'Beckett through Kant: A Critique of Metaphysical Readings'

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Chapter Five

Knowing Nothing: Indetermination and Metaphysical Speculation

i. Indetermination in The Lost Ones: lacking the object of discussion

Undoubtedly one must make mistakes prior to subjecting them to investigation. Such might be the justification for the treatment thus far of Theatre II, Krapp's Last Tape, Catastrophe and The Lost Ones. As the narrator of The Unnamable counsels, 'one mustn't be afraid of making a howler, how can one know it is one before it's made, and one it most certainly is' (Beckett, 1959, p.383). However, with regard to The Lost Ones, it is perhaps too generous an estimation of the last chapter to consider it clearly erroneous, for its putative object may be insufficiently determinate to support such a definitive judgement, even one as embarrassing as this. To know that one's statements are wrong in relation to the text, is at least to secure certain negative facts concerning The Lost Ones, to be sure that certain exclusions are justified. The Lost Ones, in common with Watt, is not so obliging to the reader.

Following a lull in the cylinder, the bodies 'start to search again neither glad nor even sorry' (Beckett, 1972, p.55). Of two possible alternatives, neither is applicable. The reaction, if the word can still be justified, is one of indifference. In Watt, indifference between possible options is the keynote of Watt's relation to Mr Knott:

Watt suffered neither from the presence of Mr. Knott, nor from his absence. When he was with him, he was content to be with him, and when he was away from him, he was content to be away from him. Never with relief, never with regret, did he leave him at night, or in the morning come to him again.

(Beckett, 1976, p.207)

Watt's contentment, indifferent between Mr Knott's presence or absence, comically recalls the will-lessness so admired by Schopenhauer.[1] Watt's attitude to Mr Knott's 'wild dim chatter' is similarly agnostic:

> This was a noise of which Watt grew exceedingly fond. Not that he was sorry when it ceased, nor that he was glad when it came again, no.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, pp.208-209)

It is questionable whether a simultaneous ascription of extravagant regard and complete indifference describes any determinate feeling or opinion. Of two possible opposites, both are applicable. In logical terms, no coherent determination of a state of affairs is made by such a sentence:

> One would have to say: there is a state of affairs which the

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[1] Schopenhauer cites with approval the indifference cultivated by the Sannyasi, who 'without dwelling and entirely without property', 'is finally enjoined not to lie down too often under the same tree, lest he acquire a preference or inclination for it' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §68, p.389).

> sentence both rules in and rules out. But this is like saying that the state of affairs both is and is not determined by the content of the sentence, which shows that the sentence has no coherent content at all.
>
> (Sainsbury, 1995, p.137)

As even the troubled narrator of The Unnamable knows, 'it is always well to try and find out what one is talking about, even at the risk of being deceived' (Beckett, 1959, p.364). In The Lost Ones, and in Beckett's other works, contradictory statements work to ensure that no determinate information is imparted. How It Is also displays this refusal to reveal how it is in its narrative world:

> it can't last it lasts I'm calm calmer you think you're calm and you're not
>
> (Beckett, 1964, p.22)
>
> midday midnight curse God or bless him
>
> (Beckett, 1964, p.44)
>
> same ratio or else not
>
> (Beckett, 1964, p.104)
>
> he can't affirm anything no deny anything no so one can't speak of memories no but at the same time one can speak of them yes
>
> (Beckett, 1964, p.106)

In the case of inconsistent legal statutes, procedures exist to deal with such 'unconditional inconsistencies', ranging from 'striking out minor clauses, to ruling the whole thing void for uncertainty' (Priest, 1987, p.229). The latter option is particularly apposite here. There can be no reason to assign greater credence to one term of the paired oppositions cited above than to the other. Each assertion is of equal status; there is no order of precedence. There is no reason to place greater faith in a denial than in the original assertion, or vice versa. Only agnosticism, uncertainty and indetermination emerge with any precision via such uninformative specifications.

It was intolerable to Chapter Four that coherent allegorical readings should be founded upon such a contradictory and indeterminate base as that available in The Lost Ones. 'When one attempts, in a general way, to pass from an obvious to a latent language', as Derrida reasonably advises, 'one must first be rigorously sure of the obvious meaning' (Derrida, 1978, p.32). The possibility of such clarity on the literal level is regularly lacking in The Lost Ones. Yet as Kenner recognized with regard to Murphy, the reader can be persuaded to assimilate literal 'transcriptions of the impossible, without a ruffled surface, without so much the equivalent of a lifted eyebrow' (Kenner, 1973, p.59).[2] To transcend the details of The Lost Ones via an

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[2] Kenner, being vigilant, is moved to ask of the opening scene of Murphy, '(1) where is the seventh scarf? (2) how was the sixth scarf tied? "His wrists to the strut behind": the reader is invited to experiment' (Kenner, 1973, p.58). There should be a distinct limit as to how well one is able to tie oneself up in literal knots.

allegorical interpretation, to replace contradictory or indeterminate statements with metaphysical lessons, is simply to cease to read the literal text. Yet, according to Butler, 'That this text is metaphorical, a parable, can hardly be in doubt' (Butler, 1984, p.171). Libera's transcendence of the literal level is thus exemplary:

> Now that we have characterized the life in the cylinder and learned how it is seen and understood by the observer, we may try to determine the meaning of this world. What do the cylinder and its inhabitants represent?
>
> (Libera, 1983, p.151)

When the details of the fable are assumed to be unproblematic, there is a professional obligation to seek a more profound meaning. What 'the cylinder and its inhabitants represent' is elaborated without further reference to the text of The Lost Ones itself:

> the cylinder may be interpreted as the human world, or more precisely, its allegorical image. The two hundred naked bodies inhabiting the cylinder would be the humans living on earth, and their situation and behavior would represent the human condition and activity. Life in the cylinder is a model of human history. The anonymous observer [...] is the personification of the human mind, which, in spite of being tied down to earth, can, nonetheless, grasp it and learn the truth about it.

(Libera, 1983, p.151)

Beckett's elevation to the status of supreme metaphysician is a shared theme among commentators on The Lost Ones. Dearlove's allegorical reading emulates this level of generality:

> Instead of individual suffering, [...] The Lost Ones presents isolated man in a society of isolated men. The loneliness and solipsism expressed in How It Is are shown to be the universal condition.
>
> (Dearlove, 1982, pp.134-135)

For Henning, 'Beckett's cylinder may also be regarded as an image of the universe as a whole' (Henning, 1988, p.176). Unintentionally, indetermination returns to The Lost Ones under such descriptions with a vengeance. The conceptual particularity of the 'loneliness and solipsism' which Dearlove identifies in The Lost Ones and How It Is is generalized out of existence by their further description as 'the universal condition' (Dearlove, 1982, p.135). Dearlove allows no other descriptive possibilities against which 'loneliness and solipsism' can be defined. Neither should the oddity of a concept of universal solipsism be discounted.[3] Libera's citation of 'the human world' and his

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[3] Dearlove's position is not completely distinguishable from that of a lady whose opinions provided Russell with a celebrated philosophical joke:

> Russell reports meeting someone who claimed that she was a solipsist, and was surprised that more people were not so as well.
>
> (Blackburn, 1994, p.356)

contention that 'Life in the cylinder is a model of human history' (Libera, 1983, p.151) are similarly indiscriminate in their universality. Henning's evocation of the 'universe as a whole' (Henning, 1988, p.176), by definition, excludes nothing, and consequently picks out nothing in particular with which the cylinder may be profitably compared. Such allegorical formulations can only gesture toward metaphysical moods; they too lack informative value, describing nothing determinate.

Classical logic contends that the acceptance of contradictions would entail similar indetermination. The narrator of The Lost Ones describes the ladders of the cylinder as 'single without exception'; notwithstanding this specification, however, 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9). As a contradiction, this does not offer a coherent description, but as these specifications are of equal rank, it is not possible to dismiss either side of the opposition as erroneous. The structure of impasse cited by Wittgenstein, namely '"this isn't how it is!" we say. "Yet, this is how it has to be!"' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §112, p.47), is reproduced here. If the contradiction is accepted, however, the infection of inconsistency can spread so as to introduce absolute indetermination into an argumentative system, for in logical terms 'A self-contradiction implies any other statement' (Hamblin, 1967, p.81). Moreover, it can be argued that 'a consciously inconsistent position is uncriticisable' (Priest, 1987, p.129, n.16). If inconsistency is permitted, then the most contradictory positions may co-exist rather than being mutually

exclusive. 'Dialetheism' is Priest's coinage to denote 'true' contradictions:

> it is argued, if dialetheism is true, no one could ever be rationally obliged to give up something they believe. For suppose someone believes a theory, T. Any impetus for giving up T will come from an argument or experiment which makes it reasonable to believe something inconsistent with T, α. But now, the argument continues, if dialetheism is correct, there is nothing to stop the person simply adding α to their belief set and believing the whole inconsistent totality. The very notions of rational criticisability and change of belief therefore disappear.
>
> (Priest, 1987, p.129)

If contradiction is accepted, we risk an obligation to accept the principle of '<u>Ex Falso Quodlibet</u> - from the false (or a contradiction), anything follows' (Read, 1995, p.160). Accordingly, for Bataille, 'the infinity of the possible was born from the death of the logical world' (Bataille, 1991, p.163). From here, we are manoeuvred back to indetermination:

> For an assertion to have determinate content it must rule something out. The content is, as it were, what is left open when the possibilities ruled out by the assertion are deleted. Now, if dialetheism is true, nothing rules

anything out.[4]

(Priest, 1987, p.118)

Either side of the contradiction concerning the ladders makes a determinate statement in isolation; together, we have a description of extended single ladders. No coherent information is now imparted. As Ayer writes in relation to a structurally identical case, 'I learn nothing, not even anything false, about the habits of lions if I am told that they are and are not carnivorous.' (Ayer, 1959, p.12). Contradictions in such cases 'are degenerate cases of factual statements' (Ayer, 1959, p.12).

Such contradictions are, however, exhaustive of the possibilities operative in these two cases. Ladders either are or are not fitted with extensions, just as lions either are or are not carnivorous; there is no third option in these instances to be considered. Here, the law of the excluded middle applies:

> Given a world w, then for any proposition P, either P obtains in w or its negation (¬P) obtains in this world. [That is, of the pair P, ¬P at least one obtains in w - there is no other possibility: tertium non datur.][5]
>
> (Rescher and Brandom, 1980, p.3).

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[4] That 'all is possible', as the narrator of The Unnamable notes, 'would account for its incoherence' (Beckett, 1959, p.362).

[5] Tertium non datur translates as 'There is no third way'. The terms of a contradiction are thus characterized as mutually exclusive and exhaustive of all possibilities.

The logical relation of contrariety, however, exceeds contradiction in its potential level of indetermination. Whereas 'the classical true-false dichotomy' (Quine, 1986, p.84) applies to the terms of a contradiction ensuring that one of its terms is true, the terms involved in a relation of contrariety similarly cannot both be true, but can both be false. Whereas one side of an a priori contradiction can be proved true by proving its opposite false, 'it can never be permissible, so far as synthetic propositions are concerned, to justify assertions by disproving their opposite' (Kant, 1933, A792/B820, p.627). Texts for Nothing tracks through this logical structure. The judgement that 'it must be winter' does not follow from the established fact that it is 'at least not summer' (Beckett, 1984, Text VIII, p.98); the possibility remains that 'it's not that either, but something else, some other thing' (Beckett, 1984, Text IX, pp.102-103). The narrator of the Unnamable can also be discovered as a concerned logician:

> they say, If it's not white it's very likely black, it must be admitted the method lacks subtlety, in view of the intermediate shades all equally worthy of a chance.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.377)

The possibilities of indetermination are multiplied from the mere inability to decide between two terms in contradiction, one of which must be true. The terms of contrariety are similarly mutually exclusive, but potentially infinite in their variety.

Contrariety is thus a favoured method in Beckett's texts for sustaining a narrative which imparts no determinate information. Much and nothing concerning position is stated in Texts for Nothing:

> I stay here, sitting, if I'm sitting, often I feel sitting, sometimes standing, it's one or the other, or lying down, there's another possibility, often I feel lying down, it's one of the three, or kneeling.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text IV, pp.83-84)

The options, all unchosen, are repeated in Not I:

> ... she did not know ... what position she was in ... imagine! .. what position she was in! .. whether standing ... or sitting ... but the brain - ... what? .. kneeling? .. yes ... whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... but the brain - ... what? .. lying? .. yes ... whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... or lying ...
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.377)

What we are invited problematically to 'imagine!' in Not I is explicitly 'not yet imagined', one might say not yet determined, in Company:

> In the same dark as his creature or in another not yet imagined. Nor in what position. Whether standing or sitting or lying or in some other position in the dark.

> These are among the matters yet to be imagined. Matters of which as yet no inkling.
>
> (Beckett, 1980, p.35)

To extend the options, the narrator inquires 'Could M be reimagined in an easy chair?' (Beckett, 1980, p.61). Better regulated narrative is more usually employed to communicate accomplished determinations; narrative in these cases informs us as to issues which remain unresolved and undecided. The narrator of Enough similarly declines to decide between any of the possible relationships between stopping and starting and walking and talking which are available to two players, preferring instead to list the available permutations of these options:

> Other main examples suggest themselves to the mind. Immediate continuous communication with immediate redeparture. Same thing with delayed redeparture. Delayed continuous communication with immediate redeparture. Same thing with delayed redeparture. Immediate discontinuous communication with immediate redeparture. Same thing with delayed redeparture. Delayed discontinuous communication with immediate redeparture. Same thing with delayed redeparture.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.142)

Nothing is chosen at the expense of anything else, resulting in a chaos of possibilities, no matter how exquisitely enumerated. The invocation of every possibility is resolutely uninformative

as to what is actually considered to have taken place. And no information additional to these narratives is available; when How It Is declares 'brief black long black no knowing' (Beckett, 1964, p.51), nothing else exists to sway the determination the narrator refuses to give. Possibilities and potentialities are exhaustively pursued; decisions between mutually exclusive options are declined. It is Watt, above all others, which will be found most 'aswirl with vain entelechies' (Beckett, 1976, p.219) and which consequently ranks amongst the least informative of Beckett's texts.

ii. Absence, enumeration and indetermination in Watt

Much of Watt's story remains entirely undetermined, for Sam the narrator is conscious of the inadequacy of his grasp of Watt's methodology in inverting letters, words and sentences as he relays his account of Mr Knott's establishment. 'Thus I missed', Sam confesses, 'I suppose much I suspect of great interest touching I presume the first or initial stage of the second or closing period of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house' (Beckett, 1976, p.163). These reservations, should Sam's suppositions, suspicions and presumptions prove well-founded, apply likewise to his rendering of stages one to eight, or all, of Watt's account. Much that is possibly of 'great interest' is simply absent. There are further worries as to narrative reliability:

> my own hearing now began to fail, though my myopia remained

stationary. My purely mental faculties on the other hand, the faculties properly so called of ?

? ?

? ?

were if possible more vigorous than ever.[6]

(Beckett, 1976, p.167)

As proof of one's mental acuity, reference to unknown faculties of unknown origin and purpose, thereby advertising lacunae in one's knowledge, is perhaps inadvisable. In contrast to Sam's omissions, Watt, as narrated by Sam, returns to the relentless enumeration of possibilities, raising the chances that the correct form of words to describe a situation or to solve a problem does indeed appear in the text. However, we are left without any means of distinguishing such words from all the erroneous alternative forms of words within which they are embedded. Arsene, as heard by Watt, as narrated by Sam, initiates this technique. It is the housemaid's ability to lose dusters which motivates Arsene to rehearse the options which might account for such vagaries; there is a veto, however, on deciding to adopt any of the proffered explanatory hypotheses:

> Now what, it may well be asked, can the fancies have been that so ravished Mary from a sense of her situation? Dreams

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[6] The ghost of tabulation resides in this arrangement of absent elements. Kant, philosophy's most notorious compiler of tables concerning the faculties of the mind, shares Sam's preference in working out his architectonic structures in groups of four. According to Nietzsche's sardonic judgement, 'Kant was first and foremost proud of his table of categories' (Nietzsche, 1990, §11, p.41).

of less work and higher wages? Erotic cravings? Recollections of childhood? Menopausal discomfort? Grief for a loved one defunct or departed for an unknown destination? Daltonic visualizations of the morning paper's racing programme? Prayers for a soul? She was not a woman to confide.

(Beckett, 1976, p.50)

We are obliged to confess a lack of knowledge, mitigated by the entertainment of ungrounded speculation. Arsene's freedom of invention could expand possibilities infinitely; Watt prefers the enumeration of options within mathematically subscribed limits, the better to be exhaustive. Amongst the 'Twelve possibilities [which] occurred to Watt' as to whether Mr Knott was or was not responsible for the arrangements concerning the preparation of his food, whether he knew or did not know who was responsible for such arrangements, knew or did not know that such arrangements existed, and was or was not content, one entry of the twelve, one combination of these four variables, must describe the 'actual' extent of Mr Knott's responsibility, knowledge and contentment.'[7] No clue is provided as to which entry this might be, however. Such a list of all contingencies is entirely uninformative:

Watt's characteristic mode of thought is to explore the

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[7] The demon of the existence of 'Other possibilities' in regard to this matter must be exorcised from Watt's cogitations, for such an eventuality could render all twelve options vain. As 'for the moment they did not seem worthy of serious consideration', Watt 'put them quite out of his mind, and forgot them' (Beckett, 1976, p.87).

> possibilities of a particular situation, not what has happened or what might happen, but what is <u>logically</u> possible.[8]
>
> (Hoefer, 1965, p.66)

Exhaustive logical enumeration, as opposed to reasoned selection, however, reveals nothing at all about any determinate state of affairs.

If all possible options are considered equally and all the possible permutations of relevant elements provided, the net result once more is indecision between possibilities. With reference to Mr Knott, given his possession of two feet and slippers, socks, stockings, boots and shoes, Watt is supplied with ample variables to generate an entirely uninformative litany of potential ways for Mr Knott to be shod:

> As for his feet, sometimes he wore on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking, or a boot, or a shoe, or a slipper, or a sock and boot, or a sock and shoe,

---

[8] Watt's lists of permutations may mark a parodic faith in Descartes' 'Rules for the Direction of the Mind'; Rule Seven states:

> In order to make our knowledge complete, every single thing relating to our undertaking must be surveyed in a continuous and wholly uninterrupted sweep of thought, and be included in a sufficient and well-ordered enumeration.
>
> (Descartes, 1985, vol.1, p.25)

The practicality of such exhaustiveness is, however, less conducive to reliable conclusions, for 'if every single thing relevant to the question in hand were to be separately scrutinized, one lifetime would generally be insufficient for the task' (Descartes, 1985, vol.1, p.27).

> or a sock and slipper, or a stocking and boot, or a stocking and shoe, or a stocking and slipper, or nothing at all.[9]
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.200)

No actual appearance of one type of footwear at the expense of any other at any specific time is communicated here. With reference to other aspects of Mr Knott's appearance, impossible physical mutations are preferred to determinate descriptions:

> With regard to the so important matter of Mr. Knott's physical appearance, Watt had unfortunately little or nothing to say. For one day Mr. Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middle-sized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale and fair, and the next middle-sized, flushed, thin and ginger, and the next tall, yellow, dark and sturdy, and the next fat, middle-sized, ginger and pale, and the next tall, thin, dark and flushed, and the next small, fair, sturdy and yellow, and the next tall, ginger, pale and fat, and the next thin, flushed, small and dark [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.209)

Mentioning only 'the figure, stature, skin and hair' (Beckett,

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[9] The latter option of 'nothing at all' is offered for consideration at the end of each of the ten blocks of permutations between socks, stockings, boots, shoes, and slippers that Watt suggests. Yet, as a final wild-card option, Watt admits 'And sometimes he went barefoot' (Beckett, 1976, p.201) quite as if the possibility of such a thing had been unjustly neglected.

1976, p.211), Watt supplies two pages of such data while simultaneously proving to have, in terms of determinate information, 'little or nothing to say' (Beckett, 1976, p.209).

'From time to time', we do learn, 'for no apparent reason, Mr. Knott opened his mouth in song. From bass to tenor, all male registers were employed by him, with equal success' (Beckett, 1976, p.208). As ever, no one tone is to be distinguished from its two rivals and see itself preferred. Watt's disinclination to rule out any possibility in regard to Mr Knott cultivates a conception of him which is hopelessly inconsistent, equivalent to Schoenberg's 'chromatic saturation', with 'all the twelve notes played at once' (Albright, 1981, p.18). Under Watt's descriptive profligacy, 'Mr Knott is the man to whom any conceivable words refer' (Albright, 1981, p.199), the manifestation of all particularities at once, which translates into absolute unspecificity. Watt demonstrates the result of dismissing the principle of 'omnis determinatio est negatio':[10] a concept from which nothing is excluded 'possesses every property' and hence is obliged to possess 'its complementary negation as well' (Rescher and Brandom, 1980, p.33).[11] Whereas

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[10] Rescher and Brandom cite this as 'Spinoza's principle' (Rescher and Brandom, 1980, p.33). Ackerley reports Beckett himself as making a different philosophical link:

> Kant [...] in the Murphy Notebook [...] is associated with the tag: 'omnis determinatio est negatio' (every determination is a negation), which may point towards Watt's via negativa.
>
> (Ackerley, 1993, p.185)

[11] Borges' 'The Garden of Forking Paths' describes a novel constructed upon just such a revocation of logical exclusion, where 'all possible outcomes occur':

the extended single ladders in The Lost Ones are suspended between two contradictory specifications, Mr Knott remains undetermined between several hundred inconsistent descriptive options. According to Nietzsche, the functional equivalent of 'nothing' is to be 'all sorts of things'; to cease 'being all sorts of things' provides the chance of precision and determination, to 'become something' (Nietzsche, 1968, §108, p.68). In both Watt and The Lost Ones such determinate objects are lacking.

iii. Kant's 'categories of the understanding'

'All knowledge', Nietzsche continues, 'originates from a separation, delimitation, and restriction; there is no absolute knowledge of a whole' (Nietzsche, 1979, §109, p.39). Notions of 'the undiscriminated One' (Adorno, 1973, p.249) by seeking to exhibit 'All', as in the case of Mr Knott, fail to manifest any determinate qualities. In the Kantian scheme of sensory perception, the same necessity to separate and delimit applies; concepts and categories must be introduced to organize a sensory manifold which in itself is an undifferentiated whole. Analogous to space and time, the forms of intuition which order

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> In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses - simultaneously - all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions.
>
> (Borges, 1970, p.51)

sensibility,[12] are the categories of the understanding which bring sensory intuitions under determinate concepts:

> experience contains two very dissimilar elements, namely, the <u>matter</u> of knowledge [obtained] from the senses, and a certain <u>form</u> for the ordering of this matter [obtained] from the inner source of pure intuition and thought which, on occasion of the sense-impressions, are first brought into action and yield concepts.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A86/B118, p.121)

The categories serve actively to distinguish objects from within the totality of sensory perception, organizing a 'synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition' (Kant, 1933, A105, p.135). Objects comprise such impressions of sensory 'unity': 'an <u>object</u> is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is <u>united</u>' (Kant, 1933, B137, p.156). The division of the empirical realm into discrete 'objects', or events, is thus a procedure carried out by the understanding under the guidance of its concepts, rather than an organization conveniently pre-established in nature. Accordingly, '<u>individual</u> things [...] would not exist without the experiencing subject' (Janaway, 1994, p.24). Coherent experience, as distinct from chaotic apprehension of the sensory manifold, is dependent upon such active synthesis and organization by the understanding:

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[12] The 'forms of the intuition' were introduced above in Chapter One, Section ii.

> Experience is an empirical knowledge, that is, a knowledge which determines an object through perceptions. It is a synthesis of perceptions, not contained in perception but itself containing in one consciousness the synthetic unity of the manifold of perceptions. This synthetic unity constitutes the essential in any knowledge of objects of the senses, that is, in experience as distinguished from mere intuition or sensation of the senses.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A177/B218-219, pp.208-209)

Originating in the understanding of the subject, the category of 'object' is permanent, while its content is contingent upon sensory data.[13] The interdependence between the possibility of experience and the understanding's conceptual work in distinguishing objects from the manifold, as proposed here by Kant, is acknowledged by Beckett in an entry in the Murphy notebook:

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[13] The same object, however, must display stability in content as well as form in order to be re-identified as the same object, that is, to be brought under the same concept with regularity. The instability of appearance attributed to Mr Knott in Watt should prevent the continued re-identification and re-unification of these perceptions under the concept 'Mr Knott'. Stability of identity could be granted instead to Watt's re-encounters with a vision of 'his dead father':

> Here no tendency appeared, on the part of his father's trousers, for example, to break up into an arrangement of appearances, grey, flaccid and probably fistular, or of his father's legs to vanish in the farce of their properties, no, but his father's legs and trousers, as then seen, in the wood, and subsequently brought to mind, remained legs and trousers, and not only legs and trousers, but his father's legs and trousers [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1976, pp.70-71)

Hallucinations, always liable to mutation in appearance, in Watt are exemplary in their perceptual continuity.

> Kant's proof that the conditions of the possibility of experience are also the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience!!![14]
>
> (Beckett, cited in Pilling, 1992, p.16)

In Murphy itself, an object for Neary comprises '"the single, brilliant, organized, compact blotch"' which can be discriminated from '"the tumult of heterogeneous stimulation"' (Beckett, 1963, p.7). Murphy can do even better than distinguish a 'blotch' from the tumult:

> Celia mentioned her name. Murphy, unable to believe his ears, opened his eyes. The beloved features emerging from chaos were the face against the big blooming buzzing confusion of which Neary had spoken so highly.[15]
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.21)

An analogous process of distinguishing objects and imposing

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[14] Whatever Beckett's three exclamation marks may signify, the note tells us little of Beckett's attitude toward such a contention beyond his awareness of it. Schopenhauer, for instance, characterises Kant's judgement that 'without thought, and hence without abstract concepts, there is absolutely no knowledge of an object', as a 'monstrous assertion' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, p.474). In Proust, heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, Beckett too endorses the value of pre-conceptual apprehension. Whether Proust offers a coherent account of perception and conception, however, is debatable.

[15] As Rabinovitz points out, 'A phrase that is twice attributed to Neary, "the big blooming confusion," actually is from an essay by William James' (Rabinovitz, 1984, p.86). The point shared by Neary and James is Kantian: 'According to James, the physical world would seem incoherent if not for the mental patterns that organize one's experience of it' (Rabinovitz, 1984, p.86).

conceptual classifications takes place in the later prose text, 'The Image':

> emergence little by little of grey and white spots to which I do not hesitate to give the names of lambs among their dams I don't know from where I received this knowledge of animals
>
> (Beckett, 1990a, pp.34-35)

When later in Murphy 'the somethings give away' again, and 'Murphy began to see nothing', each formulation is equivalent to the return of 'Neary's big blooming buzzing confusion or ground, mercifully free of figure' (Beckett, 1963, p.138). This formulation itself approximates to the undifferentiated sensory manifold posited by Kant prior to its conceptual organization by the subject.[16] A condition of ecstasy could be attributed to Murphy in such a state, which, being ecstatic, would not be

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[16] Categorical organization is operative but eccentric in Murphy. Whereas Kant prescribes a priori categories common to every subject, Beckett allows his characters to choose their own:

> Not the least remarkable of Murphy's innumerable classifications of experience was that into jokes that had once been good jokes and jokes that had never been good jokes. What but an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of chaos.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.41)

Whereas Murphy is profligate in possessing 'innumerable classifications of experience', which accordingly make 'a mess of chaos' rather than introducing order, Ticklepenny's faculty of discrimination is excessively blunt:

> Two sorts of reprimand were familiar to Ticklepenny, those that left him in the necessity of wiping his face and those that did not. He used no other principle of differentiation.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.97)

amenable to further conceptual determination. Perhaps the opposite finicky high-point of Beckettian approbation for conceptual discrimination is found in his reported concern to maintain distinctions between generic classifications with regard to Act Without Words I:

> Now for my sins I have to go on and say that I can't agree with the idea of Act Without Words as a film. It is not a film, not conceived in terms of cinema. If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down.
>
> (Beckett cited in Zilliacus, 1993, p.298)

A sharp distinction in attitude towards conceptual tidiness, however, can be found in Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, the Trilogy, Ill Seen Ill Said and Watt.

iv. 'Haze sole certitude': indetermination via conceptual breakdown

Considering the boundaries of objects, Beckett's Three Dialogues is willing to proclaim 'The tyranny of the discrete overthrown', preferring the instability which finds 'The world a flux of movements' (Beckett, 1965, p.101). Such is D.'s version of Masson's project:

> D. - Masson himself, having remarked that western

> perspective is no more than a series of traps for the capture of objects, declares that their possession does not interest him.
>
> (Beckett, 1965, p.112)

Reversing Kantian perceptual procedures in regard to the delineation of objects, Masson 'seeks to break through their partitions to that continuity of being which is absent from the ordinary experience of living' (Beckett, 1965, p.111). To this end, 'vigilant coenaesthesia' (Beckett, 1965, p.101),[17] the chaotic sensory assault suffered by Moran as 'each pinpoint of skin screams a different message' (Beckett, 1959, p.111), is recommended as 'a more adequate expression of natural experience' (Beckett, 1965, p.101). Beckett's 1934 essay 'The Essential and the Incidental' supports this judgement as to the primacy of chaotic sensory apprehension:

> The influences of nature are great, but they do not enable the disruptive intelligence, exacting the tumult from unity, to invert its function. A man's mind is not a claw-hammer.
>
> (Beckett, 1983a, p.83)

The precision of the reversal of Kantian terms is striking: here, 'intelligence' is itself 'disruptive' and it is the original 'tumult' of experience which must be extracted from the

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[17] Coenaesthesia comprises 'undifferentiated sensations and complex, often contradictory, organic reactions' (Harrington, 1980, p.347). In its own opinion, coherence only exists 'at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to' (Beckett, 1965, pp.124-125).

falsifications of artificial 'unity'. The Kantian scheme would be exactly opposite, requiring an organizational intelligence to distinguish areas of unity from general tumult. It is this faculty of discrimination which has broken down in Malone Dies:

> for a long time now I have been hearing things confusedly. There I go again. What I mean is possibly this, that the noises of the world, so various in themselves and which I used to be so clever at distinguishing from one another, had been dinning at me for so long, always the same old noises, as gradually to have merged into a single noise, so that all I heard was one vast continuous buzzing.[18] The volume of sound perceived remained no doubt the same, I had simply lost the faculty of decomposing it. The noises of nature, of mankind and even my own, were all jumbled together in one and the same unbridled gibberish. Enough.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.207)

In Molloy, Moran's capacity to maintain distinctions can be overwhelmed by a preponderance of similarities; bicycle wheels are a case in point: 'I forget which wheel it was. As soon as two things are nearly identical I am lost' (Beckett, 1959, p.156).[19] By the time of The Unnamable, it is considered a

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[18] Compare Murphy's 'big blooming buzzing confusion' (Beckett, 1963, p.21) and one of the refrains of Not I: '... and if not exactly ... insentient ... insentient ... for she could still hear the buzzing ... so-called ... in the ears ...' (Beckett, 1986, p.377).

