

Béatrix Beck: The “Barny Cycle”: Writing to Inform and  
Heal the Self

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Contre les révisions, les falsifications, les mensonges de  
l'histoire officielle, la mémoire, parfois, résiste et veille

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Individual memory can stand firm and fend off the revisionism, falsifications and lies perpetrated by official history.<sup>1</sup>

Individual memories from World War II are growing dim, and countless retellings have shaped new memories for later generations. The realities of the 1939-40 Phony War, the June 1940 Armistice, the Vichy régime, the German Occupation, a divided France, and the postwar purge were difficult to face. For many years, the least painful way for the French to cope with those memories was to suppress them.<sup>2</sup> The collaborators and denunciators, the deportations and conscriptions, the hardship, hunger, deprivation and despair became blurred, and a collective myth of the noble *résistant* ‘resistance fighter’ was forged.<sup>3</sup>

The collective memory that evolved was thus in large part false. Only recently, through much soul-searching, debate and analysis—deconstruction and reconstruction—has France begun to recover from what more than one historian has termed a civil war.<sup>4</sup> Uncovered by a new generation of historians, the suppressed humiliation, fear, ambiguity and daily compromises of the war years came to the

fore. Starting in the early 1970s with books such as Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, historians now chronicle the process of "la mémoire et l'oubli" 'memory and forgetting' to create a historiography of historical memory.<sup>5</sup> Black and white distinctions disappear and gray areas are explored as the nation makes an effort to restore and clarify individual memory to reach historical truth, through reconstruction of a collective memory.<sup>6</sup>

By returning to texts written during and just after World War II, we can restore some individual realities and shape a more truthful memory of the war. France suffered profound trauma. One of the paths to recovery from horrible events encompasses a willingness to heal—first to remember, and then to probe the issues, even in their painful ambiguity.

We recognize this willingness to heal in the semi-autobiographic fiction that makes up the first six books by novelist and short-story writer Béatrix Beck. They are *Barny* (1948), *Une mort irrégulière* (1950) 'A Suspicious Death,' *Léon Morin, prêtre* (1952) 'The Passionate Heart,' *Des accommodements avec le ciel* (1954) 'Compromises with Heaven,' *Le muet* (1963) 'The Mute,' and *Cou coupé court toujours* (1967) 'Cut-throat Finch Still Runs Around.'<sup>7</sup> In these books, Béatrix Beck gives us a personal and human view of the war and its aftermath, through the complex psychological underpinnings of her characters and the dynamics among them.

Beck was born in Switzerland in July 1914, of Irish and Belgian parents. She lived in France most of her life and died there in November 2008, having published more than forty works of rich poetic fiction. Although her works sit prominently on library and bookstore shelves between those of Simone de Beauvoir and Samuel Beckett, and new editions continue to be published, Beck's relative obscurity warrants a close recounting of her story.

Beck often spoke of her life in interviews, explaining personally that she wrote what we call her "Barny cycle" as fictionalized autobiography.<sup>8</sup> Speaking to interviewer Béatrice Shalit about her 1984 novel *L'enfant chat* 'The Cat Child,' Beck described it "as a fantasy as opposed to my first books, which were almost entirely autobiographical" (Shalit 38). In a 1994 interview with Valérie Marin La Meslée, Beck said that while writing her first novel, *Barny*, after the

war, she chose to write in the first person as “Barny Heulls” to retain total honesty vis-à-vis her subject matter. “Dans l’autobiographie, les difficultés sont uniquement ponctuelles” (Marin La Meslée 98, 102) ‘In autobiography, the difficulties are just in the details.’ It is interesting that although not all the “Barny” novels are written in the first person (*Une mort irrégulière* and parts of *Le muet* use the protective distance of the third person), Beck remembers all these books as first-person texts, indicating that even late in life she considered them autobiographical.

Beck roundly denied that she had based the six “Barny” novels on a social or ideological premise. Writing was not a means of resistance for her. “Aucun rapport entre mes expériences de guerre et mes idées quant à l’écriture,” Beck wrote in answer to our questions. ‘My ideas on writing have no connection to my wartime experiences.’<sup>9</sup> However, in these books we may read the episodic account of her development as a writer as paralleling the itinerary of France itself, as Barny and the nation go through the various stages of forgetting and remembering, healing and recovery.

