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A Bodily Haunting

The Woman's Wordless Scream on Samuel Beckett's Stage

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Abstract

The woman's wordless scream in *Not I* and *Happy Days* acts as a spectral-yet-embodied rendering of unspoken and apparently unspeakable sexual trauma. If trauma symptomatology is itself a form of bodily haunting—the past intruding into the present—the wordless scream performs this phenomenon on Beckett's stage, as a disruptive return of the repressed through the body itself. This essay explores how the performed scream returns embodied trauma to embodied expression in *Not I* and *Happy Days*, emphasising the voice as a simultaneously spectral yet profoundly corporeal force. It then examines the potential therapeutic effect of the scream in performance, drawing on a range of actor testimonies.

Résumé

Le cri muet de la femme dans *Pas moi* et *Oh les beaux jours* fonctionne comme une représentation spectrale et pourtant physique d'un traumatisme sexuel qui reste non-dit et apparemment indicible. La symptomatologie du traumatisme est une forme d'hantise – le passé faisant intrusion dans le présent – et le cri muet, tel un retour bouleversant du souvenir refoulé à travers le corps, concrétise ce phénomène sur la scène de Beckett. Cet article examine la manière dont le cri traduit le traumatisme corporel en expression corporelle dans *Pas moi* et *Oh les beaux jours*, en envisageant la voix sur scène comme une force à la fois spectrale et vivement physique. L'article considère ensuite l'effet potentiellement thérapeutique du cri à haute voix, à travers une série de témoignages d'acteurs.

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Keywords

Happy Days – *Not I* – scream – women – trauma – voice

Content Warning

This paper deals with allusions to sexual violation and trauma in *Happy Days* and *Not I*. Beyond the allusive detail in Beckett's scripts, there is no graphic description of sexual assault itself.

Incoherent and yet communicative, the wordless scream is splintered language *in extremis*, an emotional outburst that strains against the limits of verbal expression. There are two key instances of the wordless scream in Samuel Beckett's stage plays. In *Happy Days* (1961), Winnie narrates how, when the mouse runs up the child Mildred's thigh, she "began to scream—[*Winnie gives a sudden piercing scream*]—and screamed and screamed—[*Winnie screams twice*]—screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed" (2006, 165). In *Not I* (1972), Mouth narrates how she found herself unable to make any sound, "no screaming for help for example", while interspersing her narrative with actual screams: "... scream [*Screams*] ... then listen ... [*Silence*] ... then scream again ... [*Screams again*] ... then listen again ..." (Beckett 2006, 378). In both instances, the wordless scream acts as an articulation of the inarticulable in the playtext, a spectral rendering of unspoken and apparently unspeakable trauma. Reading these screams as part of the playscripts' allusive expression of Winnie and Mouth's sexual trauma, this essay examines these onstage screams as a form of spectral embodiment, giving voice—and, by extension, body—to unarticulated trauma.

Trauma is itself a form of bodily haunting. Trauma memory is defined by clinical literature as the repressed or fragmented trace of a traumatic event which is too unbearably distressing to be assimilated into the standard memory 'narrative', overwhelming the survivor with disorienting sensory experience when the trauma memory is triggered, the past relived in the present through the body.¹ Difficult to verbalize, "trauma is held in people's bodies", psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk explains: "The sensory fragments of memory intrude into the present, where they are literally relived", the body re-experiencing

1 For fuller detail see Caruth 2014, xiii–xviii, and Herman 2015, 37–47.

the feeling of the traumatic moment over and over again, “but these feelings are almost impossible to articulate” (26, 66, 43). Trauma symptoms follow Jacques Derrida’s “logic of haunting”, in which the past—and particularly the repressed past—intrudes in spectralized bodily form into the present, a hauntological epistemology that replays the events of the past through the body’s reactions, can “*comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly” (10; original emphasis). The wordless, repeated scream performs this phenomenon on Beckett’s stage, as a non-verbal, embodied-yet-spectral, shockingly disruptive return of the repressed. The scream “is a psychic cum somatic shock wave that both acknowledges and takes the form of a disturbance”, conveying distress from the screamer’s to the hearer’s body (Dixon 2011, 441). Here I analyse the woman’s wordless scream in *Happy Days* and *Not I* as a vehicle for literally unspeakable sexual trauma that is nevertheless *vocalized*, if not verbalized, on stage—and the potential therapeutic effect of the scream for the actor in performance, as a somatic release that gives vent to the spectre of her own past trauma or the physical demands of Beckettian performance itself.

