

**'Beckett through Kant: A Critique of Metaphysical Readings'**

**Volume 1**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, August 1998.**



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## Abstract

This thesis calls upon ideas from Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason to disrupt readings of the plays and prose of Samuel Beckett predicated upon metaphysical presuppositions.

The Introduction focuses upon such presuppositions in the criticism of Martin Esslin. In Chapter One, substantial passages of Kantian exposition are given to prepare the ground for a parallel between Kant's critique of metaphysics and those Beckett texts examined through Chapters One, Two, Three and Four. In this first chapter, the limits which Kant places on possible knowledge are compared to the frustrations imposed upon the investigative duo of Beckett's Rough for Theatre II. Chapter Two considers Krapp's Last Tape as a parody of both Proustian and Manichaean metaphysical profundities. Chapter Three examines the consequences of staging the fabrication of a recognizably 'Beckettian' image of the human condition in Catastrophe. Chapter Four engages with the textual specifications of The Lost Ones via an 'immanent' method of analysis, in opposition to 'transcendent' or allegorical readings capable of promoting themes of metaphysical import.

Chapter Five marks a turning-point in the thesis. It investigates why analysis of The Lost Ones should prove as troublesome as it does in Chapter Four. As a response, it details Beckett's efforts toward narrative 'indetermination' and

links this process to the equally troublesome 'noumenon' of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. Chapter Six reassesses the parallels drawn between Beckett and Kant thus far. The paradoxes and flat contradictions contained in Chapters One to Four provide the materials for Chapters Six's re-appraisal of the main thesis pursued here, that a critique of metaphysics can be found in Beckett's works analogous to that supplied by Kant. A secondary thesis is that a tendency toward self-defeat during such an interpretation is inevitable. The Conclusion reassesses this contention.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Department of English Studies and the University of Nottingham for a three-year postgraduate studentship which enabled me to pursue this research. My thanks also to Jon Simons of the School of Critical Theory for allowing me to attend MA lectures in the School. Many thanks to Terence Wilkerson and Robert Kirk of the Department of Philosophy for a warm welcome to a series of invaluable classes and lectures on Kant, Descartes and the Philosophy of Mind. Thanks to John Pilling of the University of Reading for the introduction to Beckett and fielding a series of questions thereafter. I am particularly grateful for the MenCard delivery. Thanks also to mum and dad, David and Julie, Emma and Bobbie Merecki, Bethan Jones, Christa Knellwolf, Manuela Antoniu, Mick Dalton, Joy and Howard Eggerton, Robert Scourfield, Simon Williams and Kam Yen Wong.

Special thanks to Angela Smallwood for one year of official, and three of unofficial, mentoring in the Department of English Studies. A better tor-Mentor could not be found. Thanks to Rosanne Richardson and Ann Collins for their unlimited patience. Thanks to Mac Daly for some essential bits of computer. John Worthen will have to consent to be thanked at last and be called the kindest and canniest of Supervisors, and not only of Supervisors.



## Note on the text

Three dots in square brackets [...] are used here to signal omissions from citations. Where three dots occur alone, the citation reproduces this usage from the source text.

QUESTIONS:

[...]

9. Has the work, for you, a metaphysical dimension? Yes ( ) No ( )

10. What is it (twenty-five words or less)? \_\_\_\_\_

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(Barthelme, 1968, p.82)

## Introduction

### i. Beckett and Kant

There are several worthy things that this thesis does not attempt to be. It is not a scholarly study of Kantian references in Beckett's manuscripts, typescripts or published works. It undertakes no archival research. It does not even try to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Kant's critical philosophy directly influenced Beckett's thought. Its intention rather is to interpret four pieces of Beckett's work, Rough for Theatre II, Krapp's Last Tape, Catastrophe and The Lost Ones, in the light of Kant's critique of metaphysics. Those Beckett texts considered most amenable to Kantian interpretation receive the greatest emphasis here. A deliberate bias may be admitted.

Evidence exists of Beckett's acquaintance with Kant's philosophy, but no effort is made here to contribute to the stock of available biographical facts. Between 1938 and 1939, Knowlson finds Beckett 'reading eclectically but critically' among Descartes, Johnson, Renard and Kant (Knowlson, 1996, p.295). It is specifically Kant 'whom Beckett had been reading enthusiastically in German since his copies had arrived at the beginning of January from Germany' (Knowlson, 1996, p.761, n.161). The year in question would seem to be 1938. This is unlikely, however, to have been Beckett's first encounter with Kant. Pilling takes issue with Ludovic Janvier for dating Beckett's initial interest in Kant to 1930, for 'his lecture "Le concentrisme" refers to Kant and may well be earlier' (Pilling,



1993, p.26, n.16). If the basis of the interpretation of Beckett's works via Kant were dependent upon conscious authorial intention, the Kantian influence would need to be maintained across almost half a century in order to reach into Catastrophe as produced in 1982.<sup>1</sup> As reported by Knowlson, however, the ultimate fate of Beckett's volumes of Kant's philosophy was to be given away to Avigdor Arikha (Knowlson, 1996, p.761, n.162). Knowlson only considers this fact worthy of a small footnote in a major biography of Beckett because the manuscript of 'Petit sot', perhaps Beckett's least-known poem, was discovered between the pages of Beckett's edition of Kant when in Arikha's possession. From the fact of Beckett dispensing with his Kantian volumes, one may urge either that such a saturation in Kantian themes had been achieved that further reference to sources was superfluous or, alternatively, that a strong measure of indifference to Kant's philosophy and the books containing it had been acquired. Neither option is provable nor refutable. Instead, responsibility for bringing together Beckett and Kant will be borne by this thesis, with its justification resting upon interpretative felicity rather than biographical imperatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Pilling does find in Beckett's 'Murphy notebook' (or MS 3000/1 of the International Beckett Foundation's archive at the University of Reading), evidence of 'a very nearly inexhaustible dialogue between the Beckett of the mid-1930s and the post-war Nobel prizewinner' (Pilling, 1992, p.6). Also, as Pilling confirms,

the Murphy notebook provides unambiguous evidence - long suspected, but never so well authenticated - of the importance to Beckett of a distinctively German tradition, especially in regard to philosophy.

(Pilling, 1992, p.14)

This tradition is 'massively present, the key figures being Kant, Schopenhauer and Fritz Mauthner' (Pilling, 1992, p.3).

Despite biographers' considered inattention to this matter, the presence of Kant in the works of Beckett can be demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> The reference to Kant in 'Le concentrisme' is as explicit as could be wished:

what is crystal clear is that, if you insist on rigidifying the Idea of which [Chas] speaks, on concretizing Kant's Thing-in-itself, you would be devaluing to the level of a vaudeville by Labiche the art which, like a resolution of Mozart's, is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable.

(Beckett, 1990b, MenCard 118)

The contrast between the latter two descriptions can be resolved by an appreciation that the 'intelligible' is, in Kantian terms, entirely unknowable, and, as a consequent, 'inexplicable'. There are other direct references. Beckett's Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit refers to 'Kant's cosmological proof of the existence of God' (Beckett, 1965, p.112) notwithstanding Kant's concern, at least in the Critique of Pure Reason, to refute the cosmological proof, as actually and notably deployed instead by Descartes. The Addenda to Watt includes a phrase from Kant's Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, 'das fruchtbare Bathos der

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<sup>2</sup> Here, at least, finding Kant in Beckett is better favoured than Beckett's own assessment as to finding Vico in Joyce:

These [...] aspects of Vico have their reverberations, their reapplications - without, however, receiving the faintest explicit illustration - in 'Work in Progress.'

(Beckett, 1961, p.5)

Erfahrung' (Beckett, 1976, p.254) or 'the fruitful bathos of experience' (Kant, 1950, p.122, n.2). Chapter Two will show a further interest in this. The Unnamable adopts some 'pigsty Latin', 'De nobis ipsis silemus' ('Of myself I say nothing'), which, according to its narrator, 'should have been my motto' (Beckett, 1959, p.332). It is in fact part of Kant's motto or epigraph to the Second Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason (Kant, 1933, Bii, p.xviii).<sup>3</sup> The presence of a recognizably Kantian philosophical vocabulary can be discerned. Variations upon 'pure reason' are a Beckettian standard; Company is Kantian in its first judgement:

Pure reason? Beyond experience. God is love. Yes or no?

No.

(Beckett, 1980, p.73)

A professor, shared between Dream of Fair to Middling Women and More Pricks than Kicks, is concerned with '"the violated matrix of pure reason"' (Beckett, 1993, pp.234-235; Beckett, 1970b, p.84). Macmann of Malone Dies 'was rather of the earth and ill-fitted for pure reason' (Beckett, 1959, pp.243-244). Murphy's losses following the consumption of his biscuits by Miss Dew's dog Nelly amounts to '"Twopence [...] and a critique of pure love"' (Beckett, 1963, p.60). Switching to Kant's Critique of Judgement, 'Unfortunate Belacqua', in Dream of Fair to Middling Women, fails to appreciate the Kantian distinction between

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<sup>3</sup> As Pilling points out, the phrase previously belonged to Bacon's Novum Organum (1620) (Pilling, 1992, p.5).



conceptual and aesthetic judgement, whereby 'beauty, in the final analysis, is not subject to categories, is beyond categories' (Beckett, 1993, p.35). Malone, on the other hand, will not 'say the vital parts, but at least the sensibility and understanding' (Beckett, 1959, p.244); the latter terms mark the most vital distinction of the human faculties made in the Critique of Pure Reason. This distinction between the sensory and the conceptual was earlier exploited by Arsene in Watt:

[...] I perceived it with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding.

(Beckett, 1976, p.42)

For Poème VIII of Beckett's Poèmes 1937-1939, however, the requisite contrast is between 'Lisbonne fumante' and 'Kant froidement penché' (Beckett, 1977, p.46).

Each reference, borrowing or allusion above could have reached Beckett via Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's entanglement in Kantian presuppositions, systems and vocabulary and Beckett's well-documented entanglement in Schopenhauer, further problematize any impulse to cite Kant as a direct philosophical source for Beckett.<sup>4</sup> In addition to incorporating many aspects

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<sup>4</sup> For an examination of the importance of Schopenhauer to Beckett, see, for example, 'Beckett, Proust and Schopenhauer' (Acheson, 1978, pp.165-179); 'Schopenhauer and Beckett's Proust' (Jones, 1986, pp.71-81) and 'Beckett's Schopenhauerian Reading of Proust: The Will as Whirled in Re-Presentation' (O'Hara, 1988,

of the Kantian system into his own philosophy, Schopenhauer also wrote directly upon Kant's critique of metaphysics. Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Representation includes a substantial Appendix devoted entirely to 'Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, pp.413-534). This thesis does not seek to dispute the possibility that each Kantian theme explored below could have been inculcated by a subtle reading of Schopenhauer.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, it is Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics and Critique of Judgement which predominantly supply this thesis' idea of an appropriately 'Kantian' critique of metaphysics in Beckett.<sup>6</sup> Substantial

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pp.273-292).

<sup>5</sup> Sources of Kantian concepts expand as one looks for them; according to Yack, 'Stripped of their rhetorical masks, Marx and Nietzsche are, in a very important sense, left Kantians' (Yack, 1986, pp.30-31). A recognizably Kantian critique of metaphysics can be found in Wittgenstein, Russell, Ayer and Logical Positivism. The 'separation of valid cognition and metaphysics' (Adorno, 1973, p.381) has not, before or since 1781, been restricted to the Critique of Pure Reason. Proponents of such a distinction are not themselves sufficiently separable for the game of source-hunting invoked in Dream of Fair to Middling Women to be successfully concluded:

We stole that one. Guess where.

(Beckett, 1993, pp.191-192)

<sup>6</sup> The pretence is maintained throughout that an attribution to 'Kant' means that all citations, whatever their particular location in Kant's works, are of equal validity in an exposition of the Kantian. To the scholar, the sector of the Critique of Pure Reason from which citations originate is of the first importance, given the philosophical notoriety or respectability of the arguments deployed therein. Here, citations are referenced merely to Section A or Section B, or both, to designate their origin from the First or Second Editions respectively of the Critique of Pure Reason. Arguments as to the merits of and relationship between these editions are not entered into.



passages of exposition of Kant's philosophy are given in the initial sections of Chapter One, are extended in Chapter Five and re-visited in the concluding sections of Chapter Six. The early stages of Chapter One prepare the ground for a parallel between Kant's critique of metaphysics and those Beckett texts examined through Chapters One, Two, Three and Four. The first chapter outlines Kant's theory of the two 'forms' of the intuition, space and time, which necessarily define human perception as empirical, and subsequently examines the incommensurability which Kant urges between empirical evidence and metaphysical conclusions. The limits which Kant places on possible knowledge are compared to the frustrations imposed upon the investigative duo of Theatre II. Chapter Two assesses the relationship between Krapp's Last Tape and the issues it can invoke from Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, including the essential continuity of the subject, the workings of involuntary memory and the possibility of an exit from the flow of linear time. Chapter Two considers Krapp's Last Tape a parody of these Proustian metaphysical profundities. The Manichaeian metaphysical system, the binary terms of which are used by Krapp as a means of organizing thought and experience, is judged by Chapter Two to receive even harsher tests to its dignity in Krapp's Last Tape. Chapter Three attempts to analyse the consequences of staging the fabrication of a recognizably 'Beckettian' image of the human condition in Catastrophe. Chapter Four engages with the detailed textual specifications of The Lost Ones via an 'immanent' method of analysis which seeks to establish itself in opposition to 'transcendent' or allegorical readings capable of promoting



themes of metaphysical import. Such readings can only retain their coherence by transcending the contradictions, inconsistencies and aporias apparent in the stated terms of The Lost Ones itself. Accordingly, the reader may doubt whether Chapter Four, by seeking to avoid such transcendence, can retain its coherence.

Chapter Five marks a turning-point in the thesis. It investigates why analysis of the terms of The Lost Ones as undertaken in Chapter Four should prove so extraordinarily troublesome. As a response, it details Beckett's efforts toward narrative 'indetermination', especially in Watt and Murphy, and links this process to the equally troublesome 'noumenon' of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. Chapter Six reassesses in detail the parallels drawn between Beckett and Kant in the first four chapters here. The shortcomings, paradoxes and flat contradictions contained in Chapters One to Four provide the materials for Chapter Six's re-appraisal of the main thesis pursued here, that a critique of metaphysics can be found in Beckett's works analogous with that supplied by Kant. The secondary thesis is that certain errors and impasses encountered during such an interpretation of Beckett's texts are inevitable rather than disgraceful to the offices of criticism. This is also the point where a temptation toward critical transcendence of the details of Beckett's texts, rejected by Chapter Four, might re-assert itself. Charitably, this structure may be considered 'bien balancé' with, as Beckett recommends, 'affirmation d'abord, négation ensuite' (Beckett, 1983a,

## ii. Beckett criticism

The Beckett-and-philosopher scenario is a staple of Beckett criticism. Kant's critique of metaphysics, however, can hamper the smooth operation of the philosophies of Beckett's more usual companions, Descartes, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Sartre or Heidegger, in so far as their thought involves metaphysical commitments. If metaphysics has always been subject to 'the rifle-fire of scepticism', the Critique of Pure Reason represents the battery of 'the heavy artillery' against such philosophical systems (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.168). Consequently, an analogy between Kant and Beckett can be deployed against readings of Beckett pursued from a Cartesian, Schopenhauerian, Hegelian, Sartrean or Heideggerian metaphysical basis. With Kant taken into account, the relationship between Beckett's writings and other philosophical systems appears critical and parodic. It is not so much a matter of disputing these established philosophical links, as re-interpreting the evaluative attitude taken towards them.

Much Beckett criticism is content to reach the conclusion that metaphysical insight constitutes the greater glory of the

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<sup>7</sup> There will be little other citation of Beckett in French. Some limited comparison of the French and English versions of The Lost Ones is undertaken in Chapter Six; Chapters One to Four, however, are not concerned with the alternative intricacies of the French Fragment de théâtre II, La dernière bande, Catastrophe or Le Dépeupleur. This thesis restricts itself to the English side of the linguistic divide in Beckett's oeuvre.

works of Samuel Beckett. Critics writing from a cultural materialist perspective recommend impatience with Beckett precisely because of the essentialism, and typically pessimism, endemic in the above criticism. The first phase of Beckett's reception in East Germany exemplifies such disapproval:

Beckett was blamed for presenting 'alienation' and the Absurd as ontological and historically irreversible conditions. With a view to his booming reception in the West Beckett's work was seen as an apologia for late bourgeois capitalism. What irritated the theorists and propagandists of socialist realism most were his lack of perspective, his pessimism, and his nihilism. In a manner of speaking he had become a class enemy.

(Huber, 1993, p.50)

It is precisely Beckett's supposed metaphysical content, that which is 'ontological and historically irreversible', which provoked disdain. Despite playing a relatively minor role in Lukács' diagnosis of the distortion of reality inherent in Modernism, Beckett's Molloy does emerge with a particular distinction; the catalyst for condemnation is again Modernism's putative investment in the metaphysical:

What served, with Musil, as the ideological basis of a new typology - escape into neurosis as a protest against the evils of society - becomes with other modernist writers an immutable condition humaine. Musil's statement loses its



conditional 'if' and becomes a simple description of reality. Lack of objectivity in the description of the outer world finds its complement in the reduction of reality to a nightmare. Beckett's Molloy is perhaps the ne plus ultra of this development [...].

(Lukács, 1962, p.31)

A historically contingent situation is mistakenly elevated to the irremediable status of an eternal metaphysical condition. This mis-recognition occurs when 'the modernist writer identifies what is necessarily a subjective experience with reality as such' (Lukács, 1962, p.51). The distinction which Modernism blurs had already been drawn by Nietzsche:

Modern pessimism is an expression of the uselessness of the modern world - not the world of existence.

(Nietzsche, 1968, §34, p.23)

In Modernism, Lukács sees instead the ambition to achieve a 'revelation of the human condition', grounded upon the assumption that 'Man is now what he has always been and always will be' (Lukács, 1962, p.21). For Edward Bond such an ambition, such an assumption and such a wholesale neglect of the historical, signals the 'decadence of that literature':

Writers of the theatre of the absurd in our time write only from weakness because they are trapped in the decadence of our time and have no rational view of the future or of



anything else.

(Bond, 1978, p.x)

If the human condition is essential and fixed, if it is a matter of metaphysical import, any attempt at amelioration or alteration of such an eternal state must necessarily be futile. Such is the stated position of Ionesco, taken up by Sinfield as representative of a shared attitude in the theatrical Absurd:

Such plays challenge conventional assumptions about the world, but politically [...] they are conservative, for they tend to deny the relevance of political commitment [...]. This tendency was attacked by Tynan in his review of The Chairs and The Lesson at the Royal Court (1958). Ionesco replied: 'No society has been able to abolish human sadness, no political system can deliver us from the pain of living, from our fear of death, our thirst for the absolute.' He reversed Marx's dictum that social being determines consciousness: 'it is the human condition that directs the social condition, not vice versa.'

(Sinfield, 1983, p.183)

'"Absurdist" theatre', Sinfield writes, echoing Lukács' critique of Modernism, 'purports to present the ultimate human condition' (Sinfield, 1983, p.183). As the 'ultimate human condition', whatever its baleful consequences, cannot be subject to revision, the 'overall drift' in Absurdist drama may thus be diagnosed as, by default, 'complicit with existing society' (Sinfield, 1983,

p.184). Having been placed among the ranks of Absurdist dramatists,<sup>8</sup> despite never issuing remarks of comparable generality to those of Ionesco,<sup>9</sup> Beckett is subject to the same charges. As Sinfield reports, George Devine, the director of the English Stage Company, 'distrusted political commitment and valued most his theatre's work with Samuel Beckett' (Sinfield, 1989, p.261). These options are presented as mutually exclusive. 'With few exceptions', Stephen Watt records, 'most Marxist critics have echoed Georg Lukács' disdain for the ahistorical, allegorical, bourgeois work of Beckett, Kafka, and others' (Watt, 1987, p.103).<sup>10</sup> It is a disdain predicated upon the alleged metaphysical pretensions of each writer.

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<sup>8</sup> Such is one of Martin Esslin's achievements; 'Both Ionesco and Beckett', Esslin is assured, 'are concerned with communicating to their audiences their sense of the absurdity of the human condition' (Esslin, 1960, p.671). The Theatre of the Absurd (first published 1961) placed Beckett and Ionesco within the same dramatic genre.

<sup>9</sup> Ionesco wrote of a fixed human condition; consider by contrast Beckett's comments on the experience of the Irish Red-Cross workers in Saint-Lô in his post-war radio broadcast 'The Capital of Ruins' (1946):

they got at least as good as they gave, [...] they got indeed what they could hardly give, a vision and sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again.

(Beckett, 1990a, pp.27-28)

When a 'conception of humanity' can 'be thought again' under the pressure of concrete experience, that conception is defined as contingent rather than metaphysical.

<sup>10</sup> The most notable exception was Adorno. 'Beckett's Ecce Homo is what human beings have become' (Adorno, 1980, p.190), Adorno argues, not as a result of any metaphysical necessity, but rather as a response to actual, and contingent, historical and social circumstances.

It is these very metaphysical pretensions which operate to the delight of other strands of Beckett criticism. O'Hara turns the evaluative criteria of the cultural materialist position upside down:

The nouvelles foreshadow the trilogy in achieving a point of view from which mere social criticism is excluded. To blame the hero's plight on society [...] would be as absurd as blaming it on his nationality. It is existence itself that victimizes him.

(O'Hara, 1970, p.5)

As Hamm, not Beckett, laments in Endgame, 'you're on earth, there's no cure for that!' (Beckett, 1986, p.118). Butler expands discursively upon Hamm's portentous proclamation:

Beckett seems to be in violent revolt against the nature of this world and it is clearly not something political or psychological that he is revolting against. It is something ontological. In general terms it is la condition humaine that is wrong, there is something wrong at the root of the human situation, something wrong that no amount of love or donations to relief agencies will cure, something wrong ontologically.

(Butler, 1984, p.151)

The assurance that aid of any kind must always prove useless can provide a comforting justification for Hamm's decision to hand



over neither oil, bread nor corn to his various supplicants. The bad terms of human existence are not his responsibility. But the narrative which leads up to Hamm's metaphysically resonant statement of the incurability of the evils of the human situation does include details of a human situation which is open to amelioration:

Enough of that, it's story time, where was I? [Pause.  
Narrative tone.] The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. [...] He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears. [...] Come on, man, speak up, what is it you want from me, I have to put up my holly. [Pause.] Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was ... bread for his brat. Bread? But I have no bread, it doesn't agree with me. Good. Then perhaps a little corn? [...] Corn, yes, I have corn, it's true, in my granaries. But use your head. I give you some corn, a pound, a pound and a half, you bring it back to your child and you make him - if he's still alive - a nice pot of porridge [NAGG reacts], a nice pot and a half of porridge, full of nourishment. Good. The colours come back into his little cheeks - perhaps. And then? [Pause.] I lost patience. [Violently.] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!

(Beckett, 1986, p.116-118)

Considered as an explanation as to why his granaries should not be depleted of a pound and a half of corn begged on behalf of a

starving child, Hamm's metaphysical diagnosis loses some of its disinterested philosophical grandeur.<sup>11</sup> Yet, according to Rosen, it is precisely the kind of ease that Hamm seeks via a self-serving metaphysical pessimism that Beckett himself recommends. 'His works describe', Rosen maintains, 'a quest for effective calm, an acceptance of life's inevitable sorrows' (Rosen, 1976, p.66); the familiar assurance of futility returns:

To secure this peace of mind, it is necessary to maintain that all efforts are futile, because all conditions of life are essentially similar. Distinctions of milieu are not only irrelevant to this sort of vision, but, as local accidents suggesting irrelevant meanings and explanations, contraindicated; hence the general lack of concrete details in Beckett's writing.

(Rosen, 1976, p.66)

There is, amongst proponents of 'this sort of vision', a distinct lack of attention to the 'concrete details in Beckett's writing'. It is the details of Endgame which serve to re-define its metaphysical gestures from authorially-sanctioned assertions into parodic pricks against episodes of staged metaphysical

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<sup>11</sup> Consider also the metaphysical overtones of Hamm's warning that 'Outside of here it's death' (Beckett, 1986, p.96). Before such an assertion is cited as confirmation of the wreck of nature or universal holocaust in Endgame, it should be taken into account that Hamm above all else wishes to dissuade Clov from abandoning him. The mundane self-interested motives of the statement are clear when it is interpreted in the context of the play. Only when detached from the situation in which it occurs can it be unproblematically presented as a metaphysical diagnosis.

exposition.<sup>12</sup>

The details of Beckett's work must be underplayed by critics seeking to extract a metaphysical vision of the human condition. Each Beckett text is reduced by them to the provision of an identical metaphysical lesson. For Butler, Beckett's work 'is a whole, a unified and self-consistent statement about existence' (Butler, 1984, p.154), indeed, 'the series of ontological parables we read into Beckett may in the end resolve themselves into one unified statement' (Butler, 1984, p.155). The significance of Beckett's works could be subsumed, Butler thinks, under this one abstract metaphysical message. Thus Beckett's theatre, through all its variations, can be ultimately valued for its 'dramatized metaphors for human existence' (Hesla, 1971, p.151). 'In the case of Beckett', Hesla confirms, 'what is being revealed in and through his art is simply the condition of man' (Hesla, 1971, p.164). The prose texts are thus identical to the drama in subject-matter. 'For Beckett', Baldwin concurs, 'there is one story and one story only that is worth telling, and that is the story of quest, of man in search of the ground of his

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<sup>12</sup> A metaphysical set-piece speech in Waiting for Godot is similarly afflicted by a note of bathos:

VLADIMIR: [...] Astride of a grave and a difficult birth.  
Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts  
on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is  
full of our cries. [He listens.] But habit is a great  
deadener.

(Beckett, 1986, p.84)

The lack of empirical substantiation provided as Vladimir's refers the audience to 'The air [...] full of our cries' introduces a parodic tone, consistently under-exploited by commentators, which lightens the metaphysical weight consistently attached to this passage.



being' (Baldwin, 1981, p.8). The Trilogy accordingly 'speaks for mankind' (Levy, 1980, p.62):

The narrator must always speak as Beckettian Man with the vestigial voice of his species.<sup>13</sup>

Malone's stories demonstrate this clearly. Their characters have experiences to be sure, yet these concern not personal problems but the unmitigated suffering of human existence. That is the denominator to which all individuals are reduced.

(Levy, 1980, p.63)

Beckett does not supply 'the private wail of one man in pain, but that of humanity, the human species' (Levy, 1980, p.62), all of whom, presumably, suffer equally under the burden of the human condition. Yet the scenario of Catastrophe, for example, is extraordinarily inappropriate as an illustration of any such

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<sup>13</sup> If Levy is correct in this contention, then the laxity of 'pupil Mahood' in his study of mankind is outrageously indulged by the narrator of The Unnamable:

Frankly, between ourselves, what the hell could it matter to pupil Mahood, that man was this rather than that?

(Beckett, 1959, p.340)

The narrator is barely more respectful of the grave subject-matter upon which critics consider him also engaged:

it might sometimes almost be wondered if all their ballocks about life and death is not as foreign to their nature as it is to mine.

(Beckett, 1959, p.388)

Metaphysicians should not so doubt the efficacy of their project, but as Malone commiserates, 'It's vague, life and death' (Beckett, 1959, p.225). Whatever else it does, the Trilogy does not unproblematically confirm its credentials as a work with metaphysical intent.

equalization of suffering. Müller confesses that critics also took some little time to overcome the specificity of the problems trailed by Catastrophe's dedication to Václav Havel:

At first Catastrophe seems to have been written for a very specific group, occasion and situation, like Ohio Impromptu, until its universal significance is revealed.

(Müller, 1993, p.263)

Concrete specificity is assumed to represent a fault needing correction. The singularly strange text How It Is must, like Catastrophe, also be raised to universality:

Through his vocabulary and his bits and scraps of remembered knowledge, the narrator of How It Is subsumes all humanity.

(Brienza, 1987b, p.93)

According to Brienza, 'our timeless narrator can represent all human beings' (Brienza, 1987b, p.95).<sup>14</sup> Yet the narrator of How It Is specifically states that 'of the four three quarters of our total life only three lend themselves to communication' (Beckett, 1964, p.143). The narrator is unable to represent the totality of his own experience, let alone that of 'all human beings' (Brienza, 1987b, p.95). How It Is comes 'complete with missing parts' (Beckett, 1965, p.101). The next scene in the sequence initiated, that of the narrator tormented by Bom in Part Four,

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<sup>14</sup> In case the category of 'all human beings' does not contain them, Brienza further contends that the narrator also represents 'all writers' (Brienza, 1987b, p.95).

the companion piece to his own tormenting of Pim in Part Two, cannot be narrated. The story cannot be told from the position of the victim, for he is permitted to utter according only to the whims of his tormenter. The Protagonist of Catastrophe is staged and spotlighted enduring an equally enforced silence. We may speculate as to the experiences of the Protagonist; they are not communicated from his perspective. We may inquire as to 'Bom and me part four what that will be' (Beckett, 1964, p.133), but the narrator can offer no statement of it:

but we shall never see Bom at work I shall pant on in  
abeyance in the dark the mud the voice being so ordered I  
quote that of our total life it states only three quarters  
(Beckett, 1964, p.142)

The narrator of How It Is actively rejects the universality which Brienza nevertheless awards him. Metaphysical generality and the details of Beckett's texts do not make common cause.<sup>15</sup>

### iii. Martin Esslin, metaphysics and self-defeat

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<sup>15</sup> Note in contrast the terms in which Beckett approves Vico:

We notice that there is little or no attempt at subjectivism or abstraction, no attempt at metaphysical generalisation. We are presented with a statement of the particular.  
(Beckett, 1961, pp.16-17)

It is attention to awkward detail, disruptive to generalization and thus metaphysical readings, which criticism has often been disinclined to pay to Beckett's texts. Chapter Four attempts an analysis of the 'statement of the particular' in regard to The Lost Ones, to the necessary detriment, as will be seen, of its own argumentative coherence.



According to Cohn, writing in 1990, one should remain 'appreciative of the formative impact of Martin Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd' (Cohn, 1990, p.8) on the study of twentieth-century drama.<sup>16</sup> The Theatre of the Absurd, as directed by Esslin, is also dedicated to the provision of metaphysical propositions. Absurdity incorporates an essential metaphysical aspect; 'the avant-garde theatre of our time is concerned with the Absurd', according to Esslin, - 'the Absurd in its metaphysical sense' (Esslin, 1960, p.670). This twentieth-century avant-garde, in a manner disconcertingly similar to Tillyard's Elizabethan dramatists, supplies a metaphysical world-picture to its audience. Esslin perceives that a 'sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet' (Esslin, 1968b, pp.23-24). Particularity is again devalued, for Esslin requires 'man stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position or historical context', the better to be 'confronted with the basic choices,

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<sup>16</sup> The extent of Esslin's influence on the study of Beckett is demonstrated in a survey of teachers of Waiting for Godot undertaken by Schlueter and Brater and published in 1991:

The work to which teachers most frequently send their students (with some caution regarding terminology) is Martin Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd, a study that provides both a theatrical and a philosophical context for the play. In fact, every respondent who recommended secondary works mentioned Esslin, and several who resisted secondary materials conceded that if they did require ancillary reading, it would be Esslin.

(Schlueter and Brater, 1991, p.4)

Esslin has been more influential than any other critic in his identification of Beckett's literary works with metaphysical tracts. Accordingly, he is commended within major strands of Beckett criticism.

the basic situations of his existence' (Esslin, 1968b, p.391).<sup>17</sup> It would be difficult to frame a version of Beckett more provocative to the sensibilities of cultural materialist critics.

It is the precise nature of the metaphysical reality represented by the Absurd which manoeuvres Esslin toward logical self-defeat, an impasse which will become familiar as this thesis proceeds. It is established by Esslin that metaphysical reality is so constituted as to render metaphysical discoveries impossible. The Absurd can reveal nothing concerning metaphysical reality except that it is mysterious, meaningless and purposeless. As Esslin interprets these discoveries, they signal the end of metaphysical speculation as such. By the reckonings of the Absurd, 'the world has lost its central explanation and meaning' (Esslin, 1968b, p.389); there is now no 'firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe' (Esslin, 1968b, p.390). Esslin neglects to

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<sup>17</sup> Initially, Esslin judges that such a 'process of contraction' has been 'carried out triumphantly' in Endgame, a play which may be considered 'a shaft driven deep down into the core of being' (Esslin, 1968b, p.67). Attention to Beckett's later and greater minimalism, however, provides grounds for an unexpected critique of the play's newly discovered inessential opulence:

Nell, after all, is Hamm's mother, and he hears her voice (no doubt not literally) emerging from a dustbin. That bin is merely there as a picturesque illustrative detail. In Footfalls the mother's voice remains; the dustbin, and the mother's face protruding from it, have been dispensed with as inessentials.

(Esslin, 1980, p.119)

Esslin's revised evaluation of Nell's dustbin as a 'picturesque illustrative detail' is arguably the most comic remark in Beckett criticism.



notice that he now implies new certainties and firm foundations, those of meaninglessness and purposelessness. There are 'many', according to Esslin,

searching for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless - absurd.

(Esslin, 1968b, p.389).

Unexpectedly, such a new non-centred world-disorder can yet be encapsulated in a single word - 'absurd'. Esslin installs absurdity as a replacement 'integrating principle' for a world defined by its very deprivation of such a thing.<sup>18</sup> With regard to the theatre categorized as Absurd, Esslin writes:

The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found

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<sup>18</sup> This self-defeating lapse back into the type of thinking from which one wishes to break decisively is also exhibited in LeMay and Pitts' description of the Absurd:

Absurdity is recognizing the world without the concepts we posit upon it. This is the experience - horrifying to some existentialists, liberating to others - of meaninglessness.  
(LeMay and Pitts, 1994, p.61)

The apocalypse of conceptual ordering can be postponed, however, for 'Absurdity' is merely an alternative concept posited upon the world. The Absurd does not mark an exit from conceptual understanding as such, but offers an alternative concept for metaphysical deployment.



wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions.

(Esslin, 1968b, p.23)

After this revelation of error, 'life must be faced in its ultimate, stark reality' (Esslin, 1968b, p.391). But as illusions depart to reveal the reality of absurdity, Esslin has merely struck a new metaphysical chord rather than achieved an exit from metaphysical thinking. The definition of reality as meaningless or Absurd remains within the frame of metaphysical speculation as a positive assertion. To define the world as inherently senseless or purposeless is to claim metaphysical knowledge. The difference between knowing the universe to be meaningless and knowing it to be meaningful is easily overestimated: both are metaphysical assertions. This confusion is evident in Esslin's comments on Camus:

In one of the great, seminal heart-searchings of our time, The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs [...].

(Esslin, 1968b, p.23)

Esslin should not so easily proclaim the universal shattering of beliefs: his very statement concerning 'a world of shattered beliefs' is itself a belief about the world which appears to lie exempt from the universal destruction it announces. Such internal logical tensions destabilize Esslin's assertions. Should he state that 'In a meaningless universe, it is always

foolhardy to make a positive statement' (Esslin, 1968b, p.84), Esslin has supplied a positive statement against positive statements. To declare 'the impossibility of ever attaining certainty' (Esslin, 1968b, p.85) implies the metaphysical certainty of an eternal state of uncertainty. Made self-reflexive, Esslin's statements become self-refuting.

Surprisingly, after issuing so many, Esslin began by declaring the impossibility of establishing any metaphysical truths. Such is the concern of this thesis also. Esslin's summary of his project is uncomfortably close to the Kantian critique of metaphysics undertaken here:

What then are some of the main features that are common to the work of the playwrights of the 'Theatre of the Absurd'?

Above all, there is their shared basic attitude to the world and life: a recognition that any certainties, any valid insights into the essential nature of the universe or the purpose of human life on earth are beyond our reach, humankind being too short-lived, too limited in its perceptual apparatus and in its intellect ever to penetrate these ultimate mysteries. Camus and Sartre [...] coined the phrase that summed up this recognition: what is beyond explanation, inaccessible to any rational explanation or understanding must remain 'senseless' and - in that special meaning of the word - 'absurd.'

(Esslin, 1991, p.44)

Man's inability to know is known to constitute the essential human condition. Esslin thus lapses back to dependence upon a metaphysical assertion in order to establish why human access to metaphysical verities cannot occur. Notwithstanding the self-refuting strategies used by Esslin to support his conclusions, this thesis wishes to replicate Esslin's stance as to the incommensurability between metaphysical knowledge and the human faculties. What cannot be achieved in epistemology by any human endeavour cannot be achieved in Beckett's works either: such is a central part of the case here against metaphysical readings of Beckett.<sup>19</sup> If Beckett were issuing the metaphysical assertions which many critics claim to discover in his work, then the robust judgements of cultural materialist criticism would be justified. But it should be part of the cultural materialist case that the metaphysical dimension which Beckett is castigated for cultivating, is, in principle, inaccessible to him. Chapter One below sets out Kant's case as to why metaphysical knowledge must remain unavailable and applies these arguments to Theatre II. Yet Chapter Six is also obliged to consider finally whether these Kantian arguments, upon which the main thesis here relies, do not themselves retain covert metaphysical presuppositions in order to facilitate, contradictorily, a critique of metaphysics. It must be considered whether the self-defeating loop which destabilizes Esslin's critical conclusions is perceptible within

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<sup>19</sup> Beckett himself is not given to extravagant claims to knowledge; witness the pulling up short of Watt's Arsene:

the fit is perfect. And he knows this. No. Let us remain calm. He feels it.

(Beckett, 1976, p.39)



Kant's critical philosophy and thus transported into the accounts offered below of Theatre II, Krapp's Last Tape, Catastrophe and The Lost Ones. Just as the logic of Esslin's arguments can be disputed without direct reference to the Beckett texts which are their occasion, Chapter Six below is primarily concerned with the self-defeating arguments and logical inconsistencies committed through the first four chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, the very persistence of such internal flaws might demonstrate something about the nature of writing about Beckett, metaphysics and the conjunction or dissociation of each. This thesis exists to undermine the positions adopted by Esslin and other critics who encumber Beckett with metaphysical meanings, yet discovers that the ability to avoid reproducing the logical impasses typical of Esslin's criticism is only dearly won, and perhaps would be better lost. The experience of writing it can at least bequeath an inverted insight into the gnomic terms with which Beckett begins the second of his Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit:

In search of the difficulty rather than in its clutch. The disquiet of him who lacks an adversary.

(Beckett, 1965, p.109)

Disquiet in this study is provoked by the suspicion that it has lapsed into the clutches of the difficulty it seeks to address, that Esslin, complete with metaphysical presuppositions and self-defeating procedures, is not its adversary but its model.

## Chapter One

### Rough for Theatre II: Knowledge in Leaps and Bounds

#### i. Kant's critique of metaphysics

The contribution of Kant to exercises in metaphysics consists principally in the deletion of their epistemological security. Kant's Critique of Pure Reason recommends that philosophy be more frugal in the number of propositions it permits to reside within the bounds of 'knowledge'. Provoked by metaphysical extravagance, Kant demands retrenchment:

The greatest and perhaps sole use of all philosophy of pure reason is [...] only negative; since it serves not as an organon for the extension but as a discipline for the limitation of pure reason, and, instead of discovering truth, has only the modest merit of guarding against error.

(Kant, 1933, A795/B823, p.629)

In the 'formal determination, on principle, of the boundary of the use of our reason' (Kant, 1950, §57, p.100), empiricism will lie within the limits, metaphysics without. A strict logical division is to be maintained between empirical knowledge and metaphysical speculation. The metaphysical concept 'cannot be an object of sensuous intuition', which is precisely what the empirical object must be (Kant, 1950, §57, p.101). Kant removes 'any point or line of contact' (Kant, 1950, §57, p.101) between these two areas of philosophical inquiry. Infinitely extended empirical inquiries cannot bridge this qualitative division.

Henceforth, speculative leaps across the empirical-metaphysical boundary are outlawed.

The investigators in Beckett's Rough for Theatre II are charged with the task of discovering whether a suitable exit from the bounds of the disastrous empirical experience of their case-study, C, may be made via a leap. Theatre II designs a situation which is peculiarly explicit in its willingness to put itself at the mercy of metaphysical interpretations. The means of exit from an existence of unrelieved suffering, a 'high double window open on bright night sky', is strategically positioned 'Upstage centre' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). C, 'Standing motionless before left half of window with his back to the stage' (Beckett, 1986, p.237), contemplating the exterior 'void' (Beckett, 1986, p.245), is, as befits a 'Croker', apparently at the very point of suicide. A 'briefcase crammed with documents' (Beckett, 1986, p.237) contains the material for an extensively researched and minutely detailed suicide-note. Disinterested third-party investigators have identified 'Work, family, third fatherland, cunt, finances, art and nature, heart and conscience, health, housing conditions, God and man' as, one and all, 'so many disasters' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). A wider acknowledgement of the futility of existence is recommended on humanitarian grounds, for 'How many unfortunates would be so still today if they had known in time to what extent they were so?' (Beckett, 1986, p.247). In readiness for a more general inclination to suicide, Beckett has thought to provide additional capacity; C has at his disposal, after all, a 'double window' (Beckett, 1986, p.237).



In the assessment of the advisability of suicide, the evidence is overwhelmingly on one side. The symmetry of the stage set is breached by this single factor: 'Downstage audience left' a 'small table and chair' and 'extinguished reading-lamp' is complemented by the 'briefcase crammed with documents'; 'Downstage right, forming symmetry' an 'identical table and chair' receives the distinction of 'Extinguished lamp only' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). C has positioned himself on the side of the evidence, before the 'left half of window' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). The evidence of the Testimonies, besides documenting a catalogue of adversities, also emphasizes C's resolute attention to them:

B: I quote again: 'Of our national epos he remembered only the calamities, which did not prevent him from winning a minor scholarship in the subject.' Testimony of Mr Peaberry, market gardener in the Deeping Fens and lifelong friend. [Pause.] 'Not a tear was known to fall in our family, and God knows they did in torrents, that was not caught up and piously preserved in that inexhaustible reservoir of sorrow, with the date, the hour and occasion, and not a joy, fortunately they were few, that was not on the contrary irrevocably dissolved, as by a corrosive. In that he took after me.' Testimony of the late Mrs Darcy-Croker, woman of letters. [Pause.] Care for more?

A: Enough.

B: I quote: 'To hear him talk [...] you would have thought

he had never set foot outside hell [...].'

(Beckett, 1986, p.240)

Despite due amplification of 'that incident of the lottery' (Beckett, 1986, p.240), permission is granted for C to jump.

Although the volume of evidence exceeds A's estimation of 'Enough' to furnish a definite recommendation, neither the investigation nor Theatre II itself are able to discover a procedure for finishing which would install a sense of completeness. The play remains amongst the 'Roughs'; C declines to make his meticulously justified leap within the allotted stage time.<sup>1</sup> Reduced ultimately to matches as a source of enlightenment, A reintroduces C as a character he is finally unable to assess or touch. According to a reading informed by Kantian strictures on the limits of possible knowledge, the task of the investigators in Theatre II is one which must necessarily lack conclusion in just this way. Entering the stage space defined by Theatre II, A and B are immediately assigned positions which emphasize its physical limits: A 'sits with his back to

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<sup>1</sup> The Unnamable must be a similar disappointment to those kind enough to attempt to persuade him to take his 'last step':

They can't do everything. They have put you on the right road, led you by the hand to the very brink of the precipice, now it's up to you, with an unassisted last step, to show them your gratitude. [...] Through the splendours of nature they dragged a paralytic and now there's nothing more to admire it's my duty to jump, that it may be said, There goes another who has lived.

(Beckett, 1959, pp.335-336)

But they ask too much: 'The last step! I who could never manage the first' (Beckett, 1959, p.336).



right wall', B 'with his back to left wall' (Beckett, 1986, p.237).<sup>2</sup> Dutifully, A and B push to the limits of their permitted area of investigation; yet the nature of their assignment demands transcendence of these necessary limits. The metaphysical potentialities of Theatre II do not require extravagant critical guile to abstract. The investigators A and B, and by implication the play itself, seek to establish a substantive position on the nature and value of the human condition. The concrete experiences of the case-study C constitute the evidence for deliberation. The verdict is in accord with venerable strains of philosophical pessimism.<sup>3</sup> But Theatre II, thus 'worked [...] up' and primed to go 'down well' in the context of Beckett's presupposed allegiance to systems of metaphysical pessimism, retains disconcerting links with the

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<sup>2</sup> The curious idea of being trapped in space is found also in the tale of Macmann in Malone Dies, where 'space hemmed him in on every side and held him in its toils' (Beckett, 1959, p.280). The inability of the subject to escape the frame of space, in the Kantian system, will indeed prove a restriction.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett's acknowledged familiarity with the works of Schopenhauer, perhaps the most determined exponent of metaphysical pessimism, should consolidate such a reading. The condition of 'men's lives', varying between 'emptiness and monotony' and the 'unpleasant and repulsive' (Schopenhauer, 1974, §396, p.652) does not admit amelioration. Schopenhauer will be comforted by 'neither constitutions, legal systems, steam-engines, nor telegraphs', none of which 'can ever make anything that is essentially better' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.443). Even examples of happiness are set as traps by a duplicitous fate:

The comparatively happy are often only apparently so, or else, like those of long life, they are rare exceptions; the possibility of these still had to be left, as decoy-birds.  
(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.573)

As Schopenhauer superfluously confesses, 'It is not [...] my purpose here to write a Utopia' (Schopenhauer, 1974, §125, p.247).



'skit' (Beckett, 1986, p.240).<sup>4</sup> Contrasted with the boundaries imposed by Kant on the proper uses of pure reason, the nature of the metaphysical investigation dramatized in Theatre II reclassifies the play as a comedy of errors.

Metaphysical inquiry is concerned with 'those highest ends that most concern humanity' (Kant, 1933, A464/B492, p.423), with delineating 'the conditions of existence in general' (Kant, 1933, A483/B511, p.435). The faculty of pure speculative reason, discounting the circumstantial and contingent, aims at the abstraction of eternal verities, whether ontological or evaluative.<sup>5</sup> Philosophical dignity is at stake here; as Kant acknowledges, metaphysics comprises 'those enquiries which owing to their importance we consider to be far more excellent, and in their purpose far more lofty, than all that the understanding can learn in the field of appearances' (Kant, 1933, A3/B7, p.46). In this investigation 'we prefer to run every risk of error rather than desist from such urgent enquiries, on the ground of

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<sup>4</sup> Its situation is also aligned with the early play Eleutheria which, presumably judged to be even less than a 'skit', Beckett refused to see published in his lifetime. As the 'condition' of 'Man' is 'repugnant to him - more or less' (Beckett, 1996, p.161), the play again explores the question of suicide. Dr Piouk is the prime advocate of 'The great refusal [...] that only man is capable of, the most glorious one he is capable of, the refusal of Existence!' (Beckett, 1996, p.161). Theatre II revisits this territory.

<sup>5</sup> Beckett's titular formulation How It Is (1964, first published 1961) signals both senses simultaneously. As Abbott notes, without redundancy, 'there is considerable critical support for the position that How It Is is indeed about how it is' (Abbott, 1973, p.141). An attempt to 'tell the ultimate truth' is promised by this title (Bishop, 1986, p.27). Saul Bellow's Mr Sammler's Planet employs the same phrase with the same overtones: 'All metaphysicians please note. Here is how it is' (Bellow, 1971, p.12).

their dubious character, or from disdain and indifference' (Kant, 1933, A3/B7, p.46). The character of metaphysics, as delineated in the Critique of Pure Reason thus unites obligation with ultimate impossibility.

The particular statements of metaphysics must themselves exhibit necessity; 'trifling about probability and conjecture', according to Kant, 'are suited as little to metaphysics as to geometry' (Kant, 1950, pp.117-118). Geometry, mathematics and metaphysics are, for Kant, modes of knowledge comprised of synthetic a priori propositions. The force of the boundary between metaphysics and empiricism imposes itself here: to qualify as a priori a proposition must be necessary; propositions drawn from the empirical sphere are, by definition, a posteriori and contingent. Thus, under Kant's direction:

we shall understand by a priori knowledge, not knowledge independent of this or that experience, but knowledge absolutely independent of all experience. Opposed to it is empirical knowledge, which is knowledge possible only a posteriori, that is, through experience. A priori modes of knowledge are entitled pure when there is no admixture of anything empirical.

(Kant, 1933, B2-3, p.43)

The a priori status of propositions, 'as is requisite in metaphysics' (Kant, 1950, p.119), is the guarantee of their necessity. 'Experience teaches us what is, but does not teach



us that it could not be other than what is 'it'; thus, it follows, 'no empirical grounds of proof can ever amount to apodeictic proof' (Kant, 1933, A734/B762, p.590). Necessity, and hence metaphysics itself, 'cannot be derived from experience' (Kant, 1933, B14-15, p.52).<sup>6</sup>

Kant further subdivides modes of knowledge between the analytic and the synthetic a priori; metaphysics is to partake exclusively of the latter. The analytic a priori merely makes explicit what is necessarily contained in a given concept; its prerogative is to state trivial, although necessary, truths. Avoidance of offence against the principle of contradiction necessitates its validity; no extension of knowledge is involved.<sup>7</sup> The synthetic a priori, the mode of metaphysics and mathematics,<sup>8</sup> purports to make a substantive contribution to knowledge; these propositions must 'add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it, and which no analysis could possibility extract from it' (Kant,

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<sup>6</sup> Scientific research into the necessary constitution of natural elements supplies a difficulty for Kant. A substance with the constitution 'two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen' is, a priori, water; this would seem to be, to the confusion of Kant's divisions, a necessary empirical fact derived from empirical investigations.

<sup>7</sup> That 'all bachelors are unmarried' is an example of an analytic a priori truth. Chapter Four below applies 'analysis' in this Kantian sense to The Lost Ones.

<sup>8</sup> The classification of mathematics as a system of synthetic a priori propositions continues to be a controversy that exercises Kantian commentators. Kant maintains that the proposition  $7 + 5 = 12$  is synthetic: 'The concept of 12 is by no means already thought in merely thinking this union of 7 and 5' (Kant, 1933, B15, p.53), a contention which is indeed 'more evident if we take larger numbers' (Kant, 1933, B16, p.54).



1933, A7/B11, p.48). Here, the contemplation of concepts is insufficient; attention to a Kantian antinomy of pure reason sharpens the point:

Consider the conclusion that the world is eternal and consider the opposing conclusion that the world has existed for a limited period of time. By reflecting on the concept of the world it cannot be made out which of these conclusions is true. The concept of the world leaves it unspecified whether the world has always existed. Each of these conclusions thus affirms of the world a predicate not contained in the concept of the world. Kant points out that these conclusions are thus not only a priori; they are also synthetic.

(Dryer, 1966, p.48)

Since the function of the synthetic a priori 'is not merely to analyse concepts which we make ourselves a priori of things' but also to 'add to the given concept something that was not contained in it' (Kant, 1933, B18, p.54), the principle of contradiction alone cannot determine the validity of such assertions. Non-contradiction, 'beyond the sphere of analytic knowledge', has 'as a sufficient criterion of truth, no authority and no field of application' (Kant, 1933, A151/B191, p.190). Systems of metaphysics, in Kant's critique, may be 'free from all inner contradiction' and yet be 'either false or groundless' (Kant, 1933, A150/B190, p.190). Exploiting their a priori freedom from empirical restriction, internally consistent

metaphysical statements risk dismissal as 'empty', their concepts being without purchase on any sensible or even super-sensible object.

## ii. Space and time

The security of empirical knowledge, with its concepts derived from objects available to sensuous intuition, is always to be contrasted with the unanchored conceptual flights of speculative metaphysics, manipulating concepts for which no object can be given. Exploration of the conditions which render empirical experience possible, however, is itself to yield a priori and synthetic knowledge. Kant's 'legitimate' metaphysics of empiricism is constituted by knowledge independent of but necessary to the possibility of experience. In Kant's account, it is an a priori deduction that the intuition of all empirical objects must take place within the frame of time and space. Space and time constitute the irreducible 'form' of empirical sensibility:

If we remove from our empirical concept of a body, one by one, every feature in it which is [merely] empirical, the colour, the hardness or softness, the weight, even the impenetrability, there still remains the space which the body (now entirely vanished) occupied, and this cannot be removed.

(Kant, 1933, B5-6, p.45)

A position in space is not a contingent empirical feature of the object, but an a priori condition of its availability to sensuous intuition. Similarly, 'all appearances whatsoever, that is, all objects of the senses, are in time, and necessarily stand in time-relations' (Kant, 1933, A34/B51, p.77). What appears is contingent, but it must appear within time:

We cannot, in respect of appearances in general, remove time itself, though we can quite well think time as void of appearances. Time is, therefore, given a priori. In it alone is actuality of appearances possible at all. Appearances may, one and all, vanish; but time (as the universal condition of their possibility) cannot itself be removed.

(Kant, 1933, A31/B46, p.75)

Among all the contingent possibilities of empirical intuition, 'The only intuition that is given a priori is that of the mere form of appearances, space and time' (Kant, 1933, A720/B748, p.581).<sup>9</sup> While 'the matter of knowledge [obtained] from the senses' is entirely contingent, 'the form for the ordering of this matter' is necessarily that of the spatio-temporal frame

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<sup>9</sup> Space and time are inextricably linked by Kant as twin forms of the intuition. Their relationship is also acknowledged in The Unnamable:

And even should the notion of time dawn on his darkness, at this punctual image of the countenance everlasting, who could blame him? Involving very naturally that of space, they have taken to going hand in hand, in certain quarters, it's safer.

(Beckett, 1959, p.366)



(Kant, 1933, A86/B118, p.121).

This frame is 'the subjective condition of sensibility, under which alone outer intuition is possible for us' (Kant, 1933, A26/B42, p.71). Space and time are the necessary impositions of the subject upon the empirical object. What this object may be in itself, 'without regard to the constitution of our sensibility' (Kant, 1933, A28/B44, p.72) through which it is perceived remains unknown:

The transcendental concept of appearances in space [...] is a critical reminder that nothing intuited in space is a thing in itself, that space is not a form inhering in things in themselves as their intrinsic property, that objects in themselves are quite unknown to us, and that what we call outer objects are nothing but mere representations of our sensibility, the form of which is space. The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it.

(Kant, 1933, A30/B45, pp.73-74)

Empiricism can only intuit its object under conditions of its own manufacture. The object cannot be intuited independently of the conditions of intuition. To be perceived at all, all empirical objects must be perceived within space and time; consequently, the apprehension of all empirical objects is conditioned by these forms of intuition and therefore cannot be identical with the

thing-in-itself, or 'noumenon', that which is unconditioned. It is the province of metaphysics to raise questions concerning the nature of objects unconditioned by the form of human intuition. Empirical intuition, as the very source of these conditions, can offer it no assistance.

The security of empirical knowledge is based upon its very restriction to appearances. Empirical appearances are a function of the a priori constitution of human sensibility and cognition; in consequence, 'the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce' (Kant, 1933, A125, p.147). In Kant's 'Copernican Revolution', the constitution of the subject determines appearances; rather than passively representing nature, human perception imposes form upon it. Now, as Deleuze asserts, 'it is we who are giving the orders' (Deleuze, 1984, p.14). At once restricted and empowered by its inability to access things-in-themselves, 'the understanding [...] is itself the lawgiver of nature' (Kant, 1933, A126, p.148), organizing appearances according to its own constitution. This Kantian form of idealism is distinguished as transcendental: it is a priori and shared by each human subject. These 'subjective conditions of thought' furnish, via their universal operation in human cognition, 'objective validity' in the empirical realm (Kant, 1933, A89/B122, p.124). Transcendental idealism is the guarantee of the security of empirical knowledge:

The transcendental idealist is, therefore, an empirical

realist, and allows to matter, as appearance, a reality that does not permit of being inferred, but is immediately perceived. Transcendental realism, on the other hand, [...] regards the objects of outer sense as something distinct from the senses themselves, treating mere appearances as self-sufficient beings, existing outside us. On such a view as this, however clearly we may be conscious of our representation of these things, it is still far from certain that, if the representation exists, there exists also the object corresponding to it. In our system, on the other hand, these external things, namely matter, are in all their configurations and alterations nothing but mere appearances, that is, representations in us, of the reality of which we are immediately conscious.

(Kant, 1933, A371-372, p.347)

Here, the gap between intuition and the 'real' independent object, the source of Cartesian scepticism concerning the empirical, is dissolved; the direct impression that the apprehended object actually produces in the human sensibility is the limit of what can be known about that object. Intuition is limited to appearances, but these appearances are immediately known and thus incorrigible. The Kantian subject knows its own impressions of objects, not the objects themselves. The configuration of these appearances is similarly a function of the subject. The intuition supplies the forms of space and time and the faculty of the understanding the 'categories' under which all



appearances must be subsumed.<sup>10</sup> These impositions of the subject comprise a conceptual scheme, but one which is transcendental, universal and necessary.<sup>11</sup> These appearances, or 'phenomena', are the field of inquiry of empiricism; metaphysics seeks the thing-in-itself beyond appearances and the formal conditions imprinted by the subject. This object, the noumenon, is that which, a priori, cannot be encountered in empirical experience.

### iii. Empirical verification vs empty concepts

Empirical intuition is necessarily in space and time; further, if an intuition is in space and time it is necessarily empirical and not metaphysical. Space and time 'cannot be applied to things in themselves' (Kant, 1933, A149/B188, p.189), for 'things in space and time are given only in so far as they are perceptions [...] - therefore only through empirical representation' (Kant, 1933, B147, p.162). The empirical is necessarily conditioned, whereas metaphysics seeks the unconditioned. Yet under this system, metaphysical concepts are

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<sup>10</sup> The functioning of the categories of the understanding will be reassessed in Chapter Five in relation to Watt and Murphy. Here, the emphasis is on the forms of sensuous intuition, space and time.

<sup>11</sup> Kant considers the conceptual scheme of the transcendental subject to have been deducted a priori in the Critique of Pure Reason. It details how empirical experience must be organized in human cognition. The conceptual schemes extracted from linguistic structures by later theorists differ in that they emphasize the disparity between organizational systems imposed upon 'matter' by individual subjects. The latter support relativity; the Kantian plan seeks to guarantee objectivity.

left entirely without corresponding objects. If the metaphysician claims intuitive insight into 'what cannot be an object of experience', which is the basis of his claim to go beyond empiricism, he will 'always really change this into an appearance', for intuition is only possible via the imposition of conditions which convert noumena into phenomena (Kant, 1933, Bxxx, p.29). The concepts of empiricism refer to objects locatable within space and time; the concepts of metaphysics, in so far as they are not empirical, refer to no objects of possible experience. Metaphysics thus violates the 'principle of significance', a principle drawn from Kant by Logical Positivism<sup>12</sup> and Strawson:

For any employment of concepts in propositions purporting to give knowledge of objects to be a significant employment, that employment must be tied to a possible intuition, to empirical conditions of the concept's application. Any employment of a concept not subject to this limitation, the limitation to objects of possible experience, is illegitimate.

(Strawson, 1966, p.156)

Further, 'there is no conceivable way in which concepts could be instantiated in our experience except by our being aware of instances of them in space and time' (Strawson, 1966, p.20).

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<sup>12</sup> In Logical Positivism and A.J. Ayer in particular, this is termed rather 'the principle of verification' (Ayer, 1990, p.171). It too allows only the analytic a priori and empirical propositions to pass the test for 'meaningful' statements.

Dismissing that which is to be found in space and time as merely empirical appearance, metaphysics comprises 'the propensity to think in terms of ideas for which no empirical conditions of application could be specified' (Strawson, 1966, p.16).<sup>13</sup> According to Kant, 'we can never transcend the limits of possible experience, though that is precisely what this science is concerned, above all else, to achieve' (Kant, 1933, Bxix-xx, p.24).

The achievements of metaphysics are thus restricted to the manipulation of ideas:

To think an object and to know an object are thus by no means the same thing. Knowledge involves two factors: first, the concept, through which an object in general is thought (the category); and secondly, the intuition, through which it is given. For if no intuition could be given corresponding to the concept, the concept would still be thought, so far as its form is concerned, but would be without any object, and no knowledge of anything would be possible by means of it. So far as I could know, there would be nothing, and could be nothing, to which my thought could be applied. Now, [...] the only intuition possible to us is sensible; consequently, the thought of an object in general, by means of a pure concept of understanding, can become knowledge for us only in so far as the concept is

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<sup>13</sup> Metaphysics transgresses, in Strawson's titular formulation, The Bounds of Sense (1966).



related to objects of the senses.

(Kant, 1933, B146-147, pp.161-162)

Concepts which extend beyond the possibilities of empirical verification are 'empty': 'through them we have indeed thought, but in this thinking we have really known nothing; we have merely played with representations' (Kant, 1933, A155-156/B194-195, p.193). If the concept is such that its object may be given in experience, if the concept has application, it is an empirical concept which can have no metaphysical repercussions. 'Metaphysics rests on concepts alone' (Kant, 1933, Bxiv, p.21), and, being cut off from all possible intuition of their objects, concepts which are necessarily empty.

To be escorted beyond the boundaries of knowledge, metaphysical concepts do not have to be proved contradictory. Concepts may have sense without having reference. From an internally consistent arrangement of synthetic a priori concepts, the actual existence of anything to which those concepts relate is not concluded. Thinking cannot legislate that the objects of its concepts are brought into being:

In the mere concept of a thing no mark of its existence is to be found. For though it may be so complete that nothing which is required for thinking the thing with all its inner determinations is lacking to it, yet existence has nothing to do with all this, but only with the question whether such a thing be so given us that the perception of it can, if

need be, precede the concept. For that the concept precedes the perception signifies the concept's mere possibility; the perception which supplies the content to the concept is the sole mark of actuality.<sup>14</sup>

(Kant, 1933, A225/B272-273, p.243)

Moreover, the nature of the metaphysical assertion ensures that the citation of items of empirical evidence contrary to it can do no damage, for 'once we are outside the circle of experience, we can be sure of not being contradicted by experience' (Kant, 1933, A4/B8, p.46). Empirical evidences themselves can neither prove nor refute any metaphysical proposition; rather, it is in this very disconnection from the empirical that metaphysics violates the principle of significance and defines its own concepts as empty.

The completion of empirical investigation in all its branches could provide no conclusions of metaphysical import; exhaustive knowledge of appearances remains 'toto coelo different from knowledge of the object in itself' (Kant, 1933, A44/B61, p.84). An overwhelming mass of evidence is inadequate:

since premisses that are simply empirical do not lead to anything supersensible, nothing can supplement the imperfection of such an empirical series. Not the smallest approximation, therefore, occurs in the attempt to reach the

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<sup>14</sup> These issues will be revisited below in Chapter Four, Section xii.

supersensible, or a knowledge of it, from such premisses; and consequently no probability enters into a judgement about the supersensible, when it rests on arguments drawn from experience.