Beck’s intimate retelling of Barny’s story calls into question many political myths. There are no pure and noble *résistants*, no satanically evil enemies. Nothing is unambiguously black or white, right or wrong. Details merge in an equivocal gray zone. In typical fashion, Beck acted away from the mainstream and on her own.

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In her 1992 book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman, a psychiatrist, theorist and researcher in the area of psychological trauma, wrote that “traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail. ... Recovery unfolds in three stages. ... The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life (34, 155).<sup>10</sup>

In a striking parallel to Herman’s formulation, Beck’s Barny goes through all three stages. Her own upbringing and early adulthood forced Beck to struggle with the grim and unprincipled reality of survival. In order to cope, and as her writing matured, Beck looked inward to language and to Barny’s already damaged psyche. In the same way, Barny, in the first stage of recovery, goes from be-

ing prey to circumstance to a place of relative safety: her aunt's farm in Belgium. In the second stage, she begins to remember and tell the story of her trauma. Barny writes her first book. In the third stage of recovery, she chooses to become a writer by vocation.

Barny is a repository of an extraordinary fantasy and emotional life, with dreams, myth, religion, and especially language, in free interplay. She suffers not one, but a barrage of traumatic experiences: rejection by family and society, and loss, absence, humiliation and death from disease, war and suicide. As a fatherless toddler during World War I and a widowed young mother during the Phony War, Barny is buffeted from one war to another, one traumatic circumstance to another. She survives hand to mouth in an isolated mountain town working at menial jobs and fearing for the safety of her infant daughter. The same was true of Beck.

Barny—like the nation—was isolated by her experiences, and because she was helpless to act or react, she was traumatized. In the face of repeated pain and setbacks, Barny has two saving traits—self-absorption and a passion for writing. Writing intensely about herself allowed her to surpass her circumstances and heal.

Barny's unhappy childhood did not strengthen her for adulthood. In the way she lives her life, Barny repeats her mother's adage that nothing can console an adult for the emotional hardships suffered as a child (*Barny* 92). Barny had no highly socialized, solid bourgeois upbringing to rebel against. She clings to traditional Catholic values, such as belief in religion and in family and children that other intellectual and activist women of her generation were questioning or rejecting outright.

The novel *Barny* traces the life of its first-person heroine from the death of her poet father when she was a toddler, through the suicide of her mother (on the eve of Barny's marriage), as well as her young adulthood during World War II.<sup>11</sup> Born, like Beck, in Switzerland to a Belgian father and an Irish mother, growing up in France where she cannot obtain citizenship, Barny considers herself a foreign outsider, a half-breed (*Barny* 39-40).

The young Barny is raised by a group of women, all severely neurotic. She is treated strangely and inconsistently by those troubled and cruel relatives: her impoverished mother, Aldoveen; her wealthy, frightening grandmother, *Grand'mère*; her sadistic great-

grandmother, Granny; and, finally, her much older half-sister, Anna (born of an affair between her father and a married lover), whom Barny both adores and hates. Barny the toddler cannot reach her mother emotionally. When she tries to break into her mother's mourning of her husband's death, saying: "Sois pas triste, tu as moi" (*Barny* 8) 'Don't be sad, you have me,' her mother retorts, "Cela ne suffit pas" 'That's not enough.' A few years later, when Barny can already read, her mother writes to her own brother, Uncle Edgard, in Ireland, in a letter left for Barny to see: "Barny est bête et laide" (*Barny* 82) 'Barny is stupid and ugly.' Within the family she is treated as an unwanted throwaway. At school, she is nicknamed "the cat who walks by herself"—in a reference to the Rudyard Kipling story. But the unhappy girl would ask nothing better than to be accepted by the other children (*Barny* 106).<sup>12</sup>

