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'In the heart of each joke hides a little holocaust' (George Tabori): Horrendhilarious Wit on the British Contemporary Stage"

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« Au cœur de chaque plaisanterie, un petit holocauste » (George Tabori). L'horrisible sur la scène britannique contemporaine : une réévaluation du *wit*

Résumé

Cet article entend démontrer que sur la scène britannique expérimentale post-adornienne, le *wit* est devenu le lieu privilégié de la catastrophe. On analyse comment les dramaturges In-Yer-Ear que sont, dans le sillage de Beckett, Pinter, Crimp Caryl Churchill ou encore Alice Birch, explorent la nature intrinsèquement tragique du *wit* et font du régime métaphorique qui en est le fondement le *locus* de la tragédie, gravant ainsi le sentiment tragique dans le rire. Ce faisant, ces dramaturges redéfinissent les contours de la tragédie et invitent à repenser la nature du *wit* sur la scène contemporain.

Mots-clés
Beckett, Pinter, Crimp, Caryl Churchill, Birch, Mullarkey, wit, In-Yer-Ear, neosatirisme, tragédie, catastrophe, comédie, absurde, incongru, horrisible

Abstract in English

This article argues that on the post-Adornian British experimental stage, wit has become a privileged place to cradle and harbour catastrophe. It analyses the way such In-Yer-Ear post-Beckettian playwrights as Harold Pinter, Martin Crimp, Caryl Churchill or Alice Birch explore the intrinsic tragic nature of wit and turn witticisms into the genuine *locus* of tragedy, thus engraving the tragic feeling at the heart of laughter. Doing so, they redefine both the architecture of tragedy and the nature of contemporary wit.

Keywords
Beckett, Pinter, Crimp, Caryl Churchill, Birch, Mullarkey, wit, In-Yer-Ear, neosatiricism, tragedy, catastrophe, comedy, absurd, ludicrous, horrendhilarious

'In the heart of each joke hides a little holocaust' (George Tabori): Horrendhilarious Wit on the British Contemporary Stage"

If we take it from Aristotle that comedy has to do with evil and the ugly[1], then laughter becomes the symptom of some kind of merry fatality telling us about the inevitable evil of humanity. Laughter is therefore often (always?) the sign of an assertion (acceptation?) of the worst and tends to elect comedy as potentially even more tragic than tragedy: and this is because comedy does not repudiate ugliness and evil – on the contrary, it thrives on them. Even if it puts them at a distance, the basic rhetorical principle on which comedy is based is close to *praeteritio* ("I will not tell you what in fact I'm telling you", as famously exemplified by the "He said Jehovah" joke in Monty Python's "Life of Brian"). One can feel therefore, to put it with Edward Bond, that " the comic does not alleviate the suffering entailed by the tragic. It makes it worse – yet", and this is what Bond adds, "so doing, it changes the nature of the real and gives us back our innocence."[2] Bond's intuition deserves further analysis when applied to the contemporary stage. Is this statement really valid in our post-Adornian world? Can we be as optimistic as post-Marxist Edward Bond? Is innocence retrievable at all?

The link between laughter and violence has been generously commented upon. One of the most precocious critics who made a point about the violence of English humour is Baudelaire. In his well known reaction to a British pantomime performed in France, he claimed that what struck him in the performance given by the English actors was the violence emanating from the performance[3]. Whereas Baudelaire's impression invites us to consider violence as intrinsic to British humour or to British laughter, other theorists or philosophers, among whom Bergson of course, suggest to understand laughter (no matter its cause or nationality) as a violence in itself: a violence performed on the body (both that of the farcical mechanised character and that of the laughing spectators who are jerked out of their rational composed stance). Parallelly, I would argue that wit can be seen as a violence performed on language which is forced out of its logic (nonsense, absurdism), taken off its course and severed from its conventional (euphemized) symbolical level.

Ever since Beckett, we have known that laughter is the best of places for tragedy to relocate. Ever since Nell declared that "Nothing's funnier than unhappiness", the porosity between the tragic and the comic has been a fact. In *Mein Kampf* (farce), Hungarian playwright and theatre director George Tabori writes: "In the heart of each joke hides a little holocaust." In this article, I will contend that wit is a privileged form to express trauma (be it intimate, domestic or collective) on the contemporary stage.