(Kant, 1952, Part II, §90, pp.138-139)

The a priori is not implicit in the a posteriori; the necessary cannot arise from the contingent; there is no means of inference from the sensible to the supersensible; metaphysical conclusions cannot have an empirical basis. The conclusion of Kant's account of metaphysics is that 'it is useless to endeavour to prove transcendental propositions by examples' (Kant, 1933, A554/B582, p.477). As Carnap argues too:

Since rigorous inference can never lead from experience to the transcendent, metaphysical inferences must leave out essential steps. The appearance of transcendence stems from this.

(Carnap, 1959, p.145)

Empirical evidence can never supply the logical steps to metaphysical conclusions. All leaps between these incommensurable orders of knowledge are illegitimate.

#### iv. Theatre II: position in time and space

The subject locates every item of its sensory experience within the parameters of space and time; an item that can be



encountered no where and at no time has removed itself from possible empirical manifestation. Similar conditions apply to the perceiving subject: empirical perception must occur at some time and at some place. The observer must stand in temporal and spatial relations to the object of his perception. It would be most convenient if that to be observed approximately coincided with the observer in time and space.<sup>15</sup> In the operation of empirical observation, the knowing subject occupies a particular and thereby limited position in space and time and is necessarily limited in his observations. In the terms of Thomas Nagel, the empirical subject bequeathed by Kant comprises a 'gratuitous creature existing in a tiny morsel of space and time' (Nagel, 1986, p.61). For Nagel, objectivity requires the transcendence of position itself; objective observers must 'alter their conception of the world so that it is no longer just the view from where they are but in a sense a view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986, p.5). Nagel's paradoxes are intentional and instructive: in the 'pursuit of objective knowledge [...] we must get outside ourselves, and view the world from nowhere within it'; yet, 'it is impossible to leave one's own point of view behind entirely without ceasing to exist' (Nagel, 1986, p.67). The objective observer standing in no spatio-temporal relation to the empirical world is defined out of existence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A more exact coincidence, if achieved at any speed, often results in considerable injury.

<sup>16</sup> In Kantian terms this observer can only be God; Nagel's omniscient unsituated consciousness is found (in spite of itself) in the brain-in-a-vat scenario. This consciousness, directly 'fed information in words and images about what was going on in the world, what other people saw and heard, and so forth', claims 'a conception of the world without having any perspective on it'

The investigators of 'how it is' in Theatre II are emphatically positioned in space and time. Space is the condition of possibility of the symmetrical organization demanded by the stage set. Thus, chair and table 'Downstage audience left' find their precise position at the point 'equidistant from wall and axis of window' (Beckett, 1986, p.237); 'Downstage right' is to reproduce this pattern in mirror-image, 'forming symmetry' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). Whatever the symbolic significance of the set thus organized, it is evident that this organization itself can take place only in space and by utilizing spatial positions defined in relation to other positions. Alteration of the position in space of one investigator in relation to the other is an operation of delicate precision; where elsewhere B might simply go to A, in Theatre II this sequence is choreographed in fraught detail:

B: May I come to you? [Pause.] I need animal warmth.

[Pause.]

A: [Coldly.] As you like. [B gets up and goes towards A.]

With your files if you don't mind. [B goes back for papers and briefcase, returns towards A, puts them on A's table, remains standing. Pause.] Do you want me to take you on my knees?

[Pause. B goes back for his chair, returns towards A, stops before A's table with the chair in his arms. Pause.]

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(Nagel, 1986, pp.62-63). It seems rather, that it would have multiple perspectives rather escape perspective as such.

B: [Shyly.] May I sit beside you? [They look at each other.]  
No? [Pause.] Then opposite. [He sits down opposite A,  
looks at him. Pause.] Do we continue?

(Beckett, 1986, p.244)

Earlier, amidst a series of spatial modifiers, the investigators, quite explicitly, examine the very constitution of 'space':

A: [...] Is that Jupiter we see?

[Pause.]

B: Where?

A: Switch off. [They switch off.] It must be.

B: [Irritated.] Where?

A: [Irritated.] There. [B cranes.] There, on the right, in  
the corner.

[Pause.]

B: No. It twinkles.

A: What is it then?

B: [Indifferent.] No idea. Sirius.<sup>17</sup>

(Beckett, 1986, p.239)

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<sup>17</sup> In Beckett's Texts for Nothing, the perspective of Sirius is aptly characterized as taking the long view of present difficulties:

the days and nights when in spite of all I was calm,  
treading back and forth the futile road, knowing it short  
and easy seen from Sirius, and deadly calm at the heart of  
my frenzies.

(Beckett, 1984, Text VII, p.93)

The investigators of Theatre II, however, view Sirius from an earth-bound position, an inversion of the possibility of transcendence.



The demotion of an a priori assertion ('It must be') into a confession of ignorance ('No idea') is effected by the admixture of information derived from empirical observation ('It twinkles'). Furthermore, what may be empirically observed in space is determined by the point in time at which the observation is attempted:

A: Full moon.

B: Not quite. Tomorrow.

[A takes a little diary from his pocket.]

A: What's the date?

B: Twenty-fourth. Twenty-fifth tomorrow.

(Beckett, 1986, p.238)

A's diary, a physical register of the course of time, is complemented by a timetable, an abstract of the expected position in space of certain empirical items at determinate points in time.<sup>18</sup> The movements in space and time of A and B are to be relative to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of these crucial objects:

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<sup>18</sup> In Watt, the inter-relation of trains, their pre-determined movements in time and the movements required to catch them, form the basis of a hypothetical solution to one of the many impasses afflicting the eponymous hero:

The thought of leaving town was most painful to him, said Mr. Hackett, but the thought of not doing so no less so. So he sets off for the station, half hoping he may miss his train.

You may be right, said Mr. Nixon.

Too fearful to assume himself the onus of a decision, said Mr. Hackett, he refers it to the frigid machinery of a time-space relation.

Very ingenious, said Mr. Nixon.

(Beckett, 1976, p.19)

B: [...] Let's go.

[A consults his watch.]

A: It is now ... ten ... twenty-five. We have no train before eleven twenty. Let us kill the time here, talking of this and that.

B: What do you mean, eleven twenty? Ten fifty.

[A takes a time-table from his pocket, opens it at relevant page and hands it to B.]

A: Where it's marked with a cross.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.246-247)

With so many calculations as to correct timings, the watch is a privileged object in Theatre II. With A's entrance and positioning in space ('back to right wall') negotiated, 'He switches on lamp, takes out his watch, consults it and lays it on the table' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). The investigators' position in time is thus marked throughout the course of their deliberations. The main entry under the 'positive elements' of C's biography, the 'incident of the lottery' (Beckett, 1986, p.240), is similarly scored by allusions to time and space:

B: I quote: 'The last time I laid eyes on him I was on my way to the Post Office to cash an order for back-pay. [...] He was seated [...] with his back to the Thompson works. To all appearances down and out. He sat doubled in two, [...] on drawing nearer I could see he was merely scrutinizing, between his feet, a lump of dogshit. I moved it slightly with the tip of my

umbrella and observed how his gaze followed the movement and fastened on the object in its new position. This at three o' clock in the afternoon if you please! I confess I had not the heart to bid him the time of day, I was overcome. I simply slipped into his hip pocket a lottery ticket [...]. When two hours later I emerged from the Post Office, having cashed my order, he was at the same place and in the same attitude. I sometimes wonder if he is still alive.' Testimony of Mr Feckman, certified accountant and friend for better and for worse.

[Pause.]

A: Dated when?

B: Recent.

A: It has such a bygone ring.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.241-242)

The single notable success of C's life is procured in this game of coincidence, where, notably, the 'winner receives high class watch' (Beckett, 1986, p.241). The prize is a precision piece of equipment to calculate and manifest time, a 'marvel of accuracy, showing year, month, date, day, hour, minute and second', 'solid gold' and 'super chic' (Beckett, 1986, p.241). With its 'unbreakable hair spring' and 'anti-shock, anti-magnetic, airtight, waterproof' constitution (Beckett, 1986, p.241), this is a mechanism guaranteed to repulse all interference with its proper operations. Moreover, 'he didn't procure it himself. It was a gift' (Beckett, 1986, p.241); as



Kant seeks to prove, time is an inescapable given. The lottery of empirical events is played out within the a priori framework of time.

For A and B, future time coincides with the modification of their position in space for 'Tomorrow we're at Bury St Edmunds' (Beckett, 1986, p.242). If C's empirical existence is to persist, this too has its spatio-temporal organization, as has been brought to the attention of the investigators: 'At the end of the month shoosh back to the barge' (Beckett, 1986, p.239). If suicide is preferred, this must be executed within the same spatio-temporal constraints:

B: Let him jump.

A: When?

B: Now.

A: From where?

B: From here will do. Three to three and a half metres per floor, say twenty-five in all.

(Beckett, 1986, p.238)

Position of take-off and landing is crucial to the successful rearrangement of the constitution of the empirical subject; B's preference is that he should 'land on his arse, the way he lived. The spine snaps and the tripes explode' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). In the empirical sphere, such effects follow from such causes. The task of isolating the metaphysical cause which is to set this train of determinate empirical events in motion, however, focuses

on more intricate problems of entailment.

## v. Empirical evidence

The insistence upon spatio-temporal form which pervades Theatre II<sup>19</sup> emphasizes that every item of evidence produced on this restricted stage in support of a metaphysical test-case is empirical and contingent. Every testimony drawn upon is the report of a subject positioned in time and space. Each respondent appends to their testimony some combination of three items, any of which destroys the possibility of their access to the unconditioned: their particular position in space (otherwise recognizable as one's address), the nature of their relationship with C and a summary of the restricted area of their empirical expertise, or occupation. The insight of 'Mrs Aspasia Budd-Crocker, button designer in residence, Commercial Road East' (Beckett, 1986, p.240), is necessarily limited to the empirical. Every testimony is assessed by the investigators in time and

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<sup>19</sup> In Horn Came Always, the narrator is amenable enough to explain his emphasis upon temporal relations:

These allusions to now, to before and after, and all such yet to come, that we may feel ourselves in time.  
(Beckett, 1984, p.193)

Details as to time and date do damage to metaphysical pretensions; Barthelme's 'Marie, Marie, Hold on Tight' concisely hits the note of bathos cultivated in Theatre II between mundane particularity and universalist ambition:

Henry Mackie, Edward Asher and Howard Ettle braved a rainstorm to demonstrate against the human condition on Wednesday, April 26 [...].  
(Barthelme, 1961, p.115)

They, or others, could have done so anytime: the timeless is not topical.

space. Every testimony relates empirical events of times and spaces past:

A: [...] 'Aged ten, runs away from home first time, brought back next day, admonished, forgiven.' [Pause.] 'Aged fifteen, runs away from home second time, dragged back a week later, thrashed, forgiven.' [Pause.] 'Aged seventeen, runs away from home third time, slinks back six months later with his tail between his legs, locked up, forgiven.' [Pause.] 'Aged seventeen runs away from home last time, crawls back a year later on his hands and knees, kicked out, forgiven.'

(Beckett, 1986, pp.244-245)

The severity of C's punishment increases in proportion to his duration in time and persistence in spurning a designated spatial position; it is the vengeance of the relatives against the contingent.

Investigator A, whilst signalling the investigators' occupation of a position in time, briefly considers an alternation in space, and the concomitant abandonment of their mission:

A: [...] What a night! [...] Shall we go? [B switches on, rummages in his papers.] The crux. [B rummages.]

(Beckett, 1986, p.237)



The 'crux', as a point of intersection, demands that two points on separate lines (or on a line recoiling across itself) coincide in time and space; relationships in time and space are indeed the crux, the critical issue. While A reflects upon himself, B is intent on a different line of inquiry: items of evidence are lost among the paperwork. It is singularly difficult to lose a priori propositions; one should not require records but merely reflection to ascertain that which is necessarily the case. The empirical, however, as a series of facts which come into being only as a result of the contingent operations of experience, may, as history demonstrates, be so mislaid. Neither will the isolated facts detailed in this evidence, even if perfect in themselves, unite to form a single edifice:

A: May we not be mistaken?

B: [Indignant.] We have been to the best sources. All weighed and weighed again, checked and verified. Not a word here [brandishing sheaf of paper] that is not cast iron. Tied together like a cathedral. [He flings down the papers on the table. They scatter on the floor.] Shit!

(Beckett, 1986, p.238)

That which is amenable to checking and verification via sources, as the principles of significance and verification demand, can only be the empirical. B's characterization of his evidence is

emphatically in terms of the material and sensible.<sup>20</sup> But empirical facts are contingent and thereby insufficient to exclude the possibility 'that some day things might change' (Beckett, 1986, p.240). Individual experience is an insufficient guide to the eternal; as the narrator of The Unnamable acknowledges, 'Nothing has ever changed since I have been here. But I dare not infer from this that nothing ever will change' (Beckett, 1959, p.296). The metaphysical, the unchanging and unconditioned nature of things-in-themselves, cannot be derived from empirical experience. Investigator B is not sympathetic to such fine distinctions:

B: [Violently, slapping down his hand on the pile of papers.] There's the record, closed and final. That's what we're going on. Too late now to start saying that [slapping to his left] is right and that [slapping to his right] wrong. You're a pain in the arse.

(Beckett, 1986, p.246)

The phrasing of the stage directions maliciously involves B in cross-purposes: according to his signals, his right is wrong and his left is right. His evaluations and spatial distinctions are faulty. In his summary of the evidence, distinctions between those aspects which can be confirmed within the limits of empirical investigation, 'Work, family, third fatherland, cunt,

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<sup>20</sup> B's choice of a 'cathedral' as an apt comparison with the status of his evidence is notable; in each case, a hope exists that the merely material can be infused with spiritual significance (Beckett, 1986, p.238).

finances', 'health, housing conditions' and 'nature', and those which lie outside these limits, 'art', 'heart and conscience', 'God and man', are equally items on the list to be subsumed under the category of 'so many disasters' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). All distinctions, between the items and between the epistemological status of the items, are confounded in identity. For B, the conclusion is self-evident: 'Let him jump.' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). A, in response to the evidence thus presented, declines an immediate leap to this conclusion: '[Meditative.] Does it follow? [Pause.] Does it follow?' (Beckett, 1986, p.238).

#### vi. Finite observation

The tools granted to B to aid his metaphysical inquiries are 'an extinguished reading-lamp and a briefcase crammed with documents' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). A is supplied with a lamp only. A 'bright night sky' (Beckett, 1986, p.237) is without; inside, all is dark apart from the light of the lamps and the enlightenment offered by the documents as to the sufferings of C. In Theatre II, however, there is 'No need to take everything literally' (Beckett, 1986, p.246). B, the collator of the empirical evidence, is issued with a chronically malfunctioning lamp; the record of evidence emerges in fits and starts in parallel with the erratic behaviour of this instrument of observation.<sup>21</sup> Mirroring the nature of empirical evidence

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<sup>21</sup> Investigator B can read from his notes only when his lamp lights; in Horn Came Always, the relationship between light and speech is inverted:

He consulted his notes by the light of an electric torch.



itself, B's account of the content of the documents is conditioned by contingent circumstances. B's conclusions and the fortuitous behaviour of his lamp are each the result of 'a faulty connection' (Beckett, 1986, p.242). B is subject to interruptions in his efforts to marshall the empirical evidence; equally, his assessment of this discontinuous evidence is dependent upon argumentative non sequiturs. B's metaphysical conclusions do not follow from his empirical premises.

As investigator A asserts 'Sternly', 'To accumulate documents is not enough' (Beckett, 1986, p.246). Moreover, enough documents can never be accumulated. The series of empirical incidents from which the investigators' evidence is drawn is necessarily incomplete. The contingency of the empirical implies that one item in the series is caused or conditioned by an antecedent item; this item similarly has its antecedent cause. The requirement to produce a cause for the cause provokes an infinite regress: in the empirical series, there is no unconditioned item, no uncaused cause.<sup>22</sup> The observer concerned not to base his verdict on incomplete evidence is obliged to enter this infinite regress. To seek to escape this sequence by the postulation of an unconditioned first cause

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Then he switched it off and spoke in the dark. Light  
silence, dark speech.

(Beckett, 1984, p.193)

<sup>22</sup> In Waiting for Godot, the conclusions of the empirical inquiries made by the researchers cited in Lucky's speech are 'established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labours of men', for these conclusions are drawn from 'the labours unfinished of Testew and Cunard' and 'the labours of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished' (Beckett, 1986, p.42). This contingency is itself essential to empiricism.

is to cease empirical inquiries and revert to the metaphysical:

Kant makes it very clear that he regards the idea of a non-contingent ground of contingent existence as providing the main motive power behind the exorbitant claim to knowledge of God's existence. He pictures us as almost irresistibly driven to seek an escape from the endless chain of causal dependence of one empirical existence on another by assuming that there exists something upon which all that contingently exists depends finally for its existence but which is itself free from causal dependence on anything else and therefore does not belong to the sensible world at all.<sup>23</sup>

(Strawson, 1966, p.223)

Metaphysical pessimism asserted a priori may replace God as the favoured exit from the empirical chain. The unverifiable nature of the argument remains identical.

In contrast to the investigators of Theatre II, it is the prerogative of God to be omniscient. For the empirical subject, the 'whole' cannot be given in experience. Totality itself is not amenable to positioning within particular spatio-temporal coordinates, the very condition for empirical intuition. As A

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<sup>23</sup> In Lucky's speech, 'Given the existence' of a 'personal God', such an existence is 'quaquaquaqua outside time without extension' (Beckett, 1986, p.42). Empirical inquiries are not possible outside these parameters; no object can be given to intuition to substantiate the concept upon which all is based. The scenario required by so many philosophers and mimicked in Lucky's speech, '"God" at the apex as a given truth' (Nietzsche, 1968, §17, p.15), is absolutely indemonstrable.

'raises his lamp and shines it about him' (Beckett, 1986, p.238), the focus moves from one point to another; as each particular item is picked out by the lamp's beam, another is returned to the general obscurity. The perception of the subject is analogous. The series of empirical evidences concerning C cannot be completed; the character of the whole cannot be apprehended. Theatre II can only halt at an arbitrary point, its evidences lacking their ultimate cause, the condition of C defined only by particular observations and not a general diagnosis. For the purposes of establishing a metaphysical proposition, the continued citation of empirical evidences is futile. The extension of the empirical investigation is considered and rejected: 'A: [...] [B [...] switches on his lamp, switches it off again immediately.] How end?' (Beckett, 1986, p.249).

Finite observation is the obligation and defect of the empirical witness:

If he or she claims to have seen everything, he or she is not credible. If he or she is credible, it is insofar as he or she has not seen everything, but has only seen a certain aspect. He or she is thus not absolutely credible.

(Lyotard, 1988, p.45)

As Kant argues, empirical inquiry is reliable but inherently limited, metaphysics unbounded but unsustainable. The metaphysical cannot be derived from the empirical. Yet there remains a substitute route by which knowledge may be extended



beyond empirical particulars to the general or the universal: the procedure of induction must be given its chance to sufficiently incline C to take his leap.

### vii. Inductive extrapolation

Leaps are the speciality of induction. Where premises do not properly entail the desired conclusion, induction works to fill the '"epistemic gap"', 'not so much by an "inference" as by a leap - an "inductive leap"' (Rescher, 1980, p.14). It is a tool for investigators in possession of incomplete evidence and obliged to produce a conclusion:

Induction is an instrument for question-resolution in the face of imperfect information. It is a tool for use by finite intelligences, capable of yielding not the best possible answer (in some rarified sense of this term), but the best available answer, the best we can manage to secure in the existing conditions in which we do and must conduct our epistemic labors.

(Rescher, 1980, p.7)

Upon the basis of regularities that are observed in a finite number of particulars, induction proceeds to legislate for the cases that remain unobserved. If all observed items exhibit a particular feature, inductive reasoning postulates the general

rule that all such items will exhibit that feature.<sup>24</sup> From the evidence of 'so many disasters' in the past experience of C (Beckett, 1986, p.238), the application of inductive procedures would issue the conclusion that future experience is likely to exhibit the same feature; disaster is the general rule informing these particulars. Inductive judgements are gambles which, in the absence of complete evidence, nevertheless offer 'rational optimization in our quest for information' (Rescher, 1980, p.20).<sup>25</sup> Future experience is necessarily unavailable at any given time of decision; a generalization from the available data in Theatre II suggests that action taken to avoid the possibility of future experience would, in the case of C, be advantageous. Induction constructs probabilities sufficiently high to secure rational assent and action thereupon. The irrational alternatives are either acceptance of the opposite conclusion, the probability of which is merely such that it cannot absolutely be excluded, or the refusal to choose.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Inductive reasoning gives 'conclusions of the form "All As are E" from premises of the form "Some As are E"' (Priest, 1990, p.181).

<sup>25</sup> Induction offers the sceptic 'the opportunity to acquire relief from agnosticism by accepting sentences as true that are not deductively entailed by his evidence' (Levi, 1967, p.143). Rescher characterizes the problem of the rationality of inductive generalizations as 'a fundamentally Kantian problem: How can limited experience of nature provide a suitable basis for the claims of generalized knowledge needed to render empirical science possible?' (Rescher, 1980, p.1).

<sup>26</sup> Moran's scrupulous rationalism, for example, leads to an irrational paralysis as to 'how I was to deal with Molloy, once I had found him':

There was no good my saying, Let me see now, what is the usual thing? There were no usual things, in my instructions. Admittedly there was one particular operation that recurred from time to time, but not often enough to be,



However, even the sceptic's refusal to decide remains a decision. And if the objection to induction in general is that particular instances of inductive reasoning have led to erroneous conclusions, then the sceptic employs an inductive procedure to amplify doubts against induction. In regard to its application in Theatre II, the problem of induction take two different forms. In the first place, induction may be suspected of harbouring a hidden metaphysical clause. According to Hume, the 'appeal to past experience decides nothing in the present case' (Hume, 1978, I.III.VI, p.91) and yet induction proposes 'that those instances, of which we have had no experience, resemble those, of which we have had experience' (Hume, 1978, I.III.VI, p.89). To effect this transition, Hume charges, induction assumes the metaphysical proposition that 'the course of nature continues always uniformly the same' (Hume, 1978, I.III.VI, p.89).<sup>27</sup> This proposition, in its concern with the nature of the whole, the whole of nature, is not open to empirical confirmation. This 'Resemblance Thesis' postulates the stability of (incompletely verified) natural laws, and requests a commitment to the belief that 'the truth is

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with any degree of probability, the one I was looking for. But even if it had always figured in my instructions, except on one single occasion, then that single occasion would have been enough to tie my hands, I was so scrupulous.

(Beckett, 1959, p.138)

In an inversion of inductive procedures, the exception is accorded sufficient weight to invalidate the rule.

<sup>27</sup> Nagel is conveniently bold in stating the metaphysical implications of this assumption: 'Observed regularities provide reason to believe that they will be repeated only to the extent that they provide evidence of hidden necessary connections, which hold timelessly' (Nagel, 1986, p.84).



systematic' (Rescher, 1980, p.23).<sup>28</sup> In the absence of this presupposition, even the highest inductive probability remains doubtful. There is no 'a priori guarantee that induction will succeed' (Rescher, 1980, p.156).

In contradistinction, 'it is a necessary truth that any inductive inference is fallible' (Stove, 1986, p.4). Yet the 'working up' of this 'harmless necessary truth' into a '"cosmic" feeling of insecurity' (Stove, 1986, p.106) is perhaps a voluntary indulgence:

to generate the pseudo-problem of justifying induction, you must make a mere logical possibility a source of anxiety: you must make the fact, which is an inseparable feature of inductive inferences, that the conclusion may be false though the premiss be true, felt to be an alarming contingent defect of such inferences.

(Stove, 1986, p.199)

There is only one circumstantial context in which Stove will resign his equanimity, that of induction 'plus the threat of death' in the case of an erroneous conclusion.<sup>29</sup> Induction

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<sup>28</sup> Inductive inferences cannot negotiate the 'catastrophe', that which inaugurates a point of qualitative discontinuity between past and future experience. Here, nature declines to obey 'a set of unchanging laws which can be inferred with considerable probability from our past observations' (Schlesinger, 1983, p.218). See below Chapter Three, Section vii and Chapter Six, Sections xxi-xxiii.

<sup>29</sup> Stove's given fact in this scenario is '(M) Most of the balls in this urn are black, and Bob is a ball about to be drawn from it'; charged to predict the colour of Bob, the conclusion

'does not preserve truth all the time; but, as you are rational, you cannot have meant, situated as you are, to ask for that degree of reassurance' (Stove, 1986, p.205). In Theatre II, the candidate for suicide would prefer a conclusion guaranteeing the certainty of hopelessness. Upon this one may act rationally. In the case of death attending one's conclusions, the inclination to ensure one's arguments are sound is maximized. Theatre II sets up the optimal case for a philosophical demand for certainty; induction can only delineate probabilities. In this context, as Stove finds, 'it is now the difference between valid and merely probable inference, not the resemblance between them, which is painfully vivid to my mind' (Stove, 1986, p.204).<sup>30</sup> Induction from the empirical evidence can never give necessity. The investigators of Theatre II follow the procedure of induction as supplied by Kant:

Several particular instances, which are one and all certain, are scrutinised in view of the rule, to see whether they follow from it. If it then appears that all particular instances which can be cited follow the rule, we argue to its universality, and from this again to all particular

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which induction recommends is '(O) Bob is black' (Stove, 1986, p.203). Add the threat of death in the case of error:

Suppose I learn, however, that I will be shot at once if Bob is not black. This addition to my total evidence does not (it should not be necessary to say) change the probability of O. But it is apt, all the same, to give a novel turn to my philosophy of probable inference.

(Stove, 1986, p.204)

<sup>30</sup> Bob remains probably black, but Stove, now losing his repose, interjects, in point of fact about properties, that 'Nothing can be probably black' (Stove, 1986, p.204).

instances, even to those which are not themselves given.

(Kant, 1933, A646-647/B674-675, p.535)

The general ruling regarding C's experience, 'so many disasters' (Beckett, 1986, p.238), is proposed prior to the full review of evidence; all particular items cited confirm the validity of the ruling. With the universality of this rule thus established, all future episodes in C's experience, which are not given, will conform to the general ruling. Induction concludes 'Let him jump' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). But this conclusion, like Lucky's, should arrive 'not so fast and considering what is more' (Beckett, 1986, p.42). If induction operates on empirical evidence then:

the rule it supplies [...] would be as contingent as the experience upon which it is based. Since the universality and necessity of the rule would not be grounded a priori, but only on induction, they would be merely fictitious and without genuinely universal validity.

(Kant, 1933, A196/B241, p.223)

Induction cannot prove that all empirical items of a certain type must exhibit the empirical features of those so far observed. Necessity, a priori entailment and universality are not amongst its gifts. Induction aims towards but cannot guarantee universality:

experience never confers on its judgements true or strict,



but only assumed and comparative universality, through induction. We can properly only say, therefore, that, so far as we have hitherto observed, there is no exception to this or that rule. If, then, a judgement is thought with strict universality, that is, in such manner that no exception is allowed as possible, it is not derived from experience, but is valid absolutely a priori.

(Kant, 1933, B3-4, p.44)

The situation of Theatre II is precisely that limit case where the highest probability is insufficient: here, 'arguments must be either deductive or defective' (Hudson, 1968, p.307).

The justification of suicide has a peculiar impact upon the proper functioning of induction. As a process of estimating probabilities, induction must always be willing to reassess its conclusions in the light of new evidence. The possession of 'an inductively warranted answer in hand must never be taken as a basis for shutting the door to further inquiry' (Rescher, 1980, p.21). Kant is similarly concerned that the assumption of 'transcendental hypotheses' will 'deprive reason of all the fruits that spring from the cultivation of its own proper domain, namely, that of experience' (Kant, 1933, A773/B801, p.615). Upon the presumption that the answer has been found, the investigation ceases. Suicide, based upon either an inductive inference from past to future experience or a metaphysical principle declaiming a priori the disastrous character of human experience, prohibits absolutely the collection of any additional data to confirm or

deny the accuracy of the prediction or the supposedly necessary rule. The advantage gained by the avoidance of further experience is always unverifiable. Yet, as Ayer argues, 'there can be no other justification for inductive reasoning than its success in practice' (Ayer, 1990, p.42). Suicide is always too late or too soon: when complete information as to the course of experience is available it is too late to avoid its collection; when the course of experience is curtailed before completion, one is obliged to decide on cessation from the basis of incomplete evidence.<sup>31</sup> In the case of suicide, if the decision is for, one can never experience the pleasure of being right; if against, one runs the risk of being proved wrong.<sup>32</sup>

#### viii. The categorical imperative

Suicide, however, is more usually subject to ethical rather than epistemological strictures. In Kantian ethics, the very inclination towards suicide is a reason for desisting:

It seems absurd to say that a man could wrong himself

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<sup>31</sup> Mercier and Camier refers directly to this impasse of being simultaneously too early and too late. There we encounter 'the hour it always was and will be, one that to the beauties of too late unites the charms of prematurity' (Beckett, 1974, p.77). The timing of the death of Malone, by contrast, falls decisively on one side of the divide:

a murmur is born in the silent world, reproaching you affectionately with having despaired too late.  
(Beckett, 1959, p.278)

<sup>32</sup> Even Schopenhauer considers suicide 'an awkward experiment', for it puts forward a question but simultaneously 'abolishes the identity of the consciousness that would have to listen to the answer' (Schopenhauer, 1974, §160, p.311).

(volenti non fit iniuria). Hence the Stoic thought it a prerogative of his (the sage's) personality to depart from life at his discretion (as from a smoke-filled room) with peace of soul, free from the pressure of present or anticipated ills, because he could be of no more use in life. But there should have been in this very courage, this strength of soul not to fear death and to know of something that man can value even more highly than his life, a still stronger motive for him not to destroy himself, a being with such powerful authority over the strongest sensible incentives, and so not to deprive himself of life.

(Kant, 1991, Part II, §6, p.219)

In contemplating suicide, one is not 'freely to act as if no authorization were needed for this action' (Kant, 1991, Part II, §6, p.219). The investigation in Theatre II is exemplary thus far: A and B are primarily interested in the authorization of C's leap; for them it is a question, constantly, of whether they are to 'Let him jump' (Beckett, 1986, p.238, my emphasis). The subject and conclusion of their inquiries is always phrased in these terms, emphasizing the giving or withholding of consent. Furthermore, Kantian ethics will not countenance the 'disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end' (Kant, 1991, Part II, §6, p.219). In the case of suicide, the 'escape from burdensome circumstances' constitutes such a just such an outlawed contingent end (Kant, 1949, p.87). The only moral action is that which is in accordance with the 'categorical imperative'.



The categorical imperative must have an a priori basis, in order to be applicable independently of all empirical circumstances. In Kant's account, 'a law, if it is to hold morally, i.e., as a ground of obligation, must imply absolute necessity' (Kant, 1949, p.52); the categorical imperative thus 'commands or prohibits absolutely' (Kant, 1991, Part I, p.42). Again, the empirical, as contingency, cannot by definition supply necessity:

all moral concepts have their seat and origin entirely a priori in reason. [...] It is obvious that they can be abstracted from no empirical and hence merely contingent cognitions. In the purity of their origin lies their worthiness to serve us as supreme practical principles, and to the extent that something empirical is added to them, just this much is subtracted from their genuine influence and from the unqualified worth of actions.

(Kant, 1949, p.71)

In Theatre II, the nature of the action C 'ought' to take is assessed by A and B exclusively in regard to contingent empirical circumstances and the advantage to be gained by avoiding further experience of them. Once again, as Kant's translator puts it, the 'a posteriori cart is placed before the a priori horse' (White Beck, 1949, p.24). Actions with ethical ramifications, when based upon the empirical, forfeit the freedom of the moral agent, for his actions are determined solely by a contingent arrangement of circumstances. In Kant's ethics, the 'free

action' paradoxically occurs only through 'Obligation [...]' under a categorical imperative of reason' (Kant, 1991, Part I, p.48): here, the agent is freed from all dependence upon the empirical. Again, no amount of empirical evidence can produce 'the unconditional ought' required by Kant (Kant, 1991, Part II, p.185). For Hume, equally, the route from a factual to an ethical assertion is problematic:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.

(Hume, 1978, III.I.I, p.469)

Even if empirical facts and circumstances are admitted to the extent that they are not deemed irrelevant to moral questions, they nevertheless cannot entail or act as a basis for the

deduction of specific moral conclusions.<sup>33</sup> Lyotard too locates the 'ethical phrase' and the 'cognitive phrase' under heterogeneous phrase regimens separated by a differend (Lyotard, 1988, p.123). And 'Phrases obeying different regimens are untranslatable into one another' (Lyotard, 1988, p.48): hence, 'it is impossible to deduce a prescription from a description' (Lyotard, 1988, p.108).<sup>34</sup> The investigators of Theatre II, leaping from the empirical to the metaphysical and, via induction, from the particular to the universal, are obliged to also leap Lyotard's '"abyss"' separating the empirical from the ethical (Lyotard, 1988, p.123). Theirs is a triple jump over epistemological boundaries; C, set in place for a leap, remains as yet unpersuaded to follow suit.

Conversely, should the investigation result in the issuing of a true categorical imperative demanding C's suicide, the investigators would find themselves obliged to submit to the same necessity. The categorical imperative admits the moral credentials only of those maxims which are capable of being raised to the status of universal laws. The 'shortest but most infallible way' to determine whether any action 'is consistent

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<sup>33</sup> Both Kant and Hume can be cited as progenitors of what Fekete calls 'the heritage of Western Enlightened modernity: the positivist-modernist tradition' characterised by precisely this 'antinomic "fact-value" structure' (Fekete, 1988, p.ii).

<sup>34</sup> Norris deprecates 'the kind of postmodern aestheticist reading that would treat ethical issues as wholly divorced from questions of circumstantial warrant' (Norris, 1993, p.74), yet concedes that ethical judgements remain underdetermined by factual researches. Given unlimited empirical data, we remain unable to 'proceed algorithmically to determine what is right or wrong in any specific case' (Norris, 1993, p.236).



with duty' is to consider 'Would I be content that my maxim [...] should hold as a universal law for myself as well as for others?' (Kant, 1949, p.63). The universal law thus derived constitutes a categorical imperative. Kantian ethics, in their proper function, necessarily create an 'obligated legislator' (Lyotard, 1988, p.125):

The legislator ought not to be exempt from the obligation he or she norms. And the obligated one is able to promulgate the law that obligates him or her. In speaking the law, the former decrees that he or she must respect it. In respecting the law, the latter decrees it anew.<sup>35</sup>

(Lyotard, 1988, p.98)

Kant amplifies the ramifications of two maxims which cannot be thought as universal laws without contradiction. In the case of the first, the 'lying promise', 'my maxim would necessarily destroy itself as soon as it was made a universal law' (Kant, 1949, p.64). The second case is the maxim recommending suicide:

A man who is reduced to despair by a series of evils feels a weariness with life but is still in possession of his reason sufficiently to ask whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he asks

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<sup>35</sup> A certain measure of havoc will be caused in Chapter Six by applying the Kantian strictures upon metaphysical speculation expounded in this chapter to the basis of those strictures itself. Applying the words of the lawgiver self-reflexively, as demanded by the categorical imperative, can be a source of self-refutation. See below Chapter Six, Sections xxvi-xxix.

whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim, however, is: For love of myself, I make it my principle to shorten my life when by a longer duration it threatens more evil than satisfaction. But it is questionable whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. One immediately sees a contradiction in a system of nature, whose law would be to destroy life by the feeling whose special office is to impel the improvement of life. In this case it would not exist as nature; hence that maxim cannot obtain as a law of nature, and thus it wholly contradicts the supreme principle of all duty.

(Kant, 1949, p.81)

The suicide based upon protection of the welfare of the self, destroys the self in this cause, defeating its own purpose. Moreover, the action is not a priori but empirically determined. If determined a priori, the justification of one suicide would raise the maxim to a law demanding universal suicide. And as Kant remarks, no 'system of nature could maintain itself in accordance with such a law' (Kant, 1949, p.154). Such a system would be obliged to act always in accordance with the most expedient methods for its own destruction. This categorical imperative would, however, partially substantiate one of consolations of C in Theatre II, namely, his '... hope not dead of living to see the extermination of the species ...' (Beckett, 1986, p.242). Sustained by such an anticipation, C refrains from making his own contribution to this end. The formulation is in

fact determinedly self-refuting: so long as a witness exists to celebrate the achievement of the extermination of his species, it is not achieved. We should appreciate that the sentence 'Nobody is alive' can 'only be asserted if it is not true' (Parsons, 1984, p.147).<sup>36</sup>

Should the investigators find C justified in his suicide via a categorical imperative, they are involved in an even more virulent strain of self-defeat. As A nervously inquires, 'Do you want me to jump too?' (Beckett, 1986, p.249). The legislator is obliged to respect his own recommendations; the categorical imperative does not tolerate exceptions. The investigators of Theatre II, if successful in ordering C's leap, may find that they have decreed the necessity of their own suicides. A previous client, 'Smith', similarly suffers an accidental self-inflicted injury:

A: [...] Reputed to have lost his genitals in a shooting accident. His own double-barrel that went off between his legs in a moment of abstraction, just as he was getting set to let fly at a quail.

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<sup>36</sup> Malone Dies cultivates a similar paradox in insisting upon the absolute erosion of the perceiving first-person subject:

And during all this time [...] in my head I supposed all was streaming and emptying away as through a sluice, to my great joy, until finally nothing remained, either of Malone or of the other. And what is more I was able to follow without difficulty the various phases of this deliverance [...].  
(Beckett, 1959, p.224)

The subject, if dissolved, should not remain intact to so admirably describe its own dissolution.



B: Stranger to me.

(Beckett, 1986, p.247)

In a case of self-defeat, shooting oneself in the foot is the more usual metaphor. Given that 'the extermination of the species' (Beckett, 1986, p.242) determines the nature of A and B's dilemma, however, one might defer to the appropriateness of Mr Smith's misfortune.

#### ix. Theory-laden observation

Given these difficulties, the investigators' performance of their task regarding C is apt to be informed by bad grace. The forms of intuition or 'sensibility', space and time, which disqualified the investigators from metaphysical ambitions, is important again in Kantian ethics. The moral agent is not to exhibit the other type of 'sensibility' toward the recipients of his aid, for 'moral import' attaches only to the 'action done not from inclination but from duty' (Kant, 1949, p.59). The investigators of Theatre II can win Kantian approval only in their freedom from compassion for their client and displeasure in carrying out their duty towards him.<sup>37</sup> 'Man's greatest moral

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<sup>37</sup> According to Rousseau, 'It is [...] compassion [pitié] that hurries us without reflection to the relief of those who are in distress' (Rousseau cited in Derrida, 1976, p.173). In Waiting for Godot, by contrast, a blinded and fallen Pozzo must not be aided with intemperate speed for this would constitute 'an act arising out of inclination and so of no moral worth' (Hesla, 1987, p.119). In 'What a Misfortune' of More Pricks Than Kicks, Belacqua's ethical system, assessed by the ignorant public as 'callousness', is similarly Kantian in its disregard of the empirical. It is 'final, uniform and continuous, unaffected by circumstance, assigned without discrimination to all the undead'

perfection is to do his duty from duty' (Kant, 1991, Part II, p.196). Under the strictures of Kant's moral philosophy, 'one seems to be more morally worthy the less pleasure and satisfaction one derives from the proper performance of one's duties' (Solomon, 1988, p.39).

Investigator B's resentment of the examination of further evidence is thus morally exemplary:

A: [...] So, agreed? Black future, unpardonable -

B: As you wish. [He starts to tidy back the papers in the briefcase. Wearily.] Let him jump.

A: No further exhibit?

B: Let him jump, let him jump. [He finishes tidying, gets up with the briefcase in his hand.] Let's go.

(Beckett, 1986, p.246)

The irksome appointment with C has been kept. However, even the opening dialogue of the investigators is inflected by insinuations that their mission is concluded prior to its commencement:

A: [...] Ah well ... [Pause. He switches on.] Shall we go?  
[B switches on, rummages in his papers.] The crux. [B  
rummages.] We sum up and clear out. [B rummages.] Set  
to go?

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and, in a Calvinist refinement, 'without works' (Beckett, 1970b, p.125).

B: Rearing.

A: We attend.

B: Let him jump.

A: When?

B: Now.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.237-238)

'Set to go?' inquires whether the investigation is to start and simultaneously whether it is finished. B, 'Rearing' rather than 'raring' to go, has formulated his conclusion as to whether C should jump prior to the exhibition of any evidence.<sup>38</sup> The suspicion must arise that it would be convenient if the evidence were marshalled so as to validate that preconceived verdict, that the evidence might fit the conclusion rather than the conclusion fit the evidence. Where evidence is cited not as the basis of a deduction but selectively to confirm a particular hypothesis, 'There then arises a vicious circle; we are assuming just that very point which is mainly in dispute' (Kant, 1933, A693/B721, p.564). The result thus extracted explains and unifies all the evidence because the only items allowed to enter the discussion are those which confirm the result. A, however, will not allow B, the keeper of the evidence, to emphasize exclusively the disasters of C:

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<sup>38</sup> Compare Condillac's characterisation of metaphysical investigations:

This, then, is metaphysics: a science which proposes to treat of everything in general before having observed anything in particular, i.e., to speak about everything before having learned anything: a vain science which bears on nothing and leads to nothing.

(Condillac cited in Derrida, 1980, p.35)



A: Now let's have the positive elements.

B: Positive? You mean of a nature to make him think ...

[hesitates, then with sudden violence] ... that some day things might change? Is that what you want?

[Pause. Calmer.] There are none.

A: [Wearily.] Oh yes there are, that's the beauty of it.<sup>39</sup>

[Pause. B rummages in his papers.]

B: [Looking up.] Forgive me, Bertrand. [Pause. Rummages.

Looks up.] I don't know what came over me. [Pause.

Rummages. Looks up.] A moment of consternation.

[Pause. Rummages.] There is that incident of the lottery ... possibly. Remember?

A: No.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.240-241)

A consciousness of time-restraints curtail, however, the pondering of the 'bits and scraps' (Beckett, 1964, p.152) of counter-evidence:

B: ... heirless aunt ... unfinished game of chess with a correspondent in Tasmania ... hope not dead of living to see the extermination of the species ... literary aspirations incompletely stifled ... bottom of a dairy-woman in Waterloo Lane ... you see the kind of thing.

[Pause.]

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<sup>39</sup> According to Beckett similarly, 'If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable' (Beckett cited in Driver, 1979, p.220).

A: We pack up this evening, right?

B: Without fail. Tomorrow we're at Bury St Edmunds.<sup>40</sup>

(Beckett, 1986, p.242)

Such complications can be avoided via the application of inductive techniques, which are conducive to grasping observed regularities and shaving away irrelevant distractions. It is the methodology of majority rule. Yet induction as 'the search for order' (Rescher, 1980, p.161) should extract these regularities from the evidence; the prior statement of B's conclusion suggests that, in the fashion of the ancient metaphysicians, 'principles are not read out of, but read into, experience' (Walsh, 1963, p.169).

Besides offending Kant in epistemological and ethical procedures, A and B thus cultivate problems in empiricism itself, where Kant positively promotes the possibility of secure knowledge. Their deliberations on the empirical evidence lead to an insistence on merely one conclusion. In principle, however, more than one conclusion and more than one theory can account for the same evidence:

given any general theory *T* and any limited body of evidence *E* (duly consonant with *T* in the best hypothetico-deductive manner), there will always be many, and generally infinitely many, rival theories - each contrary to *T*, but consonant

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<sup>40</sup> An appropriate location for the determination of another suicide.

with E - so that no body of evidence can render T probable in the context of such an infinistic spectrum of alternatives.

(Rescher, 1980, p.26)

The investigators of Theatre II run no risk of 'becoming paralysed through having to face a superfluity of hypotheses, all of which account equally well for our observations' (Schlesinger, 1983, p.233). No rival hypothesis is permitted to diminish their fondness for conclusions recommending and informed by leaps. In the strictly scientific realm, it is contentious whether there is any 'innocent' empiricism; for Kuhn, 'Both fact collection and theory articulation become highly directed activities' (Kuhn, 1962, p.18). Branches of the philosophy of science maintain 'our very observations are theory-infected':

Observations are not 'givens' or 'data' but are always interpretations in the light of background assumptions. The idea of unambiguous objects of perception is a myth.

(Morick, 1972, pp.17-18)

That the assessment of the evidence by the investigators is 'theory-laden' does not exhaust the problem. The mass of evidence at the disposal of A and B is constituted by the 'Testimonies' and C's documented 'Confidences': A and B can be redefined as interpreters interpreting the data of interpreters interpreting the data.



## x. Evidence for the evidence: infinite regress

For empirical intuition to take place, Kant requires that the object be 'present and given to me' (Kant, 1950, §9, p.29). Kant supplies instructions as to how the expression 'That an object be given' is to be understood, that is, as 'not as referring to some merely mediate process, but as signifying immediate presentation in intuition' (Kant, 1933, A156/B195, p.193). Similarly, for Lyotard, 'the presentation of an object [...] is required for the validation of a determinate judgment, that is, of a knowledge phrase' (Lyotard, 1988, p.63). To merely 'name the referent' is not sufficient (Lyotard, 1988, p.42). In Theatre II, none of the incidents of the Testimonies or Confidences are directly witnessed by the investigators. In place of empirical knowledge, they have mediated accounts of the experience of C. Thus the Testimonies inaugurate another infinite regress. In another context, Kant details precisely this problem: all pieces of evidence in favour of a given hypothesis require 'the same justification as is necessary in the case of the fundamental hypothesis, and they are not, therefore, in a position to bear reliable testimony' (Kant, 1933, A774/B802, p.616). Before the Testimonies can be employed to validate the conclusion, they themselves must be validated. Evidence is required as to the reliability of the evidence, and, unfortunately, further evidence as to the reliability of that second-order evidence. The empirical, by definition, is not a priori, that is, self-evident; it therefore requires external verification. But further empirical evidence merely pushes that

verification backwards:

The problem in question concerns the overall justificatory structure of empirical knowledge. If what justifies an empirical belief in the sense of providing a reason for thinking that it is true is inference from some epistemically prior empirical belief which must itself be justified before it can serve as a justificatory premise, and if what justifies this second belief is yet a further empirical belief requiring justification in the same way, and so on, then empirical knowledge is threatened with an infinite and seemingly vicious regress of justifying beliefs.

(BonJour, 1985, p.xi)

Empiricism as an epistemological mode cannot be justified empirically without regress or circularity. Kant offers an a priori foundation for the empirical to halt the regress;<sup>41</sup> A and B seek to give an empirical basis for the a priori. The aid that Kant offers, the metaphysics of empiricism, ensures that metaphysics cannot be grounded in empiricism.

The empirical, even freed from these toils, can, however, support only itself. The 'intuitive given', according to Lyotard, 'can never do anything more than validate the phrase that describes it' (Lyotard, 1988, p.164). The diligent witness

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<sup>41</sup> See below, Chapter Six, Section xxviii for the self-reflexive difficulties of such a justification.

directly perceiving the cycle of departures from home by C, can validate the details described by the Testimony but not any generalities drawn from these, if we allow 'no finicking' (Beckett, 1959, p.393), facts. Empirical facts are, strictly, tautological.<sup>42</sup> An inductive leap is required to raise the individual facts of the Testimonies to the status of a description of the essential condition of C and another to raise the condition of C to the status of a description of the human condition. The evidence confirms only itself; to the regret of A, the self-knowledge of C is not extended by the review of his empirical experience:

A: [Sadly.] We'll leave him none the wiser. We'll leave him now, never to meet again, having added nothing to what he knew already.

(Beckett, 1986, p.242)

Only the assumption of 'God's point of view' can 'find everything full of meaning'; 'from the point of view of Sirius', 'the

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<sup>42</sup> Moran's conclusions concerning absences from his son's stamp collection cannot, given incomplete evidence, get beyond tautologous particularity:

Had he taken advantage of the opportunity to secure some of his favourite stamps? I had not time to check them all. I put down the tray and looked for a few stamps at random, the Togo one mark carmine with the pretty boat, the Nyassa 1901 ten reis, and several others. [...] They were all there. That proved nothing. It only proved that those particular stamps were there.

(Beckett, 1959, p.121)

Moran will permit no inductive generalization from a random sample. The issue of tautology is revisited below in Chapter Six, Sections x-xi.



senseless tumult of history offers nothing to the understanding' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.91). The empirical series is contingent and incapable of providing a basis for transcendental deductions. As the narrator observes in 'Love and Lethe', another rendition of an unsuccessful suicide, 'We state the facts. We do not presume to determine their significance' (Beckett, 1970b, p.104).<sup>43</sup>

#### xi. Lovebirds: the illusion of sensory immediacy

Both Theatre II and 'Love and Lethe' involve meditations upon the nature of birds and the apparatus required for their care. In the latter work, Ruby and Belacqua ponder the function of 'the trusses':

Right along on either hand as far as they could see  
there were fasces of bracken attached to the wire. Belacqua

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<sup>43</sup> 'Love and Lethe' shares peculiar features with Theatre II. Belacqua's attempted suicide, despite 'diligent enquiry' and a 'torrent of invective' (Beckett, 1970b, p.95), is yet to demonstrate 'his faculty for acting with insufficient motivation' (Beckett, 1970b, p.94):

How he had formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover. The simplest course, when the motives of any deed are found subliminal to the point of defying expression, is to call that deed ex nihilo and have done. Which we beg leave to follow in the present instance.  
(Beckett, 1970b, p.95)

The investigators of Theatre II restart this enquiry. The protagonists of 'Love and Lethe' too have their problems with space and time. Ruby Tough's preference is for a double suicide simultaneous in time; yet, we are '"slaves of the sand-glass. There is not room for us to run out arm in arm"' (Beckett, 1970b, p.103). The spacious 'double window' of Theatre II goes some way to resolving this technical difficulty (Beckett, 1986, p.237).

racked his brains for an explanation. In the end he had to give it up.

'God I don't know at all' he exclaimed.

It certainly was the most astounding thing.

(Beckett, 1970b, p.99)

Inspired by momentary cares for Ruby's comfort prior to suicide, involving the removal of the 'encumbrance' of a skirt, whereupon 'Ruby, greatly eased, stormed the summit in her knickers', (Beckett, 1970b, p.99), Belacqua sees the solution:

'They tie those bundles to the wire' he said 'so that the grouse will see them.'

Still she did not understand.

'And not fly against the fence and hurt themselves.'

(Beckett, 1970b, p.100)

The safety of the grouse is preserved so that they may be killed in the proper manner. Bundles are necessary to signal the wire: the panoramic bird's eye view is not adapted to empirical nuances.

In Theatre II, it is not the facility of empirical perception granted to the bird that is under examination but the reliability of the empirical vision of the investigators. Investigator B, happier with mediated documentary evidence, is startled by the sudden intrusion of direct sensory experience:

A: [...] [Pause.] How is Mildred?

B: [Disgustedly.] Oh you know - [Brief burst of birdsong.  
Pause.] Good God!

A: Philomel!

B: Oh that put the heart across me!

(Beckett, 1986, p.247)

Appropriately, the involuntary empirical perception is timed to interrupt the assumption of established knowledge concerning the dire condition of another human subject. The auditory sensation is assuredly within time; its cause, similarly empirical, is to be located somewhere in space. A is obliged to take over the investigation when and where attention to the empirical is demanded:

A: Hsst! [Low.] Hark hark! [Pause. Second brief burst, louder. Pause.] It's in the room! [He gets up, moves away on tiptoe.] Come on, let's have a look.

B: I'm scared!

(Beckett, 1986, p.247)

The limitations of vision in the empirical sphere and the fearful tentativeness of the investigators of the metaphysical in this alien environment prolong the search for the object in space:

[...] A advances on tiptoe upstage right, B tiptoes after.

A: [Turning.] Hsst! [They advance, halt in the corner. A



strikes a match, holds it above his head. Pause.  
Low.] She's not here. [He drops the match and crosses  
the stage on tiptoe followed on tiptoe by B. They pass  
before the window, halt in the corner upstage left.  
Match as before. Pause.]

A: Here she is!

B: [Recoiling.] Where?

(Beckett, 1986, p.247)

The object, extended and enclosed to emphasize the weight and awkwardness of the empirical, is manoeuvred to A's table for examination; the cloth is at last raised on the empirical. B is entrusted merely with the menial task of supporting the lamp; A is to be the empirical scientist:

B: There's one dead.

[...]

[[...] They peer. A takes B's hand and changes its position.]

A: There.

[They peer.]

B: Is it the cock or the hen?

A: The hen. See how drab she is.

B: [Revolted.] And he goes on singing! [Pause.] There's lovebirds for you!

A: Lovebirds! [Guffaw.] Ah Morvan, you'd be the death of me if I were sufficiently alive! Lovebirds! [Guffaw.] Finches, pinhead! Look at that lovely little green

rump! And the blue cap! And the white bars! And the gold breast! [Didactic.] Note moreover the characteristic warble, there can be no mistaking it.

(Beckett, 1986, p.248)

The new dispensation of the empirical extends its own claims to absolute knowledge. Where B's items of empirical evidence were, on Kantian principle, insufficient to support metaphysical claims, A's attempt at empirical judgements is entirely within the bounds of permitted knowledge. Failure here would be through negligence rather than impossibility. And so, near the end of Theatre II, the litany of incompetence begins again.

The details of colour characteristics supplied by A are insufficient to establish the determinate identity of the empirical object. Far from there being 'no mistaking it', the information given is compatible with many different conclusions concerning species. Again, an inductive judgement is made from incomplete evidence and merely one theory entertained. The colour specifications given do not exclude the identification of the bird as a finch, but neither do they exclude the possibility that it is a parrot, parakeet, canary<sup>44</sup> or any other exotic bird liable find itself caged. Identification based on 'the characteristic warble' (Beckett, 1986, p.248) introduces the

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<sup>44</sup> According to genuinely expert testimony, in addition to the bright yellow variety, one may encounter 'beige, orange-yellow and red canaries, as well as spotted, patchily coloured forms and others with lizard-like stripes, as well as the cinnamon breed formerly popular in England' (Martin, 1983, p.408).

possibility that the bird is, indeed, a warbler instead. Moreover, sexing finches according to colour difference is not infallible. In the case of some species, 'in winter both sexes are coloured like the female' (Newton, 1973, p.409); other cocks 'only sport their glorious colours [...] during the period of breeding' (St. Blazey, 1991, p.47). The colour of the cock, and hence colour differences exhibited between the cock and hen, modulate according to season. Those that know their birds better than investigator A declare in any case that 'many finches are not dimorphic' at all (St. Blazey, 1991, p.46). Many other species of bird are dimorphic, however: any colour difference is not actually sufficient either to sex the birds or define them as finches. One can, however, nearly always make a definite identification of the finch according to its beak, which is to be 'strong, broad and sharp' designed 'for grasping and cracking SEEDS' (Martin, 1983, p.74). Investigator B laments that the particular birds in question 'have no seed' (Beckett, 1986, p.248). But again many kinds of beak can cope with seed and, on this crucial matter, the shape of the beaks in question, we have no direct information, for neither A nor B think to supply such details.

It is only 'in connection with their diet' and apparatus for dealing with it that 'any form of consistency' is exhibited by the finch (Martin, 1983, p.74), although even here, unfortunately, there are exceptions to the general seed and beak rule. Some finches, to the confusion of the classifier, prefer a 'softbilled diet' (Martin, 1983, p.74). There are no



absolutely distinguishing characteristics from which definitive categorization of species follows. Judgements are made according to the differences, similarities, absences and emphases observed in various empirical manifestations. Identity is relational and progressive rather than absolute. Investigator B has insufficient evidence to deduce an essential human condition; investigator A is thwarted in the attempt to produce an account even of the definitive finch-condition.

The audience witnesses this attempt at direct empirical investigation on the part of A and B,<sup>45</sup> but never sees the contents of the cage directly. The birdcage is 'covered with a green silk cloth fringed with beads'; to make his own inspection, A 'lifts cautiously the cloth on the side away from the audience' (Beckett, 1986, p.248). For the audience, the alleged 'finch' is a conceptual construct directed by the information and assertions of A and B. There is no empirical manifestation given by which to verify the accuracy of this concept. Moreover, this is a stage-finch, and where the audience is not to see a prop, there is no requirement that any such prop should exist. The entire controversy concerning the status of this 'finch' is an argument about the contents of an empty cage. We are brought back to Kantian 'empty Ideas':

Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without

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<sup>45</sup> There are limitations to even this high point of attention to the empirical. Thwarted by the bars of the cage, A must borrow a 'long pencil' in order to make contact with his object (Beckett, 1986, p.248). B, the documenter, does not allow A to usurp his rightful property for long.

understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts.

(Kant, 1933, A51/B76, p.93)

Investigator A subsumes his supposed empirical 'intuitions' under a concept that he has insufficient evidence to fix upon; the audience, denied any visual perception of the 'finch', possess merely a concept 'without content'. The audience of Theatre II and the metaphysician share an epistemological problem. Their ideas cannot be substantiated by empirical intuition; even if 'sense' or non-contradiction is achieved, there is no 'reference'. The idea of the 'finch' imparted to the audience fails the test stated by the principle of significance, for the concept supplied, like the empty Ideas of metaphysics, has no object. The metaphysician, as represented in Kant, endeavours 'to soar above the world of sense by the mere power of speculation' (Kant, 1933, A591/B619, p.500), a 'soaring [...] far above all possible experience, on the wings of mere ideas' (Kant, 1933, A638/B666, p.529). The necessity of empirical intuition is to clip these wings. As A announces in 'Glum' mood, 'All that splendour!' of his 'bonny wee birdie' is to be ruined by an insistence on the merely empirical, the rather less elevated 'organic waste' (Beckett, 1986, p.248). According to Homan, in Theatre II 'Songbirds may suggest the ancient notion of the

artist as the solitary singer, penning verses about the mysterious' (Homan, 1984, p.182). In keeping with the limitations placed upon intuition of the 'mysterious' in this play, one songbird is dead and both are restricted to the space of a cage.

## xii. Confounding objects

The judgement of A, 'there can be no mistaking it' (Beckett, 1986, p.248), is misapplied. Only the analytic a priori is amenable to this variety of self-evident certainty; the empirical is contingent but open to investigation. But the empirical expertise of A and B has further rather startling limitations. Their opinions as to on which floor of C's borrowed building they are currently standing diverge somewhat. B bases his calculation of C's spectacular death upon the view that he will begin his leap from 'floor, say twenty-five'; investigator A 'could have sworn we were only on the sixth' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). The audience has no means of verifying either possibility.<sup>46</sup> A mistakes the date, according to B, and consequently overestimates the fullness of the moon. Beckett specifies for the audience, 'Moon invisible' (Beckett, 1986, p.237). When the audience is able to perceive the empirical objects subjected to the investigators' conceptual assertions, these conjectures are

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<sup>46</sup> Malone, reviewing the possibility of accelerating his dying, is beset by an identical problem:

If I had the use of my body I would throw it out of the window. [...] Unfortunately I do not know quite what floor I am on, perhaps I am only on the mezzanine.

(Beckett, 1959, p.219)



immediately confounded. The paper evidence, B asserts, is 'Tied together like a cathedral'; in answer, 'the papers [...] scatter on the floor' (Beckett, 1986, p.238). B has ideas to explain the behaviour of his lamp; the object will not comply:

B: I'll read the whole passage: '... morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others -' [His lamp goes out.] Well! The bulb has blown! [The lamp goes on again.] No, it hasn't! Must be a faulty connection. [Examines lamp, straightens flex.] The flex was twisted, now all is well. [Reading.] '...morbidly sensitive -' [The lamp goes out.] Bugger and shit!

(Beckett, 1986, p.242)

Investigator A's reasoned conceptual advice compounds B's difficulties:

A: Keep your hands off the table.

B: What?

A: Keep your hands off the table. If it's a connection the least jog can do it.

B: [Having pulled back his chair a little way.] '... morbidly sensitive -'

[The lamp goes out. B bangs on the table with his fist. The lamp goes on again. Pause.]

A: Mysterious affair, electricity.

(Beckett, 1986, p.243)

A direct thump upon the empirical, unclouded by preconception, is strangely effective.

Investigator B, distressed by the intrusion of the 'finch' and also its 'Cuttle-bone' (Beckett, 1986, p.249), refuses to examine C directly. His final contribution to the investigation is to plead for its termination. He retrieves his briefcase and thereafter 'sits with back to window', thereby turning away from C, the putative object of the inquiry (Beckett, 1986, p.249). The bone, perhaps, is too bare an empirical remainder of the results of a pessimism attractive in its apparent conceptual sophistication. Investigator A, however, makes a foray to inspect his client:

[Long pause. A goes to window; strikes a match, holds it high and inspects C's face. The match burns out, he throws it out of window.] Hi! Take a look at this! [B does not move. A strikes another match, holds it high and inspects C's face.] Come on quick! Quick! [B does not move. The match burns out, A lets it fall.] Well I'll be ...!  
[A takes out his handkerchief and raises it timidly towards C's face.]

CURTAIN

(Beckett, 1986, p.249)

A has ceased to offer conclusions concerning C; following all the evidence, Confidences and Testimonies, C's behaviour remains inexplicable. The mystery centres on what he is doing; the

investigators have encountered this problem in an earlier reconnaissance mission:

B: Has he still got that little smile on his face?

A: Probably.

B: What do you mean, probably, haven't you just been looking at him?

A: He didn't have it then.

(Beckett, 1986, p.245)

Inanimate material objects may thwart one in their behaviour, but their physical manifestation, at least in the case of table lamps, paper and buildings, does not vary significantly over short periods of time. Nor can they consciously modulate their conduct with the purpose of deceiving an observer; the human subject, to the consternation of A, can. Given this ability to dissemble, the task of adequate observation seems impossible:

A: [Pause. Violently.] You'd need to stare them in the face day and night! Never take your eyes off them for a week on end! Unbeknownst to them!<sup>47</sup>

(Beckett, 1986, p.245)

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<sup>47</sup> Schopenhauer too wished to observe without being observed in the act of observation. It is only when 'alone and left to himself, plunged in the depths of his own thoughts and sensations' that the chosen subject can be said to be 'entirely and absolutely himself' (Schopenhauer, 1974, §377, p.638). But as long as the subject is being observed, he is not in fact alone. A second subject cannot examine how the first behaves in solitude for the observer violates that definition.



Directly witnessing C's behaviour as the play ends, A can only exclaim upon an empirical discovery; the verb suitable to denote C's actions is not given.<sup>48</sup> The pursuit of a missing verb has caused earlier tribulations. The 'Chinese' of C's own 'Confidence' to the investigators, which flounders in conditionals, terminates in the emphasis of a single clause:

B: '[...] and truth to tell -' Shit! Where's the verb?

A: What verb?

B: The main!