All the relationships Barny experiences are disturbed and twisted. Her schoolmistress slaps the children to make them pass their tests. Barny hangs a death mask of Pascal over her bed. She wonders how long she will be able to resist his angelic, asexual face, calling to her (*Barny* 150). In her teens, Barny's interest in communism cannot obliterate her fascination with the Catholic church. Her mother arbitrarily picks a university for her to attend by sticking a pin into a map of France. Barny joins the *Jeunesses communistes* 'Communist Youth,' and loses what she calls her "ridiculous virginity" to a young Polish Jew, Toto, who dies fighting on the Loyalist side in Spain (*Barny* 187). Barny then seduces a stateless Jew, Chaïm Aronovitch—nicknamed Vim—who Toto had warned her could not be distracted from politics. This story parallels her later attempt to distract the young priest Léon Morin from God. Hoping to marry, Barny and Vim face bureaucratic obstacles because neither is a French citizen.

Barny's mother, Aldoveen, who has often attempted suicide, in a final gesture, takes Gardenal (phenobarbital) and dies, leaving the young couple waiting at a restaurant where she was to celebrate their engagement with them. "It's useless to kill oneself," affirms Vim (*Barny* 204). Barny becomes pregnant. If the baby is a boy, his name will be Christian, the better to irritate Vim's Jewish relatives. The baby is a girl, whom Barny poignantly names France.

In Beck's second novel, *Une mort irrégulière*, Barny, married to

Vim and still a foreigner in France, is living in semi-hiding during the winter of 1939-40. She barely earns enough to rent a room and feed her daughter. Barny and France are triply vulnerable—to the petty prejudices of neighbors, to the French police, and, later, to the German Occupation authorities. Vim has enlisted in the French army, partly to obtain citizenship, but, blacklisted as an undesirable, the formerly principled communist youth becomes feckless and disillusioned and looks for ways to be discharged. In April 1940, two months before the end of the Phony War, Vim dies under mysterious circumstances. After Vim's death, Barny takes a series of odd jobs—giving English lessons, teaching in a correspondence school, cleaning, cooking, working in factories, and posing for artists—as did Béatrix Beck, who also worked as André Gide's secretary just before his death in 1951. Barny's search for the truth about her husband's death occupies the second half of *Une mort irrégulière*. Her search is an economic as well as a psychological necessity, for without the four words: "Mort pour la France" 'Died for France' on Vim's death certificate, Barny and her daughter cannot receive government benefits. They are on the verge of starvation. "When I'm grown up, I will have pictures of potatoes on the walls of my house," quips France (*mort* 100). Finally, Barny is told that Vim, who once said to her that he was a "desperado, not a desperate soul," had shot himself in the neck (*mort* 117).

Barny recalls the words of *La Pasionaria* during the Spanish Civil War: "Mieux vaut être la veuve d'un héros que la femme d'un lâche" 'Better to be a hero's widow than a coward's wife.' Barny tells herself: "Toi, tu cumules, veuve de lâche" (*mort* 117) 'You've gone one better: a coward's widow.'

In the third novel of the Barny cycle, *Léon Morin, prêtre*, Barny, the cynic and near-atheist, reencounters the religion that played such an enormous role in her childhood fantasy life. She has moved to another town and now works at a box factory, a better job than the one in the zipper factory where she worked in *Une mort irrégulière*, as it offers some security and camaraderie with her fellow employees. After suffering the pangs of a romantic crush on a female co-worker, Barny enters a church one day, intent on humiliating a priest in a confessional. She chooses the priest named Léon Morin, rather than the other, Philippe Demanoir, thinking Morin's name

reveals more humble origins.

“Religion is the opiate of the people,” Barney whispers to the priest. Much to her surprise, he replies that in fact the bourgeois made religion the opiate of the people, watering it down to their own advantage (*Léon Morin* 65). Barney’s confrontation with Léon Morin in the confessional could be interpreted as the defiance of a young communist taunting the symbol of her conflicted spirituality. But Barney’s challenge to the priest could also be likened to a suicide attempt—a desperate cry for help by someone, from a family of suicides, who has been tempted by it in the past, and whose belief system no longer suffices. It turns out to be, paradoxically, Barney’s first step towards safety.