Tabori's cruel joke epitomises and radicalises the post-Adornian turn. The major rupture indeed concerns what Adorno calls "light-heartedness":

> Art, which if not reflective is no longer possible at all, must swear itself off of light-heartedness. Compelling it to do so above all is what happened in the

[1] " Comedy is as we have said an imitation of characters of a lower type, —not however in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly"(*Poetics*, 1449a)

2 « Le Comique n'apaise pas la souffrance du Tragique, il l'aggrave -- mais ce faisant il change la nature de toute réalité et nous rend notre innocence ». (Bond in Hankins 11)

[3] « Il m'a semblé que le signe distinctif de ce genre de comique était la violence. Je vais en donner la preuve par quelques échantillons de mes souvenirs. » Charles Baudelaire, « De l'essence du rire », section VI.

> recent past. The proposition that after Auschwitz not one more poem can be written does not hold utterly, but it is certain that after this event, because it was possible and remains possible into the unforeseeable future, light-hearted art is no longer tenable. (Adorno 1981, 603-604)

"[L]ight-heartedness", "serenity", "gaiety" (*Heiterkeit*, in German) can no longer be part of the frame and this paradigmatic turn delineates a new sort of laughter, a sort of laughter which becomes the best expression possible of the tragic feeling.

A number of books have addressed the subject, starting with J. L. Styan or of Kenneth Steele White who popularised such concepts as "the dark comedy" or "savage comedy", or, on the French side, with Clément Rosset's "exterminating laughter" in *Logiques du pire* (1971) and, more recently, Mireille Losco-Lena's *"Rien n'est plus drôle que le malheur" Du comique et de la douleur dans les écritures dramatiques contemporaines* (2011). In a recent dissertation, Laetitia Pasquet demonstrates that these books focus on the contradiction there is between laughter and tragedy. In this paper, I would like to further Pasquet's reflexion and demonstrate that on the contemporary stage, wit, as a specific form of laughter, plays a central role in the aesthetic experience of tragedy as the spectators "experience the tragic in the middle of a chuckle" (Pasquet 2013, 432).

One could argue that after the critical post-Brechtian often grotesque laughter the 1970-80 (Barker's first plays and Peter Barnes see *Laughter!* and *Red Noses* are good examples of this) and the In-Yer-Face 'grunge' laughter (Kane's Hippolitus masturbating in dirty socks in *Phaedra's Love*, Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* in which men and women can be bought with yoghurts in the superstore), another kind of laughter takes precedence when considering the politically committed, formally innovative plays of this past two decades. These plays very seldom graphically represent the action and turn In-Yer-Face theatre into In-Yer-Ear theatre. They often embark on aural performances (not enacted ones) and therefore facilitate a kind of relaxed laughter – a kind of laughter that is not constrained by the visual, frontal presence of the ugly –, a relaxed laughter that harbours a kind of horror all the more striking and destabilizing as it reveals itself concomitantly, even consubstantially with the act of laughing (not laughter provoked by horror but laughter in horror). This aural turn in the theatre, which relies essentially on a metaphoric use of language, may account for the necessity to focus on the new nature of wit on the contemporary stage, a kind of wit in which the "verbal image", central to wit, is given a reempowered position.

The champions of this aesthetics are Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp or Alice Birch: Their plays provoke an apparently genuine, innocent and harmless laughter in the middle of which barbarity is unexpectedly exposed. They explore the intrinsic tragic nature of wit and turn witticisms into the genuine locus of tragedy, thus engraving the tragic feeling at the heart of laughter.[4] Doing so, they redefine both the architecture of tragedy and the nature of contemporary wit. These plays elaborate a new sort of wit based on a striking network of metaphors and correspondences envisaged as a more

[4] Pasquet calls it "l'esthétique du leurre" (Pasquet 128).

powerful tool to try and have us understand the state of the world.[5] I will argue that a new sort of wit, often apocalyptic or barbarous, exacerbates the violence of language already contained in any verbally comic situation, and lies at the basis of what I call neosatiricism.