A: I give up.

B: Hold on till I find the verb and to hell with all this drivél in the middle. [Reading.] '... were I but ... could I but ...' - Jesus! - '... though it be ... be it but ...' - Christ! - ah! I have it - '... I was unfortunately incapable ...' Done it!

A: How does it run now?

B: [Solemnly.] '... morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others at the time ...' - drivél, drivél, drivél - '... I was unfortunately incapable -'  
[The lamp goes out. Long pause.]

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<sup>48</sup> In relation to C, A and B could echo the pleas for explanation that the Glazier directs toward Victor in Eleutheria:

There is only one thing I ask, and that is that you should take shape. Just the slightest glimmer of sense, enough to make people say, 'Ah, so that's what it is, now I'm beginning to understand' - and then I'll disappear.  
(Beckett, 1996, p.124)

The curtain falls on Theatre II just as investigator A might have perceived a 'glimmer of sense' via the direct apprehension of C which replaces the conceptual manipulation of documents concerning him.

Incapacity, uncertainty and bafflement are perhaps the central impressions of this play explicitly given over to the delineation of investigation and inquiry. Attempts to answer the final problem set by Theatre II, the baffling final encounter of investigator and subject, reproduce the fundamental error of the investigators throughout the play. The audience is now invited to attempt the leap from physical empirical details to their determinate significance, whether via induction to general rules or via the assumption of a metaphysical structure which informs all evidential details. In this final scene, the precise positioning of the protagonists in space ensure that the audience is granted insufficient evidence upon which to base a conclusion. C's face remains turned away from his new set of examiners in the auditorium: the details which move A to make his exclamation are not within the limited perceptual range of the audience. The announcement of new evidence is provocation to the invention of a new cycle of groundless conjecture.<sup>49</sup> That which could substantiate 'ideas' concerning the nature of C is outside the bounds of empirical possibility: there is no more time within which to perceive, there is no more play.

### xiii. Insufficient evidence of pessimism

Amongst all the invalid arguments, faulty connections and

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<sup>49</sup> Homan's reference to 'the tear in C's eye', for example, is an idea which simply lacks any definite basis in the play (Homan, 1984, p.199).

boundary violations of Theatre II, there is one instance of scrupulous 'following'. C, in his borrowed room, is 'only here to take care of the cat' (Beckett, 1986, p.239). So strictly is this injunction to 'only' tend to the cat respected that the putative number of finches surviving his necessary inattention shows a fifty percentage reduction. C does not overstep the lawful boundaries. It is questionable whether philosophers or critics would be willing to give up quite so much in order to remain within the boundaries they decree to be necessary. The limitations placed upon knowledge by Kant may have to be violated to enable those very limitations to be delineated. The rejection of a metaphysical diagnosis of the human condition may be obliged merely to replace one diagnosis with another.<sup>50</sup> The professed sceptic in matters epistemological has a habit of knowing too much concerning what he maintains cannot be known.<sup>51</sup> The problems of self-defeat oblige one to revoke a significant percentage of cherished conclusions. Attention to the tangles attendant upon self-reflexive analysis in Theatre II is limited to the maliciously engineered incompatibility between investigator B's triumphant 'Done it' and the nature of the achievement, the revelation that 'I was unfortunately incapable' (Beckett, 1986, p.243). Theatre II is content to collapse the security of metaphysical assumptions, to redefine its

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<sup>50</sup> See below Chapter Six, Sections xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>51</sup> The knowing postmodernist and Voltaire's Secretary of the Paris Academy of Sciences in Micromegas share pleasure in a blank volume of philosophy; it is the confirmation of the sceptic's expertise: '"Aha [...] just as I thought"' (Voltaire, 1990, p.121). Knowing one cannot know, however, has more to do with comfort than coherence.



investigative characters, as Homan perceives, 'from confident detectives to neurotics' (Homan, 1984, p.183): As directed by this hypothesis, the play can be aligned with a selection of Beckett's 'non-fictional' statements.<sup>52</sup> In matters of metaphysical import, Beckett denies his own qualifications to issue declarations:

If pessimism is a judgement to the effect that ill outweighs good, then I can't be taxed with same, having no desire or competence to judge. I happen simply to have come across more of one than the other.

(Beckett cited in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.13)

Empirical contingency, despite the weight of evidence, is not permitted to decide 'how it is'.<sup>53</sup> Mercier relates a similar

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<sup>52</sup> An alignment cannot be claimed with the usual critical estimation of Beckett's 'assertive pessimism' (Rosen, 1976, p.33). According to Rosen's reading, '[...] Beckett's ideas constitute a pessimistic and skeptical meaning that is not only definite, but highly traditional' (Rosen, 1976, p.123). It would be well to notice, however, that to be pessimistic is incompatible with being sceptical: one mode of thought assumes an ability to judge the value of life, the core of the other is precisely an inability issue such judgements.

<sup>53</sup> According to Adorno:

When a desperate man who wants to kill himself asks one who tries to talk him out of it about the point of living, the helpless helper will be at a loss to name one.

(Adorno, 1973, p.376)

But the same lack of knowledge means that the point to dying cannot be delivered either; as Barth writes in 'Night-Sea Journey', a work which insistently recalls Beckett's How It Is:

if I have yet to join the hosts of the suicides, it is because (fatigue apart) I find it no meaningfuller to drown myself than to go on swimming.

(Barth, 1988, p.4)

claim to insufficient knowledge:

In general, Beckett himself denies the validity of an extreme pessimist attitude to life. As he once said to me in conversation, 'That would be to judge, and we are not in a position to judge.'

(Mercier, 1977, p.175)

Being in a position itself precludes the possibility of such a judgement. Kant's Critique of Pure Reason supplies an exposition of the possible reasons why this is so. Any relationship, however, which may be suggested between Beckett's writings and Kant, is one which will grow progressively more critical.<sup>54</sup> In Theatre II, the context proposed for an absolutist pessimism is as wounding to the pretensions of metaphysics as Kant could wish:

B: I quote: 'To hear him talk about his life, after a glass or two, you would have thought he had never set foot outside hell. He had us in stitches. I worked it up into a skit that went down well.' Testimony of Mr Moore, light comedian, c/o Widow Merryweather-Moore, All Saints on the Wash, and lifelong friend.

(Beckett, 1986, p.240)

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<sup>54</sup> As examined in Chapter Five, the security of empirical knowledge explicitly becomes a problem in Watt and Murphy. Where the primary target is metaphysical speculation, empiricism receives a more sympathetic hearing; thus Enough:

What do I know of man's destiny? I could tell you more about radishes. For them he had a fondness. If I saw one I would name it without hesitation.

(Beckett, 1984, p.144)

The liability of Theatre II to reveal too explicitly the problems of investigation and epistemology, and a concomitant inability to apply such limitations to its own exposition, its reluctance to throw its own polemic into doubt, bears perhaps some relation to the putative deficiency which kept the play filed amongst the 'Roughs'. This will not be allowed to happen again.



## Chapter Two

### Proustian slips in Krapp's Last Tape

#### i. A lack of vision

Despite the obstacles to metaphysical insight encountered in Theatre II, the author of Krapp's Last Tape is apt to be credited with access to just such knowledge. Although Krapp's Last Tape predates Theatre II merely by months,<sup>1</sup> Knowlson finds within it 'philosophical issues that lead one directly into judgements on the nature of existence' (Knowlson, 1979, p.91). The critic should discern a mobilization of 'images [...] carefully chosen and patterned to suggest a dualistic view of the world' (Knowlson, 1979, pp.91-92). Further, Krapp is a prime exponent of 'the dream of absolute being which constantly haunts Beckettian man; "Be again, be again"' (Knowlson, 1979, p.85). Whereas Knowlson's identification of dualism, symbolized by the play of light and dark motifs in Krapp's Last Tape, owes a debt to Manichaeian metaphysics, the latter imperative 'Be again' recalls Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu and, in particular, its final volume 'Time Regained'. Attention, in such metaphysical matters, is focused on Krapp's vision on the jetty, an experience which is, we may choose to assume, 'to do with "world view" or "life philosophy" or "self-knowledge," something which could be called spiritual or religious' (Morrison, 1983,

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<sup>1</sup> Krapp's Last Tape began as 'Magee Monologue', the earliest version of which Admussen finds dated 20 February 1958 (Admussen, 1979, p.61). As for Theatre II, classified as an 'abandoned play', 'These pages were written a few months after Beckett completed Krapp's Last Tape, to which they show a vague resemblance' (Admussen, 1979, p.112).

p.60). Such scholarly interpretations, armed with meticulous textual documentation and argument as they may be, agree with the gestures towards metaphysical interpretation made by the first-night reviewer's judgement of Krapp's Last Tape as 'Beckett's latest [...] dramatic poem about the old age of the world', the latest offering from an author 'Still obsessed with the alienation, vacuity, and decay of life upon a planet devoid of God and hope' (Brustein, 1979, p.192). Yet the reviewer perceives a detail which is subsequently consistently under-emphasized; for Krapp, in charge of the tape-recorder, 'turns the set off in disgust in the midst of a rabid, excited account of a eureka insight into the meaning of life' (Brustein, 1979, p.192).<sup>2</sup> It is worth investigating why Beckett's interpretation of the human condition is to be proclaimed in reputable criticism while Krapp's version is included in the play only to precede its unceremonious rejection.

Krapp's vision has been linked by critic and biographer alike with an incident during Beckett's post-war visit to Ireland. 'Having been on the jetty at age thirty-nine is a feature shared by Krapp and Beckett' (Smith, 1991, p.195); according to Knowlson's version of this episode:

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<sup>2</sup> The Complete Dramatic Works version of Krapp's Last Tape directs that during the playback of the vision section, Krapp three times 'switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again' (Beckett, 1986, p.220). The 'Revised Text' which appears in The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett has Krapp fast-forward the tape while it is playing. The tape-recorder is not here switched-off as Brustein implies; instead a 'mechanical [...] gabble' (Beckett, 1992, p.7) interrupts the replay of Krapp's vision.



Between [...] various crucial experiences in a war-ravaged France, something else occurred while Beckett was staying in Foxrock with his mother that helped both to change him and to transform his approach to his own writing. The 'revelation' that he had at that time has rightly been regarded as a pivotal moment in his entire career. And it has often been related to the 'vision' that Krapp experiences in Beckett's play Krapp's Last Tape<sup>3</sup> and has been located either in Dublin harbour or in the East Pier in Dún Laoghaire.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Cronin, 'the revelation that he now had' instructed Beckett that 'he should have written about the inner world, with its darkness, its ignorance, its uncertainty' (Cronin, 1997, p.359). For Smith, the lesson of the vision to Beckett was similarly 'that the inner dark he had always fought against in order, he had believed, to write and to be was, in fact, the subject he was to write about' (Smith, 1991, p.195). 'To Ludovic Janvier', Bair maintains, 'Beckett stated that the "dark he had struggled to keep under" was ultimately to become the source of his creative inspiration' (Bair, 1990, p.373). Curiously, Bair has Beckett referring to himself in the third person to Janvier; more curiously, the words cited are to be found also in Krapp's Last Tape: 'clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most -' (Beckett, 1986, p.220). Most curiously, Hugh Kenner, Bair's source for her quotation of what Beckett 'stated' to Janvier (Bair, 1990, p.373; Bair, 1990, p.721, n.16), does not in fact assign these words to Beckett in communication with Janvier or anybody else but simply quotes them from Krapp's Last Tape, noting, given Krapp's rejection of his vision as 'pretentious nonsense' (Kenner, 1973, p.132), the 'ironies' which must attach to speculation concerning Beckett's putative parallel vision. The independence of information concerning Beckett's revelation is thus highly debatable. If Krapp's Last Tape is used as a source for biographical information in this manner, it is unsurprising that the vision attributed to Beckett should exhibit apparently compelling similarities to that described in the play.

<sup>4</sup> The critical unanimity concerning the meaning of Beckett's revelation does not extend to its location, which, coincidentally, is not determined in Krapp's Last Tape either. Bair's location for Beckett is the 'end of a jetty in Dublin harbour, buffeted by a winter storm' (Bair, 1990, p.373). Smith prefers 'the spring of 1946' and a buffeting by 'an equinoctial thunderstorm' (Smith, 1991, p.195). Cronin, following Eoin



Krapp and Beckett's vision is in fact shared a third way, for Proust's narrator in A la recherche du temps perdu may contribute a visionary revelation of what was to constitute his magnum opus too:

The vision [Krapp] describes has an important counterpoint in a passage at the end of Le temps retrouvé, where Proust's narrator too sees 'the whole thing' - sees, that is, how the novel we know as A la recherche du temps perdu should be written.

That novel is to derive, as Beckett tells us in his 1931 essay on Proust, from the narrator's successive experiences of the 'miracle' of involuntary memory. Proust's narrator ultimately dedicates himself to a religion

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O'Brien, considers this romancing to be in error:

There had been a revelation and it had changed his attitude to his own writing, but it had taken place further down the coast on a much more humble edifice than Dun Laoghaire pier: the little jetty that juts into the sea at Killiney Harbour, which is overlooked by his brother's house.

(Cronin, 1997, pp.358-359)

Knowlson cites another incompatible version provided by Beckett himself more than forty years after the event:

Beckett wrote to Richard Ellmann: 'All the jetty and howling wind are imaginary. It happened to me, summer 1945, in my mother's little house, named New Place, across the road from Cooldrinagh.' SB to Richard Ellman, 27 Jan. 1986 [...].

(Knowlson, 1996, p.772, n.55)

The lack of sea and storm is capable of downgrading a mysterious revelation to the status of an intellectual realisation. The fictionalizing of this episode does not only take place in Krapp's Last Tape.

of art - to the 'vocation' of writing [...]. Similarly, Krapp undertakes the task of translating his vision into a work of literature in a spirit of determined self-sacrifice: the taped memory of his excitement over that 'memorable night in March' [...] will, he thinks, sustain him against the trials and privations to come.

(Acheson, 1990, p.74)

Which ever way the terms of Krapp's vision are glossed, the stable structure remains an attempt to unite incommensurable orders, whether light and dark, mind and body or spirit and matter. For Krapp, for Marcel, and reputedly for Beckett, the vision is always regarded as the 'key to the op. mag.' (Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1992, p.32). The sensuous intuition, figured by 'storm and night', is to become the material of the artist, illuminated by 'the light of the understanding' (Beckett, 1986, p.220). Light and night, mapped as the spiritual and the sensual, partake also of the evaluative symbolic divisions of the Manichaeian system. Beckett's own production notebooks on Krapp's Last Tape confirm the connection explicitly.<sup>5</sup> Under the Manichaeian system, light denotes the intellect, spirit, knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> Four pages of Beckett's notebook for the 1969 Schiller production detail the Manichaeian framework of Krapp's Last Tape (Beckett, 1992, pp.131-141). In addition to the information he is thought to have extracted from the Encyclopedia Britannica, Morot-Sir suggests the possibility that 'Beckett knows Saint Augustine's writings against the Manichaeians, especially the Confessions, De moribus Manichaeorum et de moribus Ecclesiae, De libero arbitrio, and Contra Faustum' (Morot-Sir, 1976, p.85). Ridicule of the metaphysical pronouncements of the Manichaeians is a crucial element in Augustine's critique. Krapp's Last Tape, Mani and Augustine are discussed in Sections vi-vii of this chapter.



and ultimate salvation;<sup>6</sup> darkness is to evoke matter, sensuality, evil and earthly entrapment. In more delicate detail, according to Manichaeian metaphysics, the 'five "finer elements" (the Gentle Breeze, the Wind, the Light, the Water, the Fire)' had become 'mixed' and thus 'trapped' by 'Five elements of darkness (Smoke, Burning, Darkness, Hot Wind, and Cloud' (Hopper, 1955, p.151). Manichaeian disciples are charged to liberate the entrapped light from the darkness. Mani, founder of the sect, was himself granted knowledge of these oppositions and their proper evaluation in a vision or, rather, 'annunciation' at the age of 24' (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975, p.776). Accordingly, Mani 'was persuaded [...] that he was the recipient of divine revelations and that he was called to preach a new faith' (Hopper, 1955, p.149). Krapp's vision is decidedly second-, or given the Proustian and Manichaeian filters, third- or even fourth-hand; if one's being is to be blasted by visions of the nature of the universe, one is surely entitled to expect that such revelations should possess a degree of originality. Copied revelations barely warrant the name. The divinity supplying Krapp's metaphysical insights, however, finds it difficult to refrain from both arch literary allusions and arcane philosophical references.

Krapp's vision of the eternal, moreover, has decayed in

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<sup>6</sup> Light as a metaphor for knowledge and insight is also most forcibly used by Descartes. In the Meditations, 'the "natural light" (lumen naturale)' is invoked 'whenever he wishes to introduce into the argument premises which are supposed to be self-evidently manifest to the intellect' (Cottingham, 1993, p.95). 'The Search for Truth' itself is 'by Means of the Natural Light' (Descartes, 1984, vol.2, p.400).



time. This central experience, life and art's inspiration, has been forgotten:

... Memorable ... what? [He peers closer.] Equinox, memorable equinox. [He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.] Memorable equinox? ... [Pause. He shrugs his shoulders [...].]

(Beckett, 1986, p.217)

As Proust's Marcel records, 'after a few years, we are unfaithful to what we once were, to what we wished to remain immortally'; as Krapp finds too, the conversation with 'the self that we have been' is experienced as 'merely a boring importunity' (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.888). This repudiation is retrieved by Campbell as merely a variant interpretation, a 'new reading' attendant upon Krapp's review of the tapes:

his continual reevaluation of experience necessarily involves forgetting and criticizing some things which he once considered important. In this light, Krapp's rejection of these youthful epiphanies is not a failure, but a necessary part of intelligent interpretation: his willingness to ignore the things which now seem of limited value indicates his openness to new understanding.

(Campbell, 1978, p.197)

Such contemplative serenity and intellectual progress are both alien to the rationale informing the textual revisions made by

Beckett to the 'vision' passage in the Revised Text of the production notebooks. The effect of these revisions instead is to impose upon this section a 'crescendo' of 'unintelligible gabble' from the fast-forwarded tape (Beckett, 1992, p.229) and likewise to turn up the volume of Krapp's anger:'

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing.

([Impatient reaction from KRAPP.])

The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to ([Violent reaction from KRAPP.]) record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that ... (hesitates). ([KRAPP thumps on table.]) ... for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely - (KRAPP switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, [mechanical with gabble, 2 seconds,] switches on again.) - great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most - (KRAPP curses, switches off, winds tape forward, [mechanical with gabble, 3 seconds], switches on again.) - unshatterable association

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<sup>7</sup> As the editor notes, 'Text between square brackets [] has been added to the original English text' (Knowlson, 1992, p.2).

until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire -

(KRAPP curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, [mechanical with gabble, 4 seconds], switches on again, ([lowers head].) - my face in her breasts and my hand on her.

(Beckett, 1992, pp.7-8)

According to Beckett's director's notes, on 'namely', 'most' and 'fire', Krapp is to respond by 'winding feverishly forward without cutting sound' (Beckett, 1992, p.105). From 'Spiritually a year', Krapp 'Looks angrily at the tape-recorder' (Beckett, 1992, p.104). Krapp 'Strikes table with right hand' upon the provocation of 'Spiritually' (Beckett, 1992, p.225). Homan's judgement that 'the words fail' at these moments of metaphysical insight because 'no word - not being or reality or soul or heaven - can be commensurate with the experience' (Homan, 1984, p.101) does not recognize that the tape is wound on through 'mechanical [...] gabble' at each crucial point, the points where the experience had indeed been converted into a verbal and linguistic representation by Krapp during the original recording.

The full statement of Krapp's vision is never made. This statement has a supposed fictional existence on spool five from box three, but Krapp is willing to listen to and so concede to the audience only fragments. The metaphysical moment, 'when suddenly I saw the whole thing', 'The vision at last', 'the miracle' made 'clear to me at last' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), is



not reproduced, the key to the mystery deliberately withheld. We are provided with gestures toward metaphysical revelation but denied access to any positive or determinate content. This 'vision' replicates the Kantian estimation of metaphysical transactions: quite literally, the content of the revelation is absent. For the audience, it is never given to the senses. As in the case of Molloy's journal, the blanks 'are where the action is' (Abbott, 1983, pp.78-79). When the metaphysical moment is on the point of being fully enunciated, the tape is wound on in exasperation. The fundamentally fictional nature of such moments is itself emphasized by Kant:

All these questions refer to an object which can be found nowhere save in our thoughts, namely, to the absolutely unconditioned totality of the synthesis of appearances. If from our own concepts we are unable to assert and determine anything certain, we must not throw the blame upon the object as concealing itself from us. Since such an object is nowhere to be met with outside our idea, it is not possible for it to be given.

(Kant, 1933, A481-482/B509-510, p.434)

For the critic, the metaphysical 'object', the content of Krapp's vision, must be located only in 'thought' and his 'own concepts', for it is not given in the text of Krapp's Last Tape.

Krapp's absent metaphysical moment, 'when suddenly I saw the whole thing' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), claims insight into the very

object which Kant disallows above: 'the absolutely unconditioned totality of the synthesis of appearances' (Kant, 1933, A481/B509, p.434). Yet the vision is also paradoxically set within spatio-temporal restrictions which guarantee that it is in fact conditioned; its occurrence is limited to 'that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty' (Beckett, 1986, p.220).<sup>\*</sup> In the different time and space of the play's action on stage, even if this moment were once to be granted the status of an metaphysical insight, it is not to be possessed again. For Beckett in Proust, 'No object prolonged in this temporal dimension tolerates possession, meaning by possession total possession, only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject' (Beckett, 1965, p.57). It is the spatio-temporal dimension which inaugurates this subject and object division. Even before 'an ideal object, immutable and incorruptible', the very object of metaphysics, the subject needed to perceive it is 'mobile' through time:

Exemption from intrinsic flux in a given object does not change the fact that it is the correlative of a subject that does not enjoy such immunity. The observer infects the observed with his own mobility. [...] So that whatever the

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<sup>\*</sup> According to Henning, 'The great, involuntary revelation lasted only a brief moment, outside time and space. It was, like every great apocalypse its description invokes, a break in monotonous chronology, a tear in the fabric of mundane time' (Henning, 1988, p.149). Such, indeed, should be the conditions of the metaphysical moment of insight; Krapp's inclusion of date and location are thus a considerable blow to the dignity of his vision. The escape from time and space is not an easy matter in Beckett; even heaven, the a priori eternal, cannot escape at least spatial limitation: it is a '"there where there is no time"' (Beckett, 1970b, p.193).

object; our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable. At the best, all that is realised in Time (all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations - and never integrally and at once.

(Beckett, 1965, pp.17-18)

The playback of Krapp's vision asks for a double dispensation if it is to qualify as metaphysically significant: we must allow that an apprehension of the whole was made in the past and that recovery of that apprehension, in all its dubious original integrity, is possible in the present. Neither would be allowed by Beckett or Kant. For each, 'our vulgar perception is not concerned with other than vulgar phenomena' (Beckett, 1965, p.17). Only empirical phenomena are available to a subject which is set in space and time.

Any position in space disallows metaphysical insight; the site selected for Krapp's vision, however, has its own additional vulgar jibes to make. In 'Love and Lethe' the Dún Laoghaire jetty, which was, according to some commentators, the location for Beckett's own 'revelation', is brought briefly to the notice of Belacqua and Ruby Tough prior to their thoughts turning exclusively to suicide:

The first thing they had to do of course when they got to the top was admire the view, with special reference to Dun Laoghaire framed to perfection in the shoulders of Three



Rock and Kilmashogue, the long arms of the harbour like an entreaty in the blue sea. [...] A human turd lay within the rath.

(Beckett, 1970b, p.100)

Kant will not permit such intimations of materiality to metaphysical speculation; around 'metaphysically great men' instead, 'there is commonly much wind' (Kant, 1950, p.122, note 2). In the case of impediments to one's way, one is at least sure of 'the fruitful bathos of experience' (Kant, 1950, p.122, note 2).<sup>9</sup> Proust is more particular in selecting for his narrator 'the best point [...] for seeing the most violent storms' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.417). In common with Krapp, Marcel requires a position 'round which the winds howled and the sea-birds wheeled', where the observer may receive 'the last dying foam of the uplifted waves' (Proust, vol.1, 1981, p.708). Marcel even shares with Krapp a proximity to 'the granite rampart of a Norman cliff' (Beckett, 1965, p.40). However, according to Marcel, 'I required also, if the storm was to be absolutely genuine, that the shore from which I watched it should be a natural shore' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.417). Krapp must make do with a jetty; Marcel will not tolerate any such 'embankment recently constructed by a municipality' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.417).

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<sup>9</sup> This comment from Kant's Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics is cited in the Addenda to Watt in mysterious isolation as 'das fruchtbare Bathos der Erfahrung' (Kant cited in Beckett, 1976, p.254).

## ii. Krapp 'recovers himself'

As in metaphysical revelation, transcendence of time and space is a vital element in Proustian involuntary memory. A central instance of this transcendence occurs in 'Time Regained' with Marcel's stumble on the cobbles in the Guermantes' courtyard. Without such points of transcendence offered by involuntary memory, Marcel characterizes his experience as a meaningless and levelled continuum in time. Without possible exit from this stream, 'another hundred years of life [...] would merely have added a series of extensions to an already tedious existence, which there seemed to be no point in prolonging at all' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.898). Without this 'miracle', Marcel is 'not situated outside Time, but was subject to its laws' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.520). For Marcel, it is not mechanical equipment that can overcome 'actual separation' in space or time; the telephone merely emphasizes for him 'the illusoriness in the appearance of the most tender proximity' (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.135). Krapp's tape-recorder, stabilizing the object, cannot retard the movement of the subject. Time and space intervene:

But should a sensation from a bygone year - like those recording instruments which preserve the sound and the manner of the various artists who have sung or played into them - enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular ring with which it then sounded in our ears, we feel at once, though the name itself has apparently not

changed, the distance that separates the dreams which at different times its same syllables have meant for us.

(Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.5)

For Proust, the 'communication of our present self [...] with the past' is mediated only via chance meetings with that sensuous object wherein 'the essence of the past' is stored (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.921). In the search for 'our own past'

It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which the material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die.

(Proust, 1981, vol.1, pp.47-48)

The first object which, in its interaction with the senses of the narrator, inaugurates the transcendence of the spatio-temporal continuum is a madeleine infused with tea. In Beckett's encapsulation, 'The whole of Proust's world comes out of a teacup' (Beckett, 1965, p.34).

The spell of involuntary memory is activated for Marcel immediately upon sensory contact between mouth and madeleine: 'No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon



the extraordinary thing that was happening to me' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.48). The experience of the madeleine is centred upon 'a pure form of oral sensuousness' (Kristeva, 1993, p.43), a contact 'which is the most infantile and archaic that a living being can possibly experience with an object or a person' (Kristeva, 1993, p.44). Krapp duplicates the form of this experience in his opening routine. A blank tape is first rejected from the drawer in Krapp's table; a second exploration yields more suitable material for oral stimulation, 'a large banana' (Beckett, 1986, p.215). Krapp is to be under scrutiny on the fore-stage to determine the magical effects of this sensory experience:

He turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, drops skin at his feet, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.215-216)

Krapp is properly 'motionless' during this first experiment. Marcel too, upon the shock of involuntary memory, must halt as the experience exerts its grip:

Suddenly I stood still, unable to move, as happens when we are faced with a vision that appeals not to our eyes only but requires a deeper kind of perception and takes possession of the whole of our being.

(Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.153).

The properly Proustian experience is one of inner tumult, a 'palpitating in the depths of my being', a 'confused and chaotic' struggle within a consciousness assailed by a 'whirling medley of stirred-up colours' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.49). Krapp, banana in mouth, remains 'staring vacuously before him', bathetically unassailed (Beckett, 1986, p.216).<sup>10</sup> Involuntary memory does not permit second attempts at stimulation; the madeleine's powers of invocation are dependent upon the condition that it reactivates a 'long-forgotten taste' (Beckett, 1965, p.34). Repetition of the stimulus is subject to the law of diminishing returns, 'a progressive diminution of strength' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.48). As Marcel finds, 'a second mouthful' yields 'nothing more than in the first', 'a third [...] gives me rather less than the second': 'It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.48). Krapp, however, desires, after many mouthfuls of the first, a second banana. The chance encounter with a sensory object described by Proust is inverted by Krapp into a ritual to be repeated. Krapp returns to his starting position in order to duplicate his own parodic duplication of the essential Proustian incident. The motions of time past are mechanically and inexactly repeated in time present:

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<sup>10</sup> Oral stimulation by carrot is more successful in stirring Estragon's memory in Waiting for Godot:

VLADIMIR: [...] What was it you wanted to know?

ESTRAGON: I've forgotten. [Chews.] That's what annoys me. [He looks at the carrot appreciatively, dangles it between finger and thumb.] I'll never forget this carrot. [He sucks the end of it meditatively.] Ah yes, now I remember.

(Beckett, 1986, p.21)

He [...] returns to table, sits down, remains a moment motionless, heaves a great sigh, takes keys from his pockets, raises them to his eyes, chooses key, gets up and moves to front of table, unlocks second drawer,<sup>11</sup> takes out a second large banana, peers at it, locks drawer, puts back keys in pocket, turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, tosses skin into pit, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him.

(Beckett, 1986, p.216)

Ironically inverting Proustian rules, Krapp's revelation is attendant upon this repetition of the stimulus:

Finally he has an idea, puts banana in his waistcoat pocket, the end emerging,<sup>12</sup> and goes with all the speed he can muster backstage into darkness.

(Beckett, 1986, p.216)

A page in Beckett's production notebook headed 'CHOICE CHANCE', with the Proustian stipulation 'CHANCE' crossed out (and left legible), details the nature of Krapp's 'idea':

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<sup>11</sup> The Revised Text cuts this business with the keys; Krapp begins the repeat of the banana-sequence as he 'returns to drawer' and simply 'takes out second [...] banana' (Beckett, 1992, p.3).

<sup>12</sup> Instead of preserving the banana for future use, in the Revised Text Krapp 'throws banana backstage left' (Beckett, 1992, p.3). This action will later be counted as an offence against Manichaeian precepts.



At curtain up he is thinking of the story of  
the boat and trying to remember  
which year it was (how old he was).

Doesn't succeed. Tries again  
during banana 1. (Reseated at  
table still tries to remember.)

Remembers all of a sudden as he starts banana 2  
(thanks to  $39 = 13 \times 3$ , which had  
struck him at the time) and hastens away  
to fetch the ledger that will allow him  
to identify box and tape.

(Beckett, 1992, p.49)

Krapp has remembered the correct reference to a tape-recording  
of an experience, not the experience itself. Involuntary memory  
remains inaccessible; Krapp's power of recall is 'an instrument  
of reference instead of an instrument of discovery' (Beckett,  
1965, p.30), the very opposite of involuntary memory. Marcel's  
consciousness has the capacity to 'miraculously' transverse  
'enormous distances', invoking the experience which will 'come  
rushing upon us with almost the speed of light' (Proust, 1981,  
vol.3, p.950). This instantaneous mental retrieval is degraded  
into Krapp's physically difficult movements, his 'Laborious walk'  
(Beckett, 1986, p.215), to collect together his rather more  
cumbersome externalized mental machinery from the darkness of the  
closet.

The interval between the consumption of the first and second

banana is distinguished by Krapp's mishap with a portion of discarded peel. The incident properly maintains a low reputation as 'clownish stage business', a 'pratfall' (Knowlson, 1992, p.xv) or 'a tired piece of slapstick' (Schotz, 1991, p.48). Such a slip has portentous meaning in a Proustian context, however. Furthermore, the precise phrasing of Beckett's stage directions delicately doubles the allusion. Krapp has ceased to wait for the revelations of involuntary memory to attend banana one:

Finally he bites off the end, turns aside and begins pacing to and fro at edge of stage, in the light, i.e. not more than four or five paces either way, meditatively eating banana. He treads on skin, slips, nearly falls, recovers himself, stoops and peers at skin and finally pushes it, still stooping, with his foot over edge of stage into pit.<sup>13</sup>

(Beckett, 1986, p.216)

As Beckett's Proust argues, one of the primary powers of involuntary memory is that which enables Marcel also to 'recover himself'. Via an action or sensation shared by time past and time present, 'he has recovered the lost reality of himself, the reality of his lost self' (Beckett, 1965, p.41). For Marcel, the lost self of time past lies latent within the present

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<sup>13</sup> As Knowlson points out, after the Schiller production of Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett altered the means of disposal: 'after slipping on the skin in good circus and pantomime tradition, in the revised version Krapp picked it up and threw it backstage left into the darkness' (Knowlson, 1992, p.xv). The remnants of the second banana will follow it.

manifestation of the subject, 'Within us [...] but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged':

It is thanks to this oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the person that we were, place ourselves in relation to things as he was placed, suffer anew because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what now leaves us indifferent.

(Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.692)

In time present Marcel can recover himself, that is, recover a past 'self that I had just suddenly become once again' (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.784). Krapp's recovery of himself is a parodic physical manifestation of the psychic action of Proust's narrator. Krapp's slip, which provokes the buried reference of the stage direction,<sup>14</sup> has its own peculiar Proustian counterpart, the 'chance reduplication of a precarious equilibrium' (Beckett, 1965, p.70), as Beckett puts it, experienced by Marcel in the *Guermites*' courtyard. This decisive instance of involuntary memory at last reveals to the narrator his literary vocation:

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<sup>14</sup> It is not the only allusion or joke contained in Beckett's stage directions which is available only to the reader and must be lost in performance. In *Happy Days*, Winnie is in possession of 'a collapsible collapsed parasol' (Beckett, 1986, p.138); the direction can be followed, but the felicity of its expression cannot be reproduced for an audience. Elsewhere, Beckett introduces distinctions in the stage directions which equally cannot be made manifest during performance; in *The Old Tune*, for example, Gorman's speech is 'indistinct for want of front teeth, whistling sibilants', whereas Cream must have 'whistling sibilants due to ill-fitting denture' (Beckett, 1986, p.337). The effect of each malady is identical; the reader only is privy to their distinct causes.



Revolving the gloomy thoughts I have just recorded, I had entered the courtyard of the Guermantes mansion and in my absent-minded state I had failed to see a car that was coming toward me; the chauffeur gave a shout and I just had time to step out of the way, but as I moved sharply backwards I tripped against the uneven paving-stones in front of the coach-house. And at that moment when, recovering my balance, I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbour, all my discouragement vanished [...]. Just as, at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all anxiety about the future, all intellectual doubts had disappeared, so now those that a few seconds ago had assailed me on the subject of my literary gifts, the reality even of literature, were removed as if by magic.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.898-899)

The slip, 'with the imperious suddenness of a chance happening' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.899-900), restores to Marcel all the sensations experienced simultaneously with its earlier occurrence in the baptistery of St. Mark's and thus delivers to consciousness the 'radiant essence' of Venice as experienced then (Beckett, 1965, p.70). Beckett has reactivated this particular Proustian incident before; repeating the very words of Proust, Belacqua in Dream to Fair to Middling Women reports 'The wattmen tittered as I tottered on purpose for radiant Venice to solve my life' (Beckett, 1993, p.82). In Beckett's usage, in Dream and Krapp's Last Tape, the slip is relieved of all ability to disturb its performers by the invasion of visions or revelations. The

process of degeneration is sustained: in Proust, Marcel's stumble is enacted to 'the evident amusement of the crowd of chauffeurs' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.899); Belacqua performs to the titters of mere waitmen; Krapp, the source of his slip reduced to the banana-skin beloved of silent comedy, relinquishes his balance in return for the mere acknowledgement of buffoonery by the lowest crowd of spectators, Beckett's audience.

In a play concerned with memory, time, the ageing of the subject, literary ambitions and the replaying of time past, one would not expect Beckett to be careless with allusions to Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu. The minor idiosyncrasies shared by Krapp and Marcel are too numerous to be the result of merely fortuitous echoes. Krapp is endowed with the capacity for 'an emotional rapport with material objects' (Beckett, 1992, p.248); for Marcel, 'material objects have in themselves no power, but [...] it is in our practice to bestow power' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.889). Where Marcel reports 'unpeopled vacancy' (Proust, vol.1, 1981, p.462), Krapp concludes 'The earth might be uninhabited' (Beckett, 1986, p.223). Marcel's admission that, in regard to selected women, he 'provided each of them with a legend' (Proust, vol.1, 1981, p.462), is reproduced by Krapp's enigmatic references to 'A girl in a shabby green coat', the mysterious 'Bianca in Kedar Street' (Beckett, 1986, p.218) and the girl in the punt distinguished by a scratch on her thigh sustained while, of all things, 'Picking gooseberries' (Beckett, 1986, p.221). Krapp and Marcel share a cagibi, a 'place of refuge', especially useful as a retreat ensuring the 'inviolable

solitude' necessary for 'sensual gratification' (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.13). In the Orsay and San Quentin productions, Krapp's image was seen in shadow on the wall of the closet while taking progressively stronger drinks; Marcel is supplied with 'a magic lantern' in the cagibi, projecting upon its walls 'an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window' (Proust, vol.1, 1981, p.9). Later, set by the 'shore of that lake in the Bois', Marcel, as well as Krapp, relates an episode involving a rejected lover and a detail concerning the 'the fusion of our shadows' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.172-173). Marcel's asthmatic breathlessness has in Krapp's constipation a less aesthetic counterpart for the suggestion of artistic blockage and narcissistic self-enclosure. The death of Krapp's mother is relayed 'when [...] the blind went down' (Beckett, 1986, p.220); for Marcel, 'the vision of his grandmother begins to fade' following her death, until 'It is redeemed for a moment [...] by the drawing of a blind in a railway carriage' (Beckett, 1965, p.43).<sup>15</sup> While 'mother lay a-dying' (Beckett, 1986, p.219), Krapp, literally and parodically, doubles Marcel's 'rule

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<sup>15</sup> Marcel is struck by the gap between the fact of his grandmother's death and his emotional realization of it:

it was only at that moment - more than a year after her burial, because of the anachronism which so often prevents the calender of facts from corresponding to the calendar of feelings - that I became conscious that she was dead.  
(Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.783)

In Beckett's dramatic fragment, Human Wishes, Mrs Williams notes an identical phenomena: 'When my father, Mr Zachariah Williams, died [...] I knew at once he was dead', yet 'it did not come to the notice of my heart until the Christmas following' (Beckett, 1983a, p.164).



of the three adjectives':

It was the time when well-bred people observed the rule of affability and what was called the rule of the three adjectives. Mme de Cambremer combined both rules. One laudatory adjective was not enough for her, she followed it (after a little dash) with a second, then (after another dash) with a third. But, what was peculiar to her was that, in defiance of the literary and social aim which she set herself, the sequence of the three epithets assumed in Mme de Cambremer's letters the aspect not of a progression but of a diminuendo.

(Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.977)

Krapp, for the benefit of the tape, instigates the rule of six adjectives: 'A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball' (Beckett, 1986, p.220). The 'unerring dexterity' of Mme de Cambremer in achieving a diminishment through her three adjectives ('delicious - charming - nice') provokes Marcel into recognizing their purposeful employment as a disguised insult (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.1123). Beckett goes further down the 'descending scale' (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.1123). The 'bench by the weir' episode (Beckett, 1986, p.219) marks Krapp's sole foray into society, not quite 'throwing a ball' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), but sufficient measure of Krapp's adherence to the 'rule of affability':

Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old

men, dogs. I got to know them quite well - oh by appearance of course I mean! One dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her - not having been introduced - she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue!<sup>16</sup>

(Beckett, 1986, pp.219-220)

Omitting the ritual of formal introduction, Krapp's social graces are sufficiently lacking to justify a call for the introduction of the police to the scene instead. As Marcel discovers, Parisian society is predicated upon 'appearance'; Krapp has no aspiration to a more intimate knowledge.

Krapp shares two more linguistic peculiarities with Marcel.

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<sup>16</sup> The starched nurse provides intimations of the only major episode of involuntary memory in A la recherche du temps perdu not marked in Krapp's Last Tape. The sensations experienced by Marcel while 'holding in my hand the stiff starched towel' supplied by the hotel at Balbec (Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.723) are recalled at the Guermantes' reception by a napkin which 'had precisely the same degree of stiffness and starchedness as the towel with which I had found it so awkward to dry my face [...] on the first day of my arrival at Balbec' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.901). The sensation of touch is here the provocation for the resurgence of involuntary memory. In an earlier draft of Krapp's Last Tape, Krapp does indeed attempt a more exact, and simultaneously parodic, Proustian parallel: 'in Typescript III Beckett entertained the possibility of making Krapp's advances to the nurse more overt: "when I was ingenious enough to try and pat her on the bottom she threatened to call a policeman"' (Gontarski, 1977, p.65). The nurse, 'all white and starch' we remember, has only to be importuned by a little of Krapp's pawing to provide an allusion to the missing episode of Proustian involuntary memory, that excited by the sense of touch upon starched material.

The 'magic of names' for Marcel is attendant on 'Swann':

And then I would be obliged to catch my breath, so suffocating was the pressure, upon that part of me where it was forever inscribed, of that name which, at the moment when I heard it, seemed to me fuller, more portentous than any other, because it was heavy with the weight of all the occasions on which I had secretly uttered it in my mind.

(Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.157)

Krapp's revelry in sound swaps portentousness for vacuity: 'Spoooool! [Happy smile [...]]' (Beckett, 1986, p.216). But Marcel also experiences 'that law of change which made these loved words unintelligible to us' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.941). Krapp shares this disability too:

where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity [KRAPP gives a start] and the - [KRAPP switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on] - a-dying, after her long viduity, and the - [KRAPP switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllables of 'viduity'. No sound. He gets up, goes backstage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on table, sits down and looks up the word.]<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> According to Kelly, 'viduity' is a word 'which Beckett found in Johnson' (Kelly, 1992, p.29), although this fact is somewhat less notable if, by 'in Johnson', we refer to his dictionary wherein most words can in fact be found.



As Marcel discovers, 'even our strongest feelings [...] at the end of a few years have vanished from our heart and become for us merely a word which we do not understand' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.940). Marcel's attempts to reactivate such feelings through the rigours of involuntary memory and artistic exploration are reduced, for Krapp, to the scanning of another reference book, his 'enormous dictionary' wherein meanings may be re-discovered in an orderly fashion when erased from consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

These Proustian moments, shared images, episodes and peculiarities, are not simply reproduced: Krapp's Last Tape's remembrance of Proust, the master of fiction concerning memory, is faulty, distorted and parodic. To 'forget' Proust in such a fashion is perhaps the most subtle and well-designed of literary insults. The image of Proust is a decidedly faint memory and Krapp's unerring impulse is to degrade any 'moments' of Proustian allusion. According to Marcel, had Mme de Cambremer stretched her powers of diminutive description to a fourth adjective, 'nothing would have remained of the initial amiability' (Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.978); Krapp's assessment of 'moments' is permitted a fourth entry:

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<sup>18</sup> A la recherche du temps perdu is itself one of the few novels which require, ironically, an aid to memory in the form of a referenced synopsis. Access to episodes in the novel is facilitated by a scholarly precursor to Krapp's ledger.

Moments. Her moments, my moments. [Pause.] The dog's moments.

(Beckett, 1986, p.220)

In the flawed reproduction of Proust, predicated on obliquity rather than parallelism, nothing remains of the initial portentousness. The accent is exclusively upon diminuendo.

### iii. The magnum opus: empiricism and intellectual transcendence

The grandeur of Krapp's vision of the 'opus ... magnum' (Beckett, 1986, p.218) is dissipated by the location of his work in certain 'libraries': 'Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Marcel's vision of his literary vocation, commencing with the stumble on the cobbles in the courtyard, is instead consolidated as 'He is ushered into the library' (Beckett, 1965, p.70). In this location, Marcel finds 'suddenly illuminated [...] the whole purpose of my life and perhaps of art itself' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.923). Krapp and Marcel are brought to the same position: each has at his disposal a library where the volumes or tapes contain 'the history of my own life' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.922); each has deferred the commencement of the prospective magnum opus in favour of sensual pleasures; each perceives that the 'reality' of their own darkness is to constitute the material of their art. Marcel, sharing the vision's tropology of light and darkness, realizes 'that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined

[...] within the confines of a book!' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.1088). The raw materials of art are to be found in the artist's own individual experience:

And then a new light [...] shone suddenly within me. And I understood that all these materials for a work of art were simply my past life; I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in indolence, in tenderness, in unhappiness, and that I had stored them up without divining the purpose for which they were destined or even their continued existence any more than a seed does when it forms within itself a reserve of all the nutritious substances from which it will feed a plant.<sup>19</sup>

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.935-936)

Krapp's storage system of fragmented empirical experience is exemplary up to the point of the stage time of the play; at its end, Krapp's ledger and tapes are scattered on the floor, to be kicked aside if they should impede his path to the closet for a 'strong measure' to dull the very senses that are charged with

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<sup>19</sup> The end of Proust's work thus leaves us at the point where Marcel's is ready to begin. The Moran section in Molloy is structurally identical:

Moran's novel adopts that typical fictional form familiar to us in Wordsworth's Prelude, Hegel's Logic, Proust's novel, and in contemporary works of fiction like Iris Murdoch's Under the Net. Moran's novel brings him to the point in his experience at which he is ready to begin writing the work we have just finished reading.

(Bové, 1982, p.204)



the collection of material for the artist.<sup>20</sup> The materials of the magnum opus, gathered for assessment in the pool of light surrounding Krapp's table, are thrown back into the surrounding darkness.

Marcel desires the transcendence and synthesis of empirical experience; Krapp merely consolidates the havoc and disorder of the undigested fragments of empirical material stored on the trampled tapes. Marcel as artist 'remembers only things that are general' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.937): sensory experience, the individual and particular, must be processed by the understanding into an artistic expression of universal significance. Marcel can thus seize grief and unhappiness as the raw material of artistic creation, for the 'necessary function' of the writer is 'to extract from [...] grief the generality that lies within it' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.939). Marcel has a precise plan which could deal with the 'mere rough draft' of the punt passage on Krapp's tape; here 'the particular and the general lie side by side':

if [...] we set ourselves to work, [...] literature, recommencing the ruined work of amorous illusion, will give a sort of second life to sentiments which have ceased to exist. And certainly we are obliged to re-live our

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<sup>20</sup> Directing Pinget's l'Hypothèse, Beckett made 'concrete' the 'relationship of a man to his manuscript' in similar terms: pages were to be scattered on the stage and 'Beckett insisted that he hear the sound of the character walking through the leaves that have fallen on to the floor' (Chabert cited in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.315).

individual suffering, with the courage of the doctor who over and over again practises on his own person some dangerous injection. But at the same time we have to conceptualise it in a general form which will in some measure enable us to escape from its embrace, which will turn all mankind into sharers in our pain, and which is even able to yield us a certain joy. Where life immures, the intelligence cuts a way out [...]. The intelligence knows nothing of those closed situations of life from which there is no escape.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.942-943)

The punt passage is replayed in accordance with the experiment Marcel advocates, yet Krapp cannot reach the 'disinterested' state of the artist (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.946), where the particular, sensory experience is transformed into a general abstraction, fit for use in an art dealing in essences and universality. Krapp's experience remains undigested and unsynthesized, fragmentary and dark in its sensuous origins; the light of the understanding is unable to exercise its powers of transformation. The episode of the punt is merely repeated, the tape-recording ensuring that this material is, in itself, unchanged when replayed. Where Marcel achieves intellectual abstraction and imaginative transcendence of particular experiences, Krapp is equipped merely to rewind and play out the same raw material over again.

For Marcel, the empirical and sensory impression is the ground from which the intellectual abstraction arises; that which

is located in time and space is the material from which a timeless and universal essence is to be drawn. Sounding a Kantian note, Marcel rejects 'The ideas formed by the pure intelligence', which, lacking sensory counterparts, 'have no more than a logical, a possible truth' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.914). Such ideas, like the empty concepts of metaphysics, are merely 'arbitrarily chosen' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.914). Instead, Marcel's task is 'to interpret the given sensations as signs of so many laws and ideas, by trying to think [...] what I had merely felt, by trying to convert it into its spiritual equivalent' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.912). The empirical impression itself should remain the basic material of the intellectual abstraction. Yet this abstraction of the essential from contingent phenomena, of the general law from analysis of the particular instance, replicates both the process of induction and the grounding of metaphysical assertions on empirical evidence examined in relation to Theatre II above and each outlawed by Kant. While Marcel avoids the unanchored speculations of metaphysics entirely disconnected from empirical evidence, the difficulty remains that no empirical evidence is sufficient to properly ground his desired abstractions and generalities.<sup>21</sup> The very value of this operation for Marcel is

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<sup>21</sup> The tension here is evident in Kristeva's commentary:

We can note in passing how sensation and representation inevitably drift apart at the very moment when the experience of taste, as an immediate perceptual experience, is transcended by the concern to illuminate its meaning. Taste and vision are still inseparable paramours but they have come unstuck [...].

(Kristeva, 1993, pp.46-47).

Some conceptual violence is necessary to enable the putatively



that empirical fragments are transcended; the intellectual insight must indeed surpass its constitutive sensory experiences. Inevitably the insight is then incompletely grounded by empirically verifiable experience.

In Beckett's Proust the work of conceptualization and intellectual transcendence demanded of the artist by Marcel, is recast in terms dangerously close to that 'minister of dullness' and 'agent of security', the 'old ego' (Beckett, 1965, p.21). Conceptualization is redescribed as deadening 'Habit' which filters raw experience through the protective grid of a pre-established conceptual scheme (Beckett, 1965, p.21). In Beckett's analysis, it is the pre-conceptual sensory impression which is the privileged element:

when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment.

(Beckett, 1965, pp.22-23)

The particular impression, sensory and unique, would be subsumed in and thus eliminated by conceptual abstraction. The 'work of the intelligence' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.914) recommended by Proust, is elided by Beckett to 'the prejudices of the

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'inseparable' to 'drift apart' or 'come unstuck'.

intelligence', those processes 'which abstract [...] 'from any given sensation [...] whatever word or gesture, sound or perfume, cannot be fitted into the puzzle of a concept' (Beckett, 1965, pp.71-72).

In the double form of apprehension required for secure knowledge as detailed by Kant, sensory intuition, privileged by Beckett's Proust, and intellectual conceptualization, privileged by Proust himself, are both equally necessary:

To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. [...] The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.

(Kant, 1933, A51/B75, p.93)

As far as Proust offends against the first stricture, via transcendence and abstraction towards empty concepts, Beckett's corrective analysis in Proust pushes against the blindness of pre-conceptual intuition.<sup>22</sup> Krapp's failure intellectually to assimilate the fragments of autobiography stored externally on tape is the reverse image of Marcel's ability to transcend and

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<sup>22</sup> Beckett's position in Proust is paradoxical: the entirely uninterpreted sensory intuition must defy any commentary, so that even to declare it particular and unique is to place it under pre-established general concepts. See below, Chapter Six, Section xix.

spiritualize experience. Where Krapp wanders blindly among material remnants, Marcel risks evaporation among concepts emptied of their empirical content. The emphasis upon sensory experience in Krapp's Last Tape retains as a corollary an insistence upon the conditions of that intuition, the Kantian frames of time and space. Beyond these boundaries, violated by Marcel in the pursuit of time past and his past selves, Krapp cannot follow.

iv. Kantian offences: the 'mystical experience' of 'an extra-temporal being'

Where Proust attempts to reunite a concept drawn from the past with a present empirical intuition, there is no Kantian disagreement; both sides of the requisite apprehension are fulfilled, 'existence', merely with a time-lag, is added to the 'dream':

So often, in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because at the instant when my senses had perceived it my imagination [...] could not apply itself to it, in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent. And now, suddenly, the effect of this harsh law had been neutralized, temporally annulled, by a marvellous expedient of nature which had caused a sensation [...] to be mirrored at one and the same time in the past, so that my imagination was permitted to savour it, and in the present, where the actual shock to my senses



of the noise, the touch of the linen napkin, or whatever it might be, had added to the dreams of imagination the concept of 'existence' which they usually lack [...].

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.905)

However, the greater claim explicit in 'Time Regained' is the escape from the frame of time itself. In A la recherche du temps perdu, according to Beckett, 'Time is not recovered, it is obliterated' (Beckett, 1965, p.75). The original sensation is not merely remembered; losing its moorings in past time and space, it is again immediately present to the subject. Marcel, in Beckett's account, is granted access to 'the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself', its return 'annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction' (Beckett, 1965, p.72). In the Kantian scheme, however, the very possibility of 'sensation' or empirical intuition is dependent upon its occurrence within a particular spatio-temporal location. For Marcel, when 'the returning memory [...] remains in the context of its own place and date', the subject is transported from its present spatio-temporal context back into the empirical circumstances and contingent sensations associated with that past spatio-temporal point. The subject under the influence of involuntary memory is simultaneously located both in the present and the past; this is a 'condensation' which mysteriously 'embraces two moments in time and two different spaces' (Kristeva, 1993, p.48). To reconcile this split, Marcel declares that some essential core of the subject transcends time itself. The episodes of involuntary memory are 'diverse yet with this in

common':

[...] I had experienced them at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and I was made to doubt whether I was in one or the other. The truth surely was that the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal, and this being made its appearance only when, through one of these identifications of the present with the past, it was likely to find itself in the one and only medium in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.904)

The interdependence of empirical contingency and the frames of time and space ensure that 'the essence of things' is indeed only available 'outside time'. Such also is the realm of metaphysics and empty ideas.

In Beckett's analysis too, given this 'mystical experience' delivering 'an extratemporal essence', 'it follows that the communicant is for the moment an extratemporal being' (Beckett, 1965, p.75). That involuntary memory can excavate past experience demonstrates the fundamental continuity of the

subject: an unchanging kernel of the self must persist through time to recognize the memory as one's own. Where Marcel finally celebrates the isolation of an essential and unified extra-temporal self, Krapp's continuous identity is intimated through repeated attempts at self-repudiation. The taped representation of Krapp-at-39 is driven to cancel the authority of an earlier representation:

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.] And the resolutions! [Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.] To drink less, in particular. [Brief laugh of KRAPP alone.] [...] Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over. [Pause.] False ring there.

(Beckett, 1986, p.218)

Despite his perplexity concerning the condition of 'Being - or remaining' (Beckett, 1986, p.219),<sup>23</sup> the discontinuity of identity Krapp wishes to emphasize on the last tape is thwarted by the repetition of a similarly phrased contempt for this earlier self:

Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. [Pause.] The eyes she had!

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<sup>23</sup> '[Reading from dictionary.] State - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or widower. [Looks up. Puzzled.] Being - or remaining?' (Beckett, 1986, p.219).



An insert in the performance text, as given in the Schiller production notebook, revises the record of Krapp's last tape. Here again Krapp repeats rather than transcends: 'that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. [The voice! Jesus!]' (Beckett, 1992, p.9). The square brackets mark an addition to the text, an addition that must recall the phraseology of the voice of the old tape: 'Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus!' (Beckett, 1986, p.218). Beckett's direction calls for an 'echo-effect'; the live actor 'should here use tone and voice of the tape voice' (Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.140) when making the new recording. The mystical Proustian being exempted from the flux of time is supplemented by the extra-temporal Krapp, constituted by a consistent self-contempt, a persistent desire for bananas, a continued preference for jottings on the backs of envelopes to the composition of the autobiographical magnum opus, a steady isolation<sup>24</sup> and chronic constipation. The nature of the self retained is such that Krapp is driven to repeated and self-defeating attempts to disown it. Krapp is forced to retain a sufficient characteristic propensity for failure and humiliation in order to recognize '"that stranger whose contempt would cause one most pain - oneself"' (Beckett, 1965, p.64).

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<sup>24</sup> 'Not a soul' at the Winehouse thirty years ago (Beckett, 1986, p.217), 'Hardly a soul' around the 'bench by the weir' as 'mother lay a-dying' (Beckett, 1986, p.219), returning to 'Not a soul' as Krapp 'Sat shivering in the park' sometime during the current year (Beckett, 1986, p.222).

## v. Vacuity and empty ideas

The representation and reproduction of time on the serial medium of Krapp's tapes is linear and consecutive. The unwinding of the reels must take place in time; the filling and emptying of the inter-dependent spools physically marks the passage of time like the flow of sand between opposite ends of an hour-glass. The storage capacity of the tapes is merely such that certain aural characteristics of time past (determined to some extent by spatial relationships) can be mechanically repeated in future time. The adequacy of the representation of time past contained on the tapes can be judged by the disparity between the recording made on Krapp's last tape and the action of the play in its entirety; the last tape and the experience of Krapp delineated in the time of the play are clearly not interchangeable. Experience in its totality is not preserved. The time difference between the recording and its playback ensures that the two events are distinct. As Spivak argues, 'Repetition leads to a simulacrum, not to the "same"' (Spivak, 1976, p.lxv). The logical formula  $A = A$ , asserting identity, betrays this difference in its statement. Two separate items are presented. This 'ideal tautology', as Beckett recognizes, 'presupposes a relation'; between more than one item 'the affirmation of equality involves only an approximate identification, and by asserting unity denies unity' (Beckett, 1965, pp.69-70).<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> The  $A = A$  equivalence, apparently a priori certain, can thus be made self-defeating or void; as Wittgenstein argues:

to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is

alteration of the priorities of the subject through time also emphasizes the disparity of the putatively identical. The aspiring metaphysician, replaying his insights, may very easily be transformed into a 'stupid bastard', even in the opinion of himself (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Contextual alterations ensure the impossibility of identity in repetition. The original moment of inscription does not have authority over subsequent contextual deformation: the very repeatability of the recordings leave them vulnerable to ironic re-evaluation. The final comments on spool five from box three become the final comments of the play; the rejection of repetition which is stated there has very different implications when it is inadvertently replayed thirty years later:

Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I would want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.

[KRAPP motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence.]

(Beckett, 1986, p.223)

The implications of Marcel's claim to retrieve time past are similarly exposed or concealed according to context. Juxtaposed with Krapp's Last Tape and Kant's rulings on time and space, problems and ironies are more easily perceptible.

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to say nothing at all.

(Wittgenstein, 1974, §5.5302, p.52)



Marcel's assertions of an escape from time all occur within time. It is difficult to see how this could be otherwise; if such assertions occurred at no time, they would not occur. Patently, they do:

my anxiety on the subject of my death had ceased at the moment when I had unconsciously recognized the taste of the little madeleine, since the being which at that moment I had been was an extra-temporal being and therefore unalarmed by the vicissitudes of the future.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.904)

The existence of the 'extra-temporal being', that which is outside time, is brought into being at a certain 'moment' in time. This 'extra-temporal being' was that 'which at that moment I had been': the escape from time has its own temporal date and location in time, a time which has passed. But the escape from time should translate into an entry into a timeless eternity:

Fragments of existence withdrawn from Time: these then were perhaps what the being three times, four times brought back to life within me had just now tasted, but the contemplation, though it was of eternity, had been fugitive.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.908)

In Beckett's words, Marcel experiences the 'exaltation' of a 'brief eternity' (Beckett, 1965, p.75). This extra-temporal experience is 'fugitive'; its existence is restricted in time,

the very limit which it is said to escape. Moreover, involuntary memory, the process responsible for 'the extra-temporal joy which I had been made to feel by the sound of the spoon or the taste of the madeleine' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.911), is dependent upon particular sensory experiences which themselves can only be experienced in time. Experience within time is converted to its contradictory opposite, experience outside time. The route of escape from the parameters of space and time is itself trapped within them.

The possibility of the restoration of past time, travel between times or an exit from time itself are not matters conducive to agreement with Kant on the nature of time. Empiricists, with a distressing degree of 'sweet reasonableness', would prefer 'Time, proclaiming its day of the month and the state of its weather, to elapse in an orderly manner' (Beckett, 1983a, p.64). In Kant's account, 'Time has only one dimension; different times are not simultaneous but successive' (Kant, 1933, A31/B47, p.75). The decree that time past coincides with time present is then impossible, 'for none of the parts of time coexist; they are all in succession to one another' (Kant, 1933, A183/B226, p.214). Further, all sensory provocations to involuntary memory, 'all objects of the senses', 'are in time, and necessarily stand in time relations' (Kant, 1933, A34/B51, p.77). As it violates the very possibility of empirical intuition, an account of the extra-temporal is for Kant necessarily empty. Involuntary memory disqualifies itself as an experience by declaring its escape of the necessary spatio-

temporal frame of intuition. The freedom granted to Marcel to surpass the frame of time and space duplicates the procedures of the metaphysician; each, in their dissatisfaction with temporal succession and mere conditioned appearances, are betrayed into the production of concepts which, in principle, lack empirical grounding.

Lacking independent existence, the objects of these empty ideas can never be possessed by the subject. The impossibility of such possession is the conclusion of Beckett's Proust. Marcel, in relation to Albertine, transforms this negative entailment into its optimistic opposite:

When I had realized [...] that my love was not so much a love for her as a love in myself, I might have drawn various conclusions from this subjective nature of my love and in particular deduced that, being a mental state, it might survive the person for some time, but also that, having no real connexion with that person, it must, like every mental state, even the most lasting, find itself one day obsolete, be 'replaced,' and when that day came everything that seemed to attach me so sweetly, indissolubly, to the memory of Albertine would no longer exist for me.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.568)

Duplicating metaphysical speculation, Marcel's idea of Albertine is disconnected from any existing object. Where Beckett's Proust maintains that the idea or dream thus cannot be fulfilled, Marcel



emphasizes the fictional nature of the idea in order to gain reassurance that, as a mental state, its demands for fulfilment are transient. As these demands are also impossible to meet, their extinction is extremely convenient. A swift turnover of 'unreal enchantments' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.381) is sufficient to emphasize their 'enchantment' rather than their 'unreality' and maintain at least the self-possession of the narrator. But the elevated procession of Marcel's mental states yet has a perilous proximity to Krapp's habit of appearing 'staring vacuously before him' (Beckett, 1986, p.216). Mental vacancy is only problematically filled by concentration upon empty ideas.

#### vi. Augustine: the mania in Manichaeism

The allusions of Krapp's Last Tape to Manichaeian metaphysics must be disconcerting to an interpretation of the play which would thus emphasize its objections to metaphysical speculations as such. However, the presence of the Manichaeian 'Wild stuff' is indeed confessed by the author (Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1992, p.xxii), and its theory and correct dramatic manifestation given a prominent place in Beckett's production notebooks.<sup>26</sup> Yet Krapp's relation to the Manichaeian system is exclusively one of offence against its ethical and intellectual strictures. As in the case of his Proustian inheritance, the Manichaeian presence is signalled so that Krapp may mark his failure to adhere to its

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<sup>26</sup> Two and a half pages are given over entirely to the elaboration of Manichaeian precepts in the Schiller notebook (Beckett, 1992, pp.131-141). In addition, instructions as to the construction of dark/light and black/white emblems at particular junctures in the play are appended throughout.

esoteric doctrines. The welter of Manichaeian allusions inflecting Krapp's vision is detailed by McMillan and Fehsenfeld:

The description of the physical scene begins with Beckett's own image of mingling: 'Great granite rocks' (dark stone with embedded shiny crystalline flecks). It continues with a specifically Manichaeian 'emblem': the 'foam' flying up in the light of the 'beacon' is Beckett's representation of 'vapour' [...]. The 'anemometer spinning like a propeller' is itself an ambiguous combination of the properties of the 'quickenning wind' of light and the 'destructive wind' of darkness.

(McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.246)

Beckett's notebook lists twenty-seven instances of 'Explicit integration light dark' (Beckett, 1992, pp.132, my emphasis). The duty of the Manichaeian, however, is the 'Separation of light from darkness' (Beckett, 1992, p.137). Under the Manichaeian scheme, Krapp is continually guilty of 'intellectual transgression', 'the duty of reason being not to join but to separate (deliverance of imprisoned light)' (Beckett, 1992, p.141). Inverting empiricism, and any critique of metaphysics drawn from it, Mani ruled that sensory experience, ethically rewritten as sensual indulgence, is the outlawed element:

The way of the true gnosis is an ascetic way: it is to get free of the entanglement with matter through abstention from sensuous enjoyment. Here appears the doctrine of the three

'seals' - the seals of the mouth, the hand, and the bosom. The first forbids the enjoyment of unclean foods (flesh and wine); the second forbids the use of any unclean elements; the third forbids all sexual community.

(Hopper, 1955, p.153)

The boat story economically catalogues Krapp's violations, 'his breach of the three seals': 'my "face [signaculum oris] in her breasts [signaculum sinus ...] my hand on her [signaculum manus]"' (McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.246). Krapp's addiction to bananas does display a collateral adherence to Manichaeian orders to release the stored light of fruit. The light liberated, however, is minimal; Beckett's Schiller notebook replaces the first and second 'large banana' of the Faber text with unripened 'Little green bananas' (Beckett, 1992, p.169).

A blending of black and white, light and dark, organizes Krapp's costume and props. Additionally to the Faber text, Beckett's notebook details Krapp's 'Hair, face, trousers, waistcoat, shirt' as 'grey ex black' or 'grey ex white' (Beckett, 1992, p.133). An entry headed 'PROPS COSTUME' emphasizes these black/white combinations:

Ledger Big, black, worn

Boxes 9, varied, silver-coloured tin with  
lids, held together with a dark-coloured ribbon  
(or loose)



Dictionary Very big and heavy, bound  
in light-coloured leather.

Watch Silver 'turnip' watch, light  
silver chain against black waistcoat.

Envelope White, address recto  
in black ink, notes verso do. [ditto], white  
edge sticking out of top of  
waistcoat pocket.

(Beckett, 1992, p.189)

Krapp's tape-recorder is be powered by a 'Black cable [...] Joined by Krapp to the white lead of the recorder' (Beckett, 1992, p.185). The brightly lit cagibi is sealed by a curtain at the beginning of the play; upon his first visit, Krapp 'Draws cagibi curtain half open only, in which position till end' (Beckett, 1992, p.217). A source of light is thus itself divided by an obscuring black curtain. The lighting of the stage set diminutively manifests the Manichaeian design of light and dark sectors in its cosmological plans. Stage directions place 'Table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness' (Beckett, 1986, p.215). Filtered through Augustine, Manichaeian cosmology calls into being a 'bright and holy region' bordered by 'a land of darkness deep and vast in extent' (Augustine, 1872, p.113). As the region of fallen sensuality, it is proper that Krapp finds a freedom in the darkness that, in Manichaeian terms, is his imprisonment:

It is in the dark that his physical, sensual and emotional side is set free. In the dark he eats his bananas, drinks his whisky, lies propped up on the pillows and lets his mind wander, peoples the dark with memories: this he calls to 'be again'. What irony that in the light he should consciously try to grapple with his memories, give them artistic form and meaning, only to fail.

(Schotz, 1991, pp.47-48)

Such sensory impressions are those which, in the Manichaeian scheme, must be rejected:

At its core, Manichaeism was a type of Gnosticism - a dualistic religion that offered salvation through special knowledge (gnōsis) of spiritual truth. Like all forms of Gnosticism, Manichaeism taught that life in this world is unbearably painful and radically evil. Inner illumination or gnōsis reveals that the soul which shares in the nature of God has fallen into the evil world of matter and must be saved by means of the spirit or intelligence (nous). This knowledge is the only way to salvation.

(Encyclopedia Britannica, 1975, p.776).

This esoteric and spiritual truth is available only via intellectual intuition. Manichaeian truths are determinedly metaphysical; particular empirical intuitions cannot convict the empirical sphere as a whole of eternal evil. Manichaeism privileges the intellectual light, the metaphysical, at the

expense of the sensual 'dark', the empirical. Its epistemology is directly opposite to that of Kant: for the Manichaeon, only metaphysical knowledge proffers truth.

For Proust and Marcel, similarly in pursuit of spiritual or metaphysical knowledge, the search does begin with sensory sensation; the darkness is the raw material which the intellect must transcend. In Marcel's aesthetics, 'real books should be the offspring not of daylight and casual talk but of darkness and silence' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.934):

the truths which the intellect apprehends directly in the world of full and unimpeded light have something less profound, less necessary than those which life communicates to us against our will in an impression which is material because it enters us through the senses but yet has a spiritual meaning which it is possible for us to extract.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.912)

The abstraction of the spiritual meaning takes place as the impression is 'freed from what is necessarily imperfect in external perception' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.901). Eventually abandoning its basis in the empirical, the insight of artistic and epistemological value is that which is 'pure and disembodied' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.901). Krapp recasts this process in paradoxical and levelling physical terms, 'separating the grain



from the husks':<sup>27</sup>

The grain, now what I wonder do I mean by that, I mean ...  
[hesitates] ... I suppose I mean those things worth having  
when all the dust has - when all my dust has settled. I  
close my eyes and try and imagine them.

[Pause. KRAPP closes his eyes briefly.]

Extraordinary silence this evening, I strain my ears and do  
not hear a sound.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.217-218)

The review of Krapp's collection of intellectual intuitions  
'worth having' is swiftly completed; as the tape specifies,  
nothing is given to prolong the attention of the senses.

The sensuous, the dark, falls under the heading of  
Manichaeian vice, but, with the addition of the light of spiritual  
transcendence, under Proustian virtue. The interpretation of  
Krapp's vision is inverted according to which scheme is permitted  
to define the value of its 'light' and 'dark' emblems. The  
symbolic allusions of this opposition will not remain stable.  
Cluchey and Haerdter attempt to disentangle the vision passage  
with the aid of snippets of Beckett's direction:

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<sup>27</sup> Krapp's agricultural metaphor is strangely consonant  
with the use of the 'husk' of Mani's body following his  
execution, for 'his skin was stuffed with chaff, and hung up in  
public in terrorem' (Dods, 1872, p.ix). The blending of the  
agricultural and the metaphysical realms yields a particularly  
gruesome result.

Under [the vision's] influence, he made a decision of grave consequence: 'a farewell to love', and he resolved to turn away from 'the life of the body, the sexual life' and to turn towards 'the life of the mind, an intellectual life'. These are not compatible for Krapp. This is the 'Manichean' essence of the play which Beckett speaks of allusively. 'Krapp is an absolute being, he chooses either black or white.' His decision is against the light and for the darkness which for him is filled with his own fire, 'the fire in me'; a decision against a social life and for the solitude in his - finally unsuccessful - struggle for his 'opus magnum'. This 'opus magnum' is an 'explanation of the dark side of humanity'. At the age of 39, Krapp has the vision that 'in the darkness, the dark side of the mind, truth is to be found'. If up to this point he was convinced that 'the dark cannot be formulated, that this darkness is impossible to describe, a material which cannot be communicated', he realizes now 'his chance as a writer in the research of this darkness'.

(Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, pp.127-128)

Beckett does not choose to cast the synthesizing light of understanding on the fragmented darkness of Krapp's vision here. In Manichaeian terms, dedication to the 'life of the mind' is directly opposed to a 'decision [...] against the light and for the darkness'. Beckett's directorial comments concerning Krapp's Last Tape, may be 'blatantly allegorical' (Murphy, 1990, p.91), but the allegory is only heretically Manichaeian.

Krapp's mingling of light and dark emblems manifests his failure to adhere to the Manichaeian division. Beckett's staging modifications as director in fact emphasize a modulation between light and dark: the keynote becomes confusion and oscillation rather than separation of light and dark. The curtain of Krapp's closet is to be made restless, undulating across the absolute separation of light and dark drawn and demanded by Manichaeian metaphysics. Cluchey and Haerdter record Beckett's 'thoughts on the "den"':

'Light in the den at curtain-up but invisible till K's first visit to fetch ledger ... Curtain only half drawn, blocked on rod half-way across. At each visit to and return from den the curtain set in motion. Material of curtain such that this motion takes as long as possible to settle. Ideally curtain will be faintly stirring throughout play, helped perhaps by ventilator fan.'

(Beckett cited in Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.126).

The physical staging of the play is to disrupt the intellectual oppositions of the Manichaeian allegory attached to Krapp's Last Tape by Beckett himself. Krapp's recurrent references to eyes gain importance, according to Beckett, because 'The eye is the organ of interruption between light and dark' (Beckett cited in Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.134).<sup>28</sup> The physical action of

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<sup>28</sup> The play between light and dark also strikes Marcel in the 'gleam' of 'black eyes':

whenever I thought of her, the memory of those bright eyes would at once present itself to me as a vivid azure, since



the opening and closing of an eye and the dilation of its pupil is sufficient to confuse a Manichaeian evaluation based exclusively on a clear division between light and darkness. A commonplace physical movement can define the fixed and absolute divisions of Manichaeian metaphysics as clumsy idealizations. A metaphysics predicated upon the eternal opposition of light and dark cannot cope with the blink of an eye. For the greater confusion of light and dark, an accidental effect caused by the actor throwing the last tape to the floor is granted incorporation into the play:

A few days ago Rick had caused the lamp to swing wildly during this violent action. While the lamp was swinging, Krapp's head was alternatively in the light and shadow, while he carefully puts the old reel back on: the swinging stopped as Krapp become immobile for the final position.

'Try to keep that', Beckett asks. He thought that this play

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her complexion was fair; so much so that, perhaps if her eyes had not been quite so black - which was what struck one most forcibly on first seeing her - I should not have been, as I was, so especially enamoured of their imagined blue.

(Proust, 1981, vol.1, p.153)

As Krapp might exclaim, 'The eyes she had!' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Pinter's screenplay of A la recherche du temps perdu emphasizes in a sequence of shots the importance of the eye to Proust's work, as well as Beckett's:

- 345. Marcel's eyes.
- 346. The eyes of Gilberte at Tansonville.
- 347. The eyes of the Duchesse de Guermantes in the street.
- 348. The eyes of Odette in the Avenue des Acacias.
- 349. The eyes of Mother in the bedroom at Combray.
- 350. The eyes of Marcel in the lavatory in Combray.
- 351. The eyes of Marcel.

(Pinter, 1991, pp.143-144)

of light and dark, motion and silence, was 'divine'.<sup>29</sup>

(Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.137)

For the Manichaeon, it should be the separation of light from darkness which is 'divine', not this oscillation between them.

The design of the play introduces other physical oscillations, confusions of light and dark, which confound the Manichaeon intellectual division between them. Crucially, all representations of the privileged Manichaeon element of light or white, claimed as symbolic of spirit or mind, are given in sensuous and empirical terms. In the case of the meticulous phrased allusions to the forgotten 'memorable equinox' (Beckett, 1986, p.217), residence 'on and off with Bianca in Kedar Street' (Beckett, 1986, p.218), the 'dark young beauty [...] all white and starch' (Beckett, 1986, p.219), 'the light of the lighthouse' juxtaposed with 'storm and night' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), and 'the eyes just slits, because of the glare' opening 'in the shadow' (Beckett, 1986, p.221), each reference is to a past experience of physical objects. In the case of Krapp's costume, dirty white and faded black, and the colour specifications of Krapp's props, black ledger and white dictionary, white envelope annotated in black ink, silver tins with dark ribbons (Beckett, 1992, p.189), the white or light instances of the supposed dichotomy are directly presented to the audience as actual physical objects. In the Manichaeon scheme, the physical and

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<sup>29</sup> The effect is anticipated in How It Is, where 'the table glides from light to darkness darkness to light' (Beckett, 1964, p.11).

material must fall on the side of darkness and sensuality; the white and the light should be purely spiritual with no polluting dark empirical admixture. In the staged play, the representation of the spiritual itself is degraded to the merely material, an operation matching the parodic degeneration of Marcel's spiritual adventures into Krapp's physical, symbolically constipated, inertia. Krapp's 'throwing a ball for a little white dog' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), a ball which is, amongst its other five characteristics, black, earns special comment in Beckett's Schiller notebook:

Note that if the giving of the black  
ball to the white dog represents the  
sacrifice of sense to spirit the form  
here too is that of a mingling.

(Beckett, 1992, p.141)

If we have metaphysical aspirations, this formulation is obviously backwards: for Mani, as ultimately for Proust, the sensuous must be sacrificed to the spiritual. Given the status of the sensuous, from the radically evil in Manichaeism to that which must be transcended by Marcel, detachment from the physical should be regarded as a desirable escape rather than anything approaching a 'sacrifice'. Beckett's inversion, however, has very different implications in a Kantian context. Here, rejection of 'the fruitful bathos of experience' (Kant, 1950, p.122, note 2) necessitates that one henceforth operates only in the 'spiritual' and intellectual realm of ideas which, upon the



sacrifice of empirical substantiation, must be empty.

Manichaeism holds a privileged place in any critique of metaphysics. The philosophical and theological disrepute of Manichaeism is such that the system is made to suffer etymological comparisons with mania and its attendant grandiose delusions. As Augustine taunts the Manichaean disciple Faustus:

You swear [...] by your master Manichæus, whose name in his own tongue was Manes. As the name Manes seems to be connected with the Greek word for madness, you have changed it by adding a suffix, which only makes matters worse, by giving it the new meaning of pouring forth madness.

(Augustine, 1872, pp.344-345)

Augustine continues a tradition which presumes that Mani 'was providentially so named that men might be warned against the mania of his heresy' (Dods, 1872, p.viii). In the selection of a system of empty metaphysical ideas within which to entangle a protagonist, Beckett could not have selected for Krapp a philosophical or religious option more dead or discredited than Manichaeism. According to Manichaean doctrine, the escape of the light or spirit from the matter of the world is organized thus:

Reservoirs were [...] established for the liberated light - ten heavens and eight earths upheld by angels, plus the sun and the moon. The twelve constellations of the zodiac were then formed, and placed in such a way as to form a great

wheel with buckets. The light being liberated from the world was then caught in these buckets, wheeled upward into the heavens, and poured into the sun and the moon - the moon collecting the light for the first half of the month and then pouring it into the sun during the second half.

(Hopper, 1955, p.151)

If the Manichaean allegory is to be maintained, the entire cosmos, complete with its never-discovered buckets, must stand ready to collect the release of light contributed by Krapp's consumption of bananas.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine, Beckett's known informant on matters theological, is presciently Kantian in his attack on the Manichaean system.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The thesis of the liberation of light necessitates this profligate postulation of cosmological equipment for its processing. The application of Occam's razor is called for in the case of a thesis entailing this amount of corroborative fabrication.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine's Confessions and other works can be counted as an epic in autobiography comparable with Proust. Again, the search for a visionary moment of 'conversion' is central:

The saint described his life as a quest for conversion, that is, an intense instant of awareness, a present moment, now, no longer put off, in which 'the burden of habit and custom' will be thrown off, detachment from worldly desires achieved, and intuitive union with the timelessness of God effected.

(Rosen, 1976, pp.177-178)

Augustine's autobiographical and metaphysical opus magnum, in comparison to the results of Krapp's Manichaean inspiration, has had, at least, the greater success in 'Getting known' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). In the Kantian scheme of things, Augustine's own metaphysics may ultimately be subject to classification with Manichaeism as another system of empty ideas. In competition with Mani's overtly outlandish cosmos, however, Augustine must be judged to have failed, in terms of institutional success, considerably better.

For Augustine and Kant, faith is not equivalent to knowledge. Augustine requires verification for Mani's claims, and, as is the custom in metaphysics, 'there is no evidence' (Augustine, 1872, p.547). Those Manichaeian elements of Krapp's Last Tape which should have a purely spiritual existence are given physical manifestation; conversely, Augustine's attack charges Manichaeism with the illegitimate transformation of the physical into the metaphysical. According to Augustine, 'Manichæus got the arrangement of his fanciful notions from visible objects' (Augustine, 1872, p.131). The Manichaeian ideas of good and evil are derived from an illegitimate transcendence and abstraction from the contingent prejudices of the senses:

your idea of what is evil is derived entirely from the effect on your senses of such disagreeable things as serpents, fire, poison, and so on; and the only good you know of is what has an agreeable effect on your senses, as pleasant flavours, and sweet smells, and sunlight, and whatever else recommends itself strongly to your eyes, or to your nostrils, or your palate, or any other organ of senses.

(Augustine, 1872, pp.548-549)

As in the Kantian critique, empirical and contingent evidence cannot support metaphysical conclusions. Deflating its symbolic significance, Augustine locates the Manichaeian eternal realm of 'light' in the 'mere natural light', which the Manichaeians 'love as flies do' (Augustine, 1872, p.344).



It is the brightest coloured empirical objects that are held to imprison the greatest proportion of divine substance yearning for release. To properly follow the rigours of the Manichaeian dietary code, Augustine considers that Faustus should supplement his gruel with 'the scales of fish, or some worms and flies' which 'all shine with a light of their own in the dark' (Augustine, 1872, p.77). Krapp's trials with the digestion of bananas and resultant constipation mark a dereliction of Manichaeian duty, for the divinity residing in the materials of his diet escape to fill the cosmic buckets only 'when digestion is going on in the body by means of internal heat' (Augustine, 1872, p.74). The flying off of the light is fatally blocked by the 'utterly filthy' material by-products of digestion which remain too long within Krapp's internal constitution (Augustine, 1872, p.74). Retention of the 'unclean dregs' is not the aspiration of the Manichaeian disciple (Augustine, 1872, p.74). Krapp's disposal of his second banana is overtly sinful, for the disciple must strive to 'purify, as you call it, all that is given' (Augustine, 1872, p.82).<sup>32</sup> It is unfortunate, for the

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<sup>32</sup> For the greater liberation of the light, the Manichaeian is 'obliged to eat to excess'; the unwilling are not to be excused:

So it was charged against some one at Rome that he killed some poor children, by compelling them to eat for this superstitious reason. This I should not believe, did I not know how sinful you consider it to give this food to those who are not elect, or, at any rate, to throw it away. So the only way is to eat it; and this leads every day to gluttony, and may sometimes lead to murder.

(Augustine, 1872, p.82).

Half an uneaten banana, cast away into the darkness in Beckett's modification in the Schiller notebook, must surely damn Krapp irretrievably.

Manichæan scheme of things, that dung, 'the most unclean product of flesh' is 'also the most fertilizing manure' (Augustine, 1872, p.366-367) in the production of valued fruits. Faustus is to be humiliated with the charge his 'Jesus is produced in gardens watered by the filthy drains of a city' (Augustine, 1872, p.367). Imprisoned in matter, Jesus 'hangs in the shape of fruit from every tree' (Augustine, 1872, p.367). Occam's razor is required once more, for given this abundance, there is some question concerning 'how many Christs [...] do you make?' (Augustine, 1872, p.368).

In Augustine's account, Manichæan cosmology cannot be made compatible with either analytic or synthetic procedures of reasoning. Genuine metaphysics, for Kant, must satisfy both criteria of knowledge. In the first place, the cosmology propounded by Mani is internally incoherent. The kingdom of light is to be purely spiritual, the realm of darkness entirely material; the realm of light is to be bordered by that of darkness. Augustine explains what is wrong with Mani's organization of the universe with the aid of a homely analogy:

As if, to give the simplest illustration, a piece of bread were made into four squares, three white and one black; then suppose the three white pieces joined as one, and conceive them as infinite upwards and downwards, and backwards in all directions: this represents the Manichæan region of light. Then conceive the black square infinite downwards and backwards, but with infinite emptiness above it: this is

their region of darkness.

(Augustine, 1872, p.118)

Pieces of bread are amenable to such division and spatial organization: the spiritual, entirely immaterial and lacking extension in space, should not be so treated. In his account of analytic judgements, Kant finds that 'I do not require to go beyond the concept which I connect with "body" in order to find extension as bound up with it' (Kant, 1933, A7/B11, p.48). A body must have extension in space; that which is extended is a body. The spiritual is the putative opposite of a body. In the Manichaeian scheme, the spiritual region, in its spatial extension, is confounded with the a priori properties of material bodies. The border decreed between the region of light, defined as spiritual and immaterial, and the region of darkness, the fleshly and sensual, make this contradiction clear; the limits assigned to the light define it too as material:

What, then, bordered on the side of the region which you call shining and sacred? The region, you reply, of darkness. Do you then allow this latter region to have been material? Of course you must, since you assert that all bodies derive their origin from it. How then is it that, dull and carnal as you are, you do not see that unless both regions were material, they could not have their sides joined to one another? How could you ever be so blinded in mind as to say that only the region of darkness was material, and that the so-called region of light was



immaterial and spiritual?

(Augustine, 1872, p.118)

These 'two regions cannot be joined at their sides unless both are material' (Augustine, 1872, p.118).<sup>33</sup> In Krapp's Last Tape, the sectors of light and darkness on stage can only be organized in space; as extended phenomena, empirically manifested, each of Krapp's zones are material and sensuous. The presentation of an immaterial zone of light, as such not amenable to sensory perception, would be an insuperable challenge to stage design and oblige the audience to intuit intellectually a presence which is absent from the stage.

#### vii. Material inertia: upstaging the spiritual

The metaphysical opposition between light and darkness drawn by Manichaeism cannot survive staged, empirical, manifestation. To be given to the senses, both sides of the division must become material. What Manichaeism can supply to Krapp's Last Tape is a bizarre, and blatantly fictional, system of dualist organization. Gontarski's analysis of Krapp as 'a man who struggled against the fundamental cacophony of human character', maintains regard for this dualist impulse (Gontarski, 1977, p.64). This organizational opposition is indeed elevated to the status of 'Beckett's most persistent theme': 'the internal

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<sup>33</sup> As the zone of light is the location of God, Mani must also give 'to the nature of God limits and borders, as if God were a material substance, having extension in space' (Augustine, 1872, p.113), a theological as well as logical heresy for Augustine.

conflict, Cartesian or Manichaeian, of intellect and emotion, the attempted resolution of which has consumed Krapp's life' (Gontarski, 1977, p.64). However, Krapp is consumed not by the elevated rigours attendant upon the heroic resolution of this opposition informing the human condition, but rather by the emptiness of its metaphysical terms. As the Schiller notebook specifies, Krapp is seized by empty 'dreams':

Aliter Opens and engulfs him.

cf. in Träumen ertrunken [drowned in dreams].

[...]

Inhaltloser Traum [Empty dream]

Traum - Nichts [Dream - Nothing]

ein vom Traum (Nichts) gefressenes

Leben [A life consumed by dream (nothing)].

beim Sinnliche sich ins geistliche

wegträumen, beim geistliche ins

Sinnliche [From the sensual dreams himself away into the spiritual, from the spiritual away into the sensual]

Traumgefressener Mensch [Dream-consumed man]

(Beckett, 1992, p.241)

The complete cycle of Krapp's habitual struggle with empty ideas reappears on the last tape. Empty ideas, dreams and fancies, are firstly denied by Krapp, then admitted in rationed portions, suddenly threaten to overwhelm him, become open to doubt and are finally degraded to their only available physical manifestation:

Last fancies. [Vehemently.] Keep 'em under! [Pause.] Scalded the eyes out of me reading Effie again, a page a day, with tears again. Effie.... [Pause.] Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes. [Pause.] Could I? [Pause.] And she? [Pause.] Pah! [Pause.] Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch.

(Beckett, 1986, p.222)

As a substitute for the desire to 'eff' the ineffable 'Effie', Krapp must be content with an available empirical object which fails to substantiate the romantic exultation of Effie's conceptualization. As Arsene counsels in Watt, in the case of 'the unutterable or ineffable', 'any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail' (Beckett, 1976, p.61).

Inspired by the failure of 'all that business of the vision' (Beckett cited in Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.139), Krapp has no more transcendent insights to record, 'Nothing to say, not a squeak' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Instead a diatribe eventually emerges on 'everything', recorded to be thrown away, beset by technical problems:

[Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally.] Everything there, everything, all the -  
[Realizes this is not being recorded, switches on.]  
Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the



light and dark and famine and feasting of ... [hesitates]  
... the ages! [In a shout.] Yes! [Pause.] Let that go!  
Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! Jesus! [Pause.  
Weary.] Ah well, maybe he was right. [Pause.] Maybe he was  
right.

(Beckett, 1986, p.222)

The 'old muckball' may be a 'Manichean image of the physical world as a "bolus" of dark excrement left after spirit and light are liberated from it' (McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.248) and 'famine and feasting' may symbolize 'all the contrarities of a divided cosmos' (Knowlson, 1992, p.xxiv), but, rather than consolidating his Manichaeian and metaphysical credentials, Krapp wants at last to 'Let that go!' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Metaphysical generality is replaced by the conditional and personalized 'Maybe he was right' (Beckett, 1986, p.222). Krapp's representation of the human condition is limited:

RH But is the public supposed to think that he is a sort of Everyman?

MH Oh no, no. Beckett once said something very beautiful about this. He said that Krapp is not a way of looking at the world (keine Weltanschauung), and that in fact answers everything. No, this is just Krapp, not a world-view.

(Martin Held interviewed by Hayman, 1980, pp.69-70)

Material debris, 'just Krapp', dominates the stage; even the taped voices, reproduced mechanically, lack the animating spark

of consciousness which produced their original utterance.<sup>34</sup> Krapp's joy in 'Spooool' (Beckett, 1986, p.216) is drawn from the pleasure in producing and perceiving the sound; its semantic content is not relevant to the sensuous reward gained by making the utterance. Only the materiality of the word is emphasized.

Metaphysical and artistic ambitions, predicated upon 'the light of the understanding' (Beckett, 1986, p.220), thus lose their prominence to a mimed imbecility gratified by minor sensual comforts. The artist now 'puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him' (Beckett, 1986, pp.215-216). The very absence of thought must be portrayed in these physical terms. Elsewhere, the main insight the audience is granted as to the precise nature of Krapp's internal tribulations are reminders of his chronic constipation. Krapp's thoughts are not given: the critic is not entitled to conclude that Krapp 're-lives his past' (Campbell, 1978, p.193), that 'the timeless moment of his "farewell to love" [...] continues to stir his imagination' (Campbell, 1978, p.194), or that 'upheavals in the depths of the memory' are occurring (Catanzaro, 1989, p.406). For the performance of 'somersaults' in 'his inner life' (Catanzaro, 1989, p.407), Krapp must first be believed to possess

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<sup>34</sup> The impulse to privilege speech over writing, according to Derrida, arises precisely from the supposed presence in speech of the subject's consciousness, thought and animation. In Krapp's Last Tape, the voices on the tapes are no longer 'exteriorizing a content of interior thought' (Derrida, 1982, p.163); what they express is either disowned by Krapp in time present, or, fatally, not understood. When 'exteriority' and 'alterity' do interpose between 'what I say and what I hear myself say' (Derrida, 1982, p.287), the subject is alienated from part of his own 'I'. In Not I, similarly, the subject's 'I' is absent from its own 'live' speech.

an inner life. Krapp's retention of such a thing is a matter which is not finally determined, although the opening mime goes to considerable trouble to raise doubts as to whether Krapp, like Willie of Happy Days, is 'conceivably on the qui vive' (Beckett, 1986, p.148). Even if they are somehow considered to occur, the transports of involuntary memory are not presented to the audience of Krapp's Last Tape. The play is not an interior monologue. The external setting of Krapp's Last Tape does not change in accordance with the mental state of its protagonist, whereas this is precisely what can be effected by the narrative mode of A la recherche du temps perdu. For Marcel, given a stimulus to involuntary memory, the internal arena is able to superimpose a past empirical context upon that of the present; as Beckett writes in Proust:

just as the Piazza di San Marco burst its way into the courtyard and there asserted its luminous and fleeting dominance, so now the library is successively invaded by a forest, the high tide breaking on the shore at Balbec, the vast dining-room of the Grand Hotel flooded, like an aquarium, with the sunset and the evening sea, and lastly Combray and its 'ways' and the differential transmission of a sour and distinguished prose, shaped and stated by his mother's voice, muted and sweetened almost to a lullaby, unwinding all night long its reassuring foil of sound before a child's insomnia.

(Beckett, 1965, p.71)



Krapp's 'unwinding [...] foil of sound' cannot effect the transformation of his physical location: his den is proofed against the returning flood of the lake and punt. Krapp's 'surroundings' will not 'vanish', nor permit the presence of 'a bright and vehement interloper', the vision reproduced from memory (Beckett, 1965, p.70). For Marcel, by contrast, 'the distant scene [...] grappled, like a wrestler, with the present scene' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.908). Marcel's position in space and his corresponding empirical sensations are confused and unstable:

so complete are these resurrections of the past during the second that they last, that they oblige our eyes to cease to see the room which is near them in order to look instead at the railway bordered with trees or the rising tide, they even force our nostrils to breathe the air of places which are in fact a great distance away, and our will to choose between the various projects which those distant places suggest to us, they force our whole self to believe that it is surrounded by these places or at least to waver doubtfully between them and the place where we now are, in a dazed uncertainty [...].

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.908)

But even for Marcel, the effort to 're-create the former scene' is opposed by the 'actual scene [...] with all the resistance of material inertia' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.907). The mental exertions of Marcel and the modulations of scene possible in .

narrative fiction co-operate to overcome the restriction of the present empirical scene and to allow the incursion of the past context to inform the sensory data of the subject completely. 'Material inertia' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.907) entraps and defines Krapp externally and internally. The stage set is fixed: it will not transform itself into the manifestation of Krapp's past merely upon the word of a taped memory. Should the ontological sphere be subject to verbal or conceptual legislation, Mani's cosmos, as well as Krapp's past scenes, would be liable to spring into existence.

#### viii. Bells, bananas and buffoonery

Beckett's play emphasizes material inertia; Proust's interior narrative permits the instantaneous transport of Marcel between the empirical settings of past and present, as directed by involuntary memory. Homan's account of Krapp's Last Tape reads precisely as if he were confronted with Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu instead:

At issue is how to make something literal into something symbolic. The physical, I believe, is here transformed rather than avoided. The search for the proper spool, Krapp's rifling through his desk, gives way to his larger search for himself. The opening of those drawers, facing us becomes Krapp's own exposure, for himself no less than

for us, the means of revealing his mind, his soul.<sup>35</sup>

(Homan, 1984, p.98)

A reading emphasizing the rejection of transcendent insight must invert this diagnosis, as Krapp's Last Tape inverts the aspirations of Marcel and Manichaeism, by degrading the metaphors and symbols of their systems into parodically physical terms. The spiritual or intellectual credentials of each are confounded when these very ideas are expressed in the material sphere. Throughout Krapp's Last Tape, empirical particulars are designed both to recall and to humiliate the pretensions of universal abstractions such as the 'light' or 'dark' which should more properly proclaim portentous significance. The play must inflict a sense of shame upon commentators attempting to figure metaphysical significance from bananas. The materials of the music-hall and clown, one would assume, do not express metaphysical meanings without comic damage to their dignity. McMillan and Fehsenfeld nevertheless remain unembarrassed in calculating the precise balance of Krapp's contributions to the release of light during his banana-walk:

there are detailed entrances and exits into and out of the zone of light. He consumes the first half of the banana while pacing into the darkness. He counterbalances this by consuming the second half only after re-entering the zone of light. The net result is no change in the balance of

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<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately for Homan, the Revised Text places only one drawer to the side of Krapp's table, reducing its visibility to the audience.



light and dark. In the case of the second banana, Krapp remains in the 'circle of light' to eat the first half but he undoes that action by throwing the second half into the darkness behind him. This rejection into darkness of what he should have retained in light is the obverse of his mistake with the first banana where by dropping the peel in front of his table, he retains in the sphere of light what he should have rejected into the dark.

(McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.266)

Despite the 'net result' being 'no change', the cosmic repercussions of the spatial position in which bananas are eaten have never received so much rapt attention. In different productions the universe is variously affected, for Krapp's movement in and out of the light is not always forbidden. Evincing a cavalier attitude to metaphysical consequences and inordinate regard to the contingency of empirical stages, 'Beckett does not regard this difference as being of any importance, commenting: "He may have to exceed lit area if too short for banana walk, without disappearing completely"' (Knowlson, 1992, p.274). Confusion between light and darkness is always preferred:

'all this darkness round me' - not complete darkness. He must be seen, however dimly, to and from den including first visit before light spills from den after curtain drawn.

(Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1992, p.274)

Manichaeans will have to begin calculations again using more complex terms, to take into account the exact proportion of the mixture of light and dark in order to assess Krapp's adherence to or violation of principle. Further, any fruit but bananas would serve Manichaean purposes better: supplying a protagonist prone to constipation with bananas, the only fruit of arduous digestion, seems designed to impede the release of the light rather than facilitate it. The running together of metaphysical arguments, bananas and constipation should not be a comfortable concatenation. Bananas and constipation are, in relation to the dignity of metaphysics, fatal things.<sup>36</sup>

The function of objects in Krapp's Last Tape is to assert their material properties and tangibility. Symbolic or metaphysical processing toward their intellectual or spiritual significance would prefer instead de-emphasis of these material properties. Sufficient family resemblance, however, is maintained between the behaviour of Krapp's objects and their more respectable Proustian ancestors to mark their present degradation. A la recherche du temps perdu details the importance of metallic rings for Marcel and concludes with a meditation upon the significance of the chiming of a bell. Krapp is supplied with a series of metallic clatters. Marcel's

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<sup>36</sup> Protagonists should display some concern for the sublimity of the objects crucial to them; accordingly, the narrator of The Calmative selects a cathedral as a hiding-place:

I say cathedral, it may not have been, I don't know, all I know is it would vex me in this story that aspires to be the last, to have taken refuge in a common church.  
(Beckett, 1984, p.41)

involuntary memory is provoked when 'A servant, trying unsuccessfully not to make a noise, chanced to knock a spoon against a plate' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.900). This recalls 'the noise of the hammer with which a railwayman had remedied some defect on a wheel of the train while we stopped near the little wood' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.901). Among Beckett's modifications in the San Quentin production was the injunction that the curtain of Krapp's closet was to be 'hung on a rod with heavy metal rings to make a clattering noise when opened' (Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, pp.132-133). Krapp's tapes are reassigned from cardboard boxes to 'seven [or nine?] biscuit tins' (Cluchey and Haerdter, 1980, p.132). The clattering of the tins and tapes as Krapp scatters them on the floor is precisely timed to pre-empt the 'bell':

TAPE: [Strong voice, rather pompous, clearly Krapp's at a much earlier time.] Thirty-nine today, sound as a - [Settling himself more comfortably he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds tape back to beginning, switches on, resumes posture.] Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell [...].

(Beckett, 1986, p.217)

The same tape contains an abstract and assessment of the contents of an earlier recording, 'Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over. [Pause.] False ring there' (Beckett, 1986, p.218). Ultimately, in A la recherche du temps



perdu, Marcel's winding back to his beginning, to his childhood, is achieved as 'the peal - resilient, ferruginous, interminable, fresh and shrill - of the bell on the garden gate' sounds 'again in my ears' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.1105). The resurgence of memory proves to Marcel the fundamental continuity of consciousness, the 'unbroken series' of its moments:

in order to get nearer to the sound of the bell and to hear it better it was into my own depths that I had to re-descend. And this could only be because its peal had always been there, inside me, and not this sound only but also, between that distant moment and the present one, unrolled in all its vast length, the whole of that past which I was not aware that I carried about within me. When the bell of the garden gate had pealed, I already existed and from that moment onwards, for me still to be able to hear the peal, there must have been no break in continuity, no single second at which I had ceased or rested from existing, from thinking, from being conscious of myself, since that moment from long ago still adhered to me and I could still find it again, could retrace my steps to it merely by descending to a greater depth within myself.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The discontinuity of identity between sleep and wakefulness is earlier pursued by Proust, in contradiction to the conclusion ultimately reached in 'Time Regained' above:

Then from those profound slumbers we awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, newly born, ready for anything, the brain emptied of the past which was life until then.

(Proust, 1981, vol.2, p.1014)

In Molloy, this discontinuity is, characteristically, manifested

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.1105-1106)

On his last tape, Krapp records a supplementary account of this impulse to 'retrace my steps' towards the bells:

Lie propped up in the dark - and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. [Pause.] Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. [Pause.] And so on. [Pause.] Be again, be again. [Pause.] All that old misery. [Pause.] Once wasn't enough for you.

(Beckett, 1986, p.223)

Replicating Proust's reputedly favoured position for the composition of A la recherche du temps perdu,<sup>38</sup> Krapp issues what could be a summary of the Proustian autobiographical magnum opus, 'Be again, be again', infiltrated by the impertinence of

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in parodic physical terms; Molloy awakens after Lousse's ministrations:

I woke up in a bed, in my skin. [...] I went to the door. Locked. To the window. Barred. [...] I found my crutches, against an easy chair. It may seem strange that I was able to go through the motions I have described without their help. I find it strange. You don't remember immediately who you are, when you wake.

(Beckett, 1959, p.38)

<sup>38</sup> As Kenner recognizes:

[...] Proust writing in bed brings up to date Belacqua dreaming in the shadow of his rock; clearly too, Molloy or Malone writing in bed is a hobo Proust.

(Kenner, 1962, p.42)

'And so on'.<sup>39</sup> The Schiller notebook provides additional directions for the delivery and emphases of this section:

Leg dich ins Dunkel [Lie propped up  
in the dark] to Sei wieder, sei wieder [Be again, be again]  
uniformly quiet and simple,  
[erasure] with body still. This  
frozen body & voice, on All dies  
alte Elend [All that old misery]. But not anticipate  
extreme violence of Ein Mal  
war [Once wasn't enough for you] etc, with bowed head.

(Beckett, 1992, p.233)

This 'extreme violence' attacks the basis of the Proustian epic. Contingent circumstances make a difference to the desirability of the escape from linear time to 'Be again': for Marcel 'Once wasn't enough'; for Krapp attempts at repetition are limited to the playback of the punt scene. It is the fault of the serial medium, whether the tape or a life lived in linear time, that other unwanted episodes must be dragged back with it.

#### ix. Iteration and parody

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<sup>39</sup> The phrase 'be again' is to be found also in Texts for Nothing, subject to the same doubts concerning the wisdom of a return 'Back above' to a life already known:

Go then, no, better stay, for where would you go, now that you know? Back above? There are limits. Back in that kind of light. See the cliffs again, be again between the cliffs and the sea, reeling shrinking with your hands over your ears, headlong, innocent, suspect, noxious.

(Beckett, 1984, Text II, p.75)



Krapp's success in doubling experience is inter-textual, with flaws. Henning has already identified the players in this 'intertextual dialogue' (Henning, 1988, p.4):

[...] Krapp's Last Tape seems to provoke a dialogue with its own past textual double, Marcel Proust's monumental work, a dialogue mediated through Beckett's early critical monograph on Proust. Although critics have long seen Krapp as a derisory Marcel, the extent of the possible 'conversation' between them has, to my knowledge, never been sufficiently investigated.

(Henning, 1988, p.144)

Henning's own investigation of the relation of Krapp's Last Tape to the tributary of A la recherche du temps perdu retains a strong emphasis upon Beckett's play as tribute. Krapp's 'Be again' is considered evidence of a 'renewed desire to step out of time altogether, that is, to immortalize oneself by (re)capturing the past' (Henning, 1988, p.145). Kantian rigours will not allow such an escape; the 'extreme violence' (Beckett, 1992, p.223) appended to the 'Once wasn't enough' section, allied with the unceremonious disposal of this new recording, do not suggest Krapp's desire for such immortality either. The judgement as to whether Krapp's Last Tape is an 'amiable or contestatory' dialogue with Proust has become unbalanced (Henning, 1988, p.123). For example, to interpret the play as 'an attempt to dramatize (and hence, support) what is central in the Proustian vision' (Oberg, 1966, p.333), Oberg is prepared to

find, extraordinarily, that Krapp's vision, 'establishes itself alongside other Beckett epiphany-like moments of clarity' (Oberg, 1966, p.335). Homan, as intimated earlier, appears to have swapped Krapp's Last Tape for A la recherche du temps perdu entirely.<sup>40</sup>

Profanation marks the movement between Krapp and Marcel; the spiritual imperatives of the Proustian narrator are confounded in the physical and empirical. As Marcel's degenerate double, Krapp shares the role of 'hoary clown' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.962) with Marcel's 'personal enemy, M. d'Argencourt' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.961):

he had turned into a contemptible old beggarman, and the diplomat whose solemn demeanour and starched rigidity were still present to my memory acted his part of old dotard with such verisimilitude that his limbs were all of a tremble and the features of what had once been a haughty countenance

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<sup>40</sup> Homan considers that 'We are inside Krapp's head' (Homan, 1984, p.97), that we witness 'the "renaissance" of Krapp' as he enters the 'road leading toward both the discovery and expression of one's self' (Homan, 1984, p.99), and that 'The women in Krapp's life [...] stand in a line of growing inducements to creativity' (Homan, 1984, p.99). Despite the expanse of water in question being a lake, 'the women merge with his mother sea, and it is in and by the sea that Krapp has his lasting moments of revelation' (Homan, 1984, p.100). Even Krapp would be unlucky to get a punt stuck in flags while at sea. Nevertheless, 'the imaginative movement' of Krapp's 'present-tense recording' (meaning, inexactly, his last tape) is 'dazzling' (Homan, 1984, p.102). On the strength of this recording, Krapp is suddenly 'immortal' for his 'achievement as an artist dwarfs his own physical existence'; this allows Krapp to conclude the play in 'a pose [...] of Buddhist-like serenity' (Homan, 1984, p.104). Evidently, he should at least be disturbed by having precipitately thrown away the tape Homan uses to rescue him.

were permanently relaxed in an expression of smiling idiocy.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.961)

To identify the target of 'this brilliant study in caricature' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.963), Marcel must attempt to trace continuities between fractured images, the same process which might be used to establish his own link with Krapp:

in order to identify the puppets with the people whom one had known in the past, it was necessary to read what was written on several planes at once, planes that lay behind the visible aspect of the puppets and gave them depth and forced one, as one looked at these aging marionettes, to make a strenuous intellectual effort; one was obliged to study them at the same time with one's eyes and with one's memory.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.964)

The effect of this final reception of aged characters is re-emphasized in Krapp's Last Tape for once without need for the usual admixture of parody; in 'Time Regained' itself, the party imposes upon Marcel 'a spectacular and dramatic effect which threatened to raise against my enterprise the gravest of all objections' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, pp.959-960). That objection is simply the passing of time.

Krapp's Last Tape utilizes the potentialities of iteration, the re-contextualization of signs deployed in A la recherche du



temps perdu. Theorized by Derrida in 'Signature Event Context' and 'Limited Inc abc ...', iteration exploits the 'possibility of disengagement and citational graft' which 'belongs to the structure of every mark' (Derrida, 1988, p.12):

A written sign [...] is a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription [...]. At the same time, a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force [force de rupture] is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text.

(Derrida, 1988, p.9)

When 'Every sign [...] can be cited' (Derrida, 1988, p.12), 'contextual transformation remains an always open possibility' (Derrida, 1988, p.79). Further, 'Iteration alters, something new takes place' (Derrida, 1988, p.40). The sign, maintaining traces of a previous context, can suffer a re-deployment designed to undermine that earlier context.<sup>41</sup> The replay of Krapp's tapes

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<sup>41</sup> Bakhtin, as well as Derrida, recognizes the opportunities for distortion offered by re-contextualization:

The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted. Any sly and ill-disposed polemicist knows very well which dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent, in order to distort their sense.

(Bakhtin, 1981, p.340)

Iteration exploits latent meanings and implications which may be made manifest through re-contextualization of the sign. Equally,

is of a piece with this re-contextualization. For the purposes of parody in the play as a whole, iteration is the technique of deliberately and legitimately misunderstanding the intentions controlling the original use of the sign.<sup>42</sup> Incidents originally found in A la recherche du temps perdu suffer this distortion in their passage to re-contextualization in Krapp's Last Tape. Spiritual intoxication is degraded into the presentation of a stage drunk. Instantaneous transportation through mental space is confounded in Krapp's laborious physical movement. Marcel's stumble on the cobbles, which proffers the key to life and art, is re-enacted as a slip on a banana skin. The intellectual experience drawn from the taste of the madeleine bathetically reappears as the vacuous sucking of the end of a banana. The peal of Marcel's childhood bell becomes the clattering of Krapp's tin boxes as they are swept to the floor. Iteration, if under the control of involuntary memory, must evoke past items and experiences in their original and integral form. Krapp's Last Tape, internally and externally, will not collude

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the words of another may be quoted precisely, but 'with irony, with a smirk' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.69). Derrida's use of John Searle's essay 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida' (Searle, 1977, pp.198-208) in 'Limited Inc abc ...', (Derrida, 1988, pp.29-110) is itself a demonstration of the ludic powers of iteration.

<sup>42</sup> Here iteration closely parallels the structure of jokes as given by Freud: 'the joke is produced by [...] disregarding the meaning intended [...] and catching on to the subsidiary meaning' (Freud, 1976, p.89). The distortion of the props in Happy Days, as detailed in Beckett's production notebook for that play, is also a peculiar instance of this process where the '[General] principle' informing the shape of Winnie's parasol, toothbrush, mirror, revolver, bottle, lipstick and magnifying glass is 'hypertrophy [...] secondary, atrophy primary' (Beckett, 1985, p.119). What results, for example, is a parasol with an elongated handle and absurdly inadequate canopy.



with this delusive reproduction which considers itself to have found an exit from the differences attendant on the action of space and time. What iteration produces in Krapp's Last Tape is a parodic relationship between itself and Proust founded on difference and similarity simultaneously. Proust is incorrectly recalled.

For Chabert in the Théâtre d'Orsay production in 1975, the preparation of Krapp's tapes constituted 'one of the most disturbing aspects of the acting', for the tapes too require a problematic 'relationship between two voices, different yet similar ('ni tout à fait la même, ni tout à fait une autre'); a voice that is a strange echo of itself' (Chabert, 1980, p.90). Marcel, as 'Someone offered to re-introduce me to a friend of my youth', suffers a visual and aural disturbance of the same order:

The familiar voice seemed to be emitted by a gramophone more perfect than any I had ever heard, for, though it was the voice of my friend, it issued from the mouth of a corpulent gentleman with greying hair whom I did not know, and I could only suppose that somehow artificially, by a mechanical device, the voice of my old comrade had been lodged in the frame of this stout elderly man who might have been anybody.

(Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.985)

Such distressing physical degeneration, entwined with intimations of identity, figure Marcel's own relationship with Krapp. Krapp's Last Tape elaborates substantially upon Beckett's final



annotation in the edition of A la recherche du temps perdu he used in the composition of Proust. 'Balls', as Zurbrugg notes, would seem to signal that, even in 1931, all was not well in Beckett's estimation of the Proustian project (Zurbrugg, 1983, p.178).<sup>43</sup> The intrusion of Kant into this intertextual quarrel gives point to the impulse of Krapp's Last Tape to convert Proustian ideas into physical terms. Augustine's anti-Manichaeism writings, themselves anticipating Kantian strategies in the refutation of metaphysical claims, can perform the same function in relation to the play's treatment of Manichaeism. Metaphysical assertions are exposed as empty in Rough for Theatre II; Krapp's Last Tape insists upon providing the empirical expression of such ideas which is lacking in their original contexts. A necessary mismatch is evinced: to be manifested at all, the spiritual and intellectual must 'suddenly [...] fall' from their 'eminence', relinquish their 'stilts' (Proust, 1981, vol.3, p.1107) and degenerate into the physical terms which contradict their status as spiritual emblems. Metaphysical assertions, like young ladies whose purity guardians are keen to preserve, should not be put on the stage.

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<sup>43</sup> As Zurbrugg reports, Beckett's comment is to be found in his copy of Le Temps retrouvé (36th edition, 1927 reprint, Paris: Gallimard, Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1929, 3:1033, p.240) (Zurbrugg, 1983, p.186, n.26). Upon facing the many volumes of A la recherche du temps perdu requiring study for his monograph Proust in 1930, Beckett lamented to Tom MacGreevy:

And to think that I have to contemplate him at stool for 16 volumes.

(Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1996, p.117)

A constipation to Krappian standards would be needed.

## Chapter Three

### Metaphysical Fabrication and its Catastrophe

#### i. 'He'll have them on their feet'

Catastrophe puts its vision of Beckettian Man not merely on the stage, but 'midstage' and on an eighteen inch high plinth, to ensure that he may not be overlooked (Beckett, 1986, p.457). In emphasizing its readiness to proffer a metaphysical vision of the human condition, Beckett's Catastrophe, it appears, does not share the Director's fastidious distaste for any 'craze for explicitation! Every i dotted to death!' (Beckett, 1986, p.459). Critical explication seems eased by the familiarity of Catastrophe, for the meticulous construction of a stage image and the technical experiments undertaken with its lighting recall outstanding features of almost every Beckett play, with those written for radio escaping the net merely by default. Neither would the inclusion of an exacting Director of rehearsals remove the impression that the scene of Catastrophe is located in Beckettian territory. Here, at this late stage in Beckettian aesthetics, there is no critical ingenuity in pointing to the existence of a stage image and surely little more in providing details as to its moulding; these are tautological with the text of Catastrophe itself. The actual critical obligation is as scripted as the applause of the audience, for all that remains is to 'say it', to make explicit the significance of Protagonist and plinth.

For those rising to the challenge, the solution is similarly



familiar. Working toward 'the one genuine meaning of this play', Libera finds 'in the Protagonist, a picture of Man' (Libera, 1984, p.107). Taking note of the dismal aspect of the Protagonist, McMullan fine-tunes the identification of 'The spectacle in preparation' to 'an image of human suffering' (McMullan, 1993, p.28). States, while acknowledging the promising fact that 'in Beckett's theatre the stage tends to become "all the world," and vice versa' (States, 1987, p.14), yet hesitates from proffering an appropriately portentous conclusion, for 'The characters - all but one - are gainfully employed, in good health, and unacquainted with the metaphysical' (States, 1987, p.14). The worry of these departures is such that 'you might miss Beckett entirely' (States, 1987, p.14). To be 'unacquainted with the metaphysical' is evidently to risk a definition as un-Beckettian.<sup>1</sup> Like the Director, however, States is courteous enough to give a second look ('Once more and I'm off' (Beckett, 1986, p.460)) and Catastrophe is retrieved to the status of the properly metaphysical: 'On closer reading [...] it is unmistakably Beckett' after all, for 'The absence of the muckheap, the void, or the terminal room in the ex-world is all an illusion of the eye' (States, 1987, p.15).<sup>2</sup> Although driven to irony in the case of States, the critical pleasure in

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<sup>1</sup> This is to caricature: conceivably, one needs to be the victim of some opulence and to lack injuries or ills also, before non-Beckett may be concluded. States does not make clear whether these conditions are sufficient individually or only in consort to exclude the Beckettian hero.

<sup>2</sup> As one metaphysical lack is corrected to three recognizably Beckettian metaphysical scenes on second inspection, one may venture that the crucial element has come to the fore and is sufficient alone to assuage the initial three-fold worry.



discovering another variation on the theme of metaphysical pessimism and an image of human suffering as ostentatiously proffered in Catastrophe may be relieved of its oddity by recognition of the comfort of repetition. As the Beckett of Molloy wrote, 'to see yourself doing the same thing endlessly over and over again fills you with satisfaction' (Beckett, 1959, p.134). Acknowledgement of the 'pleasure of the same' is also conceded by Derrida; repetition 'always stems from the mastery of the dissimilar, from the reduction of the heterogeneous' (Derrida, 1987, p.113). Gontarski is willing to have Beckett share in sixty years worth of such ease won by repetition:

Catastrophe finally suggests that Beckett's vision has not mellowed with age. His estimate of the human condition is as unrelieved now as it was sixty years earlier. Catastrophe and Quadrat I & II are virtually companion pieces, since they make complementary comments on that human condition. What a curse mobility! What a curse immobility! What a curse life! What a curse death!

(Gontarski, 1985, p.181)

These 'complementary comments' exclude entirely any possibility of resting content with the human condition; its 'curse' remains constant through all manifestation. From the 1920s to the 1980s (taking in Happy Days in particular), Beckett, even more so than the Director, has been impossible to please.

The dedication of the play, however, 'For Vaclav Havel'

(Beckett, 1986, p.455), and its political ramifications, is not entirely consonant with recognized Beckettian territory, despite, as a dedication, not being entirely within the territory of Catastrophe itself either. This supplementary element moves Sandarg to provide the explicitation that Beckett 'writes not from beyond space and time but from the cultural context of twentieth-century Europe' (Sandarg, 1988, p.143). We might note the impossibility of not writing within time and space and some cultural context. As evidenced by Theatre II, however, to be positioned in a context of space and time, which would seem to be a necessary corollary of empirical existence, is an embarrassment to the metaphysician. Curiously, particularly in an essay entitled 'A Political Perspective on Catastrophe', Sandarg will not allow 'Beckett's undeniable political engagement' in Catastrophe (Sandarg, 1988, p.137) to interfere with his metaphysical duties:

on the most universal level, Catastrophe delineates nothing less than the human plight. The Protagonist's suffering exemplifies that immemorial expiation to which all are condemned during la catastrophe lente, to use Henri Michaux's term, which is life itself.

(Sandarg, 1988, p.143)

Beckett is in receipt of compliments both political and metaphysical, two spheres which are not unproblematically complementary:

Catastrophe is timeless while timely, specific while universal, artistically autonomous while politically committed. This outcry against forces both cosmic and concrete which strive to crush the human spirit is a distinguished addition to the canon of our preeminent living playwright.

(Sandarg, 1988, p.144)

Under such a description, intervention against the workings of 'concrete' forces serves merely to ensure that the 'cosmic' variety might have more to crush.<sup>3</sup> The metaphysical resonances of Sandarg's contention that 'We are all prisoners' (Sandarg, 1988, p.143), does not seem sufficiently attentive to the sense in which Havel was a prisoner in 1982, in a mundanely empirical sense not shared by Beckett, Sandarg or, one guesses, the majority of critical commentators. Should Beckett be operating in that metaphysical realm where 'We are all prisoners', it seems an unaccountable partiality on his part to select Havel, from 'all', as recipient of the dedication of Catastrophe.

To extend the import of Catastrophe to a universalized human condition is to dissolve all distinctions between the situations of its players, the objectified and objectifiers, the prisoner and those with the power to imprison. In a play of identifications around the metaphysical compartment of the 'finally, at last human' (Pearce, 1992, p.94), Pearce, in a

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<sup>3</sup> Havel, by contrast, in a letter from prison in 1982, is not content to admit 'the somewhat mystical claim that "all is lost anyway"' (Havel, 1990, p.366).



variation from Sandarg, finds that in regard to its audience Catastrophe 'casts us in the role of the Protagonist' (Pearce, 1992, p.94), although merely until the universality of the 'human' ensures that we have a turn at impersonating a necessarily absent participant:

The audience [...] can assume the role specifically of the artist Havel who in affirming his own role and identity in an isolating and debilitating environment characterizes life as a play and affirms the freedom of action in it.

(Pearce, 1992, p.95)

Unquestionably, given a sufficient level of abstraction one can remove the jarring note struck by the imputation of Havel's 'freedom of action'. At the time of the first performance of Catastrophe, one would be obliged to posit a level of understanding other than the bluntly empirical. Nevertheless, elevation to a station sufficiently metaphysical to permit one to discountenance empirical 'accidents', simultaneously condemns Beckett's play, via this accredited universality, to the most trivial levelling of 'conditions' and situations. The metaphysically unsophisticated may be tempted to judge the 'human condition' of Havel in 1982 and the audience of Catastrophe as pertinently unanalogous. If equality should be admitted here, there seems little recourse against the conclusion that the Protagonist of Catastrophe and its Director ultimately share an identical situation also.

To politicize the play by identifying political persecution with the theatrical process as detailed by Catastrophe runs similar risks of inadvertent trivialization. Where, according to Jackson, 'Beckett compels his audience to connect the tyrannical power deployed by the dictator upon the individual with that exerted by the director upon actor and assistants' (Jackson, 1992, p.24), a question also arises concerning the resonance between 'tyrannical power' and the impulse to 'compel' attributed to Beckett. Further, amidst these interconnections, identifications and equalities provoked by the levelling function of a 'human condition', reasons should be found to account for the disinclination of anybody to proclaim the analogy of their activities with those of the Director.<sup>4</sup> As Schopenhauer records, acceptance of 'the metaphysical identity of all beings' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.601) entails, despite the objectionable characteristics of certain beings, commitment to 'the frequently mentioned formula of the Brahmins, Tat tvam asi, "This thou art"' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.600). For the audience of Catastrophe, the taking of parts extends beyond the preferences of compassion to involve uncomplimentary complements.

## ii. Moran and 'everyman, above all others'

Equality of station is incongruous with the introduction of

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<sup>4</sup> The law of transitive relations states that if 'All Bs are Cs' and 'All As are Bs' then 'All As are Cs' (Hamblin, 1967, p.179). With minor modifications to its usual notation, the law translates into the rule that if  $A = P$  and  $P = D$  then  $A = D$ . Some pertinence to Catastrophe might be claimed if  $A = \text{Audience}$ ,  $P = \text{Protagonist}$  and  $D = \text{Director}$ .

an eighteen inch high block to set the Protagonist above his fellows. If Catastrophe delineates a universal human condition, then the selection of one individual to bear its dedication and another to be raised up upon a block as if he were an exceptional exemplification of the condition of all is unaccountable. Such are the difficulties incurred in the pursuit of universals. In Beckett's trilogy, Moran, as he takes over Molloy, contends with parallel difficulties during his forays into both the empirical and metaphysical realms in his assignment to find his narrative predecessor (Beckett, 1959, p.111). The objective is to 'discern my quarry', to find Molloy (Beckett, 1959, p.111). Following the necessary empirical adjustments, ('I took off my coat and shoes, opened my trousers' (Beckett, 1959, p.111)), the metaphysical search is conducted in bed:

All is dark, but with that simple darkness that follows like a balm upon the great dismemberings. From their places masses move, stark as laws. Masses of what? One does not ask. There somewhere man is too, vast conglomerate of all nature's kingdoms, as lonely and as bound. And in that block the prey is lodged and thinks himself a being apart. Anyone would serve. But I am paid to seek. I arrive, he comes away. His life has been nothing but a waiting for this, to see himself preferred, to fancy himself damned, blessed, to fancy himself everyman, above all others. Warmth, gloom, smells of my bed, such is the effect they sometimes have on me.

(Beckett, 1959, p.111)



The conceptual peculiarities attendant upon the election of a singular exemplification of 'everyman' are an undercurrent: in a metaphysical rendering of Catastrophe, the 'lonely' and 'bound' 'everyman' lodged as critical prey upon his block is positioned as 'a being apart'; whether 'damned' or 'blessed', he is at least to 'see himself preferred' (Beckett, 1959, p.111). Critical fancies can raise him to the oxymoronic stature of 'everyman, above all others' (Beckett, 1959, p.111), a universalization that is singular. Moran's ability to 'find peace in another's ludicrous distress' (Beckett, 1959, p.111) underlines his own assumed disconnection from 'everyman', an assumption which is conducive also to the satisfaction involved in declaring the dismal 'human condition' of the Protagonist. Preferable to the troubling formula 'Tat tvam asi' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.600), is Moran's transcendent position of contemplation: 'Far from the world, its clamours, frenzies, bitterness and dingy light, I pass judgement on it' (Beckett, 1959, p.111). Such is the position scripted, until the last moment, for the audience of Catastrophe and its Director.<sup>5</sup>

Moran's initial search, although able to be pursued in bed unlike the empirical quest, harbours disadvantages. For the

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<sup>5</sup> In the trilogy, the things they carry about with them provide much material for speculation on the inter-relation of its characters. Similarly, Moran and the Director of Catastrophe share both cigars and assistants to their endeavours, the former equally given to going out, the latter equally given to unsatisfactory responses to despatched imperatives. Moran finds the necessary explicitation more to his taste, however: 'Find out, I said. He was looking more and more stupefied. Fortunately I rather enjoyed dotting my i's.' (Beckett, 1959, p.118).

investigator, operations in this realm 'where of course no investigation would be possible' (Beckett, 1959, p.111) presents difficulties. Further, as Kant wishes to distinguish 'concepts of things' from 'empty figments of the brain' (Kant, 1933, A770/B798, p.613), Moran, despite feeling that 'I should have invested my man, from the outset, with the air of fabulous being', worries that he 'knew nothing of the circumstances in which I had learnt of his existence' (Beckett, 1959, p.112). Membership of Kant's class of 'heuristic fictions' (Kant, 1933, A771/B799, p.614) might be suspected: 'Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready-made in my head' (Beckett, 1959, p.112). The empirical realm must be tried:

I get up, go out, and everything is changed. The blood drains from my head, the noise of things bursting, merging, avoiding one another, assails me on all sides, my eyes search in vain for two things alike, each pinpoint of skin screams a different message, I drown in the spray of phenomena. It is at the mercy of these sensations, which happily I know to be illusory, that I have to live and work.

(Beckett, 1959, p.111)

Moran's eyes, under the sensory assault of empirical particularity, 'search in vain for two things alike' (Beckett, 1959, p.111);<sup>6</sup> at the other extreme, under the gaze of the

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<sup>6</sup> The passage evinces an inability to impose any synthesis whatsoever upon empirical perceptions, an inability profoundly at variance with Kant's prescriptions concerning the categories and schema of the understanding which organize perception so strictly as to guarantee the objectivity of the subject's sensory

metaphysically adept intellect, the players of Catastrophe, audience and Havel inclusive, can be synthesized into an undifferentiated human condition. To operate the connector 'alike', one must hold on to the separation of things; 'merging' is a preliminary to absolute confusion (Beckett, 1959, p.111). According to Havel, 'if we can't see individual, specific things, we can't see anything at all' (Havel, 1991, p.13).

