. Fixed up to her neck she can no longer see or even hear Willie, though she still talks to him as if he is still there. Her musings take her to childhood and voices in her head as well as feelings of sadness. 'My head was always full of cries. Faint confused cries ...', she says.⁷⁴ She pleads with Willie to reveal himself to her. He eventually appears and the play ends with Winnie singing in gratitude for such a small mercy, providing her with another happy day.

As mound-dwellers, Winnie and Willie demonstrate the permanent sense of entrapment and resulting feeling of ennui and depression that can beset a victim of abusive initiation practices. Through his depressive periods Beckett must have been very familiar with such a state of mind and here appears to be exploring two approaches to dealing with it: either pressing on regardless and filling one's days with endless chatter, as in Winnie's case, or succumbing to a life of silence and invisibility, as in Willie's. Neither approach seems to provide a solution, but each approach does provide a means of coping on a day-to-day basis.

All That Fall

The radio play *All That Fall*, written in 1956 and published in 1957, also deals the everyday, though in a more realist manner than *Happy Days*. As James Knowlson notes, nearly all of the characters in this play are based on individuals Beckett knew when he was a child. Mrs Rooney was based on a local character in Foxrock village, Connelly, who was the

owner of the grocer store and Watt Tyler was a market gardener.⁷⁵ The central theme of the play concerns the experience of grief over the death of a child and the concept of child sacrifice. There may also be references to the Mysteries, particularly rites of childbirth, in this play.

Mrs Rooney, a woman in her seventies, is walking on a country road to meet her blind husband at the railway station. On her journey she experiences a range of emotional states, seemingly associated with grief over some loss. On the way she meets Christy, a carter who offers her dung. She asks him, '[d]ung? What would we want with dung at our time of life?'⁷⁶ After he passes she describes herself as 'just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and churchgoing and fat and rheumatism and childlessness.'⁷⁷ Then Mr Tyler, a retired bill broker, approaches her from behind on his bicycle. She converses with him but her emotions are erratic. At one point she sobs at the thought of Minnie, who appears to have been a dead child, possibly her own daughter, who would now be in her forties or early fifties.⁷⁸ But by the time he departs she is in higher spirits. As he rides off she calls out in a jocular vein:

Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out without indecent exposure. Mr Tyler! Mr Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! [*She laughs wildly, ceases.*] What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms. (*Frenziedly.*) ATOMS! (*Silence. Cooing. Faintly.*) Jesus! (*Pause.*) Jesus!⁷⁹

As Mircea Eliade notes, vestiges of the Mysteries have surrounded the ritual practices associated with childbirth in some European countries.⁸⁰ Some of these rituals from nineteenth-century Europe may be related to the events in this play. When hearing of the birth of a child women from Schleswig would go dancing and shouting to the house of the new mother. If they met men on their way, they would knock their hats off and fill them with dung. If they met a cart, they would tear it to pieces and turn the horse loose and then proceed to the new mother's house, dancing, singing and behaving wildly. In Denmark, the women would make lascivious gestures, singing and shouting.⁸¹ In *All That Fall* Mrs Rooney seems to be suffering from the loss of a child in infancy but when she comes across men on her journey and a cart with dung she behaves in a

similar wild and lascivious manner to the ritual behaviours described by Eliade. Her comment, 'Mr Tyler! Mr Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge' has mildly sexual implications but she seems confused by her reaction and the state of frenzy it causes. Such confusion may, again, be related to Masonic themes. In Masonic ritual the Tyler is the one who protects the Lodge from intruders while the rituals are taking place, and the term 'Hedge Mason' is a term of contempt used to refer to initiations that are performed 'behind the hedges' that is, in an irregular or clandestine lodge.⁸²

The next meeting on the journey is with a Mr Slocum, the Clerk of the Racecourse who drives a limousine. A comical scene ensues where Mrs Rooney is hoisted into the car and then an accident occurs where the car squashes a hen on the road. Mrs Rooney's remarks show little real concern for the poor creature: '[j]ust one great squawk and then ... peace. They would have slit her weasand in any case.'⁸³ However, this animal sacrifice is a precursor to a more significant death, that of a child. When Mrs Rooney finally meets her blind husband after the commuter train has been delayed by a 'hitch' we learn, at the very end of the play, that the delay was due to a little child who had fallen under the wheels of the train.⁸⁴ As Mr and Mrs Rooney are walking home a couple of children begin to jeer at them and Mr Rooney asks, '[d]id you ever wish to kill a child? Nip some young doom in the bud.'⁸⁵ Mrs Rooney avoids answering the question but later, when talking of her own state of mental distress, raises the theme in an oblique manner. She tells of the time when she attended a lecture 'by one of these new mind doctors' and says:

I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he had washed his hands of her ... Then he suddenly raised his hands and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, the trouble with her was she had never really been born!⁸⁶

Clearly the doctor was not talking about physical birth here but was referring to a psychological process. This story, as Beckett told Charles

Juliet, was based on a lecture given by Carl Jung that he had attended and was to trouble Beckett for many years as he brought it up on a number of occasions. Jung had spoken of such a patient at the lecture and, when the audience was departing, expressed the comment 'she had never really been born!' audibly, as if suddenly making a discovery.⁸⁷ *All That Fall*, like many of Beckett's plays, oscillates between the serious and the comic and confronts the realities of advancing age. But here Beckett also appears to be probing feelings of grief and loss associated with childhood and the concept of something inexplicable and confusing that he was struggling to understand concerning the birth and death of a child. The possible reasons for this confusion will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Five.

That Time

Childhood and early adult memories are the theme of *That Time*, written in 1974. Deirdre Bair suggests that this play marked the beginning of a series of more autobiographical plays and seemed to be based on a combination of Beckett's memories of a ruin where he played as a child, possibly the abandoned lead mines in the hills above Carrickmines, and the period he spent in Dublin in the 1930s, which for Beckett was a lonely and dismal time.⁸⁸ The play consists of a Listener, an old face with long flaring white hair hovering above stage level, his face illuminated, and three voices A, B and C coming from the sides and above. Their voices speak in a continuous stream and talk of three different memories that are all linked by the experience of sitting on a stone. Voice A, representing the child's experience, tells of that time of 'the ruin ... where you hid as a child ... ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles ... in the black dark or moonlight'.⁸⁹ Voice B talks about sitting silently on a stone in the sun with a female companion. The couple sit stock-still beside a running stream, facing downstream, and at another time on the sand.⁹⁰ Voice C talks of another memory in the Portrait Gallery where the adult sits silently on a marble slab in the gallery, 'not a living soul in the place

only yourself and the old attendant drowsing around in his felt shufflers not a sound to be heard only every now and then a shuffle of felt drawing near then dying away.⁹¹

The play appears to be an attempt to understand why these memories conjure feelings of confusion and loss of self. It may be that they represent a combination of everyday memories laden with the unnameable horror of a lost but associated memory. They overlap and have similar themes – silence, isolation and the stone slab. They also convey a sense of foreboding. Something has happened that is inexplicable. Voice C says, ‘gradually a face appeared and you swivel to see who it was there at your elbow.’⁹² Then C says, ‘[n]ever the same after that never quite the same ... you could never be the same after crawling about year after year sunk in your lifelong mess muttering to yourself ...’⁹³

Beckett received criticism for the direction this and other plays written later in his career were taking. One critic stated angrily, ‘[t]his is *not* theatre! ... This is an exercise in vanity, egotism and exorcism of some private demon.’⁹⁴ The latter charge may well be true of this play, but in the context of the theme of ritual trauma it is highly instructive. Repeated throughout the play is the sense that there were a number of times when strange experiences occurred: ‘was that the time or was that another time there alone with portraits of the dead black with dirt and antiquity ...’⁹⁵ Voice C talks about the effects of this particular strange event, the one in the Portrait Gallery amongst the dead, being ‘when you started not knowing who you were from Adam.’⁹⁶ Another effect of this strange experience seems to be the chilling of the soul and a sense of self-loathing. The adult slinks about trying to find spaces in which to be invisible: ‘always slipping in somewhere when no one would be looking ...’⁹⁷

Ritual abuse is generally carried out as a set of initiatory trials that take place at regular intervals throughout childhood and can begin in early childhood.⁹⁸ Along with the associated memory loss these repeated experiences can cause a loss of self where the child, and later the adult, no longer knows who he or she is. They can also involve an extreme loss of self-esteem. Towards the end of *That Time* the voices seem to give up trying to make sense of the memories, but in doing so give up more of the self. A says, ‘not a thought in your head only get back on board and

away to hell out of it and never come back' and B says, 'so you gave it up gave up there by the window in the dark or moonlight gave up for good.'⁹⁹ Insights into this strange occurrence on the stone may be gained, again, through an examination of Masonic rituals.

The Degree of Nine Elected Knights, or Sublime Knights Elected is regarded as one of the 'Vengeance Grades' in which the candidate 'for a fell purpose is being taught how to kill'.¹⁰⁰ It consists of an elaborate tableau.¹⁰¹ The scene is set near a cave by the seaside and the River Joppa. A man is seen lying with his head on a rock near a running stream of water. This figure represents the traitor who murdered Hiram Abiff, the master builder of King Solomon's Temple, whose story is told in the Third Degree. In this degree there is a lamp burning by the man, a cup and a poniard by his side. Also included are a range of symbols: a burning bush, a rainbow, the setting sun, a brilliant star, a winding road leading from Jerusalem to Joppa, a dog near a cave, black and grey carpet, a bible, a sceptre, and a dagger. There is one warden in the West called the Inspector and the rest of the members are all dressed in black cloaks to represent mourning and are seated in a doleful manner, heads bowed under flapped hats, and in darkness.

The candidate is led into the Lodge and asked what he wants there. He answers that he wishes to be initiated into the degree and is told that he must revenge the murder of Hiram Abiff. He is told by the master, who symbolically represents King Solomon: 'I must previously inform you that this man is, perhaps, one of your acquaintances, probably your friend or your brother, but in such cases as this, every sentiment must give way to that of revenge ...'¹⁰² The candidate is now blindfolded and led to the cave, he is seated on a stone, opposite the sleeping murderer. He is told to lay his head on the table with his head in his arm, and his right hand on his thigh. He is then told:

[m]y dear brother I must leave you a little while, be of good courage and not daunted. Promise me faithfully, that you will remain in the position in which I now leave you, however much alarmed you may be by any noise which you may hear. Attend to what I say, for, if you neglect it, your life may be at cost. As soon as you hear a Masonic knock, take the bandage from your eyes, and closely examine every object that is around you ...

The candidate is then told to take the dagger and strike the villain, first on the head, then in his heart, and then to cut off his head. The murder is, of course, theatrically enacted. The Master then appears angry with the candidate for being so presumptuous as to kill the traitor himself and threatens him with death. A plea is made for the initiate's zeal, his death is stayed and he is then admitted to the degree.¹⁰³ By the time a Masonic candidate has advanced to this degree he would be fully aware of the purely theatrical and symbolic nature of the rites. However, if this scenario were to be used in the initiation of a child and played out as if it were real, its terrifying effects could have a traumatic impact leaving the child with a confusing set of nightmarish memories.

A number of the elements in *That Time* appear to correspond with those in the Degree of Nine Elected Knights, although not all the symbolic details are included in the play. The play is enacted on a dark stage with only the Listener's face lit; its dark atmosphere and uneasy subject matter parallels the gloomy theatrical context of the rites. The three places where the stone is situated in the play are near the ruin among the giant nettles, near the stream and the sand, and in the portrait gallery amongst the faces of the dead. It is not difficult to superimpose these three sets of situations over the Masonic rites and come up with an approximate match. The cave of the Nine Elected Knights can be associated with the ruin where the child hid, as Bair suggests, a ruin of old mines. However, the ruin also recalls the first Temple of Solomon that was destroyed by the pagans and was to be rebuilt, as in the narrative of the Holy Royal Arch rites. The reference to giant nettles may belong to an ancient tradition of puberty rites where the novices are rubbed with nettles to symbolise their initiatory dismemberment and death at the hands of demons.¹⁰⁴ Such treatment could also be related to the Masonic Rugged Road and the winding road from Jerusalem to Joppa in the Nine Elected Knights.¹⁰⁵ When there the child sleeps alone on the stone, 'waiting with the nightbag till the truth began to dawn.'¹⁰⁶ In the Nine Elected Knights the initiate is required to sit all alone and perfectly still on the stone, lying his head in his arm on the table, in the dark ominous silence awaiting the terrifying reality that he must revenge the murder of Hiram Abiff.

Voice B's narrative parallels other aspects of the rites. It conveys a story of long lost love. The couple sit on a stone near a running stream; there is a running stream in the rites. The time together in the sand where 'a dead rat ... came on you from behind', can be likened to the period where the candidate remains still on the stone and then becomes aware of the figure of the traitor lying on the ground.¹⁰⁷ B's memory of a lost love affair brings to mind the problem of 'the void': 'hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you till just one of those tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud'.¹⁰⁸ The stress due to trauma can often produce memory loss and the associated sense of an inner void.

Voice C's narrative represents another set of similarities with the rites. The single warden in the rites and the group of mourning brothers sitting dressed in black in the dark is not dissimilar to the presence of the one attendant in his felt shufflers (a reminder of the initiate's slippers) and the surrounding portraits in the gallery emerging out of their chiaroscuro backgrounds. The moment in the rites where the initiate is confronted with the murderer can be likened to the moment in Voice C's narrative, 'where gradually as you peered trying to make it out gradually of all things a face appeared had you swivel on the slab to see who it was at your elbow'.¹⁰⁹

But what is missing from the three narratives in the play is the specific event or events that was to change the course of the narrator's life so profoundly to one of misery and dejection. Here, it seems, may be the point of memory loss that corresponds with the action that occurs in the rites when the initiate removes his blindfold and confronts the murderer; the moment when the initiate must kill in an act of revenge. One of the tricks played on children during ritual abuse is to make them believe that they are responsible for the murder of another human being, perhaps another child, or a friend, and are thus the lowest of all beings.¹¹⁰ This is generally achieved through the theatrical effects of the dark ritual space and simple sleight of hand. The shock experienced by the child can produce unconsciousness, that is, the child can faint. After the event in which he was 'never quite the same again' Voice C says: 'that curled up worm in slime when they lugged you out and wiped you off and straightened

you up' and after which 'you started not knowing who you were from Adam.'¹¹¹ Such intense loss of self in an individual's formative years can have a perennial negative effect on the psyche.