1 Trauma and the Scream

The scream, both as it functions in *Happy Days* and *Not I* and as it has been theorized more broadly in performance scholarship, is a physically forceful yet non-verbal articulation. “The scream is voice torn from language”, performance artist Emil Hrvatin observes. We scream “about what we cannot speak about. [...] The scream appears where speech fails” (88, 85–86). The scream communicates what language cannot—or, rather, it communicates the moment of a breakdown of language, the eruption of something that cannot be neatly translated into verbal explanation. In both *Happy Days* and *Not I*, the wordless scream attests to the unnarrated and unnarratable trauma, invested in both cases with the intimation of sexual assault. Winnie and Mouth’s wordless screams act as particularly visceral instances of what literary scholar Gabriele Schwab describes as “haunted language”: “Haunted language uses a gap inside speech to point to a silent history. Haunted language refers to what is unspeakable through ellipsis, indirection or detour, or fragmentation and deformation” (107). Winnie’s and Mouth’s own ‘silent histories’, the traumatic experiences of which they cannot speak directly, remain unspoken yet forcefully expressed on Beckett’s stage, transmitted through their wordless screams. Like a ghostly apparition, their screams “combine concealment and revelation” (Schwab 2006, 107), signalling an intense distress but leaving the specifics of that distress veiled.

In *Happy Days*, the build-up to Winnie's wordless screams begins as she opens her "story" about Mildred, a young girl of "four or five" with her new doll, complete with dress and "undies". The story breaks off: "Crept under the table and began to undress Dolly. [*Pause.*] Scolding her ... the while. [*Pause.*] Suddenly a mouse—[*Long pause.*] Gently, Winnie. [*Long pause.*] Willie!" (Beckett 2006, 163). Winnie begins a story about childhood innocence infused with a faint dark suggestion of sexual impropriety: the hidden, secretive moment of the dolly's body being "undressed". Winnie's abrupt break in her narrative and the "*long pause*" that follows the mouse's sudden intrusion on the scene hints at the literally unspeakable event that Winnie's story mediates, a memory too distressing to re-articulate, even when transposed into another narrated character's experience. If there is already an intimation of displaced sexual trauma at this point in the playtext, left to percolate in these ominous silences, Winnie's chatter over the next few minutes continues to circulate back to the sexual. She questions Willie about the feeling of "sadness after sexual intercourse" (164), and imagines the voyeuristic Shower-Cooker couple passing comment on her body: "Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. [...] Is there any life in her legs, he says. [*Pause*] Has she anything on underneath?" (165). Imagining the male spectator's prurient questions—the attention to what she has "on underneath" echoing the attention to what the "dolly" has on under her dress in the previous moment—Winnie explodes in sudden rage: "[*With sudden violence.*] Let go of me for Christ's sake and drop! [*Pause. Do.*] Drop dead! [*Smile.*] But no. [*Smile broader.*] No no" (165). Winnie compulsively replays these imagined moments of sexual intrusion until she apparently cannot bear to continue, interrupting her own narrative with desperate urgency. Yet the moment of violation keeps bubbling back to the surface, seemingly against Winnie's will: a moment later, she will beg for Willie's "help" to distract her, before picking up the thread of the Mildred story once more:

And now? [*Pause. Low.*] Help. [*Pause. Do.*] Help, Willie. [*Pause. Do.*] No? [*Long pause. Narrative.*] Suddenly a mouse ... [*Pause.*] Suddenly a mouse ran up her little thigh and Mildred, dropping Dolly in her fright, began to scream—[*Winnie gives a sudden piercing scream*]—and screamed and screamed—[*Winnie screams twice*]—and screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed till all came running.

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Winnie's imagination is haunted by the spectre of sexualized intrusion, which she displaces onto various narratives of Mildred and the Shower-Cooker couple, but she and Mildred coalesce in the moment of the onstage scream.

Here, Winnie is no longer simply narrating an imagined story—or a displaced memory—but re-enacting the memory of trauma, reliving her physical response. Through Winnie's wordless screaming, her traumatic experience is given voice on the stage—but remains inarticulate.