Exploring Wit's Tragic Potential

Wit, as everyone knows, comes from the old English word 'wissen' which means 'to know'. To be witty therefore means that because of this knowledge, one is able to discriminate, to critically distinguish. Wit is a linguistic turn that relies on the capacity of imagination to be faster than reason to explain the facts of the world: It was considered a terrible danger by the philosophers of the first modernity (Hobbes, Locke, Hume) because of the pleasant and seductive (and often funny) effect a shorter and powerfully imaged proposition produces compared to the meanderings of reason. When Congreve has Witwoud compare sputtering gentlemen to roasting apples, the imaginative simile is immediately suggestive but the farfetched nature of the image, beside the fact that it probably tells us Witwoud was hungry when uttering it, takes us too far away from reason and verisimilitude to be a seriously enlightening simile. Yet of course, Witwoud is only a wit-would and not a True Wit. Wit therefore relies on the idea of an associative world and on the capacity to 'explain' the world by a series of binary equations (comparisons or metaphors) bringing together two spheres that are sufficiently apart one from the other to arouse laughter but sufficiently near to perfectly illuminate both terms of the comparison (Dulck 1962).

As always when one comes to study the contemporary stage, one need to go back to Beckett. Beckett confirms the necessity of a new laughter: his characters tell jokes that are so pedestrian or worn out they signal the end of the traditional joke (that of the tailor's pitiful suit made in seven days compared to God's world made in seven days, for instance in *Endgame*[6]); they are generally only capable of emitting "brief laughs", when at all (« I couldn't guffaw again today », says Clov when pondering over this possibility, [Beckett 2009, 37]). This impeded laugh is subsumed by a second-degree laugh, "a laugh that laughs", a metalaughter, a "*risus purus*" (Beckett 1953, 49-50)[7] that discloses the ontological nature of horror.

This metalaughter can be achieved by reconfiguring wit: whereas traditional wit is based on comparisons, Beckett's wit, much announced by Wilde's epigrammatic style, is based on paradoxes ("nothing is funnier than unhappiness" [Beckett 2009, 20]) that inscribe the contradiction (the *agon*, so to speak) at the heart of laughter. Beckett's laughter often rests on this paradoxical bringing together of antithetical situations

[5] This is Hans Blumenberg's theory that metaphors are thought to be the only way to think the unthinkable see « Paradigms for a Metaphorology » (1960), (qdt in Neveu 154)

[6] Beckett convoked this joke again in the title of the essay he dedicated to the painting of the Van Velde, « Le Monde et le pantalon » (Beckett 1990).

[7] Le rire sans joie est le rire dianoetique, de derrière le groin (…) c'est le rire des rires, le risus purus, le rire qui rit du rire, qui contemple, qui salue la plaisanterie suprême, en un mot, le rire qui rit — silence s'il vous plaît — de ce qui est malheureux.
Emmanuel Jacquart describes Beckett as a « desperado of derision » (Jacquart 93)

whether physical or purely linguistic, as when moribund Nell asks moribund Nagg: "What is it my pet? (*pause*.) Time for love?" (Beckett 1957, 12). The oppositional binarity of wit is pushed to its most extreme expression. When Congreve, in *The Way of the World*, has the coquette Millamant compared to a "streamer with all its ribbons out"[8], the image, though farfetched, is perfectly eloquent and immediately enlightening. On the contrary, what characterises Beckett's wit is the very unlikely relevance of the spheres he brings together.

The deconstruction (re-foundation) of wit on the contemporary stage is continued by Harold Pinter. Pinter initiates a revolution in the very formulation of wit as he creates a double degree of instability in language: we understand that wit, by putting the world in equations thanks to an associationist or analogical vision of the world, destabilizes the unicity/identity of what is being compared: this is the first degree in the deconstruction process. To say that A is like B (comparison), or worse to say that A is B (metaphor), negates A and B's ontology[9]. Yet, to this first destabilizing process, Pinter adds a second one: he undermines the conventional meaning of words and phrases by convoking their archeo-meaning which is often hidden and forgotten beneath convention. The opening line of *The Room*, for instance, uttered by Rose who serves tea to her husband Bert, provides an illuminating example.

> **Rose.** Here you are. This'll keep the cold out.
> *She places bacon and eggs on a plate, turns off the gas and takes the plate to the table.*
> It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder." (Pinter 1960, 7)

This set phrase ("here you are") which by convention designates the object passed on to Bert – his bacon and eggs as a matter of fact – is all too banal at first sight. Yet, the phrase becomes particularly and disquietingly witty and meaningful when one understands that Bert *is* "here", as opposed to "there" (for instance, in the basement or outside) as explicitly feared by Rose who one minute later, insists on the malevolent presence of an outside world ("it's murder"), another very Beckettian expression usually hyperbolically funny and meaning metaphorically that the cold is very intense yet here literally meaning that not to have the protection of the room means death. Literalised, the metaphor instills disquiet and terror inside wit.