A shorter play written in 1981, *Ohio Impromptu*, creates a similar atmosphere, though with less detail than *That Time*.¹¹² A reader R talks of a bank near a stream, being in an unfamiliar room and being warned in his dreams that a change would occur. He then states, '[n]o. What he had done alone could not be undone.'¹¹³ We never learn what it is he has done, but it causes sleeplessness and a fear of the dark. He is then visited by a nameless man who reads him a sad but comforting tale and then disappears, wordlessly. Again, we do not learn what this sad tale is, nor do we discover who the visitor is. The dreamlike and foreboding atmosphere of this play is punctuated by a series of knocks made by the listener L on the table. The atmosphere, some of the details and the knocking sound again parallel those in the Degree of the Nine Elected Knights. It is when the initiate hears the Masonic knock that he is confronted with the reality that he must commit an act of murder. Again, if this is recording vague memories of Masonic abuse, the absence of details about what has occurred may be implying a state of more complete amnesia towards the most terrifying aspect of this higher degree: where the initiate is taught how to kill.

Cascando

Similar themes to those in *That Time* occur in *Cascando*, a short radio piece written in 1962.¹¹⁴ A Voice seems to be attempting to make sense of a similarly vague memory, expressed in a fractured narrative:

... he's down ... face in the mud ... in his head ... what's in his head ... a hole ... a shelter ... a hollow ... in the dunes ... a cave ... vague memory ... in his head ... of a cave ... he goes down ... no more trees ... no more bank ... he's changed ... not enough ... night too bright ... soon the dunes ... no more cover ... not a soul ... not –¹¹⁵

The Voice describes someone searching, 'arms spread ... same old coat ... hands clutching ...' as if in the dark, and falling down again and again, but carrying in his head the need for peace and for sleep.¹¹⁶ *Cascando* creates a similar atmosphere to that of the blindfolded initiate feeling his way along the seemingly endless initiatory path and the elements of cave, riverbank and bright night sky related to the Degree of Nine Elected Knights. As Albert Mackey suggests, the rites of the Ancient Mysteries, 'which constituted what has been thus called Spurious Freemasonry ... were performed at night, and in the most retired situations, in caverns or amid the deep recesses of groves and forests ...'¹¹⁷ The need for sleep recalls the use of sleep deprivation as one of the strategies incorporated into ritual abuse.

Rough for Radio II

If the previous plays are depicting traces of Masonic abuse then it is possible that some of Beckett's work may be the aesthetic expression of experiences that amount to psychological and physical torture. Beckett deals overtly with these themes in a number of plays. In the short radio play *Rough for Radio II*, written in the early 1960s, a character called the Animator is torturing a bound and blindfolded character, Fox; a stenographer is taking notes and is accompanied by a mute character named Dick.¹¹⁸ The Animator removes the hood, then the gag and earplugs from Fox and, while whipping him with a bull's pizzle, begins a lengthy conversation with the stenographer, discussing the report on yesterday's torture. The language they employ is of a bureaucratic nature, a distancing device to mask the reality of the cruelty being inflicted. At one point Fox screams, '[l]et me out! Peter out in the stones!' The term Pietre-stones is used within Freemasonry and is associated with the building practices of Operative Freemasonry.¹¹⁹

Fox faints when the torture is prolonged. Each time he faints the torturers realise that they, too, are trapped in this scenario so long as Fox

cannot speak and reveal what he knows; but they also do not know what they are looking for. The Animator says to Fox, '[o]f course we do not know, any more than you, what exactly it is we are after, what sign or set of words.'¹²⁰ The play ends in a state of perennial entrapment, similar to that of a number of Beckett's plays, when the Animator says, '[t]omorrow, who knows, we may be free.'¹²¹ *Rough for Radio II* implies an internalisation of the roles of torturer and victim where these two aspects of the experience are bonded together indefinitely and the experience is relived from day to day, as if it were still occurring in the present. The lack of explanation or reason for the torture, other than a search for a sign or set of words (possibly a reference to the initiate's password), prolongs the torturous condition perennially. Such a theme parallels the confusing state of inexplicable guilt and inner torment suffered by victims of ritual abuse, which Martin Katchen describes as a 'Kafka-like maze of vague and yet damning accusations: [in which the victim] could neither understand exactly what he was guilty of ... nor could he in any way establish his innocence.'¹²²

What Where

First performed in 1983 this very short piece deals with the interrogation of an unnamed character that does not appear on the set. The four characters that do appear are Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom. Bam gives the orders for the interrogation, requiring the victim to be 'given the works' until he cries, screams and begs for mercy, and then passes out.¹²³ The reason for this torture is never revealed and the questions the victim is asked are never made explicit. The characters enter and exit in ritualistic fashion and the interrogators Bim, Bem and Bom are also threatened with torture if they do not achieve the desired result of the victim's admission of some inexplicit knowledge. The confusing lack of explanation for the very real sense of torture in this short play can again be interpreted as a

parallel to the inexplicable and incomplete memories suffered by victims of ritual abuse.

Rough for Theatre II

The experience of psychological torture can leave long-term scars in the form of psychosomatic illnesses and phobias. *Rough for Theatre II*, written in the late 1950s, explores this theme, one that Beckett took an interest in partly due to his own experiences in his early adult years. Two characters A and B engage in a conversation over the contents of a briefcase belonging to character C, who remains silent and motionless at the rear of the stage and, according to A and B, is perched ready to jump to his death from a double window that opens to a bright night sky.¹²⁴ The contents of the briefcase consist of a series of testimonies by various people who appear to have known character C. Under a slim file called ‘Confidences’ is a set of physical and psychological characteristics:

B (reading): ‘... sick headaches ... eye trouble ... irrational fear of vipers’ – nothing for us there – ‘... fibroid tumours ... pathological horror of songbirds ... throat trouble ... need of affection’ – we’re coming to it – ‘... inner void ... congenital timidity ... nose trouble ...’ – ah! Listen to this! – ‘... morbidly sensitive to the opinions of others ...’ What did I tell you?¹²⁵

Character B then repeats the phrase ‘morbidly sensitive to the opinions of others’ over and over again as the lamplight flickers on and off. Again, the bright night sky recalls the initiatory setting and the light being switched on and off, the repeated removal of the initiate’s blindfold. The state of ‘morbid sensitivity to the opinions of others’ correlates with the mortifying effects of the members’ mockery and derision whenever the blindfold is removed. Long-term effects in the form of psychosomatic illnesses can be one of the possible outcomes of such initiatory treatment, particularly if it occurs in childhood and is accompanied by amnesia.

Footfalls

Written in 1975–6, *Footfalls* deals with the nightly torments of an old woman who paces up and down each night unable to sleep. In contrast to many of Beckett's plays, for which the writer was unable to identify overt sources, this play was based on the nightly torments endured by his mother, May Beckett. She suffered neurotic symptoms including black rages, tension headaches and night terrors, which found their expression both in harsh disciplinary beatings of the children, especially Samuel, and a condition of insomnia where she paced the floor at night.¹²⁶ She complained to her husband that ghosts kept her awake and his response was 'a hearty guffaw that left her angry, irritated and cross for the rest of the day'.¹²⁷ Beckett captured her tireless pacing in *Footfalls*, written in 1975, and gave the pacing character her name, May.¹²⁸ Written later in his life this play is quite a tender response to her nightly suffering as well as to her terminal illness, suggesting a deep empathy towards her despite their earlier conflicts. He concludes the play with '[w]ill you never have done ... revolving it all? ... In your poor mind'.¹²⁹

One of the features of ritual abuse is that it is often multi-generational in nature.¹³⁰ May Beckett was very distant in her responses to people, but more at home with her animals. She was also fiercely dedicated to the welfare of mistreated animals and was an anti-vivisectionist.¹³¹ Animal torture is one of the strategies used in ritual abuse to demonstrate the power of the elders over the children and of terrifying them into silence. It is possible that May's depressive condition could have been a response to similar treatment in her own childhood and her lack of tenderness towards her children could have been due to its confusing effects. The conflict between mother and son, which was the source of much of Beckett's tension in his youth and early adulthood, may possibly have its roots in the fraternal practices being discussed here.

Conclusion

From the previous discussion it appears that, along with *Waiting for Godot*, many of Beckett's plays contain elements that may have been derived from distorted and parodied forms of Masonic rites. These spurious Masonic elements appear to form a sub-stratum of ritual movements and themes that are woven together with characters and situations from Beckett's publicly acknowledged personal history, his observations of Irish life and his wide knowledge of literature, to form powerful dramatic sequences. The literary themes in Beckett's work have been explored extensively by critics, but as Beckett himself said, '... when you listen to yourself it's not literature you hear'.¹³² The argument here has suggested that Samuel Beckett's capacity to listen acutely to the deepest reverberations of his own psyche and translate what he hears in theatrical terms can tell us something about a set of hidden ritual dramas that appear to have been present in the Dublin of his childhood.

As such it may be that many of Beckett's plays incorporate an aesthetic negotiation of the trauma of an irregular Masonic initiation process. Such a negotiation appears to form a key element underpinning the playwright's creative expression. Like Bacon's repetitive aesthetic re-entry into the ritual space, Beckett appears to be returning to the themes raised in his first play in order to view them from various perspectives. Also like Bacon, Beckett seems to be revealing evidence of the first stages of the initiatory process, that is, the sense of isolation, humiliation, entrapment and terror, but none of the joyful release from the imposed suffering that marks the latter stages of the initiation process. As Hélène Baldwin argues, his work suggests an 'aesthetico-mystical purgation and illumination but without union, without the glorious beatific vision'.¹³³ Without the final reincorporation stage of the ritual the candidate can be left confused and disorientated. If this experience is undergone in childhood, its power to disorient the individual is significantly greater, leaving the individual's internal psychic state as one of perpetual entrapment in the liminal space of the initiatory ordeal. As a number of critics

have suggested, the theme of imprisonment is one that pervades almost the whole of Beckett's theatre.¹³⁴

However, Beckett was also able to infuse his plays with his keen observations on human behaviour and an acute knowledge of emotional and psychological states. Thus, while his plays appear to contain ritual elements drawn from Freemasonry, they also speak to a more general human condition and therefore have wide appeal. For the author, though, the plays appear to be a site of struggle where he seems to be battling with some unknown source of grief and inner torment that this discussion may have partially illuminated. His novels may provide further insight into the subjective aspects of such a struggle as well as further details regarding a spurious form of Masonic initiation practice.

Initiatory Rites in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* and Other Prose

The Unnamable, Samuel Beckett's English translation of his *L'Innommable* (1953), was first published in 1958. It is the third novel of his trilogy, the former two novels being *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. The author regarded himself primarily as a novelist and in these three novels, especially in *The Unnamable*, Beckett engages in a profound exploration of the self. *The Unnamable* portrays a long, introspective search into a series of vague, unnameable experiences couched in a stream of consciousness monologue. It also launches on a search for what lays behind the creation of the characters and stories that people his other novels. Early in the novel the narrator expresses his frustration with these characters, saying: '[a]ll the Murphys, Molloyes and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and me alone'.¹ *The Unnamable*, as Mary Junker observes, is thus very autobiographical, coming from the depths of the author's being. Beckett himself said: '[i]n my last book *L'innommable*, there's complete disintegration. No "I", no "have", no "being", no nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on'.² The intensity of this inner excursion was to be such a test of nerves that he chose to break up the writing of the trilogy before beginning *The Unnamable* with what he felt was a less demanding project, his first play. Writing *Waiting for Godot*, he said, had saved his sanity.³

This chapter will suggest that *The Unnamable* may be telling us more about the practices of spurious Freemasonry. It will suggest that woven through this novel may be further traces of Masonic rites, Druidic practices and the tradition of puberty rites found in archaic societies that involve practices of physical and psychological torture. Such practices

also accompany contemporary reports of ritual abuse. The sense of terror elicited by these practices has the capacity to produce a profound sense of confusion and loss of self in the initiate. The first key term that Beckett introduces in this novel is 'aporia', a sense of confusion or perplexity about where to begin and how to establish the truth of a situation.⁴ The rest of the novel struggles with this sense of confusion and with a series of disturbing sensations that seem to be located within bodily experience. As noted earlier, Beckett associated his dark states of depression and confusion with the experience of birth and a feeling that somebody inside him had been murdered before he was born. He also claimed that he could remember his pre-natal existence in his mother's womb and often suffered from a terrible sense of suffocation associated with this pre-natal feeling, which was one of the frightening states for which he sought an explanation in psychoanalysis.⁵ His novel *The Unnamable* may be revealing detailed connections between these feelings of a pre-natal existence and the tortures accompanying the initiatory process of becoming 'twice-born'.

Freemasons frequently claim that their initiatory practices resemble those of other cultures, both archaic and non-Western.⁶ As Mircea Eliade notes, the initiations associated with secret societies are remarkably similar to those found in archaic puberty rites.⁷ He describes initiation in general terms as 'equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*'.⁸ The ordeals undergone to produce this complete change in identity involve a ritual death associated with chaos, darkness, the concept of a cosmic night, or the foetal state.⁹ In the tradition of puberty rites the torture of the novice is intended to produce the end of a mode of being, that is, the child must die to his childhood.¹⁰ To do this the child must return symbolically to the pre-natal condition through a complex process of maltreatments, prohibitions, ascetic exercises and long initiatory journeys that elicit strong emotions such as fear, terror and rage, before emerging as a newborn being. The particular tortures devised for puberty rites vary across cultures, but in all of them the initiates' emotions are skilfully manipulated by the initiatory elders who act as 'trickster' characters,

taunting the novices with their cruel behaviour. Accompanying these tortures is a series of special teachings.¹¹

In *The Unnamable* the narrator speaks of a group of men whom he variously calls 'gentlemen', 'avatars', 'governors' and 'the lords of creation' who are imparting special knowledge to him. Sometimes, there are four or five men, at other times the group is larger.¹² However, the experience is filled with confusion as to how, when and where this course of teaching has taken place. He says:

I can see them still, my delegates. The things they have told me! About men, the light of day. I refused to believe them. But some of it has stuck. But then, through what channels, did I communicate with these gentlemen? ... Can it be innate knowledge? Like that of good and evil ... I remember little or nothing of these lectures. I cannot have understood a great deal ... Low types they must have been, their pockets full of poison and antidote.¹³

These delegates offer him courses on his mother, a favourite topic of their conversation, on God, on love, on reason and intelligence.¹⁴ The narrator reflects on their silly humour ('they could clap an artificial anus in the hollow of my hand') and also on their relentless capacity for physical and psychological cruelty.¹⁵ He speculates as to the reason for these lessons and decides: 'I was given a pensum, at birth perhaps, as a punishment for having been born perhaps'.¹⁶ He feels that he must discharge this pensum before he can be free, but is suspicious of the meaning of this task.¹⁷ Stirred with anger and even hatred towards these men he calls them 'paltry priests of the irrepressible ephemeral' and a 'dirty pack of fake maniacs'.¹⁸ The narrator's seething anger towards them permeates the entire novel.