Thus begins a coquettish game, the struggle of a free-thinking woman—drawn to her childhood solace, the Church—to control a man. Her struggle parallels the efforts of the priest to control the soul of this unbeliever. But Barney can never raise herself to the spiritual level she longed for in childhood. The religious crisis Barney suffers is both more than and less than spiritual. However, entranced by their discussions, she is drawn inexorably to Léon Morin. In the end, Barney propositions the young worker priest, just as he is about to be transferred from the town. Although she never possesses his body, she is left with the realization that he has captured her soul. Whereas at one time she had wanted her daughter France baptized simply to hide her Jewish birth, Barney begins to practice sincerely the faith she had parroted up until then (*Léon Morin* 237).<sup>13</sup>

In *Des accommodements avec le ciel*, Barney, now aged twenty-nine, moves with her daughter to Belgium, to a farm owned by her unmarried Tante ‘aunt’ Francine, her father’s sister. A Belgian citizen, Barney is at first ecstatic, but then she is crushed when she discovers that her daughter, a French national, is considered stateless in Belgium. It seems that nowhere can she and France have the same nationality. Is life better for Barney in Belgium? She works in a factory that produces powdered pudding mix (*accommodements* 24). Later she sells at auction letters written to her father by famous people, and so has enough money to live on for a while (*accommodements* 65).<sup>14</sup> But she has no role in the household. Tante Francine is ignorant and uneducated, cruel and humorless. She holds stereotypical prejudices and believes trite, commonplace truisms. She is

judgmental and intolerant, pious but hypocritical, repeatedly compromising her beliefs to justify her bargains with God. To which Barny exclaims laughing: “Jésus!” (*accommodements* 91).

Nonetheless, in the home of these Belgian relatives, Barny has reached a place of safety—the first step toward healing. Near the end of *Des accommodements avec le ciel*, she begins to write her childhood memories. Bitterly discouraging, Francine says, “Ce ne sert à rien” ‘That’s useless.’ “Mais si, ça me rapproche de Dieu” (*accommodements* 146) ‘No it’s not. It brings me closer to God,’ replies Barny. Francine predicts that Barny will never be published or read. But Barny knows better: “Je savais qu’en écrivant je faisais ce que j’avais à faire. J’étais prosateur de droit divin, de devoir divin. Le stylo était mon sceptre et mon sexe” (*accommodements* 146) ‘I knew that by writing I was doing what I had to do. I was a writer by divine right and by divine duty. The pen was both my scepter and my sex organ.’

Lord Edgard Deirdree, Barny’s uncle on her mother’s side, then proposes that Barny move to Whittleborough Lone Farm in Ireland to live with his son Warren, who needs someone to tend the farm, cook and clean. Ever critical, Francine tries to convince Lord Deirdree that Barny is a terrible housekeeper and an even worse cook (*accommodements* 193). Lord Deirdree insists. Barny does not want to go, reasoning that at least in Belgium they spoke French, whereas in Ireland she would be in complete linguistic exile (*accommodements* 191). Young France too feels patriotic: she does not want to live among the people who killed Joan of Arc (*accommodements* 195).

In *Le muet*, Barny is working on Whittleborough Lone Farm as a housekeeper for her cousin Warren. Intimidated, she obeyed Lord Deirdree when he told her that if she did not go work for his son, she and her daughter France would no longer exist for him (*muet* 20). Curiously, Barny lives in the thrall of her uncle. Might there have been the promise of an inheritance, some small security? Or is it Barny’s continued marginalization within the family, her tendency to be dominated by men, or perhaps a desire to take refuge with someone who appears saner than other family members?

When we asked Beck whether Barny was a helpless victim, she said: “Barny est forte vis-à-vis d’elle-même mais faible vis-à-vis des

autres” ‘Barney is strong vis-à-vis her own self but weak vis-à-vis others’ (PC). ‘The Mute’ himself is Barney’s Irish cousin Warren, a writer, who was ill as a child, and who, although capable of speaking, prefers to keep silent. Barney understands him and recognizes they are connected by blood (*muet* 132). In the end Uncle Edgard evicts Barney when he, like Francine, becomes outraged by her negative characterizations of the family in her writings.