[19] In All That Fall, Mr Tyler's mind is more attuned to the differences attendant upon puncturing the front or back bicycle tyre:

'Deplorable mania, when something happens, to inquire what' (Beckett, 1959, p.298). Such inquiries are lost to the 'haze' in Ill Seen Ill Said:

> She is vanishing. With the rest. The already ill seen bedimmed and ill seen again annulled. The mind betrays the treacherous eyes and the treacherous word their treacheries. Haze sole certitude. The same that reigns beyond the pastures. It gains them already. It will gain the zone of stones. Then the dwelling through all its chinks.
>
> (Beckett, 1982, p.48)

The elements distinguished in the text, those picked out by being 'seen' and 'said' via conceptual and linguistic categories, are permitted to lapse back to the status of the unexamined area 'beyond the pastures', an area never described or determined by the narrator. The 'haze' seeks to regain objects and events differentiated from it. The body of Murphy, once a reasonably determinate object, suffers similar disintegration into its background. Death by gas explosion and cremation cause much damage to the integrity of the body; Cooper completes an unorthodox scattering of the ashes:

> Some hours later Cooper took the packet of ash from his pocket, where earlier in the evening he had put it for

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> Now if it were the front I should not so much mind. But the back. The back! The chain! The oil! The grease! The hub! The brakes! The gear! No! It is too much!
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.175)

greater security, and threw it angrily at a man who had given him great offence. It bounced, burst, off the wall on to the floor, where at once it became the object of much dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting, punching, heading and even some recognition from the gentleman's code. By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greyened the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit.

(Beckett, 1963, p.154)

Murphy as a figure will never be differentiated from the background chaos again.[20]

The initial introduction of the central protagonist in Watt is decidedly unobtrusive; Watt himself is 'scarcely to be distinguished' from his background:

Then [the tram] moved on, disclosing, on the pavement,

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[20] The body in Ping is subject to a functionally equivalent, if more dignified, disappearance into its background: 'Bare white body fixed white on white invisible' (Beckett, 1984, p.149). Cubist painting cultivates just this dissolution of the boundaries between putatively discrete objects. Peter describes the results of this technique in Picasso's Girl with a Mandolin (1910; Museum of Modern Art, New York):

> Parts of the figure begin ambiguously to fuse into each other. [...] The head is little more than an outline, and it is not clear where the profile ends and the background begins. Or rather, it sometimes seems, in the complex works of Analytical Cubism, as if objects and figures were being invaded by whatever surrounds them.
>
> (Peter, 1987, p.238)

motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it. Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr. Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord.

(Beckett, 1976, p.14)

Whereas Mr Knott was rendered indeterminate by a surfeit of heterogeneous descriptions, Watt can barely be differentiated from his background as a discrete object. Mary's prodigious loss of dusters is exacerbated by this tendency of the environment in Watt to swallow up objects into itself:

> the duster, whose burden up till now she had so bravely born, fell from her fingers, to the dust, where having at once assumed the colour (grey) of its surroundings it disappeared until the following Spring.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.50)

Watt's task in the creation of Mr Knott's meals is similarly the destruction of the distinctiveness of their ingredients. The preparation is at once 'delicate', for 'the choice, the dosages and the quantities of the elements employed had been calculated, with the most minute exactness', and also 'rude' (Beckett, 1976, p.85), for all the ingredients are to be boiled down 'so that not one could be distinguished from another':

All these things, and many others too numerous to mention, were well mixed together in the famous pot and boiled for four hours, until the consistence of a mess, or poss, was obtained, and all the good things to eat, and all the good things to drink, and all the good things to take for the good of the health were inextricably mingled and transformed into a single good thing that was neither food, nor drink, nor physic, but quite a new good thing, and of which the tiniest spoonful at once opened the appetite and closed it, excited and stilled the thirst, compromised and stimulated the body's vital functions, and went pleasantly to the head.

(Beckett, 1976, p.84)

The properties of this unnamed 'mess', operative in opposite ways 'at once' on the appetite, thirst and vital functions, do indeed cause perturbation in the head which tries to assimilate such contradictions.

v. The Galls and the pot: particularity vs conceptualization

The most important incident concerning indetermination in Watt is one which Watt himself cannot always endorse as a discrete 'incident', precisely because of its indetermination. To the reader, this is the incident of the Galls, father and son, the interaction of 'a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation' together with 'an exchange of judgments more or less intelligible' (Beckett, 1976, p.69). Watt's own apprehension of this episode does not fit securely into these

high-level conceptual categories supplied by the narrative, fragmenting instead into the separate strands of this incident's sensory components, its 'sounds', 'lights' and 'surfaces' (Beckett, 1976, p.73):

> it was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and retardings, the approaches and the separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.69)

Discrimination occurs between the sensory components of the occurrence; what is lacking in Watt at this point is the ability to synthesize these discrete details into determinate concepts.[21] Watt gives an account of sensory apprehension prior

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[21] Contrast the characteristic 'holism' of the 'conscious field' as understood in 'standard brain models':

> As I sit here at my desk, my brain is bombarded at every moment by millions of sensory data - visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory. And yet I do not perceive a scene fragmented into millions of parts. I perceive a room, I am aware of myself sitting in this room and of the projects which draw me here. My consciousness creates a unity from the diverse bits of sensory information, drawing them into a meaningful whole.
>
> (Zohar and Marshall, 1993, p.46)

How such a perceptual whole is generated is named the 'binding problem' by neurobiology (Zohar and Marshall, 1993, p.46).

to its conceptual organization into determinate events having to do with piano-tuning and the requisite tuners.[22] Prior to synthesis, Watt cannot recognize 'the knock become a knock, on the door become a door, in his mind, presumably in his mind, whatever that might mean' (Beckett, 1976, pp.73-74). Neither, consequently, can he assign to the incident of the Galls its beginning.

The difference between Watt's apprehension as described and the concepts offered to the reader is now inescapable. To communicate Watt's inability to unify his sensory data under the idea of a knock, the reader must be informed that the event in question is a knock, upon a door, similarly, that Watt is putatively unable to identify as such. The question arises as to how the idea of the Galls and piano enters the narrative at all if Watt's apprehension of them is really limited to unorganized sensory data. The narrator is troubled by these discrepancies:

> were there neither Galls nor piano then, but only an

---

[22] Tuning is geared towards imposing the very organizational framework upon sound which Watt is unable to apply to the scene of the tuning itself. The Galls work to a pre-established schema:

> Musical 'order' demands a continuous tinkering with natural sound to make the tonal system repeatable for different keys and therefore amenable to the form of series - the triumph of ratio over musical matter.
>
> (Lees, 1993, p.176)

What defeats the Galls is the state of the instrument they have come to adjust, with its missing dampers and hammers and strings in flitters. The disrepair of Watt's conceptual apparatus may be analogous.

unintelligible succession of changes, from which Watt finally extracted the Galls and the piano, in self-defence? These are most delicate questions. Watt spoke of it as involving, in the original, the Galls and the piano, but he was obliged to do this, even if the original has nothing to do with the Galls and the piano. For even if the Galls and the piano were long posterior to the phenomena destined to become them, Watt was obliged to think, and speak, of the incident, even at the moment of its taking place, as the incident of the Galls and the piano, if he was to think and speak of it at all.

(Beckett, 1976, p.76)

The non-conceptual is equivalent to the unthinkable and the unspeakable. The unthought and unspoken is entirely indeterminate. Complete conceptual breakdown is incommunicable as an experience in prose narrative, which must itself trade in concepts.[23] Watt is ascribed the experience of a failure to organize apprehension conceptually, but such a failure cannot itself be described in process:

As to giving an example of the second event, namely the failure, that is clearly quite out of the question. For

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[23] Any items of sensory experience cited in narrative remain exclusively conceptual entities. In Imagination Dead Imagine, where Beckett instructs 'go back in, rap, solid throughout' (Beckett, 1984, p.145), Hansford is willing to conclude that 'The boundary separating the inside of the rotunda from outside is here made concrete by tactile inquiry' (Hansford, 1993, p.156). But these are conceptual determinations; no tactile inquiry has taken place.

> there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1976, pp.75-76)

We are assured that 'in the first week Watt's words had not yet begun to fail him, or Watt's world to become unspeakable' (Beckett, 1976, p.82); by week two, presumably, the negation of these possibilities may be reversed.

Over-scrupulous appreciation of irreducible particularity is partly responsible for these disabilities. In the case of the pot-like non-pot, it is its 'hairbreadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt' (Beckett, 1976, p.78); it is some 'tiny little thing', an 'indefinable thing', which 'prevented him from saying, with conviction, and to his relief, of the object that was so like a pot, that it was a pot' (Beckett, 1976, p.79).[24] With the object suspended between similarity to and difference from the general concept 'pot', Watt is left with a familiar contradiction: 'This is a pot, and yet not a pot' (Beckett, 1976, p.78). The pseudo-pot of Watt rivals the extended single ladders of The Lost Ones in the quandary it

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[24] Although defeated in the classification of pots, Watt has a remarkable ability to categorize and name entities which are essentially nebulous:

> [...] Watt had a great experience of clouds, and could distinguish the various sorts, the cirrhus, the stratus, the tumulus and the various other sorts, at a glance.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.80)

sets for the understanding. The conceptual organization of the bodies of The Lost Ones under the categories of either 'those perpetually in motion', 'those who sometimes pause', the sedentary or the vanquished (Beckett, 1972, p.13) is similarly liable to collapse under the weight of exceptions the narrator gradually discloses as to the behaviour proper to these groups. Again, the particularities scrupulously registered as to the individual conduct of bodies disrupts their subsumption under general descriptive categories. Eventually it must be conceded that the differences between bodies grouped into the same category are capable of outweighing the similarities which originally justified their identification as a determinate group. Classification can burst apart by a re-emphasis on particularity and therefore difference.[25] The bodies of the cylinder in their described particularity are thus paradoxically ill-defined.

Watt can find philosophical support for his troubles based upon 'the contradictions between the concept and the particular' (Adorno, 1973, p.45). Incommensurability exists between general concept and sensory particular:

> The concept of the particular is always its negation at the same time; it cuts short what the particular is and what nonetheless cannot be directly named, and it replaces this

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[25] According to Ellis, 'the fundamental point of linguistic categories' is to 'reduce the complexities of the world to make it manageable for its speakers so they can orient themselves in it, that is, know it' (Ellis, 1993, p.33). This entails a pragmatic silence concerning particularity and difference which is ever at risk of re-description as culpable neglect of specificity.

with identity.

(Adorno, 1973, p.173)

For Adorno, 'objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder' (Adorno, 1973, p.5). Just such a remainder, some 'tiny little thing' (Beckett, 1976, p.79), thwarts Watt's attempts to categorize the object that is like but not quite a pot. Watt, marooned in specificity, similarly cannot confirm the identity between particular and general assumed in the proposition, 'Watt is a man' (Beckett, 1976, p.79). The suspension of particular differences is required to produce the concept 'man', under which Watt is loath to bring himself:

> we behave as if the concept, e.g. the concept 'man,' were something factual, whereas it is surely only something which we have constructed through a process of ignoring all individual features.
>
> (Nietzsche, 1979, §150, p.51)

Such a generally applicable concept must edit out the features which are peculiar only to Watt, although these are the very features which are essential to identify Watt. The effect is to 'dissolve my singularity in the medium of the concept' (Derrida, 1995, p.61). Where Kant orders that 'Judgement in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal' (Kant, 1952, Part I, p.18), aspects of unique sensory apprehension must be lost in this containment. Within the 'modifications of perception', according to Schopenhauer, 'the

shades of difference are so fine that the concept cannot reach them' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §12, pp.56-57). For Nietzsche, 'the great columbarium of concepts' is 'the graveyard of perceptions' (Nietzsche, 1979, §2, p.88). Yet it is still 'in categorizing, in the establishment of classes', that, for all the losses sustained, 'our knowledge begins' (Nietzsche, 1979, §150, p.51). '"Thingness"', we recall, 'was first created by us', wherein 'the fuzziness and chaos of sense impressions are, as it were, logicized' (Nietzsche, 1968, §569, p.307). Sensory apprehension, precisely because of its particularity, is ultimately undefinable and indeterminate.

A balance of discrimination and synthesis is required for coherent perception to take place:

> Ratio is not merely συναγογή, an ascent from the scattered phenomena to the concept of their species, it calls just as much for an ability to discriminate. Without this, the synthetic function of thought - abstract unification - would not be possible: to aggregate what is alike means necessarily to segregate it from what is different.
>
> (Adorno, 1973, p.43)

Throughout Watt such operations malfunction: whereas the idea of Mr Knott, as an aggregation of diffuse and inconsistent data, forms an undifferentiated whole, it is the particularity of the 'pseudo-pot' which prevents its incorporation under the general concept 'pot'. In the former case, indetermination results from

a lack of discrimination between properties; in the latter, discrimination goes so far as to differentiate the object from all others, rendering it unique and unintelligible.[26] It is not possible in either case to know what we are talking about.

vi. Kant's noumenon: the unknowable thing-in-itself

These difficulties destabilize discussion of The Lost Ones in Chapter Four. In The Lost Ones, the conception of the cylinder offered to the reader is not separable from the account provided by the narrator, despite its contradictions and inconsistencies. In general perceptual terms similarly, it is not possible to know what the state of any object might be, separable from our apprehension and conceptualization of it. An inexplicable residual datum is thus left over by this system of perception:

> We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an X which remains inaccessible and

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[26] The unique, by definition, cannot be classified under a general concept; in its unnamable particularity its nature remains mysterious. In Three Dialogues, asking himself 'what is this coloured plane, that was not there before', B. concedes that 'I don't know what it is, having never seen anything like it before' (Beckett, 1965, p.126). In How It Is, the narrator makes the same point via a contradiction: 'my mother's face I see it from below it's like nothing I ever saw' (Beckett, 1964, p.16). To make the identification, resemblance must be acknowledged despite the explicit denial. 'Impossible de raisonner sur l'unique' (Beckett, 1983a, p.127), somewhat ironically, establishes the general principle of the unclassifiable nature of the unique.

undefinable for us.

(Nietzsche, 1979, §1, p.83)

Nietzsche's 'X' is the equivalent to Kant's noumenon or thing-in-itself, that which is posited 'without regard to the mode of intuiting it' (Kant, 1933, A38/B55, p.80). Noumena are objects as they exist in themselves, unmediated by the forms and categories of human perception. They signal the inaccessibility of the unconditioned real. As discussed in Chapter One above, objects are necessarily perceived in space and time; this implies that they are 'appearances', for this frame is contributed by the form of our own sensibility:

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

Similar considerations apply to time:

> we deny to time all claim to absolute reality; that is to say, we deny that it belongs to things absolutely, as their

> condition or property, independently of any reference to the form of our sensible intuition; properties that belong to things in themselves can never be given to us through the senses.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A35-36/B52, p.78)

There are here 'two very heterogeneous elements, namely, the knowledge of things as appearances, and the knowledge of things in themselves' (Kant, 1933, Bxxi, note a, p.24). Things-in-themselves are, by definition, unmediated or unconditioned, and 'the unconditioned cannot be thought without contradiction' (Kant, 1933, Bxx, p.24). The forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding produce conditioned appearances; noumena thus comprise what is unknowable and inaccessible to human perception:

> the employment of the categories can never extend further than to objects of experience. Doubtless, indeed, there are intelligible entities corresponding to the sensible entities; there may also be intelligible entities to which our sensible faculty of intuition has no relation whatsoever; but our concepts of understanding, being mere forms of thought for our sensible intuition, could not in the least apply to them. That, therefore, which we entitle 'noumenon' must be understood as being such only in a negative sense.
>
> (Kant, 1933, B308-309, p.270)

As the categories which organize empirical sensibility are inapplicable to them, the noumena 'can be thought neither as quantity nor as reality nor as substance' (Kant, 1933, A288/B344, p.293). Nor indeed can noumena be thought as objects; each of these categories is part of the conceptual framework of the subject and hence is inimical to the perception of anything as it might be in-itself. As something 'distinct from [...] our knowledge', noumena 'must be thought only as something general = x' (Kant, 1933, A104, p.134). Alternatively, as Strawson notes, 'we can introduce the name of "noumena" [...]. But we cannot in the least understand what we are talking about when we say this' (Strawson, 1966, p.264). The impasse encountered at the close of Chapter Four provoked by the undetermined cylinder of The Lost Ones is precisely replicated in the case of Kant's noumena.

vii. Something and nothing

The noumenon adds to the list of the entirely incomprehensible: it can in principle be assigned no properties, can be the subject of no determination. Accordingly, such a 'property-bereft item' is 'tantamount to non-being' and risks falling 'under the ax of the medieval logician's principle: nihil sunt nullae proprietates ("Nothing has no properties at all")' (Rescher and Brandom, 1980, p.33).[27] Being beyond the range of

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[27] Kant and Nietzsche refer to the noumenon as an unknowable 'x', marking existence but indetermination. For Hegel, such 'pure being, without any further determination' is 'neither more nor less than nothing' (Hegel, 1969, p.82). Furthermore, 'pure nothing', with an identical 'absence of

thought, knowledge and language, it might be presumed that noumena would not be the subject of lively interest. Where the understanding leaves off, however, metaphysical speculation is ready to step in. A choice must be made as to whether the 'nothingness' of the noumena and their unspeakability denote a logically established limit to knowledge or whether such 'nothingness' denotes something of crucial metaphysical importance. Beckett's Texts for Nothing debates within itself whether the limits of language coincide with the end of significant being:

> So long as the words keep coming nothing will have changed, there are the old words out again. Utter, there's nothing else, utter, void yourself of them, here as always, nothing else. But they are failing, true, that's the change, they are failing, that's bad, bad. Or it's the dread of coming to the last, of having said all, your all, before the end, no, for that will be the end, the end of all, not certain.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text II, p.76)

Statements in Worstward Ho attempt to hold what is called unspeakable or ineffable to its word: if we take the proclaimed inaccessibility of the ineffable seriously, then, in Strawson's formulation, 'We lack words to say what it is to be without them' (Strawson, 1966, p.273). Thus, in Beckett's text:

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determination', marks 'the same empty intuition or thought as pure being' (Hegel, 1969, p.82). 'Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same'; these 'absolutely distinct' antitheses are 'unseparated and inseparable' as 'each immediately vanishes in its opposite' (Hegel, 1969, pp.82-83).

What when words gone? None for what then.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.28)

No words for what when words gone.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.28)

But hints as to the continuation of something inaccessible beyond language persist in the same text:

All there as when no words.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.39)

Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on. Then all seen as only then. Undimmed. All undimmed that words dim. All so seen unsaid.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.40)

The 'All undimmed that words dim' cannot be further determined without allowing words back to their work of 'dimming'; 'All so seen', therefore, must remain 'unsaid' (Beckett, 1983b, p.40). With no determination possible, such an 'All' is again tantamount to nothing, yet, being 'undimmed' and 'seen', its claim to existence is upheld.

Writing on the painting of Bram van Velde, Beckett manoeuvres towards the conversion of 'nothing' from absence towards an identity with an indeterminate something. Beckett suggests that we see in van Velde:

> An endless unveiling, veil behind veil, plane after plane of imperfect transparencies, light and space themselves veils, an unveiling towards the unveilable, the nothing, the thing again.[28]
>
> (Beckett cited in Albright, 1981, Plate 8, between pp.94-95)

The formulation of 'the nothing, the thing again' seems designed to insinuate an identity between terms which replay the paradoxical suspension of the noumena between something and nothing. The crucial question remains, however, as to whether access to such mysterious entities is possible, an access which, if granted, would consolidate Beckett's reputation for metaphysical concerns. Albright extrapolates Beckett's conclusion here as the assertion that 'art has access to a superior reality' (Albright, 1981, Plate 8, between pp.94-95). Any approach 'towards the unveilable', however, if the meaning of 'unveilable' is respected, must be impossible to complete; this, indeed is an 'unveiling' which is 'endless'. That is a

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[28] This note was produced in 1949; its terms are remarkably similar to those employed by Beckett in 1937 in a letter to Axel Kaun:

> more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it.
>
> (Beckett, 1983a, p.52; trans., p.171)

Beckett advocates that the writer should 'bore one hole after another' through language 'until what lurks behind it - be it something or nothing - begins to seep through' (Beckett, 1983a, p.52; trans., p.172). In each case, agnosticism is maintained as to whether language obscures 'something' of transcendent significance or merely insulates its users from 'nothingness'.

curious description of 'access'.[29] Moreover, 'the nothing, the thing again' is as indeterminate as the 'x' suggested by Kant and Nietzsche to denote the content of the noumena. The 'superior knowledge' posited by Albright is conspicuous by its absence.

Invisible also, however, is any recognition of painting as the production of empirical objects for sensory perception. As in the case of the noumena, the conditions of empirical perception, 'light and space', are themselves cited as obstacles to adequate apprehension, as themselves 'veils'. Beckett does not seem willing to concede that when nothing is empirically perceptible, this is equivalent to the existence of nothing.[30] The difference between these two positions can be illustrated by

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[29] The 'unveilable' itself, however, is ambiguous between opposite meanings, signifying either that which it is impossible to unveil, or, conversely, that which does not permit itself ever to be veiled. In both cases, the prospect of unveiling the 'unveilable' is paradoxical; in the former case it is contradictory, in the second superfluous.

[30] This is compatible with Kant's act in positing the noumena themselves; their non-existence can be no more determined than the nature of their positive actuality. The critic of metaphysical speculation is no more justified in finding in favour of atheism than he would allow a theologian to be in asserting the existence of the Deity. As Nagel berates positivism, 'to deny the reality or logical significance of what we can never describe or understand is the crudest form of cognitive dissonance' (Nagel, 1982, pp.395-396). Nagel champions the existence of 'humanly inaccessible facts' (Nagel, 1982, p.396). The possibility of these can be established logically, as in the case of noumena, without entailing metaphysical commitments. Restriction to 'merely human scope' is sufficient to posit an area of possibility which is ever inaccessible, as the Alba recognizes in Dream of Fair to Middling Woman:

> What wisdom she had acquired, from which she had distilled a savoir ne pas faire that was seldom abashed, she had, in common with her consoeurs, acquired empirically. It was of merely human scope. It was valid only up to a point. This also, instinctively, she seemed to know.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, p.192)

reference to the stage directions of Not I. According to Beckett's instructions, the movement of the Auditor, the 'simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back again', 'lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third' (Beckett, 1986, p.375). Yet the text calls for the existence of 'movement 4' (Beckett, 1986, p.382), that is, the making of a gesture lessened from the 'scarcely perceptible' status of its third occurrence. Where the fifth gesture would be expected to occur, the direction to the Auditor to move does not appear. The fourth movement, therefore, must negotiate the gap between the less than 'scarcely perceptible' and the non-existent. Beckett's text 'Neither' (written 1962) cultivates a similar impasse with its invocation of 'unheard footfalls' as the 'only sound' (Beckett, 1990a, p.109). All Strange Away similarly require us to 'imagine' unheard 'murmurs': 'And yet no sound, well say a sound too faint for mortal ear. Imagine other murmurs' (Beckett, 1984, p.121). The distinction between Molloy's sixteen sucking stones is similarly imperceptible to the empirical sense most concerned:

> deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone, until the end of time. For they all tasted exactly the same.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.74)

Yet the stones are not mathematically identical; each of the sixteen is obviously distinct from the others compared to which,

empirically, it is 'exactly the same'.[31] Something imperceptible is not then necessarily non-existent. Imagination Dead Imagine also marks this gap between an imperceptible something and achieved nothingness:

> and at the same instant for the eye of prey the infinitesimal shudder instantaneously suppressed.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.147)

The limits of what is empirically presentable as 'something' can be exceeded by such a description; yet it is not equivalent to 'nothing': a 'shudder' which does not take place at all is not 'infinitesimal', nor could it be 'instantaneously suppressed' as Beckett requires. It does not seem possible to make manifest to the eye an 'infinitesimal shudder instantaneously suppressed' (Beckett, 1984, p.147); nor can the cylinder of The Lost Ones, rendered unpresentable by its contradictions and approximations, be made empirically manifest. But the problematic nature of such specifications does not on that account dissolve them into

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[31] Despite the elaborate arrangements established to ensure the differentiation of these empirically indistinguishable stones, Molloy reintroduces the indetermination characteristic of Watt to avoid identifying their final fate:

> the solution to which I rallied in the end was to throw away all the stones but one, which I kept now in one pocket, now in another, and which of course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.74)

The last action of a section determined to invent a system which would guarantee that distinctions are maintained between identical items, is to lapse back to an enumeration of the possible ways to lose these crucial items and leave the choice between these options undetermined.

nothingness. Lacking empirical manifestation in principle, it is exceptionally difficult to imagine what constitutes 'movement 4' of Not I, or what could satisfy a call for 'unheard footfalls' and extended single ladders. Denied the simplicity of being nothing, such objects and events are subject to a necessary indetermination. Suspension between something and nothing, as evidenced by Beckett's comments on van Velde above, need not, then, necessarily signify any metaphysical intent. Nevertheless, the location of such objects and events beyond the reach of the senses, like the 'infinitesimal shudder instantaneously suppressed' (Beckett, 1984, p.147), has been a characteristic metaphysical gesture since Plato.[32]

viii. Indetermination and impasse: a return to metaphysics?

As in the case of noumena, indetermination is concomitant with lack of knowledge. Such is the case also in Watt, whether indetermination is generated from an inclusiveness which amalgamates incompatible properties or from the excessive particularity which excludes conceptual classification. What is obscure, unspeakable or subject to impasse, however, is precisely that which has always been of interest to metaphysicians. Schopenhauer is quite clear as to this division of labour; 'where all knowledge ceases' is the 'highest point' of, for instance,

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[32] Dissatisfaction with the knowledge available through the senses encourages a readiness to give credence to the insights proffered by a Platonic 'conception of a Reality behind the world of appearances and utterly different from it' (Russell, 1963, p.14). 'This mode of judgement', according to Nietzsche, 'constitutes the typical prejudice by which the metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized' (Nietzsche, 1990, §2, pp.33-34).

religious thought (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.611). Religion, for him, can find a use for impasse, inconsistency and contradiction:

> some absolute inconsistencies and contradictions, some actual absurdities, are an essential ingredient of a complete religion; for these are just the stamp of its allegorical nature, and the only suitable way of making the ordinary mind and uncultured understanding feel what would be incomprehensible to it, namely that religion deals at bottom with an entirely different order of things, an order of things-in-themselves. In the presence of such an order the laws of this phenomenal world, according to which it must speak, disappear.
>
> (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.166)

Things-in-themselves, Kant's noumena, defined by their inaccessibility to human understanding and hence condemned to absolute indetermination, might seem a hopeless target for investigation; however, that very inaccessibility and indetermination ensure also that no interpretation can be disproved or excluded. With the procedures of rational argumentation suspended, logic being merely a law of the phenomenal world, inconsistencies and contradictions themselves are permitted.

Criticism has its own versions of these procedures. 'At its highest development', according to Miller, 'art can only be

grasped through paradoxes and contradictions' (Miller, 1992, p.35). Similarly, the greater the level of indetermination in Beckett, the greater the agitation in critical ranks toward metaphysical interpretations and identifications can become. The absence of assertion itself can be converted into a gesture conducive to metaphysical interpretation. Thus Rabinovitz on the bodies of The Lost Ones, Imagination Dead Imagine, Lessness and Worstward Ho:

> Beckett gives few particulars in depicting these figures. They are usually isolated, featureless, deprived of words or thoughts. Such terseness adds to their universality: such characters can represent embryonic existences or fragmented components of the self or much larger entities, such as all of humanity.
>
> (Rabinovitz, 1990, p.113)

It is the specificity of Watt that disrupts his subsumption under the generality 'Watt is a man' (Beckett, 1976, p.79). Rabinovitz exploits the reverse consequence: when 'few particulars' are given, such undetermined figures actively exclude few general classifications. Where little is defined, little is ruled out; the less one discloses about any character, Rabinovitz assumes, the more one can be taken to be referring to 'all of humanity'. That the 'featureless' should be so informative is perhaps perverse. Finney discovers a similarly strange Beckettian technique:

> he is constantly trying to worsen his images in an effort to properly represent the nullity of human existence.
>
> (Finney, 1987, p.77)

Whereas less information is more for Rabinovitz, Finney implies that the worse Beckett's representations become, which, one could assume would confound representation as such, the better they work 'properly' to illustrate a particular metaphysical proposition.[33] The logic behind these critical procedures suggests that it is by saying nothing at all that Beckett would most effectively communicate his metaphysical vision. Wolosky obligingly undertakes to consider 'just what Beckett's nothing signifies' (Wolosky, 1991, p.225). Wolosky finds 'four possible interpretations' operative in 'Beckett criticism':

> (1) That Beckett's nothing in fact designates a transcendent fullness opposed to the material world from which ascetic withdrawal is urged, making Beckett a kind of Christian

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[33] Were it not for this 'properly', Finney could yet be rehabilitated as an affiliate to the Kantian sublime. Where metaphysical representations are concerned, art is condemned to a necessary inadequacy; the 'inadequacy of images', however, may be reconsidered as 'negative signs' attesting to the 'immense power of Ideas':

> the absoluteness of Idea, is revealed in what Kant calls a negative presentation, or even a nonpresentation. He cites the Jewish law banning images as an eminent example of negative presentation: optical pleasure reduced to nearly nothing promotes an endless contemplation of infinity.
>
> (Lyotard, 1984b, p.40)

In hindsight, 'the door had [...] been opened to inquiries pointing toward abstract or Minimal art': 'Avant-gardism is thus present in germ stage in the Kantian esthetic of the sublime' (Lyotard, 1984b, p.40). See the Conclusion below, Section iii.

mystic. (2) That the nothing signifies an ultimate transcendence which however cannot be attained despite ascetic withdrawal from the material world, making Beckett a failed Christian or a 'mystic manqué.' (3) That the material world is utterly repudiated in the name of a transcendental nothing absolutely antithetical to it, making Beckett into a gnostic. And (4) that at the core of reality, when all appearances have been stripped away, there is only an existential void, making Beckett a secular nihilist.

(Wolosky, 1991, p.225)

Such are the remarkable returns from an investment in 'nothing'. Precisely the same evidence, the abstracted formula 'Beckett's nothing', is employed as the basis of each extrapolated metaphysical option. Like Watt's list of logical possibilities, no reason is provided for preferring any one entry to another.

ix. Nothing in Murphy

'Beckettian criticism', as Wolosky demonstrates, can be provoked into creating a tremendous fuss about nothing. For Levy, it is specifically 'Murphy's experience of Nothing [which] is of archetypical importance in Beckett' (Levy, 1980, p.21). The interpretation of Murphy will indeed be influential upon controversies as to the significance of 'Nothing' and Beckett's status as a metaphysician. Much comfort as to Beckett's metaphysical proclivities can be drawn from the statement of

Murphy's alleged experience of Nothing:

> [...] Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of <u>percipere</u> but of <u>percipi</u>. His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did, as Murphy with his head among the armies continued to suck in, through all the posterns of his withered soul, the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing. Then this also vanished, or perhaps simply came asunder, in the familiar variety of stenches, asperities, ear-splitters and eye-closers, and Murphy saw that Mr Endon was missing.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.138)

Murphy's emergence from the experience of Nothing is, strangely, completed by consciousness of an absence, as 'Murphy saw that Mr Endon was missing'. The difference between the two experiences is one of determination, the latter identifying the absence of a specific object rather than the loss of an undifferentiated All. Both can claim to be perceptions of nothing or Nothing, however, rather than the suspension of the perceptive faculties themselves. The possibility of such an experience of Nothing as

proposed here would be denied by Kant. Kant would object, 'how can there be any experience of the absolutely void?' (Kant, 1933, A487/B515, p.437):

> If all reality in perception has a degree, between which and negation there exists an infinite gradation of ever smaller degrees, and if every sense must likewise possess some particular degree of receptivity of sensations, no perception, and consequently no experience, is possible that could prove, either immediately or mediately [...] a complete absence of all reality in the [field of] appearance. In other words, the proof of an empty space or of an empty time can never be derived from experience. For, in the first place, the complete absence of reality from a sensible intuition can never be itself perceived [...].
>
> (Kant, 1933, A172/B214, pp.205-206)

What Murphy describes as an experience of Nothing would be re-classified by Kant as not an experience, the absence of '*percipere*' itself, which is explicitly denied by the narrator.[34] For Kant, when nothing is perceived, this is a

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[34] In Plato's Theaetetus, Socrates ascribes to the same Kantian view: 'And whenever I become a perceiver, I necessarily become a perceiver of something: I mean, perception of nothing is impossible' (Plato, 1987, p.46). Beckett does not concur analogously that if one is to become a writer then one must necessarily write something; 'Ringelnatz's rhyming fury', for example, belongs to a different order:

> I have no doubt that as a human being Ringelnatz was of quite extraordinary interest. But as a poet he seems to have shared Goethe's opinion: it is better to write NOTHING than not write at all.
>
> (Beckett, 1983a, pp.51-52; trans., p.171)

result of not perceiving rather than positively and actively perceiving 'Nothing' as if it were an object like any other.[35] In Murphy, however, as the 'somethings gave way', 'Nothing' replaces them as the object of perception. Now Democritus the Abderite is introduced to say, 'in' rather than between guffaws,[36] that 'naught is more real' than this mysterious 'Nothing', not even the atoms, the basic stuff of all things which are not nothing, which necessitated that Democritus posit the existence of 'Nothing' or void in the first place.[37] From the opinion selected from Democritus, however, 'The vision of Nothing' here experienced by Murphy, may be identified with 'a direct intuition of the Real' (Levy, 1980, p.23). Or, the other way around, any 'vision of Reality', for Levy, 'is also' this

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[35] Worstward Ho, however, can be made to treat 'nothing' as an object of perception:

> Worsening stare. For the nothing to be seen. At the nothing to be seen. Dimly seen.
>
> (Beckett, 1983b, p.27)

Rendered as the compound 'the nothing-to-be-seen', the idea conveyed here is that of absence; alternatively, we may read 'the nothing' as what is 'to be seen' and 'Dimly seen', denoting an entity which takes the grammatical place of any other noun.