As Eliade notes, in puberty rites the stirring of the novice into a state of rage has a ritual function: along with other ordeals it is intended to elicit the break-up and disintegration of the novice's personality. Within archaic religious societies this initiatory process was believed to allow the novices to transcend the mortal state, becoming one with the gods in an incarnation of a higher mode of existence, no longer part of the profane world.¹⁹ One of the common practices used to generate feelings of terror, confusion and rage in the initiates, found in many ancient systems of

initiation, involved the immersion of the candidate in a shroud of darkness. Such darkness is described as ‘an unfamiliar experience of darkness ... absolute and menacing,’ symbolising cosmic night, the belly of a monster.²⁰ In the American tradition, for example, the youths of the Tuscacora Indians of North Carolina would undergo a process of *husquenawing* where they were kept in total darkness for five or six weeks until they were driven raving mad.²¹ In the Druidic tradition the initiation of seers and bards involved them being locked in total darkness for up to nine days and nights, either in a dark room or under a covering of hides, and isolated from sensory input in order to place them in an altered state of consciousness for the reception of important truths. After many days the initiate would be thrust suddenly into the light and this sudden contrast would invoke visions, poetry or prophecies.²² In the Welsh Druidic tradition the poem *The Spoils of Annwn* by Taliesin relates an account of a similar experience undergone by Gwair in the prison of Caer Sidi, which Lewis Spence suggests could be a description of an initiation.²³ After this experience Gwair remained for the rest of his life a bard or prophetic poet.

Throughout *The Unnamable* the narrator describes a number of sensations and physical attributes that suggest a similar form of sensory deprivation, an immersion into a black void, one of the more terrifying tasks that causes intense fear and grief. Focussing intently on the bodily aspects of this experience, he says:

I, of whom I know nothing, I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees ... but what is that presses against my rump, against the soles of my feet? I don't know. My spine is not supported ... Am I clothed? I have often asked myself this question ... I feel my tears coursing over my chest, my sides, and all down my back. Ah yes I am truly bathed in tears.²⁴

The narrator describes being clapped in some sort of dungeon, an oubliette. At one stage he calls it a pit.²⁵ He says, ‘I’ve always been in a dungeon,’²⁶ conveying the ever present nature of traumatic experience in the psyche. In Royal Arch rites there is a secret crypt that is sometimes

represented architecturally under the Chapter floor. The narrator's use of the term 'oubliette', a secret dungeon with trapdoor entrance, describes a similar sort of space, although any number of spaces could match the type of sensory deprivation described in *The Unnamable*.

As his various biographers have noted, Beckett was plagued throughout his life with insomnia and a tendency to nightmare, along with a terrible fear of the dark.²⁷ When he returned to Ireland to stay with his mother after his father's death his night terrors resumed as he had experienced them in his younger days. Anthony Cronin says, '[a]lmost every night now he woke in fear his heart pounding at a terrible rate and his panic increasing as he stared into the darkness. Sometimes there would be a feeling of imminent suffocation, such as he had experienced in his lecturing days.'²⁸ It was after these increasing attacks and states of terror that Beckett pursued a course of psychotherapy, but the analysis was to prove largely ineffectual. His biographers have emphasized the difficult relationship he had with his mother and the possibility that these panic attacks could have been associated with this relationship.²⁹ However, given his description of a group of tormenting men in *The Unnamable*, then such a severe set of symptoms could have a more profound source, such as the initiatory tortures inflicted by a group of trickster elders as described above.

References to a terrifying experience in a dark ominous space occur in other prose works. In one of Beckett's late works, *Company*, noted by critics as a highly autobiographical work, childhood memories are woven into a monologue description of lying in the dark.³⁰ The narrator describes a place where he lies on his back 'in immeasurable dark' as a hemispherical chamber, at least sixty feet in diameter with a black basalt floor.³¹ Here he lies and then crawls about for an indefinite period remembering special childhood events and listening for the faint sounds of distant voices. The experience becomes a simulacrum of the pre-natal state; the emotion produced one of complete isolation and separation from the company of others. Then the narrator states: '[y]ou were born on an Easter Friday after long labour ... You first saw the light and cried at the close of the day when in darkness Christ at the ninth hour cried and died.'³² *Company* concludes: '[a]nd you as you always were. Alone.'³³

Beckett claimed to have been born on Good Friday, 13 April 1906, but his birth certificate stated 13 May 1906.³⁴ Scholars have agreed that it was likely that he was born on Good Friday, but the significance of a birth on this day might also be related to ritual birth. Here, again, Masonic rites can throw more light on the subject. In the Eighteenth Degree the rebirth of the initiate is related to the death of Christ on Good Friday. In this degree the candidate is told:

... you have come among us at the ninth hour of the day, when we are overwhelmed with grief and the deepest sorrow, and consternation spreads horror over our brows. The earth quakes, the rocks are rent, the veil of the Temple is rent in twain, darkness overspreads the earth, and the true Light has departed from us. Our altars are thrown down, the Cubic Stone pours forth blood and water, the Blazing Star is eclipsed, our Shepherd is smitten, the Word is lost, and despair and tribulation sits heavily upon us.³⁵

During a further description of Christ's suffering the candidate is led around the Chapter seven times and then is required to enter the Black Room, the Chamber of Darkness, in which to meditate before being symbolically born into the Light in the Red Room and knighted into the degree. Beckett's description of lying on a black basalt floor in total darkness in *Company* and his 'meditation' on childhood memories creates a similar mood to that described in the Eighteenth Degree. However, the period of darkness and solitude he describes, unlike the meditations of a mature adult willingly undergoing an official initiation into the degree, conveys the traumatic experience of a terrified child.

It is possible that in an abusive form of the Eighteenth Degree a scenario might have been intentionally devised to produce a sense of isolation and identification with Christ's travails in a child initiate, who, in a traumatised or even hypnotised state, may have been tricked into believing that he was inside his mother's womb. As Michael Dames suggests, '[o]ne of the purposes of ancient religion was to lead the individual back to his or her pre-natal state, as a means of reintegrating with the lost realm of earliest life experience.'³⁶ Beckett's sense that somebody inside him had been murdered would correlate with the production of a dissociated state, and the association between the initiation and the death of

Christ would give the experience an added sense of profundity. Leonard Shengold terms the type of trauma-inducing practices that intentionally produce such states in children 'soul murder'.³⁷

In *The Unnamable* the narrator describes the impenetrable dark of his sensory prison being spasmodically perforated by lights, 'which rear aloft, swell, sweep down and go out hissing, reminding one of the naja'.³⁸ These lights produce smoke, though not fire, and each time they go out hissing and smoking the narrator complains, 'my phlegm is shattered'.³⁹ In the Masonic Order gum camphor is traditionally used to produce the bright light that confronts the initiate when he passes through the veils.⁴⁰ Gum camphor burns intensely and rapidly with a flare-like effect and its smoke is toxic. Inhalation can cause irritation to the respiratory tract and gastro-intestinal system as well as headache, confusion, nausea, vomiting, fainting and in severe cases, epileptic seizures and unconsciousness.⁴¹ In *The Unnamable* the narrator describes these lights and their accompanying smoke throughout the novel and comments on the experience of vomiting and asphyxiation. He says, '... this circus where it is enough to breathe to qualify for asphyxiation' and '... then I vomit, someone vomits, someone starts vomiting again ...'.⁴² He asks, '[b]ut these lights that go out hissing? Is it not more likely a great cackle of laughter, at the sight of his terror and distress? To see him flooded with light, then suddenly plunged back into darkness, must strike them as irresistibly funny'.⁴³ The trials that the initiates undergo have their serious purpose, but as Hutton Webster suggests, are also designed to provide amusement for the spectators, those initiatory elders that Beckett describes as the 'lords of creation'.⁴⁴

Throughout this experience in the dark the narrator refers to the feeling of being surrounded by a circular group of individuals making sounds that are intended to confuse him and lure him in particular directions. He describes this as a terrifying process where the ring of figures takes turns to talk and then makes sounds all at once to force him against the wall, then seizes his arms through holes in the wall. The author's ability to identify the nature of these ritual processes appears to be based on a close focus on the physical attributes of the experience. 'How physical this all is!' the narrator says.⁴⁵ Circular ritual formations are a feature of Druidic practice and here, it seems, a ring of Druid-like figures, invisible

in the dark, employs vocal effects to terrify the initiate and manipulate his movements.

Beckett explores a similar circular ritual, terrifying to the female protagonist, in a later prose piece, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, originally published in French in 1981.⁴⁶ It depicts a woman's confusing experience when she finds herself in a gloomy space surrounded by a group of twelve shadowy figures, all dressed in black; the woman is also dressed in black. As the characters do in *That Time* she sits perfectly still, 'erect and rigid in the deepening gloom.'⁴⁷ Stones are frequently mentioned and there is one central white stone, a rounded rectangular block. 'They take her and halt her before it. There she too is of stone. But black.'⁴⁸ As the ominous figures hover around her, keeping her in the centre of the ring, she has a moment of memory loss and then 'disappears'.⁴⁹ In other words, the character demonstrates some form of dissociation from the experience. There are a number of elements in *Ill Seen Ill Said* that suggest more of the rites of the Eighteenth Degree. In this degree there is a white stone in the centre of the Lodge. In the first part of the ceremony all the members wear black crepe robes covering their Masonic regalia; the Candidate is also dressed in black.⁵⁰ Greatcoats hung on buttonhooks, a motif used in a number of Beckett's plays and novels, appear to be a frightening reminder of the dark hooded figures of the ritual.⁵¹

All of the above strategies, the entrapment of the initiate in a dark and terrifying space, the use of bright lights, circular groups of robed and chanting figures and the creation of a state of rage within the initiate have been described in contemporary reports of ritual abuse. An early report, the 1989 report of the Los Angeles Ritual Abuse Task Force, lists these strategies amongst others aimed at producing a devastating psychological impact on the child victims.⁵² The report cites the placing of children in dark spaces where the sensory deprivation and isolation causes them feelings of disorientation, desperation, fear and dread.⁵³ The use of bright lights for the purpose of further disorientating the victims and placing them in a trance state heightens the children's susceptibility to indoctrination. Some children report the use of rapidly flashing or blinking lights.⁵⁴ The range of techniques used is intended to provoke a state of enormous rage in the children, which also contributes to their

indoctrination into the cult's belief system.⁵⁵ The initiatory process is not usually undergone during one event, but generally takes place at periodic intervals throughout childhood leading to a complex layering of traumatic material in the child's psyche. In *The Unnamable* the author appears to be engaged in a profound struggle with a process of indoctrination that involves similar techniques.

The Unnamable contains further experiences that are confusing and disorientating for the initiate. The narrator describes a spinning sensation, noted as a theme in Bacon's work. The narrator says, 'I must have got embroiled in a kind of inverted spiral' and describes being wound up like a coil, turning faster and faster until he has screwed himself to a standstill, and then being catapulted in the opposite direction.⁵⁶ This spinning precedes a task involving the family. The task takes place as a set of ritual perambulations in a small rotunda in the centre of a vast yard or campus, surrounded by high walls. There the narrator finds what appears to be his family members: '[i]t was swarming with them, grandpa, grandma, little mother and the eight or nine brats.'⁵⁷ There he must complete a series of rounds, 'stamping underfoot the unrecognisable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case may be, and sinking into them with the ends of my crutches.'⁵⁸ This task appears to be a ritual annihilation of the family; a symbolic break with family ties presented in the very physical terms of body parts trodden underfoot, of what the narrator believes is his mother's entrails, his papa's private parts and the heart of one of the little bastards.⁵⁹ It is possible that this performative action is another part of the initiatory process and that the initiate, in a hypnotised and dissociated state due to 'spin programming', is made to believe that he is tramping his family's body parts underfoot. A simple visit to the butcher shop would suffice to provide the necessary props for such a ritual, as in the use of butchered meat in Bacon's imagery.