*Cou coupé court toujours*, published in 1967, marks the end of Beck’s semi-autobiographical fiction. Here, Barney makes an appearance as a simple *figurant* ‘a walk-on,’ the Widow Aronovitch, “l’Aro,” a tenant in an apartment building in the west of France, near the sea. This appears to be Beck’s first “fictional” novel.<sup>15</sup> Barney has taken second place to a circle of small-town dwellers who gain mythic proportions in a strange surrealistic evocation of pagan and Catholic ritual. France appears as well; her playmates are Martine and Claude, the daughters of the novel’s protagonist, longshoreman Edmond Surnin, who represents “Love,” metaphorically. Beck will not forget Barney’s story. She reappears in 1992 as “Clotilde,” in a book of short treatments, *Vulgaires vies*. Beck’s daughter, the late writer and artist Bernadette Szapiro—the model for young France—also wrote a novel featuring Barney.<sup>16</sup>

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At the start of the Occupation, every detail of Barney’s life is compromised. Nothing is complete. We find examples of this blurring in her relation to politics, religion and sexuality. Barney has barely had time to cope with the traumatic mistreatment dealt her since infancy by her mother and other relatives—perhaps even by her husband Vim. Barney, as narrator, begins to process mentally what she has endured. She described the process as a visualization of superimposed sieves, with ever-receding ideas appearing as cardboard images (*Barney* 9).<sup>17</sup>

Although Beck assured us that her protagonist was committed to the Jeunesses communistes, once Barney goes to work in the zipper factory, working life is not portrayed in ideological terms. Like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, Barney never quite catches on to assembly-line work. She is rescued by a woman who inexplicably risks her own job to cover for her. Further, at this job, Barney works

indirectly for the Occupiers, since the zippers were no doubt used for the German military. When we asked Beck if she suffered during the war as a working woman lacking civil and economic rights, she reminded us that women's rights were of no importance in times when human rights were being violated. We lived in a state of terror, she wrote us (PC).

There are no easy answers for Barny, and certainly no pretty ones or politically correct ones. Barny is widowed. She is not Jewish, but she has a Jewish name, and as a stateless foreigner, she has no rights. Her child is half-Jewish. Beck herself finished law school after World War II, but could not practice law in France because she was not French. In France, especially after the Munich Pact in September 1938, Barny knew rampant anti-Semitism and growing anti-Communist feeling. In *Léon Morin, prêtre*, Barny does her best to help some Jews hide in her occupied town, but there is little nobility in her actions: she shows no affection for the family she helps. And the women who help Barny hide and raise her daughter France are shown as petty and mean-spirited.

If you can save a life, you can also take one. At one point, Barny could have warned the family of a young teenaged collaborator, when she heard the girl was targeted for execution by a Resistance faction, but she did not. After the girl is killed, Barny never knows whether she made the right choice. Moreover, she has lost the religious and moral framework that would have helped her decide. The act of saving or taking the life of another is a complex ethical dilemma.

In Beck's Barny cycle, religion itself and its practice are often suspect and even hypocritical. Barny's mother was Catholic, but ultimately committed suicide. Aldoveen would not allow Barny to go to confession as a child. Like all children, Barny uses prayer inappropriately. She prays that a little girl in her class will die. She prays for a baby at Christmas, but receives a teddy bear she names Mérovée (after the king of the Franks).

The child Barny obtains sensual pleasure from humiliating herself. Religion always has an erotic aspect. She rubs herself down with nettles after hearing that monks in the Middle Ages did so; she masturbates with a piece of wood, and cannot understand why she is punished. She wants to become a saint, if only for a few seconds.

She says she cannot stand the fact that she was born too late to know Jesus personally (*Barny* 22). When Barny was small, she confused her handsome, dead father with the image of Jesus (*Barny* 17). As a woman, she experiences the same confusion with Léon Morin—does she want to know him with her body, her soul, or both?

Barny's search for love and acceptance continues, but she most often pursues it in the wrong places and with the wrong people. More than once, she is tempted by lesbianism. She envies Joan of Arc's supposed bisexuality. But despite several obvious attractions to women as well as men, Barny says, reading Gide's *Corydon*, that she cannot understand a homosexual relationship between two men. She tells a co-worker named Jo, who copies out the verses of lesbian poet Renée Vivien, that she loves children too much to be a lesbian herself. Expressing a traditional Catholic view of sex as a means of procreation only, Barny says: "L'amour est à la génération ce que l'appétit est à la nutrition" (*Barny* 154) "The act of love is to reproduction what appetite is to nutrition."