[36] For Democritus of Abdera 'euthumia' or cheerfulness was 'the ultimate end recommended by his ethical system'; he was thus alternatively known as 'the laughing philosopher' (Blackburn, 1994, p.98).

[37] Given the function and requirements of his atoms, Democritus was obliged to reason the void into being:

> The arrangements and conglomerations of atoms produce the world we experience; this world is, however, only one of the infinite number of worlds that different arrangements of atoms produce.
>
> (Blackburn, 1994, p.98)

Empty space is required for such change and movement to be possible. It is these atomic 'somethings' which produced the need for the nothingness associated with Democritus in Murphy.

same 'experience of Nothing' (Levy, 1980, p.21). Levy is confident of the significance of Nothing:

> we shall see how Beckett expands this emerging experience of Nothing into a powerful enunciation of the human species in our own era.
>
> (Levy, 1980, p.53)

We are close now to what Ayer calls 'the utterances of a Heidegger' who, to the disdain of logical positivism, 'bases his metaphysics on the assumption that "Nothing" is a name which is used to denote something peculiarly mysterious' (Ayer, 1990, p.27) and declines to explain further.[38] In Murphy, 'Nothing' does denote something peculiarly mysterious, or, indeterminate; the reasons why are perhaps instructive.

Murphy must first shut down the senses to prevent the interference of 'the somethings' with the proposed experience 'Nothing'. Murphy adheres to the Cartesian method of contemplation laid down in the Meditations:

> I will now shut up my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all

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[38] In ... but the clouds ... the complexity of 'nothing' is at least comparable with that of the calculation of cube roots; each are 'rewarding' in terms of the amount of distraction they offer from pressing concerns:

> [...] I begged in vain, deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased, and busied myself with something else, more ... rewarding, such as ... such as ... cube roots, for example, or with nothing, busied myself with nothing, that MINE [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.421)

my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless.

(Descartes, 1984, vol.2, §34, p.24)

The patients of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat have achieved just this 'self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world', an indifference which Murphy 'had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom' (Beckett, 1963, p.96).[39] He is at least not indifference to the pursuit of a state of indifference. Murphy goes a step beyond rejection of 'the gross importunities of sensation', to include under the classification of 'gross importunities' those attendant upon the presumably intellectual operations of 'reflection' (Beckett,

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[39] The withdrawal from the external world as communicated by the senses is accompanied in Descartes by immersion in the self; as Descartes continues:

> I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself.
>
> (Descartes, 1984, vol.2, §34, p.24)

According to Murphy, the inmates of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat are similarly devoted to exploration of the 'Microcosmos' (Beckett, 1963, p.102):

> The issue therefore, as lovingly simplified and perverted by Murphy, lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter, revived by the psychiatrists on behalf of the former, in his own case unresolved.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.101)

To the detriment of its dignity, the Cartesian philosophical method of sensory withdrawal can offer guidelines as to how to reach the achieved state of the MMM patients, a state which has somehow been confused with clinical insanity.

1963, p.61). It is for the benefit of conceptual reflection, by contrast, that Descartes attempts to quieten the senses. Upon the rejection of both the senses and the powers of reflection, it is doubtful whether any faculties of the mind remain to disturb Murphy; indeed, upon this double rejection, Murphy 'composed himself on the hollow of his back for the torpor he had been craving' (Beckett, 1963, p.61). In Dream to Fair to Middling Women, Belacqua similarly aspires 'to switch off the inward glare' (Beckett, 1993, p.123) in addition to the external senses. In preference to the 'mind proddied and chivvied into taking thought', Belacqua searches for methods to reach 'the hush and indolence of Limbo' (Beckett, 1993, p.181). The Kantian forms of the intuition and the categories of the understanding are now disabled. For Murphy, accordingly, phenomenal perception and the imagination cease to be able to distinguish discrete objects:

> he [...] tried to get a picture of Celia. In vain. [...] He tried again with his father, his mother, Celia, Wylie, Neary, Cooper, Miss Dew, Miss Carridge, Nelly, the sheep, the chandlers, even Bom and Co, even Bim, even Ticklepenny and Miss Counihan, even Mr Quigley. He tried with the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than this. In vain in all cases. He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human. Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though reeled upward off a spool level with

> his throat. It was his experience that this should be stopped, whenever possible, before the deeper coils were reached.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.141)

What Murphy experiences here, communicated to the reader negatively via a register of the objects that his perceptual and imaginative faculties cannot grasp, could also be 'conveniently called Nothing' (Beckett, 1963, p.138). Despite this confusion 'in which every gestalt has vanished', Albright nevertheless considers that 'Murphy is now closer than ever before to the ground of things, to [...] authentic figurelessness' (Albright, 1981, p.173). Yet it is not explained why the failure of ordinary empirical perception and reflection should constitute a step toward the intuition of something 'authentic' or any fundamental 'ground of things'. The loss of the phenomenal is not equivalent to gaining the noumenal; rejection of the senses does not necessarily mean that a superior mode of intuition is obliged to arise to replace them.[40] What Murphy is able 'to

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[40] It is exclusively mystical thought that does assume that such a rejection of the empirical world must lead to gaining insight into the ineffable. Commentators on Meister Eckhart recommend that such a gamble upon this trade-up in knowledge is taken:

> Sense-knowledge [...] impedes the awareness of God. We have to drop it, and the imagination and logic derived from it. When sense-impressions, images and ideas have been cast aside, then the knowledge of God can shine forth. We have to renounce all that we normally call 'knowledge' if we wish to attain this higher kind.
>
> (Smith, 1987, p.18)

Not only is the mode of attaining knowledge of both 'Nothing' and God comparable, there is also a case to be made concerning their shared liability to absolute indetermination.

suck in, through all the posterns of his withered soul',[41] via an alternative method of intuition might, according to Kant's description, again be 'conveniently called Nothing' (Beckett, 1963, p.138):

> in order that a noumenon may signify a true object, distinguishable from all phenomena, it is not enough that I <u>free</u> my thought from all conditions of sensible intuition; I must likewise have ground for <u>assuming</u> another kind of intuition, different from the sensible, in which such an object may be given. For otherwise my thought, while indeed without contradictions, is none the less empty.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A252, p.270)

To experience Nothing as 'a direct intuition of the Real' (Levy, 1980, p.23), as a fundamental 'ground of things' (Albright, 1981, p.173), descriptions which gesture toward the unconditioned noumena, we 'would require a quite peculiar intuition which we do not possess'; in the absence of this mode of insight, whatever the noumenon may be in itself, it remains '<u>for us</u> nothing at all' (Kant, 1933, A279-280/B335-336, p.288).[42] 'Nothing' is again a

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[41] Compare the dismissal of visual perception in <u>More Pricks Than Kicks</u>: 'What were the eyes anyway? The posterns of the mind. They were safer closed' (Beckett, 1970b, p.173).

[42] According to Kant, to understand '"noumenon" in the positive sense' we must describe it as 'an <u>object</u> of a <u>non-sensible intuition</u>'; the 'special mode of intuition' which would be required to grasp the noumenon in this sense is named 'intellectual', as distinct from sensory, intuition (Kant, 1933, B307, p.268). Kant rejects the possibility of such unmediated, direct intellectual intuition of objects, at least for us. If all perception is conditioned, then the unconditioned cannot be perceived.

convenient title for what is gained.

While losing the phenomenal does not necessarily imply the gain of the noumenal, for Murphy the closure of the vision of the allegedly supersensible 'Nothing' is accompanied by the return of the empirical, the 'somethings' which had given way. The eternal stability of what the vision reveals must itself be doubted, for as Murphy raises his head the 'accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing' disperses:

> Then this also vanished, or perhaps simply came asunder, in the familiar variety of stenches, asperities, ear-splitters and eye-closers, and Murphy saw that Mr Endon was missing.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.138)

The 'One-and-Only' splits apart to reconstitute empirically perceptible entities, 'stenches, asperities, ear-splitters and eye-closers', the insistent nature of which justify the attempt to escape the importunities delivered via the senses. As the 'One' falls 'asunder', determinations can again be made; the judgement 'that Mr Endon was missing' is now available to Murphy. Discrete facts and entities are beginning to re-emerge from an undifferentiated whole, the 'One-and-Only' which the narrator considers it convenient to call 'Nothing'. He might equally have chosen to name it 'Everything' or 'All' or, an even more entrenched term, 'God'.[43] The paradoxical nature of the plenum

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[43] The identity of God and Nothing can be attributed to Meister Eckhart; according to Smith, 'Eckhart will sometimes use the term "nothing" to refer to God', as from the human

denoted by 'Nothing' is hinted at in the judgement of the narrator in The End: 'To see nothing at all, no, that's too much' (Beckett, 1984, p.67). Murphy's 'accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing' (Beckett, 1963, p.138) is suggestive of those 'pure universalities in which all [...] specification is somehow absorbed and nullified' (Findlay, 1977, §152, p.516). Mr Knott is another such indeterminate all-encompassing 'One'. When we attempt to conceive the 'absolutely One', 'it will be no longer possible to distinguish it from other things: all will be wholly blank unities and so indistinguishable' (Findlay, 1977, §120, p.511). All separable and determinable facts and entities are lost. And without such discrete facts and entities, according to Hegel, 'cognition' is 'reduced to vacuity':

> Dealing with something from the perspective of the Absolute consists merely in declaring that, although one has been speaking of it just now as something definite, yet in the Absolute, the A = A, there is nothing of the kind, for there all is one. To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfilment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black - this is cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity.
>
> (Hegel, 1977, §16, p.9)

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perspective 'God [...] is "nothing", since he is utterly beyond what we call "being"' (Smith, 1987, p.125). This dialectical identity between pure being and nothingness was also argued by Hegel.

The Absolute cannot be anything determinate when it is made to be everything. From protesting that All is One, and so denying difference, negation and exclusion, the slide is rapid into indetermination, vacuity, and Nothing.“ Murphy's experience of Nothing may be associated with whatever is 'denoted by the names ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God, and so on' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §71, p.410), but, as Schopenhauer concedes, the metaphysician has not by applying such terms named anything that can be positively determined:

> when my teaching reaches its highest point, it assumes a <u>negative</u> character, and so ends with a negation. Thus it can speak here only of what is denied or given up; but what is gained in place of this, what is laid hold of, it is forced [...] to describe as nothing; and it can add only the consolation that it may be merely a relative, not an absolute nothing. For, if something is no one of all the things that we know, then certainly it is for us in general nothing. Yet it still does not follow from this that it is nothing absolutely, namely that it must be nothing from every possible sense, but only that we are restricted to a wholly negative knowledge of it; and this may very well lie

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“ Similarly, if 'God' is identified with 'infinite being' which excludes nothing from itself, 'the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself' (Derrida, 1976, p.71). Ultimately, then, '[...] God is <u>nothing</u> (determined) [...] because he is <u>everything</u>' (Derrida, 1978, p.115).

in the limitation of our point of view.[45]

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.612)

Murphy can explain the rejection of both the senses and the powers of intellectual reflection; it can describe the collapse and dispersal of coherent objects and concepts, as exemplified in Murphy's inability to 'get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human' (Beckett, 1963, p.141). But what might be deemed to replace these perceptions is entirely undetermined. As evidenced by Murphy, we are 'forced [...] to describe as nothing' that which is beyond the limits of possible knowledge (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.612).

As in the incident of the Galls in Watt, the state which is attributed to Murphy during the episode of 'the accidentless One-and-Only' or Nothing (Beckett, 1964, p.138) cannot be communicated in conceptual terms, for it refers to an experience

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[45] Molloy acknowledges an awareness of such negative definition and the origins of this methodology in the pursuit of that which transcends experience:

> What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not. But my ideas on this subject were always horribly confused, for my knowledge of men was scant and the meaning of being beyond me.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.39)

Prime among the properties to be excluded by a negative definition of God would be the finite and the limited, entailing that their ungraspable opposites, infinity and the limitless, are part of the transcendental Idea of God. But, these very properties, if positively attributed to God, deny that their opposites should be excluded. There is a certain inevitability that our 'ideas on this subject' should replicate Molloy's state of being 'horribly confused'.

where conceptual understanding is allegedly inapplicable. Schopenhauer admits that, in principle, such a state 'is accessible only to one's own experience' and 'cannot be further communicated' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §71, p.410). The narrator of Murphy makes no effort to investigate the inner states of other subjects which reproduce the external behaviour exhibited by his hero in ecstatic mode. In the case of Vera the waitress, it is Murphy who becomes submerged into the general nothingness as perceived by a third person. In regard to Vera's field of consciousness, Murphy is for a time polite enough to consider himself absent and so refrain from breaking her reverie:

> The waitress stood before, with an air of such abstraction that he did not feel entitled to regard himself as an element in her situation.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.49)

One can consider Murphy absent from her experience, just as Mr Endon and the empirical surroundings of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat were absent from Murphy's consciousness for the duration of his own 'abstraction'. What the positive content of such experiences might be is undetermined in both cases. But given the association of Murphy's transports with 'Nothing' and the example of Vera, it is tempting to take the narrator at his literal word and suspect vacuity rather than metaphysical portent. The sheep encountered in alliance with Miss Rosie Dew display an 'ecstatic demeanour' which does not mitigate against the suspicion that Murphy's similarly ecstatic 'Nothing' may be

blank and empty:

> The sheep were a miserable-looking lot, dingy, close-cropped, undersized and misshapen. They were not cropping, they were not ruminating, they did not even seem to be taking their ease. They simply stood, in an attitude of profound dejection, their heads bowed, swaying slightly as though dazed. Murphy had never seen stranger sheep, they seemed one and all on the point of collapse. They made the exposition of Wordsworth's lovely 'fields of sleep' as a compositor's error for 'fields of sheep' seem no longer a jibe at that most excellent man.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.59)

The association of the 'ecstatic' with sheep 'dazed' and 'on the point of collapse' may guard against assumptions as to the metaphysical insight attendant upon such a state. Like the incorporation of bananas into the Manichaean schema deployed in Krapp's Last Tape, the popular reputation of certain objects can injure the dignity of the ideas with which they are associated. A parallel with sleepy, dejected and dazed sheep is not conducive to thoughts of the moment of exceptional acuity we would want to attribute to Murphy's metaphysical revelation of 'Nothing'. Murphy himself, described as 'Wearying' and having 'dropped his head on his arms in the midst of the chessman' (Beckett, 1963, p.138) just prior to his experience of 'Nothing', could have been mistaken by visiting superiors as having assumed a conventional pose associated with the 'field of sleep'. The game of chess

is, after all, conducted during Murphy's first night-shift with the board set up upon Mr Endon's bed. It begins as 'Murphy sank down on his elbow on the foot of the bed' (Beckett, 1963, p.135) and ends as 'Murphy [...] retires' with the 'act of submission' of 'laying his Shah on his side' (Beckett, 1963, p.138). There is a distinct possibility, supported by such hints and not decisively excluded by anything else, that what has been interpreted as the great moment of metaphysical insight in Murphy actually describes the process of the protagonist falling asleep.

x. Rhetorical metaphysical obscurity

Finally, in Murphy, competition between a serious metaphysically resonant interpretation and one keen to cultivate bathos and parody resolves into a matter of rhetoric. The statement of Murphy's experience of Nothing presses many of the buttons whereby some association with the 'metaphysical' may be programmed. Thus we are provided with a 'nice distinction' expressed in learned Latin terms (Beckett, 1963, p.138) and the capitalization of abstract nouns (the 'One-and-Only' and 'Nothing') as if to cultivate an impression of their existence in some esoteric realm other than the merely conceptual.[46] A paradoxical identity is asserted between these apparent opposites (the 'One-and-Only' and 'Nothing') with each further identified with the Real. The senses meanwhile are decreed to be at peace

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[46] Similarly, Platonic Ideas are conventionally granted a capital letter to distinguish their essential and timeless nature from the contingency attendant upon their lower-case twins. The Kick and a kick are thus very different entities.

and we await the coup de grâce appearance of a pre-Socratic philosopher, a group of archetypal metaphysicians upon whom we may always depend for extraordinary interpretations of the universe with scant regard for evidential warrant. Against such gestures stand a parodic insistence upon the mundane limitations, and concomitant untrustworthiness in matters metaphysical, of dazed sheep, a bored waitress, the inmates of a mental institution and their weary keeper. Dream of Fair to Middling Women fights the same battle between rhetorical persuasion and bathetic deflation:

> On this emotion recollected in the tranquillity of those celebrated bowers he scaffolded a theory of the mystical experience as being geared, that was his participle, to the vision of an hypostatical clysterpipe, the apex of ecstasy being furnished by the peroration of administration and of course the Dark Night of the Soul (and here we were scandalised by slight consonantal adjustments) and the Great Dereliction coinciding with the period of post-evacuative depression. When we protested that we did not think this would hold water he replied angrily that it was not meant to hold water.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, pp.185-186)

A rhetorical replica of what metaphysical insight should sound like becomes one way of persuading the reader of its occurrence. A certain measure of obscurity can be redefined as a rhetorical prerequisite, instead of representing a culpable lack of precise

determination. What is essential to the communication of the metaphysical is a liberal distribution of capitalized abstract nouns. Complaints concerning lapses and leaps in argumentation are irrelevant, for there is no engagement in argumentation. In Eleutheria, Victor's silence is one economical method of insinuating the presence of the ineffable:

> **Glazier** (falling on his knees, joining his hands) Monsieur! Monsieur! I entreat you! Have pity, have pity on those who dwell in the thick darkness. (He listens ostentatiously.) Silence! It's like the eternal silence of Pascal's infinite spaces.
>
> (Beckett, 1996, p.137)

It is crucial to the dignity of metaphysical insight that it should be expressible in neither conceptual nor discursive terms; its proper vehicle is the indetermination of silence, or, as Schopenhauer preferred, music:

> **Glazier** Just quote me one sentence, one single sentence.
>
> Silence.
>
> Wonderful! He's only prepared to explain himself off-stage, and then only to imbeciles.
>
> **Jacques** It was clear at the time. It isn't a thing you can describe. It's a bit like music.
>
> **Glazier** Music! (He walks up and down in front of the door.) What crimes! What crimes! (He comes to a halt.) Music! I get the picture. Life, death, liberty, the lot, and the

cynical little laughs to show that one is not fooled by noble words and fathomless silences, and the gestures of the paralytic who is trying to indicate that it isn't <u>that</u>, oh, no, one says that but it isn't that at all, it's something different, something completely different, there's nothing to be done, language wasn't created to express that sort of thing.

(Beckett, 1996, pp.125-126)

The rules of engagement set down by the ineffable require that it cannot be stated, challenged or defended; unsurprisingly, then, in relation to the ineffable, there simply is no engagement.[47]

xi. How criticism says the unsayable

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[47] In <u>Eleutheria</u>, as in other Beckett texts, the emptiness and indetermination of the metaphysical is not a warrant to conclude upon the absolute non-existence of its gods or its nonsensical nature, as logical positivism would prefer. For the Glazier, other topics are equally stultifying:

> let us have the decency to keep quiet, yes, decency, good night, let's go to bed, we were crazy to dare to talk of anything other than food restrictions.
>
> (Beckett, 1996, p.126)

It is also important to the complacency of the Spectator that Victor should prove unable to express coherently any imperatives greater than those conventions proposed by his family:

> [...] Dead or alive, he belongs to us, he's one of us again. That's all we had to prove. That basically there's only us. It's even much better this way. It's more decent.
>
> (Beckett, 1996, p.152)

The restrictions upon discussion demanded by positivism can be as contemptible as the special pleadings of metaphysics. The failure of the latter should not translate into the undisputed victory of the former.

If it is conceded that knowledge of the metaphysical is in principle impeded by formidable, and perhaps insurmountable, obstacles, then the difficulties surrounding the expression of such unavailable knowledge should not be a matter of controversy. Mr Hackett in Watt could not be more reasonable on this point:

> I choose to believe you, said Mr. Hackett. And that you are unable to tell what you do not know I am willing to believe also. It is a common failing.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.20)

Critics are often less willing to concede that what cannot be known can also not be expressed. For Albright, 'Most of Beckett's narrators' are 'possessed of a nearly inexpressible vision of things beyond their ken' (Albright, 1981, p.157). When something is 'beyond' the 'ken' of a narrator, it seems curious to speak of his 'possession' of a 'vision' of it, and, further, over-generous to speak of that unavailable vision as just 'nearly inexpressible' (Albright, 1981, p.157, my emphasis). Albright is unable to quite believe that Beckett's narrators are unable to tell what they do not know. This 'nearly inexpressible vision of things beyond their ken' (Albright, 1981, p.157) will withstand very little conceptual scrutiny, but its peculiar combination of metaphysical dramatization, special pleading and exemption clauses is common in Beckett criticism. 'Some critics', as Rabinovitz explains, also find in Beckett 'indecipherable statements about the impenetrability of existence' (Rabinovitz, 1984, p.3). The peculiar factor here is

that such 'indecipherable statements' are sufficiently decipherable to allow Rabinovitz to find that they are indeed '<u>about</u> the impenetrability of existence' (Rabinovitz, 1984, p.3, my emphasis). A serious rather than rhetorical classification as 'indecipherable' should rule out further critical explication of such statements. Rabinovitz declines to acknowledge that the elucidation of the 'indecipherable' should be treated as a contradiction in terms. Similarly, Lawley credits Beckett with discovery of 'the least inadequate approach to the ineffable' (Lawley, 1993, p.113), quite as if tasks rendered impossible by definition were subject to degrees of success and failure in an identical fashion to mundanely possible ones. Approaches to the 'ineffable' must be 'inadequate', otherwise we refer to something other than the ineffable. The desire attributed to Beckett 'to find a mode of language with which to communicate the incommunicable' (Finney, 1987, p.65) is similarly self-defeating. If once communicated, the estimate of what constitutes the 'incommunicable' must be revised.

Criticism is obliged to make statements. Consequently, when it professes to find the ineffable or unspeakable in Beckett, it fundamentally disables its own operations. What Kane intends to discuss with regard to postwar playwrights, for example, is unavailable for discussion according to her own terms:

> even more challenging to postwar playwrights in our century was how to speak about the unspeakable - that which cannot be verbalized because the experience it would illuminate

> exceeds the defining act of human consciousness which is speech.
>
> (Kane, 1984, p.23)

If such definitions are seriously intended, then the assignment Kane describes is not merely 'challenging' but impossible. What is 'unspeakable' by definition cannot be spoken about; where something exceeds human consciousness itself, one would be well-advised to cease investigations into it. In the essay 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin' (1938), Beckett is willing to countenance 'the extraordinary evocation of the unsaid by the said' (Beckett, 1983a, p.94); the evocation of the 'unsayable' by the said, however, is a step further which logic alone should be sufficient to discountenance. According to Kane, by contrast, the unsayable is to be said via silence:

> In a conscious retreat from the word, considered by many to be an inferior, limited, devalued, and prostituted mode of communication, these playwrights have chosen to communicate through the multidimensional, nonverbal expression of silence. Thus speech, the characterizing signature of humanity, has been superseded by silence to communicate unspoken experience beyond the limitations of human consciousness [...].
>
> (Kane, 1984, p.13)

Words are nevertheless considered fit to convey a statement of their own inadequacy. It is silence, however, which is

considered qualified to effect the communication of 'experience beyond the limitations of human consciousness'. This impossible feat is simply assumed to be achieved; Kane emphasizes 'the authority of silence to express the unspoken and the unspeakable' (Kane, 1984, p.14). Neither the 'unspoken' nor the 'unspeakable' should be subject to 'expression'. The content of each, furthermore, is entirely undetermined, as is the silence via which they are, contradictorily, spoken. Kane examines 'silence employed as thematic, structural, and dramatic statement' (Kane, 1984, p.13), and, specifically, 'Beckett's use of the unspoken and the unspeakable as dramatic structure and statement' (Kane, 1984, p.105). Silence is transformed into its opposite, statement.

The association of the 'unspeakable' with the incompatible concepts of 'expression' and 'statement' is not exclusive to Kane; Budick and Iser also are willing to debate the 'unsayable' alongside its articulation:

> Once we have encountered the limits of the sayable, we must acknowledge the existence of 'unsayable things' and, by means of a language somehow formed on being silent, articulate that which cannot be grasped.
>
> (Budick and Iser, 1989, p.xii)

The 'unsayable' should be incommensurable with the impulse to communicate signalled by any 'language' and beyond any operations which would attempt to 'articulate' or 'grasp' its nature. If

such concepts are to retain their meaning, the representation of the ineffable or communication of the unsayable should be excluded a priori. The claims of metaphorical intimation as to the ineffable or the unspeakable are, however, consistently urged by criticism. As Mandelbaum argues:

> If, for Wordsworth, the 'incompetence of human speech' is sad, others may see in that incompetence an extraordinary instigator of energetic copia, unwearying exuberance, synonymic reveling, the garrulous testing of limits. Still others may see mere non-sense in confronting, let alone trying to render, the ineffable. But even the latter must at times allow the fecundity of ineffability in urging us to metaphors and likenings - celebrating analogies even as we lament their inadequacies.
>
> (Mandelbaum, 1984, p.vii)

If the 'ineffable' continues to denote that which cannot be known, however, we are not justified in describing attempted representations as 'metaphors and likenings'. Nothing is available for inspection to confirm that any 'likening' has been achieved. It should not be possible to celebrate 'analogies' between a representation and its entirely unknown and indeterminate object. Even to 'lament [...] inadequacies' we should require an object to stand in contrast to our feeble attempt to represent it. In the case of the ineffable, it is just this insight and the hence the possibility of determining the adequacy of any representation which is in principle

unavailable. Where the ineffable is concerned, 'ignorance is recognized as being necessary' (Kant, 1933, A758/B786, p.605).

xii. Indetermination and self-defeat: the ineffable, the unspeakable, God, nothing, noumena and contradiction

The reasons for the unintelligibility of such terms as the 'ineffable' or 'unspeakable' mark their entry into distinguished, if indeterminable, company. Ayer's comments on the idea of 'God' apply equally to either of the former terms:

> we are often told that the nature of God is a mystery which transcends the human understanding. But to say that something transcends the human understanding is to say that it is unintelligible. And what is unintelligible cannot significantly be described. [...] [I]f one allows that it is impossible to define God in intelligible terms, then one is allowing that it is impossible for a sentence both to be significant and to be about God. If a mystic admits that the object of his vision is something which cannot be described, then he must also admit that he is bound to talk nonsense when he describes it.
>
> (Ayer, 1990, p. 124)

Critical machinations concerning the concepts of the 'ineffable' or 'unspeakable' are condemned to the failure attendant upon attempts to determine the true nature of God, or indeed Watt's Mr Knott, or his conceptually incoherent experience of the Galls.

The obscurity of Murphy's experience of 'Nothing' and the 'One-and-Only' is analogous, as is the confusion cultivated by the contradictions of The Lost Ones. In parallel with Kant and Nietzsche's 'noumenon', and Kant's overall critique of metaphysics, such concepts are in principle unknowable. And as demonstrated in previous sections here, Beckett's work regularly drives itself into this impasse.

Yet the usefulness of positing a list of the unknowable entities which populate Beckett's work, Beckett criticism and the philosophical tradition must be conceded to be questionable. The gain in knowledge made when one unknown 'x' is said to be analogous with another can hardly be significant. The occurrence of the unknown in Texts for Nothing is similarly marked by a comparison with an unequally undetermined element:

> But peekaboo here I come again, just when most needed, like the square root of minus one [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text XI, p.108)

The indefinable 'self' of the speaker can do no more than register its likeness with the necessary indetermination of an irrational number. But even to seek an analogy between unknown or unknowable elements is to assume an insight into the nature of each which is strictly inadmissible. It should have been queried in Chapter Four as to how the cylinder of The Lost Ones can be considered analogous to Kant's metaphysical object if, as claimed, the contradictory nature and unverifiable status of the

cylinder prevents one establishing any coherent knowledge about it. It should not be possible to assign any stable identification to such an unknowable object, even an identity with equally unknowable metaphysical propositions. Equally, however, Kant is obliged to specify the precise attributes of the noumena and the metaphysical object itself in order to establish precisely why nothing can be known about either. In demanding non-negotiable ignorance concerning such entities, Kant silently assumes too much knowledge concerning their essential unknowability.

Attention towards what is deemed ineffable commonly terminates in such self-defeat. That God, for example, should be 'beyond comprehension' and 'facts about God [...] beyond expression' (Priest, 1995, p.23), are merely two pieces of information concerning the idea of God which deny the possibility of their own comprehension or expression, despite the fact that both operations have just taken place. For Priest, 'even to claim that God was incomprehensible is to express a certain fact about God' (Priest, 1995, p.24). Where any such facts can be expressed concerning an object, its continued status as 'incomprehensible' is questionable.[48] Kant encounters identical paradoxes in seeking to elucidate the role of the noumena in his

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[48] Nevertheless, theologians are well-practised in attributing to a supposedly ineffable God the properties stipulated by dogma. That God should be ineffable undermines the attribution of any other property to the concept. The instruction of 'waifs' about the existence of 'a merciful ... [Brief laugh.] ... God' (Beckett, 1986, p.377), as recalled in Not I, would cease if the attribution of ineffability to God were seriously meant.

epistemology. Comprising that to which the categories of the understanding do not apply, the noumena are pushed outside the limits of possible knowledge, yet, as Priest notes, in the Critique of Pure Reason we find Kant 'writing a large book at least purporting to inform us about, inter alia, noumena' (Priest, 1995, p.89). The prospect of self-defeat is 'posed for anyone who holds that the Categories do not apply to noumena and, at the same time, wants even to consider propositions about them' (Priest, 1995, p.93). To think and speak about noumena at all necessitates the application of the very categories deemed inapplicable to them:

> When Kant says that noumena may be supposed to exist (A253=B309) he deploys the Category of existence; when he says that they are not in time, he deploys the Category of negation. Even the statement that the Categories cannot be applied to noumena deploys the Categories of possibility and negation [...].
>
> (Priest, 1995, p.90)

It is the inapplicability of the categories which excludes the possibility of knowing about or speaking of the noumena; yet, to make this determination is indeed to state and to assume knowledge of certain facts concerning the noumena. In effect, the determinations deployed to define the noumena as unspeakable and unknowable must contradict this assertion in the act of making it. For Priest, even 'to say that there are (or even may be) things about which we cannot judge is precisely to make a

judgement about them' (Priest, 1995, p.91).[49] Self-defeat seems unavoidable for statements alleging that the unknowability of the noumena can itself be known.