The ritual rejection of the family correlates with the tradition of male puberty rites across cultures where a part of the initiation involves a symbolic destruction of the power of the mother and the protection of the family home, so as to rebirth the initiate into the fraternal context.⁶⁰ In *The Unnamable* the narrator's rounds, where he crushes the physical remains of his family, is accompanied by intense misogyny. He describes

the women in his life as ‘the other two cunts ... the one forever accursed that ejected me into this world and the other, infundibuliform, in which, pumping my likes, I tried to take my revenge ...’⁶¹ Such intense misogyny is typical of this phase of the initiation process, which generally involves some form of denigration of the mother.⁶² In the Central Australian Aranda culture, for example, the ritual separation of the boy from his mother is known as *erakintjilama* meaning ‘to make ashamed.’⁶³ As Daniel O’Keefe notes: ‘[i]nitiation itself is always anti-family.’⁶⁴

In *The Unnamable* the narrator says that the last days of his long voyage traversing the body parts of his family were spent in his mother’s entrails.⁶⁵ In archaic religions the initiatory journey is sometimes represented as a journey into the bowels of Mother Earth, the body of the chthonian Goddess, the belly of a Giantess, or the body of a sea monster.⁶⁶ Entering this gigantic body is equivalent to descending into Hell, or the realm of the dead. In Irish mythology the tale of Finn Conan and the White Worm may be related to this theme. The story tells of a little white worm in Finn Conan’s teeth, which is thrown into Lough Derg where it grows into a water monster. Conan is swallowed by the worm and there undergoes a holy journey ‘into the fire of the lost winter sun, deep in the gut of the mother goddess.’⁶⁷ As Michael Dames suggests, this tale is a symbolic representation of the mystical journey in pre-Christian Ireland, which was enacted at Lough Derg prior to the coming of St Patrick, an alternative Purgatory, which never completely died out. One of the characters who appears in *The Unnamable* is Worm, a name that the narrator gives to one of the multiple selves that seem to be emerging through the initiatory process.⁶⁸ Worm is associated with the process of being born and is chthonian in character, a reference to the grave and to the initiate’s journey through the realms of the dead.⁶⁹ In Royal Arch rites the worm is associated with the symbolism of the vault or crypt, captured in the words of an eighteenth-century Freemason, the Revd Edward Young, ‘the deep, damp vault, the darkness, and the worm.’⁷⁰

Once these connections with family have been symbolically severed the initiate must then be incorporated into the realm of masculinity. In *The Unnamable* the entire process appears to take place through a form of brainwashing in which the narrator’s own thoughts are partially usurped

in the process. He says: '[a]nd man, the lectures they gave on men, before they even began trying to assimilate me to him!' He complains of not being able to speak, other than of and about them, through their language, of things that don't concern him, 'that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I am, where I am, and from doing what I have to do ... How they must hate me!' he says.⁷¹ Determined to 'fix their gibberish for them' he decides that he will banish the experience from memory. By forgetting, he decides, he can be himself and concludes, '[n]othing will remain of all the lies they have glutted me with.'⁷² Here it seems the trickster elders have, along with the tomfoolery of the initiation rituals, attempted to indoctrinate the narrator with their beliefs, which he clearly rejects. It appears that the only way to get rid of their lies is by forgetting them, banishing them from memory. However, later he realises that there's no getting rid of them without naming them.⁷³

The aim of these cruel rituals and torturous processes appears to be the deliberate inducement of blackouts, memory loss and the creation of dissociative states in the initiate. In *The Unnamable* the narrator surmises that, under these circumstances, some would throw themselves out of a window. However, he observes that the intention of the torturers is not to push him that far, but to train him to, 'simply to discover, without further assistance from without, the alleviations of flight from self ...'⁷⁴ As noted previously, Freemasons, along with many other initiatory groups, have a belief that the soul is connected to the body by a fine thread that can accommodate excursions away from the body during sleep, intoxication or experiences of terror. The Masonic symbol of the Cable Tow conveys such a concept. Here the initiatory elders are training the candidate to 'fly', that is to dissociate, to escape from the terror and thus from himself. They count on the victim's fatigue to break his spirit, but he resists as long as he can, fighting to remember 'what I was like when I was he, before all became confused.'⁷⁵ Finally, he succumbs, '... having reached the end of my endurance I had no choice but to disappear ... The hard knocks they invented for me!' He then collapses and a celebration follows, 'to wind up with, song and dance of thanksgiving by victim, to celebrate his nativity.'⁷⁶ This celebration, as his persecutors see it, mocks the victim who, through his own fear has been brought down to their

level. 'Then they uncorked the champagne. One of us at last! Green with anguish! A real little terrestrial! Choking in the chlorophyll! Hugging the slaughter-house walls!'⁷⁷

The surrender to the group, as noted in contemporary reports of ritual abuse, is the final aim of the cultic indoctrination process and can be marked by some form of joyful celebration.⁷⁸ The victim's 'nativity' is the rebirth of the initiate into a new indoctrinated form and the loss of his former self, the sense of his true identity. However, the abandonment of the self under the duress of this cruel initiatory process can lead the victim to experience remorse for succumbing too easily. At a certain point the narrator complains:

I can't get born, perhaps that's their big idea, to keep on saying the same old thing, till I go mad and begin to scream, then they'll say, He's mewled, he'll rattle, it's mathematical, let's get out to hell out of here, no point in waiting for that, others need us, for him it's over, his troubles will be over, he's saved, we've saved him, they're all the same, they all let themselves be saved, they all let themselves be born, he was a tough nut, he'll have a good time, a brilliant career, in fury and remorse, he'll never forgive himself ...⁷⁹

Having finally succumbed to their relentless tortures the narrator searches, in confusion, for his former self. He searches everywhere, trying the sea, the town, the mountains and the plains but realises, 'it's not I, it's not I, where am I, what am I doing, all this time ... I must have succumbed.'⁸⁰ The memory loss occasioned during these traumatic events is accompanied by a search for the right words to express it. He complains of blackouts, of losing whole sentences. Puzzled, he says, '[p]erhaps I've missed the key-word to the whole business. I wouldn't have understood it, but I would have said it, that's all that is required.'⁸¹ The search for the Lost Word is one of the central themes of Masonic initiations and this reflects the use of words in the magical traditions of Ireland, where the belief that individual magic words have great power is a central motif.⁸² However, in the case of the torture implied in Beckett's description there is no one word that would ever magically correct the loss of self produced through such means. Instead, the tortured psyche fragments into different parts, into multiple selves that each contain elements of the initiatory

process. Commenting on this sense of multiplicity the narrator says, '[h]ow many of us there are altogether, finally? And who is holding forth at the moment? And to whom? About what?'⁸³

In current research the term given to these fragmented aspects of the psyche that can result from ritual abuse is 'alters' or 'fugue states' and the deliberate process of splitting the child's psyche into many parts is extremely sophisticated.⁸⁴ It is possible that the narrator's reference to a mathematical process may reflect some underlying principle that was understood by the practitioners of the Pythagorean Mysteries with which the Druids were familiar.⁸⁵ In the case of a poet/seer, however, these fragmented parts of the psyche can take on literary form, forming the basis of a rich imaginative inner life and, in Beckett's case, 'a brilliant career, filled with anger and remorse'. Beckett's novels contain many characters and stories, and it is possible that a full analysis of each of these stories could tell us much about the relationship between Druidic practices, Irish mythology and Masonic rites. However, here the analysis will be confined to a brief account of two characters that appear in *The Unnamable*, Molloy and Malone.

Molloy and Malone are both mentioned throughout *The Unnamable*, though their stories are told in depth in the first two novels of the trilogy. In *The Unnamable* Molloy is described as wheeling about the narrator, like a planet or a moon in a state of perpetual motion.⁸⁶ Here, again, there seems to be some reference to a spinning sensation that may be associated with another initiatory indoctrination process. Molloy's story is told in the first novel of the trilogy, published in French in 1950 and the author's English translation published in 1955. According to Beckett, the writing of *Molloy* was entirely intuitive and he had no idea, from the first sentence, where he was heading. He said, '[i]t just all came out like that. Without any changes. I hadn't planned it or thought it out at all'.⁸⁷ Such an admission suggests that the author may, again, have been drawing on some form of repressed experience. Beckett began *Molloy* after being with his mother in her final illness and the novel begins with the mother/son theme.⁸⁸ In the context of this discussion, there may be something to be gleaned from looking at the links with Irish folklore in *Molloy*.

The character of Molloy is a peripatetic old man, a cripple on crutches, who is making his winding way towards a visit to his deaf and blind mother.⁸⁹ He rides a bicycle in a manner calculated to accommodate his crutches and bad leg, his memory is defective; he forgets his own name, his mother's name and where she lives. He is arrested for a violation of public decency because of the way he rests his head on the arms of his bicycle and then runs over a woman's dog. He then lives with this woman, Sophie Lousse, for an indeterminate period before setting off again on his quest for his mother. The first section of the novel concludes with him painfully dragging his crutches while crawling through a forest in search of the town where his old mother lives, and then falling into a ditch from where he can see the distant lights of a town. While undergoing this painful journey he hears a voice telling him not to fret, that help was coming.⁹⁰ There is no explanation as to where this voice comes from, and who was talking to him.

The above brief description may suggest another aspect of the initiatory process. As the narrator says in *The Unnamable*, these stories about travellers and paralytics seem to be his own story in some way, possibly his memory playing tricks on him.⁹¹ Just as many of Bacon's images may have been associated with the warrior tales of Cú Chulainn, so some of the characters in Beckett's oeuvre may also relate to old tales of the Irish warrior tradition, in this case to a heroic character known as the Great Fool. Beckett had stated that he was able to begin *Molloy* 'the day I became aware of my stupidity'.⁹² In Irish folklore *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* (The Adventure of the Great Fool) is told in the Ossianic Cycle.⁹³ The 'fool' in this tale is a 'questing innocent' or bumpkin, not unlike the hero Perceval in the Arthurian legends. He is the dispossessed son of a great king, who is driven to the woods with his mother by the King of Leinster. The rest of his family has been killed. The hero/fool of this tale is sent on two quests, first taming a wild dog, making it a pet and then slaying a wild boar. He then wins the king's beautiful daughter. Afterwards, he magically loses his shins, but can run faster on his stumps than most men, and his legs are restored when he decapitates an enemy, Maragach. Amadáin Mhóir was also a leader of the fairy host and was greatly feared because he could administer the fairy stroke, which carried the victim

away and replaced him with a simulacrum. In *Molloy* a figure C journeys through the countryside. He is a questing innocent, as is the character of the Great Fool.⁹⁴ Molloy is portrayed as a fool and he, too, gets by on his stumps. In *The Unnamable* the narrator describes his leg being whipped off and then restored as 'part of the programme'.⁹⁵

It is possible that Beckett's reaction to his mother's failing health may have brought up subliminal memories of an initiatory process associated with a mother/son relationship in Irish warrior mythology. Here, as in the case of Bacon, the initiatory journey involves a temporary and intense identification with one of the heroes of mythology. Such identification seems to be brought about through hypnotic suggestion and possibly spin programming resulting in separate personality states, or 'simulacra', which carry different parts of the initiatory process. In this case an intense identification with the hero's crippled state and magical restoration of one of his limbs is 'part of the programme'. Here there may be a connection between Beckett's preoccupation with crippled characters and Bacon's fascination with Muybridge's photographs of a crippled boy. Molloy's story thus appears to be intimately connected with one of the ordeals associated with the initiatory process, though further analysis of the novel may reveal more along these lines.

Malone also appears in *The Unnamable*. He is mentioned early in the novel, but his presence is vague and the narrator states that there will not be much on the subject of Malone in this story.⁹⁶ Malone has had his exposure in the second novel of the trilogy, *Malone Dies*, published in French in 1951 and in English in 1956. In *Malone Dies* the character Malone is alone in the dark, waiting to die, in a private room where he can hear the sounds of life outside; but he does not remember how or why he got there. Here he is like a man groping 'long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding, who has been doing so for nearly a century, a condition from which he has never been able to depart'.⁹⁷ He says, 'I used not to know where I was going, but I knew I would arrive, I knew there would be an end to the long, blind road'.⁹⁸ Such a description can be broadly interpreted as a metaphor for life, but in the case of the initiatory process it seems that Malone may be the character who embodies

the blindfolded initiate's stumbling progress along the Rugged Road as well as the trapped experience within the darkened crypt. Malone thus appears to represent the part of the psyche that is permanently entrapped in this blinded state, utterly alone, as is the initiate when abandoned in the pre-natal condition. The narrator's stories appear to relieve the pain of this condition.

Malone describes a loss of consciousness, a hiatus in his recollections, an occasion of fainting, where something is effectively wiped from memory leaving no discernible trace on his mind, but for a vague sense that some lost events have occurred that he now tries to reconstruct.⁹⁹ He describes himself as living in a kind of coma, '... perhaps I was stunned by a blow, on the head, in a forest perhaps, yes now that I speak of a forest I vaguely remember a forest'.¹⁰⁰ This recollection ties Malone's experience with Molloy's story, the heroic adventures of the Great Fool, and the initiatory practices of the Ancient Mysteries.

Malone goes through his few possessions that he keeps in a pile in the corner of his room. Among them is the bowl of a pipe. He says he doesn't remember smoking a tobacco pipe, but does remember the soap-pipe he used to blow bubbles as a child.¹⁰¹ As Mary Junker notes, the 'dudeen' mentioned in *Waiting for Godot* is a small clay pipe that in Ireland is given out to the neighbours who come to a 'corpse house' or wake.¹⁰² Amongst some fraternal groups in Ireland one of the actions performed on the Candidate is the breaking of a clay pipe over his shoulder, a reminder to the Candidate to solemnly declare that he will never break the oaths of secrecy nor divulge any secrets, signs or passwords.¹⁰³ Malone's association between the broken pipe and a soap-pipe connects the initiatory experience with childhood and with the floating sensation and blissful release of the dissociative experience.

Malone Dies concludes with a bizarre excursion for some of the inmates of the House of St John of God, where Malone and others reside. As Eoin O'Brien notes, this institution is an asylum for harmless mentally ill patients that still exists in Stillorgan near Foxrock and first appeared in Beckett's writing in *Murphy*.¹⁰⁴ St John of God is one of the patrons of Freemasonry.¹⁰⁵ This excursion to the island (identified by O'Brien as Dalkey Island) is being taken by Lady Pedal, a benevolent woman

described as 'a huge, big, tall, fat woman' with artificial daisies in her broad-brimmed straw hat.¹⁰⁶ The group that goes on the boat is a motley crew consisting of an asylum keeper named Lemuel, Macmann, the subject of Malone's last story, a character known as the Saxon, one known as the giant, a youth, a thin individual and two colossi dressed in sailor suits.¹⁰⁷ All of the inmates are tied together by the ankles. When they arrive at the island Lady Pedal tells them of the Druid remains there and promises that after they have had their tea they will hunt for them.¹⁰⁸ As soon as she disappears Lemuel suddenly murders the two sailors with a hatchet. These two men, Maurice and Ernest, are described as 'two decent, quiet, harmless men, brothers-in-law into the bargain.' Lady Pedal faints and falls, the six remaining characters get into the boat and drift out to sea, the night falls and the novel ends with Lemuel vowing that he will never hit anyone again.¹⁰⁹

Such a bizarre and blunt ending appears to be drawing on a combination of Druidic beliefs, Irish mythology and Masonic ritual. As Dáithí Ó hÓgáin notes, the Druidic concept of the Otherworld or afterlife, where the eternal souls of the dead reside, was often portrayed as a strange island, a bright and beautiful place, full of beautifully dressed people, abundant food and delightful music. The favourite food there was pork and magic apples.¹¹⁰ There was a strong relationship between the Druid poets and this realm of the dead, and many poets gained inspiration from the Otherworld, especially when sojourning in Druid sites,¹¹¹ such as the island described in *Malone Dies*. The excursion to the island is taken by Lady Pedal, who shares many of the characteristics of the goddess Brigid, 'the woman of poetry, the goddess the seer poets adored.'¹¹² Besides being a goddess of war Brigid was also a fertility goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann, a bringer of abundance (corn and milk) and associated with spring, agriculture, and fire. One of her forms was 'the river goddess who was bright in appearance and who could be envisaged as a cow.'¹¹³ Lady Pedal is big, fat and cow-like, and wears a straw hat decorated with artificial daisies. She is joyous and bursts into a song celebrating spring.¹¹⁴ However, this excursion is not to be a joyful celebration of the advent of spring but one that turns into a story of horror, one that is nevertheless conveyed in a manner that is flat and unemotional.