This literalisation of language and reactivation of catachreses form the basis of Pinter's poetics of menace. Pinter's terrible wit destabilizes all certainty: in the same play, the walls are said to be "running", whereby one understand that the walls are not only damp but may literally be running away. The metaphor is disquietingly witty as we realise that what is at stake in the play consists precisely in trying to keep the walls around oneself. It needs a double take for you to realise that this wit shelters catastrophe. Pinter's oeuvre is replete with this reconceptualised wit: as the language unfurls, so does its instability and we laugh at the discovery of the quick-sand nature of what we thought steady and firm; we laugh at this ontological instability.

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[8] **Mirabell**. Here she comes i' faith full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out and a shoal of fools for tenders …" II,1. (Congreve 40).

[9] See Julie Neveu Metaphors, because they dispense with the propositional force of "like" or "as", are much more violent and imply a more radical ontological questioning.)

Militant wit and neosatiricism

If, with Pinter, wit is both metaphysical, ontological and social ("Here you are"), more recent plays on the stage have taken a radically political turn qualifying them for more obvious satire. Because of the numerous impending dangers and crises (political, financial, environmental and scientific) (Angelaki 2017), the contemporary stage has developed a neo-satiricist ethos which is particularly 'horrendhilarious' under the pens of such playwrights as Martin Crimp, Caryl Churchill, Alice Birch, Nick Gill or Rory Mullarkey, to name but a few. All these dramatists take traditional metaphor-based wit to its end by extending it, beyond black farce, all the way to such categories as the ludicrous, the incongruous, the madcap, the surreal, the zany or the over the top, the preposterous, or the absurd.

Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* tells us about a woman – Anne, whom we never see – through seventeen scenarios constructing her as a terrorist, a victim, an artist, a performer, a car, a tv set, a cigarette…: the metaphorizing process present in the creation of a witticism becomes the matrix of the seventeen scenarios. The associationist process offers a whole range of simulacra that read as many (mediatic) filters keeping us away from the "real" individual (Baudrillard 1981). The process culminates with scenario 14:

> She's a pornographic movie star
> A killer and a brand of car
> A KILLER AND A BRAND OF CAR!

And we already know that "The New Anny" "comes with electric windows as standard" (scenario 7, Crimp 30).

> She's a terrorist threat
> She's the mother of three
> She's a cheap cigarette
> She is Ecstasy. (scenario 14 "The Girl next door", Crimp 59)

What is both very witty and very tragic about this metaphorical process is that it is based on the "decategorisation" of the referent (Anne). Crimp's metaphors function as pure witticisms: they bring together incongruous and traditionally incompatible elements, which creates a comic effect. Yet – and here is where the tragic lies – a witticism consists precisely in introducing a simile or a metaphor which dislodges the solid knowledge we have as to the referent of the word (in this case, Anne, a woman) by substituting another referent to it, which is suggested or imposed from a different point of view (the choice of the image depends on who the enunciator is – Julie Neveu speaks of "indirect lyricism" (Neveu 2013). If Ann is a cigarette or a brand of car, what is it that Ann is? consumable, smokable and burnt out rapidly? Reduced to the woman on the car's bonnet? Funny at first because of their incongruity, these metaphors strike us by their violence and convey a pungent satire of contemporary society and of the place reserved to women in it. The primitive referent (Anne is categorised as a woman) is violently swept away to the profit of an outrageously reifying, commodifying, second referent (a cigarette).

Another violence comes from the multiplication of the suggested images: the proliferation of metaphors, as in the case of Anne in *Attempts on Her Life* in which

Crimp tries to capture "All the things that Ann can be", entails a progressive dissolution in the myriad of referenciations implied, and the identity of Anne is lost for good under the plethora of simulacra.