The solution offered by Ayer and logical positivism to the problem of the ineffable is that when an entity can be defined as a priori unspeakable, we must cease thereafter to attempt to speak of it. Wittgenstein's Tractatus offers similar advice for the avoidance of self-defeat:

> The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1974, p.3)

What is passed over 'in silence' is permitted to remain entirely undetermined. As the later Wittgenstein argues, 'a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing can be

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[49] Priest catalogues a series of philosophical arguments which 'render some important states of affairs ineffable' while simultaneously 'managing to express them' within the theory itself (Priest, 1995, p.244). In addition to theologians and Kant, Priest is concerned to convict Derrida of a similar charge of self-defeat. According to Priest's reading of deconstruction:

> Claims about différance are not expressible; but Derrida's own texts would seem to be replete with such claims. Even to say that différance is inexpressible you have to refer to it to say what it is that cannot be expressed.
>
> (Priest, 1995, p.243)

The version of self-defeat identified here is structurally identical to that which exposes the vulnerability of Kant's noumena.

said' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §304, p.102). The difference between nothing and something in such circumstances could never be shown.[50] In his Preface to the Tractatus, Russell is in agreement with Mr Hackett of Watt[51] as well as Wittgenstein on the subject of the unspeakable: 'What we cannot think we cannot think, therefore we also cannot say what we cannot think' (Russell, 1974, p.xviii). Kant's evocation of the noumena is a prime example of just such an attempt to say precisely what we cannot think and why we cannot think it. As such it is inevitably self-defeating.

For Beckett's How It Is, the ineffable, which to remain itself should be indeterminate and unclassifiable, can be assimilated into the category of 'just one of those things that pass understanding there are some' (Beckett, 1964, p.68). That which passes understanding does not do so to the extent of resisting classification within this very conceptual category. Once established as a concept like any other, the unknowable can even be cited as an element contributing to an explanation of other phenomena. Accordingly, while designing an allegory for The Lost Ones, Henning contends that 'The [...] freedom of gas molecules and subatomic particles', for example, 'has been

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[50] According to Adorno's critique, this inability to determine whether the 'unspeakable' refers to something or to nothing implies that Wittgenstein's 'commandment of silence' based upon logical terms is itself indistinguishable from the mystically inspired 'wordless rapture of believers in Being' (Adorno, 1973, p.403). In their shared insistence upon silence, the difference between the positions of the logical positivist and the mystic cannot be shown either.

[51] As quoted above, p.475.

explained in terms of fundamental indeterminacy' (Henning, 1988, p.185, my emphasis). That 'fundamental indeterminacy' can be said to constitute an explanation signals just how domesticated notions of 'indeterminacy' are in the postmodernist critical lexicon. Indetermination itself can be deployed as an explanatory hypothesis in regard to Beckett. As has been the case in this chapter, selected passages in Beckett's writings can be determined as conforming to ideas of the indeterminate. But as has been found with regard to the spoken 'unspeakable' and known 'ineffable', it must be questionable whether passages thus amenable to interpretation and classification can continue to be described as 'indeterminate'. As quickly as selected passages can be determined as indeterminate, their supposedly indeterminate status, just awarded, is also cancelled by the fact that such a determination can actually be made concerning them. To adopt 'indetermination' as an organizing principle inevitably also invites charges of self-defeat. It can be argued, however, that similarly self-defeating structures are endemic to Beckett criticism, metaphysical speculation, Kant's own critique of metaphysics and Beckett's texts themselves. Self-defeating structures are of direct interest in each of these areas. The instances of self-defeat occasioned while dealing with The Lost Ones, perhaps the outstanding example of a text primed to undermine its own assertions, will be considered in detail in the sixth and final chapter. Second thoughts about Chapters One to Three will follow in the order Three, Two, One.

Chapter Six

Critical Self-Defeat: Rethinking Chapters Four to One

i. The Lost Ones: beyond the sayable, or 'Beyond what is said there is nothing'

The concepts of the noumenal, ineffable, unspeakable and indeterminable are used to signal that the limit as to what can be conceived, known, spoken and determined has been reached. In attempting to explain the existence of such limits, however, these concepts used to mark the boundary beyond which we cannot go, are themselves subject to explanation. In order to set limits to possible knowledge, the Critique of Pure Reason is forced simultaneously to transcend those limits in presenting its explanations as to their necessity. As far as the limiting case of the unknowable noumenon itself intrudes into the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant's own philosophy swerves outside the boundaries of possible knowledge it inaugurates. The unknowable is explained so that the necessity of its exclusion from the arena of the knowable can itself be known.

The existence of an analogous boundary to possible knowledge concerning the cylinder of The Lost Ones was crucial to the discussion of that text in Chapter Four. As argued there, the 'conceptual existence' of the cylinder 'is not separable from the narrative of The Lost Ones' (Chapter Four, p.364). Closed Place is called upon to state this principle:

> 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.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.199)

A strict restriction to the terms of the text itself is intended to disqualify transcendent and allegorical readings. An allegorical reading cannot concede that 'Beyond what is said' within The Lost Ones itself 'there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199); it is obliged instead to find analogies and identifications with concepts additional to those supplied by the text.[1] Commenting upon Iser's observation of the 'massive allegorization' to which Beckett's works have been subject, Levy identifies this strategy with the impulse of criticism 'to fill in what was not definitely set down' (Levy, 1990, p.13). Allegorical readings must transcend the contradictory details of the textual system of The Lost Ones in this manner if they are to supply a coherent overview as to the meaning and significance of the text. Interpretations which discover that The Lost Ones is actually about the very problems attendant upon its own interpretation, as suggested by Brienza and Henning, remain within this methodology of allegorical and transcendent reading. Both Brienza and Henning are able finally to abstract from The Lost Ones a coherent demonstration as to its potentialities as

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[1] It is tempting to turn harsh words against the allegorists; 'Barbarians, incapable of analysis and abstraction', Beckett writes in a not dissimilar context, 'must use their fantasy to explain what their reason cannot comprehend' (Beckett, 1961, p.9).

an allegory of its own reading, which, coincidentally, is neatly compatible with the interest in self-reflexive literary texts of a postmodernist critical agenda. This is altogether too harmonious for Chapter Four's liking.

The price to be paid for seeking to remain inside the text of The Lost Ones is an unedifying immersion in its contradictions. If the text of The Lost Ones is truly contradictory, then the transcendence of mere analysis of its internal details in favour of an external critical overview provides at least an opportunity to achieve for oneself a coherent interpretation. Beckett's focus upon restricted and enclosed structures built without exits, however, is powerful; an immanent reading which recognizes that it must remain so enclosed itself can readily understand, for example, the apparently perverse judgement of the narrator of The Lost Ones as to the 'certitudes' informing his cylinder-system:

> in the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found and without nothing but mystery.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.42)

The 'without' of the cylinder in The Lost Ones does indeed consist of 'nothing but mystery': being unspoken in the text itself, it is entirely undetermined. That about which we have no information may indeed be judged mysterious. Ill Seen Ill Said reproduces the gesture, albeit with added ambiguity:

Beyond the unknown. Mercifully.

(Beckett, 1982, p.9)

What is 'Beyond' the remit of the text to detail can be 'Mercifully' conceded as simply 'the unknown' without further anguish.[2] Ping starts itself with the declaration 'All known' (Beckett, 1984, p.149); again, this can be resolved into a judgement concerning what is internally detailed by the text and its potential to be exhaustively 'known'. But the omniscience claimed internally does not apply externally:

Ping elsewhere always there but that known not.

(Beckett, 1984, p.150)

Whatever is 'without', 'beyond' and 'elsewhere' in The Lost Ones, Ill Seen Ill Said and Ping respectively, is excluded from the realm of the potentially knowable. What might obtain in the area external to the structures described by these texts is not stated within them and consequently can never be known via them. The knowable is restricted to information concerning the enclosed structures from inside of which the narrator reports.

A realm external to the cylinder must logically exist, however: despite the unreliability of the information we are granted concerning the dimensions of the cylinder, we do at least

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[2] Alternatively, the narrator seeks to take us 'Beyond the unknown' and presumably back toward the known. In the manner of the 'contiguous extremes' of The Lost Ones (Beckett, 1972, p.16), to pass beyond the extreme point of the unknown could be to re-enter the realm of its opposite, the knowable.

know that it is not infinitely large. For a structure to be thus limited, something must exist externally from which it is distinct. An outside is a necessary condition for the existence of an inside:

> we must consider each space, in so far as it is limited, as being also conditioned, in that it presupposes another space as the condition of its limits.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A413/B440, pp.388-389)

The structures constructed in Beckett's later prose texts, the cylinder of The Lost Ones and the refuges of the various residual texts, and also of Endgame, insist that they cannot be left, while their limits entail a priori that something must exist beyond their boundaries. Wood asks, 'If the subject can have no conception of anywhere else, how can it know it is trapped?' (Wood, 1994, p.8); in Beckett, the limited dimensions of his artificial structures and the acknowledgement of an 'elsewhere' which supplies their boundaries ensures that a sense of restriction is emphasized. The crucial quality of the realm external to the cylinder or refuge, like that which lies beyond the knowable or speakable in Kant, is its inaccessibility. These concepts are succinctly expressed in Endgame:

> Outside of here it's death.
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.96)

As discussed in Chapter Four above, Beckett insisted that the

same death-warrant be applied to stagings of Endgame which range beyond the limits specified by the text itself. Beckettian 'responsibility' for anything beyond the situation of the play 'as stated' was rejected (Beckett, 1983a, p.109).[3] Questioned during rehearsals of Endgame with Jack MacGowran and Patrick Magee, Beckett's response, as described by Bair, remained tautological with the terms of the play as already stated:

> 'Sam, how would I say to Hamm, "If I knew the combination of the safe, I'd kill you"?' MacGowran asked.
>
> Beckett answered quietly, 'Just think that if you knew the combination of the safe you would kill him.'
>
> (Bair, 1990, p.605)

Beckett's comments on Endgame share with Hamm an impulse to declare '[...] Well, there we are, there I am, that's enough' (Beckett, 1986, p.133): the positions on stage are set, dialogue stated, definitions made, repetitive structures primed.[4] All is

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[3] The same restriction to the terms of the text is evident in Beckett's rejection of speculative interpretations of Mouth's 'life' external to what is given in Not I:

> when Sam thought that both Jessie and I were asking too many foolish questions about the birth, life experience and physical circumstances surrounding that solitary floating Mouth, he finally decided that enough was enough: 'I no more know where she is or why than she does,' he wrote. There was only the text and the stage image, both of which he had provided for us. 'The rest is Ibsen.'
>
> (Schneider, 1976, p.281)

[4] Compare the severity cultivated by Beckett to the final statement of V, the 'Voice of Bam', in What Where:

> That is all.
> Make sense who may.
> I switch off.

necessary and unchangeable; deviation outside such terms would deprive such a staging of an entitlement to represent Endgame. Restriction orders apply to characters within these texts and equally to readers, audiences, actors and directors without.

For a proposition to be judged as meaningful under Ayer's scheme of verification, however, 'some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood' (Ayer, 1990, p.9). This question of verification exercises the narrative voice of Company from its opening statements:

> Only a small part of what is said can be verified. As for example when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the truth of what is said. But by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified. As for example when he hears, You first saw the light on such and such a day. Sometimes the two are combined as for example, You first saw the light on such and such a day and now you are on your back in the dark. A device perhaps from the incontrovertibility of the one to win credence for the other. That then is the proposition.
>
> (Beckett, 1980, pp.7-8)

In the correct positivist manner, immediately available sensory

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(Beckett, 1986, p.476)

Coincidentally or deliberately, this is also the final theatrical statement written by Beckett.

experience could indeed confirm or deny whether 'You are on your back in the dark'. As communicated within a fictional context, however, such sensory data is itself merely an unverifiable verbal statement. No actual physical position exists outside the statements of the text which could arbitrate on the matter. If it is maintained that there is in principle nothing outside Beckett's fictional texts which could legislate as to the accuracy of their representations, if there really is 'nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), then this verification test can never be passed. The cylinder of The Lost Ones is instead analogous to 'the forms without parallel' which Murphy's mind is capable of producing:

> Here the pleasure was contemplation. This system had no other mode in which to be out of joint and therefore did not need to be put right in this.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.65)

Accordingly, it does not make sense to speak of the truth or falsity of a text such as The Lost Ones; if there is no external referent, it is churlish to complain of the inaccuracy or otherwise of its representation.[5] As Watt puts it, neither The Lost Ones nor indeed Watt itself, can be 'confirmed, or for that matter infirmed, by events' (Beckett, 1976, p.129).

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[5] The difficulties which fiction as a whole creates for theories designed to assess the truth or falsity conditions of assertoric propositions uttered in a non-fictional context is documented in, for example, Austin (1976), Searle (1979), Derrida (1988) and Habermas (1992).

The further implications of an immunity from reference, however, are the charges made by cultural materialism against such self-indulgent formalism in general and the allegedly Beckettian version of it in particular.[6] The version of Beckett constructed by immanent criticism is precisely that against which cultural materialism objects; in such criticism, as Murphy argues:

> Beckett is depicted as somehow safely self-contained, free of any ideological constraints that would compel us to deal with him beyond the formal restrictions of the texts themselves.
>
> (Murphy, 1990, p.xiii)

For a criticism attempting to maintain that 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), accusations accrue concerning a culpable neglect of the actual in favour of a self-referential autism and a concomitant blindness to the historical

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[6] For Graff, the attack on objectivity, representation and perspicuity upon which many literary reputations are based is a guarantee not of the spread of alarm concerning such avant-garde experimentation, but indifference:

> The more violently the arts overturn objective consciousness, the representational view of art, and the common language, the more surely do they guarantee their marginality and harmlessness [...]. Aiming at intransigence, art ends up collaborating with its scientific, commercial, and utilitarian adversaries to ensure its unimportance.
>
> (Graff, 1979, p.90)

Art that is concerned to problematize its own ability to issue cognitive claims, anchor itself to the real or engage in argumentation may simply be taken at its word as to its own ineffectuality. See the Introduction above, Section ii.

contingency of formalist works and the criticism devoted to them. An immanent reading attending only to the words on the page in a purist gesture against the pretensions of allegorical transcendence, forbids itself from raising its eyes to take account of the 'external' context within which it operates. What is contingent in such a context is misrecognized as irreducible and essential by default. Accordingly, such critiques of metaphysical assumptions in regard to Beckett as are made in Chapters One to Four above harbour unacknowledged essentialist presuppositions of their own. The self-evident desirability of an immanent interpretation of The Lost Ones is one such presupposition operative in Chapter Four.[7] It can be shown, moreover, that the attempt to rationalize a self-contained formalist approach to The Lost Ones via the principle that 'There is nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199) is itself neatly self-defeating.

ii. Self-enclosure vs the inter-textuality of the residua

The intention behind the use of the principle 'There is nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199) was to restrict analysis in Chapter Four exclusively to what is stated within the textual limits of The Lost Ones itself. However, the statement of this very principle does not occur in The Lost Ones but instead in Closed Place. That which is employed to forbid

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[7] The temptation has been to universalize the peculiarities of the self-enclosed Beckettian text to an essential feature of literature itself. Such essentialist gestures are familiar to the cultural materialist critique of Modernism and its ignorance of its own provisionality.

reference to sources external to the text of The Lost Ones is itself owed to an external source. This external assertion both recommends and violates an entirely 'immanent' analysis. Every supporting statement for the self-containment of The Lost Ones drawn from Beckett's other texts is equally self-defeating; as quickly as these statements are produced to legitimize a restriction to the terms of The Lost Ones, their source undermines it. Recourse to external evidence violates the very principle of immanent analysis it is cited to establish.

Conversely, if Closed Place states only of itself that 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), this statement then does not accord with the intertextual relations which are readily apparent between Closed Place and The Lost Ones. As Brienza argues, 'Similarities between the two pieces are so numerous and pronounced that Fizzle 5 (translated as "Se Voir" in 1974)* could have been an offshoot of The Lost Ones' (Brienza, 1987b, p.209). What cannot be assumed, following the identification of such links, is Brienza's further contention that 'we are now encapsulated in the "closed place" of metafiction' (Brienza, 1987b, p.210). Total encapsulation in one or other of The Lost Ones and Closed Place is undermined by the intertextual connections between them. As separate works, this relationship marks the end of either text's claim to self-containment. Paradoxically, Brienza proceeds to relate the totality of Beckett's fictional texts to one another by virtue

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* Closed Place is a condensed version of Fizzle 5 and 'Se Voir'.

of their common claims to self-enclosure and self-sufficiency:

> Each Beckett fiction defines its own world, its own closed system of language (most obviously in The Lost Ones), creating a structure - cylinder, oblong, dome - in which the artist or reader is enclosed.
>
> (Brienza, 1987b, p.261)

The 'enclosure' which should isolate each text from every other is in fact what Brienza uses to unite them. But Beckett's fictions themselves exploit the same paradoxes; Enough opens with a blunt imperative:

> All that goes before forget.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.139)

We are provoked to inquire what it is that we are commanded to dismiss; whatever it is that is so irrelevant thus becomes the centre of attention. In order to forget, it is preferable not so to re-invoke. Prior to the imperative 'All that goes before forget', what we are asked to discount was unlikely to be at the forefront of our minds. Before its issue, the request was fulfilled; it is the making of the request which impels us to disobey it.

The very attempt to dismiss the relationship of Enough to what has gone before it can be used to call attention to the potential interconnections between Beckett's residual texts. All

Strange Away is more candid in recalling shared phrases, objects and scenarios:

> Imagination dead imagine. A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.117)

The recurrence of just this compulsive scenario ensures that All Strange Away, Imagination Dead Imagine, Ping, Lessness, For To End Yet Again, The Lost Ones and Closed Place are inevitably linked thematically whatever declarations as to self-sufficiency they individually proffer.[9] Given the level of cross-reference between images in these texts, instead of granting credence to their alleged self-containment, it should perhaps be the tenability of their separation into completely distinct works which comes under pressure.

The circumstances of the genesis and publication of The Lost Ones further undermines the plausibility of its textual independence from the series of Beckett's other prose fictions. Hill relates the facts surrounding its French counterpart Le Dépeupleur:

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[9] The relationship of The Lost Ones with the residua substantiates Macherey's judgement that no work can considered 'simple, original, self-begotten'; instead 'it is inexorably linked to the other projects which lend it substance and meaning' (Macherey, 1978, p.234). Such considerations are also applicable to the significance of Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu in Krapp's Last Tape as examined in Chapter Two. See also Sections xxiv-xxv of this chapter.

[...] Le Dépeupleur, [...] the author makes clear, has residual status in Beckett's work. It is a remainder, an incomplete text. Even if readers were not aware of the publishing history of Le Dépeupleur (abandoned in 1966, published in bits and pieces over the years immediately following, and finally brought out as a separate volume, with the closing paragraph added in 1970), there would still be at least one tell-tale trace of its residual status. The name of that trace is Bing, or it might be any of Beckett's other residual works.

(Hill, 1990, p.153)

Beckett appended a note to the typescripts of Le Dépeupleur and Bing, the significance of which it was convenient only partially to appreciate in Chapter Four:

Mss. Le Dépeupleur - Bing

Though very different formally these 2 Mss belong together. Bing may be regarded as the result or miniaturization of Le Dépeupleur abandoned because of its intractable complexities.

(Beckett cited in Admussen, 1979, p.22; p.39)

It is only an especially comprehensive misjudgement that can insist upon the absolute self-enclosure of a text defined by its history as 'a remainder, an incomplete text', which was originally 'published in bits and pieces over the years' (Hill, 1990, p.153) and which was regarded by its author as so closely

associated with another work that a notice is left to confirm that they 'belong together'. This connection of Le Dépeupleur, and accordingly The Lost Ones, with Bing, translated as Ping, consolidates its position as embedded within the series of Beckett's short prose residua. As Bing and Ping cannot be prised away from this context, The Lost Ones must join it there.

It is the distinction of the 'residua' that this, their collective title, defines them also as irretrievably incomplete in themselves. As Pireddu explains:

> These texts are condemned - by definition - to occupy a marginal place in Beckett's aesthetic project, since they are conceived as excretions that can no longer be integrated within the original source that generated them.
>
> (Pireddu, 1992, p.306)

The text which was used to ground universalized assertions about the nature of fiction is thus relegated to occupying merely 'a marginal place' in just 'Beckett's aesthetic project'. Hill's observations upon the nature of the 'residua' confirms The Lost Ones' fall from eminence, if it must be cited among them:

> For something to be a residue it must evidently forfeit its substance and essential worth. As residues, Beckett's residua renounce any claim they may have to embody an essence.
>
> (Hill, 1990, p.143)

To be 'residual' is the very opposite of the self-contained status which an immanent critical methodology would claim for The Lost Ones.

iii. New Criticism, self-enclosure and self-defeat

It was the assumption of the self-containment of The Lost Ones, however, which justified an insistence in Chapter Four upon immanent as opposed to transcendent interpretation. Rather than admitting that the self-enclosure of The Lost Ones was the result of a particular interpretation, this reading was presumed to be sufficiently self-evident to be used to adjudicate between the merits of rival critical methodologies. Unsurprisingly, the superiority of the critical approach guaranteed to support the self-enclosure of The Lost Ones was confirmed. But if the principle that 'That there is nothing but what is said' (Beckett, 1984, p.199) were strictly applied, then the restriction of consideration exclusively to the terms of The Lost Ones as stated should invalidate any critical discussion of that text whatsoever, for anything criticism might say about it, being comprised of statements additional and external to The Lost Ones, should be ruled inadmissible according to its own principle. Yet it is from criticism that the impulse behind arguments as to the self-enclosure of The Lost Ones comes, not from the text itself independently of any interpretive agenda. The case for a restriction to exclusively internal analysis is thus made in a critical discourse which is itself extrinsic to the only text it will allow to be relevant to the discussion. Moreover, this so-

called 'immanent' approach has its own history in literary criticism. Its development has nothing do with any demands peculiar to The Lost Ones. Characterised by its exclusive devotion to 'the words on the page', what is described as 'immanent' reading in Chapter Four has little claim to be anything other than the New Criticism associated with Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley. The 'immanent' mode of reading itself exists far beyond the limits of the covers of The Lost Ones.

The adoption of a methodology borrowed from New Criticism could not be better calculated to provoke objections from cultural materialism. Wimsatt on certain 'basic distinctions' is a case in point:

> One of McKeon's basic distinctions is that between (1) analogical, or dialectical, criticism - criticism which tries to connect poetry with anything else, with science, morals, philosophy, psychology, or linguistics [...] and (2) what he calls 'literal' criticism, that which enables one to talk about poetry or some aspect of poetry and nothing else.
>
> (Wimsatt, 1954, p.49)

A preference for the second option assumes an ability to define the influence of context as optional background information strictly extrinsic to the assessment of literature itself. This distinction above between 'analogical' and 'literal' criticism

is clearly congruent with the opposition drawn between allegorical and immanent modes in relation to The Lost Ones in Chapter Four. That chapter shares with Wimsatt the conclusion that only literal or immanent criticism is properly about the literary text.

Notwithstanding attacks on Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'fraudulent attempts to consider the text in itself as an aesthetic monad' and the assertion of 'the demise of the New Criticism as a viable mode of literary criticism' (Bové, 1982, p.188), such ideas have exerted considerable influence on Beckett criticism. Harvey's study of Beckett's poetry and criticism is driven to a thoroughly New Critical lament:

> Is there any place at all left for literary criticism? Anything that even resembles causal explanation of the work in terms extrinsic to itself seems ruled out. Source criticism is a gratuitous act of the imagination. [...] [I]mpressionistic criticism is wholly arbitrary.
>
> (Harvey, 1970, p.421)

If Harvey's rejection of 'causal' explanations owes something to Wimsatt and Beardsley's critique of the 'Intentional Fallacy', (which, in its attempts to identify a work's 'psychological causes', lapses into 'biography and relativism'), his despair before the 'wholly arbitrary' nature of 'impressionistic criticism' might be inspired directly by Wimsatt and Beardsley's strictures on the 'Affective Fallacy' (Wimsatt and Beardsley,

1954, p.21). By 'trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem', the Affective Fallacy confounds criticism in 'impressionism and relativism' (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1954, p.21). The crucial consideration for Wimsatt, Beardsley and Harvey is that such approaches focus on subjects extrinsic to the work itself:

> The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.
>
> (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1954, p.21)

Harvey is also motivated by lessons drawn from Beckett's essay 'Papini's Dante', where, according to Harvey, '[...] Beckett argues consistently for an aestheticism that isolates the work of art from all extrinsic considerations' (Harvey, 1970, p.417).[10] Beckett's disdain in this 1934 essay for Giovanni

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[10] Ironically, it is references to Dante in Beckett's later fiction which militate against the isolation of these works 'from all extrinsic considerations' (Harvey, 1970, p.417). In Texts for Nothing, it is the expansion of the idea of a 'way out' itself which directs the reader outside Beckett's text to track its allusion to Dante:

> if I could say, There's a way out there, there's a way out somewhere, the rest would come, the other words, sooner or later, and the power to get there, and the way to get there, and pass out, and see the beauties of the skies, and see the stars again.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text IX, p.103)

The external text invoked is Dante's Inferno:

> we climbed up, he first and I second, so far that I saw through a round opening some of the fair things that Heaven bears; and thence we came forth to see again the stars.
>
> (Dante, 1939, Canto XXXIV.134-9, p.427)

Papini's writings on Dante could certainly be characterized as New Critical before the invention of the methodology. Papini, amassing 'marginalia' concerning Dante's character and behaviour, simply neglects to 'READ' Dante:

> It is pleasant to be reminded that lechery, wrath and pride were his meed of the cardinal sins; that he had a mania for tearing out the hair of his enemies and for applying to his friends and himself formulae usually reserved for the members of the Trinity; that he introjected certain forms of suffering like a neurotic, loathed children, hungered all his life long to be called 'son', and had Ovidian amours by the dozen. Pleasant, but beside the point, inaccessible within its Messianic cocoon, of Dante the artist. The purpose of these marginalia would be the reduction of Dante to lovable proportions. But who wants to love Dante? We want to READ Dante - for example, his imperishable reference (Paolo-Francesca episode) to the incompatibility of the two operations.
>
> (Beckett, 1983a, p.81)

The 'trapdoor' version of the 'notion [...] that there exists a way out' of the cylinder of <u>The Lost Ones</u> (Beckett, 1972, pp.17-18) is also termed so as to refer outside that text to Dante:

> The other [school] 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.
> (Beckett, 1972, p.18)

To hope to see the stars shining at the same time as the sun is perhaps unreasonable. Traces of both Dante and <u>Texts for Nothing</u> are equally visible, however, to the detriment of attempts to keep <u>The Lost Ones</u> wrapped up in itself.

An insistence that nothing extrinsic to close analysis of the Beckett text is relevant to its assessment could thus be grounded on attitudes available in Beckett's own early criticism. Accordingly, the conclusion that 'questions of cultural politics' seem 'particularly inappropriate for Beckett's texts', which Connor finds operative in some Beckett criticism, is not solely the result of that discourse's inexplicable adoption of a 'protocol which excludes or invalidates' such questions (Connor, 1990, p.17). A rationale for such exclusions is supplied by Beckett's criticism rather than an impersonal 'protocol'.[11] The fact remains, however, that the critical determinations made in 1934 in 'Papini's Dante' are also extrinsic to arguments as to the critical methodology to be applied to The Lost Ones. To approach The Lost Ones via 'Papini's Dante' is 'Pleasant, but beside the point', in the same manner as Papini's collection of facts which do not touch upon 'Dante the artist' (Beckett, 1983a, p.81). A lesson to be drawn from the essay is that we should want to 'READ' The Lost Ones, rather than an ancient essay filed among Beckett's 'disjecta'. In relation to The Lost Ones, this essay, where '[...] Beckett argues consistently for an aestheticism that isolates the work of art from all extrinsic considerations' (Harvey, 1970, p.417), is itself an extrinsic consideration from which, according to its own argument, The Lost Ones should be isolated. To cite 'Papini's Dante' as a

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[11] Neither are advocates of such exclusions necessarily within the orbit of New Criticism. According to William Burroughs, who can scarcely be said to partake of the respectability of New Critical attitudes, Beckett 'is perhaps the purest writer who has ever written. There is nothing there but the writing itself' (Burroughs, 1987, p.30).

recommendation for an immanent reading of The Lost Ones is another strategy for self-refutation.

Equally, Beckett's correspondence with Alan Schneider which insists that the staging and discussion of Endgame should be restricted to its terms 'as stated' without additions is clearly itself outside and additional to the text which it wants to declare closed. Beckett reminds Schneider that the text of Endgame is complete:

> 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)

Endgame is not so securely sealed within its 'statement', however, that external comments from its author cannot fundamentally influence attitudes towards the play. It is these extrinsic determinations which consolidate a view of Endgame as formalist and self-referential, as immune, that is, from precisely this type of external interference. Beckett writes that 'Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated' represents 'all I can manage'. However, the additions to 'Endgame-as-stated' contributed by this very correspondence with Schneider makes sense of the qualification appended: 'that's all I can manage, more than I could' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109). An addition to the statement of Endgame has been made in the process of categorically denying the legitimacy of such additions.

Similarly, Beckett's refusal 'to be involved in exegesis of any kind' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109) has become, despite itself, a significant factor in the interpretation of the 'Beckettian'. As Connor argues:

> There is simply no space for Beckett to withdraw into which is not already prepared for him by this public world of discourse. His very silence on interpretative matters has become a crucial term in the system of critical values which mediates his work, and Beckett's withdrawals from interpretation are reproduced, circulated and interpreted as feverishly as anything else in his writing.
>
> (Connor, 1988, pp.188-189)

Even responses by Beckett which are apparently tautologous with what has been already stated in a work can be made to yield additional information. Beckett's advice to Jack MacGowran cited earlier[12] may be considered to impart nothing additional by its reproduction of terms already stated by Endgame and indeed repeated by MacGowran. Alternatively, Beckett's disinclination to provide extra interpretative information can be seen as further evidence that nothing is to be added to Endgame as stated; paradoxically, in this case, the very refusal to elaborate does provide material additional to Endgame for the consideration of criticism. In the same way, the final words of What Where, which express a refusal to sanction further explanation, can be extracted from the play to serve as a general

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[12] See above, pp.492.

principle in the elucidation of archetypal Beckettian attitudes. Knowlson's use of these words, for example, harbours this irony:

> Bam's closing words, 'Time passes./That is all./Make sense who may./I switch off.' echo, then, more widely than within the play itself.
>
> (Knowlson, 1996, pp.687-688)

If any lines might wish not so to 'echo', and thus continue to be made to speak, it is surely these attempts to declare 'That is all' and 'I switch off'. So impressed has criticism been with Beckett's final words in drama that it has contrived, in its citation of them as exemplary of Beckettian intransigence, to defeat their stated desire to contribute nothing further to the operations of interpretation.

iv. An incomplete analysis

The restriction of attention in Chapter Four to the terms of The Lost Ones 'as stated' held out the possibility that an immanent analysis of these terms could, at some point, be considered complete. The declaration internal to The Lost Ones that 'All has not been told and never shall be' (Beckett, 1972, p.51) ensured that such an ambition would come to grief. This defeat, however, is not solely dependent upon the fortuitous appearance of this statement in The Lost Ones. The assumption was that the limits of the text could be simply fixed by its covers. Physically and conceptually, it would seem, a text

requires edges 'marking out its inside from its outside, so that it can be treated as a unified "body", with limits. We must know where to stop, where to start' (Collins and Mayblin, 1996, p.111). As de Man documents, however, fixing the text according to its physical limits harbours unargued implications for its conceptual identity:

> for Stanley Fish, there can be no greater aberration than thus to reduce a text to the monumental objectivity of a static entity: 'The objectivity of the text,' he writes, 'is an illusion, and moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness ....'
>
> (de Man, 1983, p.279)

Just this illusion is cultivated in the treatment of The Lost Ones. That work's relationship to Beckett's residua, however, is a disrupting factor.[13] It is no longer so clear what even comprises the 'text' for analysis in Chapter Four:

> Beckett himself described [...] the 'shorts' since How It Is [...] as 'residua' (in the Preface to No's Knife.) He

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[13] This impulse towards the isolation of The Lost Ones is silently consolidated by the use of the Calder and Boyars edition of 1972 where the limits of text of The Lost Ones are indeed the physical limits of the volume. The 1972 text, despite introducing errors to the text (see below, Section xi), retains a priority status as the first English publication of Beckett's translation of Le Dépeupleur (1970a). Ironically, where The Lost Ones is returned to its original context in Six Residua (1978) and Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980 (1984), such collections are traditionally accorded secondary status as re-issues of separately published works.

glossed this, in reply to a query by Brian Finney, 'they are residual ... in relation to whole body of previous work' [...]. This would seem to support the contention that Beckett's work is in some way a unified whole - it is as if he has been quarrying his work from the same rock-face and these are the chippings. Certainly it is hard to imagine what these 'residua' would seem like if they had appeared without the earlier work behind them.