It must be conceded that Catastrophe appears to play upon just such empirical non-particularity, despite the levelling effects of such imputed identities and mergers. In regard to its three staged characters, Beckett's directions are negatively informative in stating 'Age and physique unimportant' (Beckett, 1986, p.457). Pearce feels justified in co-opting the Protagonist as 'the nameless without a history' (Pearce, 1992, p.88); as Moran intimated, 'Anyone would serve' (Beckett, 1959, p.111). The Female Assistant has gone some way in obscuring any physical traces of individuality that may serve to particularize the Protagonist:

D. Why the hat?

A. To help hide the face.

(Beckett, 1986, p.457)

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information. By contrast, the chaotic instability of sensory perception, far beyond any Cartesian mistrust of the senses, recurs in Beckett throughout Watt, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Murphy and the trilogy. See below, Chapter Five, Section iii. Suffice it to say here, that the good repair of the metaphysical faculties cannot be concluded from the malfunctioning of the sensory apparatus.



Upon losing the services of the hat, adjustments are required:

D: There's a trace of face.

A: I make a note.

[She takes out pad, takes pencil, makes to note.]

D: Down the head. [A at a loss. Irritably.] Get going.

Down his head. [A puts back pad and pencil, goes to P, bows his head further, steps back.] A shade more. [A advances, bows the head further.] Stop! [A steps back.]

Fine. It's coming.

(Beckett, 1986, pp.459-460)

Archetypal status is 'coming' as remnants of individuality are going.

Curiously, the metaphysical provocation achieved by grooming the Protagonist into an unparticularized archetype is effected only by minute attention to the very empirical details which should be irrelevant. To satisfy the Director, the angle of the head must be precisely determined; should a metaphysical deep-structure obtain universally, remaining constant behind the illusory flux of appearances, the precise empirical realization of the Protagonist should not be of sufficient importance to demand such pains. Would not 'Anyone [...] serve'? (Beckett, 1959, p.111). Regarding position, Clov's assessment of 'there or elsewhere' should suffice (Beckett, 1986, p.120). Neither should colour schemes come into it. The Director's revision of his Assistant's staging of the Protagonist, however, seeks to

shift the empirical emphasis, with perhaps some measure of petulance, from black to white:

D: Why the gown?

A: To have him all black.

(Beckett, 1986, p.457)

D: Why the hands in pockets?

A: To help have him all black.

(Beckett, 1986, p.458)

A: Like that cranium?

D: Needs whitening.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

It is unclear whether any metaphysical resonances are less neglected by the exchange of a black-clad Protagonist for what will be a stripped and whitened model. In fact, the general principle of 'Whiten all flesh' is unapplied during the scene of Catastrophe, for the Assistant will merely 'make a note' (Beckett, 1986, p.460). The accomplished stripping, colouring the Protagonist neither black nor white but 'ash', has its literary significance, however:

The Director's insistence on 'more nudity' [...] seems to be a ruthless depreciation or humiliation of the Protagonist opposed to the image of the man in black, the Assistant's conception. The image she presents demonstrates qualities

of, perhaps, mystery, dignity, even tragedy.

(Pearce, 1992, p.88)

The Director requires, revealingly, 'the stark purity of the human being unaccommodated' (Pearce, 1992, p.88), a formulation self-conscious in its allusion to the 'Unaccommodated man' of another dramatic tragedy. Retaining his own furs, the Director orders the shaking off of the superflux by his Protagonist, for the prize of answering directly to King Lear:

Is man no more but this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Here's three on 's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come on, be true.

(Shakespeare, 1988, 11.93-99, p.927)

Yet the object under Lear's inspection, Poor Tom, is not simply himself; even here, 'the thing itself' and the instruction it offers as to the human condition is predicated upon disguise and deceit. Lear and the Director of Catastrophe may share in Vercko's prescient description of Beckett's later dramatic technique, where it is by 'By constant reduction and purification [that] he approaches the essence of human existence' (Vercko, 1979, p.37). But neither 'reduction and purification' nor 'Unaccommodated man' quite hit the note of the Director's pragmatic thoughts concerning the presentation of his Man.



'Could do with more nudity' (Beckett, 1986, p.460) seems to lack metaphysical tone.

Whether the Protagonist of Catastrophe is manifested in black, artificially whitened, ashen by virtue of exposure of his 'night attire' (Beckett, 1986, p.458) or simply flesh-coloured (although doubtless 'made-up' too), he is equally fodder for metaphysical impositions. According to Pearce, 'The Director and the Assistant conceive of meanings to be embodied in the Protagonist' and 'their conflict is a conflict of interpretations' (Pearce, 1992, p.87). What remains constant is the objective of their deployment of signs, an effort toward the construction of an 'image [...] representative of some truth about what it means to be human' (Pearce, 1992, p.87). The 'image of the man in black' with its extrapolated attributes of 'mystery, dignity, even tragedy' (Pearce, 1992, p.88), is not easily compatible with the 'poor, bare, forked animal' (Shakespeare, 1988, 11.98, p.927) left on the block after the Director's adjustments. Catastrophe is profligate in the truths concerning the human condition that it may be made to deliver, even though two or more conflicting essential truths must cause difficulties. The signification of 'human condition' remains although its content is subject to alteration, a worrying provisionality where eternally valid revelations are involved. The audience can cheer the discovery of universal and essential 'humanity', however the actual empirical image may change and however the 'essential' truth drawn from it may modulate in the course of the play. In the Kantian critique, no empirical

evidence is adequate to the direction of any metaphysical conclusions whatsoever; in Catastrophe, however the empirical evidence may change, the proffered conclusion remains of the metaphysical order. Taking note of the empirical evidence, and being thus swayed in one's judgements of eternal truth, is not, by definition, the proper work of the metaphysical investigator.

iii. Foucault and panopticism: 'I can't see the toes'

The battle between Director and Assistant over the empirical realization of the Protagonist abates on one point: their Man must be seen in his totality. A metaphysical diagnosis of the human condition would function identically; the aim must be to provide a total, complete picture of humanity. The neglect of part of this totality in the history of speculative metaphysics thus far is to be rectified:

D and A contemplate P. Long pause.

A: [Finally.] Like the look of him?

D: So so. [Pause.] Why the plinth?

A: To let the stalls see the feet.

(Beckett, 1986, p.457)

The Director's view of the correction needed to supply an unabridged portrait of Man might be inspired by the opening paradoxes of Beckett's Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit:

Total object, complete with missing parts, instead of partial object. Question of degree.

(Beckett, 1965, p.101)

It is indeed a 'Question of degree'; the angle of theatrical sight-lines are crucial. The Assistant may not sit on stage content, for her eighteen inch block is not up to its job:

D: [Off, plaintive.] I can't see the toes. [Irritably.] I'm sitting in the front row of the stalls and can't see the toes.

A: [Rising.] I make a note. [She takes out a pad, takes pencil, notes.] Raise pedestal.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

Only with the restoration of his missing parts is the image of the Protagonist complete. It is a novel scruple, but the all of Man does indeed necessitate that attention to the toes should not be omitted. Total observation is required, not oversights.

Critical compliments as to the metaphysical potentiality of Catastrophe are a prerequisite for such intimations of parody to be discerned. The implications of the total observation of the body of the Protagonist, however, may be expanded beyond such a 'Little gag' at the explicators' expense (Beckett, 1986, p.459). The Director's assurance that his Assistant's physical version of the little gag is not needed to restrain the Protagonist is instructive:



A: He's shivering.

D: Bless his heart.

[Pause.]

A: [Timidly.] What about a little ... a little ...gag?

D: For God's sake! This craze for explicitation! Every  
i dotted to death! Little gag! For God's sake!

A: Sure he won't utter?

D: Not a squeak.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

Recourse to such primitive measures of discipline offends the sensibilities of the Director; his method of coercion operates at a far more sophisticated level and need not be betrayed by physical traces.<sup>7</sup> As Foucault details, panopticism, total observation, is an alternative instrument of 'Disciplinary power':

Disciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his

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<sup>7</sup> The Protagonist is putatively an actor crucial to 'the last scene' (Beckett, 1986, p.457) of the play within a play of Catastrophe. The possibility of physically gagging an actor to ensure he 'won't utter' (Beckett, 1986, p.459), and thereby disrupt the Director's final tableau, is a problematic detail. It would suggest that, despite the record that 'P submits inert' (Beckett, 1986, p.458) to physical manipulation, his common cause with Director and Assistant must not be assumed.

subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.187)

Unlike 'violent forms of power', observation, part of 'a subtle, calculated technology of subjection', leaves no physical traces of its dominance over its subjects (Foucault, 1991a, p.221). In Foucault's analysis,<sup>\*</sup> Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon, controls via the guarantee of absolute surveillance. Within its cells, its 'so many small theatres', 'each actor is alone' and, he is made to know, 'constantly visible' (Foucault, 1991a, p.200). If 'solitude is the primary condition of total submission' (Foucault, 1991a, p.237), visibility, a function of lighting, is its foundation:

The panoptic mechanism [...] reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first

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\* The French publication of Foucault's Discipline and Punish, from which the above citations are drawn, predates the writing of Catastrophe by seven years. For other versions of the relevance of Discipline and Punish to Catastrophe, see McMullan (1993) and Jackson (1992). Here, Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972; first published 1969) and The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (1970; first published 1966) will be relevant to the discussion also.

and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.200)

The spotlight upon the Protagonist is exemplary; exhibition and surveillance achieve the necessary submission: the Director never touches the object of his gaze.\*

The central thesis of Foucault's Discipline and Punish is the transformation of European structures of punishment from 'TORTURE' to 'DISCIPLINE', from 'The spectacle of the scaffold' to 'Docile bodies' and 'The means of correct training' (Foucault, 1991a, p.v), from violent spectacle to total surveillance. The focus of the light demanded by the Director signals a parallel strategy, shifting from physical to mental domination:

D: Blackout stage.

L: What?

[A transmits in technical terms. Fade-out of general light. Light on P alone. A in shadow.]

D: Just the head.

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\* Compare Havel, writing in 1975, on 'the ubiquitous, omnipotent state police' of Czechoslovakia, 'the hideous spider whose invisible web runs right through the whole of society':

even if most of the people, most of the time, cannot see this web with their own eyes, nor touch its fibres, even the simplest citizen is well aware of its existence, assumes its silent presence at every moment in every place, and behaves accordingly - behaves, that is, so as to ensure the approval of those hidden eyes and ears.

(Havel, 1989, p.7)



L: What?

[A transmits in technical terms. Fade-out of light on P's body. Light on head alone. Long pause.]

D: Lovely.

(Beckett, 1986, p.460)

In accordance with Foucault's schema, the precise steps of the order are carried out by a staff of technicians; 'bureaucratic concealment' of the exercise of power (Foucault, 1991a, p.10) replaces its 'emphatic affirmation' as symbolized by the 'unrestrained presence of the sovereign' in the obsolete 'liturgy of torture and execution' employed as a public spectacle (Foucault, 1991a, p.49). The Director and lighting-man are offstage at the moment of decree and execution, the Assistant 'in shadow' (Beckett, 1986, p.460). Yet this sequence merely emphasizes what is patently the opposite situation throughout Catastrophe. Departing fundamentally from Discipline and Punish, the play stages that which Foucault defines as anonymous, discreet and invisible: it is the process of surveillance itself which is here delivered as a spectacle.<sup>10</sup>

In Catastrophe, that which should remain 'backstage', the preparation of the Protagonist, is itself observed by the audience. Directorial observation, assessment, dissatisfaction, minute manipulation and adjustment, the noting of necessary

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<sup>10</sup> Discipline and Punish itself, however, in so far as it describes these procedures of surveillance, renders them similarly visible. In synthesizing spectacle and surveillance, Catastrophe works out an irony implicit in Foucault's text.

modifications, even the existence of an earlier version of the climactic 'catastrophe', are exposed to view. Contrasted to the spectacle of the scaffold, surveillance, assessment and manipulation operate as 'Punishment of a less immediately physical kind', evincing 'a certain discretion in the art of inflicting pain' and combining to produce 'subtle, more subdued sufferings, deprived of their visible display' (Foucault, 1991a, p.8). The system of punishment Foucault describes functions through its own invisibility. Catastrophe stages these procedures. Yet in the play the objective of these specifically modern tactics of surveillance is the preparation of a public spectacle of a more ancient order. Again, Foucault holds the spectacle of public execution and the rationale of the observational mechanism apart both functionally and historically; Catastrophe presents the advances in domination possible via a synthesis of the two techniques.

#### iv. 'Now ... let 'em have it'

Foucault documents the revelation of truth that was to be located in the spectacle of public execution. In 'the old ceremonies of the scaffold', 'the truth must burst forth in the full light of day' (Foucault, 1991a, p.259); the 'guilty man' must be made 'the herald of his own condemnation' (Foucault, 1991a, p.43). To answer this imperative, the moment before execution 'took up once again the scene of the confession':

It duplicated the forced proclamation of the amende

honorable with a spontaneous, public acknowledgement. It established the public execution as the moment of truth. These last moments, when the guilty man no longer has anything to lose, are won for the full light of truth.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.43)

Schopenhauer too considers public executions as the site of ultimate revelation; a moment of truth, indeed, promising insights to the benefit of speculative philosophy:

[...] I do not regard it as in any way unbecoming to the dignity of philosophy to record the statements of a few criminals before execution, although I might in this way incur the sneer that I encourage gallows-sermons. On the contrary, I certainly believe that the gallows is a place of quite peculiar revelations, and a watch-tower from which the person who still retains his senses often obtains a much wider view and a clearer insight into eternity than most philosophers have over the paragraphs of their rational psychology and theology.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.631)

The behaviour of the condemned during this spectacle is crucial; it is these moments 'that all the spectators questioned: each word, each cry, the duration of the agony, the resisting body, the life that clung desperately to it, all this constituted a sign' (Foucault, 1991a, p.46). In the reading of this sign 'one could decipher crime and innocence, the past and the future, the



here below and the eternal' (Foucault, 1991a, p.46). The Director of Catastrophe will not leave the constitution of this sign, proclaiming its truth in extremis even if not up for execution, to chance.

Foucault juxtaposes two opposing 'ideals' of domination, the old and modern, the spectacular exhibition of power and bureaucratic 'leniency', the physical and the mental:

The extreme point of penal justice under the Ancien Régime was the infinite segmentation of the body of the regicide: a manifestation of the strongest power over the body of the greatest criminal, whose total destruction made the crime explode into its truth. The ideal point of penalty today would be an infinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation, a judgement that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed, the calculated leniency of a penalty that would be interlaced with the ruthless curiosity of an examination [...].

(Foucault, 1991a, p.227)

Under the Director's supervision, the latter methodology of surveillance is utilized to master, transform and improve the subjected body of the Protagonist in preparation for its use as a sign which will explode into revelation of the 'truth' in public exhibition. This is public display of the arraigned man

subject to aesthetic design, a fusion of the cruelties available in Discipline and Punish.

The construction of the spectacle and its signs benefits from the 'calculation of the infinitely small', from apparently 'petty forms of coercion' and the 'meticulous, often minute, techniques' perfected by modern methodologies of discipline (Foucault, 1991a, p.139). These strategies represent 'the coherence of a tactic':

They are acts of cunning, not so much of the greater reason that works even in its sleep and gives meaning to the insignificant, as of the attentive 'malevolence' that turns everything to account. Discipline is a political anatomy of detail.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.139)

In Catastrophe, the 'discipline of the minute' (Foucault, 1991a, p.140) controls absolutely the sign that will be exhibited. No aspect of the Director's 'catastrophe' is 'so small that it [is] not willed by one of his individual wishes' (Foucault, 1991a, p.140). This '"new micro-physics" of power' (Foucault, 1991a, p.139) exploits the 'mystical calculus of the infinitesimal and the infinite' (Foucault, 1991a, p.140). The programming of detail is crucial to the interpretative ramifications of the sign. A metaphysical rendering of Catastrophe confirms the Director's triumph in the manipulation of his sign: discipline has transformed the body of the Protagonist into an image of

'truth' and 'revelation', proffering like Foucault's condemned man an insight into 'the here below and the eternal' (Foucault, 1991a, p.46). For the benefit of those drawn to the spectacle of the 'catastrophe' seeking elucidation of the human condition, the Protagonist has been made to 'say it'. Yet the impact of this image bears a problematic relationship to the entirety of Beckett's play.

Catastrophe itself stages the rehearsal of this spectacle, its preparation, manipulation and design, its fabrication. This process is the spectacle that Catastrophe delivers to its audience. In the very different play rehearsed by the Director and Assistant, their image of the Protagonist will be exhibited for public and critical delectation in isolation from its makers and their methods of construction. Director and Assistant have no parts in this play; the fabricators will not remain on stage to testify to the fact of fabrication. Neither will they leave behind any 'little gag' (Beckett, 1986, p.459) to signal their intervention. In this play within a play, only the bowed head of the Protagonist will be staged and lit, a sign charged with sufficient mystery and portent to instigate speculations on a metaphysical level. Between this play and Catastrophe, the opposition between theatrical 'illusionism' and Brechtian alienation applies:

The audience in bourgeois theatre is the passive consumer of a finished, unchangeable art-object offered to them as 'real'. The play does not stimulate them to think



constructively of how it is presenting its characters and events, or how they might have been different. Because the dramatic illusion is a seamless whole which conceals the fact that it is constructed, it prevents an audience from reflecting critically on both the mode of representation and the actions represented.

(Eagleton, 1989, p.64)

In Catastrophe, the fabricators are caught on stage in the very act of fabrication. Compliments as to a revelation of the human condition in Beckett's Catastrophe in fact applaud the illusion constructed for the Director's play. A fabricated image is not unproblematically 'real' or 'true'; rather, when fabrication is revealed, questions arise as to the agenda informing, and the power relations allowing, the manufacture of the putatively real.

When a putatively metaphysical 'reality' is involved, the exposure of the methods informing its construction may involve further disappointments. Metaphysically resonant images share a covenant with sausages: if one could see how they were made, the inclination to swallow them might diminish. A tendency towards a 'little ... gag' (Beckett, 1986, p.459) might be encouraged by instruction as to their modes of manufacture. In Theatre II, the authority of the investigators to issue declarations concerning the human condition is punctured by their emphatic positioning in time and space; in Catastrophe, the same limitations apply. There are two additional imperatives informing the Director's vision of the human condition: it must

be decided under the pressure of time and positioned correctly in space. Worldly considerations compel the hurry:

D: [...] Get going. Lose that gown. [He consults his chronometer.] Step on it, I have a caucus.

(Beckett, 1986, p.458)

For the un-omniscient, the spatial positioning of the observer must be reckoned with, even if time is a restriction:

D: [...] [He consults his chronometer.] Just time. I'll go and see how it looks from the house.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

The limits of observation from this position determine alterations to the staging of the Protagonist. In the controversy of the toes, the Protagonist's pedestal must be raised; where 'There's a trace of face' (Beckett, 1986, p.459), his head must be 'Downed' to take account of the angle operative from the spectator's position. It is the image of the Protagonist, which should be timeless and eternal according to a metaphysical reading, that is the only variable term in these calculations. This Director is a pragmatist: the genuine metaphysician should demand that the theatre be moved to correct the sight-lines before violating the integrity of his image.

The Protagonist is not the product of an incarnate vision or an instantaneous revelation; rather, he is in process and

subject to piece-meal manufacture. As the Assistant 'Gets going', so the Director judges of his image, 'It's coming' (Beckett, 1986, p.459). Again, the procedures of Brechtian theatre can be recalled to oppose the 'ideological belief', which a metaphysical reading must assert, that 'the world [is] fixed, given and unchangeable':

Against this, [Brecht] posits the view that reality is a changing, discontinuous process, produced by men and so transformable by them. [...] The task of theatre is not to 'reflect' a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of that process of production [...].

(Eagleton, 1989, pp.64-65)

The empirical machinations involved in representing the human condition for a theatrical production are laid bare in Catastrophe, complete with missing parts: for mysticism, spiritual inspiration and revelation are humiliatingly absent. The manufacture of theatrical images must encompass the moulding and positioning of physical materials in space and time; the successful director must ensure, in Foucault's terms, that his available bodies are 'meticulously prepared, calculated and used' (Foucault, 1991a, p.26). When sentient material is involved a certain amount of discomfort may be incidental to the process:



A: He's shivering.

D: Bless his heart.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

There is no further consultation: as the image would be more aesthetically pleasing stripped, it must be so. Disconcertingly, however, a reputation for comparable ruthlessness informs certain aspects of Beckett's own history as a dramatist and director.

Alan Schneider could be describing the complaints of the acting profession against the Director of Catastrophe:

They feel he limits them too severely as artists, removes their creativity and individuality, constricts them too rigidly in their physical or vocal resources. They tell me that he must hate actors because he denies them the use of their own impulses, as well as more and more of their physical selves. After all, if they can not move freely about the stage, can not use their voices and bodies - their very means of reaching their audiences - what are they but impersonal or even disembodied puppets of his will?

(Schneider, 1976, p.285)

In fact, these are the reasons, as garnered from Beckett's reputation as a director, Schneider catalogues to explain why 'After all these years, there are a number of actors (and directors) who still do not respond to Beckett, or avoid doing his plays' (Schneider, 1976, p.284). Admittedly, in contrast to

the author of Happy Days, Play and Not I, the Director of Catastrophe will at least allow, indeed demands, total exhibition of his Protagonist's body. Total exhibition, however, entails that the application of Directorial discipline upon the actor's body is similarly complete. Emphatically, the Protagonist is a puppet of his will. The comments of actors concerning Beckett as author and director testify to a similar paucity of permitted self-determination:

The text usually dictates everything that I do.

(Whitelaw, 1989, p.240)

I will totally accept what he has written, and I will then try just to give him what he wants.

(Whitelaw, 1989, p.235)

On the first day of rehearsal he gave me the key to my role:

'Don't ask why - this is how it is!'

(Schultz, 1990, p.22)

The ideal Beckett actor matches the behaviour of an exemplary Protagonist:

I feel that I place myself totally at his disposal, and I can be a tube of paint or a musical instrument or whatever. I won't argue, I won't argue because I trust him totally, and have absolute respect for his integrity and his artistic vision. So really I just do as I'm told.

Beckett's meticulous direction of Billie Whitelaw in Happy Days extended to the formulation of rules for 'putting things down' precisely 'on a syllable of a word' (Whitelaw, 1990, p.5). Under Beckett's direction, self-abnegation on the part of the actor is a requirement: 'you the actor' according to Whitelaw, are not to 'get in the way' (Whitelaw, 1989, p.238).<sup>11</sup> To avoid this obstruction to directorial will, the keynote of Catastrophe sounds again: the duty of Beckett's actor is 'to be incredibly disciplined' (Whitelaw, 1989, p.238). This functions in a double sense: the actor is 'incredibly disciplined' by Beckett's prescriptions, in addition to cultivating self-control voluntarily - the better to follow Beckett's prescriptions. As well as the impulse to construct stage images, the Director of Catastrophe thus shares with Beckett certain procedures conducive to their achievement, principally the discipline and manipulation of the actor who constitutes part of his artistic material.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The complaints of Rousseau against the actor, and Derrida's analysis of them, centre on just this quality of self-abnegation demanded by Beckett. Rousseau contrasts the orator who 'speaks only in his own name, says, or ought to say, only what he thinks', with the 'actor on the stage, displaying other sentiments than his own, saying only what he is made to say'; a process wherein the actor 'annihilates himself' (Rousseau cited in Derrida, 1976, p.305). Of Rousseau's 'two men of spectacle', Derrida comments, only 'the actor [...] is not inspired or animated by any particular language. He signifies nothing. He hardly lives, he lends his voice. It is a mouthpiece' (Derrida, 1976, p.305).

<sup>12</sup> Appropriately, in Play, the faces of the actors, the only part of them which is visible, are made-up 'to seem almost part of the urns' from which each protrudes (Beckett, 1986, p.307). It is in regard to Play, however, that Beckett issues a rare warrant for the performative freedom of, not its actors, but the spotlight which activates their speech. As Beckett wrote



The Director's play may be 'unspecified' in its particulars, but there is evidence apparent in his aims and methods of staging it which might persuade us that it is, as Gontarski notes, 'something out of Beckett' (Gontarski, 1985, p.181).

At this point, it would seem that Catastrophe pits Beckett against himself: what is subject to exposure via the play's staging of the Director are techniques in direction and dramaturgy which can be seized upon eagerly as recognizably Beckettian. Yet the attempt to 'use Beckett's text', in the case of Catastrophe, 'to critique Beckett's practices' (Jackson, 1992, p.39) is likely to stall, for given its status as part of 'Beckett's practices', Catastrophe would be obliged to critique itself simultaneously. Catastrophe can hardly stand apart unimplicated, as Beckett's anti-Beckettian denunciation of Beckett. On the contrary: Catastrophe appears to incorporate aspects of the archetypal Beckett play. It is possible to suspect, however, that a critique predicated on Beckettian concerns could find reasons for discontent closely associated with this very 'archetypal' preconception, and here, a self-defeating identity with Beckett may not be inevitable.

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to George Devine:

The inquirer (light) begins to emerge as no less a victim of his inquiry than they and as needing to be free, within narrow limits, literally to act the part, i.e. to vary if only slightly his speed and intensities.

(Beckett, 1983a, p.112)

The risk of conceding a need 'to be free' is immediately mitigated, if not cancelled, by the injunction that such freedom must be contained 'within narrow limits'. Moreover, Beckett will grant this dubious liberty of being 'free, within narrow limits' only to a mechanism and its anonymous operative.

v. 'People were summoned as spectators'

Critical perspicacity has not been lacking to observe the potential for Beckettian self-referentiality in Catastrophe; given a sporting chance, panoramic views across Beckett's own stage images, other 'texts' and directorial demands may be given:

The figure of the Protagonist, in his long robe and wide-brimmed hat, recalls other Beckettian figures, as in Eh Joe, Ghost Trio or Ohio Impromptu, and the final fade-down to focus in on the head alone, off-handedly produced by the technician, Luke, is similar to the ending of many of Beckett's plays. [...] Indeed, the discipline exercised by the Producer is rivalled by the discipline exercised by Beckett in the mise en scène of his own work.

(McMullan, 1993, p.31)

The very emphases of Catastrophe, techniques of surveillance and the construction of spectacle, clearly reproduce aspects of 'Beckett's theatre':

Much of Beckett's theatre focuses on strategies of surveillance and spectacle - most of the bodies which appear in his plays are subject to discipline and cannot escape either the confines of the stage or the relentless glare of the spotlight. This is perhaps a major reason why the late plays are rarely performed in the round - precisely because of the way they set up a frame, offering that which appears

within it as spectacle.

(McMullan, 1993, p.16)

Catastrophe itself was first offered as a spectacle, incidentally to the considerable expense of the archetypal overview of Beckett,<sup>13</sup> at the Avignon Festival, an occasion organized for the benefit of the Association internationale de Défense des Artistes. Inside the play, the Director's contribution of a spectacle is for the benefit of his audience. There is considerable critical agreement as to a primary signification of this offering, a signification which unites metaphysical and political readings. For Sandarg, the Protagonist represents 'a statue of silent suffering' (Sandarg, 1988, p.140). Suffering is also emphasized in the identifications McMullan finds appropriate:

the Protagonist not only evokes the pathetic figure of Man, but the figure of Christ, offered up as sacrificial victim, the spectacle of his crucified body presented to the gaze of the multitude.

(McMullan, 1993, p.30)

The ascription of the source may vary between the political or the metaphysical,<sup>14</sup> but recognition of persecution and suffering

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<sup>13</sup> As Sandarg asks in mock-disbelief, 'Politics, commitment and society ... a blasphemy of Beckett?' (Sandarg, 1988, p.137).

<sup>14</sup> This can vary in the same account. Like Sandarg, McMullan's overtly political reading of Catastrophe can lapse into the metaphysical gestures of the citation above.



inform most responses to the Protagonist. This concern with 'suffering' must further position Catastrophe within the category of the archetypically Beckettian. What is not archetypal, however, is the ease with which this interpretation may be made; the very obviousness of the Protagonist's 'suffering' renders its discovery in Catastrophe as banal as at the scenes of public execution documented by Foucault. The spectacular fashion in which the Protagonist is directed to 'suffer', and Catastrophe styled to refer to the 'Beckettian', is perhaps a cause for suspicion.

Comparisons with 'the pathetic figure of Man' and 'the figure of Christ' (McMullan, 1993, p.30) is considerable recompense for the Protagonist's performance of his agonies. Yet, a peculiarity is devised precisely by such critical tributes to how impressively the Protagonist is made to suffer. The cultivation of a taste for masterful and considered representations of human misery risks a certain perversity: aesthetic congratulation of Beckett under such terms posits an audience which can extract a good measure of enjoyment from witnessing atrocities well-performed. However, the credit accorded to Beckett for the artistic depiction of pleasurable pains must in the case of Catastrophe be lavished upon the Director. His definite opinions on what suffering humanity is wearing in the Absurd this season undoubtedly demonstrate a certain expertise in costuming the archetypal Beckett play. At the conclusion of his deliberations, the stylized look, complete with its appropriately Beckettian experimental lighting, is 'in

the bag' (Beckett, 1986, p.460). Given Beckett's success in the presentation of such images, there should be no reason to withhold similar admiration from the spectacle the Director offers for critical delectation. Beckett's audience, if they arrive to see misery with the potential for co-option into a pessimistic system on a metaphysical scale, are well-served by this proxy Director. He even takes up the position of the audience to ensure that his staging decisions will fulfil their legitimate expectation for, as culled from their experience of Beckett, a vision of the complete human condition. According to Brater:

When the Director leaves the set to check the effect from the stalls, 'not to appear again,' his offstage voice assumes the frightening impersonality of absolute assertion.

(Brater, 1987, p.142)

This quality may consolidate his authority to mould a metaphysical vision;<sup>15</sup> otherwise, it may emphasize just how completely Catastrophe intends to prostrate itself before the demands of an audience which knows exactly what it requires from the archetypal Beckett play. This voice of 'absolute assertion', after all, comes from the stalls. The Assistant executes the

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<sup>15</sup> Any attempt to claim the Director as a disembodied intelligence functioning beyond space and time, as would be convenient for an impersonal voice of 'absolute assertion' (Brater, 1987, p.142), must be embarrassed by the traces of gross physicality left behind on the vacated seat of power on stage. The offices of a rag 'vigorously' applied to the 'back and seat of chair' (Beckett, 1986, p.459) are necessary before the Assistant can take the Director's place without active distaste.

necessary adjustments to ensure that Protagonist is the on-stage projection of demands emanating from the auditorium. Upon each experimental modification, she 'steps back' (Beckett, 1986, p.460) to allow Director and audience to contemplate the aesthetic progress of their substitute crucifixion. The Director's foray into the space of the audience to test the visible impact of his image signals his awareness of a crucial consideration: as the Protagonist is subject to his authority, so is the Director subject to the authority of the audience. His manipulation of the Protagonist is done in service of the audience. And this service is predicated to meet the demands, specifically, of Beckett's audience. If a signification of 'suffering' is desired, we are to have what we want, and moreover, on a plinth.

Throughout his manipulation and visual assessment, the Protagonist 'submits, inert' (Beckett, 1986, p.458). Until its final moments, Catastrophe replicates the division of power expressed in Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon. These relations are a function of visibility:

The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.

(Foucault, 1991a, pp.201-202)

Such a model can be readily transposed into theatrical terms:



a darkened auditorium and spotlit Protagonist produces an identical one-sided distribution of the right to observe and assess. Via this 'simple economic geometry', 'those anonymous and temporary observers' positioned in the central tower (Foucault, 1991a, p.202) are awarded 'a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation' (Foucault, 1991a, p.203).<sup>16</sup> The Panopticon offers the same state of serene contemplation of the 'constantly suffering' that Schopenhauer posits as available in artistic representation:

the in-itself of life, the will, existence itself, is a constant suffering, and is partly woeful, partly fearful. The same thing, on the other hand, as representation alone, purely contemplated, or repeated through art, free from pain, presents us with a significant spectacle.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §52, p.267)

From the security of aesthetic distance we may applaud.

Thus far we remain within the scripted response to the Protagonist supplied for the audience of the play within a play of Catastrophe. However, the tranquillity of contemplation owes much to the inability of the object thus fixed to return its

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<sup>16</sup> The power to observe, and command, is transformed in Foucault from being the prerogative of monarchy to the right of the people; Catastrophe insinuates a parallel shift in authority from Director to audience. According to Foucault, 'the power to judge should no longer depend on the innumerable, discontinuous, sometimes contradictory privileges of sovereignty, but on the continuously distributed effects of public power' (Foucault, 1991a, p.81).

audience's interrogative gaze. This is the 'guarantee of order' of the Panopticon:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; [...]. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.200)

The imposition of confinement, surveillance and objectification mark the relationship of the Director and audience with the Protagonist; the superiority of the former and subjection of the latter is pre-decided by their relative positions as observers and observed in the panoptical mechanism. Beckett's Catastrophe imposes a last minute revision which departs from this script:

D: [...] Now ... let 'em have it. [Fade-out of general light. Pause. Fade-out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause.] Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here.  
[Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long pause. Fade-out of light on face.]

(Beckett, 1986, p.461)

The lighting of the 'catastrophe' has erased the apparent fabricators of the image from notice: it is not the Director or

Assistant that the Protagonist 'fixes', but the audience. The gaze is returned just as the audience is called upon to play their conventional role in the success of the spectacle. The 'storm of applause' which is now finally due from the actual audience of Catastrophe is parodied and silenced within the play itself; can the disdained reaction be tendered again? The 'abyssal dissymmetry that occurs when one is exposed to the gaze of the other' (Derrida, 1995, p.28) favours the audience until the final action of the play. The focus of the interrogation is then abruptly switched. The Protagonist has been subject to scrutiny and correction throughout the play; suddenly each member of the audience must negotiate a 'correct' response to a challenge proffered publicly. The timing of this strategy is unique in Beckett's theatre.<sup>17</sup> The last act of Catastrophe is to put its observers under surveillance and to demand a response.

With parody and disdain of the role of the audience written into the text of Catastrophe, it must be asked in all innocence what has been done to merit such ill treatment. Foucault's

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<sup>17</sup> In Happy Days, the interrogation of the spectator is both mediated by the Shower/Cooker surrogates and positioned within the play to occur when the audience is secure in the invisibility of a darkened auditorium. Neither are the audience obliged to provide a public rejoinder to the many ambiguous occasions in Play when responses, apparently to the operation of the spotlight, may equally be understood as referring to the players' perception of the demands implicit in the gaze of the audience. A method of switching the gaze of the spectators back on to themselves comparable to that of Catastrophe might be found in Elizabeth Chitty's Demo Model; here, 'the audience also is made into a scene by the flash and framing of the Polaroid camera the artist carries, which returns the aggression of the theatrical scene to the audience' (Monk, 1982, p.166).



analysis of execution as a public spectacle again has ramifications for the strategies of Catastrophe:

People were summoned as spectators [...]. Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it.

(Foucault, 1991a, p.58; my emphasis)

The audience of Catastrophe are similarly implicated in the production of its spectacle of suffering. Witnesses are necessary to the definition of a spectacle. That which is unseen, whatever its inherent extravagances, cannot constitute a 'spectacle'; to achieve this status, an audience must be summoned.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in so far as Catastrophe exploits

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<sup>18</sup> The challenge to the audience in Catastrophe is structurally similar to that described by Beckett with regard to Caravaggio's The Beheading of John the Baptist, a painting recognized as an influence upon Not I (see, for example, Knowlson, 1996, pp.588-589). Armstrong records Beckett's comments from September 1985:

I stood there a long time in front of the painting. Gradually I noticed that I was not alone, that behind the screen at the side of the church [in the painting] was the face of a man watching me observe the scene of beheading.  
(Beckett cited in Armstrong, 1990, pp.69-70)

As is the case in Catastrophe, the spectator is observed in his critical and aesthetic assessment of, as Armstrong describes the scene of beheading, 'a visceral assault on another individual' (Armstrong, 1990, p.70). The repeated intimations of antagonism towards the audience in Endgame, Waiting for Godot, Not I, Play, Happy Days and Catastrophe might share a basis made explicit in Beckett's Eleutheria; there, the staged Spectator confesses that 'by definition, I am partly despicable' (Beckett, 1996, p.133). The demand that Victor explain himself, as pressed by the Spectator, is reproduced in Catastrophe in the necessity to

recognizably Beckettian techniques, the construction of this spectacle is undertaken with the expressed preferences of his own audience in mind. States' comments on the pliancy of the Director's Assistant suggests a further analogy:

of course, the Assistant - as assistants will be - is over-zealous: she would pull all the stops, over-do everything.

(States, 1987, p.17)

The Director himself bears just such a relationship to his author; the explicitness of the Protagonist's dejection, the meticulousness of his staging, the ruthless manipulation of the 'performer', the lighting plans, and, most of all, the ostentation of the plinth, 'over-do' Beckettian methods just sufficiently to tip recognition of the 'archetype' over into parody. The Director's objective in utilizing these methods, however, is to direct the expressive potential of the silent Protagonist. It is via these techniques that the Protagonist can be made to signify 'suffering'; but, crucially, it is the application of these techniques which causes his suffering. Surveillance, assessment and manipulation, as detailed by Foucault, can be operated as the modern replacements for physical violence and torture. In the utilization of these methods, the behaviour of the spectators of Catastrophe is closely analogous to that of the Director. The speciality of the critical audience

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maximize the expressive potential of the Protagonist for the benefit of his audience. It is the existence of questioning spectators which create the impulse to make both Victor and the Protagonist 'Say it' (Beckett, 1986, p.457).



in particular is the imposition of its attentions upon its chosen material to inquire as to what it may be forced to 'say'.

It is thus also within critical discourse that the Protagonist may be moulded, manipulated and re-deployed as a sign whose significance is determined by the preference of the critic. Directorial and critical surveillance share an impulse to coerce this exhibited material into harmony with some systematic end. Interpretations paying their respects to Beckett's reputation as dispenser of metaphysical truths and those readings stressing the political implications of Catastrophe, are equally liable to supplement the Director's objectification of the Protagonist with their own. In service of a politicized reading, the silence of the Protagonist attracts comment:

voiceless among the voices, he resembles a prisoner prepared for an official visit or a propaganda warning for all to see in all his agony.

(Sandarg, 1988, p.140)

Evidently, Sandarg must congratulate the Director on the expressive impact of his voiceless image. But this is Sandarg's voice and Sandarg's version of what the Protagonist can be deployed to express. Statement of what the Protagonist 'says' risks the reproduction of the same system of repression imposed by the Director, even when that system is the target of censure:

Catastrophe plays upon the audience's awareness of the body



transformed into a sign, into material to be manipulated, disciplined, shaped. The body in representation is reproduced as a conditioned image in accordance with the dominant laws, while any attempt on the part of the powerless to speak or gesture is repressed [...].

(McMullan, 1993, p.28)

Simultaneously with deploring the reduction of the status of the Protagonist to 'material to be manipulated' and his conditioning 'in accordance with the dominant laws', he is deployed for the benefit of McMullan's vision in a parallel manner. His objectification underlies the structure of the argument; the concepts of 'the body transformed into a sign', 'material to be manipulated' and 'a conditioned image' replace the actual bodily manifestation of the Protagonist. The material object is converted into an expressive symbol, a conversion which does not acknowledge its own potential investment in subtle techniques of manipulation. The Protagonist remains voiceless; it is these authoritative voices which display the ability to redescribe his significance, to add to the Director's version of how he might be positioned and seen in the best light.

## vi. Conceptualization

Critical interpretation reworks the empirical manifestation of the Protagonist in conceptual terms. At the opening of Catastrophe, the body of the Protagonist is concealed beneath the black gown and hat supplied by the Assistant; when information

is required by the Director as to the empirical characteristics of this physical 'material', he insists that the Assistant does not uncover the Protagonist for actual inspection, but that she 'say it'. Conceptual definition of the Protagonist begins here:

D: What has he on underneath? [A moves towards P.] Say it.

[A halts.]

A: His night attire.

D: Colour?

A: Ash.

(Beckett, 1986, p.458)

When the gown is removed, these conceptual descriptions serve to direct the response of the audience. We do not inspect the empirical appearance of the Protagonist entirely unprejudiced by implanted expectations. The Director requires further preliminary testimony as to the state of his object:

D: [...] How's the skull?

A: You've seen it.

D: I forget. [A moves toward P.] Say it.

A: Moulting. A few tufts.

D: Colour?

A: Ash.

(Beckett, 1986, p.458)

The Director's own empirical knowledge ('You've seen it') is superseded ('I forget') by the conceptual determinations demanded

of the Assistant ('Say it'). Implicit judgement of the attributes of the empirical object under discussion resides in the terms chosen to denote them. The selections 'skull' and 'Ash' are not neutral in their connotations. The linguistic choices of the Assistant impose an interpretative inflection upon empirical material which remains concealed from the audience at this point. These descriptions are the responsibility of the interpreter and not simply characteristics of an object objectively detailed. Remaining unavailable to empirical inspection, the Protagonist is being defined by conceptual discourse. The third sequence of this type extends the process further:

D: How are they? [A at a loss. Irritably.] The hands, how are the hands?

A: You've seen them.

D: I forget.

A: Crippled. Fibrous degeneration.

D: Clawlike?

A: If you like.

D: Two claws?

A: Unless he clench his fists.

D: He mustn't.

A: I make a note. [She takes out pad, takes pencil, notes.]

Hands limp.

(Beckett, 1986, p.458)

Again the impression made by empirical observation is too weak



to be retained in the memory of the Director; the Assistant is ordered to supply replacement data in conceptual terms. 'Fibrous degeneration', the decay of the physical,<sup>19</sup> is the fate of matter in the mind of the Director ('I forget') and the effect of the Assistant's conceptual exposition. In this exchange, the priority of conceptual definition over the empirical object itself is decisively established. Description of the hands of the Protagonist provokes for the Director the idea of 'Two claws'; the physical disposition of the Protagonist must henceforth replicate and emphasize this conceptual preference. In place of the search for concepts to describe the object adequately, the object must be manipulated in order to manifest the concept adequately.<sup>20</sup>

The Director is shielded from any confrontation with materiality by the exertions of his Assistant. His manipulations are exclusively conceptual; he is never directly in contact with the body of the Protagonist. The discipline exerted by his

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<sup>19</sup> Upon the first occurrence of the concept 'Ash' (Beckett, 1986, p.457), the Director 'takes out a cigar' and demands a 'Light' (Beckett, 1986, p.458). The materiality of this particular prop disintegrates into smoke and ash in time with the Director's increasing conceptual domination of the major stage prop on the plinth.

<sup>20</sup> Havel notes a similar inversion in relation to the operations of the Czechoslovakian regime in 1975: 'the authorities, instead of adapting themselves to life, try to adapt life to themselves' (Havel, 1989, p.28). The impact of 'dialectical metaphysics' is analogous also, where 'instead of the dialectic confirming itself by serving reality, it is supposed to confirm itself by having reality serve it' (Havel, 1980, p.8). In application 'It mortifies, destroys and ruins things' for it 'changes all around it into arguments favouring its own abstract truth. It is interested only in how to incorporate things into its scheme' (Havel, 1980, p.9).

conceptual determinations is such that his mere decree is sufficient to exclude empirical actions not consistent with his wishes:

A: Sure he won't utter?

D: Not a squeak.

(Beckett, 1986, p.459)

As the Director declares, so it shall be. The idealist endowed with power may compel the reworking of the empirical to satisfy his conceptual definitions. In Endgame, Hamm ponders, a 'rational being' might be 'liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough' (Beckett, 1986, p.108); in Catastrophe, the Director reverses the order of priority: 'ideas' are to inform the material offered for observation. Hamm's 'rational being', extracting concepts a posteriori from empirical observation, conforms his procedures to Kantian epistemology:

Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts. But all thought must, directly or indirectly, by way of certain characters, relate ultimately to intuitions, and therefore, with us, to sensibility, because in no other way can the object be given to us.

(Kant, 1933, A19/B33, p.65)

The empirical basis underlying the Kantian scheme determines that

'In the absence of intuition all our knowledge is without objects, and therefore remains entirely empty' (Kant, 1933, A62/B87, p.100). As the Protagonist remains robed during the sequences where the Assistant is required to 'say' his empirical condition, the concepts she delivers to both the Director and the audience remain similarly 'empty'. Conceptual assertions stray into the metaphysical realm when the nature of the objects required to fill or substantiate them 'transcend the conditions of all possible experience' (Kant, 1933, A751-752/B779-780, p.601). Amongst the metaphysical ramifications posited in criticism upon Catastrophe, States's ability to point out the objects or intuitions corresponding to 'the void, or the terminal room in the ex-world' (States, 1987, p.15) must in particular be doubted. But the metaphysical nature of such entities of course also guarantees that no conclusive refutation of their existence can be given either. Where 'assertions [...] do not relate to objects of experience' (Kant, 1933, A742/B770, p.595) battles are fought merely in a zone of ideas. The metaphysician may posit supersensible existence and 'it is [...] apodeictically certain that there will never be anyone who will be able to assert the opposite with the least show [of proof], much less, dogmatically' (Kant, 1933, A742/B770, p.595). The 'spectacle' offered by combatants in metaphysical disputes is therefore literally immaterial:

Both parties beat the air, and wrestle with their own shadows, since they go beyond the limits of nature, where there is nothing that they can seize and hold with their



dogmatic grasp. Fight as they may, the shadows which they cleave asunder grow together again forthwith, like the heroes in Valhalla, to disport themselves anew in the bloodless contests.

(Kant, 1933, A756/B784, p.604)

The operations of the Director of Catastrophe introduce a crucial variation: his vision, originating equally in merely conceptual determinations, is to be forcibly made manifest upon the empirical material at his disposal. The substantiation of concepts via an object capable of empirical intuition, which Kantian epistemology demands, is to be fulfilled. Under the Director's modification, however, the required object is not simply 'given' (Kant, 1933, A19/B33, p.65), but is to be fabricated.

The Protagonist begins Catastrophe concealed and shapeless beneath a black gown; his eventual empirical manifestation is a function of the Director's organization of the potentialities of this inert material. Similarly, within Discipline and Punish, the 'individual' is 'fabricated' by a 'specific technology of power':

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and

the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.<sup>21</sup>

(Foucault, 1991a, p.194)

While the metaphysician merely manipulates ideas which can have no empirical application, the Director exercises the prerogative of power to substantiate his conceptual determinations upon the body of the Protagonist. The Director's role in Catastrophe is to produce the 'reality' that validates his conceptual vision. Critical speculations upon the 'knowledge that may be gained' (Foucault, 1991a, p.194) by examination of the vision embodied by the Protagonist must take account of what Catastrophe explicitly stages, that this vision is the result of modes of fabrication, manufacture and manipulation, not fortuitous discovery or independent existence. The evidence substantiating the Director's idea of his Man has been fabricated.<sup>22</sup> Attending to the image of the Protagonist produced by the Director, criticism bases its deliberations upon an object that has already been subject to unsparing interference.<sup>23</sup> Further, to claim the Protagonist as the embodiment of 'suffering', of Man, of the human condition, of any conceptual package, entails the

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<sup>21</sup> In Havel's analysis, the assumption of 'the centre of power' is that it is itself 'identical with the centre of truth' (Havel, 1989, p.39).

<sup>22</sup> The Kantian priority of intuitions over concepts has been violated; now 'Reality does not shape theory, but rather the reverse' (Havel, 1989, p.47).

<sup>23</sup> The audience is never permitted to view the Protagonist in a state free of any external intervention: his 'original' appearance in black gown and hat is determined by staging decisions made by the Assistant.

imposition of conceptual determinations upon the available material in precisely the way demonstrated by the Director. This is not an accidental oversight: merely to be reproduced in discourse, the empirical manifestation of the Protagonist must be replaced by concepts. Conceptual reordering is the obligation of the enterprise that would parade the Director as a devious manipulator of his materials.

The very impossibility of doing anything other in discourse than substituting conceptual formulations for empirical intuitions harbours comforts. The problem and the consolation, if a little irony can be tolerated, emerge for the Animator and Stenographer in Beckett's Rough for Radio II:

A: [Pained.] I chatter too much.

S: Come, come, sir, don't say that, it is part of your rôle, as animator.

(Beckett, 1986, p.283)

While one's putative object cannot remain precisely itself following its translation into conceptual terms, methods exist to maximize the measure of transformative corruption far beyond the merely inevitable. In his dealings with another piece of pointedly 'Beckettian' text, the Animator of Radio II introduces the technique of simple addition to his interpretative strategies:

S: 'Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened -'



A: Don't skip, miss, the text in its entirety if you please.

S: I skip nothing, sir. [Pause.] What have I skipped, sir?

A: [Emphatically.] '... between two kisses ...'  
[Sarcastic.] That mere trifle! [Angry.] How can we ever hope to get anywhere if you suppress gems of that magnitude?

S: But, sir, he never said anything of the kind.

A: [Angry.] '... Maud would say, between two kisses, etc.'  
Amend.

S: But, sir, I -

A: What the devil are you deriding, miss? My hearing? My memory? My good faith? [Thunderous.] Amend!

S: [Feebly.] As you will, sir.

A: Let us hear how it runs now.

(Beckett, 1986, p.284)

Similarly, critical supplements to the text of Catastrophe come in varying degrees. The impulse of Libera's allegorical account of each player in Catastrophe is towards a replacement of the empirically staged play by its 'meaning'. The empirical is transcended by its conceptual determination:

Such an interpretation of the meaning of these characters can now shed light on the event depicted and render its significance truly moving.

(Libera, 1984, p.108)

It is the 'interpretation', the conceptual property of Libera, that 'can now shed light on the event'. As for the Director, it is the concepts brought to bear upon empirical material that take precedence. Each 'shed light' by moulding their materials in accordance with conceptual preferences. Following his emendation to the text under consideration, the Animator of Radio II, would 'hear how it runs now' (Beckett, 1986, p.284); Libera's next line, following reorganization of Catastrophe in the light of 'interpretation', is not so very dissimilar:

Such an interpretation of the meaning of these characters can now shed light on the event depicted and render its significance truly moving. For we now have the following:  
[...].

(Libera, 1984, p.108, my emphasis)

We now have something different; Catastrophe transforms into a scenario where '[...] Satan has persuaded Man to reject God and the Scriptures as inculcating in him a feeling of guilt [...] and limiting his freedom' (Libera, 1984, p.108). Libera at least maintains his own freedom in the conceptual rewriting of Beckett's script. In the case of metaphysical interpretations, the tendency of commentary to introduce conceptual additions to the text of Catastrophe is redoubled. In Kant's analysis, in so far so 'metaphysics consists [...] entirely of a priori synthetic propositions' (Kant, 1933, B18, p.55), it is entailed that 'Metaphysics rests on concepts alone' and is obliged, by its very nature, to soar 'far above the teachings of experience' (Kant,

1933, Bxiv, p.21).<sup>24</sup> Where metaphysical assertions are concerned, the scene of their elaboration is necessarily restricted to conceptual discourse. To fit a metaphysical scheme onto Catastrophe is to guarantee that its empirical manifestation on any stage will be replaced by determinations that are exclusively conceptual. Concepts without intuitions are empty; metaphysical concepts, which are incommensurable with empirical intuitions, are necessarily so. In States' reading of Catastrophe, however, it is the absence of empirical substantiation for metaphysical concepts which is claimed as the 'illusion':

The absence of the muckheap, the void, or the terminal room in the ex-world is all an illusion of the eye.

(States, 1987, p.15)

The order of priority between intuition and concept is again reversed; the determinations of the critical mind are assumed to be of an accuracy sufficient to correct the constraints of the empirical manifestation of Catastrophe itself.

In States' account, the 'artist's instrument of expression' is subject to an unavoidable flaw 'because it is finally a thing made of words and not the thing itself' (States, 1987, p.20). This is precisely the flaw which threatens the integrity of the relationship between conceptual determinations and their putative empirical objects. The burden of criticism is to undertake a

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter One, Sections i-iii.



reworking of Catastrophe in conceptual terms, a process analogous to the Director's insistence that his object be remoulded physically in order to substantiate a conceptual vision. It is not the duty of the empirical world, however, to replicate the conceptual preferences of its analysts; 'there is nothing more tentative', according to Foucault, than the process of 'grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents' (Foucault, 1970, p.xix). The 'sick mind' attempting to sort strands of wool into conceptual categories serves as an extreme exemplification of the difficulty 'of establishing an order among things' (Foucault, 1970, p.xix):

the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety.

(Foucault, 1970, p.xviii)

Such anxiety results from the inability of any single conceptual determination to dominate and subsume empirical particularities. An adequate basis for conceptual organization cannot be settled. '[W]ays of ordering empiricity' are subject to discontinuity and fracture (Foucault, 1970, p.220); the conceptual scheme that is 'posited and affirmed in the luminous space of understanding' retains the potential 'to topple down into error, into the realm of fantasy, into non-knowledge' (Foucault, 1970, p.217). Any

domination accorded to a conceptual scheme can be overturned.

## vii. Catastrophes

The concept of 'catastrophe' has been applied in this way to conceptual systems themselves. In Kuhn's analysis of revolutions in scientific understanding, the arrangement of 'conceptual boxes' supplied by the paradigm of 'normal science' (Kuhn, 1962, p.5) can be pressured to a state of collapse by the occurrence of disruptive anomalies which eventually enforce an alternative 'way of giving order to data' (Kuhn, 1962, p.90). Such 'overturning' can be extracted as the literal meaning of the Greek root of 'catastrophe', katastrechein.<sup>25</sup> 'Catastrophe theory', in its mathematical incarnation, focuses upon the point where the predictability of a system breaks down:

a situation of generalized catastrophe is characterized essentially by a failure, phenomenologically, of Curie's principle: Any symmetry in the cause will lead to a symmetry of the effects.

(Thom, 1975, p.106)

'According to this theory', in Boutot's analysis, 'a catastrophe occurs when a continuous variation of causes produces a discontinuous variation of effects' (Boutot, 1993, p.168). Where 'nothing in the previous state contained the structural

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<sup>25</sup> See Sportelli (Sportelli, 1988, p.120) and States (States, 1987, p.18).

ingredient to produce the subsequent one, the genealogy must describe a rupture or a reversal, a revolution or a catastrophe' (Derrida, 1976, p.255). In engineering applications, the point of catastrophe marks the moment where the regular behaviour of a structure subject to a continuous application of stress abruptly alters. When the point of 'critical load is reached the system does not merely incline slightly; it fails completely' (Saunders, 1980, p.81).<sup>26</sup> Catastrophe theory retells the story of the straw and the camel's back. Philosophy charts catastrophe similarly as 'a minimal disturbance that is amplified existentially' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.154) or a 'crazy imbalance of cause and effect' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.155), both recognizable as 'sudden escalations that surprise the course of things' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.154). Behaviour following the point of catastrophe is subject to instability; if we attempt to continue analysis, 'we cannot be sure that any further predictions are correct' (Saunders, 1980, p.74). In its application to discursive regimes and conceptual systems, catastrophe marks an analogous 'leap into irreducible difference', a 'point of rupture' which destabilizes any predictable 'law of discursive fatalities' (Foucault, 1972, p.142). It is a disadvantage of 'the perfect system' that it is

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<sup>26</sup> An enigmatic connection between a point of failure describable as catastrophic and literature itself is almost drawn by Beckett in 'La peinture des van Velde':

On dirait l'insurrection des molécules, l'intérieur d'une pierre un millième de seconde avant qu'elle ne se désagrège.

C'est ça, la littérature.

(Beckett, 1983a, p.128)

A thousandth of a second splits the difference between the two.



most prone to such 'sudden collapses': 'a non-optimized system will exhibit some stable buckling first', 'the optimized system will fail without warning' (Saunders, 1980, p.82). A formulation of the collapse of 'any system of thought' by Havel focuses on just this paradoxical weakness:

the moment when any system of thought culminates and declares itself complete, when it is brought to perfection and universality, has more than once been described as that deceptive moment when the system ceases to live, collapses in upon itself (like the material collapse of a white dwarf star) and reality eludes its grasp once and for all.

(Havel, 1990, p.192)

In its use in the analysis of the structure of drama, 'catastrophe' denotes the culmination of the process, 'the crowning moment, what we have come to see' (States, 1987, p.18). Catastrophe follows the stages of exposition and conflict as their denouement. It is the point in mathematics, engineering, discourse and drama where the plot begins to unravel.

The dominance of the Director's conceptual reordering of his empirical materials in Catastrophe is not absolute. The action which finally ruptures the integrity of his vision is explicitly forbidden during a conceptual wrangle with the Assistant:

A: [Timidly.] What if he were to ... were to ... raise his head ... an instant ... show his face ... just an

instant.

D: For God's sake! What next? Raise his head? Where do you think we are? In Patagonia? Raise his head? For God's sake! [Pause.] Good. There's our catastrophe. In the bag. Once more and I'm off.

A: [To L.] Once more and he's off.

(Beckett, 1986, p.460)

Manipulation of the Protagonist has already rendered his empirical manifestation 'Lovely' (Beckett, 1986, p.460) and 'Terrific!' (Beckett, 1986, p.461); the perfected system may now be left to run in the absence of its chief architect without further modifications. As the Protagonist 'raises his head' and 'fixes the audience' (Beckett, 1986, p.461), however, the Director's outraged response to the idea of such an event, 'What next!' (Beckett, 1986, p.461), imposes itself again. A response to the point of 'catastrophe', the collapse of the Director's rehearsed and predictable system, is demanded of the audience. At the close of our theatrical entertainment, 'the law of discursive fatalities' (Foucault, 1972, p.142) demands the very 'storm of applause' (Beckett, 1986, p.461) that is revoked in the play. After the point of 'catastrophe', the continuation of predictable behaviour is subject to rupture."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Under a regime where 'a deadly order has been imposed', where 'all activity is completely organized and so completely deadened' (Havel, 1989, p.26), Havel traces the disruptive forces unleashed upon the emergence of 'something unscheduled in the official calendar of "happenings"' (Havel, 1989, p.28). The question 'what happens after that?' (Havel, 1989, p.29) is not open to conclusive analysis.

The point of Catastrophe, perhaps, is analogous. Prior to its rehabilitation to the properly metaphysical, States considers Catastrophe 'an unusual Beckett play' (States, 1987, p.14); according to Zeifman too,

almost every journalist and critic who has written on the play has categorised it as a radically new departure for Beckett's theatre: a play overtly about politics.

(Zeifman, 1988, p.133)

Catastrophe, marking for Sandarg 'an undeniable political engagement on Beckett's part', 'may lead us to reevaluate his entire canon from the perspective of social consciousness' (Sandarg, 1988, p.137). In this disconnection from the paradigm of the archetypically Beckettian, Catastrophe plays the role of 'the "dangerous supplement"' (Derrida, 1976, p.259), 'a negativity perfectly exterior to the system it comes to overturn, intervening in it therefore in the manner of an unforeseen factum' (Derrida, 1976, p.259). Catastrophe, however, is only 'a radically new departure for Beckett's theatre' (Zeifman, 1988, p.133) in relation to the set of critical presuppositions which identifies metaphysical concerns as irreducibly Beckettian territory. Within this paradigm, inspection of earthly political matters is neglected as a point of principle. The rupture represented by Catastrophe is in relation to critical determinations of the Beckettian, a set of conceptualizations which cannot guarantee their identity with their putative object. Catastrophe both provokes and parodies the application of the



conceptual boxes organizing the 'archetypically Beckettian' to itself; it is an anomaly which destabilizes these conceptual determinations. In so far as these conceptualizations incorporate metaphysical assertions, they cannot have an adequate empirical basis in any actual production of Catastrophe. To impose a metaphysical interpretation upon the image offered by the Protagonist is to discount what has been staged empirically, not by the Director, but by Catastrophe: the fabrication and manipulation of that image, equally in service of conceptual determinations. The depreciation of empirical warrant in order to ease conceptual redescription is not a matter of urgent ethical concern in so far as such techniques are confined to critical accounts of Catastrophe. Similarly, the impropriety of inserting false testimony into a transcript which will be received as a verbatim record of the proceedings of an interrogation is a minor matter so long as Radio II is considered to refer to methods of critical interpretation. Within Beckett's Catastrophe, the manipulation of the Protagonist to satisfy the conceptual preferences of the Director begins to intimate the results possible from the conjunction of unfettered power and an impulse to rework the empirical according to a system of ideas. In a political and legal context, the systematic exploitation of such techniques has real consequences. The dedication of Catastrophe should perhaps function as a remainder that the empirical actions of its recipient were defined as 'criminal' by means of just such an ideological determination.<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Upon the suspension of his sentence on the grounds of ill-health, Havel speculated 'I may find a summons in my mailbox, ordering me to report on such-and-such a day to complete my jail

catastrophic results following the authoritative subsumption of Havel's activities under this conceptual category were all too predictable.

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term [...]. In the long term, as always, it will depend more on the overall political situation than on me' (Havel, 1991, pp.237-238). See also Havel's essay 'Article 203' (Havel, 1991, pp.117-124) for an analysis of the ingenuity of the authorities in bringing criminal indictments based upon this Article in Czechoslovakian law. In both cases, it is not empirical actions in themselves which are crucial, but a separate ideological determination as to what can be categorized as 'criminal'.

## Chapter Four

### The Lost Ones and Aporia: Building In No Way Out

#### i. Specifications without regard to harmony

The narrator of The Lost Ones calls into problematic being a 'flattened cylinder' as the site of the action he undertakes to describe (Beckett, 1972, p.7). These two attributes are not easily compatible in the same object: conformity to cylindrical specifications may have been the past state of this object fundamental to The Lost Ones, but it cannot at once be flattened and retain a shape that is unarguably cylindrical.<sup>1</sup> Whereas a squashed tomato does not cease to be a tomato because of the alteration of its usual shape, any alteration to the shape of an object defined as a 'cylinder' can revoke the validity of that definition. Within this strange entity, two important conditions obtain with regard to its relationship with its interior 'lost bodies'; this is a container 'Vast enough for search to be in vain. Narrow enough for flight to be in vain' (Beckett, 1972, p.7). The precise interior dimensions whereby conditions are determined to satisfy these two necessities is entirely enigmatic. Depending on the activities of the bodies, their

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<sup>1</sup> The narrator of How It Is, conversely, violates a statement of flatness by the introduction of an element of curvature:

flat assuredly but slightly arched none the less  
(Beckett, 1964, p.58)

One may have one or the other shape; to claim both is contrary to the meaning of the words employed.



abode is specified as both 'Vast' and 'Narrow'.<sup>2</sup> The narrator moves on to 'The light' and 'Its dimness' (Beckett, 1972, p.7). The first quality of the 'light' detailed by the narrator is its proximity to darkness.<sup>3</sup> What is required, furthermore, is 'Light in a word that not only dims but blurs into the bargain' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). This light, 'with this slight reserve that light is not the word' (Beckett, 1972, p.40), is subject to a certain 'restlessness at long intervals' (Beckett, 1972, p.7), a curious compound condition where an instability which is yet stable reigns. When the narrator goes on to refer to 'every separate square centimetre' of the abode (Beckett, 1972, p.7), the cylinder thus described in its entirety begins to float apart in accordance with the idea of every 'separate' square centimetre of it. Yet it is this quality of being 'separate' which is shared by, which unites, each square centimetre of the cylinder surface.