The character Lemuel is the asylum keeper who attends the excursion to mind the inmates. He is portrayed as a villainous individual, who firstly chews the bacon from the inmates' soup and throws the rinds back into the pot, thus depriving them of the traditional otherworld sustenance needed for their journey.¹¹⁵ He then deals a few blows to Macmann's skull with his hatchet before murdering the other two men. In biblical terms, Lemuel was associated with King Solomon and was, supposedly, the author of Proverbs Chapter 31, which lauds the characteristics of the virtuous woman, the characteristics that seem to be those of Lady Pedal. Lemuel's association with the story of King Solomon connects him to one of the central motifs of Freemasonry, the murder of King Solomon's master builder, Hiram Abiff. Lemuel's use of his hatchet to deal murderous blows reflects these Masonic ritual murders and conveys in rather matter-of-fact terms the initiatory symbolism. One of these symbols appears to be a curious gesture, the breaking of an umbrella on a rock,¹¹⁶ not dissimilar to the breaking of a pipe over the initiate's shoulder. The events take place on the Easter weekend, spent by Jesus in hell,¹¹⁷ which may be another reference to the Eighteenth Degree. But this Masonic story also appears to be interwoven with the story of Brigid. When Lady Pedal sees what has happened she faints, then falls over, and breaks something, perhaps her hip. When she regains her sense she begins to moan and groan. The Saxon screams, 'smash her!'¹¹⁸ The goddess Brigid was said to have brought together two warring tribes through her marriage to Bres, an Irish king. However, two of the brothers-in-law were murdered and Brigid launched into a state of grief, introducing the concept of keening into the culture.¹¹⁹ The cult of the goddess Brigid was to be 'smashed' by the invading Saxons and supplanted by a Christian version in the form of St Brigid.

Ó hÓgáin suggests that the concept of the Otherworld in Druidic lore was not only meant to suggest the afterlife but was also used for cult purposes within the context of earthly life.¹²⁰ Here it would seem that the visit to the island in *Malone Dies* represents this latter concept and the initiate's entrance to the liminal world of the dead is to be psychological in nature and not a physical death. The journey to the island therefore suggests that the initiate or would-be poet is being made to undergo

another symbolic process in order to gain inspiration and that while the goddess of poetry may be in attendance, her power to nurture, protect and inspire with themes of beauty and abundance has been destroyed. Instead, the process is insane, horrifying and ultimately one of abandonment as the remaining inmates and their keeper drift out to sea, the broken Lady Pedal is left on the island, and the night is strewn with absurd lights. Such lights and the figure of the youth who vomits on the journey anticipates the narrator's terrifying experiences conveyed in the final novel of the trilogy, as previously discussed.¹²¹

As Ó hÓgáin notes, the ancient Druid-poets were determined to portray their profession as intimately connected with the wellbeing of the community and the fertility goddess's association with both poetry and the coming of spring suggests such a positive connection.¹²² However, the conclusion of *Malone Dies* implies that through the distortion of Druidic initiation practices poetry itself has been transformed into an expression of madness. The practice of sensory deprivation may have been useful for a Druid-poet as it could stimulate his imagination as an escape from the self-imposed terror of an entrapment in darkness. However, if such a practice were to be used secretly on a child, along with other ritual trials such as the interpretation here is suggesting, then it would amount to an act of torture and a gross violation of human rights. Furthermore, if the child has been made to completely dissociate from the memory of these tortures, then he or she will carry all of the associated pain and confusion permanently in the psyche leading to feelings of madness, if not necessarily to a fully diagnosable condition. While Beckett suffered greatly from anxiety, depression and panic attacks he was never diagnosed as insane but was well known for his empathy for the mentally ill and the presence of this theme in his work.

In *The Unnamable* then, the last novel of his trilogy, Beckett seems to be making a deliberate attempt to search behind the characters and stories of his other novels in order to try to tap into a deeper level of experience. But it is not easy to escape from the story telling as the immersion into narrative does, in fact, provide a rest from the search for the self.¹²³ Telling stories is 'an old habit, I do it without heeding, or as if I were somewhere

else, there I am far again, there I am the absentee again ...'¹²⁴ The one the narrator is looking for, the absent self, 'is made of silence ... he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable.'¹²⁵ This absent self's story, as the previous analysis has argued, appears to be one of torture, the deliberate torture of a child who, as the novelist seems to suggest, is being prepared, using an ancient Druidic technique, for a future career as a writer. Such techniques, as we have seen in the discussion of Bacon's work, are reflected in Auden's recipe for the upbringing of a poet: 'as much neurosis as the child can bear'.¹²⁶

At times the narrator questions whether the experiences he is describing ever happened, or whether they were just a dream. If these experiences never actually happened, he says, he has no cause for anxiety. Nevertheless, he emphasises how anxious and afraid he is.¹²⁷ The whole matter is inexplicable, a '[l]abyrinthine torment that can't be grasped, or limited, or felt, or suffered, no, not even suffered ...'¹²⁸ But he also has the feeling that the events have stopped, if not their effects. He says, '[w]hat is strange is that they haven't been pestering me for some time past ... Do they consider me so plastered with their rubbish that I can never extricate myself, never make a gesture but their cast must come to life?'¹²⁹ Generally, Masonic ritual abuse can continue at regular intervals throughout childhood but tends to cease during the mid-teens.¹³⁰

At certain points the narrator recognises the trickster-like elements in all of this, that this treatment is some form of joke. He says:

It took him a long time to adapt to this excoriation. To realise, pooh, it's nothing. A mere bagatelle. The common lot. A harmless joke. That will not last forever ... Well, no matter, let's drive on now to the end of the joke, we must be nearly there, and see what they have to offer him, in the way of the bugaboos.¹³¹

The conclusion of the novel sums up the dilemma for the writer who is attempting to articulate the inexplicable nature of ritual trauma. The narrator realises that all he has now is words, but that words fail to articulate this strange experience and memory falters. He concludes, 'perhaps it's a dream, all a dream, that would surprise me ... strange pain, strange sin ... you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.'¹³² The narrator knows that this phenomenon, while it feels like a dream, is not one, but is in fact some

powerful force that pushes individuals to strive beyond their capacity, to survive despite the continual threat of both physical and psychological annihilation, as Pozzo relentlessly drives Lucky with his Cable Tow and whip. As contemporary research suggests, the experience of paralysis, the sense that there is no escape and the feeling of being completely controlled by the will of others are some of the resulting cognitive beliefs induced by the initiatory techniques of cultic groups.¹³³

The reading here suggests that in *The Unnamable* Beckett appears to be articulating an experience of ritual trauma in elaborate physical and sensory detail, along with a record of a set of thought processes that indicate the degree of confusion encountered by victims of such practices. The narrator goes so far as being able to perceive, understand and state the intentions of the ritual elders as they enact their deliberate training techniques, much as a powerless victim of torture can interpret the intentions of his torturers, while nevertheless being subjected to their will. In language that has been hailed by many critics as a *tour de force*, the novelist describes the disintegration of the personality under the duress of these torturous techniques. However, as in the case of Francis Bacon, it would appear that Samuel Beckett did not fully understand what it was he was writing about in *The Unnamable*, other than some form of dreamlike state or inexplicable condition. This may be partly due to the mind's capacity to dissociate protectively from the memories of extreme abuse. The power of the mind appears to be so strong in this regard that the articulation of the experience in aesthetic form does not necessarily equate with a full recognition of its significance. In Beckett's day the lack of public knowledge of these practices would have also been a factor. Nevertheless, as the above reading of *The Unnamable* suggests, Beckett's ability to transform his night terrors and panic attacks into literary form can provide much insight into the practices involved in ritual abuse, and the ways in which the psyche can accommodate a course of severe and arduous trials entailed in a cruel initiatory process.

Trauma, Druidism and the Gnostic Tradition in the Work of Bacon and Beckett

Throughout their creative lives both Bacon and Beckett were permanently focussed on a nameless and confusing inner reality, struggling with its daily effects on their psychological wellbeing and finding within it the source of their artistic subject matter. From the numerous references to themes found in Masonic rites, the visual and written descriptions of ritual spaces, references to traumatic bodily sensations, terror and entrapment in their work and the nature of some of the comments they have made, it appears that this inner reality may have been associated with the tradition of initiation that was an integral part of Irish society in the early twentieth century. As this reading has suggested, it seems that both Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett may have been exposed to 'the Mysteries' at some point in their development. However, their responses suggest a repression of any clear conscious awareness of this possibility despite the artistic expression of their subjective reality.

As this discussion has demonstrated, the activities described in many of Bacon's paintings and Beckett's texts correspond with those reported by contemporary victims of sadistic ritual abuse. These activities include the witnessing of animal sacrifices or mutilations, the presence of death threats, both witnessing and receiving physical and/or sexual abuse or torture, being deprived of sleep, being shut up in confined spaces, and being surrounded by groups of figures in robes engaging in chanting and circular ritual formations. As Walter and Linda Young point out, ritual abuse patients may draw, write, dream or talk about these rituals and in doing so 'may be flooded with scenes of group victimization in which multiple adults participate in or force the patient to witness the abuse of others.'¹ Bacon's paintings of beef carcasses in ritualistic tableaux, his visual

descriptions of what appears to be Masonic oaths and pledges, the image of a gun pointed at the viewer and the suggestion of frightening sexual encounters capture the first of these activities, while Beckett's many references to physical and psychological torture, conditions of sensory deprivation and descriptions of robed figures in circular groups match the latter categories. Furthermore, the work of Bacon and Beckett demonstrates the many ways in which these strategies can be woven together with distorted versions of Masonic rituals and the mythology of early Ireland to create a complex and almost impenetrable layer of symbolism.

While both men appear to draw on similar rites there are, nevertheless, dissimilarities in the ritual aspects of their work. In Beckett's work there are no obvious references to the theme of 'no-popery' and anti-Catholic sentiments and no references at all to the colour orange and its significance, which are found in Bacon's images. If anything, Beckett's plays suggest a lack of colour and the preponderance of black costumes and grey tones. There also does not appear to be any reference to sexual trauma in Beckett's oeuvre, which seems to be an aspect of Bacon's work. Instead, physical trauma due to the rough treatment of the initiate, and psychological trauma, due to humiliation and torment, seems to form the substance of the writer's focus. These differences in focus may be due to individual responses to similar practices but may also be due to the different agendas and techniques used by the groups that perform these rites. As Alexander Piatigorsky notes, Freemasonry is a conglomeration of Christian, Gnostic and pagan beliefs and rituals. After a Lodge is established and warranted by Grand Lodge it essentially becomes a private space and is entirely self-sufficient, making its own decisions about what goes on there.² This may mean that if members of a Lodge are not concerned to stay within the boundaries of the scripted rituals then the emphasis can shift in focus to one or other of the traditions upon which the Order draws. When the rituals become even more clandestine or more 'irregular' and are adopted by groups with widely varying ideologies then the solemn and dignified enactment of Masonic initiations, aimed to symbolically signify a state of spiritual renewal in the candidates, can be distorted into a mockery of the rites that can be accompanied by acts of extreme cruelty.

As recent research has suggested, magic practices from the Scottish and Irish Druidic tradition have been found to lie behind the continuation of cult and satanic abuses in contemporary culture.³ Writing about these old Irish traditions in 1894 James Bonwick suggests that the conjurations associated with Druidic rituals were potent spells and wicked magic 'that could set the ministry of hell at work'.⁴ The consequences for the individual exposed to such rituals, he says, could be devastating, imparting a sadness and terror to life continuing long after the Druid had been supplanted.⁵ The negative psychological effects of initiation may have been recognised by the ancient Druids themselves. The *Metrical Dindshenchas* records the kindling of the 'mystic fire' by Mide, son of Brath, which spread over the four quarters of Erin for seven years before the Druids of Erin protested. 'It is an ill smoke was brought to us eastward, it has brought an ill mood to our mind', they said, 'hateful to us is the fire that hath been kindled in the land'.⁶ However, the Druids were punished for their protest, Mide cutting out their tongues to silence them so as to continue the practice.

As this study has demonstrated, traces of the Druidic tradition can be found in the work of both artist and writer. In Bacon's case the emphasis appears to be on the visual iconography of bull sacrifice. As Chapter One suggests it appears that 'behind the veils' in an irregular version of Royal Arch rites remnants of what Bonwick calls 'the old idolatry' involving the sacrifice of animals 'in the heathenish manner' could provide explanations for works such as *Painting*, 1946, and others.⁷ In Bacon's work Druidic themes also appear in the visual references to the warrior hero Cú Chulainn and the myths and stories associated with Irish battle-lore. Elements of the Persian cult of Mithras, with its theme of bull sacrifice and mockery of Christianity may also be present here. In Beckett's case the parody of Christian themes in *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot* and the distortion of Christ's suffering for the purposes of initiation in *Company* and *The Unnamable* could also reflect this blend of Masonic and Druidic elements. The analysis of more of Beckett's novels and short stories in future might reveal further references to the combination of Druidic and Masonic themes.

As contemporary research suggests, the Gnostic tradition also plays a major role in the history of ritual abuse.⁸ Gnosticism's positive aims were associated with a spiritual practice in which the individual could, through prayerful meditation, eventually recall to consciousness his or her divine origin in the form of a mystical experience.⁹ However, ever since the Gnostic tradition was established historians, including Pliny and Philo of Alexandria, have noted that the arts associated with it have been corrupted by a class of charlatans and unscrupulous practitioners.¹⁰ As Tobias Churton has argued, it may also be that much damage has been done through the interpretation of Gnostic principles in literal terms rather than in terms of their role as metaphor.¹¹ Gnosticism developed alongside early Christianity but presents a very different interpretation of Christ's message and involves the use of magic practices. Interpreted in its distorted form it professes a profoundly pessimistic view of human existence.