(Butler, 1984, p.158)

It is not necessary to celebrate the mystical unity of the oeuvre to concede that The Lost Ones can only be inadequately conceived in isolation from both its context in Beckett's prose fiction and its close links with aspects of the drama; even to argue for its isolation involves reference to Closed Place and Endgame. Indeed, it is the context chosen which will determine in many respects what conception of The Lost Ones is developed. Chapter Four, with its insistence upon immanent reading within the limits of The Lost Ones, was informed throughout by what it should have considered extrinsic irrelevancies drawn from the residua, Mercier and Camier, the criticism of Brienza and Henning, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Representation. What its own argument would declare irrelevant, was central to the formulation of that argument. Chapter Four found itself obliged to refer extensively to philosophy and criticism to justify why it should talk of nothing but The Lost Ones itself.

v. Derrida: 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte'

Writing on Rousseau in Of Grammatology, Derrida argues that 'our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text' (Derrida, 1976, p.159). For Closed Place 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199); apparently congruently, Derrida argues 'There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte]' (Derrida, 1976, p.158). The conclusion toward which Derrida argues, however, is directly opposed to a restriction to the terms of a single text and anti-referential bias which Chapter Four urges:

> the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse [...]. What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real,' 'economic,' 'historical,' socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents.[14] Another way of recalling once again that 'there is nothing outside the text.' That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naive enough

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[14] De Man is still more sensational in his conversion of events into 'text':

> the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions.
>
> (de Man, 1983, p.165)

Derrida and de Man reproduce '[...] Nietzsche's over-arching metaphor of the world as a text that is to be interpreted' (Nehamas, 1985, p.164). Such a 'history' is not available in a non-discursive, pristine form independent of the concepts through which it is thought and the agendas which direct its manifestation.

to believe [...].

(Derrida, 1988, p.148)

When '"text" is [...] used so broadly that nothing remains outside it' (Barnes, 1988, p.96), a restriction to the terms of the text as a strategy to effect exclusions from the proper focus of analysis is transformed into a commitment to examine a 'limitless context' (Derrida, 1988, p.136). When 'text' comprises 'the entire "real-history-of-the-world"' (Derrida, 1988, p.136), the incompleteness of any textual analysis is guaranteed.

vi. Regression

Dream of Fair to Middling Women admits that its 'statement of Belacqua' is similarly subject to a 'botched circumscription' (Beckett, 1993, p.186):

> little by little Belacqua may be described, but not circumscribed; his terms stated, but not summed. And of course God's will be done should one description happen to cancel the next, or the terms appear crazily spaced. His will, never ours.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, p.125)

Such difficulties reappear in The Lost Ones, less the narrator's willingness to inform us explicitly of them. The terms relevant to an analysis of The Lost Ones cannot be limited only to those

stated by the text itself. Consequently, the terms which are deemed relevant cannot be determinately 'summed' or circumscribed. The potentiality for inconsistencies between relevant terms means that incoherence is a constant hazard. Additionally, as Dream of Fair to Middling Women admits, an analysis attempting to be complete must cope with the threat of infinite regress. The concept of 'Belacqua' may be analysed into its constituent terms, but those terms themselves may require explicative analysis:

> Only for the sake of convenience is [Belacqua] presented as a cubic unknown. At his simplest trine, we were at pains to say so, to save our bacon, save our face. He is no more satisfied by the three values, Apollo, Narcissus and the anonymous third person, than he would be by fifty values, or any number of values. And to know that he was would be precious cold comfort. For what are they themselves - Apollo, Narcissus and the inaccessible Limbese? Are they simple themselves? Like hell they are! Can we measure them once and for all and do sums with them like those impostors that they call mathematicians? We can not. We can state them as a succession of terms, but we can't sum them and we can't define them. They tail off vaguely at both ends and the intervals of their series are demented.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, pp.124-125)

The narrator does establish the 'precious cold comfort' that Belacqua is unknowable in more than three ways, for the 'trine'

values which analysis accords him must themselves be analysed. Witness now the confusion of heterogeneous terms which may be extracted from the terms 'Apollo' and 'Narcissus', whose duty it was to explain Belacqua:

> We give you one term of Apollo: chasing a bitch, the usual bitch. And one term of Narcissus: running away from one. But we took very good care not to mention the shepherd or the charioteer or the healer or the mourner or the arcitenens or the lyrist or the butcher or the crow; and very good care not to mention the hunter or the mocker or the boy howling for his pals or in tears or in love or testing the Stygian speculum.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, p.125)

Apollonian or Narcissistic conceptions of Belacqua harbour such latent identifications, ready for narrative exploitation 'if it suit and amuse us' (Beckett, 1993, p.125). As the narrator previously informed us, these terms which cannot 'sum' Belacqua are not 'simple themselves' but compound concepts whose content likewise cannot be determinately totalized. Analysis embarking on its regress may accordingly turn its attentions to the latent conceptual content of 'the shepherd or the charioteer or the healer or the mourner' or the rest of them, and properly insist that a comprehensive analysis of what is contained in 'Belacqua' includes these determinations also.

These attempts to break down the concept of 'Belacqua' into

its simpler constituent elements replicate 'philosophical analysis', which holds that 'any statement about [...] complexes can be reduced to a more fundamental statement about its constituents which gives its meaning' (Priest, 1995, p.205). That the technique risks regress is well-recognized:

> Suppose we start with some claim of English. If it is not explicitly about simples then it can be analysed. Its sense is therefore given by <u>analysandum</u>$_1$. If <u>analysandum</u>$_1$ is not itself explicitly about simples, it, too, can be analysed to give <u>analysandum</u>$_2$, which determines the sense of <u>analysandum</u>$_1$, and hence of the original sentence. But now we are obviously off on a regress; and if the regress does not bottom-out in a claim containing simple signs - i.e., signs referring to simples [...] whose sense is determined by their relation to reality (substance), then it goes on to infinity.
>
> (Priest, 1995, p.206)

The faulty claims of Chapter Four have not yet been so completely renounced as to admit the existence of a real or 'substantial' Belacqua, external to the fiction which creates him, that could halt the analytical regress suffered by the narrator of <u>Dream of Fair to Middling Women</u>.[15] As Priest admits in the case of conceptual analysis, 'when we chase back the senses of

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[15] The protagonist of <u>Dream of Fair to Middling Woman</u> is defined as a narrative object only: 'There is no real Belacqua, it is to be hoped not indeed, there is no such person' (Beckett, 1993, p.121).

components, we never break out of language' (Priest, 1995, p.213). In the case of Belacqua and The Lost Ones, analysis begins from and ends with linguistic determinations which at each stage can themselves be subjected to further analysis. Without a halt to the regress, the sense of neither of these conceptual entities can be definitively determined. The inevitable incompleteness of analysis must be conceded.

vii. Literature, logic and non-equivalence

Whatever the dubious New Critical credentials gained in seeking to restrict itself to the words on the page of The Lost Ones, analysis, on loan from philosophy, is of questionable appropriateness as a technique for reading a literary text.[16] Under the attentions of analysis, The Lost Ones is read as a system of propositions, whose inter-relations are fraught with inconsistency and contradiction. The work's literary status is not taken into account. The desire to read the narrative of The Lost Ones as a formal language, to be held accountable for its internal logic, is an ironic tribute to its scientific rhetoric.

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[16] The statement of what comprises 'analysis' as far as Chapter Four is concerned is taken from Kant:

> 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)

Analysis therefore should not go beyond what is contained in the concepts which delineate the properties of the cylinder in The Lost Ones; again, it is a method intended to restrict interpretation to what is stated, whether explicitly or by implication, in the text itself.

It is these very literary and rhetorical effects, linguistic gestures of rigour and exactitude, which actually discourage attention to these same rhetorical manipulations in the text. Rhetoric, classically, is to be excluded from the rigorous philosophical or scientific text; The Lost Ones employs rhetoric to cast itself as a rigorous scientific document.

The aspiration of analysis was to achieve logical equivalence in relation to its source text. Immanent reading wishes to explicate the concepts of its text and make clashes between propositions explicit, but this is not to alter or expand upon what the text itself states implicitly. In the determination of contradiction, implication, negation or any other logical relation between statements, nothing other than those statements is required. There is an argument, therefore, for equivalence between such a reading and the text it explicates.[17] Equivalence implies interchangeability: 'When two statements are equivalent', according to Hamblin, 'they may be substituted one for another in any formula, without altering the truth or falsehood of that formula under any circumstances' (Hamblin, 1967, p.90). There must be, however, an obvious and fundamental alternation of literary value between The Lost Ones and any commentary which would attempt to supply a logically equivalent explication. An analytic account of The Lost Ones

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[17] Analysis of the terms of The Lost Ones in Chapter Four staked its claim to immanence on the pledge to add nothing to concepts under its consideration than was already implicitly contained within them. As argued in Chapter Four above, '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' (Chapter Four, p.338).

which was logically equivalent to the original, in every respect, could not claim to be a tautologous replacement for the literary text 'under any circumstances' as Hamblin requires above to confirm equivalence. Claims to tautologous status must founder on criteria of literary value which are not amenable to logical quantification. Affective associations and ultimately meaning are not preserved between a literary text and its logically equivalent paraphrase.

According to the requirements of logical equivalence, 'the two symbols "oculist" and "eye-doctor" are synonymous' (Ayer, 1990, p.49). The values associated with each term, however, whether to do with formal or colloquial qualities, or which groups of speakers are more likely to use either term, are not identical. In a literary context especially, one is obliged to ask why a term is preferred to its synonym; why, in The Lost Ones, the narrator writes of 'bodies', the 'vanquished' or the 'quidam'. Terms which might be cited as synonymous, 'people', the 'defeated' or 'individual', are not equivalent in literary or rhetorical value. As Ayer concedes,

> if we are to use the sign 'meaning' in the way in which it is most commonly used, we must not say that two sentences have the same meaning for anyone, unless the occurrence of one always has the same effect on his thoughts and actions as the occurrence of the other.[18]

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[18] It is unclear how the different effect of apparent synonyms upon one's thoughts could be verified to Ayer's satisfaction. The reference to thoughts, as distinct from

(Ayer, 1990, p.60)

Affective discrepancies thus disrupt the desired tautologous relation between statements which are logically equivalent.

Additionally, analysis of a text 'as stated' undervalues the affective impact of such basic literary devices as irony, tone and metaphor. As Wittgenstein notes, it is possible via irony or tone to '<u>say</u> "It's cold here" and <u>mean</u> "It's warm here"' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §510, p.140). Our capacity for '<u>Hearing</u> a word in a particular sense' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §534, p.144)[19] is sufficient to confound a conceptual analysis which, although correct in regard to literal meaning, can fundamentally misconstrue the intended meaning of a statement. Analysis of the literal statement made is inadequate in regard to such techniques of implicit expression. Irony, 'evasive, indirect, discontinuous', is only one form of 'linguistic reticence' (Kane, 1984, p.103):

> The retreat from the word encompasses not only nonverbal symbolism, but also many forms of connotative, indirect dramatic expression such as innuendo, intimation, hesitation, reticence, and bivalent speech that implicitly conveys more that it states.

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observable actions, risks being defined as a 'meaningless' criterion according to Ayer's own principle of verification.

[19] 'How queer that there should be such a thing!' Wittgenstein is moved to exclaim (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §534, p.144).

(Kane, 1984, p.15)

Both Beckett and Pinter specialize in 'colloquial dialogue implicitly conveying more than it superficially and explicitly communicates' (Kane, 1984, p.103). Analysis is designed to make explicit what is implicitly contained in concepts, but at its basis is a dependence upon determinate logical equivalence rather than speculative literary interpretation. Analysis can unpack concepts according to definitions, synonyms and logical tautology; it is not possible to explicate definitively literary symbols, imagery, innuendo or intimation. The silences which inform Beckett's drama and which are invoked by his prose are incommensurable with attempts at conceptual analysis.

Metaphor is also problematic, for 'using a group of words literally and then metaphorically will result in two different statements' (Erwin, 1970, p.111). But, as the words used are identical, logical analysis is not equipped to perceive any discrepancy between the two statements. The ideas contained implicitly within a metaphor are also indeterminate; 'metaphor [...] opens the wandering of the semantic' where 'signification will be in a kind of state of availability' (Derrida, 1982, p.241). If a definitive conceptual analysis of such literary effects were possible, the controversies of criticism would be severely curtailed. For Macherey, however, tropes and analysis are of different orders: 'The literary discourse assembles images rather than concepts, and images by their nature defy definition'

(Macherey, 1978, p.59).[20] Responses to such images are arguable rather than logically demonstrable. Zurbrugg, for example, finds in The Lost Ones's 'final evocation of "a man in some unthinkable past for the first time"' a 'potent image [...] of distressed introspection' (Zurbrugg, 1991, p.41). Such an identification cannot be proved correct according to conceptual or linguistic definitions, nor does it make sense to claim that it is logically equivalent to the image provided. The image does not have a logical content that can be replicated. But because of the indeterminate nature of the image, neither can the identification be refuted, despite its apparent mismatch between 'introspection' and the 'unthinkable'. Analysis was employed in Chapter Four in opposition to allegorical readings of The Lost Ones; an allegory conceived as a extended metaphor, such as States provides below in relation to Waiting for Godot, however, is irrefutable so far as the metaphors and images it appeals to are themselves of indeterminate significance. No defence against allegorization can be given when the appeal is to non-verbal images, such as, for instance, Vladimir and Estragon's staggerings which constitute 'doing the tree', for logical analysis is incapable of demonstrating that such apparently ungrounded expansion is not legitimately part of the conceptual field generated by the

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[20] Schopenhauer sardonically identifies a comparable incommensurability between determinate conceptual analysis and the more mystical pronouncements of Hegelians: 'they write down words and even whole periods in which they think nothing but yet hope that someone else will think something' (Schopenhauer, 1974, §283, p.517). In such a situation, it is the reader who is responsible for any meaning which is extracted.

image.[21] Thus, indetermination frees States to reconfigure 'doing the tree' as 'doing the Cross':

> Here, under the guise of having the characters do exercises 'for the balance,' the play has them unwittingly act out the episode from which their key scriptural identity derives. It might be argued that this is reading into the play with a vengeance, but if this scene succeeds at all there must be 'greater' implications of some sort, since there can be no conceivable interest in two men improving their motor skills late in Act II.
>
> (States, 1978, p.17)

States goes on to inquire 'What does Pozzo's blindness mean? What is the nature of the world-order it exemplifies?' (States, 1978, p.63). Analysis cannot supply a determinate answer to State's first question in order to invalidate the speculative adventurism of the second.

Tropes in Beckett's prose and non-verbal imagery in his drama both present statements incommensurable with logical

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[21] What is invoked by such an image is not amenable to determinate conceptual analysis. Poetry, according to Kant, by 'giving freedom to the imagination' is capable of generating 'a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate' (Kant, 1952, Part I, §57, p.212). The potential content of an 'aesthetic idea' always exceeds any determinate concept:

> <u>understanding</u>, in the case of an aesthetic idea, fails with its concept ever to attain to the completeness of the internal intuition which imagination conjoins with a given representation.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part I, §57, p.212)

analysis. But with regard to literary texts, analysis cannot claim to replicate even a literal meaning without semantic loss or addition. The very exchange of terms between The Lost Ones and a logically equivalent account of it must alter the original economy of the former fundamentally. The particular 'idiom' of a work, according to Derrida, is ultimately within the category of the 'Untranslatable':

> In another language, given enough space and time, and endurance, it might be possible for long discourses to propose laborious approaches to [the idiom of the locution]. But the untranslatable it remains in its economic performance, in the ellipsis of its trait, the word by word, the word for word, or the trait for trait in which it contracts: as many words, signs, letters, the same quality or the same expense for the same semantic content, with the same revenue of surplus value.
>
> (Derrida, 1987, p.5)

Only a word-for-word restatement of The Lost Ones could preserve the original integrity of such an economy. Analysis as practised in Chapter Four is deeply implicated in what New Criticism would disapprovingly call the heresy of paraphrase.[22] The Lost Ones cannot be transposed into different, even if logically

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[22] Analysis also offends the New Critical idea of the work as an integral organic whole. Analysis has an affinity with the dismemberment and 'technocratic violence' (Graff, 1979, p.25) that Graff associates with those epistemologies which do not preclude killing their objects if exploration of them might thus be more thorough.

equivalent, terms and retain its original literary and semantic identity.

viii. Le Dépeupleur vs The Lost Ones

This non-identity plainly obtains also between the French Le Dépeupleur and The Lost Ones as its English translation. The existence of two authorized versions of what is putatively the same work in different languages, with attendant variations in connotation, emphasis, tone and syntax, undermines the very self-identity of the text upon which analysis relies. The discrepancy between an original and its translation can be simply demonstrated by the 'irreversibility' of translation, that is to say, 'you could not possibly get from the translation back to an original' (de Man, 1986, p.97). There is no way to extract precisely the original text of Le Dépeupleur from the English of The Lost Ones. Both Le Dépeupleur and The Lost Ones may be considered provisional and incomplete by virtue of the existence of the other; what obtains concerning Le Dépeupleur cannot be totalized without reference to The Lost Ones and vice versa. As Evenson observes in relation to the English and French Molloy:

> the translation of Molloy does little to clarify the original Molloy or to create an ur-Molloy: if anything, it confuses what already exists. To read both versions is to be less sure than one would be reading only one.
>
> (Evenson, 1992, p.282)

Evenson recognizes our 'inability to hierarchize the two versions' of the trilogy (Evenson, 1992, p.278), or any other French-English or English-French translation completed by Beckett. As Hill confirms:

> There are no compelling reasons [...] why Beckett's English translations (or his French versions of English texts) should not be read as autonomous works in their own right (as they are by the vast majority of Beckett's monolingual readers). The chronological precedence of the French text of the trilogy is not, in itself, sufficient justification for treating the French as a more accurate or faithful version than its English counterpart, just as the fact that the English translation was done later does not constitute grounds for considering it as more definitive than its predecessor.
>
> (Hill, 1990, pp.41-42)

The double existence of Beckett's text in French and English, and the equality of their authority, undermines the simplicity of critical appeals to the words on the page. For Butler, for example, it is only 'the words in front him' upon which Beckett's reader can depend:

> when the reader finds himself adrift on the sea of Beckett's prose he tends to try to anchor himself in the hard fact of the words in front of him; Beckett may build castles and destroy them but the stones are there on the pages of his

works.

(Butler, 1984, p.61)

In translation, all the fundamental building-blocks are reshaped and reconfigured and differences emerge as to what can be built from them. The terms of the original text are not such a 'hard fact' that translation does not change every one of them. According to Chapter Four above, 'The cylinder of The Lost Ones is exactly what every statement of the narrative makes it' and 'In the completed text, these terms are fixed and unchangeable' (Chapter Four, p.368). This is factually incorrect; concerning the 1972 edition of the English text, it is incorrect twice over. In Le Dépeupleur each 'fixed and unchangeable' term is different. Moreover, the 1972 edition contains errors in the cylinder dimensions which were subsequently corrected in later editions.[23] Of all Beckett texts, The Lost Ones as published in 1972 by Calder and Boyars is an unfortunate choice to declare 'fixed and unchangeable'.

ix. Fixing the text: 'fundamental sounds' and essentialism

Analysis may extract contradictions which are the necessary consequence of the terms of The Lost Ones, but those terms

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[23] See below, Section xi. The mundane occurrence of errors in a published work undermines Macherey's contention, shared by Chapter Four, that 'the literary work establishes a certain kind of necessity, which is evident primarily in the fact that not a word in the text can be changed' (Macherey, 1978, p.46). The living writer can order such changes. To ensure that 'the language established by the act of the writer, in the form given by his statement, is irreducible' (Macherey, 1978, p.46), the demise of the writer in question is preferable.

themselves are not necessarily securely fixed. The reading given of The Lost Ones by analysis, promoted in Chapter Four as an a priori inference from the text, is contingent to the same extent as the terms it explicates. The a priori or necessary is thus only so relatively or dependently. One of the aspirations of analysis, however, is to reach a fundamental account of the conceptual content of its source text in order to halt any further dissection. Beckett's correspondence to Schneider concerning Endgame plainly invokes just this gesture of finality:

> 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. [...] My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else.
>
> (Beckett, 1983a, p.109)

If the level of 'extreme simplicity' and 'fundamental sounds' has been reached, there should be, by definition, no further 'elucidations to offer' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109).[24] Like Beckett

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[24] Compare Derrida's comments on the 127 drawings by Gérard Titus-Carmel collected under the title The Pocket Size Tlingit Coffin. The question posed is 'What will this number - 127 - have satisfied to stop desire from going further? Why not one coffin more?' (Derrida, 1987, p.208). One answer is that '127 is a prime number' and can, consequently, sustain itself 'entire, intact, invulnerable' (Derrida, 1987, p.208); it 'resists all analysis, [...] it doesn't resolve itself into phantasies, it does not divide itself, it does not split' (Derrida, 1987, p.209). Derrida refers to 'the modesty, the measure, the moderation one can always hear when someone says, accepting the limit: that's enough. 127, that's enough, sufficient, I can't go on' (Derrida, 1987, p.209). It is this sufficiency, the

here, 'Analysis seeks to distinguish simple, undivided elements which can then be treated as originary and explanatory' (Collins and Mayblin, 1996, p.95). The contingencies concerning the text which emerged as The Lost Ones in 1972 should sound a warning against 'the fetish of the irrevocability of things in being' (Adorno, 1973, p.52), as cultivated by the impulse to restrict attention to the terms of that text 'as stated'. For Macherey, exclusive attention to the 'singular totality' of the work in its published form betrays an attempt at 'individualisation' and 'isolation' which, in its culpable neglect of the circumstances of its production and reception, is 'a pure abstraction, a de-realisation' (Macherey, 1978, p.161). Borges' short story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' also emphasizes the centrality of context to the analysis of the literary text. The 'astonishing' posit of the story is Menard's writing of Cervantes's Don Quixote from the twentieth century and 'through the experiences of Pierre Menard', yet with the result that the two 'versions' coincide 'word for word and line for line' (Borges, 1970, p.66). Their identity does not extend into the realm of meaning, however:

> Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)
>
> (Borges, 1970, p.69)

'enough' which is 'plenty for us' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109), to which Beckett's correspondence on Endgame appeals.

The significance of the words on the page of Cervantes and Menard's texts is subsidiary to the determinations which can be made via reference to the context of their production and reception. The different truths which can be extracted from identical words is a function of the influence of historical context. No analysis can reach the fundamental terms of its text, for what is considered fundamental will alter according to contextual circumstances and the interpretative agenda. Indeed, it is an interpretative agenda created by the context of problems surrounding the analysis of The Lost Ones which determines the attempt to press Borges' text into service here.

Once again, the text-in-itself, like Kant's noumena, is unavailable for inspection free of the determinations made upon it by the context within which the observing subject operates.[25] Neither can possible contextual determinations be totalized; according to Fish:

> one can no longer have any simple (that is, noninterpretive) recourse to context in order to settle disputes or resolve

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[25] Analysis, like New Criticism, is pre-Kantian in its assumption concerning the independence of the 'words on the page' from their reader. According to each method, as Palmer argues:

> the literary work is simply 'out there' in the world, essentially independent of its perceivers. One's perception of the work is considered to be separate from the work itself, and the task of literary interpretation is to speak about the 'work itself.' [...] The preliminary separation of subject and object [...] becomes the philosophical foundation and framework for literary interpretation.
> (Palmer, 1969, p.5)

The chosen methodology of Chapter Four displays a positivism at odds with the very Kantian interpretation it wishes to promote.

> doubts about meaning, because contexts, while they are productive of interpretation, are also the products of interpretation.
>
> (Fish, 1989, p.53)

Analysis can neither declare that it has exhausted the semantic potentialities of its text, given the possibility of context shifts and the emergence of new principles of organization, nor undertake to describe that context itself free from similar contingencies and interpretative pressures. Contrary to what it was convenient to assume in Chapter Four, the text of The Lost Ones cannot be claimed to be fixed, self-enclosed, self-identical or exhaustive even of what constitutes The Lost Ones. Le Dépeupleur must be permitted an influence, as must the other texts of the residua which impinge upon the conceptual field associated with a refuge and its inhabitants. The accidental occurrence of errors in the 1972 text of The Lost Ones breaks open all the barriers against external interference in the text 'as stated' erected in Chapter Four. An external critical agenda is an irreducible part of the context which determines from outside the text how its signifying potential is directed. Having lost the argument as to the possibility of withholding attention from everything except the words on the page, and with evidence that the internal integrity of this text cannot be maintained, analysis cannot claim an ability to reach the fundamental terms of The Lost Ones. The 'fundamental sound' by which analysis wished to characterize The Lost Ones was a cacophony of contradictions and inconsistencies. Instead it is

the methodology for doing so in Chapter Four that sounds many of these discordant notes.

x. The empty tautologies of analysis

If analysis could have just one of its wishes granted, it would be that the analytical commentary could be conceptually tautologous with the text analysed. Whereas 'interpretation' beyond the terms of the text 'is nothing but the possibility of error' (de Man, 1983, p.141), analysis aspires to be nothing more than an 'elucidating commentary':

> Far from being something added to the text, the elucidating commentary simply tries to reach the text itself, whose full richness is there at the start. Ultimately, the ideal commentary would indeed become superfluous and merely allow the text to stand fully revealed.
>
> (de Man, 1983, p.30)

The contradiction between a statement that the ladders of The Lost Ones 'are single without exception' and one that holds that 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9) is not invented or disclosed by analysis, but merely emphasized. Analysis must pride itself on being '<u>explicative</u>', that is, rather curiously, 'adding nothing to the content of knowledge' (Kant, 1950, §2, p.14). The ambitions of philosophy were also to be curtailed by the limits of logical analysis. Carnap, for example, recommended that 'To pursue philosophy can only be to

clarify the concepts and sentences of science by logical analysis' (Carnap, 1959, p.145). Traditional pursuits in metaphysics were to be scrapped in favour of informing science exactly what it was saying; we are returned to explication:

> Our language is so constituted that in asserting such and such propositions we implicitly assert such and such other propositions - but we do not see immediately all that we have implicitly asserted in this manner. It is only logical deduction that makes us conscious of it.[26]
>
> (Hahn, 1959, p.157)

If this version of analysis is credible, however, one of its implications is that the full range of assertions which may be deduced from a text are latently contained within it at all times.[27] Analysis, if it is to maintain its tautological status, must confirm that everything it can legitimately say is

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[26] The narrator of The Unnamable recognizes just such a tendency for the consequences of statements to multiply. Once started, speech gathers its own momentum:

> One starts things moving without a thought of how to stop them. In order to speak. One starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.301)

If one were forced to take into account all the consequences which might be extracted from a statement and how it might be combined with other utterances to one's embarrassment or disadvantage, the merits of silence might appear overwhelming.

[27] This version of analysis will find itself replicating the metaphysical propositions of Leibnitz concerning the necessary unfolding which proceeds from initial definitions. According to Leibnitz's metaphysics, 'from the notion of any given thing all its future states already follow' (Leibnitz, 1973, p.90). Analysis believes something similar in relation to propositions and the implications they latently contain.

already contained within its source text. Analysis must tell us nothing new.

Beckett frequently supplies such analyses of the consequences of his own statements; the common factor in each instance is indeed their determination to impart no information which could be seized upon as additional to statements already made. Consider the bow window which concerns the narrator of Company:

> The big bow window looked west to the mountains. Mainly west. For being bow it looked also a little south and a little north. Necessarily.
>
> (Beckett, 1980, p.15)

The information of the last three sentences is all implicitly contained in the first; once we have a west-facing bow window, everything else is available via analysis if we should choose to pursue the matter. What is said follows 'Necessarily' from the initial statement. Equally, we can have 'no doubt' as to the truth of more obvious tautologies:

> he had no doubt at all in his own mind that the Lord would have mercy on whom he would have mercy.
>
> (Beckett, 1993, p.182)

The case is unarguable. The truth of tautology does not guarantee appreciative listeners, however, as the dolour of Croak

in Words and Music illustrates:

> CROAK: Love. [Pause. Thump of club on ground.] Love!
>
> WORDS: [Orotund.] Love is of all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love. [Clears throat.] This is the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than in this. [Pause.]
>
> CROAK: Rendering sigh. Thump of club.
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.288)

Words' trial-runs to which the listener has been privy multiplies the tautological redundancy of his speech. Nothing is said without its repetition in an alternative form of words which is itself subject to repetition. If the original statement is true, its conceptually identical variants are also, but no additional information is imparted. Statements in The Lost Ones and Worstward Ho are constructed to be equally uninformative. In the former, the time constraints upon keeping a ladder to oneself are supposedly delineated:

> Some users keep it till the last moment. For others one half or any other fraction of this time is enough.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.47)

If only 'Some users' persist until the 'last moment', then it is self-evident that 'others' consider a lesser duration sufficient.

As the space of time which elapses between taking over a ladder and the 'last moment' of one's allotted time is not determined, no clue is given as to the actual duration of 'half or any other fraction of this time'. This latter construction resolves into any length of time lesser than that taken to reach the 'last moment'. The second sentence thus states that some ladder-users desist before the 'last moment' is reached. But the first sentence has already implicitly told us this. We circle back to the beginning: if only 'Some users' persist until the 'last moment', then it is self-evident that 'others' consider a lesser duration sufficient. The information of the second sentence can all be inferred from the first. In Worstward Ho we find tautologies internal to sentences:

> How if not boundless bounded.
>
> (Beckett, 1983b, p.11)

The statement is entirely analytic: what is 'not boundless' is necessarily 'bounded' and vice versa. No object need be involved to substantiate the statement; it is true by virtue of the meaning of its terms. It is thus entirely uninformative. The uninformative narrative statement is also a speciality of Watt; via tautology, one statement out of any two can be relieved of any duty to communicate new data:

> Watt had little to say on the subject of the second or closing period of his stay in Mr. Knott's house.
>
> In the course of the second or closing period of Watt's

stay in Mr. Knott's house, the information acquired by Watt, on that subject, was scant.