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<sup>2</sup> Compare the efforts of Worstward Ho:

Try say. How small. How vast.  
(Beckett, 1983b, p.11)

Far and wide. High and low. That narrow field.  
(Beckett, 1983b, p.18)

Where in the narrow vast?  
(Beckett, 1983b, p.28)

The assignment of any particular dimension gives way to oxymoronic non-specificity.

<sup>3</sup> As Watson notes, 'dim' is peculiar in its ability to signify simultaneously 'both a presence and a lack of light' (Watson, 1991, p.165). The paradoxical nature of this 'dark light' (Bataille, 1991, p.52) might be retrieved to sense if we refer light back to its source, for, as Derrida points out, 'The heart of light is black' (Derrida, 1978, p.86).

A conceptual entity which would satisfy these specifications can indeed be thought. In a piece of impeccable reasoning concerning his particular 'defect of the understanding', Molloy ponders whether 'such a thing is conceivable' and concludes that 'such a thing is conceivable, since I conceive it' (Beckett, 1959, p.50). A flattened cylinder, vast and simultaneously narrow, a light whose primary quality is adjacent to darkness, an unstable stability and discrete pieces of a continuous surface are attributes of the abode which are similarly conceivable, since, demonstrably, they have just been conceived. But no empirical object could be built which would make these attributes available for physical inspection. In a trivial sense, no fictional world is amenable to empirical verification; it is the distinction of The Lost Ones that the narrative specifies a world which is not merely fictional but empirically impossible.

Within The Lost Ones, it is the non sequiturs of the narrator which should be followed. The abode includes within itself a 'distant ceiling where none can be' (Beckett, 1972, p.8). But for the implication that this is a ceiling 'where [no ceiling] can be', this might be a conclusive statement debarring searchers from access to the ceiling. It must be modified again almost immediately, however, upon consideration of the compound height of longest ladder and tallest searcher:

Bolt upright on the top rung of the tallest the tallest climbers can touch the ceiling with their fingertips. Its composition is no less familiar therefore than that of floor

and wall.

(Beckett, 1972, p.9)

The heights may add up; the physical possibility of any searcher managing to achieve a 'Bolt upright' position on the top rung of a ladder is more dubious. The 'inviolable zenith' of the cylinder (Beckett, 1972, p.21), a further absolute, is also open to leisurely inspection upon certain conditions:

On the same ladder planted perpendicular at the centre of the floor the same bodies would gain half a metre and so be enabled to explore at leisure the fabulous zone decreed out of reach and which therefore in theory is in no wise so. For such recourse to the ladder is conceivable.

(Beckett, 1972, p.20)

In order to violate that previously defined as 'inviolable', the narrator considers that the searchers need display but the 'instant of fraternity' required to maintain the ladder in its upright position (Beckett, 1972, p.21). The unfortunate tallest searcher would perhaps prefer his ladder-holders to manage a little longer than an 'instant' of co-operative fraternity in order to be entirely 'at leisure' atop a perpendicular ladder. Yet the narrator's own description of the laws of ladder use forbid their transport any where near the position at 'the centre of the floor' (Beckett, 1972, p.20) required for these operations to commence:



the transport of the ladders is not left to the good pleasure of the carriers who are required to hug the wall at all times eddywise. This is a rule [...] not lightly to be broken. Nothing more natural. For if for the sake of the shortcut it were permitted to carry the ladder slap through the press or skirting the wall at will in either direction life in the cylinder would soon become untenable.<sup>4</sup>

(Beckett, 1972, p.27)

The narrator does not take this 'natural' law into account in his advice to the searchers on the strategy necessary to gain access to the 'inviolable zenith' (Beckett, 1972, p.21). Under his former set of instructions, the ladder must be positioned in the centre of the arena, a place where no ladder can be. Discoursing upon the character of the ladders supplied within the abode, the narrator finds 'They are single without exception and vary greatly in size' (Beckett, 1972, p.9). One sentence later, the narrator proceeds to state that 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9).<sup>5</sup> To reach the zenith, the

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<sup>4</sup> The tenability of the injunction to the carriers to 'hug the wall at all times eddywise' (Beckett, 1972, p.27) is not examined. But, unless suffering a curvature consistent with the circular base of the cylinder and its walls, a ladder 'not less than six metres' in length (Beckett, 1972, p.9) is more likely to collide with the wall at either end than 'hug' it. If carried upright, there must be a risk of sweeping away ladders already propped against the wall.

<sup>5</sup> The inconsistency originates in the French text, Le Dépeupleur:

Echelles. Ce sont les seuls objets. Très variées quant à la taille elles sont simples sans exception. [...] Plusieurs sont à coulisse.

searcher would require 'the great ladder fully extended' (Beckett, 1972, p.20). Later we hear again that 'Only objects fifteen single ladders propped against the wall at irregular intervals' (Beckett, 1972, p.17). The first assertion is never cancelled, indeed it is repeated, and co-exists with incompatible additional statements. The nature of these objects mutates according to the reader's position in the text.

Given the prohibition on removing any ladder to the necessary spot within the arena and the difficulty of remaining upright on the top rung, the possibility of storming the zenith would seem to be ruled out. What is important for the narrator, however, is that the bodies will not co-operate to achieve this end, this end which under the narrator's own explanation of the ladder laws is in any case outlawed:

An instant of fraternity. But outside their explosions of violence this sentiment is as foreign to them as to butterflies. And this owing not so much to want of heart or intelligence as to the ideal preying on one and all.

(Beckett, 1972, p.21)

Should this 'ideal' be concerned with the discovery of the way out of the cylinder, it is an odd reason for failing to join forces to reach the zenith, for here precisely according to the 'amateurs of myth lies hidden a way out to earth and sky' (Beckett, 1972, p.21). Bizarrely, also, 'fraternity' is

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(Beckett, 1970a, p.9)

displayed amongst the bodies during 'their explosions of violence' against one another (Beckett, 1972, p.21). The 'ideal preying on one and all', an ideal which is here used to unite the entire population, is also cited as the very basis of their division. This common ideal is the reason why 'An instant of fraternity' is never achieved (Beckett, 1972, p.21). Universal 'submission' to the ladder laws is one ground upon which the bodies may display their unity; for this display of solidarity to occur, however, an infringement of the universally respected rule is required:

Certain infractions unleash against the culprit a collective fury surprising in creatures so peaceable on the whole and apart from the grand affair so careless of one another.

(Beckett, 1972, p.21)

Previously, an inability to cooperate was blamed on 'the ideal preying on one and all' (Beckett, 1972, p.21); now the bodies are defined as 'careless of one another' with the single exception of the seemingly analogous 'grand affair' (Beckett, 1972, p.21). These are creatures which are 'peaceable on the whole' while given to 'collective fury'; the semantic parallel between the 'whole' and the 'collective' emphasizing the oddity of these opposing descriptions (Beckett, 1972, p.21). Of course, to execute their 'collective fury' the bodies require one of their number to be excepted from this collective to take on the role of the object of their fraternal attack.



The ladders give further cause for concern. According to the narrator 'it takes courage to climb':

half the rungs are missing and this without regard to harmony. If only every second one were missing no great harm would be done. But the want of three in a row calls for acrobatics.

(Beckett, 1972, p.10)

If precisely 'half' of the rungs are removed, this does seem to call for a tribute to the harmony of this depletion. It is not the case that 'every second one' is lacking: if this condition were fulfilled, it would be easier to ensure that the required 'half' of all rungs were deducted from the ladders. The removal of 'three in a row' problematizes this very formulation, for upon their disappearance, these rungs are not in a row: in regard to the ladder, they are not there at all. The situation is not yet desperate, however:

These ladders are nevertheless in great demand and in no danger of being reduced to mere uprights runged at their extremities alone.

(Beckett, 1972, p.10)

Given the record of the bodies in their consideration for one another, demand for the ladders is not a conclusive reason for their good repair. According to the narrator's comments on the ladders elsewhere, 'The shortest measure not less than six

metres' (Beckett, 1972, p.9): if this specification is trusted, such ladders may be put out of service long before the condition of being 'runged at their extremities alone' is reached. An additional rung set at the three metre mid-height point would save the ladder from the disastrous state considered by the narrator and yet aid the climber little in putting this piece of equipment, still serviceable under the narrator's definition, to any use for an ascent. The reason why the ladders are required is swiftly explained:

The purpose of the ladders is to convey the searchers to the niches. Those whom these entice no longer climb simply to get clear of the ground. It is the custom not to climb two or more at a time.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.10-11)

The narrator does not choose to provide such a satisfying explanation as to the purpose of the niches. The neatness of his account as to the purpose of the ladders is somewhat dissipated by the exception which has to be made to cover those who prefer not to be conveyed to the niches after all. Their reasons for preferring to eschew the possibility of gaining a niche in favour of merely getting 'clear of the ground' is not subject to exhaustive analysis either. The surprising possibility of climbing two ladders at once is nevertheless considered worthy of special mention. It is unclear how a single body could contrive to climb 'two or more at a time'; nevertheless, the injunction against this seemingly impossible indulgence has

merely reached the liberal status of a 'custom'.

The niches of the upper abode 'are disposed in irregular quincunxes'<sup>6</sup> which, in harmony with their irregularity, are 'cunningly out of line' (Beckett, 1972, p.11). The precise point where irregularity is sufficient to forbid the identification of quincunxes could be the source of some controversy. There are the tunnels which connect 'A certain number' of the niches (Beckett, 1972, p.12) to consider, however. Attempting to follow the narrator's disposal of the average number of entrances and exits to these tunnels entails an arduous crawl behind a leader subject to equivocation and confusion. Of these 'tunnels opened in the thickness of the wall',

most have no other way out than the way in. It is as though at a certain stage discouragement had prevailed. To be noted in support of this wild surmise the existence of a long tunnel abandoned blind. Woe the body that rashly enters here to be compelled finally after long efforts to crawl back backwards as best it can the way it came. Not that this drama is peculiar to the unfinished tunnel. One has only to consider what inevitably must ensue when two bodies enter a normal tunnel at the same time by opposite ends.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.12-13)

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<sup>6</sup> A 'quincunx' might be represented as ':.:.:'; the proper appearance of an 'irregular' quincunx, however, is imponderable.



The existence of the tunnels is introduced in connection with the niches, with the contention that some 'certain number' of the niches themselves are connected by tunnels. It transpires, however, that 'most' tunnels do not serve to connect different niches for 'most have no other way out than the way in'. Yet the 'wild surmise' that discouragement accounts for the abandonment of this majority of tunnels is supported by reference to only one tunnel left 'blind'. Where 'most have no other way out than the way in', one would conclude that 'most' have been 'abandoned blind', not merely one among their number. Where the narrator may call much evidence in support of a 'wild surmise', it is unaccountably neglected.\* Tiny verbal ambiguities re-enter the text as the fate of 'the body that rashly enters' this entirely unexceptional 'unfinished tunnel' is dramatised in accordance

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\* The term 'wild surmise' is borrowed from Keats' 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', a work concerned, like The Lost Ones, with the creation of an alternative world:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise -  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

(Keats, 1970, 1.9-14, p.62)

\* There may be another, bizarre, answer. In full, we learn of the niches that:

A certain number are connected by tunnels opened in the thickness of the wall and attaining in some cases no fewer than fifty metres in length. But most have no other way out than the way in.

(Beckett, 1972, p.12)

As the circumference of the cylinder is also fifty metres, the length of the tunnel 'in some cases' is sufficient to extend all the way around the cylinder so that the niche which serves as its entrance is also its exit. A tunnel may then be completed rather than 'abandoned' in order for it to have 'no other way out than the way in'.

with all its unprecedented difficulties. Does the body submit 'to be compelled' only 'finally' and 'after long efforts' to make it so? If it is obliged to 'crawl back backwards [...] the way it came', is 'the way it came' backwards? If so, it may presumably crawl out forwards, except that this would not be 'the way it came'. But should it have crawled in forwards, to crawl out backwards would violate the same condition.<sup>9</sup> The narrator lets it be known that this drama is not peculiar to 'the unfinished tunnel' (Beckett, 1972, p.12, my emphasis); this is indeed the case if the definite article implies singularity, for such are the risks attendant on entering 'most' tunnels.<sup>10</sup> Nor do two bodies have to enter a tunnel with two entrances (which double as exits) 'at the same time' for this drama to ensue. The second's entrance any time between the first's entrance and exit will suffice for these troubles to be conjured up. And it must be sufficient for one body only to retreat 'the way it came', if such a thing is possible, without detriment to the objective of extricating both from a logjam. Most peculiarly, however, while 'most' tunnels are unfinished with 'no other way out then the way in', it is the remainder, those with a double exit or entrance,

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<sup>9</sup> Watt's habit of walking backwards creates similar descriptive difficulties; what Sam perceives is the curious sight of Watt 'advancing backwards towards me' (Beckett, 1976, p.157). The narrator of The Lost Ones courts similar conceptual confusions concerning the use of the ladders. When a body begins to climb a ladder before the previous body has descended, the narrator describes how the laggard 'hastens to descend preceded by his successor' (Beckett, 1972, p.25).

<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, 'the unfinished tunnel' (Beckett, 1972, p.12, my emphasis) could claim to name a generic type of tunnel and thus be itself plural. The title The Lost Ones plays an analogous game with the singular and the plural; 'lost ones' makes a plural of precisely that term which most obviously denotes singularity.



which the narrator chooses to categorize as 'a normal tunnel'. The 'normal' variety of tunnel, after the subtraction of 'most' tunnels which are blind, are necessarily in the minority. The apparently abnormal is renamed 'normal'; what pertains to 'most' is treated as exceptional.

There is no obligation, however, for even those bodies defined as 'climbers' ever to explore the peculiarities of this system of niches and tunnels, or indeed for a 'climber' ever to climb. To restrict the narrator to single sentences might be a strategy whereby simple facts concerning the cylinder can be extracted. Thus: 'The truth is that no searcher can readily forego the ladder' (Beckett, 1972, p.14). Unfortunately, this 'truth' is dependent upon the whole technical apparatus of the ladder laws or climbers' code rather than simply affection for climbing. The searcher cannot 'readily' forego any ladder because the ladder can only be foregone after the process of queuing is completed, when 'the ladder [is] virtually his at last' (Beckett, 1972, p.46):

once at the very foot of the ladder with between him and it only one more return to the ground the aspirant is free to rejoin the searchers of the arena or exceptionally the watchers of the intermediate zone without opposition.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.45-46)

The lengthy wait for the point of permitted foregoing to occur ensures the 'truth [...] that no searcher can readily forego the



ladder' (Beckett, 1972, p.14). 'To be noted also' is 'the possibility for the climber to leave the queue once he has reached the head and yet not leave the zone' (Beckett, 1972, pp.46-47). Once successful in entering the jealously guarded zone of ladders, a body may spend its lifetime doing nothing else but accruing opportunities to forego the ladder. The only condition is that such rejection cannot be completed 'readily': a demonstration of the body's aspiration to gain the ladder is a necessary preliminary to abandoning it without fear of opposition.

Many of the narrator's statements inspected in isolation do not seem to provide matter for controversy. If certain other statements could become 'lost ones' all might be well. The distinction of being capable of the most extreme violence to be encountered in the cylinder seems to belong unequivocally to that class of searcher known as the 'sedentary':

A sedentary searcher stepped on instead of over is capable of such an outburst of fury as to throw the entire cylinder into a ferment.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.28-29)

This is confirmation of the narrator's earlier specification that 'the sedentary are those whose acts of violence most disrupt the cylinder's quiet' (Beckett, 1972, p.14). No rivals in ferocity approach the unbecalmed sedentary for pages at a time. Yet in the penultimate section, when the accolade is almost theirs at

last, the narrator upstages their capacity for irascibility by reference to the furies of mere searchers still queuing for ladders, bodies which are two stages below the dignity of 'sedentary' in the class system of The Lost Ones. Within the cylinder, the activity of searching 'would clearly be a mockery', the narrator explains, 'if in case of doubt it were not possible to check certain details' (Beckett, 1972, p.58). Consequently, provision is made for the searchers to search their fellow searchers. There are certain details it is not possible to check, however, even at the risk of reducing the search to a 'mockery':

To be noted finally the immunity in this respect of those queuing for a ladder. [...] Woe the rash searcher who carried away by his passion dare lay a finger on the least among them. Like a single body the whole queue falls on the offender. Of all the scenes of violence the cylinder has to offer none approaches this.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.59-60)

The searcher may not 'lay a finger' on those queuing; the inverse does not hold in relation to the queue's right to come into contact with the offending searcher. The sedentary cannot after all claim the undisputed title of perpetrators of the most extreme violence. But the violated queues are not the clear winners either. According to the comments of the narrator, both

are the worst.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear how this is possible.<sup>12</sup>

A similarly problematical logical status belongs to the narrator's reference to the 'heightened fixity of the motionless' upon the occasion of a 'lull' (Beckett, 1972, p.17). A object which is already 'motionless' does not usually have the ability to be yet more still; if it does, it should be made to relinquish its prior claim to be 'motionless'. The narrator's account of the apparently irrational movement of belief between the two rival versions of the way out of the cylinder, by contrast, is eminently reasonable:

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<sup>11</sup> Whether skin or eye qualifies as suffering the worst damage from the ravages of the cylinder's climate is similarly unfathomable. We begin with skin:

It continues none the less feebly to resist and indeed honourably [a feeble and yet honourable resistance?] compared to the eye which with the best will in the world it is difficult not to consign at the close of all its efforts to nothing short of blindness. [an unfortunate pun, between blindness and closed eyes?] For skin in its own way as it is not to mention its humours and lids [eyes again?] it has not merely one adversary to contend with.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.52-53).

Skin resists, but in comparison to the eye, has a greater number of adversaries. To calculate the net result, ability to resist must be balanced against the severity of attack. The net result is not considered.

<sup>12</sup> Categories that can have, by definition, only one member such as the 'worst' or 'first' or 'last' offer a clear opportunity for the narrator to perpetuate confusion. To award a superlative which is subsequent superseded, as in the case of the 'worst' here, is a succinctly contradictory strategy. Compare the illogicalities of the narrator of How It Is:

as weak as possible then weaker still

(Beckett, 1964, p.46)

sinking a little at last having attained the bottom

(Beckett, 1964, p.112)



Conversion is frequent either way and such a one who at a given moment would hear of nothing but the tunnel may well a moment later hear of nothing but the trapdoor and a moment later still give himself the lie again.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.18-19)

Providing the narrator will allow there to be such a thing as time, wherein there may be found the three distinct 'moments' required for this switching of unshakeable convictions to take place, the sense of this sentence at least might be secure. A little later, however, the narrator exhorts attention to 'this moment of time' and continues, disastrously, to declare that 'there will be no other' (Beckett, 1972, p.35).<sup>13</sup> Now, presumably, there are not the required three moments, given that there is only one. It is also impossible now to permit the possibility that there are 'those who every now and then stand still' (Beckett, 1972, p.35) or that a lull can have the duration of 'a brief ten seconds at most' or that, after a lull, 'the throbbing is resumed and all is as before' (Beckett, 1972, p.37). Now and then, duration, and such ideas as before and after, should be obsolete under the new time regime within which only a single moment is available. Reduction of time to one singular moment is a severe restriction. Certain notable spectacles, wherein the concerned parties 'strive in vain' 'But [...] will not give in' (Beckett, 1972, p.8), would have to be given up:

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<sup>13</sup> If we dispense with context, a judgement can be got from the narrator of How It Is that, as in The Lost Ones, it is 'the same instant always everywhere' (Beckett, 1964, p.121).

The spectacle then is one to be remembered of frenzies prolonged in pain and hopelessness long beyond what even the most gifted lovers can achieve in camera.

(Beckett, 1972, p.54)

While 'pain and hopelessness' are not adequate reasons for desisting, the absence of successive moments of time within which such efforts may be 'prolonged' should cancel conclusively the possibility of any such lengthy enterprise beginning, persisting or ending. The narrator does not choose to make any such cancellation.

There are more subjects of moment to be accounted for in the cylinder. A recourse to 'logic' is promised in the narrator's account of the growing popularity of the 'trapdoor' theory of the means of exit from the cylinder, at the expense of the niche-and-tunnel thesis:

This shift has logic on its side. For those who believe in a way out possible of access as via a tunnel it would be and even without any thought of putting it to account may be tempted by its quest. Whereas the partisans of the trapdoor are spared this demon by the fact that the hub of the ceiling is out of reach.

(Beckett, 1972, p.19)

Under logical inspection, to posit a method of exit which is absolutely unreachable is to create for oneself a source of

solace. A desire which can never be satisfied is instantly satisfied. Yet, as specified earlier, the narrator also proclaims that this 'fabulous zone decreed out of reach', is, with innovatory use of the tallest ladder, 'in no wise so' (Beckett, 1972, p.20). Yet, we are to take note of 'the fact that the hub of the ceiling is out of reach' (Beckett, 1972, p.19). These two statements, one declaring impossibility, the other possibility, of access, should not logically co-exist. The 'demon' of temptation, the removal of which is the chief virtue of the trapdoor thesis, must return if the possibility of access does also. The disadvantage of the tunnel option of exit centres upon the possibility that it might be correct. Consequently, searchers 'may be tempted by its quest', whereupon accessible tunnels 'would be' or 'may be' searched (Beckett, 1972, p.19). The entire apparatus of the ladder laws, the division between zones, worries over the state of the ladders and attention to the exceptional rights of defence accorded to the queue, would suggest that these conditional tenses are fantastically understated: the mere temptation to search countenanced here is answered throughout the first fourteen sections of The Lost Ones by an insistence that this search is constant, obsessive and unrelenting. The search that bodies might be tempted to undertake is emphatically in progress. The logical exposition of these myths continues:

Thus by insensible degrees the way out transfers from the tunnel to the ceiling prior to never having been. So much for a first aperçu of this credence so singular in itself



and by reason of the loyalty it inspires in the hearts of so many possessed.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.19-20)

This 'credence so singular in itself' is in fact double, transferring between trapdoor and tunnel. The peculiarities of sentence structure suggest a third possibility, the as yet neglected linguistic entity of 'the tunnel to the ceiling'. There is indeed a singular kind of 'loyalty' to be applied to the tunnel/trapdoor credence, however, for the bodies alter their allegiance moment by moment and the belief itself, despite the burgeoning popularity of the trapdoor thesis, is declining such that it will 'never [have] been' (Beckett, 1972, p.19).

Like the narrative itself, the bodies switch between competing descriptions of what is putatively the same object. To posit two options for exit and to vacillate between them, however, whatever the peculiarity of its statement, is not logically incoherent. This status is reserved for the narrator's verbal formulations. Internal self-defeat is his speciality:

Sucklings who having no longer to suck huddle at gaze in the lap or sprawled on the ground in precocious postures. Others a little more advanced crawl searching among the legs.

(Beckett, 1972, p.30)

'Sucklings who having no longer to suck' are a simultaneous

compound of the unweaned and weaned. The 'precocious' are contrasted to 'Others a little more advanced', a contrast which undermines their precocity. Consider the status of another group:

never again will they ceaselessly come and go who now at long intervals come to rest without ceasing to search with their eyes.

(Beckett, 1972, p.34)

An ability to 'come to rest without ceasing' might be extracted for its curiosity value. The change of state described is from a search 'ceaselessly' pursued to one pursued 'without ceasing'. The difference is indeed subtle. During a lull, 'Those who never know a moment's rest stand rooted to the spot' (Beckett, 1972, pp.36-37) ensuring immediately that they do know a moment's rest. The effect of a lull in the cylinder 'is unspeakably dramatic to put it mildly' (Beckett, 1972, pp.36), which is hardly to put it mildly. Those somehow 'making unmakeable love' (Beckett, 1972, p.37) are interrupted. The response of all bodies to a lull is singular in its multiplicity:

Whence invariably the same vivacity of reaction as to the end of a world and the same brief amaze when the twofold storm resumes and they start to search again neither glad nor even sorry.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.54-55)

The final unconcern and indifference of 'neither glad nor even sorry' does battle with the 'amaze' and 'vivacity of reaction' stationed at the sentence's opening. The 'amaze' attributed to the bodies seems to be provoked by their very maintenance of indifference. Whether the amazed can truly be said to be indifferent or the indifferent amazed is again a semantic puzzle.

Neither is deciding the colour of objects in the cylinder facilitated by transparency of statement. We are to watch the progression of blindness, with particular attention to eye-colour:

And were it possible to follow over a long enough period of time eyes blue for preference as being the most perishable they would be seen to redden more and more in an ever widening glare and their pupils little by little to dilate till the whole orb was devoured.<sup>14</sup>

(Beckett, 1972, pp.38-39)

Let us assume 'a long enough period of time' and depreciate the earlier announcement of the existence of merely one moment, otherwise the conditional 'were it possible' will never be

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<sup>14</sup> In contrast to this progressive perishing of the eye in the cylinder, the human eye is, according to Bohr, so adapted to 'the fundamental properties of the light phenomena' that 'no instrument is imaginable which is more efficient for its purpose than the eye' (Bohr, 1958, p.8). For Bohr, 'this ideal refinement of the eye, [...] suggests that also other organs [...] will exhibit a similar adaptation to their purpose' (Bohr, 1958, p.8). The desiccation of the skin of the bodies in the cylinder intimates the opposite, a calamitous inability to adapt to its environment.



negotiated. From blue to red is straightforward; but if the pupil finally devours the 'whole orb', a final state of black would seem to be implied. These eyes need to become progressively more red and at once progressively more black. Up to this point, the searchers have been 'devouring with their eyes' (Beckett, 1972, p.29); now the narrator merely inverts these terms to give a formulation where the eye itself is devoured by the eye.<sup>15</sup> Reckoning skin tones appears simpler: .

the skin of a climber alone on his ladder or in the depths of a tunnel glistens all over with the same red-yellow glister and even some of its folds and recesses in so far

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<sup>15</sup> Worstward Ho replicates the confusion as to colour pursued in The Lost Ones:

The eyes. Time to try worsen. Somehow try worsen. Unclench. Say staring open. All white and pupil. Dim white. White? No. All pupil. Dim black holes.  
(Beckett, 1983b, p.27)

Ill Seen Ill Said too gives 'Ample time' for 'the iris to be lacking. Wholly. As if engulfed by the pupil' (Beckett, 1982, pp.57-58). What is paradoxically 'foreseen' is again the reduction of the eyes to 'two black blanks':

Blackness in its might at last. Where no more to be seen. Perforce to be seen.

(Beckett, 1982, p.58)

The narrator in each text must be spared in order to witness the universal blindness. To grant such an exemption is as self-defeating as C's hope in Theatre II of 'living to see the extermination of the species' (Beckett, 1986, p.242). Endgame exchanges this self-defeating loop for the entirely inexplicable, Hamm's knowledge of the visual characteristics of his own blinded eyes:

HAMM: Did you never have the curiosity, while I was sleeping, to take off my glasses and look at my eyes?

CLOV: Pulling back the lids? [Pause.] No.

HAMM: One of these days I'll show them to you. [Pause.] It seems they've gone all white.

(Beckett, 1986, p.94)

as the air enters in.

(Beckett, 1972, p.40)

This is in harmony with the light. We begin with 'The light. Its dimness. Its yellowness' (Beckett, 1972, p.7), but 'the sensation of yellow is faintly tinged with one of red' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). One modification is not sufficient however; to conclude on 'red-yellow' is to neglect the 'desiccation' of skin by climate:

This desiccation of the envelope robs nudity of much of its charm as pink turns grey and transforms into a rustling of nettles the natural succulence of flesh against flesh.

(Beckett, 1972, p.53)

Red-yellow turns pink which turns grey which, via a detour from visual to aural description, incorporates from 'nettles' overtones of green, or, given the dryness conducive to 'desiccation' and 'rustling', hints of brown. All this is seen through a 'Light [...] that not only dims but blurs into the bargain' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). The description alone achieves an accomplished level of obscurity. The 'prostration' of many 'withered ones' (Beckett, 1972, p.61) reflects the final exhausted state of the majority of the narrator's bodies; the state of the reader attempting to follow the specifications which have laid these bodies low is perhaps analogous. The desolate stability of such physical prostration, surely enacted in sympathy for the reader's troubles, is, nevertheless, complicated

by the additional fact that 'Lying down is unheard of in the cylinder' (Beckett, 1972, p.60).

ii. Following the climbers' code

A ladder is required in order to get off the ground again. The climbers' code should provide hints as to how firstly to find a ladder and then, if desired, a niche. Although 'None has ever been known to seek out a niche from below' (Beckett, 1972, p.55), the narrator is able to speak of a grounded climber's 'desired niche' (Beckett, 1972, p.56) and, of course, the ladders are in demand because 'The purpose of the ladders is to convey the searchers to the niches' (Beckett, 1972, p.10). Without unravelling this controversy further, a new problem arises. Locating the spot to set down a ladder so that a niche will be at the top of it is an intricate business:

Floor and ceiling bear no sign or mark apt to serve as a guide. The feet of the ladders pitched always at the same points leave no trace. The same is true of the skulls and fists dashed against the walls. Even did such marks exist the light would prevent their being seen. The climber making off with his ladder to plant it elsewhere relies largely on feel. He is seldom out by more than a few centimetres and never by more than a metre at most because of the way the niches are disposed.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to envisage how this safeguard operates unless it implies that no gap between the niches is greater than two metres. Yet other data makes this claim surprising. The



If the ladders are 'pitched always at the same point' even to be 'out by [...] a few centimetres' should be impossible. The surface of the wall and floor is entirely undifferentiated, for the striking of heads, fists or ladders against it fails to effect any indentation. Yet feeling the surface helps. The climber 'relies largely on feel', except when he relies upon the 'guide', of which there had previously been none:

There does none the less exist a north in the guise of one of the vanquished or better one of the women vanquished or better still the woman vanquished.

(Beckett, 1972, p.56)

When the description is perfected to the narrator's satisfaction, it is altered: 'She is the north' (Beckett, 1972, p.57). 'To one bent for once on taking his bearings she may be of help' (Beckett, 1972, p.57); indeed, she is 'so often taken for a

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distribution of the niches is described thus:

In the upper half of the wall disposed quincuncially for the sake of harmony a score of niches some connected by tunnels.  
(Beckett, 1972, p.17)

The size of the mural area across which these niches are distributed is 400 square metres, that is, the upper half of the cylinder wall, which in total is 800 square metres (Beckett, 1972, p.16). It is not possible to locate twenty niches across a 400 square metre area so that no niche is more than two metres away from another. An average distribution would locate one niche every twenty square metres. The 'irregular quincunxes' in which the niches are disposed are, furthermore, 'roughly ten metres in diameter' (Beckett, 1972, p.11). Some niches must therefore be not less than five metres apart.

guide' (Beckett, 1972, p.62). The frequency is either 'once' or 'often'. North is 'She rather than some other among the vanquished because of her greater fixity' (Beckett, 1972, p.57). The position of some other vanquished, merely 'stricken rigid' (Beckett, 1972, p.31) or 'motionless' (Beckett, 1972, p.17), must be dangerously subject to fluctuation. The 'greater fixity' of the woman vanquished (Beckett, 1972, p.57) wins out against even the 'heightened fixity of the motionless' (Beckett, 1972, p.17) attributed to her rivals. That 'None has even been known to seek out a niche from below' (Beckett, 1972, p.55) is a statement lacking harmony with the described use of this pole:

For the climber averse to avoidable acrobatics a given niche may lie so many paces or metres to east or west of the woman vanquished without of course his naming her thus or otherwise even in his thoughts.

(Beckett, 1972, p.57)

The rule of circulation in the zone of ladder-carriers, however, declares that movement must be 'at all times eddywise' lest life in the cylinder 'become untenable' (Beckett, 1972, p.27). The carrier is not permitted to proceed either 'east or west' according to convenience (Beckett, 1972, p.57). To base one's calculations upon this fixed point while guarding against thinking of it as a guide is within the rules of cylinder, despite its evident peculiarity.

The services of a ladder must be obtained, before one's

thoughts may practically turn to niches. As the 'ladders are [...] in great demand' (Beckett, 1972, p.10), despite the wavering of belief in the tunnel-exit theory, a system of queues operates. One's turn at climbing a ladder arrives when the preceding body has both ascended and descended:

All rests on the rule against mounting the ladder more than one at a time. It remains taboo therefore to the climber waiting at its foot until such time as his predecessor has regained the ground.

(Beckett, 1972, p.22)

Should the exit be found, the next in line would never be allowed to follow the escapee. But although 'All rests' on this rule, 'there is no question of its applying without restriction' (Beckett, 1972, p.22). Permission to break the rule is not grounded upon the possibility of discovering the way out, however, but on the temptation to engross the ladder beyond a certain time-limit. Should provision not be made for this offence by the climber and should 'others [...] follow his example' the consequences would be dire:

the spectacle would finally be offered of one hundred and eight-five searchers less the vanquished committed for all time to the ground. Not to mention the intolerable presence of properties serving no purpose.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.22-23)



The exceptional ability of the vanquished to leave the ground while all ladders are out of commission is not enlarged upon. What is crucial is that an 'intolerable' state of purposelessness be ruled out by a new rule:

It is therefore understood that after a certain interval difficult to assess but unerringly timed by all the ladder is again available meaning at the disposal in the same conditions of him due next to climb easily recognizable by his position at the head of the queue and so much the worst for the abuser. The situation of this latter having lost his ladder is delicate indeed and seems to exclude a priori his ever returning to the ground. Happily sooner or later he succeeds in doing so thanks to a further provision giving priority at all times to descent over ascent.

(Beckett, 1972, p.23)

The 'priority at all times' of 'descent over ascent' does not apply when the user of the ladder exceeds that mysterious 'interval' of time which is at once 'difficult to assess' and 'unerringly timed by all'. If 'all' time it correctly, this must include the abuser of the ladder who errs in his timing of it. His crime is the result of 'a temporary derangement of his inner timepiece easy to understand and therefore to forgive' (Beckett, 1972, p.26). The body 'due next to climb', and hence offended against, would be 'easily recognizable by his position at the head of the queue' (Beckett, 1972, p.23) but for the rule that it is only at this point that he may forego the ladder and so not

climb. It is climbing too soon, however, that is considered the most serious infringement of the climbers' code. Punishment for engrossing the ladder does not approach

the fury vented on the wretch with no better sense than to climb before his time and yet whose precipitancy one would have thought quite as understandable and consequently forgivable as the converse excess. This is indeed strange. But what is at stake is the fundamental principle forbidding ascent more than one at a time the repeated violation of which would soon transform the abode into a pandemonium. Whereas the belated return to the ground hurts finally none but the laggard himself.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.26-27)

The 'principle forbidding ascent more than one at a time' (Beckett, 1972, p.26), which began as the 'taboo' upon which 'All rests' (Beckett, 1972, p.22), temporarily weakens into a rule concerning which there is 'no question of its applying without restriction' (Beckett, 1972, p.22) but re-emerges at last as 'fundamental' to preserving the abode from pandemonium (Beckett, 1972, p.26). Breaking this rule, by contrast, merely militates against the 'intolerable' (Beckett, 1972, p.23). Keeping this rule is 'fundamental', but always keeping it is 'intolerable'. The identity of the body guilty of an infraction against the climbers' code is entirely dependent upon that fabulous interval which is 'difficult to assess but unerringly timed by all' (Beckett, 1972, p.23). A body's attempt to keep the ladder

beyond this period defines it as a 'laggard' (Beckett, 1972, p.27) deserving to have its ladder removed; to remove or climb a ladder thus in service before this same period comes to an end, defines another body as a 'wretch' upon which furies are to be vented in revenge for 'precipitancy' (Beckett, 1972, p.26). These two infringements of the code are only possible as the result of errors in calculating the correct interval, that is, in fact, 'unerringly timed by all' (Beckett, 1972, p.23).

Prior to gaining a chance to abuse the rules of ladder use, the bodies must succeed in choosing a queue. Strict rules of conduct apply here also. Only one inspection of the available queues is permitted; the indecisive are then obliged to decide their preference:

Some could [...] revolve through thousands of degrees before settling down to wait were it not for the rule forbidding them to exceed a single circuit. Any attempt to elude it is quelled by the queue nearest to the point of full circle and the culprit compelled to join its ranks since obviously the right to turn back is denied him too. That a full round should be authorized is eloquent of the tolerant spirit which in the cylinder tempers discipline.<sup>17</sup>

(Beckett, 1972, pp.48-49)

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<sup>17</sup> Such tempering of discipline with licence recalls Leibniz's desire to discover 'the means of obtaining as much variety as possible, but with the greatest order possible', an end which is equivalent, Leibniz contends, to 'obtaining as much perfection as possible' (Leibniz, 1973, §58, p.188). See the Appendix at the end of this thesis for further elaboration of this reading.



Traditional reckonings put the number of 'degrees' in a complete revolution at three hundred and sixty rather than the 'thousands' feared by the narrator (Beckett, 1972, p.48). Arsene in Watt, for example, considers that 360 different degrees are the limit even for a 'desperate man':

[...] faster and faster through the grey air and further and further away, in any one no matter which of the three hundred and sixty directions open to a desperate man of average ability [...].

(Beckett, 1976, p.47)

Beyond such quibbles, however, a further rule controlling entry to the zone of queues and ladders must be considered:

access to the climbers' reserve<sup>18</sup> is authorized only when one of them leaves it to rejoin the searchers of the arena or exceptionally those of the intermediate zone.

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<sup>18</sup> The curious nature of this 'climbers' reserve' should be acknowledged. Minor difficulties enter at the point of the zone's definition: 'All along the wall therefore a belt about one metre wide is reserved for the carriers. To this zone those also are confined who wait their turn to climb' (Beckett, 1972, p.27). Neither 'carriers' nor those 'who wait their turn to climb' are quite the 'climbers' for whom the zone is reserved (Beckett, 1972, p.27). More importantly, 'It is curious to note the presence within this belt of a certain number of sedentary searchers sitting or standing against the wall' (Beckett, 1972, p.28). We might also like to notice here the additional presence 'both sitting and standing' of 'four vanquished out of five', despite the concession that 'They may be walked on without their reacting' (Beckett, 1972, p.29). This area 'reserved for the climbers', comprises 'an outer belt roughly one metre wide [...] and strange to say favoured by most of the sedentary and vanquished' (Beckett, 1972, p.43). Quite how this belt maintains its status as the climbers' reservation while under such profligate occupation is not explained.

Entry cannot be made before a departure. The attempted 'infringement of this rule' is a contingency the narrator has foreseen:

While infringement of this rule is rare it does none the less occur as when for example a particularly nervous searcher can no longer resist the lure of the niches and tries to steal in among the climbers without the warrant of a departure. Whereupon he is unfailingly ejected by the queue nearest to the point of trespass and the matter goes no further.

(Beckett, 1972, p.44)

Only one obstacle remains to the happy functioning of these rules. The narrator has previously taken great pains to emphasize the inability of any searcher to recognize any other searcher. We have learnt that 'Whether relatives near and far or friends in varying degrees many in theory are acquainted',<sup>19</sup> but 'The gloom and press make recognition difficult' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). Again:

Press and gloom make recognition difficult. Man and wife are strangers two paces apart to mention only this most intimate of all bonds.

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<sup>19</sup> It might be thought that 'relatives' and 'friends' are in practice, rather than 'in theory', 'acquainted' (Beckett, 1972, p.13).

(Beckett, 1972, pp.35-36).

Recognition may not be forthcoming even during 'the work of love' (Beckett, 1972, p.53), which presumably requires a proximity even greater than the 'two paces apart' cited above as the 'most intimate of all bonds' (Beckett, 1972, p.36):

Even man and wife may sometimes be seen in virtue of the laws of probabilities to come together again in this way without their knowledge.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.53-54)

And yet the searchers forming the queue 'nearest to the point of full circle' (Beckett, 1972, p.48) are charged to recognize and thereafter pounce upon any body attempting to transgress the one circuit rule. All other searchers whose point of entry was different, must be permitted to complete their circuit unseized by every other queue. These creatures are considered capable of forgetting the lulls which are analogous 'to the end of a world' (Beckett, 1972, pp.54-55),<sup>20</sup> but not the identity of a potential violater of the single circuit rule. That the twice repeated 'gloom and press make recognition difficult' (Beckett, 1972, p.13) is not a fact the narrator considers worthy of mention with regard to the assumed infallibility of this rule. No time limit applies to the completion of the circuit; when the tourer returns

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<sup>20</sup> According to the narrator, 'Irregular intervals of such length separate these lulls that for forgetters the likes of these each is the first' (Beckett, 1972, p.54). Being the first of its kind for 'forgetters', each lull should have no 'likes'.



to the crucial point of entry, every member of the nearest queue may have changed. The rules demand that he is still recognized. Furthermore, every queue must take note of any departure from the climbers' zone at any point, no matter how distant, and upon this information consider a new entrant 'authorized' (Beckett, 1972, p.44). When the omniscience they do not possess informs them that no departure has taken place, they know that any new entrant is an unwarranted interloper, whereupon it is their duty to ensure 'he is unfailingly ejected' (Beckett, 1972, p.44).

A second opinion on the character of the climbers' code may be instructive. For Dearlove, the ladder laws are rather better defined than the searchers themselves:

Whereas the bodies remain relatively indistinct and impersonal, referred to as only 'bodies' or lost 'ones,' the rules for the use of ladders are described in detail.

(Dearlove, 1982, p.133)

Unfortunately, these detailed rules cannot work unless the 'indistinct' bodies can be differentiated and identified. Dearlove nevertheless finds that 'The laws themselves are simple, logical, and consistent' (Dearlove, 1982, p.136). What ever they are, to agree at last with a verbal formulation of the narrator, they are not that.

iii. Reckonings with the population

During the delineation of the laws of ladder use, the narrator points out that such laws are irrelevant to the operations of two categories of lost one:

The sedentary call for no special remark since only the ladders can wean them from their fixity. The vanquished are obviously in no way concerned.

(Beckett, 1972, p.52)

If the ladders could not 'wean' the sedentary 'from their fixity', the narrator's disinclination to accord them any 'special remark' on the subject of the ladder laws would be more readily understandable. As might be expected, the vanquished too, who 'are obviously in no way concerned' (Beckett, 1972, p.52), display their complete indifference to the ladders by climbing them:

They may wait their turn at the foot of the ladders and when it comes ascend to the niches or simply leave the ground. They may crawl blindly in the tunnels in search of nothing.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.31)

The vanquished may behave in a manner indistinguishable from any other class of searcher. The sorting of the lost ones into the conceptual categories provided by a stable taxonomy is a endeavour made arduous by the narrator's complete inability to maintain any clear distinctions between his bodies:

Seen from a certain angle these bodies are of four kinds. Firstly those perpetually in motion. Secondly those who sometimes pause. Thirdly those who short of being driven off never stir from the coign they have won and when driven off pounce on the first free one that offers and freeze again. That is not quite accurate. For if among these sedentary the need to climb is dead it is none the less subject to strange resurrections. The quidam then quits his post in search of a free ladder or to join the nearest or shortest queue.<sup>21</sup>

(Beckett, 1972, pp.13-14)

Allied with other specifications, the results so far are not auspicious. During a lull there is an 'abeyance of all motion among the bodies' (Beckett, 1972, p.17); consequently, there is no class of bodies which could quite be said to be 'perpetually in motion' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). The 'perpetual' should not be subject to exceptions. All bodies placed in the first category, therefore, can also join the ranks of the second group, 'those who sometimes pause' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). Members of the third category have 'won' a 'coign' from which they may yet be 'driven off' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). As they are subject to being thus 'driven off', their ability to 'never stir' cannot be maintained (Beckett, 1972, p.13). These pouncing sedentary may further violate their charge to remain in place 'short of being driven

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<sup>21</sup> It is debatable whether these comments comprise anything other than an according of 'special remark' to the sedentary and their use of the ladders, an operation considered uncalled for some moments earlier.



off' from their unwon won coign (Beckett, 1972, p.13), for the post may voluntarily be 'quit' without interference from another body in favour of the ladders once more (Beckett, 1972, p.14).<sup>22</sup> Non-movement will not do to define the sedentary. Another distinction is to be considered:

The fact is that these sort of semi-sages among whom all ages are to be admired from old age to infancy inspire in those still fitfully fevering if not a cult at least a certain deference. They cling to this as to a homage due to them and are morbidly susceptible to the least want of consideration.

(Beckett, 1972, p.28)

Those merely 'fitfully fevering' are to defer to the ascetic deliverance of those whose indifference reaches the level of being 'morbidly susceptible' to behaviour counter to their wishes. The very basis of the distinction is incorporated into similarity. Classification of the fourth group, the vanquished, is again grounded on movement and its absence:

normally abandonment freezes them both in space and in their pose whether standing or sitting as a rule profoundly bowed. It is this makes it possible to tell them from the sedentary devouring with their eyes in heads dead still each body as

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<sup>22</sup> The 'coign' in *Le Dépeupleur* is a mere 'place' (Beckett, 1970a, p.12). Yet, if a relationship can be claimed to the French 'coin', the circular base of a cylinder should not be suspected of harbouring any corners either to be 'won' or 'quit' by the sedentary (Beckett, 1972, pp.13-14).

it passes by.

(Beckett, 1972, p.31)

Yet, as we have learned, the vanquished may climb the ladders, an option taxing for the securely frozen. Furthermore, the vanquished, allegedly distinguished from the moving unmoving sedentary by their identically incomplete non-movement, 'may stray unseeing through the throng indistinguishable to the eye of flesh from the still unrelenting' (Beckett, 1972, p.31). As the sedentary are found to persist with 'devouring with their eyes' (Beckett, 1972, p.31), perhaps the key to discrimination is to be located in the advantage of 'unseeing' accorded to the vanquished (Beckett, 1972, p.31). Indeed, 'Eyes cast down or closed signify abandonment and are confined to the vanquished' (Beckett, 1972, p.30). Inexplicably, however, among the rabble of common searchers 'The eyes are seldom raised' (Beckett, 1972, p.55). Neither is it the exclusive prerogative of the sedentary to partake of a 'devouring with their eyes' (Beckett, 1972, p.31); the narrator turns again to 'the searchers in the arena' and their interest in the 'climbers' territory':

When weary of searching among the throng they turn towards this zone it is only to skirt with measured tread its imaginary edge devouring with their eyes its occupants.

(Beckett, 1972, p.29)

This devouring must presumably be accomplished by the same eyes that 'are seldom raised' (Beckett, 1972, p.55). The state of a

searcher's eyes and his passion for the ladders are equally unstable, for 'The spent eyes may have fits of the old craving just as those who having renounced the ladder suddenly take to it again' (Beckett, 1972, pp.31-32). The narrator is driven by such evidence of intolerable vacillation to inaugurate the inspired sub-category of the 'ill-vanquished':

the ill-vanquished may at long intervals and with each relapse more briefly revert to the state of the sedentary who in their turn count a few chronic waverers prone to succumb to the ladder again while remaining dead to the arena.

(Beckett, 1972, p.34)

Yet the sedentary are said to be 'Dead to the ladders to all intents and purposes' (Beckett, 1972, p.28). It is the group superior in the hierarchy of indifference to searching of any kind, the vanquished, who are yet to be found roaming the arena, the temptation towards which is 'Dead' in the inferior sedentary. No system of classification, whether based upon the need to frequent the ladders or to search, the position of eyes up or down, the freezing of position or a persistence of movement, will serve to organize the behaviour found in the cylinder. One general postulate only emerges from the morass of contradictory information:

one has only to suppose the need to search no less resurrectable than that of the ladder and those eyes to all



appearances for ever cast down or closed possessed of the strange power suddenly to kindle again [...].

(Beckett, 1972, pp.14-15)

One learns to suppose that every state which can be attributed to the bodies may be converted into its opposite. As stated, the controversy as to the way out being by means of trapdoor or tunnel is similarly infected by chronic wavering. The subdivision between acolytes of trapdoor and those of tunnel cannot be maintained for 'Conversion is frequent either way' (Beckett, 1972, p.18). But neither can the division between believers and non-believers in the existence of any exit be assumed, for 'Those who no longer believe so are not immune from believing so again' (Beckett, 1972, p.18). Even the heathen are chronic waverers in their disbelief.

No classifier seeking to maintain stable categories can operate under this state of contingency. Emendation, refinement and conceptual overlaps mar each attempt at imposing a workable systematic taxonomy.<sup>23</sup> This has one further troublesome consequence. The population of the cylinder is calculated in proportion to the number of vanquished it contains. For this operation, the vanquished join forces to be the pole and guide, rather than the role being awarded exclusively to the rather

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<sup>23</sup> For a taxonomy to function, as Priest notes, its categories must be 'mutually exhaustive, and, particularly, mutually exclusive' (Priest, 1987, p.86). When the bodies of one category display the characteristics which define another group, as each of the four groups does in The Lost Ones, the classification system has, by definition, broken down.

unjustly favoured 'woman vanquished' selected to be 'north' (Beckett, 1972, p.56). The very existence of the bodies of categories one to three depends upon the number who can be counted as vanquished:

may it suffice to state that at this moment of time to the nearest body in spite of the press and gloom the first are twice as many as the second who are three times as many as the third who are four times as many as the fourth namely five vanquished in all.

(Beckett, 1972, p.35)

An earlier statement as to the number of vanquished was not lacking the customary measure of equivocation;<sup>24</sup> now, however, we have a declared number upon which to base all calculations. Working from the base of five, the population of the cylinder must be securely and mathematically known: four times five vanquished yields twenty sedentary; three times twenty sedentary gives sixty bodies of the second rank; two times this sixty

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<sup>24</sup> Previously, we were informed:

Eyes cast down or closed signify abandonment and are confined to the vanquished. These precisely to be counted on the fingers of one hand are not necessarily still.  
(Beckett, 1972, pp.30-31).

The 'fingers of one hand' are not necessarily five. Of fingers, indeed, there are usually four. In Beckett's 'The Image', however, we read of 'four fingers including the thumb because one is missing not the thumb' (Beckett, 1990a, p.32), a formula which would yield, were the missed digit returned, five fingers after all. Yet, a further implication of the phrase 'These precisely to be counted on the fingers of one hand are not necessarily still' (Beckett, 1972, pp.30-31) is that these bodies are 'not necessarily still' to be counted as equivalent to the unknown number of 'fingers of one hand'.

entails the existence of one hundred and twenty bodies within the first class. Total population in numbers is the sum of  $5 + 20 + 60 + 120$  or 205. The narrator's preference to speak in round numbers leads to a substitute figure of 200, but this minor modification can be borne. What causes difficulties is that the base number of vanquished is not constant. At the 'moment of time' chosen by the narrator to introduce this method for computing the population of the cylinder, the vanquished number five. This has not always been the case: 'In the beginning', we are told, 'all roamed without respite' (Beckett, 1972, p.34). At this moment, all bodies conform to the definition of the first category, 'those perpetually in motion' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). Accordingly, the base number of vanquished must be zero. The formula is now  $(4 \times 0 = 0) + (3 \times 0 = 0) + (2 \times 0 = 0)$  and gives a grand total of zero. In the beginning when all bodies roamed, there were no bodies. This beginning is also simultaneous with the end of all. Elevation of these non-existent searchers to the status of vanquished is gradual:

all [...] roamed a vast space of time impossible to measure until a first came to a standstill followed by a second and so on.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.34-35)

As vanquished are selected from this entirely absent population, the population must change instantaneously with this increase in the foundation group. When one body enters the crucial category, the formula is reorganized as  $(4 \times 1 = 4) + (3 \times 4 = 12) + (2 \times 12$



= 24) and upon the instant 40 bodies are conjured into existence. Upon a second vanquished, the cylinder must obey the mathematics of  $(4 \times 2 = 8) + (3 \times 8 = 24) + (2 \times 24 = 48)$  and increase its population to 80. These considerations apply to the other categories also. Upon elevation from first class to second, one body is subtracted from the number of the first as it is no longer of that class, but is replaced according to the stated ratio by two entirely new bodies. As there must be twice as many bodies in the first as in the second class, every departure from the first class miraculously serves to swell its numbers by one: as one goes, two arrive. Any movement of bodies between classifications must be accompanied by this entirely inexplicable adjustment in population within the cylinder. And the bodies constantly switch categories:

experience shows that it is possible to graduate from one to three skipping two and from one to four skipping two or three or both and from two or four skipping three.

(Beckett, 1972, p.34)

Bodies must be destroyed and created equally rapidly. These are bodies which, as the narrator states, 'endlessly come and go' (Beckett, 1972, p.35), into and out of nowhere.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Beckett does have a history of such conjuring tricks. In Watt, the appearance and disappearance of a succession of servants is equally mysterious, as is the whereabouts of the lady and gentleman who initially appear on Mr Hackett's bench. All vanish from the narrative. Christy, hinny and cart disappear just as completely from the road of All That Fall. The narrator of How It Is calls into being and dismisses a procession of millions within several sentences. The title of the French version of The Lost Ones is recalled:

Moving between the ranks 'In the other direction', are those 'ill-vanquished' which may 'briefly revert to the state of the sedentary' and the 'chronic waverers' of the sedentary who vacillate between groups three and two (Beckett, 1972, p.34). The sub-category of the 'ill-vanquished' provokes special problems. Perhaps being neither properly vanquished nor sufficiently of the sedentary to decisively change category, they could be counted as equivalent to some fraction of a vanquished. Upon a serious relapse of one of the five vanquished to the status of ill-vanquished, that body might count as 0.3 of a vanquished rather than scoring a complete 1. The formula then states  $(4 \times 4.3 = 17.2) + (3 \times 17.2 = 51.6) + (2 \times 51.2 = 103.2)$ . Because of the vagaries of this ill-vanquished, four fifths of both a perfectly innocent sedentary and a lower searcher must be abolished. One member of the second rank too will have to lose two-fifths of himself, both legs perhaps, in order to satisfy the sums. There is this additional evidence to consider when the difficult reckoning of those responsible for the greatest violence in the cylinder is next undertaken. The narrator makes clear in his statement of the population formula that it is accurate only 'to the nearest body' (Beckett, 1972, p.35). Fractions of lost one are to be rounded up and made thereby to disappear from the reckoning. To collate or round up evidence

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[...] Beckett's title is a reference to the famous verse from Lamartine's 'Loneliness [Isolement]': 'A single being is absent, and all is depopulated [dépeuplé].' (Henning, 1988, p.217, n.3)

Depopulation is the explicit prerogative of the narrator in How It Is; in The Lost Ones, waves of depopulation are a repercussion of the loss of any member from the category of the vanquished.



of the possible existence of such pieces of lost one, however, will oppose their visibility to the disappearance preferred by the narrator. The strategy of rounding up permits both opposing results.

As the number of bodies changes in accordance with the number of vanquished, 'Relatives' are indeed 'well represented' (Beckett, 1972, p.35). All figures submitted as the population of the cylinder are entirely relative. Each is drawn from a proportional calculation, founded on a 'constant' which is subject to rapid alteration. As members of the vanquished decline to stay 'vanquished for good and all' (Beckett, 1972, pp.33-34), the population cannot remain stable. When 'the eyes suddenly start to search afresh' (Beckett, 1972, p.32), some power must undertake a massacre within the cylinder; when 'for no clear reason they as suddenly close again or the head falls' (Beckett, 1972, p.32), re-population must be instigated just as suddenly. All calculations concerning the amount of space available to each body must also be revised upon each fluctuation of the population. The assessment 'One body per square metre' (Beckett, 1972, p.13) cannot survive as absolute: it is a judgement relative to the number of bodies. Such are the difficulties attendant upon the peculiar task of counting how many 'lost ones' can be found.

#### iv. All strange away: factual extractions

A failure to follow applies to each item in the text of The



Lost Ones and might also describe the experience of the reader. Like Belacqua of More Pricks Than Kicks, the narrator displays 'a strong weakness for oxymoron' (Beckett, 1970b, p.41).<sup>26</sup> A comparable condition is displayed within the opening remarks of The Unnamable:

These few general remarks to begin with. What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later? Generally speaking. There must be other shifts. Otherwise it would be quite hopeless. But it is quite hopeless. I should mention before going any further, any further on, that I say aporia without knowing what it means. Can one be ephectic otherwise than unawares? I don't know.

(Beckett, 1959, p.293)

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<sup>26</sup> Self-collapsing constructions are welcomed within this early text: 'moving pauses' (Beckett, 1970b, p.41) give way to the protestation 'he said Grüss Gott but I didnt hear him' (Beckett, 1970b, p.164). Another effort of the Smeraldina is clearly worthy of the narrator of The Lost Ones: upon inspection of the dead Belacqua, she feels 'a spasm of anxiety, lest there should be anything the matter with this corpse that rigor mortis had apparently passed over' (Beckett, 1970b, p.191). Well-designed oddities can be collected from many other texts: Still refers us to a hand 'clenched lightly' on an arm-rest (Beckett, 1984, p.184). Worstward Ho can offer 'No choice but up if ever down' (Beckett, 1983b, p.17); a source of light 'Dim undimmed' (Beckett, 1983b, p.33) and suspicions concerning the devotion of a figure to be seen 'forever kneeling', for he has done so only 'So far' (Beckett, 1983b, p.18). The essay 'An Imaginative Work!' refers us to 'cowering skyscraper days' (Beckett, 1983a, p.90). Gorman in The Old Tune laments the precariousness of modern building methods: 'And on top of all no foundations [...]' (Beckett, 1986, p.340). A Piece of Monologue maintains that there is 'No such thing as none' (Beckett, 1986, p.426). The only thing of which there is certainly none, is what 'none' itself denotes.

Amongst the ideas which can be associated with the 'aporia', those of the 'pure and simple' are an unusual choice. An independent connoisseur of philosophical terms catalogues the implications of the word in terms peculiarly appropriate to The Lost Ones: 'aporía: with no way out, difficulty, question, problem' (Peters, 1967, p.22). An ability to 'proceed' via the cultivation of aporia is questionable; more commonly, 'aporia' signals the occurrence of a disabling contradiction which imposes a halt upon proceedings. As the narrator of The Unnamable is unaware of the meaning of the term, such subtle equivocations around its associations must be the result of a marvellous accident.<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, the quibbling deliberation is provoked and denied: a contradiction not unrelated to the workings of the aporia itself.<sup>28</sup> To call up the 'ephectic' gives similar results, for the word can collapse itself by reference to its opposing implications. To 'hold' judgement can be to suspend, check or refrain from judging; equally, to 'hold' can be expanded to insinuate that a judgement is maintained or secure. It is a term taken from the Sceptics: hence, it may be maintained, the little impersonation of the Sceptic's response to all matters epistemological, the 'I don't know' which knowingly masquerades as a claim of ignorance. All, however, is

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<sup>27</sup> As Malone speculates, 'Nothing has been left to chance. Or is it a happy chance?' (Beckett, 1959, p.253).

<sup>28</sup> To supply an example of the problems occasioned by aporia while claiming to remain unaware of the significance of the term, creates a problem posed in a way disconcertingly relevant to the significance of the unknown term.

to be done 'unawares' also (Beckett, 1959, p.293).<sup>29</sup>

The narrator of Mercier and Camier knows better what he is about in replicating the procedures of his pseudo-counterpart in The Lost Ones. The place of meeting for the titular 'pseudocouple' (Beckett, 1959, p.299) 'had something of the maze', a location, like the cylinder, 'difficult to egress, for one not in its secrets' (Beckett, 1974, p.9). Argumentative infelicities are the primary maze, however. A bicycle, two dogs and a ranger are the extra participants required for a major philosophical symposium to get under way:

You see that bicycle? said the ranger.

I see nothing, said Camier. Mercier, do you see a bicycle?

Is she yours? said the ranger.

A thing we do not see, said Camier, for whose existence we have only your word, how are we to tell if it is ours,

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<sup>29</sup> O'Hara can explain the reasoning behind this studied inattention towards the 'ephectic' and concomitant inability to understand the 'aporetic'. A particular expertise is displayed in this denial of knowledge:

The reason for this denial is implied when the Unnamable asks if one can be ephectic - if one can suspend judgment - otherwise then unawares. Obviously if one is deliberately skeptical, if one deliberately suspends judgment as a matter of policy, then one's action is in itself a judgment; pretending to be skeptical, one has actually committed oneself to a belief. Both Beckett and his speakers know better than to fall into that trap.

(O'Hara, 1970, p.67)

Such superior philosophical negotiations do not fit comfortably, however, with the narrator's claims to ignorance in The Unnamable.



or another's?

Why would it be ours? said Mercier. Are these dogs ours? No. We see them today for the first time. And you would have it that the bicycle, assuming it exists, is ours? And yet the dogs are not ours.

Bugger the dogs, said the ranger.

But as if to give himself the lie he fell on them with stick and boot and drove them cursing from the pagoda. Tied together as they still were, by the post-coitus, their retreat was no easy matter. For the effort they made to escape, acting equally in opposite directions, could not but annul each other. They must have greatly suffered.

He has now buggered the dogs, said Mercier.

(Beckett, 1974, p.15)

The reasoning behind Mercier and Camier's conviction that ownership of the dogs is a crucial factor in determining ownership of the bicycle is as pleasingly obscure as any formulation in The Lost Ones. Sentence structure plays its tricks (can dogs curse?); the order to 'Bugger the dogs' is ignored by its dispatcher and thereby finally achieved by him. It is the unfortunate dogs and their attachment which supplies the most important link to the cumulative effect of sentences in Beckett's later text. To link the isolated assertions and statements of the narrator of The Lost Ones to one another is to build up inconsistencies, contradictions and aporias. There is no hierarchy of authority to which appeal can be made in order to accept one assertion and reject its contradictory or

inconsistent supplement. Dogs and sentences thus organized towards 'acting equally in opposite directions' cannot help 'but annul each other' (Beckett, 1974, p.15). Like the Unnamable, the narrator of The Lost Ones favours 'affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later' (Beckett, 1959, p.293). Mercier and Camier prefer the former strategy of instantaneous deadlock in their efforts to 'annul each other' (Beckett, 1974, p.15). To conclude a 'long debate', 'they would arrive simultaneously at often contrary conclusions and simultaneously begin to state them' (Beckett, 1974, p.17).

The narrator of The Lost Ones, however, does not choose to aid the reader by such explicit reflections upon the unworkability of his working method. When trying to follow the logical progression of Mercier and Camier, the reader is warned to expect 'deviations to right and left and sudden reversals of course' (Beckett, 1974, p.67). 'Nor let us', Camier counsels his followers, 'hesitate to halt, for days and even weeks on end' (Beckett, 1974, p.67) at advertised points of deadlock. The reader attempting to abstract secure propositions from the equivocations of the narrator of The Unnamable is informed that such hopes are 'quite hopeless' (Beckett, 1959, p.293). The narrative regime of The Lost Ones does not even allow such a proposition declaring the insecurity of all propositions to stand secure. If all 'affirmations and negations' of The Unnamable are to be 'invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later' (Beckett, 1959, p.293), this affirmation must itself be subject sooner or later to the general invalidation it prescribes. To allow such

formulations to stand in isolation as secure descriptions of these texts in their entirety must be at the cost of depreciating their self-collapsing construction. Such propositions reproduce the logical tangles of the sceptic's thesis concerning the impossibility of secure knowledge, a thesis which must presuppose a single exception amidst the universal insecurity of knowledge in order to allow its own claim to stand unassailed by doubt. The sceptic is embroiled in 'the standard dialectic of self-defeat':

If no proposition is true, then neither is this universal hypothesis about truth. If there is no proposition whose truth-value is knowable then this universal thesis about knowledge, though may be true, is nevertheless not knowable.