Aural theatre

This affirmative bringing together of unlikely elements (Anne is "a cigarette") is only possible because Crimp, like other dramatists of the very contemporary stage, opt for not showing, rather than showing on the stage: whereas Congreve's Millamant is represented with her "streamers out", Anne is not represented as a cigarette. The dismissal of graphic representation allows for what Dan Rebellato calls "a hypertrophy of violent imaginative representation" (Rebellato 2017). Unconstrained by visual representation, wit has all latitude to come quite close to surrealistic absurdism, a kind of absurdism which makes radically incompatible or improbable pairings, thus exacerbating the functioning of traditional wit. This linguistic humour is based on surprise and among its favourite rhetorical figures, zeugmas and hodge podge associations rank first. Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000), invents a sort of lexical zeugma (not syntactic ones, as is generally the case for zeugmas) and uses it as the basis of her wit:

> **Todd.** But we're not exactly on the other side from the French. It's not as if they're the Moroccans and the ants.
> **Harper.** It's not as if they're the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes. (Churchill 2000, 36)
> Mallards are not a good waterbird. They commit rape and they're on the side of the elephants and the Koreans. (*Id.* 39)

Surrealistic absurdism first allows for laughter because we take if for granted that this kind of humour is habilitated to dismiss meaning, but it soon strikes us as not being the "outcast of meaning" it pretends to be (Mourey 16). Quite the contrary: the madness of the world exceeds our imagination, and wit, therefore is reinvested with a militant, activist political denunciating force. When first hearing that male ducks are said to be rapists, just like Latvian dentists, we may be tempted to believe that language has gone crazy. Yet on second thoughts, we cannot help trying to imagine what kind of a new world this would be if words still meant what it is they mean, if the metaphorical network at the basis of wit was to be taken as a valid system, and if language was to be taken at face value.

It is precisely this strategy that Caryl Churchill exacerbates in her brilliant 2016 play, *Escaped Alone*. The play opened at the Royal Court and staged four post-70 years old actresses in an English garden, a sort of comedy of nostalgic manners, or a 'conversation piece' set in a British back garden, the back garden being nostalgically reminiscent of Pastoral England, lost Eden or Arcadia. As all Pastorals that always bear the germs of their tragic reversibility, Churchill's pastorality is systematically reversed – through a sort of Brechtian cross editing – into a dystopian revelation (*apokalupsos*) in which one of the old ladies, against a black backdrop and standing on the very forefront of the sage (therefore in the same chronotope as us), describes Hieronymus Bosch-like portraits of hell:

> **MRS J**
> The hunger began when eighty per cent of food was diverted to tv programmes. Commuters watched breakfast on iPlayer on their way to work. Smartphones were distributed by charities when rice ran out, so the dying could watch cooking. The entire food stock of Newcastle was won by lottery ticket and the winner taken to a 24 hour dining room where fifty chefs chopped in relays and the public voted on what he should eat next. Cars were traded for used meat. Children fell asleep in class and didn't wake up. The obese sold slices of themselves until hunger drove them to eat their own rashers. Finally the starving stormed the tv centres and were slaughtered and smoked in large numbers. Only when cooking shows were overtaken by sex with football teams did cream trickle back to the shops and rice was airlifted again. (Churchill 2016, 22)

Every apocalyptic image is anchored in a recognisable reality but of course all the situations are taken to the end of their logic and convoke the "anthropocene", a concept introduced by Eugen F. Stoermer in the 1980's and further explored by atmospheric scientist Paul J. Crutzen in 2000:

> The term Anthropocene (…) suggests that the Earth has now left its natural geological epoch, the present interglacial state called the Holocene. Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary terra incognita. (in Lavery and Finburgh 2015)

The play, much in the continuity of *Far Away*, reads as a militant play. Elaine Aston analyses it through the prism of "dark ecology" and as part of a general demonstration about "greening" Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd, as Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh put it.

Wit here consists precisely in the creation of this dystopian realism marked by the refusal of pathos and by the reasoned presentation of horror. The language used by Mrs J here is technical, precise, structured; sentences are perfectly syntactic and the diction is firm to speak of a world that has gone totally wild. Wit lies in the gap between the contents expressed and the perfectly mastered and composed syntax. Furthermore, in James McDonald's production, Mrs Jarrett gave the audience a cold (not to say detached) account of what she had "Escaped" from, "Alone". She did not opt for a lively pathos-prone hypotyposis. This normalized, somehow played down hyperviolence triggered some horrendhilarious wit trapping the audience within their own laughter. At the Royal Court, dystopia had become a modality of realism, horrendous situations were banal and the audience experienced tragedy within a chuckle of laughter.