Mouth's wordless screaming in *Not I* functions similarly. Indeed, in an October 1972 letter to Alan Schneider, Beckett drew explicit comparison between Mouth's screams in *Not I* and those of Winnie in *Happy Days*, advising the director, "Cf. Winnie's screams in Milly story" (2016, 312). I have explored elsewhere how *Not I* replicates much of the common symptomology of trauma, and of sexual trauma specifically (see Simpson 2022, 29), examining the intimations of sexual violence encoded in the playtext and the resultant trauma symptomology that shapes Mouth's narrative, including the fragmented, compulsively relived memory and the self-defensive, dissociative evasion of selfhood.² Building on this reading, we can identify Mouth's series of wordless screams as one particular—and particularly visceral—instance of embodied trauma memory in performance. Mouth narrates how, after having collapsed into a dulled, dissociative state, "she" cannot make any sound: "no screaming for help for example ... should she feel so inclined ... scream [*Screams*] ... then listen ... [*Silence*] ... then scream again ... [*Screams again*] ... then listen again ..." (2006, 378). As in *Happy Days*, *Not I* never provides any clear-cut explanation of what has happened to Mouth, but the scream in performance gives insistent voice to her distress, while simultaneously conveying the force of a trauma so overwhelming as to be inarticulable. Indeed, even the wordless scream itself seems a step too close to articulacy in both these plays, and must be denied even as it is enacted. Mouth declares that she does not, cannot scream, even as she does so. Winnie screams only 'in character' as the child Mildred, recalling a coded memory of bodily invasion. As Linda Ben-Zvi observes, "Even her anger and her fear must be expressed indirectly in her fictionalized account of Millie, the surrogate figure who is allowed to scream as the proper Winnie is not" (xii).

If the wordless scream gives voice to the inarticulable trauma, it also locates that trauma firmly in the body. Both Winnie and Mouth are, of course, in considerable physical distress throughout their respective monologues, Winnie painfully immured in the ground and Mouth having collapsed and now slowly

2 Many other Beckett scholars and practitioners have identified resonances of sexual assault in *Not I*, including actor Jessica Tandy, director Alan Schneider, and scholars Enoch Brater, Lois Oppenheim, Sandra Wynands and Daniel Albright. See Simpson 2022, 28 for full details.

regaining consciousness. But the hints of sexual violation that haunt their narratives also point to a deeper somatic torment; this is a trauma that began in the body and which lingers there. The scream itself comprises a complex concatenation of impulse away from and renewed grounding in the body. We scream in response to the unbearable scene, experience or threat: the situation which we cannot endure but cannot escape. Peter Schwenger theorizes this “horror of situatedness” as the basis of the human impulse to scream, the horror of being in that moment that catalyses the scream as an unconscious mode of escape, “this projecting of oneself out of that hole in the body through the power of the voice” (387, 394). Following Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of the scream as “the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth” (12)—and Deleuze, it is worth noting, draws his conclusion from Beckett’s own work, alongside that of Francis Bacon and that of Antonin Artaud—Schwenger suggests that at moments of horror when we “wish to escape from the body”, we scream in an attempted “projection of the self out of the body” (394). Yet, the scream simultaneously locates the screamer back in their body. If the scream is an attempt to “find an outside that takes us out of our too solid flesh”, Schwenger laments, this attempt “cannot succeed; the flesh unrelentingly persists” (394); in screaming, “the body discovers the materiality of which it is composed” (Deleuze 2005, 39). Despite its haunting quality, the scream itself is a very fleshly phenomenon. All speech, of course, is a matter of the body: air in the lungs is pushed up through the trachea, mouth and nose; along the way, the airstream is modified by the various organs of speech, phonated in the larynx’s vocal folds and articulated further by the tongue, teeth and lips in the mouth. There is no such thing, really, as the ‘disembodied voice’; even via radio transmission, the sound of the body can always be heard. Roland Barthes describes “the grain of the voice”, the sound of the body that can be discerned in the voice as it sings or speaks, “the materiality of the body speaking” through “the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membrane, the nose” (188, 182–183). Speech is likewise emphasized as an embodied process in both *Not I* and *Happy Days*; we hear an echo of Barthes’s “the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membrane, the nose” in Mouth’s own litany of her mouth’s anatomy as she becomes aware of the workings of her own body in speaking: “lips ... cheeks ... jaws ... tongue” (Beckett 2006, 380), and in Winnie’s careful examination of her teeth and gums early in *Happy Days*. And if speech is an embodied process—and is emphasized as such in both plays—the scream is a still more emphatically bodily phenomenon. In order to scream, the body passes air through the trachea and vocal folds with greater force than typical during speech, producing not only a higher volume and pitch of sound but also what has been termed the characteristic “roughness” of the scream, its defining high-speed change in vol-