The concept of an alien God is the central tenet of Gnosticism. In order to grapple with the problem of evil Gnostics derived the concept of two creators, one the true or original creator, belonging to the world of Light, or the Pleroma, a realm of boundless, blissful fullness, who after the creation withdrew to this realm; the other, a false deity or Demiurge, the false or blind creator, who controls the universe and the world, the domain of humanity.¹² The universe is perceived by Gnostics as a vast cosmic prison with the earth, the lowest dungeon, ruled by dark angels known as Archons. The role of the Archons is to prevent souls from returning to the Godhead after death.¹³ Gnostics view the world 'as a jest or a kind of conjuring trick, with the Demiurge as the conjurer...'¹⁴ Human life is thus perceived as a form of alienation from the Godhead involving a period of endless waiting, which can become a source of cosmic terror. As Hans Jonas argues, the way of salvation in the Gnostic tradition lies in a long and laborious search of seemingly endless duration, involving a process of memory loss and retrieval, in order for the soul to fulfil its destiny.¹⁵ Anguish and homesickness characterise the soul in this condition.¹⁶

Clearly Beckett's work reflects this tradition. The endless waiting for something that never comes in *Waiting for Godot* as well as the memory loss and retrieval throughout the play and the confusion as to who Godot

is, all correlate with Gnostic concepts. The permanent state of entrapment in *Happy Days* resembles the concept of human life as a form of imprisonment and alienation in Gnostic belief. The despair and desolation suffered by most of his characters is relieved only by the author's 'sardonic gallows humour',¹⁷ a humour that parallels the trickster behaviour in the tradition of initiatory practice and reflects the concept of the divine jest. In the Gnostic tradition the endless search for meaning is represented through the metaphor of the labyrinth. In *The Unnamable* the narrator complains of a '[I]abyrinthine torment that can't be grasped, or limited, or felt or suffered, no, not even suffered'¹⁸ Another series of metaphors used in Gnosticism is that of numbness, sleep, intoxication, and oblivion, the characteristic state of the dead in the Underworld. The role of the 'world' is perceived as preventing the soul from awakening to its true nature.¹⁹ Beckett's characters like Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* and Fox in *Rough for Radio II* drag themselves through their torturous days, on the verge of falling asleep when it all gets too difficult. The narrator in *Malone Dies* says, 'I have lived in a kind of coma.'²⁰

The French critic Guy Scarpetta was to note the close relationship between Beckett's work and the kind of negative theology of Gnostic beliefs where God is manifest through his absence.²¹ Scarpetta had suggested that Beckett must have been aware of Gnostic philosophy, particularly that of Manichaeism, enough to have been able to weave it so consistently throughout his creative work.²² However, as Anthony Cronin points out, Beckett had never been particularly interested in this area and only knew as much as could be found in the copy of the Encyclopaedia Britannica that sat on his bookshelf.²³ The argument here suggests that Beckett *was* aware of the principles of the Gnostic tradition, not from researching it, but from an intense and traumatic exposure to its practices. The nature of this exposure meant that coupled with this awareness was a profound level of confusion and a struggle to find an explanation for the feelings of alienation, psychological imprisonment and spiritual numbness associated with it.

As this discussion has explored, many of the negative effects of abusive initiation practices can be explained in terms of the characteristics of trauma. These characteristics may not be dissimilar to some of the

attributes of Gnostic beliefs. The deep and pervasive sense of alienation and accompanying anxiety and homesickness, explained in Gnostic terms as the yearning for an alien and distant God, along with the sense of memory loss and need for retrieval of this memory for the soul to fulfil its density, may not be very dissimilar to the sense of emptiness or inner void produced when an individual suffers amnesia due to extremely traumatic events. The interminable search for some solution to this sense of inner void and the inability to find words to express the feelings that are due to the brain's storage of traumatic events in its non-linguistic centres parallels the labyrinthine search of the Gnostic seeker for the 'lost word'. If the trauma is induced through an abusive initiation process then the trickster's sleight-of-hand used to shock the initiate is not dissimilar to the concept of the conjuring trick employed by the Demiurge. If the initiation is a form of puberty ritual in a fraternal structure, then the sense of abandonment by the original creator and cruel trickster treatment by the Demiurge can be likened to the loss of the mother's protection as the child is launched painfully into the patriarchal order by the group of men that Beckett calls 'the lords of creation.'

The concept of genuine and corrupt forms of Gnosticism, which corresponds with the concept of true and spurious Freemasonry, may have its basis in the two ways in which the brain produces ecstatic or mystical experiences. In his study of the relationship between mystical encounters and brain processes the scientist John Horgan notes the two ways in which such experiences can be produced, which he says corresponds with the two different functions of the autonomic nervous system. He calls the first, the 'top down' method that includes meditation, prayer and relaxation, which exploits the quiescent component of the autonomic nervous system, whereas the 'bottom up' methods, such as dancing, hyperventilation, excitation and other processes, arouse the 'fight or flight' response to exploit the arousal component of the autonomic system. 'If either the arousal or the quiescent component is pushed far enough', he says, 'the one activates the other through a "spillover effect", producing a paradoxical state of ecstatic serenity.'²⁴ It seems that the more severe forms of Gnostic initiation practice involve an understanding of the powerful effect on the brain of traumatic experiences such as extreme shock and

near-death situations and the capacity for such experiences to produce the sensations of a mystical encounter. It may be that these extreme versions of initiatory practice were themselves creating the very psychological state of alienation in the initiates and practitioners that became the basis of the philosophy and that continued use of these practices both mirrored and confirmed the beliefs held within the Gnostic tradition.

In the context of early twentieth-century Ireland, where groups such as the British Israelites, the Orange Order or members of Freemasonry believed that they were descendents of the Lost Tribes of Israel, there may be a similar situation occurring. If distorted and abusive forms of Royal Arch rites were being used on children, such as the argument here is suggesting, then there is the potential for the creation of a community bound by a deeply embedded and forgotten sense of trauma interpreted as a powerful yearning, coupled with a sense of being 'the chosen ones', that could act as a formidable barrier to outsiders. The concept of the Lost Tribes then becomes an apt description of a group of people dissociated through trauma. Even if these children, as adults, abandon their religious roots, they could still carry with them a psychological attachment to these beliefs and, in the case of artists such as Bacon and Beckett, betray a profound sense of alienation in their artistic expression that still manages to affirm the Gnostic belief system. For example, in Beckett's case James Knowlson refers to his work in terms of abandonment by 'an absent, indifferent, if not actively malevolent deity'.²⁵

In the mid-twentieth century this profound sense of alienation in art and literature was to become associated with Existentialist philosophy. A number of scholars have argued that there may be analogies between Existentialism and the Gnostic tradition. Hans Jonas suggests that the Gnostics were the first existentialists and talks of Gnosticism as providing a key to Existentialism and *vice versa*.²⁶ Jonas compares the cultural situation of the Graeco-Roman world with the twentieth century and suggested that the two ages were 'contemporaneous' in the sense of being identical phases in the life-cycles of their respective cultures.²⁷ James M. Robinson drew parallels between the second-century Gnostic movement and the counter-culture movement of the 1960s.²⁸ And as Janja Lalic points out, charismatic cults such as the ill-fated Heaven's Gate cult that

committed group suicide in California in 1997 sprang directly from the 1960s New Age movement that incorporated Gnostic beliefs, amongst others, into its practices.²⁹

Given the discussion here, the question to be asked is whether this contemporaneity between the twentieth century and the late Classical period may involve the hidden practice of initiating children, leading to the profound sense of 'loss of soul' described so expertly in Beckett's *The Unnamable* and captured so vividly in the atmosphere of Bacon's paintings. If this is so, the work of Bacon and Beckett may not only be an illustration of these hidden practices but also an indicator of the social and psychological control that members of the secret societies could exert behind the scenes. As Martin Harrison observes, Bacon was one of a generation of artists and writers that expressed a tangible Oedipal fury, which George Orwell described as, 'among the young, a curious hatred of "old men"'.³⁰ Were these 'old men', like Beckett's 'lords of creation', those men who took it upon themselves to act clandestinely in a priestly capacity to initiate the young in ways not dissimilar to those of the Druids of pre-Christian Ireland or those of the cult groups of the Classical world?

In primitive societies, as Hutton Webster points out, initiatory practices on the young were regarded as a toughening process, particularly in the case of warrior societies. But they also served to keep the old in control over the young.³¹ Webster argues that the knowledge of initiatory practices helped to enhance the lot of the old men in these primitive communities. He says, 'with the machinery of the puberty institution lying ready to their hand, it is not surprising that the elders should find in it a powerful means of ameliorating what would be otherwise a difficult existence.'³² As 'directors of the early mysteries' these old men, he says, were able to harness the natural curiosity and awe associated with adolescence in order to create a successful organised system based on deceit and chicanery. Webster extends his observations on this form of initiation to the role of secret societies where he makes a further moral judgement on the practice. He says, 'an element of selfishness is introduced which results, finally, when the secret society stage is reached, in

prostituting the good of the community to the private ends of a small number of initiates.³³

In the case of Francis Bacon such a toughening process would have been a natural extension of the military ethos surrounding his upbringing. Cruelty to children and animals was a feature of his home life. His grandfather, Walter Lorraine, for example, delighted in playing sadistic and cruel jokes on the children such as putting them on unbroken horses and was notorious for his torture of cats.³⁴ The artist's ability to acknowledge this level of cruelty implied an acceptance of a reality that was part of the era in which he was raised; although this acceptance did not ameliorate the state of confusion that this argument suggests may have been associated with an initiatory process. In Beckett's case there seemed to be even more confusion. His relationship with his father, Bill Beckett, was seemingly a good one: they spent quality time together playing sports and walking in the country. However, accompanying the panic attacks and depression he had after his father's death Samuel complained of a feeling of 'some ultimate sadness, even injustice in his father's life would never leave him' but for which he had no explanation.³⁵ While there are multiple references to groups of anonymous men in *The Unnamable* the research has yet to examine Beckett's writing for material that would help to explain this feeling towards his father. However, in my own experience ritual abuse can involve the humiliation of the Masonic father in front of his child as a means of compounding the sense of confusion experienced as a result of the indoctrination process.³⁶

Here it may be relevant to note that some who have abandoned their membership of Freemasonry claim that the Order places members' families in some form of spiritual danger.³⁷ One of the complaints made by critics of Freemasonry, among them former members, is that membership is conditional on the taking of oaths before knowing precisely what these oaths mean.³⁸ This may not be a problem if the ideology of the group is based on the concept that the rituals are a metaphor for a state of internal, spiritual growth. However, if the particular group takes the 'left-hand path' and interprets these rituals in very literal ways, then the member can be gradually caught up in an inextricable web of hidden shame and guilt that can permeate all aspects of his life. In the case of

Freemasonry, the hold of the group can be particularly difficult to shed due to its inherent association with privilege, social standing and business opportunities. If the member threatens to leave the group then he is not only abandoning this level of privilege but can also be subjected to deliberate ruin, brought about through acts of vengeance by other members. To leave such a situation one would need to be of very strong character. If the member were aware of the initiation of children within the group, then the virtual guarantee that the children would forget their experiences would perhaps ameliorate the guilt in some way. Due to these binding effects of membership some have called Freemasonry 'the cult of the Establishment'. I would suggest that this term would be more applicable to irregular forms of Freemasonry, such as being described here, rather than its more purist or regular forms.

In her study of cult behaviours the sociologist Janja Lalich addresses similar situations where members gradually subsume their values to those of the group and eventually commit acts that would otherwise have been abhorrent. The various theories that have tried to explain these group behaviours include conformity theories, which argue that the need to be liked and accepted can often override the need to act in ways that the individual knows as morally right. In these cases the individual can be aware that they are doing something wrong but choose acceptance over its alternative: criticism, ostracism or expulsion from the group. Lalich argues, however, that complete immersion into the cult goes even further than this, so that over time the individual's worldview shifts altogether to be aligned wholly with the group's beliefs and there is no longer an internal conflict felt by the member.³⁹ In the cases of Bacon and Beckett, it may be that their forebears were so embedded into a deeply held belief structure that stretched back not only generations but also into the mythical realms of ancient Ireland that they failed to question the moral issues inherent in the application of initiatory techniques on the young, or even deemed these practices necessary.

What is perhaps to be taken from this discussion is that children of particular groups, among them some children of Freemasons and members of related fraternities and secrets societies, may be particularly vulnerable to the abusive use of initiation practices. As Anthony Cronin notes, later

in his career Beckett found that his writing produced a particularly obsessional effect on some people. Cronin describes them as mostly young and neurotic, even slightly deranged, who would sometimes camp outside his door and for whom Beckett's writings were almost sacred texts containing a key to some sort of salvation.⁴⁰ It is quite possible that these young people could have been victims of similar practices and recognised their own plight in his texts, though possibly without knowing the reasons why. It would be interesting to know if these people were children of members of secret societies.

As noted in Chapter Three, in the Masonic tradition the *lewis* or child of a Freemason is related to the bolt that is attached to the Foundation Stone to enable it to be lifted in place. Symbolically, the *lewis* carries some sort of weight for the rest of society. In warrior societies the collectively repressed grief of the war experience, accumulated over generations, must have needed some symbolic outlet for the soldiers themselves not to be psychologically crippled by the after-effects of war. It is possible that in the corrupt use of the rituals the child's psyche is being offered up in sacrifice to compensate for the sacrifices made by the warriors. This collective male grief, an almost tangible entity, is then passed from one generation to the next, leaving the participating adult males symbolically freed for a time from their own burden, and therefore capable of functioning in their required social roles in the community. Unhampered by too much emotional baggage these fraternal members can even enjoy the comforts and benefits that civilisation offers, much like Pozzo can indulge his appetites while Lucky carries his master's suitcases filled with sand.

Beckett frequently referred to the theme of child sacrifice in his writing and Bacon, too, alluded to it in his comments and images of a crippled boy. The child sacrifice being referred to here is not one where the child is physically killed (there are no bodies to be found, as those who denied the existence of ritual abuse in the 1990s pointed out) but what is sacrificed is the child's psyche, the sense of his own identity that has been so thoroughly butchered and parasitised that there is little sense of his own self left, other than the part that flails unremittingly against the injustice. As Beckett says in *The Unnamable* and reiterates frequently throughout the novel, 'I know it's not I, that's all I know, I say I, knowing

it's not I, I am far, far, what does that mean, far ...'⁴¹ For a time the child's resilient psyche can support this burden, but as time goes by the part that constitutes the banished self, the one that is far, far away perennially remaining in the liminal space of the initiatory ordeal, must be heard. But, as Beckett says, 'he's in the silence', 'he is made of silence'. This 'I' cannot speak, 'he has no story, he hasn't been in story, it's not certain, he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable ...'⁴² The terror of the initiatory experience is so thoroughly trapped within the non-linguistic centres of the brain that the narrative cannot be told, despite the interminable search to find words to express it. However, research into ritual abuse since the 1980s has suggested that this unspeakable story *is* slowly being told and the reading here suggests that both Bacon and Beckett may be part of its telling. What was once 'unnameable' in the mid-twentieth century is now an acknowledged phenomenon that, for obvious reasons, is still a painfully difficult aspect of western society that few are prepared to address.