(Nathan, 1980, p.116)

The narrative terms of The Lost Ones seem designed to lead its readers into structurally identical procedures of self-defeat.

The simplest and quickest way to ensure one's defeat by this text is to extract selected statements from it to be treated as reliable facts about the cylinder system and to decline to take into account either the immediate or eventual invalidation of these 'facts' elsewhere in the same text. The oscillation between contradictory terms is arbitrarily halted and one term selected as reliable. Via this strategy, unfortunately, one can maintain the veracity of an opposite or inconsistent 'fact' and simultaneously claim equal fidelity to the text of The Lost Ones.



Lodging complaints that rival readings are not quite accurate in their details is an activity with an inherent tendency to misfire:

Beckett writes of hell; Alvarez calls it purgatory. [...] Kenner gets the image right: the cylinder is 'some nether hell'; but he too is careless about details (falsely describing the vanquished searchers as immobile) [...].

(Graver, 1974, p.625)

Rival statements made by the narrator define the vanquished as both immobile and mobile. Neither description is false, although neither, either, is true. The combination of these embattled details gives the result that the vanquished are both mobile and immobile, which might be a satisfying conclusion to the controversy if it did not mar both attempts at providing their defining feature. When such a little detail is not amenable to determination, the possibility of describing the cylinder in its totality, quite as if every detail were determined, whether as 'hell', 'nether-hell' or 'purgatory', must be similarly doubted. Libera's reckoning of the number of inhabitants of the cylinder and their respective activities is accurate for so long as other inferences implicit in the narrator's assertions are discounted:

20 of the cylinder dwellers sit (4 x 5), 60 pause (3 x 20), and 120 are in motion (2 x 60).

(Libera, 1983, p.147)

At the time, however, when 'all roamed without respite' (Beckett, 1972, p.34) the same formula gives forth an entirely different result. Neither can the 20 sedentary sit when described as climbing ladders, or the 120 remain in motion upon the universal immobility demanded by the narrator during a lull. According to Zurbrugg, 'individual lost ones find that their world is not yet bare as they suddenly remember "some unthinkable past"' (Zurbrugg, 1988, p.267); to argue that to the lost ones 'each lull seems the first', Brienza needs to establish in contradistinction to Zurbrugg that 'there is no continuity of time and therefore no memory in the cylinder' (Brienza, 1977, p.151). One might enquire also how an 'unthinkable' past might enter thought as a memory, or how, lacking memory of any kind, the elaborate rules of the cylinder might be remembered. Further, as Cohn argues, we have no knowledge of any such mental states:

The narrator never intrudes into the consciousness of any of these 205 people, but his clinical descriptions reveal suffering as pervasive. With parchment-dry skin, the cylinder-dwellers are tortured by touch, and the lack of space forces constant contact.

(Cohn, 1973, p.260)

Neither can we be sure, however, that there are 205 people; at the point when the population formula states that there are no inhabitants, their sufferings must be somewhat less pervasive. The lack of space is then rectified also. Upon occasion, Brienza

finds it necessary to insinuate tiny modifications into the statements of the narrator to rescue them from their own inconsistency:

The gradual, almost imperceptible, decline of life in The Lost Ones proceeds with a pace as slow but as inexorable as that in Endgame [...]. Little by little the desire to climb is extinguished, but this is '[a] languishing happily unperceived because of its slowness and the resurgences that make up for it in part ...' (15). Just as slow is the shift from belief in an escape via the tunnels to belief in escape via an upper trapdoor: '... of these two persuasions the former is declining in favour of the latter but in a manner so desultory and slow and of course with so little effect on the comportment of either sect that to perceive it one must be in the secret of the gods' (19). Little by little the strong light of the cylinder produces the 'slow deterioration of vision'; the eyes are destroyed '[a]nd all by such slow and insensible degrees to be sure as to pass unperceived even by those most concerned ...' (39). In short, the story is based on the premise that 'here all should die with so gradual and to put it plainly so fluctuant a death as to escape the notice even of a visitor' (18). This idea determines the form of the story.

(Brienza, 1977, p.151)

In the narrator's words, the perceived languishing of the desire to climb is 'happily unperceived' (Beckett, 1972, p.15); the



recognized shift in belief between the tunnel- and trapdoor-exit is so imperceptible that 'to perceive it one must be in the secret of the gods' (Beckett, 1972, p.19); the perceived destruction of the sensory capacity of the eyes is so 'insensible' as to be 'sure [...] to pass unperceived even by those most concerned' (Beckett, 1972, p.39); the noted and notable occurrence of the death of all will 'escape the notice even of a visitor' (Beckett, 1972, p.18). All these perceived events are described as imperceptible. As the imperceptible is patently perceived by the narrator, Brienza revises his insistence upon actual imperceptibility to the more reasonable diagnosis that each event is 'almost imperceptible' (Brienza, 1977, p.151). Active contradiction is now averted; yet active contradiction is built into the primary text.<sup>30</sup> With regard to the languishing of the desire to climb, the narrator points out 'the inattention of those concerned' (Beckett, 1972, p.15) just as this phenomenon claims his own concern and attention.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> The narrator of Watt retreats under the pressure of this very contradiction concerning the perception of the imperceptible:

And Watt was greatly troubled by this tiny little thing, more troubled perhaps than he had ever been by anything, and Watt had been frequently and exceedingly troubled, in his time, by this imperceptible, no, hardly imperceptible, since he perceived it, by this indefinable thing [...].  
(Beckett, 1976, p.79)

The narrator of The Lost Ones is not so amenable as to back down when confronted by the same contradiction. In this instance, Brienza retreats with logic, but not the primary text, on her side.

<sup>31</sup> From Brienza's citation above, the narrative continues on to further conceptual peculiarities:

and the inattention of those concerned dazed by the passion preying on them still or by the state of languor into which

transfer of allegiances between tunnel or trapdoor as exit is described as 'frequent either way' (Beckett, 1972, p.18) in addition to being 'so desultory and slow' (Beckett, 1972, p.19). The 'strong light of the cylinder' to which Brienza refers (Brienza, 1977, p.151) is also distinguished by 'Its dimness' (Beckett, 1972, p.7). The notable end of the cylinder which will not be noticed is further thought to be 'unthinkable' (Beckett, 1972, p.60). These inconsistencies themselves are rendered imperceptible when criticism makes its selections from the narrative while choosing not to perceive the links and inferences which seek to put a stop to such inaccurate coherence.

The interest of The Lost Ones in narrative incoherence is indeed undervalued. Kalb ascribes to the text 'a persuasive weight similar to that of ancestral utterance' (Kalb, 1989, p.134); furthermore, '[...] The Lost Ones is a relatively straightforward tale', related by that bastion of reliability the 'third-person omniscient narrator' (Kalb, 1989, p.134). Dearlove's trust in the narrator is similarly striking:

The prose of the first fourteen paragraphs is neither ambiguous nor elliptical. It describes a cylinder that can be measured, inspected and tested. The narrator speaks as

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imperceptibly they are already fallen.  
(Beckett, 1972, p.15)

A further condition operating 'imperceptibly' is nevertheless perceived. The 'concerned' bodies, as well as the narrator, are also inattentive to their own condition. In order to be 'dazed', 'passion' and 'languor' become functionally identical states, in addition to being opposites.

a scientist about a controlled and knowable system.

(Dearlove, 1982, p.138)

The manuscript of the first fourteen paragraphs or sections of Le Dépeupleur begun in October 1965 (Admussen, 1979, p.35), the French original which was translated as The Lost Ones, was abandoned temporarily by its author around June 1966 (Admussen, 1979, p.127) 'because of its intractable complexities' (Beckett, cited in Admussen, 1979, p.22; p.39). In Dearlove's analysis, the major part of The Lost Ones remained insufficiently 'intractable', despite being laid aside for that just that reason:

Although Beckett had written the first fourteen paragraphs by 1966, it was not until 1970 that he was able to write the final paragraph. The differences between these two portions of the book suggest that Beckett sought to counterbalance the analytic statements of his initial paragraphs with a conclusion which would return mystery and uncertainty to the cylinder and to The Lost Ones.

(Dearlove, 1982, p.138)

For Dearlove, it is 'the primary function of the final section of The Lost Ones [...] to make the whole work problematic' (Dearlove, 1982, p.138). But problems, mystery and uncertainty, what one might term intractability, is endemic throughout the whole text. In criticism, however, three localized aspects of The Lost Ones are granted sole responsibility for any ambiguity



the text may possess: the additional fifteenth section with its allegedly distinctive descent into equivocation; the occurrences of the refrain 'if this notion is maintained' (Beckett, 1972, p.32; p.39; p.60; p.63); and the narrator's explicit declarations that some of his calculations may only be considered approximations. To build a case concerning the particular difficulties presented by the appended section of The Lost Ones, Dearlove is obliged to consider the main text exemplary in its clarity. This notion cannot be maintained. Henning, similarly, argues that 'the last paragraph contradicts the normal functioning of the cylinder in order to force the end' (Henning, 1988, p.219, n.27). Normality, logical or otherwise, is a scare commodity in The Lost Ones from its first lines. According to Brienza's analysis, it is 'The frequent repetition of the phrase "if this notion be maintained"<sup>32</sup> [that] undercuts any authority the narrative may have had' (Brienza, 1977, p.157). The impact of the refrain is considerably dissipated upon appreciation of the scant degree of reliability that can be accorded to any part of the narrative. This phrase does not occur at all until the thirty-second page of the narrative as published by John Calder in 1972; inconsistencies and blatant contradictions must be negotiated from the point of the second sentence.<sup>33</sup> In order to

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<sup>32</sup> Brienza's citation is not quite accurate, at least in relation to the John Calder text of 1972: in all four occurrences of the phrase, this text reads 'if this notion is maintained' (Beckett, 1972, p.32; p.39; p.60; p.63).

<sup>33</sup> The opening sentence, 'Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one' (Beckett, 1972, p.7) is unusual in its logical good order, harbouring only the minor obscurity as to what the 'lost one' of each lost body actually is. However, obscurity cannot count as a contradiction, primarily because it is difficult to know how to neatly contradict a statement that

throw into relief the disruptive qualities of this refrain, Brienza first posits, like Dearlove, 'a narrator [...] who is precise on each minute detail' (Brienza, 1977, p.158). A 'paradox' thus emerges from the fact that such a narrator is 'yet ready to call into question the validity of the story as a whole' (Brienza, 1977, p.158).<sup>34</sup> The imputation of the narrator's ability to be 'precise on each minute detail' (Brienza, 1977, p.158), however, is marred by Brienza's own citation of some of his finer approximations:

He indulges in Latin terms [...]. But with equal frequency he descends to the level of cliché ('roughly speaking,' 'to put it mildly,' 'for some reason or other') [...]. Having a large vocabulary with a scientific flavor, the narrator strives for precision, but at times the clichéd commonplaces undercut his accuracy: the lulls are 'of varying duration but never exceeding ten seconds or thereabouts' (17). Here the 'thereabouts' contradicts the finality of the 'never,' and the sentence as a whole becomes laughable.

(Brienza, 1977, p.156)

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makes no clear assertion.

<sup>34</sup> As this calling into question of 'the validity of the story as a whole' (Brienza, 1977, p.158) takes place within the very story which calls itself into question, the statement of invalidity must be threatened by invalidity itself. Lessness, similarly, requires a 'Figment' to act as the 'dispeller of figments' (Beckett, 1984, p.157); this 'Figment' must thus work to de-create itself. This self-consuming structure informs The Lost Ones, Lessness, How It Is and The Unnamable. Each can be fundamentally destabilized by this variation on the liar paradox. See the Conclusion below, Section i.

As 'clichéd commonplaces undercut his accuracy' (Brienza, 1977, p.156), Brienza cannot also have the narrator given over entirely to precision, the one required for the delineation of the special troubles caused by his saying 'if this notion is maintained'. The authority of the narrative does not require undercutting by any of these devices. An authority and reliability which is entirely absent from the narrative of The Lost Ones is awarded to the text extraneously, so that we may find strategies to take it away again. Such an activity, however, is admirably in tune with its text.

#### v. A first aperçu of allegory

With this parallel between the difficulties of The Lost Ones and the troubles involved in their exegesis in mind, the lure of the allegory preferred by Brienza is almost irresistible. Brienza identifies a 'critical consensus that one of the themes of the story is frustrated hope' (Brienza, 1977, p.148). The frustration attending the efforts of the searchers within the cylinder applies also to the critical search for secure statements concerning the text. According to Brienza:

the reader is put in the same position as the searcher. Just as the searcher must follow intricate, exact rules for climbing the ladders with little hope for a way out to the stars, so the reader must follow intricate, exact sentences with little hope of a way out to meaning.

(Brienza, 1977, p.158)



The analogy may be broadened towards an allegorical reading:

The style of the story, from the morphological to the structural level, suggests fruitless waiting, futile searching, and unsatisfied hoping. Also, if the story presents a statement about man's futile search for order and meaning in the world, this statement translates easily into a comment on the reader's futile search for order and meaning in the piece itself. Thus the reader becomes one of the searchers trying to find a critical 'way out' of the cylinder.<sup>35</sup>

(Brienza, 1977, p.148)

It is perverse, but not arbitrarily so, to identify the possible success of this interpretation as the decisive factor in its failure. Once this reading is in place, it violates the analogy which is its basis, that between the 'fruitless waiting, futile searching, and unsatisfied hoping' (Brienza, 1977, p.148) of reader and searcher. A meaning for the reader, a 'way out' of the cylinder, has been installed. A 'search for order' which should be 'futile' (Brienza, 1977, p.148) if the analogy is to be maintained, is no longer so. The reader's ability to find in the work 'a statement about man's futile search for order and

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<sup>35</sup> In Kalb's account of the Mabou Mines staged reading of The Lost Ones, 'the designer Thom Cathcart's admittedly excellent idea to seat spectators amphitheater-fashion around the edges of a vertical dark-rubber cylinder', had the similar effect of 'drawing an explicit parallel between the audience and the story's characters from the first moment' (Kalb, 1989, p.136).

meaning' (Brienza, 1977, p.148) immediately establishes the 'order and meaning', coherence and purpose, that are deemed unavailable. The futile search has provided a meaning not only for The Lost Ones, but also a 'statement' about the ultimate nature of 'the world' (Brienza, 1977, p.148). The reader must escape the nets of futility and frustration in order to identify these two qualities as inescapable features of either The Lost Ones or the universe. And it should not be within the power of futility to succeed so spectacularly.

Brienza's allegory readily incorporates the instruction offered by Schopenhauer's reflections upon the futility of searching and striving. Schopenhauer's opinion of the 'will-to-live' finds expression in terms appropriate to the disorder of activity within the cylinder:

All push and drive, some plotting and planning, others acting; the tumult is indescribable. But what is the ultimate aim of it all? [...] With this evident want of proportion between the effort and the reward, the will-to-live, taken objectively, appears to us from this point of view as a fool, or taken subjectively, as a delusion. Seized by this, every living thing works with the utmost exertion of its strength for something that has no value. But on closer consideration, we shall find here also that it is rather a blind urge, an impulse wholly without ground and motive.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.357)

The obscurity cultivated in The Lost Ones as to the ultimate objective of the search is analogous to the explicit basis of Schopenhauer's account of 'lifeless longing without a definite object':

It is fortunate enough when something to desire and to strive for still remains, so that the game may be kept up of the constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from that to a fresh desire, the rapid course of which is called happiness, the slow course sorrow, showing itself as a fearful, life-destroying boredom, a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor. According to all this, the will always knows, when knowledge enlightens it, what it wills here and now, but never what it wills in general. Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §29, pp.164-165)

Thus, perhaps, the information offered by the narrator that 'The purpose of the ladders is to convey the searchers to the niches' (Beckett, 1972, p.10) and the omission thereafter to state the purpose of the niches or the search as a whole. Localized purposes only can be given; the purpose served by the purposive use of the ladders remains unstated. The cylinder's vanquished, according to Brienza, attain a Schopenhauerian recognition of the ultimate futility and frustration which accompany the activity of searching. Renunciation of the search is the proper exit from the tumult of the cylinder into 'spiritual calm' and 'wisdom'



(Brienza, 1977, p.162); the '"vanquished," those who have given up the search, can attain physical and mental rest and thus an escape of sorts' (Brienza, 1977, p.163). The tempting possibility of this 'escape', however, signals a new entry into searching:

The goal of the search then becomes the state which the vanquished have reached. Paradoxically, though, the way to attain this static condition is to give up the desire to search, to cease to hope for a way out.

(Brienza, 1977, p.162)

As it is not established in the text of The Lost Ones that the lower searchers do aspire to the state of the vanquished, this allegorical reading has the double disadvantage of introducing an order to the search which is not articulated by the text, as well as being liable to a self-defeating loop. If it is upon the cessation of hope that one's hopes are realized, it would seem sensible for the searchers to hope for the cessation of their hoping. To hope for or aspire to the cessation of hope, however, is a self-collapsing disposition.<sup>36</sup> The paradox acknowledged by Brienza has its origin in Schopenhauer's own statement of the desirability of achieving a state untormented by desires. This,

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<sup>36</sup> It is also one of Beckett's favourite paradoxes; as the narrator of Murphy confides, 'There seems really very little hope for Neary, he seems doomed to hope unending' (Beckett, 1963, p.113). With its 'Vain longing that vain longing go' (Beckett, 1983b, p.36), Worstward Ho courts a similar impasse. As How It Is 'screams abandon hope', it detects a 'gleam of hope' that this might be achieved (Beckett, 1964, p.52). It should also detect a self-defeating structure.

the most desirable state possible, cannot be desired without succumbing to self-defeat. Further, in Schopenhauer's account, it remains unexplained how the 'peace of blessed nothingness' achieved upon renunciation of the will-to-live can be experienced as 'infinitely preferable' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.640) when no part of consciousness remains to register such an experience or preference." The 'peace' which Schopenhauer recommends and the final state of the cylinder, precisely the point where such peace might enter in, each present ends which define themselves as 'unthinkable' (Beckett, 1972, p.60).

This particular variant upon the allegory of 'Reader as Searcher' (Brienza, 1977, p.148) and the allegory itself, replicate the structure of sceptical self-defeat, for knowledge

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<sup>37</sup> As Victor recognizes in Eleutheria, 'If I was dead, I wouldn't know I was dead. That's the only thing I have against death' (Beckett, 1996, pp.149-150). Moran has a solution to this problem which otherwise threatens to spoil the 'unspeakable satisfactions' of 'the great classical paralyses' of the human faculties:

To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps as deaf as a post! And who knows as blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain intact to allow you to exult!

(Beckett, 1959, pp.140-141)

How It Is shares this solution:

no more head in any case hardly any no more heart just enough to be thankful for it a little thankful to be so little there

(Beckett, 1964, p.112)

A very fine balance is needed. Schopenhauer's 'blessed nothingness' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.640) is so extreme as to leave nothing intact which could exult in the blessed state of its own non-existence.

of the key factor which the allegory needs to maintain as unknowable is assumed. In the case of The Lost Ones, the very nature of allegory exacerbates these difficulties. If it is the duty of the allegorist to give a more adequate account of the meaning of the cylinder world than is explicitly stated in the text itself, the allegorist must be able to assume a position which transcends that of the narrator. The allegorist aspires to reveal what the narrator and his cylinder allegedly reveal only implicitly, to state what remains unstated by the narrator. The structural tendency of allegorical readings of The Lost Ones is to push aside the transcendent narrator of the text to install instead the allegorist in the problematic transcendent position. Rather than achieving a workable position of actual transcendence, this strategy of reading reproduces difficulties which the narrator encounters internally in the course of his narrative. To repeat, even if unawares, is not to transcend.

#### vi. Transcendent readings and their lapses

It is difficult to take issue with Brienza's remark that The Lost Ones 'seems to cry out for an allegorical interpretation', even if from the distorting distance of Watt 'one can almost hear Beckett answering, "No allegories where none intended"' (Brienza, 1977, p.148). At numerous places in the text, details can be expanded toward allegorical significance.<sup>38</sup> Materials may be

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<sup>38</sup> See the Appendix to this thesis for a series of allegorical identifications with some potential to be imposed upon the narrative of The Lost Ones. The awkward positioning of such material is not unrelated to this chapter's wish to depreciate the methodology which supports allegorical readings,



gathered from The Lost Ones to sustain an allegory concerning epistemological procedures with a particularly Kantian inflection. 'To be noted in support of this wild surmise' (Beckett, 1972, p.12) is the possibility of identifying aspects of the futile search undertaken in the cylinder with methods of metaphysical investigation.<sup>39</sup> Ladders, the means of a searcher's elevation above the ground, may be mapped on to metaphysical procedures; that such ladders 'vary greatly in size' and 'are propped against the wall without regard to harmony' (Beckett, 1972, p.9) is not injurious to the Kantian scheme which would assess metaphysical systems as lacking harmony in their composition and erection while remaining identical in function, that of undertaking an exploration raised beyond the empirical. From such ladders 'half the rungs are missing' and, as the narrator concedes, 'the want of three in a row calls for acrobatics' (Beckett, 1972, p.10). As Kant maintains, the ascent from the empirical ground to metaphysical heights is hampered by missing logical steps; to effect the transition between realms, epistemological leaps become necessary. Assembling evidence as to the necessary acrobatics of metaphysical reasoning and disabling the metaphysical systems of others are the traditional duties of the sceptic; accordingly, in the cylinder 'The missing rungs are in the hands of a happy few who use them mainly for

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while lacking the resolve to reject them, and the philosophical resonance of their details, out of hand. As detailed below, any feature of The Lost Ones which might be turned to Kantian account cannot be resisted.

<sup>39</sup> Hélène L. Baldwin's chapter 'The Way Out of the Cylinder: The Quest for the Lost Ones' in Samuel Beckett's Real Silence (Baldwin, 1981, pp.125-135) also gives a reading of The Lost Ones as an allegory of a metaphysical search.

attack and self-defence' (Beckett, 1972, p.10). With regard to these rickety ladders, 'It is the custom not to climb two or more at a time' (Beckett, 1972, p.11); as specified in Kant's critical philosophy, internal consistency in a chosen metaphysical system is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for its proper functioning. Indeed, concerning their bolt-holes established above the empirical realm, the searchers take cognizance of this requirement for 'each climber has a fondness for certain niches and refrains as far as possible from the others' (Beckett, 1972, p.12). When disparate metaphysical systems are available, consistency will be best served by maintaining a preference for one among their number and despising the claims of all rivals. In parallel, 'it is exceptional for a body in the first place to leave its queue and in the second having exceptionally done so not to leave the zone' (Beckett, 1972, p.47). The circulation of metaphysicians is not between competing schools; disillusionment more normally entails abandonment of the zone of metaphysical investigation itself.

The competing versions as to the way out of the cylinder might also be employed to posit a sub-division between empirical and metaphysical investigations:

One school swears by a secret passage branching from one of the tunnels and leading in the words of the poet to nature's sanctuaries. The other dreams of a trapdoor hidden in the hub of the ceiling giving access to a flue at the end of which the sun and other stars would still be shining.

The choice might be mapped as one between exploration directed toward discovery of the secrets of the empirical realm of nature and an exit which offers delivery into the cosmos rather than back down to earth. As Henning maps the distinction, the tunnel is 'the immanent' exit (Henning, 1988, p.193), the trapdoor, 'the transcendent' option (Henning, 1988, p.192). Yet this division between the 'material' and the 'ideal' or the empirical and metaphysical does not quite accord with the textual evidence or the allegorical speculations thus far, for both possible exits are theoretically accessible only via the ladders, or under allegorical terms, via metaphysics. Nevertheless, the narrator associates 'nature' (Beckett, 1972, p.18) and, by extension, empiricism, with the tunnel-exit<sup>40</sup> which is not only not to be found but is situated in the realm of the cylinder, that raised above the ground, which the allegory wants to identify as metaphysical. The inaccessibility of the putative location of the trapdoor does reproduce, however, the quandary of metaphysics identified by Kant:

Why has Providence placed many things which are closely bound up with our highest interests so far beyond our reach that we are only permitted to apprehend them in a manner lacking in clearness and subject to doubt - in such fashion that our enquiring gaze is more excited than satisfied?

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<sup>40</sup> Until, that is, the narrator redescribes the trapdoor as the way out to both 'earth and sky' (Beckett, 1972, p.21).



But there remains something wrong, for the inaccessibility of the trapdoor-exit associated with the metaphysical is not the result of any a priori deduction but of practical difficulties; as the narrator concedes 'the fabulous zone decreed out of reach [...] in theory is in no wise so' (Beckett, 1972, p.20). A genuine inability to determine truth status or existence can only be attached to 'assertions of pure reason' which 'transcend the conditions of all possible experience, outside which the authentication of truth is in no wise possible' (Kant, 1933, A750-751/B778-779, p.601, my emphasis). Empirical experience of the fabulous zone is possible. The impossibility of proving or refuting the thesis cannot be grounded upon such an empirical accident as the absence of that 'instant of fraternity' (Beckett, 1972, p.21) required to maintain the tallest climber atop the tallest ladder in order to test the trapdoor thesis. The searchers' theoretical ability to determine the accuracy of the trapdoor-thesis is instrumental in frustrating the accuracy of this particular system of allegorical identifications. The emerging danger is not 'in the neatness of identifications' (Beckett, 1961, p.3), but their confusion.

Henning is better advised in identifying 'the arena proper', mundanely situated on 'The bed of the cylinder' and 'chosen hunting ground of the majority', (Beckett, 1972, p.43) as the realm of empirical investigation. Within the arena, one undertakes to search 'with the eyes':

Eyesight relates more to empirical observation: the mere collecting of facts in the manner of the early scientists. The still-active searchers speculate or theorize on the basis of the experience acquired in their wanderings, but do so without the rigid methodological ladders of the climbers. This allows them more latitude but less support for rising upwards.

(Henning, 1988, p.172)

'From the Bible through Wittgenstein's Tractatus', on the other hand, 'the ladder has referred to the search for essential knowledge' (Henning, 1988, p.172):

The only objects within the abode are a number of ladders varying in size and type. They suggest the various gnosiological schemes that men have employed in an effort to scale up to a commanding position from which they could explain the world and so bring it under at least cognitive control.

(Henning, 1988, pp.161-162)

Henning avoids the argumentative incoherence involved in searching the text of The Lost Ones for fragments of information, a strategy of reading as disablingly random and undirected as 'the mere collecting of facts in the manner of the early scientists' (Henning, 1988, p.172). Instead, cognizance of the empirical occurrence of the ladders is elevated from the status of merely an isolated detail to play a part in Henning's own

allegorical scheme concerning the inadequacies of both the empirical and speculative procedures in epistemology. Henning finds the relative merits of each approach also 'implicitly posed in Endgame':

Whose activity is more authentic, that of the speculative Hamm or that of the empirical Clov? Is the real world the realm of everyday existence or that of ideas? From a materialist point of view, the ideal world is a fiction. From an idealist perspective, the phenomenal world is an illusion.

(Henning, 1988, p.94)

The procedures of such allegorical reading in relation to The Lost Ones, however, are themselves deeply embroiled with the interests of the idealist and speculative side of this epistemological controversy. An allegorical system which values its own coherence cannot accord attention to textual details which are inconsistent with its own systematic and transcendent arrangement of conceptual categories. For Henning, it is the narrator who 'works to eliminate' numerous irregularities that threaten 'his search for a comprehensive overview' (Henning, 1988, p.159); in so far Henning's own epistemological allegory is comprehensive and consistent, however, a similar objection applies to her own strategy of reading. In her account, both narrator and Kant are upbraided for their attempts to 'form a perfect system' from empirical data (Henning, 1988, p.165):



we had regarded le dépeupleur as one who (re-)establishes a state of oneness by eliminating from life all its incongruent, inconvenient corporeal elements. He abstracts. In that case the narrator to the extent that he analyzes with the surgical precision that was Kant's [...] is himself a sort of dépeupleur. His narrative shares that deadly, deadening quality that characterizes every attempt to elaborate closed systems purporting to account for life's complexities in purely 'objective' terms.

(Henning, 1988, p.165)

Henning elaborates an interpretative structure that is assured that 'all traditional interpretative structures - scientific, historical, religious, psychological, political, and narrative' exhibit this 'dépeupleur tendency' (Henning, 1988, p.190). It remains obscure how Henning's own act of abstraction in service of this 'state of oneness' (Henning, 1988, p.190) can fail to implicate itself in its own disapproving diagnosis of this tendency. While the narrator of The Lost Ones is convicted of 'obscuring the more troublesome irregularities' (Henning, 1988, p.187) of the cylinder in favour of producing 'a satisfying cognitive whole' (Henning, 1988, p.185), Henning undertakes the same procedure with regard to Western epistemology in its totality.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> According to Henning, 'Beckett shares Mikhail Bakhtin's criticism of the repressive monologism that is so characteristic of Western thought with its penchant for abstract integrality' (Henning, 1988, p.1). The 'carnavalesque challenge' incorporating 'paradox, play, incompleteness, difference, reciprocity, passion, laughter' may be employed to destabilize this entire 'Western tradition' (Henning, 1988, p.190). The

In so far as the irregularities of the cylinder threaten to 'exceed the narrator's cognitive grasp and burst the bounds of his theoretical system' (Henning, 1988, p.184) and the 'bodies display a propensity to unmanageable behaviour' (Henning, 1988, p.193), The Lost Ones plays into the hands of Henning's own totalizing and transcendent thesis concerning the ultimate inadequacy of all such totalizing and transcendent theses. Under Henning's system, no discourse is immune from 'review and revision':

Any textual or discursive level can be invested with different and differing points of view, or 'voices.' The privileged tendencies of a text or aspects of an idea may then be confronted by latent or repressed ones. The impulse to stage this confrontation entails what might be called the deconstructive strategy of dialogization that exploits the 'loopholes' through which a subversive 'voice' may insinuate itself into the discourse of the dominant perspective.

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single exception to the recommended violation of 'repressive monologism' and 'abstract integrality' is Henning's analysis of such authoritarian modes of thought. Henning's deployment of the carnivalesque neglects to challenge its own formulations during its challenging of all systematic abstractions. A fundamental inconsistency emerges in Henning's use of Bakhtin's carnivalesque in the form of a rigorous theory; according to Norris:

Bakhtin's attitude, roughly stated, is one that holds 'the more the merrier', an outlook of undifferentiated pluralist 'freeplay' that celebrates diversity for its own sake and equates such values as reason, truth and method with the working of a grim paternal law of oppressive 'monological' discourse.

(Norris, 1993, p.166)

Abstracting a methodology to be conscientiously pursued from such an attitude risks converting the carnivalesque itself into another system of monological discourse.



There [...] this strategy may take advantage of unthematized reservations, hesitations, and contradictions to create ironic interferences that undermine the impression of self-identity or harmonious integrity.

(Henning, 1988, p.3)

This theoretical framework predetermines the failure of any theoretical model to achieve an explanatory force free of points of inadequacy, qualification, or inconsistency. All discourse harbours repressed areas of incoherence, despite the fact that an exemption has to be granted again to the discourse which elaborates the universality of this inadequacy. Henning's analysis is now in a position to transcend and diagnose the failings of every discourse; the narrator of The Lost Ones simply proffers a discourse that has perfected its ability to operate as Henning knows it must:

Neither the narrator's discourse [...] nor the world he describes actually forms [...] a closed and unified system. [...] [L]ike the world that the narrator describes, his own processes of descriptive interpretation are also open to questioning, including self-questioning, and modification. The inquisitive probing into the fundamental principles of the hermeneutical, or methodological, system that the narrator's models would forcibly repress within the cylinder reappears in his own discourse to call for a reappraisal of the whole enterprise. Indeed, if this notion is maintained, there is really no more insistent subtheme in the book.



Every detail that thwarts the narrator's 'desire for a fully comprehensive, internally harmonious system' (Henning, 1988, p.183), confirms the accuracy of Henning's own system; the persistence of 'nagging irregularity' and every one of the 'inadequacies' which 'gradually undermine the narrator's confidence in his ability to see the full truth about the cylinder world' (Henning, 1988, pp.180-181), acclaims the full truth of Henning's account. That such comprehensive success revokes the very basis of Henning's own theoretical framework is not acknowledged.<sup>42</sup> Positioned at such a transcendent height above all discourse, Henning's criticisms of the narrator's 'superior vantage point' (Henning, 1988, p.172) apply with even more force to the operation of her own analysis:

As one who seeks an ideally cohesive and fully comprehensive system encompassing all levels of cylinder life, the

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<sup>42</sup> Henning judges that a certain degree of collusion with the modes of totalizing thought 'subjected to profound and sustained criticism' by Beckett is yet an 'inevitable' feature of his writing:

Harbouring an inevitable complicity with traditional modes and values, Beckett's work not only reproduces them but also, to some extent, contributes to their reinforcement and even legitimation. It is, in other words, symptomatic of its sociocultural context.

(Henning, 1988, p.196)

No recognition is accorded to the complicity with totalizing discourse displayed by Henning's own text. That the only discourse immune from the 'self-questioning' (Henning, 1988, p.194) which Henning considers universally advisable should be her own is a testimony to the infection of her theoretical model by the 'unthematized reservations, hesitations, and contradictions' it is used to theorize (Henning, 1988, p.3).

narrator clearly belongs to the dominant tradition. Nevertheless, his formulations allow for and perhaps indirectly encourage a carnivalesque or hermetic interpretation of the information he himself provides with a straight face. At crucial junctures this alternative seems almost unavoidable, though it is never consciously considered, let alone accommodated within the narrator's rigid, totalizing perspective.

(Henning, 1988, pp.190-191)

It is Henning who must be in possession of a 'fully comprehensive system' and a 'rigid, totalizing perspective' in order to position the narrator's desire for such possessions so firmly within 'the dominant tradition'. Henning's maintenance of a straight face at this 'crucial juncture', a blatant point of access for a carnivalesque appreciation of self-reflexive ironies in her own discourse, is indeed to be admired. The carnivalesque model, which places such emphasis upon recognition of conceptual fracture and discontinuity within totalizing systems of discourse, is employed by Henning as just such a totalizing discourse, one which organizes the qualities of all other discourses around its own binary terms of 'totalization' or 'carnivalesque'. To carry on such an operation, Henning must assume a self-defeating immunity from fracture and discontinuity within her own analysis.

The incoherence credited to the narrative of The Lost Ones finds a context within Henning's discourse which can re-describe

its behaviour as an exemplary textual system, for incoherence is the repressed tendency of all texts according to this analysis. In The Lost Ones itself, as Henning concedes:

the bits of knowledge, the little 'truths' discovered along the way prove so unstable and indeterminate that they could never add up to a complex, mosaic version of absolute knowledge. Eventually, the narrator reveals the existence of a fundamental conflict between the passion for searching and the ethos of the search. In practice, the aspect of need or desire always threatens to exceed or transgress the laws that control and regulate it.

(Henning, 1988, p.165)

The occurrence of inconsistencies in the narrator's account of the cylinder is precisely consistent with Henning's account of the operation of discourse. Where the coherence and comprehensiveness of other theoretical accounts of The Lost Ones are defeated by the instability of details in the narrative, Henning's account is sustained by just such anomalies. The 'fundamental conflict' between 'the passion for searching' and 'the ethos of the search', presumably to discover what is sought, does not apply to her own analysis, for in the pursuit of anomalies Henning's search is easily satisfied. The opinion that criticism of The Lost Ones unenlightened by Henning's methodology replicates more closely the operation of the text itself, is perhaps an awkward detail genuinely troublesome to Henning's preference for anomalies. More importantly, once put to work



under the guidance of a transcendent theoretical perspective armed with conceptual categories for the collection of discontinuities, inconsistencies and anomalies, such disruptive qualities in the narrative of The Lost Ones are transformed into regularities entirely consistent with the predictions of the theoretical scheme. The theoretical scheme organized to emphasize the importance of narrative disruption, in practice converts disruption into regularity within the context of its own theoretical perspective. The disruptions internal to the narrative of The Lost Ones cause no problem for Henning's critical account of the text. However, the fractures and contradictions considered endemic to discourse are displaced from the primary text only to re-emerge in the theoretical perspective under which The Lost Ones is transformed into a paradigm of discourse in general. It is here that the occurrence of anomalies and self-reflexive doubts are repressed. The way out of the contradictory narrative system of The Lost Ones offered by Henning operates at the cost of reinstating a system of unacknowledged contradiction within itself.

The chaos associated with the narrator's undirected observation of properties of the cylinder, which is reproduced by a reading which cannot get beyond the collection of inconsistent narrative statements in The Lost Ones, is transcended by Henning's application of a theoretical perspective, the 'intellectual complement' necessary to organize 'sensible experience' (Henning, 1988, p.172). From the 'superior vantage point' gained, Henning joins forces with the narrator of

The Lost Ones as he 'speculatively elaborates its system' (Henning, 1988, p.172). Henning's description of this enterprise applies equally to the narrator's account of the cylinder and her own account of that account:

his own 'light,' taking the form of an all-encompassing descriptive explanation, exhibits a [...] tendency to provide more or less adequate illumination of the broad surface of things while obscuring the more troublesome irregularities.

(Henning, 1988, p.187)

Henning, also in possession of 'an all-encompassing descriptive explanation' of The Lost Ones, whether specifically allegorical or regulated by a fixed theoretical perspective, is also prey to these failings. Henning's system is notable in swapping the source of 'troublesome irregularities' from The Lost Ones to her own all-encompassing explanation of it. As the narrative of the primary text is retrieved to regularity, the theoretical discourse, which contrives thus to transcend and render instructive the contradictions and aporiai pursued by its object, lapses back into an identical system of fracture within its own formulations. This is a complex route to self-defeat.

#### vii. Immanent analysis of The Lost Ones

Allegory may claim transcendence in relation to the details of its text in a manner analogous to a metaphysical transcendence

of empirical phenomena. The parallel may be drawn from Schopenhauer's formulation of the function of Plato's 'Idea' and Kant's 'thing-in-itself':

both declare the visible world to be a phenomenon which in itself is void and empty, and which has meaning and borrowed reality only through the thing that expresses itself in it (the thing-in-itself in the one case, the Idea in the other).

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §31, p.172)

The apprehension which is 'conscious of the true state of things' beyond the confusion of empirical detail and flux of appearances 'is transcendental' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §31, p.173).<sup>43</sup> The allegorist also is charged to discover the stable idea informing and organizing textual detail, and, in the case of The Lost Ones, the confusion and flux of details concerning the cylinder. The opposing perspective, satisfied merely with the phenomenon in all its instability, Schopenhauer names 'immanent' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §31, p.173).

The disadvantage of transcendent apprehension is that it requires of its followers the assumption of a perspective which

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<sup>43</sup> According to Schopenhauer, 'the most characteristic and important step of my philosophy' is to be found in this return of attention to 'the transition from the phenomenon to the thing-in-itself, given up by Kant as impossible' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.191). In Schopenhauer, as Desmond notes, 'we have access (contra Kant) to the thing-in-itself in our own will' (Desmond, 1988, p.105). This step marks Schopenhauer's reinstatement of metaphysical speculation in opposition to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.



is not available. Schopenhauer's pessimistic metaphysics, for example, require for their statement an overly optimistic estimation of Schopenhauer's ability to be conscious of the true state of things:

To the eye of a being who lived an incomparably longer life and took in at a single glance the human race in its whole duration, the constant alternation of birth and death would present itself merely as a continuous vibration.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.481)

It is unaccountable how Schopenhauer can provide a statement as to what would be apprehended from this perspective when it is described in such terms as to preclude its availability to Schopenhauer.<sup>44</sup> Beckett's Malone is more adept in his metaphysical chicanery:

I have pinned my faith to appearances, believing them to be vain. I shall not go into the details.

(Beckett, 1959, p.210)

The utility of faith in the detail of appearances is ruled out by their vanity, but neither will the transcendent perspective

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<sup>44</sup> The narrator of The Lost Ones includes among his repertoire an identical trick; consider his knowledge of the harmony of the niches:

Such harmony only he can relish whose long experience and detailed knowledge of the niches are such as to permit a perfect mental image of the entire system. But it is doubtful that such a one exists.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.11-12)

which sustains belief in this vanity bear detailed attention. It is the vanity of appearances which condemns the chances of the immanent route in epistemology for Schopenhauer:

naturalism, or the purely physical way of considering things, will never be sufficient; it is like a sum in arithmetic that never comes out. Beginningless and endless causal series, inscrutable fundamental forces, endless space, beginningless time, infinite divisibility of matter, and all this further conditioned by a knowing brain, in which alone it exists just like a dream and without which it vanishes - all these things constitute the labyrinth in which naturalism leads us incessantly round and round.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.177)

The existence of the cylinder in The Lost Ones and its attendant intractable complexities are similarly the product of the 'knowing brain' of the narrator; this labyrinth is constructed as an object of the narrative 'without which it vanishes'. Consequently, to transcend the intractable terms of the narrative in favour of a transcendent or allegorical interpretation is to presume an ability to describe the cylinder more adequately than the narrator, when it is only from the basis of these terms that the cylinder can be thought at all. The narrator's version of the cylinder is the only account available. And to be led 'incessantly round and round' by the contradictions and aporiai of this account, to read immanently rather than transcendentally or allegorically, to refrain from stabilizing these unstable

terms by recourse to theories of their ultimate significance, is at least to read the narrator's text. The qualities of the cylinder are defined by 'all the components' of the narrative, 'the sum of which it is' (Beckett, 1972, p.38).<sup>45</sup>

If the cylinder is tautologous with its blueprint in the narrative, analysis of the narrative should determine all that can be known of its qualities. To revert to analytic judgements is not to transcend the narrative, but to make explicit the implications contained in the concepts employed to define the cylinder. Analytic explication of a concept should add nothing to that concept which is not already implicitly contained within it. In so far as this rule is observed, an analytical approach to The Lost Ones is tautological with the concepts of which the narrative is made:

Analytic judgements really teach us nothing more about the object than what the concept which we have of it already contains; they do not extend our knowledge beyond the concept of the object, but only clarify the concept.

(Kant, 1933, A736/B764, p.591)

A comparable analytical restriction to the dramatic situation 'as stated' informs Beckett's rejection of any further 'exegesis' in

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<sup>45</sup> If allegories had not been foregone, proposition number one of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, which states that 'The world is all that is the case', might be called to mind (Wittgenstein, 1974, §1, p.5). That the system of the Tractatus should have been renounced by its author would doubtless appeal to the narrator's preference for unworkable methodologies in The Lost Ones.



regard to Endgame:

when it comes to journalists I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind. And to insist on the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue. If that's not enough for them, and it obviously isn't, it's plenty for us, and we have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.

(Beckett, 1983a, p.109)

To make the terms of Endgame 'as stated' explicit in production, and nothing beyond this, introduces themes of enclosure, limitation and a precision approaching that of mathematics into the staging process itself.<sup>46</sup> Interpretative stagings, like faulty analytic judgements, 'err [...] through introducing characteristics which do not really belong to the concept' (Kant,

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<sup>46</sup> It is the prerogative of mathematics, according to Kant, to 'say with certainty that what it did not intend to represent in its object by definition is not included in it', for 'the concept of the defined arises first from the definition, and it has no meaning at all other than that which the definition gives it' (Kant, 1949, §1, p.276). Beckett claims a similar right, if not to define, then to state the terms by which Endgame is constituted and to 'accept responsibility for nothing else' which goes beyond this statement (Beckett, 1983a, p.109).

1933, A732/B760, p.589); that is, introducing additions to how that concept has been stated in the text of the play which move beyond strictly inferential expansion. In the same manner, allegorical readings of The Lost Ones introduce conceptual additions which are strictly extraneous to the narrative 'as stated'. Allegorical structures are 'ampliative' or 'synthetic' for 'they add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it, and which no analysis could possibly extract from it' (Kant, 1933, A7/B11, p.48).<sup>47</sup> Analytical procedures, 'adding nothing through the predicate to the concept of the subject', are charged with 'merely breaking [the concept] up into those constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it, although confusedly' (Kant, 1933, A7/B11, p.48). Analysis can infer and thereby make explicit what is 'covertly' contained in the concept (Kant, 1933, A6/B10, p.48). Analysis must be carried out immanently, within the narrative of The Lost Ones as stated.<sup>48</sup> What results are headaches, not among the imported overtones, but among the covert inferences which may be drawn from the concepts of the narrative.

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<sup>47</sup> If the cylinder is not available for empirical inspection separately from its blueprint as stated in the narrative, the allegorist encounters problems similar to those Kant poses for the metaphysician. When 'I do not [...] have the advantage of looking around in the field of experience' to confirm an ampliative or synthetic judgement, the question arises as to 'Upon what, then, am I to rely, when I seek to go beyond the concept A, and to know that another concept B is connected with it?' (Kant, 1933, A9/B12-13, p.50). See below, Sections x-xii.

<sup>48</sup> Examination of The Lost Ones 'as stated' means a restriction to what Kenner calls its 'bleak externality of denotation', a process extended in Ping, which 'has not even verbs, simply specifications' (Kenner, 1973, p.179).



viii. The beginning and the end: 'The affair is thorny'

The conceptual determination of the beginning and end of the cylinder as stated by the narrator offers a system for analysis which rivals the dance of Moran's bees for intractable complexity.<sup>49</sup> Without any meddling in speculative allegorical identifications, the terms of the text itself provide what Moran discovers with 'rapture': 'something I can study all my life, and never understand' (Beckett, 1959, p.170). Although the narrator neglects to attend to it until past the halfway point of The Lost Ones, the beginning of the cylinder will be examined first:

In the beginning then unthinkable as the end all roamed without respite including the nurselings in so far as they were borne<sup>50</sup> except of course those already at the foot of the ladders or frozen in the tunnels the better to listen or crouching all eyes in the niches and so roamed a vast space of time impossible to measure until a first came to a standstill followed by a second and so on.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.34-35)

Nothing should exist of the cylinder or within it prior to its 'beginning'. Qualities or states ascribed to the cylinder or the bodies prior to their beginning, belong to nothing and nobody, to entities not yet called into existence. Yet the statement of

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<sup>49</sup> See Beckett, 1959, pp.169-170.

<sup>50</sup> Such 'nurselings' presumably have been born, if not 'borne', to the usual extent.



the situation within the cylinder at its beginning includes reference to searchers 'already' positioned 'at the foot of the ladders or frozen in tunnels' (Beckett, 1972, pp.34-35). These positions must have been taken up prior to the 'beginning' or existence of the cylinder. If the point of 'beginning' ascribed to the cylinder by the narrator is correct, the situation as stated is also one that is logically incoherent, for it assumes the existence of a state within the cylinder, complete with ladders and niches and ladder laws, prior to the beginning of the cylinder. What obtains 'already' here obtains before the beginning. When something occurs before the beginning of everything, the point of beginning has been misplaced.<sup>51</sup> The 'already' stationed are thoroughly problematic: besides existing anterior to the beginning of the cylinder, they mar the first

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<sup>51</sup> Similar considerations apply to Molloy, which begins prior to the protagonist's acknowledgement of its beginning:

Here's my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn't keep it. Here it is.

(Beckett, 1959, p.8)

Yet the work Molloy must clearly have commenced prior to any cogitations it contains concerning its own beginning. This beginning cannot be then be re-located further into the text by narrative fiat. The problem of assigning a beginning returns to exercise the narrator of The Unnamable:

[...] I am obliged to assign a beginning to my residence here, if only for the sake of clarity. Hell itself, although eternal, dates from the revolt of Lucifer. It is therefore permissible, in the light of this distant analogy, to think of myself as being here forever, but not as having been here forever.

(Beckett, 1959, p.298)

What results is a Kantian antinomy: the proposition of eternal existence and its negation are both maintained, as is the case in the 'First Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas' (Kant, 1933, A426/B454, p.396). The Unnamable suggests an emotional solution: 'One can be before beginning, they have set their hearts on that' (Beckett, 1959, p.355).

notable attribute of its inhabitants for 'In the beginning [...] all roamed without respite' (Beckett, 1972, p.34). 'All' do not roam for some are already 'frozen in the tunnels' (Beckett, 1972, p.35). These 'frozen' bodies have also come to a standstill prior to the body described by the narrator as the 'first' to do so.<sup>52</sup> The narrator's next line compounds all such conceptual convolutions:

But as to at this moment of time and there will be no other  
[...]

(Beckett, 1972, p.35)

We have travelled from the beginning through 'a vast space of time' (Beckett, 1972, p.35) to find now that all future succession in time has been abolished. Being bereft of further moments, the controversy above as to relative movement and immobility should at least be dissolved. No body can now at one moment be in one position and alter this position in the next, for the two moments necessary for this change to take place are now denied those within the cylinder. Nevertheless, the narrator proceeds to catalogue the bodies that 'endlessly come and go' and 'those who every now and then stand still' (Beckett, 1972, p.35). The existence of only one moment should not offer the space of

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<sup>52</sup> As noted earlier, the narrator experiences severe difficulties in deciding first places. After describing the impression made by the state of the ladders, the arrangement of the niches, the qualities of the tunnels, the categories of lost one, the peculiarities of the lulls, the cylinder walls, the rumours of a way out, the ladder laws and the zones within the cylinder, the narrator discovers that 'What first impresses in this gloom is the sensation of yellow it imparts' (Beckett, 1972, p.36, my emphasis).



time needed to 'every now and then' pursue an activity, let alone time for a pursuit to be undertaken 'endlessly'. The sense of these statements exclude each other but are each stated. Such is the general state of the cylinder at its beginning as sullied by analytic attentions. As this beginning is also defined as 'unthinkable' (Beckett, 1972, p.34), both the narrator's account and these cogitations upon it must presumably be cancelled and forgotten if we are to remain true to this additional specification.

According to Cohn, 'only in 1970 did Beckett think of the "unthinkable end"' (Cohn, 1973, p.260) of the cylinder, after beginning The Lost Ones in 1966. Taking merely four years to think the unthinkable is a considerable achievement. These conditions cannot exist together: if the unthinkable is thought, it is not unthinkable; if a thought is unthinkable, it cannot be thought. The Lost Ones chooses to claim this impossible disposition as its own by describing both the beginning and the end of the cylinder as 'unthinkable' precisely at the points in the narrative when they are actually being thought.<sup>53</sup> Having

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<sup>53</sup> The narrator of How It Is prefers to define its beginning and end as 'inconceivable':

one day one night at the inconceivable outset  
(Beckett, 1964, p.45)

all here in position at the inconceivable start of this  
caravan no impossible  
(Beckett, 1964, p.148)

The conception of the end is similarly, contradictorily, to be conceived as the 'inconceivable end of this immeasurable wallow' (Beckett, 1964, p.154). As is the case in The Lost Ones, however, we are lured into conceiving the beginning and the end of How It Is at these very moments when each is defined as



thought the unthinkable beginning and found it unthinkable by virtue of its contradictions, the beginning of the end may next be assessed:

So on infinitely until towards the unthinkable end if this notion is maintained a last body of all by feeble fits and starts is searching still. There is nothing at first sight to distinguish him from the others dead still where they stand or sit in abandonment beyond recall.

(Beckett, 1972, p.60)

The conjunction of concepts appealed to in the construction 'infinitely until' is concisely self-collapsing: a continuation that is stated to be infinite is pulled up short by its limiting condition, the 'until' which demarcates its end.<sup>54</sup> The cylinder continues 'infinitely until towards the unthinkable end': if the attribute of 'infinitely' is to be retained by this continuation, then its end is indeed 'unthinkable'. If it is the progression 'towards' the 'unthinkable end' that continues 'infinitely', then this end will be put securely out of reach. The additional condition, 'if this notion is maintained', could apply to the contradictory conceptual compound 'infinitely until', the existence of any movement 'towards the unthinkable end', the possibility that this movement will continue 'infinitely', the 'unthinkable end' itself, or the existence and activities of the

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inconceivable.

<sup>54</sup> How It Is similarly foreshortens the 'everlasting': 'Lent everlasting then of a sudden Hallowmas' (Beckett, 1964, p.18).

'last body'. The ambiguity as to which 'notion' is to receive the attentions of this clause is irresolvable. The implications of the refrain 'if this notion is maintained' are themselves equivocal: the phrase suggests that 'this notion', whichever is meant, might be 'maintained' while simultaneously suggesting its provisionality.

To avoid continuing activities in the cylinder after its end, the obverse oversight to that previously committed by beginning its activities prior to its beginning, it might be conceded that the 'last body' is 'searching still' while the cylinder is merely moving 'towards' its 'unthinkable end'. To maintain this notion, the cylinder must have continued 'infinitely until' it reached the point where a movement 'towards' the 'unthinkable end' comes into force. Infinite continuation then stops somewhere prior to its end. As the infinite cannot end, to call for its ending at a point anterior to where it could not previously end seems in fact to make matters worse. There is choice of inconsistencies; a choice so profuse that they are inconsistent with each another too. Neither is the 'last body of all' actually the last body in the cylinder, as there remain 'others' from which 'There is nothing at first sight to distinguish him'. Nevertheless, as he is the 'last body', which he also is not, the narrator's description does distinguish him successfully from the ranks of the 'others' and this at first sight.<sup>55</sup> This is, after all, the first aperçu

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<sup>55</sup> If 'An observer will not be able to spot the last man, still stirring among the others who seem dead, "at first sight"' (Brienza, 1977, p.154), it should indeed be asked how the

of the unthinkable end.

The narrator begins to switch attention from the 'last body' to the situation of those that contradict this description, his companions:

There is nothing at first sight to distinguish him from the others dead still where they stand or sit in abandonment beyond recall. Lying down is unheard of in the cylinder and this pose solace of the vanquished is for ever denied them here. Such privation is partly to be explained by the dearth of floor space namely a little under one square metre at the disposal of each body and not to be eked out by that of the niches and tunnels reserved for the search alone. Thus the prostration of those withered ones filled with the horror of contact and compelled to brush together without ceasing is denied its natural end.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.60-61)

The bodies additional to the 'last body' stand or sit 'dead still' and yet are 'compelled to brush together without ceasing' (Beckett, 1972, pp.60-61).<sup>56</sup> These immobile and moving bodies have now achieved a state of abandonment 'beyond recall'

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narrator is able to perform this task. If an observer cannot spot the last body at first sight, knowledge of his existence at first sight is mysterious. Perhaps a non-observer would fare better in seeing him.

<sup>56</sup> This contradiction obtains whether the compound 'dead still' emphasizes the immobility of the bodies or their continuation in being deceased. Movement would seem precluded in both cases.



(Beckett, 1972, p.60), a statement which seems to be an absolute beyond equivocation. Although the tunnels and niches are 'reserved for the search alone' (Beckett, 1972, p.61), the search has been abandoned, except by the 'last body'. So privileged is the last searcher, that all other bodies must suffer the privation of contact and an inability to find solace in prostration in order to reserve the tunnels and niches solely for his search. For lack of space, 'Lying down is unheard of in the cylinder' (Beckett, 1972, p.60), just as space is found in the narrative to let us hear what obtains concerning 'Lying down'. The result of the unavailability of the prostrate position is 'the prostration of those withered ones' (Beckett, 1972, p.61). We may, however, choose to remember an earlier qualification to the disposition of such 'non-searchers' and their commitment to the abandonment of searching:

By non-searchers and despite the abyss to which this leads it is finally impossible to understand other than ex-searchers. To rid this notion of some of its virulence one has only to suppose the need to search no less resurrectable than that of the ladder and those eyes to all appearances for ever cast down or closed possessed of the strange power suddenly to kindle again before passing face and body. But enough will always subsist to spell for this little people the extinction soon or late of its last remaining fires.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.14-15)

According to Connor, 'what there will be enough left of is the

capacity for diminishment' (Connor, 1988, p.105); as this sufficiency will 'always subsist' absolute extinction can never come about.<sup>57</sup> The paradoxical completeness of 'the all of nothing' cannot be reached so long as 'the least less' can be subtracted from it (Beckett, 1972, p.32). To maintain this notion revokes the possibility of the end envisaged by the narrator. Similarly, the notion concerning the resurrectability of the desire to search mars the final status of the non-searchers as 'beyond recall' (Beckett, 1972, p.60). Recall from this abyss has been achieved before:

if among these sedentary the need to climb is dead it is none the less subject to strange resurrections.

(Beckett, 1972, p.13-14)

A capacity which is 'dead' might be safely judged to be also 'beyond recall' (Beckett, 1972, p.60), but in the cylinder this is not quite accurate. The vacillation of bodies between categories of searcher and vanquished, a function of their 'strange resurrections' (Beckett, 1972, p.14), has previously caused difficulties in the reckoning of the cylinder's population. If we accept that during the 'unthinkable end', the companions to the 'last body' are 'beyond recall' (Beckett, 1972, p.60) even for some interval of time and with whatever danger of

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<sup>57</sup> Zeno's account of the arrow which can never reach its target or the race which can never be completed is an analogous paradox. The arrow or runner must complete half of its course, then a quarter, then an eighth and so on infinitely to ever smaller fractions, but never the zero distance which would signal the end of the journey.



resurrection, further diversion may be drawn from the formula granted us to calculate population figures.

Bodies 'beyond recall' (Beckett, 1972, p.60) might be considered sufficiently vanquished to be allowed to swell the ranks of the five vanquished previously existent (Beckett, 1972, p.35). At its point of having five extant vanquished, the total population of the cylinder works out to a figure of 205 complete bodies. Let it be assumed, despite evidence of wild fluctuations on the way, that at the 'unthinkable end', the population remains at this figure. As the 'last body' yet retains a desire to search, he must be subtracted from the ranks of the vanquished non-searchers, who number now 204.<sup>58</sup> The population formula states that there are four times as many sedentary as vanquished ( $4 \times 204 = 816$ ), three times as many of the second order than sedentary ( $3 \times 816 = 2448$ ) and twice as many of the lowest searchers than of the second order ( $2 \times 2448 = 4896$ ). When there are only 204 vanquished bodies and one remaining searcher within the cylinder, the population formula also decrees the existence of 8160 other bodies shared between the three lower ranks. The total population is now 8365; when the last searcher relents and

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<sup>58</sup> Two bodies are identified in the cylinder at this point, the last searcher and the woman vanquished, otherwise recognized as the north pole. Consequently, following the population formula backwards cannot be accurate, although to reverse its relations is not to depart from what can be inferred from its statement. If there is one searcher, and if he might be claimed as a lower searcher, the formula would give the result that in the second group there exists 0.5 of body (for group one's being twice group two also means that group two is half group one), 0.16 recurring of a sedentary and 0.041666 of a vanquished. This is clearly not enough vanquished to fulfil the requirements of the narrative.



attains the status of vanquished, it will be 8405, 8200 of which, if the sedentary may be included, will ruin the claim of the 'last searcher' to be the last by continuing to search. The scarcity of space, it may be assumed, will become even more pressing. As the cylinder moves towards its end and in accordance more searchers become vanquished non-searchers, more unvanquished searchers are required to come into existence. If the notions of the population formula are maintained beyond the moment of their statement, the cylinder can never be populated solely by the vanquished, for concomitant with the creation of more vanquished is the creation of ever more searchers. As more searchers abandon the search, the number of bodies pursuing the search increases to an ever more exorbitant figure. Movement toward stasis in the cylinder, itself a conceptual curiosity, is rendered inherently self-defeating: the net result of additional abandonment and immobility amongst the bodies is an exponential increase in the frenetic activity of searching. When the cylinder takes one step toward its end, it multiplies the steps it takes back to its reactivation.

It is not clear whether 'The mite still in the white-haired woman's clasp' (Beckett, 1972, p.61) is to be counted among the population of the cylinder or to which category he might belong. What is curious is his continuation as a 'mite' while the cylinder has progressed 'on infinitely until' this point of 'the unthinkable end' (Beckett, 1972, p.60). The abode is now defined as 'old' and the 'vanquished of the third zone' as 'aged' (Beckett, 1972, p.61) but the 'mite' has not developed from this

condition since he and the white-haired woman were first noticed as a 'Picturesque detail':

Picturesque detail a woman with white hair still young to judge by her thighs<sup>59</sup> leaning against the wall with eyes closed in abandonment and mechanically clasping to her breast a mite who strains away in an effort to turn its head and look behind.

(Beckett, 1972, p.30)

At the moment of this description, many are 'still unrelenting' (Beckett, 1972, p.31). During the interval between this moment and the supposed depletion of the unrelenting to merely one, the development of the mite is to regress towards an increasingly insubstantial state:

The mite still in the white-haired woman's clasp is no more than a shadow in her lap.

(Beckett, 1972, p.61)

With reference back to the state of the cylinder prior to the coming of this unthinkable end, several other odd details emerge. For the end to occur, the 'faithful who endlessly come and go' (Beckett, 1972, p.35, my emphasis), must have been earlier misdescribed. After the delineation of the rules governing the use of ladders, the prerogatives of the queue, a body's right to

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<sup>59</sup> There is a certain novelty in making a judgement as to youthfulness upon the appearance of 'her thighs' while ignoring the more usual evidence of 'white hair' (Beckett, 1972, p.30).

one complete circuit of the climbing zone and the regulations governing access and departure from that zone, the narrator leaves the system to its autonomous operations: 'And so on infinitely' (Beckett, 1972, p.50). With hindsight, the system does not continue 'infinitely'. Earlier, a searcher of the arena may have been forced to endure an 'interminable' wait for a departure from the ladder zone filled to capacity by climbers and carriers; now, the system has broken down:

At the foot of the ladders propped against the wall with scant regard to harmony no climber waits his turn.

(Beckett, 1972, p.61)

Either the rules of climbing have been abandoned, so that 'no climber waits his turn' but climbs at will, or the ladder zone itself has been abandoned. In the case of either possibility, the system previously inaugurated has not carried 'on infinitely' (Beckett, 1972, p.50).

With regard to the final state of the twin storms of temperature and light within the cylinder, reference backwards reveals unexpected accuracy from the narrator. As the last searcher ceases, the environment within his world responds in kind:

He himself after a pause impossible to time finds at last his place and pose whereupon dark descends and at the same instant the temperature comes to rest not far from freezing



point.

(Beckett, 1972, p.62)

Describing the condition at the 'last state' (Beckett, 1972, p.63) of the cylinder very early in his narrative, the narrator's second sentence is thoroughly consistent with his own final reckoning:

Then light and climate will be changed in a way impossible to foretell. But the former may be imagined extinguished as purposeless and the latter fixed not far from freezing point.