Despite equivocating on these other topics, Beck faces the difficult subject of rape head on. When her town is liberated in *Léon Morin, prêtre*, the arrival of the American troops brings not joy but danger for Barny. Two soldiers help Barny and France carry some luggage. Then, one of them tries to force Barny to have sex with him in exchange for the bags. She tells him to keep them. In *Barny*, at age sixteen, visiting her father's grave and alone in the crypt, Barny is nearly raped by a cemetery guard who stops short when, repulsed, he realizes she is menstruating. Imagining herself responsible, Barny fears resisting. When she goes to the police, she is chastised: She must be mistaken. The guard is a good man, the father of eight. No one has ever lodged a complaint against him before (*Barny* 169).

"Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims," according to Herman (1). Beck instinctively recognized this progression and incorporated it into her own view of both her conscious and her unconscious existence. In her 1981 notes on dream analysis, *La mer intérieure* (collected in *Josée dite Nancy*), Beck recounts that on the night of August 24, 1956, she dreamed she was stringing colored shells into necklaces. She realized she created books in the same way, out of true facts from

the past, like so many cast-off sea shells (*La mer* 175).

With the Barny cycle of fictional autobiography, Beck carried out Herman's scheme of trauma and recovery, whose ultimate goal is to put the story, including the imagery, into words. For Herman, the central task of the third stage of recovery is reconnection with ordinary life (*Trauma* 155). We know that Beck was able to reconnect from the mid-1960s on, teaching for some ten years in the U.S. and Canada, and working as an editor for the *Revue de France*. Her ordinary life had begun and was to continue into her prolific retirement in a village in Normandy. There, Beck liked to say, the freedom from the worries of a *second métier* 'day job' allowed her to develop her writing into the more fanciful and fictional directions it later took.

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Beck and her work permit us to return to the human face, the artistic and writerly face, of the Second World War. We find that individual memory can stand as a microcosm, a reflection in miniature, of the pain and recovery of a nation against a false collective memory, and eventually form a new and healed (or at least healing) one. Beck's art and her honesty provided her with a means to recover from deeply traumatic experiences. Her trajectory could be a model for resilience and healing on a broader scale.

#### Notes

1 Nicole Lapierre, "Dialectique de la mémoire et de l'oubli," 6. In the present article, English translations of French quotations are by the authors.

2 See Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy: De 1944 à nos jours*.

3 According to Henry Rousso, Gaullism further compounded this myth, overriding memory by creating a "national" resistance history: "The Gaullist view stressed military aspects and republican legitimacy. The resistance fighters had been heroic, to be sure, but they had done no more than their duty as soldiers. The 'resistance,' for its part, had stemmed from France as a whole, from the France of Joan of Arc and the *poilus* 'World War I veterans'" (26-27).

4 See, for example, Colin W. Nettelbeck, *Forever French: Exile in the United States, 1939-1945*.

5 Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. See also, by Jean-Pierre Azéma, *Le régime de Vichy et les Français, La France des an-*

*nées noires*, and 1938-1948, *Les années de tourmente*, and by Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande: 1940-1944*. Trans. Janet Lloyd, *France under the Germans*. Films such as Marcel Ophüls's seminal 1969 documentary *Le chagrin et la pitié*, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and more recently, Yves Jeuland's television series *Comme un juif en France*, *Being Jewish in France* (2007) and Roselyne Bosch's *La Rafle*, *The Round Up* (2010) have had enormous impact.

6 Gérard Namer, *Mémoire et société*.

7 Béatrix Beck won the 1952 Prix Goncourt for *Léon Morin, prêtre*. Leaving Paris for Normandy in 1981 (where we were fortunate to visit her in October 1992), she continued to publish at least one book a year, maintaining a lively correspondence and interview schedule into her nineties. See Jean-François Kosta-Théfaine, "Bibliographie des écrits et critiques de Béatrice Beck," 46-52.