Through an examination of their work in the light of the initiatory tradition this study has attempted to provide a few answers to some of the lingering questions about the work of Bacon and Beckett. The answers, however, are not very comfortable ones. In particular, the continuation of this hidden practice in the modern era raises multiple questions concerning human rights issues and the rights of the child, as well as questions concerning the relationship between the production of art and literature and issues of power. However, while it is difficult terrain, this type of analysis could well allow a deeper penetration into the work of a range of contemporary and modern artists and writers in the light of the social forces that surround them. It may be that Francis Bacon and Samuel Beckett are at the apex of a much wider phenomenon within the creative arts.

APPENDIX

Francis Bacon websites

There are many websites that display reproductions of Francis Bacon's paintings and drawings. Some of the best include the following:

The Official Site of the Estate of Francis Bacon

<http://www.francis-bacon.com/>

Tate Online: Francis Bacon 1909–1992

<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=999999961&artistid=682&page=1>

Francis Bacon Studio, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

http://www.hughlane.ie/fb_studio/index.html

Francis Bacon: 27 January–13 May 2001, Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag

http://www.bacon.nl/site_engels/index_catalogus.html

Francis Bacon, Gagosian Gallery

<http://www.gagosian.com/artists/francis-bacon/?gclid=COGiyYa5w5UCFQoxawodmzv6Qw>

Francis Bacon Image Gallery

<http://www.francis-bacon.cx/>

Notes

Introduction

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, first published 1981; London, New York: Continuum, 2002, p. 40.
- 2 T. Desmond Williams, ed., *Secret Societies in Ireland*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1973, pp. ix, 6.
- 3 Williams, *Secret Societies in Ireland*, p. 37.
- 4 This reply is frequently noted in discussions of Bacon's work. See, for example, Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon*, ed. Rudy Chiappini, exhibition catalogue, Lugano: Electa 1993, p. 22.
- 5 See James Knowlson, 'Beckett, Samuel Barclay (1906–1989)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 720, for a summary of these various critics' responses. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, first published 1938; New York: Grove Press, 1970, p. 4.
- 6 The exact date of Samuel Beckett's birth was disputed. Beckett claimed to have been born on Good Friday, 13 April 2006, which differs from the date on his birth certificate. Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1997, p. 1. See Chapter Five for a discussion of the Masonic significance of the concept of a birth on Good Friday.
- 7 Francis Bacon was born on 28 October 1909. He claimed to have had vivid memories of the Irish Civil War experienced while living in Kildare. Hugh M. Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Early and Middle Years, 1928–1958*, New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1978, pp. 1, 5.
- 8 Michael Peppiatt states that Bacon despised religious beliefs. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996, p. 322.
- 9 Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, London: Vintage, 1990, p. 17. Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, p. 3.
- 10 This quotation is included in the exhibition of Francis Bacon's studio in Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.
- 11 See, for example, John Haynes and James Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 25, 26.

- 12 James Randall Noblitt and Pamela Sue Perskin, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America*, Westport, London: Praeger, 1995, p. 101.
- 13 Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopaedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*, New York: Facts on File, 1997.
- 14 See, for example, Mitsuki Shiota, 'Reunited with Anima: The Female Spirit Cult Reconsidered' in Katsuhiko Yamaji, ed., *Gender and Fertility in Melanesia*, Nishinomiya: Kwansai Gakuin University, 1994, p. 132. Shiota cites the prominent ritual expert, Mogoi Yakili, who stated: '[t]hough men monopolise the magic and rituals, women by nature have more power than men. For, women give birth to men (and women) while men cannot give birth to women (or men). This is the biggest miracle surpassing any artificial (man-made) magic or any ritual men pre-
side over'.
- 15 Paul Nettl, *Mozart and Masonry*, first published 1957; New York: Dorset Press, 1987, p. 93.
- 16 Cited in Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992, p. 147.
- 17 Albert G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry: Illustrating and Explaining its Science and Philosophy, its Legends, Myths and Symbols*, Chicago: Charles T. Pownier Co., 1955, pp. 4–16.
- 18 The Craft degrees or Blue Masonry are comprised of the first degree, or Entered Apprentice, the second or Fellow Craft and the third or Master Mason degree. These three degrees form the basis of the Masonic system of knowledge. All 'higher' degrees are a development of these three original degrees. C. W. Leadbeater, *Ancient Mystic Rites*, first published 1926; Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986, p. 3.
- 19 Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry: Its Antiquities, Symbols, Constitutions, Customs, Etc.*, vol. 2, 3, London: Thomas C. Jack, 1883, 1884, p. 60.
- 20 Eliphas Lévi, *The History of Magic*, trans. A. E. Waite, London: Rider, 1982, p. 301.
- 21 Kurt Randolph, *Gnosis, the Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, first published 1977; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983, p. 173.
- 22 Leadbeater, *Ancient Mystic Rites*, p. 1.
- 23 Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, p. 16.
- 24 Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, p. 34.
- 25 Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, p. 38.
- 26 Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, p. 19.
- 27 Cited in W. P. Malcolmson, *Behind Closed Doors: The hidden structure within the Orange Camp [the Royal Arch Purple Order] examined from an evangelical perspective*, Banbridge: Evangelical Truth, 1999, p. 57.

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Chapter One

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Chapter Two

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- 44 David Sylvester, 'The Supreme Pontiff', *Francis Bacon: Important Paintings from the Estate*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 1998, p. 27.
- 45 Sylvester, *Francis Bacon*, p. 35.
- 46 Historically, the Pope concurrent with the events of William's victory over King James was Pope Innocent XI. His forebear was Pope Innocent X, who died in 1655, and the next pope took his name as a mark of respect. Pope Innocent XI had famously celebrated William's victory even though it represented an overthrow of the Catholic rule of Ireland in favour of Protestantism and had ordered *Te Deums* to be sung in Rome as a celebration of the first alliance between Catholic and Protestant countries, known as the League of Augsburg. Michael Ott, 'Pope Innocent X', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08020b.htm>, accessed 15 August 2008. Orangemen, amongst others, viewed this strategy in purely political terms, as a means of curbing the ambitions of Louis XIV in France whose power was threatening the rule of Rome. See Anonymous, *Orangeism in Ireland and Throughout the Empire*, p. 137.
- 47 Harrison, *In Camera*, p. 94.

- 48 Penny, 'Stolen Ritual', p. 1.
- 49 Gray, *The Orange Order*, p. 27.
- 50 Paul Elliott, *Warrior Cults: A History of Magical, Mystical and Murderous Organizations*, London: Blandford, 1995, p. 53.
- 51 Lewis Spence, *The History and Origins of Druidism*, New York: Rider & Co., 1949, pp. 139–40.
- 52 Spence, *The History and Origins of Druidism*, p. 140.
- 53 Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p. 107.
- 54 Eithne O'Donovan, *Ritual Abuse: Information for Health and Welfare Professionals*, NSW Sexual Assault Committee, 1994, p. 3.
- 55 Elliott, *Warrior Cults*, p. 9.
- 56 Ward Rutherford, *Celtic Lore: The History of the Druids and Their Timeless Traditions*, first published 1993; London: Thorsons, 1995, p. 62. Margaret Odrowaz-Sypniewska, 'The Celtic Bear', *The British Isles: Their Geneology, History and Heraldry*, last updated 20 May 2007, <http://www.angelfire.com/mi4/polcrt/CelticBear.html> accessed 18 August 2008.
- 57 Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1995, p. xx.
- 58 Cecile O'Rahilly, ed., *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967, p. ix.
- 59 Simon James, *Exploring the World of the Celts*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1993, p. 160. See also O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, pp. 201–2.
- 60 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, pp. 205, 216.
- 61 Ernst van Alphen states of *Triptych May – June 1973*: 'And the shadow looks as thick and substantial as a bodily fluid'. Ernst Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, London: Reaktion Books, 1992, p. 27.
- 62 Antonin Artaud, 'Madness and Black Magic' in *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*, trans. Clayton Esheman and Norman Glass, Los Angeles: Panjandrum Books, 1982, pp. 51–2.
- 63 Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio*, p. 140.
- 64 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 200.
- 65 Harrison, *In Camera*, p. 41.
- 66 Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*, Cork: Collins Press, 1999, p. 95.
- 67 James Bonwick, *Irish Druids and the Old Irish Religions*, London: Griffith, Farran & Co., 1894, p. 140.
- 68 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. xiii.
- 69 John Ferguson, Member of Larne Loyal Orange Lodge, no. 70, *A True Dream*, 1864. Manuscript held at Public Records Office, Belfast.

- 70 Anonymous, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúalnge*, trans. Joseph Dunn, Project Gutenberg, released 7 August 2005, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16464>, accessed 10 August 2008.
- 71 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 196.
- 72 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, pp. 149–62.
- 73 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 151.
- 74 Essex Master, *An Introduction to Royal Arch Masonry*, London: Rider & Co., 1930, p. 75.
- 75 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 236.
- 76 Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio*, p. 212.
- 77 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, p. 167.
- 78 'Personal Testimony' in 'The Orange Order: Freemasonry roots in the Orange structure in Ireland', *Freemasonry Databank*, <http://www.christian-restoration.com/fmasonry/orange.htm>, accessed 21 June 2008.
- 79 See, for example, Thomas Gordon, *Journey into Madness: the true story of secret CIA mind control and medical abuse*, New York: Bantam Books, 1989. In this popular study Gordon notes that in the 1950s a leading Scottish psychiatrist, Dr Cameron, was employed by the CIA to investigate the brainwashing of American soldiers during the Korean War and developed a spinning chair that could effectively be used to brainwash individuals in a very short space of time.
- 80 See John D. Lovern, 'Spin Programming: A Newly Uncovered Technique of Systematic Mind Control', presented at The Sixth Western Clinical Conference on Multiple Personality and Dissociation, Irvine, California, revised 5 February 1993, <http://www.ra-info.org/library/programming/lovern.shtml>, accessed 18 August 2008.
- 81 Harrison, *In Camera*, p. 118.
- 82 Davies, *Francis Bacon*, p. 73.
- 83 Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio*, p. 164.
- 84 In my PhD thesis I argued that the contemporary American artists Matthew Barney, Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy all depict spinning themes in their work that could be related to a similar practice. Matthew Barney depicts spinning in *The Cremaster Cycle* and relates it to Celtic practices on the Isle of Man as well as to Freemasonry. Bruce Nauman wrote poetry about the feeling of spinning and also dealt with themes of torture and Paul McCarthy practiced bodily spinning early in his career and constructed a mechanical spinning bed. His work also concerns aspects of child abuse along with sexual aberrations. Lynn Brunet, *Terror, Trauma and the Eye in the Triangle: The Masonic Presence in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Australian Digital Theses Program, 2007, http://search.arrow.edu.au/main/redirect_to_title?identifier=oai%3Aarrow.nla.gov.au%3A1212642698487131, accessed 20 August 2008.
- 85 Harrison, *In Camera*, pp. 50, 201.

- 86 James Bonwick, *Irish Druids and the Old Irish Religions*, London: Griffith, Farran & Co., 1894, p. 11.
- 87 Bonwick, *Irish Druids*, p. 145.
- 88 Simon James, *Exploring the World of the Celts*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1993, p. 89.
- 89 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 11.
- 90 Anonymous, *Orangeism in Ireland*, p. 131.
- 91 Haddick-Flynn, *A Short History of Orangeism*, p. 33. The term ‘Wild Geese’ was based on the belief that when these Irish soldiers fell in battle their souls migrated to their native land in the form of geese.
- 92 Anonymous, *Orangeism in Ireland*, pp. 274, 276.
- 93 Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996, p. 95. See also Mark Sladen, ‘The Bacon Myth’, *Bacon’s Eye: Works on paper attributed to Francis Bacon from the Barry Joule Archive*, London: 21 Publishing, 2001, p. 101 and Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 47.
- 94 A number of Orangemen’s songs refer to the role of dissociation in the context of war, that is, the soldier’s ability to disconnect from the horror occurring in the midst of battle. The Relief of Derry is one example where the biblical myth of Noah and the Flood is used as a metaphor for this dissociation process. It goes:
- Like Noah’s dove, sent from above,
While foes would starve and grieve us, O,
Through floods and flame an angel came,
To comfort and relieve us.
- See *The Orange Lark ... and other songs o’ the orange tradition*, introduced by Bobbie Hanvey, 1987, p. 24 (no other publishing details).
- 95 Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, London: Reaktion Books, 1992.
- 96 Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, p. xviii.
- 97 Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, p. 190. Michael Peppiatt argues that the striped mattresses are a reference to this stormy period with his lover, Peter Lacey, in Tangier where Bacon was frequently beaten.
- 98 Bacon, quoted in David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon: The Brutality of Fact*, first published 1987, London: Thames & Hudson, 2002, p. 78, cited in *Francis Bacon: The Violence of the Real*, ed. Armin Zweite and Maria Müller, London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, p. 147.
- 99 Cappock, *Francis Bacon’s Studio*, p. 192.
- 100 Michael Dames, *Ireland: A Sacred Journey*, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 2000, p. 22.
- 101 David K. Sakheim and Susan E. Devine, *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse*, New York: Lexington Books, 1992, p. 31.
- 102 Zweite and Müller, *Francis Bacon*, p. 245.

- 103 Harrison, *In Camera*, p. 89.
- 104 Zweite and Müller, *Francis Bacon*, p. 111.
- 105 Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, p. 190.
- 106 This quotation is included in the exhibition of his studio in Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin.
- 107 Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon*, exhibition catalogue, Lugano: Museo d'Arte Moderna, 1993, p. 86.
- 108 From Gray, *The Orange Order*, p. 146.
- 109 The term 'soul murder' was coined by Leonard Shengold in his *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.
- 110 Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon*, p. 78.
- 111 As Barbara Steffen notes, Bacon hated modern mysticism and rejected every kind of occultism. Barbara Steffen, 'Chance and the Tradition of Art in Francis Bacon's Work' in Wilfried Seipel, Barbara Steffen and Christoph Vitali, eds, *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, exhibition catalogue, Milan: Skira, 2003, p. 34.