ume.³ The spectrally insubstantial air of the scream must be merged with the fleshly corporeality of the body to produce the human scream; sound theorist Douglas Kahn's term "meat voice" neatly—if unsettlingly—encapsulates the scream's bodily quality (290). The moment of trauma is relocated back in the body on which it was first inflicted, resonating through—and produced by—that same corporeal materiality that suffered the original violation.

In fact, I would argue that it is in part the bodily materiality that can be heard in the scream that renders it so disturbing to the hearer: the intangible 'air' of the scream is entwined with the grain of the embodied voice, inflecting the sound's spectral incorporeality with the sonic intimation of the vulnerable, suffering body. Audience responses to the screams in *Not I* in performance in particular have emphasized the impact of this reminder of the distressed body via the vocalized scream. Reviewing Clara Simpson's performance in the bilingual *Pas Moi/Not I* at the Enniskillen Happy Days Festival in 2019, Emma Keanie wrote: "Simpson's screams still reverberate in my head. The throat-tearing force of feeling which escaped from her was, in my opinion, no act, for a person cannot make such a genuine sound without something unspeakable informing it. Herein lies the power of the production: the piece did not feel performed, but rather *lived*" (n.pag.; original emphasis). In his review of Billie Whitelaw's performance in the 1973 London Royal Court production, theatre critic Benedict Nightingale commented that the play and its "scream of suffering" was "all sweat, clenched muscle and foaming larynx", with a specifically somatic impact: "It is also unusually painful—tearing into you like a grappling iron and dragging you after it" (135–136). Reviewing Ger FitzGibbon's 2014 production of *Not I* at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork starring Regina Crowley, Marc O'Sullivan wrote: "When Crowley is required to scream, it is truly awful, the anguished wail of one who seems damned to be eternally alone. The experience of witnessing *Not I* is so vivid that a live performance is akin to having the breath sucked from one's body" (n.pag.). The bodily actuality of the scream in performance—its "*lived*", "throat-tearing" corporeality, to borrow Keanie's words—emphasizes the suffering body that produces it, and consequently catalyses a responsive embodied distress in many spectators. Giving both voice and body to unarticulated trauma, the wordless scream on Beckett's stage is a spectral yet profoundly corporeal affective force.

3 "Roughness" is the measure of acoustic variation in volume, or how quickly a sound's volume changes over time. Typical human speech tends to change volume at a rate of less than 5 hertz per second, whereas the human scream changes volumes at a higher rate of 30 to 150 hertz per second, producing this "rough" quality (Amal et al. 2015). No other human vocalization shares this auditory quality.

2 The Actor and the Scream

Winnie and Mouth both describe their screams as not simply reactions to the unbearable, but more specifically as screams for help. Mouth screams at the moment in her narrative when she imagines that “she” is unable to scream for help; that is, she “screams herself in illustration of what she might have done if able, if not ‘numbed’”, as Beckett explained to Schneider (2016, 31). Likewise, Winnie narrates Mildred screaming “till all came running [...] to see what on earth could be the matter”. However, the would-be helpers are “Too late. [Pause.] Too late. [Long pause. Just audible.] Willie” (165). Winnie’s lament here and her increasingly hopeless call for Willie underline how the screams of both women are also *unanswered* calls for help. “Did you not hear me screaming for you?” she will ask Willie next time she sees him (167), underlining his failure to respond to her distress. The women’s screams go unanswered not only within the framework of the scripted action—Willie does not respond to his wife’s screams, and no passer-by attends to Mouth—but also within the boundaries of theatre etiquette within the theatre auditorium; the well-trained audience member knows not to offer ‘help’ in response to these screams, however viscerally unsettling we might find the scream itself. The scream signals “a crisis of help” as well as “a crisis of expression” (Batiste 2018, 130). It expresses the horrific unspeakability of the trauma that haunts these entrapped women—and its apparent unanswerability.