(Beckett, 1976, p.199)

The narrator has little to say concerning Watt's lack of knowledge, but compensates by saying it twice. It is a technique which can be reapplied:

But having neither tie, nor collar, he had neither collar, nor tie.

(Beckett, 1976, p.218)

This much can be conceded true.

The problem concerning analysis and the tautologies it produces is not only the maintenance of conceptual identity across variant forms of words,[28] but the consequences of an inability to proceed beyond self-confirming formulations. Investigator A of Theatre II encapsulates the worry:

[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)

The ambition of analysis with regard to The Lost Ones is

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[28] Affective differences associated with logically equivalent but verbally distinct statements were examined above, Section vii.

precisely to add nothing which could not be known from the text itself. If an analysis is not incorrect, it does merely repeat its texts:

> Analysis is a repetition, another way of saying what has already been said; reading complements writing. This repetition ensures a certain fidelity: structural criticism will not say anything that has not already been said in the work itself. We are told that this repetition is not entirely futile because it produces a new meaning: this is obviously a contradiction: meanings can only be elucidated [...] because they are already there.
>
> (Macherey, 1978, p.143)

What is produced is merely 'the repetitive stutter of tautology' (de Man, 1978, p.18). Not daring to go further than its texts, the technique of analysis can merely offer to the critic a route whereby 'this miserable functionary can hope to achieve innocuity' (Beckett, 1983a, p.92).

The largest tautology in Beckett is ordered by the understated direction in Play to 'Repeat play' (Beckett, 1986, p.317). Initially, according to Beckett in a letter to George Devine, this repetition was to be 'rigorously identical with the first statement' of Play (Beckett, 1983a, p.111).[29] It is the

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[29] Eventually, however, a liberalization permits deviations; now 'The repeat may be an exact replica of first statement or it may present an element of variation' (Beckett, 1986, p.320). Of the potential exploitation of such variations, Beckett comments, in proper analytical mode, that 'This is all

need for the statements of analysis to be, at least conceptually, 'rigorously identical' with their original text which prevents them being counted as substantive contributions to knowledge concerning that text.[30] The very inability of the analytic technique to provide new knowledge is itself contained in the concept of the analytic. To range beyond conceptual identity and supply new knowledge is to leave analysis and enter synthesis. As Kant explains, synthetic judgements '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). Such judgements 'may therefore be entitled ampliative' (Kant, 1933, A7/B11, p.48). It was the purpose of Chapter Four to deny the legitimacy of just this amplification of the conceptual terms of The Lost Ones. Allegory was condemned precisely for a synthesis which adds 'to the concept [...] a predicate which has not been in any wise thought in it' (Kant, 1933, A7/B11, p.48). Allegory, it was thus argued, lacks an adequate textual basis. But analysis cannot range beyond empty tautologies.

The gravest difficulty for analysis is that if an analytic

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new and will yield more as we go into it' (Beckett, 1983a, p.112).

[30] The 'knowledge' supplied by the analyst is subtly unoriginal; as Schopenhauer puts it, 'What he gets to know resided in what he knew; thus he knew it already, but did not know that he knew it' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.107). For Hegel, this is 'a business that would not belong to cognition, but would merely be a matter of a closer acquaintance' (Hegel, 1969, p.787). So long as we are engaged in 'tautological empty talk', 'knowledge has not advanced a step' (Hegel, 1969, pp.458-459).

judgement is known to be correct a priori, it is necessarily tautologous and hence redundant. The results of analysis can either be correct and uninformative, or wrong. We have reached 'the paradox of analysis provoked by the philosophy of G.E. Moore':

> According to the paradox of analysis an analysis of a statement is trivial if the sentence expressing the analysing statement means the same as the sentence expressing the statement analysed, and incorrect if it does not.
>
> (Llewelyn, 1992, p.83)

Equally paradoxical are the crucial logical characteristics which the analytic methodology, as employed in Chapter Four, can now be seen to share with the contradictions it is employed to discover in The Lost Ones. Tautologies and contradictions together must be distinguished from all other propositions:

> Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing.
>
> A tautology has no truth-conditions, since it is unconditionally true: and a contradiction is true on no condition.
>
> Tautologies and contradictions lack sense.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1974, §4.461, p.34)

Tautologies are always 'trivially correct' and 'since they are

trivial they are uninformative' (Priest, 1987, p.186).[31] Beckett's tautologies cited above plainly contribute as little to determinate narrative information as the contradictions of The Lost Ones. In so far as the analysis of The Lost Ones in Chapter Four is correct, it is also tautological and, consequently, incapable of providing any information additional to that already available in The Lost Ones. Chapter Four is either redundant or wrong.

xi. Analysis of The Lost Ones: redundant or wrong?

From the proposition that 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it', Wittgenstein concludes that, concomitantly, philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' (Wittgenstein, 1968, Part I, §124, p.49). Analysis, in fear of error, must display similar passivity before its objects. Yet the claims of analysis in Chapter Four to passivity and receptivity before The Lost Ones, ignores the simple interpretative agenda of that chapter which is to uncover as many contradictions as possible in the source text. The mathematics of the cylinder's dimensions in The Lost Ones is one crucial area where Chapter Four exceeds the limits

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[31] Camus's lament below reproduces the problems attendant upon both analytic and synthetic propositions:

> you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure.
>
> (Camus, 1975, p.25)

The analogy maps the choice in Chapter Four between uninformative immanent analysis and dubious allegorical transcendence in relation to The Lost Ones.

of analysis in order to marshall details into a general argument concerning the inconsistencies and impossibilities which infect the cylinder's specifications. As an a priori discipline, it should be a strictly analytical question as to whether the mathematics of Beckett's cylinder are right or wrong. In the 1972 edition of The Lost Ones, the mathematical dimensions attributed to the cylinder describe an impossible entity; the figures stated cannot be made to accord with each other. In the beginning we find:

> a flattened cylinder fifty metres round and eighteen high for the sake of harmony.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.7)

These dimensions are quite in order; the relation between circumference and height is one of indifference, any figures are equally possible. It is when calculations which are dependent upon circumference and height are made that errors enter the narrative. Area or 'total surface' is one such dependent calculation; we are referred to:

> every separate square centimetre [...] of some eighty thousand of total surface.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.7)

But a circumference of 50 metres multiplied by a height of 18 metres gives a mural area of 900 square metres, a figure which might be taken to mean that the correct figure for area is

90,000, rather than 80,000, square centimetres. Both calculations are in fact wrong. This area is not equivalent to the 'total surface' of the cylinder; the incorrect figure of 80,000 square centimetres which the narrator offers above, leaves out the top and bottom surfaces of the cylinder and calculates merely the area of the cylinder's walls. This confusion as to mural and total area is corrected later in the text:

> Inside a cylinder fifty metres round and eighteen high for the sake of harmony or a total surface of roughly twelve hundred square metres of which eight hundred mural.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.16)

The miscalculation of 800, instead of 900 ($\underline{18} \times 50 = 900$), square metres of mural area remains in place, however. Such clear violations of mathematical law appears to support the contention of Chapter Four that the cylinder described in The Lost Ones is an impossible object by virtue of its contradictory and inconsistent specifications.[32] Straying beyond analysis, the

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[32] The discovery of mathematical errors was especially significant; as Russell argues, the laws of mathematics are not open to debate or ambiguity:

> mathematics takes us still further from what is human, into the region of absolute necessity, to which not only the actual world, but every possible world, must conform; and even here it builds a habitation, or rather finds a habitation eternally standing, where our ideals are fully satisfied and our best hopes are not thwarted.
>
> (Russell, 1963, p.55)

The cylinder of The Lost Ones appeared to violate such laws by fiat and be content to define itself eternally impossible. Such indifference to mathematical necessity could be translated into an attack on logic and ultimately rationality itself. A mathematical impossibility can never be interpreted away.

significance of the mathematical errors in the text was amplified to sustain a particular interpretation of the text as a whole. Under analytic rules themselves, such an appeal is illegitimate. Moreover, if Chapter Four had cared to look outside the limits of its 1972 text, the unfortunate discovery would have been made that The Lost Ones of Beckett's Collected Shorter Prose and Six Residua unaccountably get their sums right in relation to the cylinder's dimensions. A piece of apparently indisputable textual evidence as to the cultivation of impossibilities in the 1972 text of The Lost Ones must ultimately be conceded to be mundane errors in translation or transcription. To find that an aspect of the text which had lent substantial support to one's interpretative agenda is actually nothing more than a publishing error is a rather disheartening irony. Later English editions of The Lost Ones do not seek to calculate their cylinders as impossible objects. Le Dépeupleur of 1970, however, can produce some errors. The French text reckons its cylinder as 16 metres high:

> C'est l'intérieur d'un cylindre surbaissé ayant cinquante mètres de pourtour et seize de haut pour l'harmonie.
>
> (Beckett, 1970a, p.7)

The 80,000 square centimetres of 'surface' transferred to The Lost Ones of 1972 is thus understandable, for a 50 metres circumference multiplied by a 16 metre height measurement equals

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Unfortunately for Chapter Four, as detailed below, Beckett takes the only other option, which is to change the figures.

800 square metres, which might be assumed to yield 80,000 square centimetres. The French text also confuses total and mural surface:

> les quelque quatre-vingt mille centimètres carrés de surface totale émettaient chacun sa lueur.
>
> (Beckett, 1970a, p.7)

Le Dépeupleur's mistake here is likely to be the source for the same confusion in its 1972 translation as The Lost Ones. When the French text keeps its measurements in metres and square metres, its statement of the cylinder's height as 16 metres is sufficient to introduce harmony to its other dimensions:

> Intérieur d'un cylindre ayant cinquante mètres de pourtour et seize de haut pour l'harmonie soit à peu près douze cents mètres carrés de surface totale dont huit cents de mur.
>
> (Beckett, 1970a, pp.14-15)

The texts of Six Residua and Collected Shorter Prose both change the 'eighteen high' of the 1972 English edition to translate Le Dépeupleur correctly:

> Inside a cylinder fifty metres round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony or a total surface of roughly twelve hundred square metres of which eight hundred mural.
>
> (Beckett, 1978, p.59; Beckett, 1984, p.162)

In both these English texts, however, something curious happens to the 'eighty thousand' square centimetres 'of total surface' in both the 1972 English version (Beckett, 1972, p.7) and Le Dépeupleur's equivalent 'quatre-vingt mille centimètres carrés de surface totale' (Beckett, 1970a, p.7):

> Inside a flattened cylinder fifty metres round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony. The light. Its dimness. Its yellowness. Its omnipresence as though every separate square centimetre were agleam of the some twelve million of total surface.
>
> (Beckett, 1978, p.55; Beckett, 1984, p.159)

The sudden shift from 80,000 square centimetres mural to 'twelve million of total surface' stated above looks spectacularly wrong. After all, it is the mistake of describing the cylinder as 18 metres high which we presume has caused all the trouble. But the analytical, mathematical and tautological transformation from square metres to square centimetres had also gone wrong. To calculate square centimetres from metre lengths, the latter must be multiplied by one hundred twice. In the above statement from The Lost Ones as reprinted in Six Residua and Collected Shorter Prose, Beckett shifts from one dimensional metre lengths, giving height and circumference, to a two dimensional square measurement expressed in centimetres, a double transformation which makes the result yielded look intuitively implausible.[33] If the

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[33] The intuitive mismatch between figures expressed in widely differing terms is recognized in Company. Heartbeats are being counted:

calculation is translated into centimetres throughout, however, the figure of twelve million square centimetres can be shown to be correct:

circumference = 50 metres = 5,000 centimetres

height = 16 metres = 1,600 centimetres

5,000 × 1,600 = 8,000,000 square centimetres mural

We were correctly informed above that 'a cylinder fifty metres round and sixteen high' gives 'a total surface of roughly twelve hundred square metres of which eight hundred mural' (Beckett, 1978, p.59; Beckett, 1984, p.162); more transformations are needed:

1,200 square metres total surface - 800 square metres mural

= 400 square metres for top and bottom cylinder areas

800 square metres = 8,000,000 square centimetres

400 square metres = 4,000,000 square centimetres

8,000,000 + 4,000,000 = 12,000,000 square centimetres

or, more quickly, 1,200 square metres = 12,000,000 square centimetres

Ironically, it is errors in analysis, a priori mathematical calculations transforming metres into square centimetres, which

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> But for the moment with hardly more than seventy American billion behind you you sit in the little summerhouse working out the volume. Seven cubic yards approximately. This strikes you for some reason as improbable and you set about your sum anew.
>
> (Beckett, 1980, p.55)

compound the errors generated by the rogue figure of an 18 metre high cylinder. Beckett confirmed the correction of height from 18 metres to 16 metres and of total surface from 80,000 to 12 million square centimetres in two notes to publishers. The first was sent to Grove Press:

> Just to point out 2 errors on first page of The Lost Ones (p.7 of Calder & Boyars edition.) Line 6 'eighteen high' should read 'sixteen high' and line 11 'eighty thousand' should read 'twelve million.'
>
> (Beckett cited in Altschul, 1987, p.157)

A query by Altschul was answered by Beckett with both a repudiation of a second 18 metre height figure which appeared in the 1972 edition of The Lost Ones, and was passed on to its Grove Press reprint, and a second confirmation of the twelve million figure:

> P.7 (Grove Press edition): 'sixteen high' and 'twelve million' correct.
> P.16: 'sixteen' instead of 'eighteen' and ensuing figures as they stand.
>
> (Beckett cited in Altschul, 1987, p.157)

The corrections made by Beckett which appear in The Lost Ones of Six Residua and Collected Shorter Prose describe a cylinder of entirely reasonable dimensions. Abbott's assumption that the cylinder's 'design is of consummate mathematical exactitude'

(Abbott, 1973, p.149) could have been proved foolish, a typical example of criticism thoughtlessly tidying up crucial textual discrepancies, in relation to the 1970 edition of Le Dépeupleur and 1972 edition of The Lost Ones, the texts to which Abbott's judgement in 1973 must surely refer. But, to the frustration of Chapter Four, which wishes to collect contradictions and convict critics of neglecting the inconsistent details of the text, Abbott manages to describe accurately the corrected versions of The Lost Ones not published at the time of his statement. Ultimately, Abbott is right, albeit by accident, and Chapter Four must concede that its arguments rely upon figures in the text repudiated by its author. The corrected figures support Butler too, for example, in his tribute to 'the meticulous construction' of the world of The Lost Ones (Butler, 1984, p.183). The dimensions of the cylinder must be removed from the list of examples which support a theory of the deliberate cultivation of inconsistencies in the specification of the abode of The Lost Ones.

xii. Ambiguity vs contradiction: repairing the cylinder and undoing Chapter Four

Other examples of contradiction or inconsistency in the text of The Lost Ones cited in Chapter Four can also be shown to be dubious. If an appeal to semantic ambiguity could have rescued a textual detail back to consistency with its fellows that option was on principle never taken. Chapter Four required univocal statements which could be made to clash with other univocal

statements. In this cause, natural ambiguities were ignored in favour of extracting evidence as to precise illogicalities. According to the narrator of The Unnamable:

> impossible situations cannot be prolonged, unduly, the fact is well known, either they disperse, or else they turn out to be possible after all [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.365)

Admitting ambiguity is one method of dispersing the 'impossible situations' allegedly stated in The Lost Ones. Consider the use of the ladders:

> 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)

What is stated, according to Chapter Four, is that 'It is the custom' for one searcher 'not to climb two or more' ladders 'at a time'. As noted there, it is thus bizarre that 'the injunction against this seemingly impossible indulgence has merely reached the liberal status of a "custom"' (Chapter Four, pp.262-263). Equally, however, the same words may be taken to mean that if a ladder is in use, a second searcher should desist from climbing it; this meaning too could be expressed by the statement that 'It is the custom not to climb two or more at a time' (Beckett, 1972,

pp.10-11). All hinges on whether the 'two' items invoked are ladders or searchers. And that judgement is ambiguous. It was not in the interests of the argument of Chapter Four, however, to countenance possible solutions to oddities via an appeal to ambiguity. Chapter Four choose rather to exploit the presence of such potential clashes in the interests of a general interpretation.

Whether the narrator of The Lost Ones is to retain a reputation for issuing bizarre statements or whether they may in fact be retrieved to sense, rests below on how the word 'feel' may be construed:

> 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.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, pp.55-56)

Chapter Four imagines the hands of the searcher feeling the cylinder walls for the irregularities which are declared non-existent in the same paragraph. Analysis of what the text says, it was thought, yields this clear inconsistency in the narrator's account as to how the ladders are correctly positioned:

> 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.
>
> (Chapter Four, p.279)

If 'to feel' is to be defined solely as 'To examine or explore by touch' (OED), the inconsistency must be upheld. But 'to feel', does not necessarily imply that tactile sensations are involved; 'to perceive, be conscious' may also be offered as a definition (OED). Alternatively, 'feel' may be glossed as a noun pertaining to guidance received internally or instinctively. This use makes sense of the words of The Lost Ones above; in the absence of any distinguishing features on the walls of the cylinder, the searcher must rely, as the narrator reasonably says, 'largely on feel', on instinct. The acknowledgement of ambiguity again resolves the apparent clash of assertions in the narrative.

The number of degrees in a complete revolution around a circle, which should not be a matter for dispute, is at the centre of a further battle over the sense of the narrator's statements. The narrator is worried about the searchers' indecision in choosing a ladder at the foot of which to wait in the climbers' zone:

> 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.

(Beckett, 1972, p.48)

As the total number of degrees through which a searcher could pass while making his way around the circular track of the climbers' zone is only 360, Chapter Four was moved to object to the 'thousands of degrees' which the narrator fears would be accumulated without the imposition of restrictions. Yet, it is also clear that the narrator means to refer to the sum of 360° + 360° + 360° ... set in motion if the circuit around 360 degrees may be repeated. Chapter Four would counter that what is question is whether the counter should be reset back to 1°, 2°, 3° ... as the searcher's starting point is reached and a second circuit begun; the narrator wishes to count from 360° to 361°, 362°, 363° ..., a method which would indeed soon involve 'thousands of degrees' if unchecked. It is possible to pass through more than 360 degrees, as the narrator upholds, but only if, as Chapter Four upholds, a second circuit is not understood as 1-360° repeated but logged as the beginning of a circuit through 361-720°. In a clear sense, the journey does continue beyond 360 degrees; in a clear sense also, there are no more than 360 degrees. This is no clear method of determining which of these incompatible interpretations should be upheld at the expense of the other. Chapter Four, however, registers only the oddity of speaking of a revolution 'through thousands of degrees' (Beckett, 1972, p.27); it does not choose to concede that the statement may be granted a straightforward sense. Ambiguity is not countenanced if a proper inconsistency might be available.

The imbroglio concerning population fluctuations in the cylinder is also founded upon a textual base whose ambiguity was not acknowledged. To gain the right to calculate the bizarre whirl of bodies which the ratios stated in the text imply,[34] we have to ride roughshod over a crucial grammatical puzzle in the text as it is stated. The statement of the ratios of bodies in other groups in relation to the vanquished is introduced as 'numbering the faithful':

> But as to at this moment of time and there will be no other numbering the faithful who endlessly come and go [...]
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.35)

The text then launches into a four-way division of the bodies and a statement of the ratios between each group in relation to the one above it, with the vanquished at the apex. Chapter Four reads these introductory words as a main sentence with a sub-clause:

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[34] The population of the cylinder is calculated in ratio from a base figure of the number of vanquished it contains:

> 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)

The numerical conceit of the sentence itself (1st × 2, 2nd × 3, 3rd × 4) determines that the 4th group, the vanquished themselves, will need to be connected with the figure 5 to maintain the sequence. It is argued in Chapter Four that if the number of bodies achieving the status of vanquished is not stable and the base figure of five changes, then the whole population of the cylinder worked out by the ratios above must fluctuate also.

> But as to at this moment of time[,] and there will be no other[,] numbering the faithful who endlessly come and go [...]
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.35)

If what there 'will be no other' of, is a 'moment of time', then inconsistencies can also be signalled each time the narrator requires some temporal duration in which actions or scenarios can be completed. An action as basic as movement is thus made problematical (Chapter Four, pp.343-344). There is an alternative reading of these words, however; one that states moreover, to the chagrin of Chapter Four, that the population of the cylinder is always actually fixed:

> But as to at this moment of time[,] and there will be no other numbering[,] the faithful who endlessly come and go [...]
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.35)

Central to the first reading is the implication that there will indeed be another 'numbering' of the population whenever the vanquished gain or lose a member. Shifting a comma-break forward by one word is sufficient to make the text state the opposite quite categorically: 'there will no other numbering'. The fate of a whole section of Chapter Four depends upon where this non-existent comma is imagined to fall.

Chapter Four cannot be excused for declining to comment on

the ambiguity which undermines the chaotic population fluctuations it wished to describe. Such laxity is not illustrated elsewhere; if nitpicking precision is better able to force an inconsistency into the open, then that strategy will be adopted as the only proper way of reading. Consider the significance of 'half the rungs are missing' as construed by Chapter Four:

> 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.
>
> (Chapter Four, p.261)

Here 'half the rungs' is taken to mean precisely fifty percent, no more or less. Chapter Four is prepared to read against the grain of the tone of approximation here and insist upon the letter of what is stated. As a reward, a quibble can be lodged that such exactitude in vandalism should deserve a tribute to the harmony inaugurated between present and absent rungs, rather the

statement of disharmony provided.

xiii. 'Roughly! Roughly! [...] Bang in the centre!'

These shifts in Chapter Four between a cavalier readiness to ride roughshod over inconvenient ambiguities and a pedantic insistence upon precision where the narrator gives only approximations, might find an image of its unreason in Endgame:

HAMM: Back to my place! [CLOV pushes chair back to centre.]

Is that my place?

CLOV: Yes, that's your place.

HAMM: Am I right in the centre?

CLOV: I'll measure it.

HAMM: More or less! More or less!

CLOV: [Moving chair slightly.] There!

HAMM: I'm more or less in the centre?

CLOV: I'd say so.

HAMM: You'd say so! Put me right in the centre!

CLOV: I'll go and get the tape.

HAMM: Roughly! Roughly! [CLOV moves chair slightly.] Bang in the centre!

CLOV: There!

[Pause.]

HAMM: I feel a little too far to the left. [CLOV moves chair slightly.] Now I feel a little too far to the right. [CLOV moves chair slightly.] I feel a little too far forward. [CLOV moves chair slightly.] Now I feel a

little too far back. [CLOV moves chair slightly.] Don't stay there [i.e. behind the chair], you give me the shivers.

[CLOV returns to his place beside the chair.]

CLOV: If I could kill him I'd die happy.[35]

(Beckett, 1986, pp.104-105)

Hamm demands, and dismisses equally arbitrarily, a precision in centring which is impossible to achieve.[36] He is obliged to be satisfied with merely a 'Roughly!' accurate approximation to the pedantic demand for the absolute centre.[37] The methodology

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[35] Waiting for Godot too has games to play between the vague and the precise:

ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?
VLADIMIR: Were you not there?
ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.
VLADIMIR: Oh ... nothing very definite.
ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.
VLADIMIR: Precisely.
ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.
VLADIMIR: Exactly.

(Beckett, 1986, p.19)

By the time of Act II, Estragon is merely stunned by a request for exactitude:

POZZO: What happened exactly?
ESTRAGON: Exactly!

(Beckett, 1986, p.81)

[36] The centre of a circle can be known to exist, but the effort to attain it is regressive:

> each attempt to circumscribe it merely creates not a center but a new circumference which itself has a new and equally unattainable center, and so on [...].
>
> (Chambers, 1965, p.154)

[37] As the stage set in relation to which Hamm wishes to be placed centrally is not circular, the calculation of its 'central' point is practically as well as theoretically imprecise. The same problem afflicts the positioning of the cabin in Ill Seen Ill Said:

adopted in Chapter Four is analogously arbitrary: it will ignore ambiguities in the text as stated when they could be cited to resolve inconsistencies, thereby refusing to read precisely ('Roughly! Roughly!' is deemed sufficient) but, conversely, will insist upon an adherence to the letter of the text ('Bang in the centre!'), as opposed to an evident if imprecise signification, if clarity and coherence can be better avoided that way. As a result, Chapter Four is certain that analysis of the text as stated proves that The Lost Ones is riven by contradiction and inconsistency.

A certain pedantry is indeed invaluable in finding objections to the narrator's statements in The Lost Ones. Prior to the disputes concerning the faulty mathematics of the cylinder's dimensions in the 1972 edition, the description of the abode as a 'flattened cylinder' (Beckett, 1972, p.7) offends the desire for exactitude in matters of definition in Chapter Four. In the parlance of mortals, the possibility of a cylindrical structure suffering a degree of flattening and thus becoming a compound 'flattened cylinder' is entirely uncontroversial. In mathematical terms, however, what applies to a cylinder, and

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> The cabin. Its situation. Careful. On. At the inexistent centre of a formless place. Rather more circular than otherwise finally.
>
> (Beckett, 1982, p.8)

The significance of attaining a central position is flagged but unresolved in The Unnamable:

> No matter where he goes, being at the centre, he will go towards them. So he is at the centre, there is a clue of the highest interest, it matters little to what.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, pp.359-360)

applies solely by virtue of the regularities which define the shape of a cylindrical figure, does not apply to a deformed 'flattened cylinder'. A cylinder can be flattened, but when flattened it is no longer a cylinder. The regularity of shape which obtains of the 'cylinder' is cancelled by the undetermined misshapenness attendant upon its status as 'flattened'.[38] Pedantry would define the 'flattened cylinder' as oxymoronic despite the fact that such an entity may exist quite unproblematically. The description of the abode as a cylinder must be relegated to the past for Chapter Four to be satisfied.

An insistence upon reading exactitude into the text of The Lost Ones can also cause trouble as to how bodies are said to effect an exit from tunnels which they discover to terminate in dead ends. The narrator is particularly concerned with 'a long

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[38] According to the figures given as its dimensions, the cylinder could indeed be considered squat in relation to its width. Analysis will yield the diameter of the cylinder with some help from formulae:

mural area = 2 × pi × radius × height
800 sq. m. = 2 × 3.1415927 × radius × 16m
which gives the radius as 7.9577472m
diameter = 2 × radius
diameter = 2 × 7.9577472m
diameter = 15.915494m

The cylinder is thus slightly less wide than it is tall. With the added predicate of its 'flattened' nature, however, these calculations must be thought of as approximations. Any crumpling of the cylinder will mean that its height might be more or less than 16 metres at any given point; equally, crumpled walls will yield diameter measurements of either more or less that 15.9 metres, depending upon where the measurement is taken. As the nature of the flattening of the cylinder is undetermined, these potential irregularities are necessarily speculative also. 'Cylinder' denotes a certain regularly shaped object; 'flattened' introduces to the concept the potential for all sorts of undetermined deviations from the shape that is the essence of the preceding word.

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.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.12)

A tiny ambiguity here is sufficient to provoke a deliberate misreading of the evident statement that the searcher must reverse feet-first:

> 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.
>
> (Chapter Four, p.265)

The 'way it came' can, with sufficient wilfulness, be made ambiguous between the track followed by the searcher and the manner in which that track was crawled, whether forwards or backwards. There is nothing to exclude the possibility that the tunnels are entered backwards, except its inherent implausibility and a complete absence of motivation. If the searcher is made to retreat 'the way it came', that should include the possibility that its manner of crawling should also be reproduced, and that 'the way it came' was indeed via a backwards crawl. If the words

stated might be bent to such meanings, in aid of the preferred interpretation of The Lost Ones as replete with bizarre incidents, then Chapter Four is willing to ignore the self-evident significations of the narrator's statements in the service of this greater cause.

xiv. Contradiction in The Lost Ones: a transcendent reading

These alternate pedantries and grand sweeps across ambiguities, performed in the interests of gathering evidence about the contradictions and inconsistencies of The Lost Ones, yield a blatantly partisan reading of the text. This does not prevent Chapter Four from maintaining that its attentions are to the text-in-itself, as if such a thing were available in isolation from the distortion of interpretation itself:

> The narrator's version of the cylinder is the only account available. And to be led 'incessantly round and round' [(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.177)] by the contradictions and aporiai of this account, to read immanently rather than transcendently or allegorically, to refrain from stabilizing these instable terms by recourse to theories of their ultimate significance, is at least to read the narrator's text.
>
> (Chapter Four, pp.337-338)

To focus exclusively on potential contradictions and aporiai is to read the narrator's text according to a certain interpretative

agenda rather than with a disinterested devotion to explicating meaning as genuine analysis would require. It is in the nature of criticism, according to Macherey, to be 'never absolutely satisfied with what has been given' as analysis claims to be; if criticism were so sated 'it would run the risk of abolishing itself' (Macherey, 1978, p.15) by cognizance of the self-evident significance of its text which requires no critical explication or emphases. Instead, criticism undertakes to make clearer the putative organization of its text. A coherent univocal interpretation is an idealization of a less tidy signifying potentiality:

> by reference to an ideal norm [criticism] destroys that which is, substituting a revised, corrected and consistent version of an initial reality. It does not matter that this elaboration expresses an ideal and a wish; for not only is the possible preferred to the real, but the real itself is depicted as the possible form of a norm <u>given</u> at the same moment. It would be agreed, in general, that criticism can begin only from a desire for change.
>
> (Macherey, 1978, p.15)

The ideal in <u>The Lost Ones</u> for Chapter Four is the flat contradiction generated between descriptions of the ladders as 'single without exception' despite 'Some' being 'fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9). Other examples, as to whether ladders are climbed two at a time; the possible methods by which one 'feels' one's way; the existence of 'thousands of

degrees'; whether the population of the cylinder is fixed or fluctuating; the accuracy of 'half the rungs are missing'; the idea of a 'flattened cylinder' and the scope of an instruction to a body to retreat 'the way it came', all require special management in order to qualify as oddities with a contribution to make toward the incoherence of the cylinder. Once so identified, with ambiguities edited out, the shared peculiarity of such details helps to render the cylinder predictable and consistent in its lapses into inconsistency. The strange is now entirely expected and familiar. The postulation of the incoherence of The Lost Ones unfortunately acts as an alternative source of interpretative coherence. Disconnected incidents and statements can be marshalled together as pieces of evidence in support of such an overarching thesis. Meaning is determined roughly or pedantically according to which method yields the best return of inconsistency. Evidently, this is not to analyse but to interpret, manipulating the meaning of the text in accordance with the demands of an interpretation which, despite all its protests to the contrary, does transcend the details of the text itself. As Iser argues:

> The process is virtually hermeneutic. The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning.
>
> (Iser, 1974, p.285)

In accordance with certain details of the text, an explanatory thesis may be proposed which then serves to direct the signifying potential of other textual features. An interpretation implemented in this way reproduces the same transcendence of the text as is effected by allegorical reading. The prime objection to allegorical interpretation, as Chapter Four rehearsed at length, was its tendency not to read the text as stated but to make projections according to the general allegorical concept adopted by the critic. The examination of particular details in Chapter Four is similarly prejudiced by an over-riding concern to bring the narrative of The Lost Ones under the general concept of a contradictory text. Details which display unwelcome consistency with one another need not be mentioned. An additional irony is generated by the choice of incoherence and contradiction as the principles around which the details of the text are to be coherently organized.[39] This organization is the work of criticism; it is not displayed by the text-in-itself. The principles of analysis are thoroughly violated.