8 Published interviews that shed light on Beck's own views of her work include Béatrice Shalit, "En parlant, en écrivant," *Nouvelles littéraires* (May 24, 1984): 36-38; Valérie Marin La Meslée, "Béatrix Beck: Écrire comme on rêve," *Magazine littéraire* (June 1994): 94-103; collected interviews with Marin La Meslée, *Confidences de gargouille* (Paris: Grasset, 1998); Janine Ricouart, "Entrevue avec Béatrix Beck en Normandie le 9 janvier 1995," *Women in French Studies* 6 (1998): 92-101; and Frédérique Chevillot, "Entretien: Béatrix Beck," *Brèves* (March 2003): 17-45. Alain Cavalier (in the series *Portraits de l'écrivain*) and Gérard Mordillat (in the series *Les hommes livres*) have filmed separate interviews with Beck. Beck's new books were consistently reviewed in France, and she has been the topic of conference presentations and articles by U.S.-based critics Frédérique Chevillot (University of Denver) and Susan Petit (College of San Mateo), as well as by the present authors. Petit also regularly reviewed Beck's new works for the *French Review*.

9 Quoted from personal communications from Beck to authors, summer and autumn 1992. Henceforth: PC.

10 Herman also emphasizes that "denial, repression and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level" (2).

11 Béatrix Beck's father was the Belgian Symbolist poet Christian Beck (1879-1916), a friend of André Gide and founder of *Antée*, the Belgian forerunner to *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. See Pierre Masson, "Christian Beck," *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide*, vol. XXI, no. 97 (January 1993, *André Gide et ses amis belges*): 57-64, and Marin La Meslée (1994: 98-99).

12 Beck repeats this line to describe herself, in the 1994 interview with Marin La Meslée (100).

13 *Léon Morin, prêtre* was adapted into a successful film by director Jean-Pierre Melville, with actors Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Paul Belmondo. To Beck, the

fact that it won the Goncourt made her third novel no more valuable than her two earlier books. It was simply the continuation of the others. Furthermore, she maintained she was not really its author, because it was simply the portrait of a man she once knew (Marin La Meslée 1994: 99). Five years earlier, in 1947, Albert Camus and Jacques Lemarchand had championed *Barny* for a new, prestigious award—Gallimard's Prix de la Pléiade. However, Sartre arranged for Jean Genet to win the prize, although Genet had not been nominated. See Edmund White, *Genet* 305-06. After winning the Goncourt, Beck obtained French citizenship (in part with the help of a good friend, the novelist Roger Nimier). She bought an apartment on the rue Bonaparte, coincidentally in the same building as Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1962, when the OAS, which opposed Algerian independence, bombed Sartre's apartment, hers also suffered damage.

14 Beck reminded Marin La Meslée that it was by selling the correspondence between Christian Beck and André Gide that she managed to write *Barny* while living with her Belgian aunt on a farm (Marin La Meslée 1994: 98).

15 After *Cou coupé court toujours* Beck did not publish fiction again until 1977, subsequently writing more than twenty additional volumes. Her later works use what she called her *seconde manière* 'second style,' an imaginative, humorous style that she said gave her great satisfaction, but which she found constantly challenging: "parler [*chaque fois*] d'une façon absolument neuve de choses vraies essentielles et constantes" 'to speak an absolutely new language [every time] about true, essential, everlasting things' (Marin La Meslée 1994: 102). (Note that in addition to the June 1994 special issue of *Magazine littéraire*, Beck has been the featured subject of two other periodicals: *Nord'* [Brussels]. No. 26-28 (1996) and *Brèves* [Villelongue d'Aude, France]. No. 68 (March 2003).

16 A seventh *Barny* novel by Béatrix Beck's late daughter, Bernadette Szapiro, *La première ligne*, continues *Barny's* life story. Here, the character France—*Barny's* daughter—takes up the pen to recount it from her point of view.

17 Young *Barny* also finds extreme pleasure in words. The narrator's brilliant interior life prefigures Beck's writing after 1967, full of humor, fantasy and the free play of imagery.

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