However—and without attempting to rewrite Mouth or Winnie’s stories as in themselves redemptive—a different kind of “help” or “answer” becomes visible in the wordless scream when we consider the actor’s experience. Vocalising the wordless scream has functioned as a therapeutic outlet for some of Beckett’s female performers. Several of the actors who have played Mouth and Winnie have spoken both of how intensely the roles spoke to their own lived experiences of trauma and of the cathartic quality of vocalising the scripted screams in performance, suggesting a release of repressed energy in the scream that goes beyond the spoken word into a form of enacted bodily healing. There is an instructive parallel here with Arthur Janov’s “primal scream therapy”, popularized in his 1970 book *The Primal Scream: The Cure for Neurosis* in the period between the 1961 premiere of *Happy Days* and the 1972 premiere of *Not I*. The primal scream, Janov writes, can cure neurosis or trauma by liberating the patient from psychic pain: the scream can “release all that stored up feeling” of trauma, “overthrowing the neurotic system by a forceful upheaval” of both body and mind (84, 11). The primal scream, in Janov’s conceptualizing, is both driven by and releases “the force of years of compressed feelings” (1973, 102), violently wrenched out of the patient’s system by the bodily force of the

scream itself. Likewise, the scream in Beckett's stage plays offers a dual model of both trauma and healing. This final section focuses on a range of actors' experiences in playing Mouth and/or Winnie's trauma and in vocalising their screams. I take a lead here from Nicholas Johnson's observation that "Beckett studies has tended to focus on trauma in terms of the characters of his fiction and drama, rather than with the material circumstances of enacting Beckett, in particular the actual people who are tasked with making these characters come to life" (47). If, as Johnson notes, there are elements of the "demanding physicalities and alarming subject matter" of Beckett's plays that may "contribute to, or even engender, trauma in those who undertake it"—and that "certain symptoms associated with trauma have been reported among the makers associated with Beckett's drama"—there are nevertheless also potential "therapeutic side-effects" associated with the sheer "athleticism" of the psychophysiological style of acting prompted by Beckett's scripts (46–47, 57, 60).⁴ If the wordless scream expresses the spectral presence but not the details of hidden trauma, the action of *performing* the wordless scream may still turn the unspeakable into the liveable.

Actor Billie Whitelaw has described performing both Mouth and Winnie in terms of the scream: both her "own inner scream", as she puts it (116), and the need to literally scream in order to deal with the demands of the performance. In her autobiography, Whitelaw recounts how her memory of performing *Not I* under Beckett's direction in 1972–1973 was tied up in her five-year-old son Matthew's near-death experience of bacterial meningitis, involving an agonizing series of lumbar punctures and an extended stay in intensive care. Six months after Matthew was released from hospital—to begin a long and risky convalescent period—Whitelaw received the *Not I* playscript from the Royal Court. She recalls:

I started reading, and three-quarters of the way through it I found I couldn't stop crying. [...] Had anyone asked me why I was crying, I couldn't have told them. What hit me was this inner scream, an endless nightmare that poured out of this old woman of seventy who kept saying she was

4 My argument here also builds on my previous discussion of *Not I* as an embodied trauma narrative that emphasizes how "the crucially embodied nature of much trauma memory" makes necessary "embodied form[s] of therapy, a therapy that reaches and realigns the somatic experience of trauma" (30). It also owes much to Dúnlaith Bird's recent reading of "the unspeakable grief, and the invisible travail of *Not I*" and her attention to Mouth's outcry as form of productive labour, "a conduit for necessary grief and a scream for the silenced" (12, 18).

sixty. In her outpourings I recognized my own inner scream which I'd been sitting on since Matthew's illness began.

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Whitelaw articulates her repressed anguish over her son's illness in terms of an "inner scream which I'd been sitting on", and recognizes the same "scream" in the *Not I* playtext. Her initial response to this encounter with Mouth's scripted trauma is a similarly embodied but non-verbalized one, an uncontrollable crying that, Whitelaw says, she couldn't have translated into words: a scaled-down version of the scream expressing her unarticulated—and at this point, unarticulable—trauma. When she later came to work on *Happy Days*, Whitelaw again spoke of a moment of distressed recognition, the experience of "sometimes having to hang on by one's fingernails, just to survive" (148), and she repeatedly returns to the idea of the repressed scream in articulating her memories of preparing for the performance. Speaking of her rehearsal calendar, she remembers: "Sometimes on this calendar I scrawled 'Help' in large red letters" (150)—a 'silent' written scream for help—and recounts an unnerving hallucinatory experience: "Towards the end of this period I became aware of something horrible happening inside my skull. I couldn't lie flat on the bed because a large mouth had started to grow across the back of my head, and when I put my head down, the mouth kept trying to scream" (150). Whitelaw's visit to an Alexander Technique practitioner to relax her body did not help; what she needed to do, she realized, was to scream:

I needed to free myself. All I wanted to do was stand on that stage and yell the words out up to the gallery. [...] [I said]: 'Right, let's get out from behind the table, throw the chair away, and let me yell this stuff up to the Gods.' I had my forty-eight hours on my own, and managed to rid myself of my tension.

152–153

Whitelaw identifies the need to release the embodied tension of performance through a forceful vocal outcry, in striking parallel with Janov's account of the scream as a means of releasing physically held trauma. Whitelaw speaks similarly of the degree of physical tension that performing as Mouth required, energy that would "go through my body, and come out of my mouth":

Usually, when you're acting a part, you are given some physical movement to use the accumulated energy. Here there was nowhere for the energy to go. [...] What now happened in performances was that my head started to

shake; all the energy was going into the back of my head and neck. When I was building up speed, that was the only place the tension could go.

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Whitelaw attests to the level of physical stress that is necessary to perform *Not I* according to the script's demands. As theatre scholar and practitioner Dan Rebellato puts it, "The sheer difficulty of the task adds to the tension in the actress's voice that heightens the emotional intensity of the performance" (n.pag.). For these physically restricted roles, the energy repressed in the body comes out through the mouth, the voice—just as, within the playworld, Mouth and Winnie's repressed trauma comes out in their screams. If an intense degree of physical stress is necessary to performing the role with requisite force, the scream in performance is necessary to enduring that stress. Wendy Salkind, who played Mouth in Xerxes Mehta's 1995 production of *Not I*—which reviewer Shimon Levy described at the time as "pain-and-power-full" and "the fastest I have ever witnessed—about twelve minutes" (1995, 207)—remembers that, during performance, "I couldn't wait to get to the screams" (qtd. in Diamond, 64), suggesting the scream as a moment of necessary release in performance. Similarly, Rebellato recalls directing a production of *Not I* at Bristol University, in which Liz Harris, the actor playing Mouth, described to him the necessity of Mouth's screams:

I'd sort of thought of Beckett as a bit cruel to his actors, making them crouch (not sit or stand) in an urn for *Play*, burying them in sand up to their waist and then neck in *Happy Days*, and, in *Not I*, placing you high above a stage, head braced in one position forced to repeat a nine-minute text at terrifying speed. It has always stayed with me that when I mentioned this thought to Liz, she replied: "oh no, I think he's very *kind* to his actors. There's a short series of screams that he gives us in *Not I* and when I get to that bit I always say 'thank you, Sam' because without being able to scream, to let out the tension, *Not I* would be unbearable to do".

n.pag.

If the physical stress of enacting these roles is critical in generating the required intensity in performance, the enacted scream can stop them becoming "unbearable" by offering a moment of physically forceful expressive relief. When the stress is in the body, a bodily release is needed—just as trauma enacted and stored in the body needs a bodily release. Operating in the overlap between fictional playworld and embodied onstage actuality, the primal scream on Beckett's stage offers both.

3 Conclusion

This is not to claim that *Happy Days* and *Not I* are ‘healing’ or ‘therapeutic’ plays to perform in any straightforward or guaranteed sense. If, as Beckettian actor Michael Lonsdale describes, “Il arrive qu’on se soigne à travers un rôle, qu’on se libère, et c’est comme ça que je me suis donné et que j’ai pu investir dans des cris et des hurlements tout le chagrin que je vivais” (Sometimes it happens that you can heal yourself through a role, you can free yourself, and thus it was that I gave myself over and was able to throw all my grief into these screams and cries; 49; my translation), this is not always the case.⁵ The descriptions above give a sense of the physical and mental difficulty of enacting either role, and many actors have emphasized the distressing, even traumatic rather than therapeutic dimensions of these performances.⁶ Indeed, several actors have described the challenge using the specific language of the scream: Joy Coghill-Thorne explains that she believes it is “wrong” for an actor “to be used that way” in *Not I* as “a long scream of life” (qtd. in Levy 2001, 141), and Hanna Hacoen recalls how, playing Mouth in 1982, “My inner unpreparedness to accept her terrible misery made me scream” (qtd. in Levy 2001, 141–142). In turn, Lisa Dwan focuses very specifically on the moment of screaming in Trevor Nunn’s 2021 production of *Happy Days* at the Riverside Studios in London—during which she was pregnant—as the most discomfoting element of performance:

The truth is that there’s only one point in the play where I get concerned, which is a very, very dark story about Mildred, featuring screams. Here I’m concerned for my baby. So, during this part in the play, I grab my belly and massage it. My stage manager can see me underneath, massaging my belly to try and reassure the baby that the screams will be short-lived, and that it’s OK.

DILEK 2021, n.pag.

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- 5 Lonsdale is speaking here of how he had “hurlé mon chagrin personnel à travers ce personnage” through his performance in Marguerite Duras’s 1975 film *India Song* (howled [his] personal unhappiness through this character; 49). Lonsdale has performed with Compagnie Renaud-Barrault in Beckett’s *Comédie* (1966, 1968), *Ohio Impromptu* (1983–1986) and *Catastrophe* (1983–1986); he has also directed and performed in *Comédie, Pas* and *Catastrophe* (sic, 2006).
- 6 See, for example, Lisa Dwan’s description of how she was “psychologically and emotionally and physically ravaged” by touring *Not I*, “going to a dark place of trauma every single night” (Dilek 2021, n.pag), Brenda Bruce on *Happy Days* (qtd. in Whitelaw, 150), and Whitelaw herself on *Not I* (131).

If Dwan's experience of Winnie's wordless scream is one of strain rather than relief, it nevertheless reiterates the idea of the scream as constituting an acutely embodied distress: one which both signals and actually enacts a moment of felt suffering in performance by reverberating through the performer's own body—and, Dwan worries here, also through the body of the child she carries, strikingly extending the passage of bodily affect that the performed scream transmits to the listening spectator. The scream in performance gives not only voice but body to the Beckettian woman's distress, and thus acts as an emphatic assertion of some *wrong* done to that body. To borrow Susan Ruddick's description of the scream more generally, "The scream is a social act, the rendering visible of forces. It poses the problem at the level of sensation rather than resolving it", and "makes the terrain of struggle visible. It cannot determine an outcome, but it marks something that can no longer be contained" (38). If the physical forceful scream does not 'articulate' or 'resolve' the trauma per se, it at least testifies to its existence through forceful vocalization. The scream translates embodied trauma to embodied expression, emphasising the woman's voice on Beckett's stage as an insistently corporeal affective force.

Our focus on the wordless scream here might also speak to the associated phenomenon of the silent or near-silent scream in Beckett's work. To cite only one example from Beckettian performance history, here is how Whitelaw describes working with Beckett on the 1976 Royal Court production of *Footfalls*, and specifically May's cry of "Amy" in the final moments of the play:

I broke off briefly to say: "I'm not quite sure what this means. Does it matter?" Sam didn't bother to explain; he just said: "Make it ghostly". Or he would say: "Make that very quiet, then take it even further down". I took it down almost to nothing, yet at the same time gave it as much physical energy as if I were screaming. I opened my mouth wide enough to belt out a scream. I gave it all the energy of a Shakespearean roar, but produced only a thin cry: "Amy, Aaaamyyy ..." Beckett liked that.

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This moment does not fall within the remit of the "wordless scream" analysed in this essay, being neither wordless nor precisely a scream. Yet Whitelaw's language of the "ghostly" might compel us to think of the silent scream here in the same terms of traumatic expression—not an expression or exorcism of that expression, but a continued lingering repression. If the vocalized scream unleashes (and sometimes even purges) the woman's trauma, the silent or near-silent scream leaves the trauma still unvoiced. As Hrvatin notes, "The horror of the mute scream lies in the fact that the body does not produce what the body is

sending from itself”, and thus the silent scream “remains and persists as unbearable image” (88, 90). Compared to such agonising ghostly ‘screams’—screams which are not screams, in which trauma is left mute—there is a power embodied in the performed screams in *Happy Days* and *Not I*, in which the ghostly is made material.

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