Neither is this violation accidental: the only method of ensuring a tautologous and analytic relation to the terms of the text would be to repeat The Lost Ones word for word, that is, as Macherey argues, to abolish what may be called criticism entirely. If criticism is to proceed, the text must instead give

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[39] The tendency to consider that the code of the text is cracked is perhaps greater when contradictions and inconsistencies are in question. It is tempting to think that the content of such a reading subverts the impulse of allegory to find unity and coherence in the text. Structurally, however, the reading offered in Chapter Four is identical with any other means of explication, whether allegorical or transcendent.

way. Criticism, like the transcendental idealism described by Kant, itself contributes the frameworks through which its objects will be perceived. The dispute between positivism, which views the subject as the passive receiver of objective external data, or the 'words on the page', and idealism, which holds that the subject, to some degree, determines his own perceptions of objects, is fought out again over the nature of criticism:

> either literary criticism is an art, completely determined by the pre-existence of a domain, the literary works, and finally united with them in the discovery of their truth, and as such it has no autonomous existence; or, it is a certain form of knowledge, and has an object, which is not given but a product of literary criticism. Literary criticism applies a certain effect of transformation.[40]
>
> (Macherey, 1978, p.7)

Chapter Four, in league with the claims of analysis, would want to consider itself entirely determined by the objective terms of The Lost Ones; it would not desire the privilege of an 'autonomous existence', but rather a position of absolute dependence upon its text. But this is a claim to passivity which translates into the presumption that the essence of the text can,

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[40] The quandary is framed by Barnes in terms equally compatible with competing general versions of perception:

> Either literary texts are self-subsistent repositories of meaning responsible for the experience readers have of them - or literary texts are the end-products of reading experiences, objects themselves constituted by such experiences and not antecedent to them.
>
> (Barnes, 1988, pp.86-87)

in principle, be correctly and exactly represented by such a commentary. The contention is that the text can be known in-itself with no distortion being attendant upon the activity of seeking to know, organize or generate arguments concerning it. To prove the accuracy of such a contention, one would be obliged to find no discrepancies between the text as known and organized by the reader and its inherent characteristics prior to being so known, read or organized. To seek to say anything about a text as it exists 'inherently', 'in-itself', uninformed by any critical concepts, is to replicate the contradiction identified by Kant in the impulse to introduce the noumena into conceptual discourse. Any such unconditioned item defines itself as also unknown, and, in principle, unknowable. As Kant argues, whatever the noumenon or unconditioned may be in itself, it remains '<u>for us</u>, nothing at all' (Kant, 1933, A279-280/B335-336, p.288). What constitutes <u>The Lost Ones</u> in-itself, freed from any interpretative determinations made by its readers, is similarly imponderable.

xv. Some coherence via ambiguity

For all its protestations of fidelity via analysis to the terms of the text, to the extent of claiming conceptual equivalence between text and commentary as an ideal, Chapter Four is engaged in a deliberate misreading of <u>The Lost Ones</u> for the purposes of the coherence of the interpretation which finds the text incoherent. In the case of each ambiguous statement, a choice between semantic implications was made; each time, the

implication which contributed to the impression of the contradictory nature of The Lost Ones was chosen without acknowledgement that this sense was being emphasized at the expense of alternatives. Where, for example, the text of The Lost Ones reads '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), Chapter Four is only interested in isolating the curious construction 'come to rest without ceasing' (Chapter Four, p.274). Properly contextualized as 'come to rest without ceasing to search with their eyes', the phrase manifests no apparent contradiction. When one is fixated by contradictions, however, the words of The Lost Ones can be exploited in this manner. Equally, however, many of the examples given can be rescued back to consistency if their ambiguity is properly taken into account. Ambiguity is the classical line of defence against contradiction:

> if B can be both affirmed and denied truly of A within the same statement, then B is ambiguous. This rule [...] is nothing more than a version of, or at least an implication of, Aristotle's statement of the rule of noncontradiction. (Probably, the closest Aristotle comes to explicitly stating this as a separate rule or criterion is in Book IV, Chapter IV, of the Metaphysics: 'And it will not be possible to be and not be the same thing, except in virtue of an ambiguity.') In applying this rule, we might say that a dark feather, for example, is both light and not light, and

> thus we might conclude that 'light' is ambiguous.[41]
>
> (Erwin, 1970, p.54)

In the case of ambiguity, 'the predicate can be both affirmed and denied of the same thing' (Erwin, 1970, p.55) without the occurrence of contradiction. It is only meanings which are assumed to be singular and prescriptive that can be made to appear irreconcilable. In Chapter Four, a determinate contradiction is always preferred to undecidable equivocation between ambiguities. An ambiguity or ambivalent term marks the limits of determination and thereby of criticism also. 'The critic always <u>decides</u> on a meaning' (Bass, 1978, p.329, n.6); in the case of an irresolvable ambiguity, the possibility of such

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[41] Priest also notes how apparent contradictions can be resolved into ambiguities which are context-dependent. His advice is that we 'parameterise the relevant predicates' (Priest, 1995, p.167). 'Parameterisation' is 'a well-known stratagem for disposing of contradictions':

> The stratagem is to the effect that when one meets an (at least <u>prima facie</u>) contradiction of the form P(a)!, one tries to find some ambiguity in P, or some different respects, r_1 and r_2, in which something may be P, and then to argue that a is P is one respect, $P(r_1, a)$, but not in the other, $\neg P(r_2, a)$. For example, when faced with the apparent contradiction that it is both 2pm and 10pm, I disambiguate with respect to place, and resolve the contradiction by noting that it is 2pm in Cambridge and 10pm in Brisbane.
>
> (Priest, 1995, p.166)

The contradiction concerning the ladders of <u>The Lost Ones</u>, all single but some with sliding extensions, can survive this test with its oddity intact. A statement such as <u>The Unnamable</u>'s 'Here all is clear. No, all is not clear' (Beckett, 1959, p.296), which Federman classifies as amongst that text's 'flagrant contradictions' (Federman, 1970, p.103), can be resolved simply as an example of rapid re-consideration. Time is a great healer of contradictions; as Kant argues: 'Only in time can two contradictorily opposed predicates meet in one and the same object, namely, <u>one after the other</u>' (Kant, 1933, A32/B48-49, p.76).

a decision, and so of criticism itself, is undermined. It is not possible finally to determine, for example, whether the statement that 'half the rungs are missing' from the cylinder's ladders (Beckett, 1972, p.10) is thrown off as an approximation or whether it tells us that precisely fifty percent of rungs are no longer attached to the ladders. The clash between the tone of the statement and its literal meaning causes this suspension in ambiguity. The manner in which statements are expressed concerns precisely those affective influences upon meaning which analysis as a system of logical equivalence wanted to bracket apart from determinate conceptualization.

In Chapter Four, the focus on precise contradiction is also a reaction to the technique of logical analysis. As Barwise and Etchemendy remark, 'Logicians abhor ambiguity but love paradox' (Barwise and Etchemendy, 1987, p.177). In place of usual critical attempts to ignore details in The Lost Ones which lead to contradiction,[42] Chapter Four ignores the ambiguities of sentences which might allow consistency to be reinstated. Semantic acrobatics are involved in both cases. When consistency is at stake, however, all manner of re-readings and little twists of sense remain invisible. No reading of The Lost Ones which re-configures the text to restore an unruffled narrative flow appears suspect in itself. The unstated assumption that a text is not self-contradictory is in no way remarkable. To halt the

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[42] Such charges concerning critics' selective reading in the interests of maintaining coherence are flagged high in Chapter Four. A case in point is Brienza's rewriting of the narrator's definition of events as imperceptible. See Chapter Four, Section iv.

equivocation between ambiguities upon an interpretation which preserves consistency, however, is equivalent to the misreadings of Chapter Four which seek to emphasize the potentiality for inconsistency via the converse exploitation of ambiguities. Many of the contradictions cited are as insecure as any coherent reading of them could be, for a genuine ambiguity can be finally resolved into neither simple consistency nor inconsistency. The Lost Ones cannot be identified as consistently inconsistent as desired by Chapter Four.

xvi. Precision entanglements

The reading of The Lost Ones given in Chapter Four thus displays two traits concerning its treatment of ambiguity which define it as illegitimate. Both apply also to the interpretation of Beckett's other texts here. Firstly, ambiguous statements are treated as if they were without sense, as contradictions or irreducible paradoxes. The meaning of many apparently paradoxical Beckettian statements, however, is actually readily comprehensible. That 'Mercier and Camier were old young' (Beckett, 1974, p.16), for example, can be aggravated into a contradiction or resolved into signifying premature ageing. Celia in Murphy is entitled to have 'remembered her solitude was not without witnesses' (Beckett, 1963, p.151) if we are prepared to allow that physical proximity and companionship are distinct concepts. Neither is the sense of Beckett's comment to Schneider that Fin de partie 'gains unquestionably in the greater smallness of the Studio' (Beckett, 1983a, p.108) handicapped by its

deliberate opposition of concepts. Chapter Four professes to consider the 'contiguous extremes' invoked by The Lost Ones as 'a conceptual compound which is indeed "shaken by a vertiginous tremolo" [(Beckett, 1972, p.16)] each time an attempt is made to think it' (Chapter Four, p.358). But, despite this declared inability to understand the narrator's meaning, the same phrase is borrowed in Chapter Four to characterize the last act of searching in the cylinder. Where 'the last searcher returns to the first to desist', it can be seen that 'contiguous extremes meet' (Chapter Four, p.358). Derrida follows a similar strategy in underdoing the purity of binary oppositions by demonstrating that each extreme is implicated in defining the content of the other; in this sense, they partake of each other and can be understood as contiguous. There is thus slippage between extremes; under this system, we find statements contending that, for example, 'Abraham is faithful to God only in his absolute treachery' (Derrida, 1995, p.68) or that we may 'push artifice to that limit which leads back to nature' (Derrida, 1980, p.37). Here, 'the extremities touch' (Derrida, 1982, p.60). The end-point of the circle is also its beginning. Derrida finds analogous gestures in Joyce:

> what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the copula in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: 'Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet'?
>
> (Derrida, 1978, p.153)

An answer is perhaps intimated by the ascription of an 'Hegelian'

nature to such a process. Hegel's dialectic is predicated upon participation between opposites, leading to their subsumption in a new synthesis. The synthesis is thus contiguous to both extremes:

> Between two opposites, the third can participate, it can touch the two edges.
>
> (Derrida, 1987, p.34)

Richard Ellman's comments on Beckett are informed by this play between opposites:

> Action is suspiciously like inaction, being like nonbeing. [...] Murphy is in search of plenitude, or is it emptiness? Perhaps they are the same. Beckett's work was to rest, or to be restless, amid such paradoxes.
>
> (Ellman, 1986, p.27)

The logical status of such identifications is as paradoxes capable of resolution into sense rather than statements of flat contradiction. Chapter Four does not make this acknowledgement with regard to either ambiguities or paradoxes; each are misrepresented as straightforward contradictions.

The precision which is required of a true contradiction points up the second way in which ambiguities are mistreated in Chapter Four. In the case of the single and extended ladders, the contradiction is well-formed. The negation or contradiction

of a proposition that 'all' members of a certain group share a particular property is simply a subsequent statement to the effect that that property is not displayed by 'some' members of the defined group. It is contradictory to hold that the ladders 'are single without exception' and that 'Some are fitted with a sliding extension' (Beckett, 1972, p.9). Crucially, neither of these statements is ambiguous; precision is central to the impasse:

> There would be no indecision or <u>double bind</u> were it not between <u>determined</u> (semantic, ethical, political) poles, which are upon occasion terribly necessary and irreplaceably singular.
>
> (Derrida, 1988, p.148)

What ambiguities precisely are not is singular. In the case of contradiction, if either of the two putatively opposing elements could be supplemented by an alternate meaning, then this supplement disrupts the binary confrontation in question. If three or more meanings are in play, the impasse between two fixed terms cannot be maintained. Only a determinate, univocal statement can properly form a stable contradictory pairing with only another such statement. By treating <u>The Lost Ones</u> as a logical rather than a literary entity, it was logical relationships between statements, rather than the ambiguities or word-play within statements, which received emphasis. Statements can be found in Beckett which cannot be contradicted by an opposing singular statement by virtue of the ambiguity of the

first statement's meaning. Lessness refers to 'arms fast to sides' (Beckett, 1984, p.156); what is described is either a body with its arms held 'fast' to its sides, or a body moving its arms quickly, 'fast', to its sides from some other position. Neither alternative is meant more or less than the other. The same considerations apply to 'The unerring feet fast' in Company (Beckett, 1980, p.52). It cannot be determined whether such feet are moving rapidly or are absolutely still, clasped 'fast' in the grip of some unidentified impediment. When an opposition is suggested to the ambiguous 'fast', the result is also simultaneously to suggest a synonym:

> And that his posture there remained to be devised. And to be decided whether fast or mobile.
>
> (Beckett, 1980, p.60)

'Fast' in the sense of exhibiting rapid movement cannot be opposed to the connotations of 'mobile'; but to be held 'fast', on the other hand, is clearly the negation of the primary literal meaning of 'mobile'. Ambiguity produces here either a contradiction or a tautology, without the possibility of deciding between the two. Such an impasse of undecidability is intolerable to an analysis of logical relations. Where ambiguity is concerned, two conflicting versions of the logical relation between statements are produced and both suspended as unprovable.

An impressive degree of precision is necessary to provoke such a messy logical entanglement. As Derrida argues:

undecidability is always a <u>determinate</u> oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly <u>determined</u> in strictly <u>defined</u> situations [...].

(Derrida, 1988, p.148)

As Plotnitsky adds, 'certain relations are determined to be indeterminate': 'indeterminacy itself is <u>determinate</u>' (Plotnitsky, 1994, p.198).[43] Indetermination via ambiguity is a device distinct from contradiction, where only the two terms which negate one another can be in play, but equally needful of precise engineering. As Beckett confirms in relation to <u>Happy Days</u> and <u>All That Fall</u>, the ambiguity concerning a key event, which introduces obscurity and undecidability into these plays, must itself be 'established clearly':

The question as to which Willie is 'after' - Winnie or the revolver - is like the question in <u>All That Fall</u> as to whether Mr Rooney threw the little girl out of the railway-carriage or not. And the answer is the same in both cases - we don't know, at least I don't. All that is necessary as far as I'm concerned - technically and otherwise - less too little, more too much - is the ambiguity of motive, established clearly I hope [...]. To test the doubt was dramatically a chance not to be missed, not to be bungled either by resolving it.

(Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1996, p.485)

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[43] See above, Chapter Five, Section xii.

Whereas a contradiction is split between only two possible options, one of which must be true and the other false, the cultivation of ambiguity as described by Beckett above opens the discussion of motivation up to unlimited speculation. To define the possible resolution of this open ambiguity as a 'bungled' handling of the device, confirms the presence of conscious design in such areas of impasse. In seeking to resolve ambiguities in The Lost Ones into closed pairs of contradictions, Chapter Four is guilty of just such bungling on a systematic basis.

xvii. Self-defeat: errors of fact in fiction

The initial claim of an analytical relationship between Chapter Four and The Lost Ones must give way to an admission of partisan interpretation and ultimately charges of misreading specific ambiguities in service of that interpretation. Many of the assumptions which underpinned the attempt to define Chapter Four as an analysis of The Lost Ones can be shown to be self-defeating. The central assertion that 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), employed to rule out allegorical readings which exceed the terms of the text, itself exceeds the stated terms of The Lost Ones. The possibility of the completeness of analysis is negated by this inability to fix the boundaries of the text and by the danger of regression, where the terms which result from one level of analysis must themselves be subject to further analytical unpacking. The existence of Le Dépeupleur negates any claim to self-enclosure by The Lost Ones. The conceptual proximity of Beckett's other residual works

confirm the inter-textual dependencies of The Lost Ones. The aspiration of achieving logical equivalence between text and commentary founders on the inevitable disruption to linguistic economy which must be caused by even the most exact conceptual transposition of terms. The assumption that the words on the page of The Lost Ones can at least be physically fixed is frustrated by errors in the cylinder dimensions published in the 1972 Calder and Boyars edition. If all the above dreams of analysis could yet be somehow rescued, the technique must nevertheless finally be judged to yield a commentary which is either tautological with its text, and hence trivial and redundant, or simply erroneous. The suppression of ambiguities and concomitant illegitimate emphasis of well-defined contradictions supports the latter judgement.

The treatment of The Lost Ones as a logical entity goes to the heart of these lapses into self-defeat. Chapter Four presupposes in regard to The Lost Ones what Beckett takes the trouble to ensure that his version of Proust rejects:

> Proust does not share the superstition that form is nothing and content everything, nor that the ideal literary masterpiece could only be communicated in a series of absolute and monosyllabic propositions.
>
> (Beckett, 1965, p.88)

It is the logical relations between propositions treated as individually 'absolute' which exercises Chapter Four in relation

to The Lost Ones. The scientific and investigative rhetoric of the text is a lure into just this misidentification. Logical analysis, which may assimilate mathematical or scientific discourse into itself without loss or addition, is, arguably, incommensurable with the workings of any literary text. The discrepancy between logical meaning and literary effect unacknowledged in Chapter Four is illustrated by Brienza:

> with two consecutive 'un-'s the writer can pretend to make a positive statement [...], yet 'ununsaid' delivers not the force of 'said.'
>
> (Brienza, 1987b, p.257)

As far as analysis is concerned, the double negation of 'ununsaid' has as no impact upon its meaning: 'ununsaid' = 'said', just as, Brienza suggests, -(-5) = 5. For criticism, conversely, the occurrence of 'ununsaid' in place of 'said' would be cause for considerable remark, not least upon the gesture towards logical analysis that is signalled by such usage.

The analysis of significance is fundamentally different in the logical and literary fields of inquiry. As Levy maintains:

> Only if a circumstance non-reducible to logic is added does one understand what a speaker can possibly mean when he says, for example, 'A day is a day.' [...] Philosophers who try to solve the logical difficulty of self-reflective phrases may succeed in their task, yet fail in releasing the

motivating <u>emotional</u> reason to the first place.

(Levy, 1990, p.9)

What criticism can recognize in 'A day is a day' as emphasis or a wistful concession to the nature of time and duration, is dismissed by analysis as redundancy. While criticism ponders the rhetorical and affective value of such a utterance, analysis would be at a loss to suggest any reason why such a tautologous statement should ever be issued. This distinction between how criticism and analysis assigns significance is completely submerged in Chapter Four. When critical judgements are grounded upon inappropriate logical principles, their assessment with regard to literature may be severe:

> Beckett's self-reflective, self-referring utterances - as expressed by tautology, metaphor, contradiction and paradox - ought to be regarded as sheer nonsense when considered by rigorous, formal and symbolic logic.
>
> (Levy, 1990, p.10)

Analysis must either dismiss such a text as <u>The Lost Ones</u>, as construed by analysis, in comparable terms or be forced to renounce the applicability of the principles upon which such a judgement is based. As Derrida argues in respect of his own essay 'Signature Event Context', controversies as to whether its propositions can be judged 'true' represent a basic category mistake:

> Instead of precipitously, in the name of truth, hurrying on to sentences (in the French - but also English - sense of the word: to the verdicts, the decrees of justice, even to the condemnations) on the wrong or false, or the 'obviously false,' a theoretician [...] ought to have spent some time patiently considering questions of this type: Does the principal purpose of Sec consist in being true? In appearing true? In stating the truth?
>
> And what if Sec were doing something else?
>
> (Derrida, 1988, p.43)

The Lost Ones, analogously, nowhere proclaims an aim to be consistent with itself, yet it is upon this criterion alone that Chapter Four attempts to hold it to account. Elsewhere, the nature of Beckett's work, and his comments thereupon, must rule out the applicability of a critical approach so contemplative as analysis; upon the speed at which the monologue of Not I proceeds, for example, Beckett wrote:

> I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece would work on the necessary emotions of the audience rather than appealing to their intellect.
>
> (Beckett cited in Bair, 1990, p.664)

The Opener of Cascando, similarly, while delineating an image, will refuse to acknowledge that its discursive intelligibility is part of his responsibility:

There was a time I asked myself, What is it.

There were times I answered, It's the outing.

Two outings.

Then the return.

Where?

To the village.

In the inn.

Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the inn, by the only road that leads there.

An image, like any other.

But I don't answer any more.

I open.

(Beckett, 1986, p.303)

The pedantic importunities of analysis against such 'images' may properly attract the complaints of Company: 'What kind of imagination is this so reason-ridden?' (Beckett, 1980, p.45). The objections of logic against the specifications of the cylinder in The Lost Ones neglect the fact that fiction need not deal in possibilities; as Texts for Nothing says of the fictional 'I':

But I am, it's not possible otherwise, just so, it's not possible, it doesn't need to be possible.

(Beckett, 1984, Text V, p.87)

The same may be said of the cylinder. Chapter Four proclaims 'it's not possible', without acknowledging that as a fictional

entity 'it doesn't need to be possible'. Barth's 'Lost in the Funhouse' makes the same challenge to the 'reason-ridden' critic:

> Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author's imagination? Was it Assawoman Bay or Sinepuxent? Are there other errors of fact in this fiction?
>
> (Barth, 1988, p.88)

To charge a fiction with 'errors of fact' is an absurdity assiduously pursued by Chapter Four. Baudrillard's question is pertinent: 'Why search for plausibility in imaginary stories?' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.165). Kenner too recommends that reading of Beckett develops beyond an obsession with 'idiot consistency' (Kenner, 1962, p.76):

> since the novelist has nowhere undertaken to conform to God's rules, we have no license to complain. On one occasion - it is in Watt again - Beckett is quite specific about the principle employed: 'Haemophilia is, like enlargement of the prostrate, an exclusively male disorder. But not in this work.'
>
> (Kenner, 1973, p.59)

After the debacle of the collapse of arguments based upon erroneous figures concerning the dimensions of the cylinder in The Lost Ones, the narrator of Watt is refreshingly open about the unreliability of his calculations as to the combined ages of the Lynch family:

> The figures given here are incorrect. The consequent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.101, n.1)

Sensibly, this fiction is does not try to convince its readers that its own statements are anything other than 'factually' incorrect.

Chapters One to Four here endeavour more or less dishonestly to make sense of their respective texts. That criticism of Beckett should endeavour to make sense of his texts is not commonly questioned. Coherence is a prerequisite in conceptual discourse. Dissent from this most basic presupposition is largely confined to such marginal documents as Beckett's own works. Texts for Nothing is simply unconcerned at the logical impossibility of maintaining 'it's true and it's not true':

> what has become of the wish to know, it is gone, the heart is gone, the head is gone, no one feels anything, asks anything, seeks anything, says anything, hears anything, there is only silence. It's not true, yes, it's true, it's true and it's not true, there is silence and there is not silence, there is no one and there is someone, nothing prevents anything.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, p.115)

The assertion that 'nothing prevents anything' in this fictional context is devastating to the operations of analysis, for the

technique relies upon establishing the logical impossibilities beyond which discourse must not go. Texts for Nothing, Watt and The Lost Ones need not recognize any such injunction against the fictional exploitation of the illogical or impossible. If such texts are to be re-read by criticism within the limits of coherence, if sense is to be made of them, the illogicalities they can contain must be suppressed. However, it is the case with regard to Chapter Four and, as discussed below, of dealings with Catastrophe, Krapp's Last Tape and Theatre II, that such illogicalities are apt to re-emerge as self-defeating structures implicit in what criticism chooses to argue concerning these texts. Potential contradictions are merely re-located in rather than transcended by criticism. Self-defeat encroaches upon the arguments of Chapters One, Two and Three also. Reconsideration of these chapters, having begun with the emergency case of Chapter Four, will continue in reverse numerical order.

xviii. Catastrophe: the dedication to Havel

The attempt to limit critical analysis in Chapter Four to the words on the pages of The Lost Ones has been found to be unsustainable. The critical presuppositions which govern the treatment of Catastrophe in Chapter Three are rather different. Three words provoke the disparity:

For Vaclav Havel

(Beckett, 1986, p.455)

Such is the basis for Chapter Three's introduction of details concerning Havel's biography and references to Czechoslovakian political and legal procedures of the 1970s and early 1980s. These references to extra-textual matters would be roundly condemned by Chapter Four for exceeding the terms of its chosen literary text. This methodological dispute between chapters, it might be noted, is no more conducive to argumentative coherence than structures of self-defeat internal to chapters. The examination of literature with reference to a specific political context in one chapter does not sit easily alongside a devotion to New Critical verities in the next. Furthermore, the dedication itself has a problematic textual status which should give pause to our seizure of it as a self-evident indication of the context in which Catastrophe must be read.

If Texts for Nothing is at ease with at the logical oddity of simultaneously maintaining 'it's true and it's not true' (Beckett, 1984, Text XIII, p.115), Chapter Three is equally sanguine at the parergonal status of the dedication of Catastrophe. A parergon, as analysed by Derrida, is attached to a work 'without being part of it and yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it' (Derrida, 1987, p.55).[44] A parergonal element

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[44] The term, and the problem, is taken from Kant's Critique of Judgement. The 'parerga' should be eminently dispensable:

> what is called ornamentation (parerga), i.e. what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part I, §14, p.68)

Yet, in Kant's aesthetics, it is the form of the artwork which is crucial to its very classification as being subject to

constitutes a disturbing puzzle for any method of reading, such as that pursued in Chapter Four, which wants to remain within the terms of its text, for the parergon is neither simply internal nor external to the text. The parergon 'is precisely an ill-detachable detachment' (Derrida, 1987, p.59). Such is the status of the dedication of Catastrophe; it is neither properly internal nor conclusively external to the text of the play. In Chapter Three, however, little attention is paid to this problem of textual status. Consequently, an element which is not completely 'within' Catastrophe is made central to its interpretation. As Derrida counsels, 'it would be better to go to less marginal places in the work, nearer the center and the heart of the matter' (Derrida, 1987, p.63) when evidence is required to determine the direction of an interpretation. In Chapter Three instead, a marginal element of Catastrophe determines the direction of the interpretation of the play in its entirety.

xix. Directing the conceptual potential of the play

The dedication of Catastrophe is used to invoke a context of political repression around the Director's treatment of the Protagonist in the play. The packaging of the Protagonist to fit certain conceptual determinations is cited as analogous to the

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aesthetic judgement. Any element which acts 'in augmenting' the appreciation of form, therefore, cannot play merely a negligible role. Indeed, the parerga may even be said to 'enter into the composition of the beautiful form' (Kant, 1952, Part I, §14, p.68). Kant goes on to introduce the alternative term 'finery' to reclaim the idea of an additional element which is simply contingent (Kant, 1952, Part I, §14, p.68). The insinuation of the putatively inessential parerga into the form of the artwork precludes its dismissal in these terms.

classification of Havel's activities as 'criminal' by the Czechoslovakian authorities. As Adorno maintains, 'the complete abstraction of subsuming human beings under arbitrary concepts and treating them accordingly' (Adorno, 1973, p.236) - that is, as objects rather than subjects - constitutes a strategy of repression often favoured by authoritarian regimes. Manipulation of the available evidence is a common factor in the operations of both Catastrophe's Director and the Czechoslovakian regime in 1982. The concomitant conceptualization of the Protagonist by commentators on Catastrophe is thus also subject to disapproval in Chapter Three:

> to claim the Protagonist as the embodiment of 'suffering', of Man, of the human condition, of any conceptual package, entails the imposition of conceptual determinations upon the available material in precisely the way demonstrated by the Director.
>
> (Chapter Three, pp.241-242)

'Statement of what the Protagonist "says"', it is argued, 'risks the reproduction of the same system of repression imposed by the Director, even when that system is the target of censure' (Chapter Three, p.233). The worst charge that Chapter Three can think to make against critical writings on Catastrophe is that their authors inadvertently treat the Protagonist in a manner structurally identical with that of the Director. 'Conceptual reordering' of the empirical is essential to the operations of each putatively opposed camp:

> 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.
>
> (Chapter Three, p.242)

But neither does the enterprise of Chapter Three contrive to avoid such ignominy. The fate of the Protagonist is cited as an exemplar of the potential evils of conceptualization, yet this package 'Protagonist-as-an-exemplar-vs-conceptualization' is itself a conceptualization of the Protagonist. No critical comment about the Protagonist can avoid being a conceptualization. It is a matter of indifference whether that concept contains a metaphysical or a political message; the Protagonist is still made to 'say it'. The Protagonist remains within the system of conceptualization set up by the Director. A unique empirical presentation is still transformed into an abstract concept, meaning or message. And, as Chapter Three argues, the imposition of such conceptual determinations can be associated with the callous objectification of the Protagonist by the Director, a procedure which can itself be cited as analogous with the treatment of Havel at the hands of the Czechoslovakian authorities. The censure which Chapter Three distributes against techniques of conceptualization, objectification, manipulation and repression must apply to its own procedures also. In so far as Chapter Three says anything about the Protagonist, it must violate its own strictures about

the repression inherent in his conceptualization.

Equally, any critique of the evils of conceptualization must itself employ concepts in order to make that critique. Beckett's Proust, for example, courts self-defeat in its depreciation of 'the haze of conception':

> 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. Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide the essence - the Idea - of the object in the haze of conception - preconception.
>
> (Beckett, 1965, pp.22-23)

The potential 'enchantment' of the mysterious 'it' to which Beckett refers must also be dissipated by its description here under such 'general notion[s]' as 'object', 'particular', 'unique', 'isolated' and 'inexplicable'. Each, as a concept, must contribute to the very 'haze of conception - preconception' which Beckett wishes to disperse. Foucault, whose Discipline and Punish is an important element in Chapter Three, has been accused by Derrida of a similar self-defeating deployment of concepts against conceptualization. Derrida's target is Foucault's Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of

Reason:

> In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted - and this is the greatest merit, but also the very infeasibility of his book - to write a history of madness itself [...], that is madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, the language of psychiatry on madness [...]. 'A history not of psychiatry,' Foucault says, 'but of madness itself, in its most vibrant state, before being captured by knowledge.'
>
> (Derrida, 1978, pp.33-34)

As Derrida points out, the attempt '"to say madness itself" is self-contradictory' (Derrida, 1978, p.43); Foucault cannot simply 'return to innocence and [...] end all complicity with the rational or political order which keeps madness captive' (Derrida, 1978, p.35). A history of madness cannot opt out of the rational discourse which stands in opposition to its own subject. Beckett's Proust cannot depreciate the use of general concepts without reflecting badly upon its own employment of such concepts even in making such a critique. Chapter Three cannot coherently retain its own condemnation of critical conceptualizations of the Protagonist while offering merely an alternative conceptualization. Chapter Three cannot use concepts to condemn conceptualization as such without compromising that critique. What Chapter Three wishes to say about the Protagonist

and Catastrophe cannot be said without self-contradiction.

xx. Directing Catastrophe

Havel's play Mistake (1992a, first published 1983), written in response to Catastrophe, dramatizes the structure of this self-defeating impasse. According to States' analysis, 'it is about how prisoners in a cell, without realizing it, set up a replica of the oppressive system that has imprisoned them' (States, 1987, p.18). The only way to extract virtue from such self-contradictory procedures is to track their re-emergence and examine their persistence. Shannon Jackson provides an account of the self-defeating structures operative in Catastrophe as perceived through the act of directing a production of the play. The critic is caught in the impasse of conceptualizing a condemnation of conceptualization, if the issue is to be spoken about at all. The director of Catastrophe risks replicating the actions of its fictional Director, which he or she would want to condemn, if Catastrophe is to be staged at all.

The director of a production of the play wants, like its internal Director, 'to bag my Catastrophe' (Jackson, 1992, p.30). During rehearsals of an actual production of the play, the locus of domination over the stage action shifts; as Jackson explains, the 'real' director 'employs a process of subjugation to depict a process of subjugation' (Jackson, 1992, p.29):

> Ruled by a hyperawareness of every second, gesture, and

intonation, I found myself giving orders to the actor playing D - orders which were uncomfortably reminiscent of those the fictional D gives to A. I thus placed the D-actor in a position metaphorically equivalent to the one in which A is placed - he had to act and be acted upon. In this scenario, it is now he who takes my dictation [...]. The D-actor was disciplined by my 'vision' of the fictional director's domination.