Chapter Three

- 1 See, for example, Andrew K. Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 35.
- 2 James Knowlson, 'Beckett, Samuel Barclay (1906–1989)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 4, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 721.
- 3 See, for example, the biographies by Anthony Cronin, James Knowlson and Deirdre Bair, and studies such as Mary Junker, *Beckett: The Irish Dimension*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1995; Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland*, Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1986, and others.
- 4 See, for example, Hélène L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981.
- 5 Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, London: Vintage, 1990, pp. 17, 469.
- 6 Karen L. Laughlin, 'Seeing is Perceiving: Beckett's Later Plays and the Theory of Audience Response', *Make Sense Who May: Essays on Beckett's Later Works*, ed. Robin Davis and Lance Butler, Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988, p. 20.
- 7 James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, London: Bloomsbury, 1996, pp. 181–2.
- 8 Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, trans. Janey Tucker, first published 1973; Leiden: Academic Press, 1995, p. 138.

- 9 Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1997, p. 388.
- 10 See, for example, David Healey, *Images of Trauma: From Hysteria to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, London: Faber and Faber, 1993, pp. 66, 107.
- 11 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 269.
- 12 Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose, 1929–1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski, New York: Grove Press, 1995, pp. 18–24.
- 13 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 182.
- 14 Beckett, *Complete Short Prose*, p. 20.
- 15 Beckett, *Complete Short Prose*, p. 24.
- 16 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 13.
- 17 Lois Gordon, *The World of Samuel Beckett 1906–1946*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, p. 2. See also Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 22, 82, 130, 178–9, Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, pp. 17, 23, 201 and others for references to the stormy relationship between Beckett and his mother and the emphasis placed by his therapist on this relationship as a source of his depressive condition.
- 18 John Haynes and James Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 25–6.
- 19 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 6. The role of a particular Huguenot is pivotal to the development of English Freemasonry. Jean Théophile Desaguliers, first ordained in the Church of England, became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in 1719 and was highly influential in encouraging the support and protection of the Order by the aristocracy. The first Grand Lodge of England was established in 1717. Desaguliers was one of several Grand Masters who were commoners until 1721 when the ruling that only aristocrats could become Grand Masters was instigated. He nevertheless held a highly influential role within the Order. Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society*, first published 1999; New York: Arcade, 2001, p. 36.
- 20 Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 9.
- 21 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 2.
- 22 Cronin, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 9.
- 23 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 6.
- 24 Anthony D. Buckley and Kenneth Anderson, 'Conclusion', *Brotherhoods in Ireland*, Belfast: Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, 1988, n.p.
- 25 Buckley and Anderson, 'Conclusion', *Brotherhoods in Ireland*.
- 26 Alexander Piatigorsky, *Who's Afraid of Freemasons? The Phenomenon of Freemasonry*, London: The Harvill Press, 1997, p. 290.
- 27 Roy A. Wells, *Some Royal Arch Terms Explained*, Shepperton, Middlesex: A. Lewis, 1978, p. 19. This and other 'Mac' words were introduced by the Stuarts.
- 28 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 404.

- 29 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 406. Bair states that he was waiting for his novels to be accepted by publishers and the public.
- 30 Neville Barker Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch? Ten Lectures*, first published 2002; Hersham, Surrey: Lewis Masonic, 2004, p. 12, 17.
- 31 In the Craft degrees the Past Master is known as PM. PZ in Royal Arch rites stands for Principal Zerubabel and PPZ for Past Principal Zerubabel. Roy A. Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, first published 1984; Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allen Lewis Masonic, 1998, p. 33.
- 32 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 13. Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, p. 11.
- 33 There are some variations in the way the candidate wears the cable tow. In the First Degree it is generally worn around the neck and in Royal Arch rites it is worn around the waist, though not always. In the mid-nineteenth century in Australia, for example, the cable tow was worn around the neck in Royal Arch rites. See Henry Melville, *Initiation, Passing, Raising and Exaltation, demonstrated by the Median and Persian Laws on the Original Tracing Board*, Hobart Town: H. & C. Best, 1864, pp. 5.
- 34 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot, a tragicomedy in two acts*, first published 1956; London: Faber & Faber, 1960, pp. 21, 22.
- 35 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, pp. 11, 12.
- 36 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 22, 23.
- 37 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 94.
- 38 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 22.
- 39 Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, p. 46.
- 40 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 24, 25.
- 41 There are generally three Principal Sojourners, but Beckett has conflated this role into one. Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 30. The rites state, 'they then might be properly clothed and in a dignified position in their seats'. Cryer, p. 34.
- 42 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 69. Masonic tracing-cloths or tracing-boards are painted designs that were originally intended to be portable visual images that depicted all the symbolic elements of a degree and were used during the ritual, to be set up in the space that was designated for the initiation. Cryer, pp. 59–71.
- 43 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 30, 36, 46.
- 44 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 22.
- 45 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 97.
- 46 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 380.
- 47 'And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel.'

- Deuteronomy 31: 9, *The Holy Bible*, London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1958, p. 202.
- 48 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 13.
- 49 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 28.
- 50 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 9, 20.
- 51 Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, p. 11. Wells notes that 'Passing the Chair' became so overused in order to allow many new members to be admitted that it grew out of proportion with sometimes many brethren 'Passing the Chair' in the course of one evening.
- 52 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 29.
- 53 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 71. Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 10.
- 54 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 20.
- 55 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 379.
- 56 Richard Carlile, *Manual of Freemasonry*, London: Reeves and Turner, 1860, pp. 4, 31.
- 57 Victor Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage', *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation* ed. Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster and Meredith Little, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987, p. 8.
- 58 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 38.
- 59 Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, p. 18.
- 60 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 27.
- 61 C. R. Manasseh, 'The Mysticism of the Royal Arch', Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/manasseh.html>, accessed 16 August 2008.
- 62 Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* ed. Edith Turner, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992, p. 51.
- 63 C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, eds, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 329.
- 64 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 131.
- 65 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 184.
- 66 Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, pp. 25–6.
- 67 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 40.
- 68 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 42–4.
- 69 Malcom C. Duncan, 'Royal Arch or Seventh Degree', *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor*, 1866, scanned January 2005, http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/duncans_ritual/royal_arch_degree.htm, accessed 10 August 2008.
- 70 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 42.
- 71 Junker, *Beckett*, p. 52.
- 72 Junker, *Beckett*, p. 51.
- 73 Junker, *Beckett*, pp. 50, 186.

- 74 James Randall Noblitt and Pamela Sue Perskin, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America*, Westport: Praeger, 1995, p. 81.
- 75 See, for example, the website of the New York based *Isaiah 54 Ministries*, 'Freedom from the Generational Curses of Freemasonry', <http://www.isaiah54.org/freemasonry.html>, accessed 16 August 2008.
- 76 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 410.
- 77 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 10, 59.
- 78 W. P. Malcolmson, *Behind Closed Doors: The hidden structure within the Orange Camp [the Royal Arch Purple Order] examined from an evangelical perspective*, Banbridge: Evangelical Truth, 1999, p. 55.
- 79 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 61.
- 80 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 35.
- 81 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 67–8. Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 97.
- 82 Cited in Malcolmson, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 57.
- 83 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 27.
- 84 See, for example, *That Time*: '... ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles'. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, first published 1986; London: Faber and Faber, 1990, p. 390. The number 'eleven' also features in Royal Arch ritual from versions of Royal Arch rites carried out in Dublin in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Bernard E. Jones, *Freemasons' Book of the Royal Arch*, revised by Harry Carr, p. 29, http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/freemasons_book_of_the_royal_arch.htm, accessed 22 August 2008.
- 85 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 50.
- 86 Malcolmson, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 55. 'Riding the goat' can involve various trials such as the initiate being tossed in a blanket or being made to ride a bucking mechanical goat while blindfolded. Discussion with Cecil Kilpatrick, archivist, Grand Orange Lodge Belfast, 3 October 2005.
- 87 Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Faithful Tribe: An Intimate Portrait of the Loyal Institutions*, London: HarperCollins, 1999, p. 61.
- 88 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 50.
- 89 Roy A. Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allen Lewis Masonic, 1984, p. 12.
- 90 'The Shepherd's Boy'
 One night I lay on my bed, I fell into a dream.
 Some rugged paths I thought I trod, till a sheepfold I came.
 Down by a brook, with scrip and crook, a youth I did espy,
 I asked his name, from whence he came; he said, a Shepherd's Boy.
Songs Pertaining to 'The Black', <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ivymead/Black%20songs.htm>, accessed 18 August 2008.

- 91 David K. Sakheim and Susan E. Devine, eds, *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse*, New York: Lexington Books, 1992, p. 30.
- 92 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 90.
- 93 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 91.
- 94 Manasseh website.
- 95 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 17.
- 96 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, pp. 17, 18.
- 97 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 378. At another time he referred to another Caspar David Friedrich painting, *Mann und Frau den Mond betrachtend (Man and Woman Observing the Moon)*, 1824, as the source.
- 98 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 37.
- 99 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 17.
- 100 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 19.
- 101 Duncan, 'Royal Arch or Seventh Degree' website.
- 102 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 14.
- 103 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 76.
- 104 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 74.
- 105 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 74.
- 106 Duncan, 'Royal Arch or Seventh Degree' website.
- 107 Stephen Knight, *The Brotherhood: The Secret World of the Freemasons*, London: HarperCollins, 1994, p. 182.
- 108 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 23.
- 109 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 382.
- 110 The Ars Quattuor Coronati Circle of Correspondence Works (official site of Masonic research), *The Cable Tow*, <http://www.guigues.org/guitex54.htm>, accessed 22 August 2008.
- 111 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 34.
- 112 Carlile, *Manual of Freemasonry*, p. 4. In other variations the cable-tow is called the 'cable tau'. See Melville, *Initiation, Passing, Raising and Exaltation*, p. 5.
- 113 W. L. Wilmshurst, Chapter II, 'The Cable-Tow', *Masonic Initiation*, http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonic_initiation/the_cable_tow.htm, accessed 16 August 2008.
- 114 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 18. The two lines 'Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.' And 'Estragon: (*highly excited*) An erection!' are not included in the 1960 publication, but the directions state '*Vladimir whispers to Estragon. Estragon highly excited.*'
- 115 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 93.
- 116 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, p. 23.
- 117 Wilmshurst, 'The Cable-Tow' website. Wilmshurst cites a famous biblical quote: '... or ever the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken; then shall the body return to the earth and the spirit to God who gave it.'

- 118 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 91.
- 119 Eithne O'Donovan, *Ritual Abuse: Information for Health and Welfare Professionals*, New South Wales Sexual Assault Committee, 1994, p. 3.
- 120 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 45.
- 121 Melville, *Initiation, Passing, Raising and Exaltation*, p. 10.
- 122 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 46.
- 123 Cryer, *What Do You Know About The Royal Arch?*, pp. 39–40.
- 124 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 79.
- 125 'I furthermore promise and swear, that I will be aiding and assisting all poor and indigent Companions Royal Arch Masons, their widows and orphans, wheresoever dispersed around the globe; they making application to me as such, and I finding them worthy, and can do it without any material injury to myself or family'. Duncan, 'Royal Arch, or Seventh Degree'.
- 126 Wells, *Royal Arch Matters*, p. 18.
- 127 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 84.
- 128 Albert G. Mackey, *Symbolism of Freemasonry: Illustrating and Explaining its Science and Philosophy, its Legends, Myths, and Symbols*, Chicago, Illinois: Charles T. Pownier, 1955, pp. 26–31.
- 129 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 84.
- 130 Numbers 9: 15–22.
- 131 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 88.
- 132 Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 622.

Chapter Four

- 1 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame: A Play in One Act*, first published 1958; London: Faber and Faber, 1972, p. 11.
- 2 Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 12. C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, eds, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, New York: Grove Press, 2004, pp. 94–6. Theodor Adorno discusses the chess theme in 'Trying to Understand "Endgame"', *Samuel Beckett*, Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985, p. 77.
- 3 James Bonwick, *Irish Druids and the Old Irish Religions*, London: Griffith, Farran & Co., 1894, p. 54.
- 4 Albert G. Mackey and H. L. Haywood, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry Part 2*, Kessinger Publishing, n.d., p. 962. Malcom C. Duncan, 'Royal Arch or Seventh Degree', *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor*, 1866, scanned January 2005, <http://>

- www.phoenixmasonry.org/duncans_ritual/royal_arch_degree.htm, accessed 10 August 2008.
- 5 Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 174.
- 6 Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 12.
- 7 Henry Melville, *Initiation, Passing, Raising and Exaltation, demonstrated by the Median and Persian Laws on the Original Tracing Board*, Hobart: H. & C. Best, 1864, p. 5.
- 8 Melville, *Initiation, Passing, Raising and Exaltation*, p. 5.
- 9 Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 18.
- 10 Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 19.
- 11 Richard Carlile, *Manual of Freemasonry*, London: Reeves and Turner, 1860, p. 29.
- 12 Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 11.
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- 32 Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, p. 60.
- 33 Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, p. 61.
- 34 Andrew Sinclair, *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1993, p. 12.
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- 36 Here my own experience of Masonic ritual abuse may provide some information in this regard. One of the ordeals that a child of a Freemason can undergo is to witness the humiliation of his or her father within the context of the initiatory space, so as to confuse the child further and embed the initiatory pain even deeper into the psyche. Here the father can be subjected to hypnosis by his fraternal brothers, as J. D. Buck describes, in an act of 'black magic', and forced to perform degrading acts in front of his child. Afterwards the father can have no memory of his behaviour, but the events can be seared into the child's psyche, though can be blotted out as too painful to remember. The effect on the child can be the creation of a further set of conflicting emotions where the child's humiliation and rage is combined with a sense of over-protectiveness towards the father who has, by the very fact of his membership of the group, placed the child in this situation. In my own case this took place in the dark and gloomy confines of the Masonic temple when I was seven years of age. See also J. D. Buck, *Symbolism of Freemasonry or Mystic Masonry and the Greater Mysteries of Antiquity*, Chicago: Charles T. Powner Co., 1967, pp. 34, 86.
- 37 See, for example, William Schnoebelen, *Masonry: Beyond the Light*, Ontario: Chick Publications, 1991, pp. 240–53.
- 38 Schnoebelen, *Masonry*, pp. 51–5.
- 39 Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, pp. 247–9.
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- 42 Beckett, *Beckett Trilogy*, p. 380.

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