Caryl Churchill's absurdist dystopian realism is no isolated experiment. In an article entitled "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in the Theatre" (Rebellato 2017), Dan Rebellato mentions two plays that I can read as being part of the same horrendhilarious trend: Alice Birch's *Revolt. She said. Revolt Again* and Rory Mullarkey' s *The Wolf From the Door*, two plays that opened at the Royal Court in 2014 in a season dedicated to revolution and that contain their dose of eschatological wit. *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again*. (2014) was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by Katie Mitchell. In the 4th act, four women in a very composed

manner discuss how they are going to take over the world: after marking their authority in the intimate sphere --- "AndImgoingtotakemyvaginaandputitOnyouFIRST" (Birch 27) -- they claim they are about to perform very violent and radical "revolutions":

> -We're going to dismantle the monetary system, overthrow the government, All jobs will be destroyed, And all couples broken, And we'll take over the airwaves, the televisions, the Internet, etcetera, And we'll eradicate all men." (Birch 74)

Less surrealistic than Caryl Churchill's already past and done-with apocalypses, these prospective images of pure destruction whose unfeasibility is of course taken for granted are both comic and apocalyptic. Similarly, in *The Wolf From the Door*, Rory Mullarkey exacerbates this unfeasibility and therefore the comic dimension: the play imagines an apocalyptic uprising against the established order by the middle classes of middle England, a revolution carried out by very unlikely actors: Scene 14 is entirely made of stage directions:

> A women's fencing association pull down Nelson's Column. Buckingham Palace is raided by an over-seventies golf team. Harrods is looted by a group of 7 years old who've just got their hundred metre breaststroke badges.
> The BBC is bulldozed by South London Cossak Dance Society.
> A ukulélé orchestra storm the Gerkhin (Mullarkey 42)

Dan Rebellato very rightly remarks that this scene is entitled 'The Sights', and that yet, in James Macdonald's production, "these sights were not seen; the stage directions were spoken chorally by the actors." Rebellato concludes that "Nonetheless, these verbal images of violence, somewhat like those of Sarah Kane, push at the edges of realism; they are absurd, comic acts of violence and yet make claims on our imaginations" (Rebellato 2017).

The power of the images is all the more important as these dramatists have renounced graphic representation: wit, therefore, is on the one hand disconnected from referential reality and creates what Barthes calls a "configuration de paroles" ("a configuration of words"), provoking an extra degree of fiction within the fiction (Barthes 1987, 89 sq.); yet on the other hand it does rely on solid and resisting categorizations (e. g. the obese "eating their own rashers") and therefore, to say the least, it "makes a claim on our imaginations" (Rebellato, *ibid*.) and aggresses us so as to shake us awake.

These political contemporary plays redefine wit as the place where the spectator experiences tragedy. They reempower verbal images and confirm the radically violent nature of laughter. All these plays, characterized by a "profound withdrawal from realism" (Rebellato, *ibid*.), rehabilitate wit not only as instrumental for a theatre whose mission would be to denounce the banality of evil, but in a more precisely repoliticized way: as a weapon and as a militant event. The "tone" is generally "apocalyptic" and addresses the occidental world at large, the globalized (capitalistic) world and not, as was the case with the end of the 20th century dramatists (Steven Berkoff, for instance),

"Maggot Scratcher"'s new not cool Britannia. This epic neosatiricism targets globalized issues in the shape of absurdist epic fantasias.

On the post-Adornian experimental stage, through a collusion between laughter and slaughter (only separated by one letter), wit has become a privileged place to cradle and harbour catastrophe and trauma. The aural turn taken by the post-In-Yer-Face theatre, the In-Yer-Ear theatre, allows for an "apocalyptic laughter" (Kristeva 1980), an eschatological wit that takes us to the extremities of absurdism, somehow rejuvenating the Beckettian project:

> En face
> Le pire
> Jusqu'à ce
> Qu'il fasse rire[10]

If this laughter does not give us back our innocence – Bond's wishful thinking –, it certainly impulses a visceral experienced awareness of the tragic. Monstrous laughter "monsters": it both shows and warns (according to the double etymology of the term). The contemporary stage exhibits a necessity to laugh "in spite of all" (Didi-Huberman 2994).

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[10] Il s'agit de la première « mirlitonnade" dans *Poèmes* suivi de *Mirlitonnades* (Beckett 1978, 35).

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