(Beckett, 1972, p.15)

A query might be lodged as to what purpose the light 'that not only dims but blurs into the bargain' (Beckett, 1972, p.38) served at any time in the cylinder, but nevertheless the narrator's prediction here is for once in harmony with his second aperçu of the same subject. The only difficulty associated with this exact foretelling of the climatic alteration of the cylinder at its climax, its climatic condition we might say in a double sense, is that the narrator also chooses to assure us that it would 'be changed in a way impossible to foretell' (Beckett, 1972, p.15). In this rarest of cases, where two of the narrator's statements display admirable consistency, a third exists to deny the possibility of the accord that has actually been achieved. Here, where the narrator is proved right, he proves himself wrong in the same sentence.

An accusation of consistency on the part of the narrator, then, is 'Hushed in the same breath' (Beckett, 1972, p.62). Instantaneously with the 'rest' of the climate, 'all the faint breathings put together' of the individual bodies are replaced by the collective silence of 'the same breath':

Hushed in the same breath the faint stridulence mentioned above whence suddenly such silence as to drown all the faint breathings put together.

(Beckett, 1972, p.62)

The noise of 'breathings' cannot compete to be heard above the odd din of this silence which drowns them out. This paradoxical event is the last of any kind in the cylinder:

So much roughly speaking for the last state of the cylinder and of this little people of searchers one first of whom if a man in some unthinkable past for the first time bowed his head if this notion is maintained.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.62-63)

The impossible task has changed. Narrator and reader are now suddenly thinking of the cylinder in its 'unthinkable past' (Beckett, 1972, p.63). The end of cylinder was to occur 'imperceptibly' so as to catch the searchers 'unawares' (Beckett, 1972, p.15); the narrative has played precisely this trick upon the reader. Between the gap of this last sentence and its predecessor, wherein the cylinder still existed to be drowned in

silence, its 'unthinkable end' has occurred leaving only its 'unthinkable past' to be thought. In the last words of the penultimate sentence, concepts concerning the condition of the cylinder were still being 'put together' to describe its progression toward the end (Beckett, 1972, p.62). While something existed to progress towards dissolution, the state of the cylinder could continue to be narrated; upon completion of the process of dissolution, nothing remains of the cylinder to describe. The actual point where progression towards absence transforms into completion, the climactic, crowning moment of the narrative, is contained between a full stop and a capital letter.<sup>60</sup>

So much for the 'unthinkable end' for, as the end of the cylinder has pre-empted the end of the narrative, we now have its 'unthinkable past' with which to contend. As the end of the cylinder was 'unthinkable', thinking about its past, which the narrator undertakes to do after this impossible end, presents its own difficulties. Furthermore, the narrator is now profligate with his use of 'first' and 'last', absolutes which have in the thinkable past proved especially troublesome. The 'first' of 'this little people of searchers', then, has 'bowed his head' and this in the past tense. The last action described in the

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<sup>60</sup> The exaggeration of understatement into an absence of statement on some crucial event occurs earlier in Molloy; as Kenner notes:

[...] Moran meets a man who resembles himself, enquiring after an old man with a stick. [...] He kills this man. It is the most perfunctory killing in literature, occurring as it does in the interval between two sentences.

(Kenner, 1973, p.99)



narrative is not contemporaneous with the moment of its narration; the 'bowed' head of which we are now thinking is an object of the cylinder's unthinkable past. Hitherto, we have been waiting for the 'last of all' searchers (Beckett, 1972, p.62) to become 'motionless and bowed' like the 'aged vanquished of the third zone' who 'has none about him now but others in his image' (Beckett, 1972, p.61). But the last sentence cannot describe the last searcher's decision to submit to becoming vanquished: the narrator instead reminisces about 'one' from among 'this little people of searchers' who was distinguished as being the 'first' to have 'bowed his head' (Beckett, 1972, p.63, my emphasis). We are at the other extreme to the searcher who bows his head 'last of all' (Beckett, 1972, p.61). Yet a connection between these two opposites, the 'last' searcher before the end of the cylinder and the 'first' referred to by the sentence which comes after its end, is installed by the narrator. The 'last of all' has a special conditional clause attached to him:

And sure enough there he stirs this last of all if a man  
[...].

(Beckett, 1972, p.61)

There he opens then his eyes this last of all if a man  
[...].

(Beckett, 1972, p.62)

In the last sentence too, this is a recurring condition:

So much roughly speaking for the last state of the cylinder and of this little people of searchers one first of whom if a man [...] bowed his head [...].

(Beckett, 1972, p.62-63, my emphasis)

These two bodies are connected by a conditional clause and opposed by the narrator's certainty that they are the first and last respectively. Like the light, they occupy 'contiguous extremes', a conceptual compound which is indeed 'shaken by a vertiginous tremolo' each time an attempt is made to think it (Beckett, 1972, p.16). And it may indeed be inquired whether the 'first' among the 'little people of searchers' to bow 'his head' was 'a man' (Beckett, 1972, p.63), for the 'first among the vanquished' (Beckett, 1972, p.62) to whom the last among the vanquished returns, may be re-identified by her 'red head sunk to the uttermost' (Beckett, 1972, p.61) and position as a 'guide' (Beckett, 1972, p.62) as 'the woman vanquished' (Beckett, 1972, p.56).

The inspection to which she is subjected by the last searcher is not the first of its kind. At all times in the cylinder, the searcher is at liberty to 'raise the lid to examine the eye' (Beckett, 1972, pp.57-58) of a vanquished body. In the last act of searching in the cylinder, the last searcher returns to the first to desist: contiguous extremes meet again. Throughout his delineation of the 'unthinkable end' (Beckett, 1972, p.60), the narrator's main focus has been upon the 'last of all' (Beckett, 1972, p.62); in his last sentence, the

narrator, with all of 'this little people of searchers' from which to choose, also returns to the first of all:

So much roughly speaking for the last state of the cylinder and of this little people of searchers one first of whom if a man in some unthinkable past for the first time bowed his head if this notion is maintained.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.62-63)

The last act of the narrative is to switch attention from the 'last state of the cylinder' to the first 'bowed [...] head' (Beckett, 1972, p.63). Having moved beyond the end of the cylinder, the narrative thinks itself back to a situation contemporaneous with merely the beginning of the end. The actions of the last searcher to relent returns him to the first. At the end of the cylinder, the first does not come to the last; the last moves towards the first. There is one other example of contiguous extremes: the beginning and ending of the narrative itself. The penultimate sentence of the narrative is the last aperçu of the cylinder:

Hushed in the same breath the faint stridulence mentioned above whence suddenly such silence as to drown all the faint breathings put together.

(Beckett, 1972, p.62)

The first aperçu of the cylinder presents almost immediately a teasing statement of this end:



The light. [...] Its restlessness at long intervals suddenly stilled like panting at the last. Then all go dead still. It is perhaps the end of their abode. A few seconds and all begins again.

(Beckett, 1972, p.7)

Less than 'A few seconds' separates the end of the narrator's penultimate sentence and the beginning of his last, where we are thought back to the time of the 'first' searcher to desist (Beckett, 1972, p.63). From this temporal position onwards, 'all begins again' (Beckett, 1972, p.7). Tunnelling analytically through the narrative as stated towards to its point of exit, drops us, suitably breathless by now, back to the original point of entrance into this labyrinth.

As 'time flies' between beginning the narrative and coming to the point of its end, we find like the Unnamable that:

the metamorphosis is accomplished, of unchanging future into unchangeable past. Eh? Another thing, but of a different order. The affair is thorny.

(Beckett, 1959, p.370)

At the completion of the narrative, its past terms are 'unchangeable' and, as the reader is positioned by its end back at its beginning, the terms of the narrative promise an 'unchanging future' (Beckett, 1959, p.370) for its contradictions and inconsistencies are to be gone through again. And at last,

having been unable to negotiate these terms again,<sup>61</sup> we reach the end again and all begins once more. Yet a 'metamorphosis is accomplished' (Beckett, 1959, p.370), for possibly there is 'The dulling effect of habit, how do they deal with that?'; equally, 'suffering' (Beckett, 1959, p.370) may be lessened, constant or increased, for the Unnamable is at least comprehensive in the inconsistent options he supplies. Neither is this analogy an explanatory way out of The Lost Ones, unless contradictory terms may be thought to elucidate contradictory terms:<sup>62</sup> it is rather another thing, but of the same order.

#### ix. More residua

Like the tunnels constructed by the searchers which are either 'abandoned blind' or lead back into the cylinder (Beckett, 1972, p.12), the route of analysis through The Lost Ones leads to the discovery of many little dead-end aporiai which lie covertly in the terms of the narrative and ultimately, just when an exit is promised, to the major aporia of the text, the return to the beginning whereupon all the little aporiai may be activated again. The well-constructed maze, after all, encourages its inmates to go round in circles as well as bringing them to dead-ends. According to Kant, however, analytic

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<sup>61</sup> A journey undertaken 'first in one disorder, then in another' as the dust-jacket to Lessness has it (Beckett cited in Pilling, 1979, p.173).

<sup>62</sup> How a 'metamorphosis is accomplished' in relation to entities which are 'unchanging' and 'unchangeable' respectively is at least thorny; the distinction between 'Another thing' and one that is 'different' (Beckett, 1959, p.370) is also admirably subtle.

judgements should display the capacity 'to dispel falsehood and error' and, additionally, in their 'positive employment', facilitate 'the knowing of truth' (Kant, 1933, A151/B190, p.190). It is 'The principle of contradiction' which 'must [...] be recognized as being the universal and completely sufficient principle of all analytic knowledge' (Kant, 1933, A151/B191, p.190):

if the judgement is analytic, whether negative or affirmative, its truth can always be adequately known in accordance with the principle of contradiction. The reverse of that which as concept is contained and is thought in the knowledge of the object, is always rightly denied. But since the opposite of the concept would contradict the object, the concept itself must necessarily be affirmed of it.<sup>63</sup>

(Kant, 1933, A151/B190-191, p.190)

To unpack analytically the concepts of the narrative of The Lost Ones as stated, is to find endemic contradiction and inconsistency between conceptual terms. Being contradictory, the notions contained in these terms cannot at one and the same time be true: the narrator states how the cylinder is, and analysis

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<sup>63</sup> For example, 'if I say, no unlearned man is learned, the proposition is analytic, since the property, unlearnedness, now goes to make up the concept of the subject, and the truth of the negative judgement then becomes evident as an immediate consequence of the principle of contradiction' (Kant, 1933, A153/B192, p.191). Neither does the analytic judgement go beyond what is implicitly thought in the concept; that 'learnedness' excludes 'unlearnedness' is a tautology.



must maintain that the cylinder cannot be like that. But howsoever the narrator's 'point of view' cannot be maintained, it is also true, as stated in Imagination Dead Imagine, that 'there is no other' (Beckett, 1984, p.146).

In The Lost Ones, according to Dearlove:

the narrator's powers of perception separate him from us. If it were not for the narrator, we would draw false conclusions about the cylinder.

(Dearlove, 1982, p.134)

The narrator, it may be contended, does little else but draw conclusions about the cylinder which are subsequently proved untenable by the addition of further inconsistent conclusions. Judgement as to the state of the cylinder is caught between inconsistent assertions, a state of 'antinomy' between the 'thetic' and 'antithetic':

If thetic be the name for any body of dogmatic doctrines, antithetic may be taken as meaning, not dogmatic assertions of the opposite, but the conflict of the doctrines of seemingly dogmatic knowledge (thesis cum antithesi) in which no one assertion can establish superiority over another."

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"The first 'antinomy of pure reason' which Kant examines divides into a conflict between the thesis that 'The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space' and the antithetical proposition that 'The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space' (Kant, 1933, A427/B455, p.396). Starting from either thesis or antithesis, Kant's analysis aims to demonstrate that

Were it not for the narrator, however, nothing whatsoever would obtain of the cylinder: its conceptual existence is not separable from the narrative of The Lost Ones. Amongst the residua, Closed Place, a text which revisits more than the topography of The Lost Ones, chooses to state explicitly the reader's absolute reliance upon the narrator:

Closed place. All needed to be known for say is known. There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing. What goes on in the arena is not said. Did it need to be known it would be. No interest. Not for imagining. Place consisting of an arena and a ditch. Between the two skirting the latter a track. Closed place. Beyond the ditch there is nothing. This is known because it needs to be said. Arena black vast. Room for millions. Wandering and still.

(Beckett, 1984, p.199)

Beckett refused to 'accept responsibility' for anything placed under the auspices of Endgame beyond its situation 'as stated' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109). Amongst the residua, the restriction that 'There is nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199)

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'the assertion of the opposite has, on its side, grounds that are just as valid and necessary' (Kant, 1933, A422/B449, p.394). Both may be equally supported, yet each excludes the other. Analysis of The Lost Ones involves the reader in comparable conceptual tangles, on comparable subjects, as the narrator maintains two or more incompatible statements where the maintenance of one should cancel support of the others.

reappears as a crucial factor in the interior definition of their conceptual objects.<sup>65</sup> These conceptual entities increase in complexity as the narrative adds to their definitions. It is the prerogative also of the narrator to introduce alterations to these definitions; thus, in Closed Place, 'The lots still bright are square. Appear square' (Beckett, 1984, p.199). The qualification is implemented as quickly as it can be thought: dealing in conceptual structures, their nature can be transformed purely by fiat. What is 'known' of these conceptual objects is entirely dependent upon 'what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199). When what is said alters or modulates, the concept transforms itself simultaneously. The residua inaugurate worlds by narrative fiat. These texts are not, in Kant's terms, 'reproductive' or representative of a pre-existent object, but are rather autonomously 'productive' of their own imaginative objects (Kant, 1952, Part I, §22, p.86). The narrator of each text is endowed with a 'performative power to make all by fiat' (Miller, 1987, p.70):

The genius, according to Kant, imitates nature not by copying it, but by duplicating the manner of its production. As God spoke nature into existence by means of the divine word and by means of his Son, the Word, so the genius [...] speaks into existence a heterocosm which adds something hitherto unheard-of to nature. [...] This new beauty is beyond measure by any slavish standards of mirroring

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<sup>65</sup> As Pilling points out, Lessness is also 'intent on demonstrating that there is literally nothing beyond the propositions that are being uttered' (Pilling, 1979, p.151).



correspondence to things as they are.

(Miller, 1987, pp.66-67)

In Beckett's Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, representation, whatever its shifts in focus 'from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration' (Beckett, 1965, p.124), is merely one stop on 'a dreary road' of artistic convention (Beckett, 1965, p.103). The narrator of The Lost Ones, however, might claim common cause with M.C. Escher's 'impossible staircases, architectural Möbius strips' and other 'teasing constructions of visual nonsense' (Albright, 1981, p.14). Such empirically impossible structures are as 'genuinely antimimetic' (Albright, 1981, p.14) as Miller could desire. In Cézanne's painting, inconsistencies begin the disruption of reference to the real:

Inconsistencies in Cézanne's paintings have frequently been pointed out: the most famous being his Kitchen Table (Jeu de Paume, Paris), in which, if we follow the edge of the table under the tablecloth, it does not meet at the other end. But in the extraordinary Still Life with a Gingerjar and Eggplant (Metropolitan Museum, New York), we are dealing with more than such simple inconsistencies. [...] [Cézanne] was prepared to invade the world of the objects and rearrange their relationship to the natural world. It mattered not a jot to Cézanne that if you hold a plate at a certain angle everything will roll off it [...].

(Peter, 1987, pp.224-225)

Chirico's The Philosopher's Conquest (1914; Art Institute of Chicago) similarly incorporates both 'unmoving clouds of smoke' and 'flags fluttering in the wind' as part of 'an a-logical visual scheme' (Peter, 1987, p.233). The paintings of Cézanne and Chirico, as well as Matisse, Braque and other Cubists, 'bear the mark of a despotic artist, who imposed himself upon reality' (Peter, 1987, p.225). As Albright speculates, 'If mimesis cannot be slain, perhaps it can be tricked into committing suicide' (Albright, 1981, p.14) via such techniques as these. Allegorical readings of The Lost Ones which endeavour to restore a referential function to the text must similarly founder on its cultivation of empirical impossibilities. The work of each artist here endeavours to remove itself from what Beckett depreciates in Three Dialogues as 'the plane of the feasible' (Beckett, 1965, p.103).

Where the definition of a conceptual object is thus purely the product of the interior determinations of a text, rather than guided by reference to the real, an opportunity is created for exhaustive analysis of that concept, for it contains only what has been put into it via 'what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199). The fabricated conceptual objects of Beckett's residua hold out the temptation of 'complete exposition, that is, [...] definition' (Kant, 1933, A730-731/B758-759, p.588):

A concept which I have invented I can always define; for since it is not given to me either by the nature of the understanding or by experience, but is such as I have myself

deliberately made it to be, I must know what I have intended to think in using it.

(Kant, 1933, A729/B757, p.587, my emphasis)

Analogously, in 1967, between the composition of Ping and Lessness, Beckett is reported to have associated 'the value of the theatre' with the satisfaction of defining an artificial structure, 'a world of one's own':

One must make a world of one's own in order to satisfy one's need to know, to understand, one's need for order ... There for me, lies the value of the theatre. One turns out a small world with its own laws, conducts the actions as if upon a chessboard [...].

(Beckett cited in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.15)

Ping opens with the declaration 'All known' (Beckett, 1984, p.149);<sup>66</sup> it closes with the exact judgement 'ping over' (Beckett, 1984, p.151). The cylinder of The Lost Ones is exactly what every statement of the narrative makes it. In the completed text, these terms are fixed and unchangeable. In alliance with his counterparts in the other residual texts, the narrator of The Lost Ones must be permitted to make a striking declaration:

in the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found and without

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<sup>66</sup> If the situation of Ping is co-extensive with its statement in the narrative then it may be correctly asserted that 'All' is indeed 'known' concerning this situation. The narrative itself is necessarily the exclusive source of knowledge about its own invention; what is not said does not exist in relation to it.



nothing but mystery.

(Beckett, 1972, p.42)

In the context of the residua, where 'There is nothing but what is said' and 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), no irony need be attached to the narrator's contention. Each statement as to what obtains in and of the cylinder is fixed and certain: the concept of the cylinder simply is what these statements define it to be. There exists no independent object exterior to the narrative in comparison to which the narrator's conceptual determination of the cylinder could be judged to be inadequate.

x. 'What is it I want? [...] I want to see the dog'

The accuracy of the narrator's version of the cylinder in The Lost Ones cannot be disputed as if some other object were available separately from the text for the purpose of verifying these specifications. In respect of critical complaints concerning the narrator's mistaken delineation of the cylinder, the question must be posed, as compared to what? Murphy is particularly unhappy with the final section of The Lost Ones:

The narrator (like Beckett) is trapped by the cylinder, by the realities of his creation or discovery. Section 15 attempts 'a way out' of this dilemma by imagining the end of the searchers. The epilogue is, however, a patent falsification of the reality of the work in the interests

of a rhetorical closure that will satisfy the narrator's need for order.

(Murphy, 1982, p.74)

Whether thinking an end that is simultaneously defined as 'unthinkable' (Beckett, 1972, p.63) is the best way to satisfy a 'need for order' (Murphy, 1982, p.74) is matter for a different dispute. This section, however, cannot be a 'falsification of the reality of the work' (Murphy, 1982, p.74), when it is the reality of the work. There is nothing exterior to the text which it can be judged to falsify. The fifteenth section is the end of the narrative; like moments in the cylinder, 'there will be no other' (Beckett, 1972, p.35). If the ending is considered inconsistent with the logic of the rest of the text, this inconsistency is also the reality of the work: it can be concluded that the ending is inconsistent, but not that it is a 'falsification' (Murphy, 1982, p.74). The ending, like the rest of the cylinder, simply is what its statement makes it. According to Murphy again:

the reader need not be a silent victim of the author's designs; we are not compelled to accept the form in which the work is cast nor to believe it.

(Murphy, 1990, p.106)

Declining to 'accept the form in which the work is cast' (Murphy, 1990, p.106) would seem to be identical with rejecting The Lost Ones as an object of discussion. The work takes no other form

than the one in which it is cast. Brater is more circumspect in recommending departures from the text:

Sometimes it [...] becomes necessary to reposition elements in a sentence or to add new elements to them in order to extract some elementary point of reference. Yet in these instances the reader experiences the same insecurity in 'correcting' the sentences in The Lost Ones as he does in checking the figures of the narrator's mathematics: we are never quite sure that the adjusted syntax sufficiency transmits the true sense of what the grammatically 'inaccurate' sentences have been designed to imply.

(Brater, 1983, p.105)

Again, nothing is available for inspection in comparison to which these sentences may be judged as being in need of '"correcting"' (Brater, 1983, p.105). Their 'true sense' is not something distinct from what they actually state. If statements are grammatically inaccurate and cultivate obscurity as to even 'some elementary point of reference', this is a quality which cannot be conjured away by replacing ambiguous statements with their 'true sense' (Brater, 1983, p.105). As Brater makes clear, in the case of ambiguity it is this 'true sense' which is missing, but what is absent cannot be appealed to in order to dissolve ambiguity.

In The Lost Ones, the reader is given 'nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199); by virtue of this restriction, the



reader is considerably disadvantaged in relation to the searchers of the cylinder, for notable provisions are made in the cylinder to prevent their 'quest' from becoming a 'mockery':

It is enjoined by a certain ethics not to do unto others what coming from them might give offence. This precept is largely observed in the cylinder in so far as it does not jeopardize the quest which would clearly be a mockery if in case of doubt it were not possible to check certain details.

(Beckett, 1972, p.58)

The defining feature which converts the good order of the search into a 'mockery' comes into force when 'in case of doubt' it is not possible 'to check certain details' (Beckett, 1972, p.58). For the reader, it is never possible to check any of the manifold doubtful details of the cylinder. There is nothing beyond any of the narrator's doubtful assertions to which an appeal may be made for adjudication. The searchers, by contrast, may instigate direct empirical investigations in order to gain 'elucidation' with respect to their doubtful 'details':

Direct action with a view to their elucidation is generally reserved for the persons of the sedentary and vanquished.<sup>67</sup> Face or back to the wall these normally offer but a single aspect and so may have to be turned the other way. But

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<sup>67</sup> It is to be 'the persons' of the sedentary and vanquished who are open to investigation (Beckett, 1972, p.59); the ambiguity of this sentence converts the bodies which are to be investigated momentarily into those of the investigators.

wherever there is motion as in the arena or among the watchers and the possibility of encompassing the object there is no call for such manipulations.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.58-59)

The cylinder itself cannot be manipulated in the same way by the reader. Each detail concerning the cylinder is 'Seen from a certain angle' (Beckett, 1972, p.13), that determined by the narrator.<sup>68</sup> Where the reader receives 'but a single aspect', he cannot independently turn this conceptual object the other way around; the adjustment needed to permit 'the possibility of encompassing the object' (Beckett, 1972, p.59). Where a second or third aperçu is undertaken into what are putatively the same details, the majority of the results stated are inconsistent. In both cases, what obtains in and of the cylinder is always mediated by the narrator; direct empirical inspection to verify incomplete or incompatible details is not possible.

To sort out the conceptual clashes supplied by the narrator of The Lost Ones, we should need to follow the empirical procedure envisaged by Molloy, designed to provide determinate evidence concerning the objects which exercise him:

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<sup>68</sup> The partiality of the angle of vision assumed by the narrator is often acknowledged. The 'two narrow rings turning in opposite directions about the teeming precinct' is an 'impression' which may 'at times' be given, but only when the scene is 'suitably lit from above' (Beckett, 1972, p.29). What is seen from other angles is not stated. '[T]he wall' that 'presents an unbroken surface all the way round and up to the ceiling' presents this appearance only when 'Seen from below' (Beckett, 1972, p.55).

What is it I want? Ah that tone I know, compounded of pity, of fear, of disgust. I want to see the dog, see the man, at close quarters, know what smokes, inspect the shoes, find out other things.

(Beckett, 1959, p.13)

Lacking this chance of verification, Molloy's speculations concerning his objects remain entirely groundless: 'all that proved nothing, refuted nothing' (Beckett, 1959, p.12). Within The Lost Ones, the narrator at least is not going to have hypotheses maintained when an appeal to empirical evidence suggests the opposite conclusions. Empirical observation is needed, inappropriately, in order to determine the proper progress of the destruction of the searchers' eyes:

It might safely be maintained that the eye grows used to these conditions and in the end adapts to them were it not that just the contrary is to be observed in the slow deterioration of vision ruined by this fiery flickering murk and by the incessant straining for ever vain with concomitant moral distress and its repercussion on the organ.

(Beckett, 1972, p.38)

Empirical observation pierces the 'flickering murk' to see 'the slow deterioration of vision'; it can be seen that all 'straining' to see is 'for ever vain' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). A hypothesis is refuted by empirical observation and the latter



procedure vindicated. Except, that on the facing page, attention to empirical evidence leads to a 'mistaken conclusion' on the same subject:

And the thinking being coldly intent on all these data and evidences could scarcely escape at the close of his analysis the mistaken conclusion that instead of speaking of the vanquished with the slight taint of pathos attaching to the term it would be more correct to speak of the blind and leave it at that.

(Beckett, 1972, p.39)

Data and evidences, the basis of the empirical method, are now unreliable. It should also be noted that the evidence appealed to in this case is additionally defined as 'insensible' and 'unperceived' (Beckett, 1972, p.39), qualities would seem to disqualify its eligibility for empirical apprehension. For the reader, every scrap of the 'data and evidences' (Beckett, 1972, p.39) cited by the narrator is unverifiable and perceived only conceptually. The reader has no empirical evidence whatsoever concerning the cylinder, but rather incommensurable hypotheses. Similarly, the narrator's thoughts about the swiftness or otherwise of queues appeal to a merely illusory empirical grounding:

The short queue is not necessarily the most rapid and such a one starting fifth may well find himself first before such another starting tenth assuming of course they start

together. This being so no wonder that the choice of the queue is determined by considerations having nothing to do with its length.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.47-48)

If the narrator were really watching the progress of his exemplary queues, rather than marshalling support for the hypothesis of the searchers' other 'considerations' when choosing a queue, he might notice that the examples employed to substantiate his original contention in fact contradict it. To verify the notion that 'The short queue is not necessarily the most rapid', the narrator points to the useful example of a searcher at a shorter queue gaining first place more rapidly than a searcher waiting at a longer queue.<sup>69</sup> The narrator's example, in relation to his hypothesis, is wrong; the narrator's hypothesis, in relation to his example, is also wrong. If it were established that the longer queue might be the more rapid,

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<sup>69</sup> Amiran picks the right example for the wrong reasons to qualify his judgement that The Lost Ones presents a 'world of high certainty' (Amiran, 1993, p.168):

At the same time, Beckett carefully infuses [...] a spirit of randomness and unaccountability. The climbers in The Lost Ones, for instance, may wait long at the queues to the niches, or they may not, so that the wait for a ladder does not correlate with the length of a line to that ladder, as compared to the wait at another line. Just when it appears that life is regular and predictable, our information is made imprecise by intangible factors (here the whim of the climbers).

(Amiran, 1993, p.172)

In the first place, if the longer queue were determined as quicker in the narrator's example, this departure from the 'regular and predictable' would actually have been predicted; regularly, such irregularities may occur. This would increase precision rather than otherwise. In the second place, the narrator does not unproblematically maintain any such thing.

it would then be 'no wonder that the choice of the queue is determined by considerations having nothing to do with its length' (Beckett, 1972, p.48); as this is not decisively established, this second contention breaks down also.<sup>70</sup> For the reader, there is no empirical access to the cylinder to verify or disqualify either side of the narrator's claim. The example the narrator cites is itself merely another conceptual statement about what may be observed in the cylinder: as far as the reader is concerned, it has nothing to do with direct empirical observation. What the reader actually has to contend with once more are two incompatible conceptual hypotheses with no way of choosing between them. Upon the basis of the statements provided by the narrator as to the relative merits of the shorter or longer queue, the searcher should be similarly bereft of reasons to prefer one to the other.

xi. 'It's all a bubble'

Molloy's recourse to a strategy of empirical inspection retains within his narrative merely the status of one further hypothesis concerning what may be done with the undetermined objects which temporarily attract his speculative attentions. Empirical research does not in fact serve as the way out of the fantasies woven by ungrounded hypotheses, as its pursuit does not itself get beyond the stage of the hypothetical:

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<sup>70</sup> Exasperation may be increased further by proceeding to the narrator's next contribution: 'Not that all choose nor even the greater number' (Beckett, 1972, p.48). For the 'greater number' of searchers this whole protracted controversy as to the most rapid queue is utterly irrelevant.



I knew I could catch him, lame as I was. I had only to want to. And yet no, for I did want to. To get up, to get down on the road, to set off hobbling in pursuit of him, to hail him, what could be easier? He hears my cries, turns, waits for me. I am up against him, up against the dog, gasping, between my crutches.

(Beckett, 1959, p.13)

The point where the empiricist reaches sufficiently 'close quarters' (Beckett, 1959, p.13) to begin a direct investigation of these objects is a fiction within the larger fiction of Molloy. From 'He hears my cries' onwards (Beckett, 1959, p.13), Molloy is writing up the postulated behaviour of man and dog from the resources of an additional speculative hypothesis as to what would be empirically apprehended from 'close quarters', a proximity that is never achieved. These empirical results are themselves hypothetical. For the reader here, as in The Lost Ones, no direct determination of the empirical attributes of these objects is available to put an end to Molloy's ungrounded speculations concerning them. Trivially, no exit from fictional determinations is possible from any fictional text. However, the objects which Molloy speculates that he might wish to 'inspect', being dogs, men, smoking materials and shoes (Beckett, 1959, p.13), do not in their nature rule out the theoretical possibility of his doing so within his own fiction. Neither is there anything to hamper the theoretical possibility that the reader might be able to inspect objects of the same order, although not the particular ones that exercise Molloy, in the

mundanely empirical world exterior to the text. The conceptual objects which constitute the narrative of The Lost Ones are somewhat different.

If the reader has encountered in his travels through the world a man, a dog, a cigar and a pair of shoes, it is a matter of little controversy whether such things may exist empirically. Whether ladders of the type in use in the cylinder of The Lost Ones could ever be empirically apprehended even by the most experienced explorer is more debatable. What are required are ladders that 'are single without exception', although simultaneously 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9). The ladders which would satisfy both of these specifications at once cannot be built. Some are to incorporate a 'sliding extension' while all of their number are to be bereft of such an attribute. This is how the ladders must be, but empirical ladders cannot be like this. Further, all 'vary greatly in size' although 'The shortest measure not less than six metres' (Beckett, 1972, p.9): in ordering the ladders for a working model of the cylinder, it can be determined that none should be shorter than six metres and all should be of different lengths, but the actual sizes of the ladders are undetermined. All empirical ladders are of an actual size, whatever that size is. A decision as to length would have to be made in the absence of determinate information as to the proper length required. This problem applies to all the instances where the narrator supplies merely approximate information, for



approximations cannot be manifested empirically.<sup>71</sup> As stated, the 'Floor and wall' of the cylinder 'are of solid rubber or suchlike' (Beckett, 1972, p.8): if the cylinder is built, its floor and wall will either be fabricated from rubber or from a material like rubber although not rubber. In either case, the material must be determined as either rubber or not; the indeterminate specification 'rubber or suchlike' cannot be empirically reproduced. Similarly, the cylinder's 'total surface' cannot be actualized to fulfil the specification that it measures 'some eighty thousand' in square centimetres.<sup>72</sup> If the total area built is 79,999 square centimetres or 80,000 square centimetres or 80,001 square centimetres or any fraction between these points, then this is its exact total mural area. Strictly, none of these possible empirical measurements respect the specification that the surface area of the cylinder is 'some eighty thousand' square centimetres (Beckett, 1972, p.7, my emphasis). When empirically constructed, the surface area of the

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<sup>71</sup> Approximations, it may be maintained, are to be found in 'our' descriptions of reality' rather than as 'a feature of reality' (Sainsbury, 1995, p.25, n.4). Real objects must lack certain aspects of the vagueness attributed to them in The Lost Ones; as Wittgenstein remarks:

A speck in the visual field, though it need not be red, must have some colour: it is, so to speak, surrounded by colour-space. Notes must have some pitch, objects of the sense of touch some degree of hardness, and so on.

(Wittgenstein, 1974, §2.0131, p.6)

As actual ladders must be of some determinate measurement, so, Wittgenstein agrees, 'Every rod has a length' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §251, p.90).

<sup>72</sup> There is a disagreement between editions of The Lost Ones as to whether eighty thousand square centimetres should refer to mural, rather than total, area of the cylinder surface. See below Chapter Six, Section xi on this controversy.



cylinder will actually be something exact and determinate, whereas the narrator specifies that it is to be an approximation.

Whereas the narrator states that the oscillation of temperature in the cylinder between its extremes takes 'about four seconds' (Beckett, 1972, p.8), the time taken for this change in the empirical model will be determined as either four seconds or not, and this determination too will violate the approximation required. Application of the instruction that lulls are of 'varying duration but never exceeding ten seconds or thereabouts' (Beckett, 1972, p.17) must cope with the impossibility of actually reproducing the specification of 'ten seconds or thereabouts': an exact duration must be chosen which is at liberty to be some fraction less than or exactly ten seconds. But it cannot be other than a determinate time. In regard to the temperature, 'remission never lasts more than a little less than a second' (Beckett, 1972, p.17). If unravelling of this specification can proceed past the conceptual perplexity engendered by 'more than a little less than', in application, empirical exactitude must make inaccurate the approximation 'a little less than a second'. Where the narrator describes the temperature of the cylinder as 'more or less hot or cold' (Beckett, 1972, p.8), the temperature is determined in such a way as to avoid determining it at all.<sup>73</sup> In an empirical

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<sup>73</sup> It is the temperature's 'regular variation of five degrees per second' (Beckett, 1972, p.16), which appears to be an entirely straightforward statement, which ultimately works out into a further source of indetermination. We know that the temperature 'passes from one extreme to the other in about four seconds' (Beckett, 1972, p.8). It seems apparent, then, that the drop of temperature from the maximum of twenty-five degrees to

reconstruction, the temperature may be anything, but it must also be something. The empiricist must pick a temperature upon the basis of information which takes care not to make a specification.

If we are to have ladders, and in an astonishing recourse to determinate numbers we are to have fifteen of them (Beckett, 1972, p.17), we will also need niches and tunnels to avoid 'the intolerable presence of properties serving no purpose' (Beckett, 1972, p.23). Discovery of the nature of the niches themselves, however, so that they may be reproduced empirically, is not so easy:

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twenty takes one second, another drop from twenty to fifteen degrees takes one second, another from fifteen to ten degrees one second and one second also passes as the temperature drops from ten degrees to the minimum of five degrees. The possibility of regularity is available to the narrator; it is a chance of simplicity not taken:

Does this mean that with every passing second there is a rise or fall of five degrees exactly neither more nor less? Not quite. For it is clear there are two periods in the scale namely from twenty-one degrees on on the way up and from nine on on the way down when this difference will not be reached.

(Beckett, 1972, p.41)

It is also clear that it is not only at these two points where the average move of five degrees per second might be breached. The only information which remains stable concerning the movement of temperature is that it moves between its extremes of twenty-five to five degrees in four seconds. The average movement is thus five degrees per second, but these limits are actually compatible with all kinds of sudden fluctuations. For example, a slow movement of temperature from five to six degrees in three seconds complemented by a rapid rise from six to twenty-five degrees in one second is quite compatible with the average of a five degree shift per second. How the temperature should actually move between its maximum and minimum limits is entirely undetermined. The statement of an average is uninformative as to actual behaviour.



A more or less wide mouth gives rapid access to a chamber of varying capacity but always sufficient for a body in reasonable command of its joints to enter in and similarly once in to crouch down after a fashion.

(Beckett, 1972, p.11)

As the size of a body is not stated, the narrator does not give away any hint as to the actual dimensions of such niches. Without knowing the dimensions of a searcher, the statement that the mouth of a niche is large enough to permit his 'rapid access' is entirely uninformative as to its actual measurements. The interior of a niche, furthermore, is 'sufficient' to contain a searcher only upon the condition that he is in possession of 'a body in reasonable command of its joints', begging the question as to what is 'reasonable' in such circumstances, and then only to permit such a body 'to crouch down after a fashion' (Beckett, 1972, p.11). The actual position denoted by 'after a fashion' is not stated. An empirical model, if it wishes to put its searchers in niches, and it must, will be obliged to ride roughshod over all such indetermination and fashion niches and searchers to dimensions not given by the narrator. These niches are then to be positioned empirically such that their regularity gives the impression of 'quincunxes' and their irregularity the simultaneous impression of 'irregular quincunxes' (Beckett, 1972, p.11). Of the tunnels, 'most have no other way out than the way in' (Beckett, 1972, p.12) but 'a normal tunnel' may be entered 'at the same time by opposite ends' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). Whether the majority of tunnels that we must carve are to comply



with the specification of 'most' or with the opposing specification of the 'normal' is not possible to decide. Real tunnels must conform to one specification or the other, and once built the type in the majority can be determined or a draw declared. But this is to depart from the narrative as stated, wherein the majority cannot be decided. Similarly, as the narrator specifies the difficulties attending the bodies' recognition of one another, the climbers' code regulating the use of ladders and circulation between zones will not properly work in practice; but the narrator also states that in the cylinder, the operations it demands are carried out 'unfailingly' (Beckett, 1972, p.44). If other statements concerning the non-recognition of one searcher by another are played out empirically, the climbers' code cannot simultaneously function in application. If the climbers' code is to work, the specifications of non-recognition must be not put into practice. But the searchers cannot be empirically set in motion with orders to recognize each other and not to recognize each other at one and the same time. In an empirical model, recognition would either be possible or impossible and each option excludes the other. Again, this would be to violate the inconsistency which obtains in the cylinder as stated. The possibility of representing empirically the qualities of that 'certain interval' of time which divides the climbers into either ladder-engrossing laggards or precipitantly climbing wretches must also be doubted (Beckett, 1972, p.23). If we can observe that the bodies' calculation of this interval is 'unerringly timed by all', the narrator's statement that it is 'difficult to assess' would lack any substantive evidence

(Beckett, 1972, p.23). If we can observe in our empirical model that the bodies find this interval 'difficult to assess', this apprehension can only be substantiated by evidence that it is not 'unerringly timed by all' (Beckett, 1972, p.23). Only one side of the specification can be visible empirically at any one time: in the cylinder, it is the nature of this 'interval' that it is at once 'difficult to assess but unerringly timed by all' (Beckett, 1972, p.23). This definition cannot be made manifest empirically. It will also be difficult to demonstrate the 'heightened fixity of the motionless' (Beckett, 1972, p.17) in empirical terms; for the 'motionless' would seem to be bereft of any further options for demonstrating their 'heightened fixity'. Convincing an observer that the belt along the wall of the cylinder is actually 'reserved for the carriers' (Beckett, 1972, p.27) would not be facilitated by the narrator's specification that 'a certain number of sedentary searchers sitting or standing against the wall' (Beckett, 1972, p.28) and 'four vanquished out of five' (Beckett, 1972, p.29) must be also stationed in this zone. The empirical representation of this reservation also must make manifest that it is not 'reserved for the carriers' (Beckett, 1972, p.27) just as we are trying to construct it to make manifest the specification that it is. Quite how 'Sucklings [...] having no longer to suck' (Beckett, 1972, p.30) could be presented so as to assure the observer that they remain 'Sucklings' also presents a challenge to the model-builder.

Empirically, it would be possible to observe whether the skin or the eyes of the searchers are destroyed first under the



conditions of the model we have set up; to be true to the cylinder, however, there should be no possibility of determining this fact. The eyes of the searchers, however, would have to be 'seen to redden more and more' while 'their pupils little by little [...] dilate till the whole orb was devoured' (Beckett, 1972, p.39), that is, be observed becoming increasingly red while becoming increasingly black. Neither do we know whether our model searchers are to be coloured red, yellow, red-yellow, grey, green, brown, or some tone derived from a mixture of all or some of these colours. If these bodies are to be manufactured empirically, they will have to be of some determinate colour, a necessity which again violates the lack of information provided in the narrator's specification. It may be possible to replicate empirically the effect of a 'dim omnipresent light' (Beckett, 1972, p.55), even if the narrator does define it as a light which, being 'dim', is barely there and at the same time, being 'omnipresent', is everywhere. It may even be possible to contrive that this light renders the cylinder 'uniformly luminous' (Beckett, 1972, p.40), for it is decreed that 'Niches and tunnels are subject to the same light and climate as the rest of the abode' (Beckett, 1972, p.13). The interior 'depths of a tunnel' which more usually display less brightness than is present externally, in the cylinder must not (Beckett, 1972, p.40). With sufficient ingenuity, this specification might be followed. Whether lighting arrangements can be found which reproduce the additional effects required by the narrator, however, is more doubtful, for this must also be a 'Light in a word that not only dims but blurs into the bargain' (Beckett,



1972, p.38). A light that dims rather than illuminates what it shines upon would be a unique empirical effect.

Before beginning this empirical construction, however, we must 'already' have in place some searchers 'at the foot of the ladders or frozen in the tunnels' (Beckett, 1972, pp.34-35), a task which will be made more difficult by the fact that before we have begun making the cylinder neither ladders, tunnels nor searchers yet exist. After we have managed to incorporate this impossible feature into the model cylinder, we must ensure that one searcher later qualifies as the 'first' to come 'to a standstill' despite the fact that other have already been deployed 'frozen' in the tunnels (Beckett, 1972, p.35). As this empirical model progresses toward its specified end, we must ensure that 'dead still' non-searchers (Beckett, 1972, p.60) are also 'compelled to brush together without ceasing' (Beckett, 1972, p.61). All the qualities of the cylinder and its bodies which the narrator defines as 'unperceived' (Beckett, 1972, p.15; p.19) and 'insensible' (Beckett, 1972, p.39) must be perceived to be imperceptible by the perceptual apparatus of the observer. It would be as well to ensure that the 'insensible' nature of these features be made manifest to the senses of the observer too.<sup>74</sup> Apprehending the end of this empirical reconstruction of the cylinder presents particular problems for the observer:

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<sup>74</sup> Ping plays similar tricks as to what is known and not known: 'Ping elsewhere always there but that known not' (Beckett, 1984, p.150); 'Planes meeting invisible one only shining white infinite but that known not' (Beckett, 1984, p.150). A description is given in each statement prior to the content of that statement being described as 'known not'.

here all should die but with so gradual and to put it plainly so fluctuant a death as to escape the notice even of a visitor.

(Beckett, 1972, p.18)

In accordance with what the narrator states, an empirical version of the cylinder must make clear to its observers that 'here all should die', for this proposition is part of what the model must demonstrate. But it must also ensure that this proposition, which has to be made manifest so that its workings may be empirically perceived, is made manifest in such a way as 'to escape the notice even of a visitor' (Beckett, 1972, p.18), or, to put it plainly, so that its workings may not be empirically perceived. It must also find a way to present an occurrence recognizable as 'a death' which is yet 'fluctuant' (Beckett, 1972, p.18), without cancelling the observer's judgement that 'a death' had occurred. This 'death' and its 'fluctuant' nature are, at the same time, 'to escape the notice' of the observer. But, to be true to the terms of the narrative as stated, it must also to be brought to the notice of the observer that precisely these occurrences, of which he now has no clue, have escaped his notice. To be aware of this, and to be aware of the nature of what he has missed, these occurrences must be made manifest again. And now it cannot be made manifest that they have escaped notice, for they are brought to the notice of the observer so that he may perceive the nature of what he has not noticed.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Whether these features are perceived or sensed or not is now the subject of some confusion. The situation is analogous to position of Henry's long-johns in Embers:



Within conceptual terms, the narrator's proposition that 'all should die [...] so fluctuant a death' as to be imperceptible is doubly contradictory, but it is a combination of contradictions that can be thought; otherwise, not even its contradictory nature could be determined. Empirically, however, no object could simultaneously make manifest all the incompatible statements issued by the narrator concerning the cylinder."<sup>6</sup>

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ADA: [...] Did you put on your jaegers, Henry?

HENRY: What happened was this, I put them on and then I took them off again and then I put them on again and then I took them off again and then I took them on again and then I -

ADA: Have you them on now?

HENRY: I don't know.

(Beckett, 1986, p.257)

<sup>76</sup> In relation to How It Is, according to Pilling:

The impossible to be uttered, needs to be put in the form of a contradiction, but as Wittgenstein has pointed out (Tractatus, 4.464) a contradiction's truth is impossible. The contradiction negates itself; it is the nearest approximation to actual absence that the literary work can support.

(Pilling, 1976, p.51)

In The Lost Ones, contradictions do not work to cancel either term: for contradiction to occur both terms must be equally present. To maintain that both terms can be rendered absent by the presence of both is a proposition that does negate itself, but the concepts thought in this proposition do not thereby disappear. As Schopenhauer confirms:

Even a logical contradiction is only a relative nothing; it is no thought of our faculty of reason; yet it is not on that account an absolute nothing. For it is a word-combination; it is an example of the unthinkable which is necessarily required in logic to demonstrate the laws of thought.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §71, p.409)

The contradictions of The Lost Ones remain intact to be reactivated each time the terms of the narrative are thought. What is necessarily absent is any possibility that a contradictory description of an object could be manifested empirically. To paraphrase Pilling, the narrative of The Lost Ones presents an '[empirical] void that is also a [conceptual] plenum' (Pilling, 1976, p.51).



Actual ladders are either single or fitted with an extension. Objects are either in motion or immobile. An immobile object cannot display additional fixity. Light does not make dim what it illuminates. What is perceived is not also unperceived. Approximations cannot remain securely indeterminate when what they do not exactly measure is built. It may be safely maintained that if one of these specifications is carried out empirically, its complementary opposite cannot be.

The Lost Ones departs fundamentally from texts which deal with events and objects which could theoretically be made empirically manifest. The fiction constructed by All Strange Away, for example, is indeed considerably less strange:

Light out, long dark, candle and matches, imagine them, strike one to light, light on, blow out, light out, strike another, light on, so on. Light out, strike one to light, light on, light all the same, candlelight in light, blow out, light out, so on. No candle, no matches, no need, never were.

(Beckett, 1984, p.118)

The narrator of The Lost Ones might be trusted to reformulate this eminently possible fiction as light out, blow out, light on, strike another, light out, and so on to more elaborate inconsistencies. The cylinder of The Lost Ones is an impossible object in addition to being a fictional object. Not only is there no object separable from the concatenation of inconsistent

conceptual terms of The Lost Ones which could adjudicate between these terms, the possibility of constructing such an object is ruled out precisely by virtue of these inconsistencies.<sup>77</sup> The specifications of the cylinder are entirely at the mercy of the narrator's fiat, and this privilege is employed for the furtherance of ever greater conceptual disorder. According to Schiller:

we must surely call divine any tendency which has as its unending task the realization of that most characteristic attribute of Godhead, viz., absolute manifestation of potential (the actualization of all that is possible), and absolute unity of manifestation (the necessity of all that is made actual).

(Schiller, 1967, pp.75-77)

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<sup>77</sup> The consistency of invented fictional detail can be a source of concern to Beckett's other narrators:

Buttons of all shapes and sizes. Worn upright the skirts swept the ground. That seems to hang together.  
(Beckett, 1984, p.209)

When my chamber-pot is full I put it on the table beside the dish. Then I go twenty-four hours without a pot. No, I have two pots. They have thought of everything.  
(Beckett, 1959, p.185)

The narrator of All Strange Away is concerned that his fictional construct 'might well be imagined' (Beckett, 1984, p.123). His is an empirically plausible and non-contradictory, if bizarre, invention. In this text the measurements of its 'rotunda' must be revised when the narrator admits 'suddenly clear these dimensions faulty' (Beckett, 1984, p.124). The narrator of The Lost Ones is not disposed to such confessions or corrections. Reflection upon itself is as dangerous to The Lost Ones as silence for The Unnamable: 'they dare not be silent for long, the whole fabrication might collapse' (Beckett, 1959, p.351).

The fiat of the narrator is abused to precisely the opposite ends. Rather than the actualization of the possible, the narrator prefers the conceptual elaboration of the impossible. The narrative respects neither the constraints of empirical possibility nor the limits of logical consistency between conceptual propositions.

In its first English translation in 1972, disrespect is accorded to mathematical laws also.<sup>78</sup> The height of the cylinder in Le Dépeupleur is given as sixteen metres; in the first edition of The Lost Ones, it is eighteen. In this English text, this measurement, in alliance with the fifty metre circumference with which the French text agrees, is not in harmony with the 'some eighty thousand' declared square centimetres of the cylinder's 'total surface' (Beckett, 1972, p.7). In David Warrilow's account, Beckett was brought to 'ruefully' confess 'that the figure eighteen was indeed a most regrettable error' (Warrilow, 1986, p.87); whether it is a regrettable error of the narrator or author, however, is not stated. If responsibility does lie with the narrator, the miscalculation can be counted as something other than an error. How suspiciously appropriate such unaccountable accidents, or intractable complexities, are in relation to The Lost Ones. The critical excitement expended upon the mistake made in the provision of two figures which are incompatible, however, is a discourtesy to all the other manifold ranks of conceptual

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<sup>78</sup> See below Chapter Six, Section xi for what obtains concerning the dimensions of the cylinder in later English editions of The Lost Ones.



inconsistencies harboured within the narrative. Each may protest with the Unnamable that 'I too have the right to be shown impossible' (Beckett, 1959, p.379).<sup>79</sup> Empirical construction of the cylinder system in its totality as stated is not possible, even if the extra help accorded by the error as to cylinder height in the English text is unreliable. To wish the impossible more so is analogous to pointing out the 'heightened fixity of the motionless' (Beckett, 1972, p.17). Remarks of the Unnamable are suggestive in regard to the status of the cylinder itself, and perhaps the source of the narrator's mistake:

they'll give up, saying, It's all a bubble, we've been told a lot of lies, he's been told a lot of lies, who he, the master, by whom, no one knows, the everlasting third party, he's the one to blame, for this state of affairs, the master's not to blame, neither are they, neither am I, least of all I, we were foolish to accuse one another, the master me, them, himself, they me, the master, themselves, I them, the master, myself, we are all innocent, enough.

(Beckett, 1959, p.379)

If we abandon hopes of seeing the cylinder constructed empirically, following the example of Molloy's inspection left

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<sup>79</sup> The mathematical error can be detected a priori, without recourse to empirical evidence, but this is the case in the narrator's logical contradictions also. The specification of ladders that are 'single without exception' while 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9) is similarly an a priori contradiction. Recourse to a posteriori experimentation is not necessary to find such specifications contradictory: it is the contradiction that they state which rules out the possibility of constructing them.

undone, we will be 'innocent' ('enough'), 'of wanting to know, wanting to be able, of all this noise about nothing' (Beckett, 1959, p.379). No one should be held responsible for the fact that a cylinder which cannot exist does not have a determinate height. In a specifically Kantian sense, we cannot help but be innocent of knowledge concerning this purely conceptual 'bubble'.

### xii. Empty ideas

The Unnamable's judgement above is rather harsh in one respect concerning the cylinder system of The Lost Ones, for we have not quite 'been told a lot of lies' (Beckett, 1959, p.379). We have been supplied with specifications which are contradictory, inconsistent and unworkable. The complete conception of the cylinder supplied by the narrative is the sum of all these specifications. While this conception is more or less crazed as a result of the nature of these specifications, it is neither a lie nor nothing.<sup>80</sup> In the absence of the possibility of empirical verification, however, this conception

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<sup>80</sup> To assert that a concept that is contradictory negates itself in so far as to become nothing, is a variation on the 'subreptic fallacy':

One way of committing the subreptic fallacy would be to deny even logical existence to a concept - and thus declare it 'absolutely impossible' - as a result of a defective application of a sensible predicate to an intellectual concept: in other words to conflate [...] the realm of the ontological with that of the epistemological.

(Winterbourne, 1988, p.118)

What cannot exist, may still be thought. The beginning and the end of the cylinder cannot be made empirically manifest, but it cannot be maintained that the concept of the beginning and end are 'unthinkable' (Beckett, 1972, p.34), especially as they are being thought when this charge is made.

remains a 'bubble' (Beckett, 1959, p.379); while the cylinder is conceivable it is not properly knowable. These two procedures are not identical:

To think an object and to know an object are [...] by no means the same thing. Knowledge involves two factors: first, the concept, through which an object in general is thought (the category); and secondly, the intuition, through which it is given. For if no intuition could be given corresponding to the concept, the concept would still indeed be a thought, so far as its form is concerned, but would be without any object, and so no knowledge of anything would be possible by means of it. [...] Now, [...] the only intuition possible to us is sensible; consequently, the thought of an object in general, by means of a pure concept of understanding, can become knowledge for us only in so far as the concept is related to objects of the senses.

(Kant, 1933, B146-147, pp.161-162)

The concept of the cylinder system fabricated by the narrative of The Lost Ones cannot be verified by the construction of any empirical object perceivable by the senses. An earlier appeal to Kant in this chapter to sustain the narrator's right to elaborate the concept of the cylinder in whatever manner desired, repressed a crucial qualification to the prerogative of free conceptual invention:

A concept which I have invented I can always define; for



since it is not given to me either by the nature of the understanding or by experience, but is such as I have myself deliberately made it to be, I must know what I have intended to think in using it. I cannot, however, say that I have thereby defined a true object.

(Kant, 1933, A729/B757, p.587, my emphasis)

The invention of 'this arbitrary concept of mine does not assure me of the existence or of the possibility of its object' (Kant, 1933, A729/B757, p.587). The narrator's fabrication of arbitrary concepts which can be verified by no possible empirical experience is more usually the preserve of metaphysicians. Such is Kant's charge against Leibniz:

No philosophy at all is required to say what name I will attribute to an arbitrary concept. Leibniz thought of a simple substance [...] and he called it a sleeping monad. In so doing, he did not explain this monad; rather, he invented it, for the concept of it was not given to him but was created by him.

(Kant, 1949, §1, p.263)

In such cases, speculative reason 'exalts itself to modes of knowledge which so far transcend the bounds of experience that no empirical object can ever coincide with them' (Kant, 1933, A314/B371, pp.310-311). These conceptual determinations are outside the bounds of possible experience: it is not merely an accident of history that no sleeping monad has yet been

empirically encountered. Empirical apprehension of the 'hyperphysical' (Kant, 1933, A63/B88, p.101) is impossible in principle. To substantiate a claim to 'knowledge' certain demands must be met:

We therefore demand that a bare concept be made sensible, that is an object corresponding to it be presented in intuition. Otherwise the concept would, as we say, be without sense, that is, without meaning.

(Kant, 1933, A240/B299, p.260)

The determination of the cylinder supplied in The Lost Ones is distinct from the empty conceptual propositions of the adept metaphysician, however, in that its manifold internal contradictions ensure that even its merely conceptual elaboration does not make sense. According to Kant, 'much is possible which is not actual' (Kant, 1933, A231/B284, p.250);<sup>81</sup> accordingly, most fictional texts are content to specify events and conditions which, while not actual, are possible. The difference between these fictions and actuality maps on to 'the distinction in Kant's philosophy of mathematics between what is "merely logically possible" and what is real' (Winterbourne, 1988, p.108). Crucially, 'merely logical existence means, for Kant, freedom from contradiction' (Winterbourne, 1988, p.111). Non-contradiction is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the

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<sup>81</sup> In Rousseau's opinion, 'it is good logic to reason from the actual to the possible' (Rousseau, 1973, p.237); what is actual has indeed established its possibility. But what is actual does not exhaust the realm of what is possible.

existence of what a concept describes:

even if our judgment contains no contradiction, it may connect concepts in a manner not borne out by the object, or else in a manner for which no ground is given, either a priori or a posteriori, sufficient to justify such judgment, and so may still, in spite of being free from all inner contradiction, be either false or groundless.

(Kant, 1933, A150/B190, pp.189-190)

The cylinder of The Lost Ones, however, cannot proceed past even the 'negative' condition of logical existence:

The universal, though merely negative, condition of all our judgements in general, whatever be the content of our knowledge, and however it may relate to the object, is that they be not self-contradictory; for if self-contradictory, these judgements are in themselves, even without reference to the object, null and void.

(Kant, 1933, A150/B189-190, p.189)

Metaphysical speculation, gods and winged horses fall at the fence of empirical substantiation while their logical possibility remains unscathed by internal contradiction. If that which is properly known and determined must exhibit logical possibility and be amenable to empirical verification, the nature of the cylinder of The Lost Ones is of an unrivalled obscurity.



Analysis of the concept of the cylinder specified by the narrative of The Lost Ones cannot dissolve this obscurity. In the first place, without an object to verify its explicative results, a priori analysis of 'arbitrarily invented concepts' (Kant, 1933, A729/B757, p.587) can never declare itself completed:

[...] I can never be certain that the clear representation of a given concept [...] has been completely effected, unless I know that it is adequate to its object. But since the concept of it may, as given, include many obscure representations, which we overlook in our analysis, although we are constantly making use of them in our application of the concept, the completeness of the analysis of my concept is always in doubt, and a multiplicity of suitable examples suffices only to make the completeness probable, never to make it apodeictically certain.

(Kant, 1933, A728-729/B756-757, pp.586-587)

Analysis of an invented concept, which only is what is put into it, cannot be assured of its exhaustiveness in the absence of any object which could verify this claim to complete adequacy. To conclude a list of intractable queries concerning the circulation of bodies between zones in the cylinder, the narrator throws out a distinct challenge to the powers of inferential analysis to complete the conceptual account of the cylinder from the basis of the specifications given:

What principle of priority obtains among the watchers always in force and eager to profit by the first departure from among the climbers and whose order of arrival on the scene cannot be established by the queue impracticable in their case or by any other means? Is there not reason to fear a saturation of the intermediate zone and what would be its consequences for the bodies as a whole and particularly for those of the arena thus cut off from the ladders? Is not the cylinder doomed in a more or less distant future to a state of anarchy given over to fury and violence? To these questions and many more the answers are clear and easy to give. It only remains to dare.

(Beckett, 1972, pp.51-52)

Through mere faint-heartedness, the last two sentences insinuate, answers which reside covertly in the narrative and thus should be 'clear and easy to give' upon analysis of the terms as stated, are passed over. Concerning the regulations of circulation and the additional questions which are posed concerning them, however, it is beyond the power of analysis to do anything more than make explicit that the answers required are not implicitly stated in the narrator's account. What does emerge is that the 'daring' to state answers readily available is not the missing element, but rather the availability of these answers themselves. The completeness of analysis must founder on the statement which immediately precedes this passage:

All has not been told and never shall be.

(Beckett, 1972, p.51)

Analysis which would wish to be exhaustive must take into account the specification that 'All has not been told and never shall be' (Beckett, 1972, p.51), for this is as much part of the concept of the cylinder as any other narrative statement. But any ambition harboured by analysis to be exhaustive by according equal consideration to this aspect of the cylinder, violates what is stated by this very conceptual determination as to the nature of the cylinder. Analysis should be tautological with what is stated: in this case, it cannot help but contradict this status, either by editing out this particular statement or by ignoring what it states.<sup>82</sup>

The additional specifications which would yield the 'All' of the cylinder, which would complete its conception, are determined in no form whatsoever. That 'All has not been told and never shall be' (Beckett, 1972, p.51) ensures that the

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<sup>82</sup> The narrator of How It Is makes a similarly paradoxical assessment of his text:

without its being said all is not said almost nothing and far too much

(Beckett, 1964, p.72)

This shared impasse is, perhaps distantly, related to Goedel's Incompletion Theorem; according to Priest:

Goedel's theorem [...] bears witness to the general fact [...] that there is a necessary trade-off between consistency and completeness: consistency forces on a theory a certain incompleteness.

(Priest, 1987, p.59)

In both The Lost Ones and How It Is, completion forces upon analysis a certain inconsistency.



cylinder cannot even be thought in its totality. The narrator does not deign to supply 'the mere concept' of the cylinder in its entirety:

In the mere concept of a thing no mark of its existence is to be found. For though it may be so complete that nothing which is required for thinking the thing with all its inner determinations is lacking to it, yet existence has nothing to do with all this [...].

(Kant, 1933, A225/B272, p.243)

In the case of what 'has not been told and never shall be' (Beckett, 1972, p.51), the reader lacks even unsubstantiated and contradictory ideas concerning the nature of the cylinder. As a consolation, it should be recognized that the sum of secure knowledge yielded by concepts which are not given in any way and by those which are unverifiable or contradictory is not substantially different.

In the absence of empirical verification, none of the claims made by analysis concerning the narrative of The Lost Ones can be known to be properly adequate, let alone exhaustive, in relation to the nature of the cylinder. Analysis of the concepts of the narrative merely elaborates what is thought within them; the lack of any empirical object in comparison to which these elaborated concepts could be verified remains unchanged. Analysis does not find a way out of the conceptual bubble of the cylinder. Its sole function in this chapter is to explicate

unverifiable concepts by blowing forth the conceptual bubbles which are covertly contained in the narrator's terms as stated. No contact with the object described is achieved. The analysis of the terms of The Lost Ones carried out remains exclusively conceptual. These additional concepts remain empty, in many cases contradictory and in all cases unsubstantiated by reference to any possible empirical object. And as Schopenhauer, in Kantian mode, emphasizes:

Concepts and abstractions that do not ultimately lead to perceptions are like paths in a wood that end without any way out.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.82)

In strictly Kantian terms, in the absence of any possible object to which a concept refers, that concept cannot be made properly comprehensible. Inferential analysis of the concepts supplied by the narrator cannot make any clearer 'what sort of a thing is [...] meant' by these concepts:

We cannot define any one of them in any real fashion, that is, make the possibility of their object understandable, without at once descending to the conditions of sensibility [...]. For if this condition be removed, all meaning, that is, relation to the object, falls away; and we cannot through any example make comprehensible to ourselves what sort of a thing is to be meant by such a concept.

(Kant, 1933, A240-241/B300, p.260)

Analysis does not know any better than the narrator what sort of thing is meant by his contradictory, inconsistent, empty and, if all is not told, absent, concepts. Dutifully, this chapter has endeavoured to make unclear that it does not know what it has been talking about. It could yet be rescued by a conclusion declaring the cylinder of The Lost Ones strictly unknowable. But, according its own terms, the nature of the cylinder cannot be known sufficiently well to substantiate the claim that the inherent nature of the cylinder is to be unknowable. If such a claim could be securely established, the nature of the cylinder would be known after all. To assert the impossibility of a true understanding, one must depreciate the ability of this understanding to contradict its own alleged impossibility. For to master the terms of The Lost Ones so far as to understand that they cannot be understood, with the concomitant supply of reasons, citations and supportive philosophies, is to understand altogether too much for harmony with one's original contention to be maintained. Upon an instant of self-reflexive consideration, contradictions, inconsistencies and aporiai reappear in a discourse which is much less adept than The Lost Ones in putting them to good use. To be obliged to conclude that this chapter cannot be saved is a most unfortunate outcome. It smacks of a mockery. A rueful confession of the error of these ways will have to be submitted.