(Jackson, 1992, pp.30-31)

The '"real" director', Jackson admits, 'exploited the power of her position' for the incompatible end of 'creating a play which critiques theatre's hierarchy' (Jackson, 1992, p.31). Furthermore, the moment of 'P's liberation' in the play is won at the expense of that actor's disciplined restraint:

After D and A's work is done, the Protagonist finally 'raises his head,' breaking the image of subjugation they have created, in seeming protest at his aestheticization. Yet the actor's experience of this moment is actually one of aching control in trying to keep the rest of his body perfectly still and in slowing the pace of his 'head raise' to the ten seconds called for by the 'real' director [...].

(Jackson, 1992, p.30)

Upon the orders of the 'real' director, the '"real" actor is thus oppressed' by what constitutes 'the fictional actor's release' (Jackson, 1992, p.30). As Jackson writes with regard to the

Director of Catastrophe, 'in order to paint the picture of a tyrant, it could be said that I momentarily became one' (Jackson, 1992, p.31).

Jackson attributes the 'hyperawareness of every second, gesture, and intonation' (Jackson, 1992, p.31) which informed her direction of Catastrophe to the necessity of obedience to the play-text as sanctioned by Beckett. If the locus of domination in Catastrophe regresses from the fictional to the real director during its production, it ultimately resides with Beckett as author. Beckett's reputation for a strict proprietary concern over productions of his plays was consolidated by the case of the American Repertory Theatre's version of Endgame directed by JoAnne Akalaitis in December 1984. For Knowlson, the representation of Beckett 'as a tyrannical figure, an arch-controller of his work' is a 'caricature' (Knowlson, 1996, p.691); the statement which was inserted in all programmes for the ART Endgame does not, however, denote an overly liberal attitude towards directorial innovation:

> Mr Beckett's statement reads: 'Any production of Endgame which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. [...] The American Repertory Theatre production, which dismisses my directions, is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this.'
>
> (Beckett cited in Garbus and Singleton, 1984, pp.1-2)

Similar authorial control is implicit in Beckett's series of letters to Alan Schneider from 1957 to 1958 insisting that Endgame be produced 'as stated' (Beckett, 1983a, p.109).[45] By the time of Catastrophe, the detail of Beckett's stage directions can be said 'to master in advance the director's reproductive activity', for 'the text reaches out jealously beyond itself to predict and monitor the form of its theatrical embodiment' (Connor, 1988, p.187).[46] According to Jackson:

> Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the whole Beckett phenomenon is the part so many scholars and directors play in preserving the 'integrity,' the 'sanctity,' of his text.

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[45] If 'Beyond what is said there is nothing' (Beckett, 1984, p.199), the departures made by the ART production do indeed define that production as having nothing to do with Beckett's Endgame. The paradoxes which surround such a restriction are rehearsed at length above, Sections i-v.

[46] Beckett's plays for television, Quad, Eh Joe, Ghost Trio, ... but the clouds ... and Nacht und Träume can be produced in definitive terms, as evinced by Beckett's work with Süddeutscher Rundfunk, and thereafter reproduced in identical terms. As Connor points out, Beckett's later stage-plays incorporate similar techniques for the control of performances:

> [...] Beckett has continued to write for the stage as well as for electronic media, but his work for these media seems to have kindled a desire to replicate the structures of control which they offer. The conventional opposition between the reproducible text and the unique and transitory performance is upset by plays like Rockaby and That Time, in which the actual performance consists largely of a recording.
>
> (Connor, 1988, p.186)

The relationship between Beckett's production notebooks for earlier plays such as Waiting for Godot, Happy Days and Krapp's Last Tape and their initial performance texts is also fraught with issues of authorial proprietary and control. For Connor, the notebooks similarly mark an attempt 'in the form of a text, to master and control all of the variations which performance might introduce' (Connor, 1988, pp.187-188).

> How dutifully so many play the role of the Female Assistant, carrying out the orders of their director-dictator.
>
> (Jackson, 1992, p.37)

Critics, director and actors each seek in the manner of the Female Assistant to 'light Beckett's cigar the way he wants it lit' (Jackson, 1992, p.39). Disowning, the American Repertory Theatre controversy might suggest, follows disobedience. Thus 'Beckett's work and the criticism which reconstitutes it', according to Connor, 'remain deeply implicated in the structures of power which, in certain senses, his work undermines' (Connor, 1988, pp.184-185). In order to use Catastrophe to expose a structure of power in the theatre in Beckett's name, the structure of power which installs the director as dominant over actors, and dramatist dominant over director, must be retained.

As opposed to Artaud's innovations, Beckett's theatre remains, in Derrida's description, 'theological':

> The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent

> characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the 'creator.' Interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the 'master'.
>
> (Derrida, 1978, p.235)

Potentially, in theatrical production, 'the image of the playwright as an individual creative subject is fractured by the extratextual intervention of director, designers, and actors' (Lyons, 1990, p.114). Beckett's theatre, it may be countered, through the strategies of authorial control discussed here, attempts to minimize the scope of such extratextual interventions. In the case of 'the Beckett actor', Jackson emphasizes control above collaboration:

> The actor's mind, body, and emotions are trained and retrained, trimmed and tailored, sculpted and sustained, until all extraneous tendencies that might 'conflict with the text' are extricated from the performance [...].
>
> (Jackson, 1992, p.33)

Such are the actions undertaken by the Director within Catastrophe; such are the actions which the director must undertake to produce a version of Catastrophe which is faithful to the 'integrity' of Beckett's text. Evidence of Beckett's demands for similar subjugation can be found in the productions of Happy Days, Play and Not I which he himself directed. For Jackson, it is the production of Catastrophe in particular which

courts self-defeat:

> In spite of the critique of theatrical hierarchies waged within Catastrophe's fictional text, an acknowledgement of the performance space as the site of intersecting operations of power working from various domains reveals the performance's existence as the locus of a reinscription, a reification, of the very interactions it condemns. Though its message seems to critique hierarchical practices, the exploitation of these practices in the performance process ensure[s], as far as Beckett and his interpretive slaves are concerned, the effectiveness, the intelligibility, and the 'integrity' of this critique.
>
> (Jackson, 1992, p.39)

The critique must be compromised by its exploitation of the very techniques which it exists to condemn. The impasse is exactly of a type with a condemnation of conceptualization which can only be made via conceptual argument. Jackson too perceives a 'reinscription' of the object of a condemnation in Catastrophe. Where the object of a critique is replicated within that critique, no structural overturning, no 'catastrophe', has occurred. Another strand of Chapter Three sought to conceptualize the Protagonist as part of a critique, sanctioned by Beckett, against stereotypical aspects of the 'Beckettian'. However, not only does the Protagonist remain a spectacle to be conceptualized under this reading, but an appeal must be made to a Beckett play, Catastrophe, to undermine the Beckettian. The

terms through which the critique is made are again those under attack. The sense in which Catastrophe could be said to denote an 'overturning' is thus compromised at source.

xxi. Catastrophe: assuming continuity in order to break it

The relationship which Chapter Three assumes to exist between Catastrophe and the 'Beckettian' must be defined as paradoxical. The alleged overturning which Catastrophe inflicts upon the recognizably Beckettian would install a discontinuity between the play and the remainder of Beckett's oeuvre. But for the play to have any purchase upon the Beckettian, a continuity must first be assumed to exist between Catastrophe and that oeuvre. Catastrophe cannot be considered as free-standing or separate from what went before, if it is also to be an intimate comment upon the generic Beckettian play and its concerns. Yet, if Catastrophe is an attack upon the archetypal Beckettian play, a certain disconnection between it and the Beckettian must be maintained if Catastrophe is to avoid being compromised by incorporating within itself the object of its own critique. The play which 'overturns' the Beckettian must be reconnected to the oeuvre in order to effect a break from it.

Chapter Three does admit that 'Catastrophe can hardly stand apart unimplicated, as Beckett's anti-Beckettian denunciation of Beckett' (Chapter Three, p.222). What Catastrophe can overturn without risk of paradox is not the 'Beckettian' itself but critical versions of it:

> Catastrophe [...] 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.
>
> (Chapter Three, p.251)

This alteration of target removes Catastrophe from implication in paradox only to deepen an impasse for Chapter Three. That chapter wishes to direct Catastrophe against Beckett criticism as if its own operations were entirely unimplicated in anything which might also be recognized as 'Beckett criticism'. As previously noted, whether the Protagonist is made by criticism to express a metaphysical message or a message of any other type, he remains objectified as a spectacle and as a representation just as intended by the Director. Chapter Three would like his presentation to signal 'the-overturning-of-the-Beckettian' as well as 'an-exemplar-vs-conceptualization'. While the latter remains a self-defeating conceptualization, both 'messages' merely add two more entries on to the critical list of options which might describe what the Protagonist represents. No overturning of the usual procedures of Beckett criticism is achieved. Moreover, Chapter Three explicitly frames its interpretation with reference to the pre-established terms of criticism on Catastrophe provided by States, Gontarski, Libera, McMullan, Pearce and Sandarg. Rather than effecting any disconnection with previous criticism on Catastrophe, the discussion of Chapter Three is entirely dependent upon it. What Chapter Three does not admit is that it cannot stand apart from

criticism on Catastrophe, as if uncompromised by its own employment of the very procedures used in the criticism it condemns. An anti-critical critique of criticism cannot be coherently given from within the field of criticism itself. Chapter Three is thoroughly entangled in what it attempts to critique.

xxii. Catastrophe: an established anomaly

It is the idea of 'catastrophe', thematized by Chapter Three as congruent with an 'overturning' or disconnection from a previous system of regularity, which informs this desire to establish Catastrophe as a radical break from critical versions of the Beckettian. 'Catastrophe theory' carries with it, at least in its literary critical manifestation, these associations with 'a radical break from the tradition' (Hoy, 1988, p.24). For example, according to Hoy's reading of Lyotard:

> Citing examples ranging from quantum theory to catastrophe theory to studies of schizophrenics, he believes that modern science is increasingly interested in studying not general regularities but singularities, incommensurabilities, and unstable rather than stable systems.
>
> (Hoy, 1988, p.23)

But it is precisely catastrophe theory that also offers scope to predict and control the actions of phenomena previously conceived as irretrievably irregular or unstable. As Boutot notes,

catastrophe theory 'provides a general method for studying discontinuous changes and qualitative jumps' and consequently 'raised great hopes amongst the specialists of disciplines reputed to be unformalizable by traditional mathematical methods' (Boutot, 1993, p.167). Whereas Chapter Three appealed to catastrophe theory for a statement of chaotic instability following the sudden overturning of an established conceptual regime, in its scientific and mathematical applications, catastrophe theory expands that conceptual regime to include slots for such aberrations. The occurrence of irregularities becomes a predictable regularity in catastrophe theory. Indeed, 'The major interest of the theory' for Bruter, 'is to render comprehensible the appearance of discontinuities in a milieu' (Bruter, 1978, p.303). Catastrophe theory actually marks a retreat from emphasizing anomalies and a return to what, in Kuhn's system, would be called 'normal science':

> awareness of anomaly opens a period in which conceptual categories are adjusted until the initially anomalous has become the anticipated. At this point the discovery has been completed.
>
> (Kuhn, 1962, p.64)

When 'the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected' (Kuhn, 1962, p.53), we are no longer exploring an area of anomaly but of regularity. Even if it were conceded analogously that Catastrophe functions, somehow, to overturn the Beckettian, there must be a distinct limit as to how

long this operation could be recognized as genuinely anomalous. Ultimately, the overturning of the Beckettian at this point in the oeuvre must be incorporated into the very concept of the Beckettian oeuvre. At the point of such a recognition, normal critical manners will have been restored. An overturning which is pre-established and predictable has lost its defining dynamic. Changes to the conceptual regime cease when that regime has slots ready to facilitate internal change at a pre-determined point. The occurrence of catastrophe becomes a regularity. The introduction of Catastrophe or catastrophe thus produces an alternative version of a continuous oeuvre rather than signalling its negation.

xxiii. Catastrophe theory and its catastrophe

Perhaps because of his familiarity with concepts promoting chaos, irregularity and, that postmodernist favourite, the abyss, it takes Baudrillard in the field of critical theory to recognize clearly the power of predicability implicit in catastrophe theory. The catastrophe unfolds according to 'a rational logic of the unexpected' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.154); it is, of all things, a 'determinist' theory (Baudrillard, 1990, p.154). Accordingly, 'There is no chance at work in all of this'; between a state of affairs and its catastrophe, there is rather 'a formal linkage of the highest necessity' (Baudrillard, 1990, p.156). Departure from contingency to necessity should be alarming for a chapter entitled 'Metaphysical Fabrication and its Catastrophe'. Instead of a weapon for the destruction of

unwieldy metaphysical fabrications, catastrophe theory functions as an replacement metaphysical principle for many of its proponents. According to Thom:

> we must concede that the universe we see is a ceaseless creation, evolution, and destruction of forms and that the purpose of science is to foresee this change of form and, if possible, explain it.
>
> (Thom, 1975, p.1)

Catastrophe theory offers a description of this supposed deep structure of the universe. As such, it replicates the role of a metaphysical principle. 'Thom's theory', as Boutot maintains, 'has a practically universal range': 'It struggles against the scattering of knowledge by discovering the fundamental structural unity of Nature itself' (Boutot, 1993, p.179). Its metaphysical credentials are to be emphasized:

> catastrophe theory possesses an essential philosophical dimension. Since it searches for the principles of reality, of the world of experience beyond (meta in Greek) reality or Nature or physics (in the logoi), it can be considered as mathematical meta-physics. Thom himself regards it as a philosophy of Nature.
>
> (Boutot, 1993, p.193)

In Boutot's description below, catastrophe theory conforms to one of the distinguishing features of metaphysics as identified in

Kant's critique. Being transcendent, metaphysical statements are neither provable nor refutable by reference to the empirical. Boutot argues that catastrophe theory similarly cannot be confirmed by 'experience':

> Catastrophe theory does not come from experience, nor can experience confirm it in any way. The empirical confirmation of a catastrophe model does not prove the model to be true as it is, but, at most, that the model may rightly be used to formalize the considered phenomenon.
>
> (Boutot, 1993, p.180)

The second part of the bargain is kept; catastrophe theory is also empirically irrefutable:

> neither can experience invalidate catastrophe theory. If predictions drawn from a model are in contradiction with experience, it does not put the theory itself in doubt, but shows that the model does not fit the studied morphology or that it has not been rightly chosen from the catastrophic arsenal.
>
> (Boutot, 1993, p.180)

Boutot manoeuvres catastrophe theory into a position where it is entirely unverifiable in practice. Its judgements, as Kant writes of metaphysics, 'cannot be refuted, although they do not indeed allow of any proof' (Kant, 1933, A781-782/B809-810, p.620).

Unfortunately, Chapter Three relied upon catastrophe theory to describe the collapse of metaphysical pretensions in criticism of Beckett's Catastrophe. This is the 'overturning' to which its title, 'Metaphysical Fabrication and its Catastrophe', refers. If catastrophe theory aspires to be applicable to and explanatory of Nature as a whole, while disallowing the possibility of its own verification, then the theory approximates to the very character of the metaphysical speculations that it is employed to counter. Rather than offering the basis for a critique, catastrophe theory itself contributes to the metaphysical fabrication which Chapter Three aspires to eliminate. Once again, 'overturning' lapses into a reproduction of that which is under dispute. From employing concepts to counter conceptualization, Chapter Three moves on to the deployment of a metaphysical theory to counter metaphysical theories as such. Each is a self-defeating procedure. Neither does Chapter Three break from the criticism which pursues the conceptualization of the Protagonist. In catastrophe theory, it continues to appeal to an ungrounded metaphysical principle. The concept of the Protagonist and metaphysical principle are changed, but the argumentative structure of Chapter Three remains identical to that which informs the criticism of States, Gontarski, Libera, McMullan, Pearce and Sandarg. A greater density of active self-contradiction is the only novel element.

xxiv. Krapp's Last Tape: perceiving absence and distortion

Chapter Three, for all its agitation against the replacement

of the empirical manifestation of the Protagonist by his conceptualization, effects just such a replacement itself and then proceeds to import ideas about the play, notably concerning catastrophes and the theories of Foucault, which would be impossible to present adequately in any possible staging of Catastrophe. Following a detailed exposition of the importance of chess to an adequate understanding of Endgame, Kenner is honest enough to conclude his cogitations with the disarming remark, 'Not that all this is likely to be yielded up with clarity by any conceivable performance' (Kenner, 1962, p.159). In its treatment of Krapp's Last Tape, Chapter Two directs attention to elements which are not merely problematical to represent in any actual staging, but which are, according to its own analysis, actually absent from or subject to distortion within the written play-text itself. According to the argument of Chapter Two, Krapp's Last Tape demonstrates that metaphysical abstractions cannot be put on the stage. It is not evident how its own non-existent features could be any better represented.

To an interpretation seeking to derive a metaphysical meaning from Krapp's Last Tape, the taped sequence recounting Krapp's 'vision' (Beckett, 1986, p.220) would be crucial evidence. For Chapter Two, the same passage is crucial as evidence of an absence of anything which could be construed as metaphysical insight on the part of Krapp-at-69. The 'vision' of the vision passage is significant now only in its absence. The critique of metaphysical speculation which Krapp's Last Tape is charged with making, is thus predicated upon an event which

fails to occur. In principle, there can be scant textual evidence to support this part of the interpretation of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two also makes a case for the pervasive influence of Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu on Krapp's Last Tape. Simple reproduction, however, is not the contention:

> [...] 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.
>
> (Chapter Two, p.132)

Where the crucial elements of the play are not argued to be absent, they are proclaimed to be 'faulty, distorted and parodic' mis-rememberings of an entirely different text. Given such damage in transit, it may be inquired how the pervasive influence of Proust could be so easily recognized.[47] As Wimsatt and

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[47] Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, Chapter Two argues, is subject to 'iteration' in Krapp's Last Tape. As Derrida defines the term, iteration introduces difference into repetition:

> the structure of iteration - and this is another of its decisive traits - implies both identity and difference. Iteration in its 'purest' form - and it is always impure - contains in itself the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration. The iterability of an element divides its own identity a priori [...].
>
> (Derrida, 1988, p.53)

Chapter Two appeals to Derrida as an authority on the quandary of identity and difference between Beckett and Proust. But in doing so, it is also obliged to assume that its own use of Derrida's theory of iteration constitutes just the kind of simple

Beardsley write of other literary influences, the presence of Proust in Krapp's Last Tape is 'not a part of the work as a linguistic fact' (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1954, p.10). An influence which is entirely implicit and also distorted by parody cannot be demonstrated to be simply present in the play in terms which would satisfy the standard of empirical verification so often cited in Chapter Two against the metaphysical claims of Beckett criticism.[48]

As has been the charge against metaphysics, the alleged presence of Proust can be neither proved nor refuted upon the empirical basis of the text of Krapp's Last Tape. As Kant's admonishment has it:

> If in employing the principles of understanding we do not merely apply our reason to objects of experience, but

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repetition which the theory itself throws into doubt. Iteration itself should not be the sole exception to the disruptive differences which it theorizes as always attending repetition and re-contextualization.

[48] The identification of the literary participants in such a parodic relationship is a matter of fraught, and insufficiently substantiated, judgement. As Bakhtin writes:

> Except in those cases where it is grossly apparent, the presence of parody is in general very difficult to identify [...] without knowing the background of alien discourse against which it is projected, that is, without knowing its second context. In world literature there are probably many works whose parodic nature has not even been suspected.
> (Bakhtin, 1981, p.374)

Internal textual evidence is rarely sufficient to conclusively verify partners in parody. The role of Beckett's Proust in provoking the entire issue of a parodic relationship between Krapp's Last Tape and A la recherche du temps perdu is a question which Chapter Two ignores.

venture to extend these principles beyond the limits of experience, there arise pseudo-rational doctrines which can neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it.

(Kant, 1933, A421/B448-449, p.394)

That which never emerges from a text further than implicitly can never be so blatantly present as to constitute an 'object of experience'. The argument may be rigged by affecting astonishment that so short a play should contain so many incidents and themes reminiscent of so vast as work as A la recherche du temps perdu without Beckett's active connivance. Alternatively, one could refrain from being surprised that so vast a work as A la recherche du temps perdu should coincidentally contain incidents and themes which might be made to bear some resemblance to the concerns of a short play, given sufficient determination to imbricate the two forcibly at carefully selected points. As Proust is further said to be partially 'forgotten' or 'distorted', inexactitude in any suggested parallels can be rehabilitated as beneficial to the case which insists upon a parodic relationship. This latter tactic edges the case of Chapter Two towards the preposterous: if distortion is evidence for the implicit presence of Proust, why, it may be asked, is not any and every explicitly absent 'influence' similarly 'present' in mis-remembered or distorted form in the text of Krapp's Last Tape? Everything else that the play has 'forgotten', the entire corpus of Western literature if necessary, must be equally crucial to its proper interpretation,

rather than, as in the normal course of events, plainly irrelevant because never cited.

The impulse to expand the allusive potential of Beckett's texts is, however, a venerable procedure in criticism. Mercier appeals to just such a strategy to promote an eminently reasonable reading of Waiting for Godot, which is, nevertheless, strictly beyond the explicit terms of the play:

> a play like Waiting for Godot could hardly 'work' artistically if it did not invoke the Judaeo-Christian Messianic tradition and its political derivatives.
>
> (Mercier, 1977, p.172)

A certain disparity of tone between play and criticism is evident; the partial 'presence' of just such elements, however, is equally evident. Remark has also been made in Beckett criticism of the paradoxical presence of absent terms in just the manner advocated by Chapter Two on Krapp's Last Tape. According to McMillan on Echo's Bones:

> The presence of the girl absent in reality from the poet's life permeates the series and forms a part of each of the poems. She is the Echo of the title [...].
>
> (McMillan, 1976, p.170)

Although appealing to the same critical dispensation as Mercier and McMillan, Moorjani's expansion of the mythical dimensions

which inform the fatal encounter of Molloy's bicycle with Lousse's pet dog Teddy, and all its attendant repercussions, illustrates the temptations into which an untrammelled analysis of the implicit can lead:

> As ambiguous as the male representations of the law, [Sophie Loy-Lousse] appears to be a chthonian mother-goddess, a lunar deity, the law (Loy) and ruler of a matricentric realm, and finally the sphinx. That she has usurped the place of the father-god is indicated by the death of Teddy. [...] Teddy's death causes Molloy to fall (a constant of the death-of-god motif in Beckett) and to enter the paradisiacal realm of the mother.[49]
>
> (Moorjani, 1976, pp.230-231)

The comic fiasco of Molloy, Lousse and Teddy's literal entanglement is not important to Moorjani. The terms of text, it is assumed, are only properly appreciated when their implicit content is revealed. To install Proust into Krapp's Last Tape, Chapter Two must endeavour to reveal an implicit content to the play in an identical manner. This obligation marks another reversal of what was argued in Chapter Four in relation to The Lost Ones 'as stated': Krapp's Last Tape is instead approached in terms of what it does not state. What Chapter Two perceives

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[49] Contrast Kenner's restraint in his interpretation of an etymological and associative potentiality in Molloy:

> Gaber is 'a messenger'. The Greek for 'messenger' is angelos, and the name of a well-known angel is Gabriel. We shall do well to make little of this.
>
> (Kenner, 1973, p.97)

to be crucial in Krapp's Last Tape are not the words on its pages, but precisely those which are absent. Its non-existent features, bizarrely, are of the highest significance.

Consequently, there can be no question of assigning to Krapp's Last Tape any ideas of self-containment, as Chapter Four argued was appropriate with regard to The Lost Ones. The 'inscription of an otherness in the work, through which it maintains a relationship with that which it is not' (Macherey, 1978, p.79) disqualifies all claims to definition as a self-sufficient autonomous whole.[50] Instead, according to Macherey:

> The real narrative is [...] determined by the absence of all the other possible narratives from amongst which it could have been chosen [...].
>
> (Macherey, 1978, p.256)

In order to insist that the discrepancy between the narrative outcomes of Krapp's Last Tape and A la recherche du temps perdu is significant, Chapter Two must subscribe to some version of Macherey's dictum. What is absent or unstated is vital to the meaning of the actual narrative; a significant choice and rejection has been made. It is the very absence of the Proustian exit from temporal succession via involuntary memory which

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[50] Analysis of a parody, moreover, necessitates this 'continual passing beyond the boundaries of the given, sealed-off verbal whole', for 'one cannot understand parody without reference to the parodied material' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.237), material, that is, which exists independently of the work of parody itself.

sustains Chapter Two's thematic reading of Krapp's Last Tape as charting the degradation of the metaphysical, the artistic and the artist from their spiritual elevation in A la recherche du temps perdu to bathetically physical terms in Beckett's play. The work 'resorts to an eloquent silence' (Macherey, 1978, p.79) where crucial Proustian solutions should be offered. Price explains the influence of the absent as that of a 'voice [...] no longer foregrounded':

> Instead it operates as what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the 'hidden polemic,' whereby a text engages antagonistically but implicitly with another discourse which is not itself articulated in the text.[51]
>
> (Price, 1993, p.82)

But what a text does not state or articulate is potentially infinite. There is no limit to the 'other possible narratives' (Macherey, 1978, p.256) which Krapp's Last Tape might have become; concrete justification for emphasizing the singular importance of its decision not to become A la recherche du temps perdu is lacking. It is the difference between Krapp's Last Tape and A la recherche du temps perdu which is crucial to Chapter Two, but, as Derrida remarks, 'By definition, difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude' (Derrida, 1976, p.53). The

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[51] Potential for semantic paradox abounds in such quibbling between presence and absence. As to Proust's presence in Krapp's Last Tape, we have reached a point, as the narrator of the Unnamable puts it, 'where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions' (Beckett, 1959, p.337).

bathetic reduction of Proustian concepts to their empirical parodies in Beckett, is itself merely a concept concerning Krapp's Last Tape which can never be empirically substantiated, so long as the evidence for it rests upon what is absent from the terms of Beckett's play.

Just how the content of the 'unstated' or 'implicit' is to be determined is entirely enigmatic. The problem of tautological redundancy encountered in relation to commentary on The Lost Ones is removed;[52] but the critic now appears to be at liberty to elaborate the implicit meaning of terms which are, as a point of principle, absent from the text. As Macherey admits, the object of his literary analysis 'is not in the work' (Macherey, 1978, p.154). We return to 'the classic problem of the interpretation of latent meaning' (Macherey, 1978, p.83). The final crucial secret of the text is only to be found in what it has never itself said. Whereas the immanent methodology employed in Chapter Four courts redundancy, the appeal to terms absent from the text of Krapp's Last Tape risks promoting an analysis that is ungrounded, indiscriminate and interminable.

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[52] As Macherey explains:

> For there to be a critical discourse which is more than a superficial and futile reprise of the work, the speech stored in the book must be incomplete; because it has not said everything, there remains the possibility of saying something else, after another fashion. The recognition of the area of shadow in or around the work is the initial moment of criticism.
>
> (Macherey, 1978, p.82)

Where, as argued in this chapter, everything that can be truly predicated of a text must already be contained within it, criticism defines itself as either redundant or wrong. See above, Sections x-xi.

xxv. Arbitrary principles of organization: Mani and Proust

The alleged importance of Proust to Krapp's Last Tape is the responsibility of Chapter Two and other critical expositions of the play. Any gestures towards Proust are acknowledged to be implicit. The presence of Manichaean structures, on the other hand, is sanctioned by Beckett's production notebooks for Krapp's Last Tape, the stage set required by the play and the verbal peculiarities of Krapp's lines, organized so often according to the binary oppositions of Manichaean precepts. There is, in short, textual evidence available to support a Manichaean reading of the play, whether reverently or parodically, in a way denied to the Proustian interpretation. Krapp is made to employ Manichaean oppositions as a method of organizing his thoughts and experience in a manner which, according to Chapter Two, is parodic and laughable. His costume recalls clownish garb, in addition to the Manichaean division of black and white. The external imposition of a Proustian filter upon Krapp's Last Tape, however, has precisely the same function in organizing thought for the critic about the play itself.

The disrepute of Manichaean precepts has been exacerbated by the historical accidents which have ensured that the doctrines of the various strands of Gnosticism are known only through the surviving writings of their sworn opponents. As Bataille writes, 'the polemics of the church fathers', such as Augustine's anti-Manichaean writings upon which Chapter Two draws, define them as 'obligatory slanders' of the heretical doctrines they ironically

preserve (Bataille, 1985, p.47). Beckett's particular use of Manichaean oppositions in Krapp's Last Tape inflicts further damage. The extraordinarily detailed Manichaean conceptualization which structures Krapp's taped statement of the 'memorable equinox' vision (Beckett, 1986, p.217), for example, actually distances him from the episode as an empirical experience. Kant predicates the experience of the sublime, a status which Krapp's vision might wish to emulate, upon its transcendence of conceptual understanding:

> in what we are wont to call sublime in nature there is such an absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms of nature, that it is rather in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided it gives signs of magnitude and power, that nature chiefly excites the ideas of the sublime.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part I, §23, p.92)

Krapp's Manichaean system of concepts negates the immediacy and chaos of the episode, which could have qualified it for sublimity, by meticulously organizing its components into categories which ultimately reduce into a principled binary division between ideas of light and dark. Those who would 'dream according to principles', especially of their own eccentric devising, according to Kant, are subject to 'rational raving' (Kant, 1952, Part I, §29, p.128). Krapp's principled Manichaean filter upon experience leads back to mania:

> If enthusiasm is comparable to <u>delirium</u>, fanaticism may be compared to <u>mania</u>. Of these the latter is least of all compatible with the sublime, for it is <u>profoundly</u> ridiculous.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part I, §29, p.128)

For the Unnamable, by contrast, the passion for such a principled division between light and dark has lapsed:

> All the rest I renounce, including this ridiculous black which I thought for a moment worthier than grey to enfold me. What rubbish all this stuff about light and dark. And how I have luxuriated in it.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.308)

The interchange of light and dark is no longer filled with mystical significance but comic potential, at least for its spectators; the future impertinences of the spotlight in <u>Play</u> are foretold:

> To see him flooded with light, then suddenly plunged back in darkness, must strike them as irresistibly funny.[53]

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[53] <u>The Unnamable</u> has described the concise attitudinal signal by which <u>Play</u> humiliates its characters. The spotlight is less than enthralled with the M's over-wrought invocation of what might occur in 'a little dinghy':

> M: Never woke together, on a May morning, the first to wake to wake the other two. Then in a little dinghy -
> [<u>Spot from</u> M <u>to</u> W1.]
> W1: Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either.
> [<u>Spot from</u> W1 <u>to</u> W2.]

(Beckett, 1959, p.358)

The possible application of the Manichaean system, either as a tool for the organization of experience or the communication of mystical insight, lapses in The Unnamable into merely 'a game whose arbitrariness is freely conceded and advertised by the writer' (Graff, 1979, p.220).[54] The Manichaean extravagances of Krapp's Last Tape promote, according to Chapter Two, recognition of the determinedly parodic nature of the play's harnessing of the system.

Yet Chapter Two's imposition of a Proustian grid of understanding on Krapp's Last Tape itself harbours disconcerting parallels with Krapp's ability to view autobiographical episodes through Manichaean spectacles. As Chapter Two maintains that the Proustian narrative is significant to Krapp's Last Tape precisely because of the play's rejection of the most crucial spiritual and metaphysical innovations of A la recherche du temps perdu, notably the exit from time and retrieval of experience offered by involuntary memory, Chapter Two can no more cite positive textual evidence for the presence of Proust in Beckett's play

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W2: I say, Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already? [Hopefully.] Just a little? [Pause.] I doubt it. [Spot from W2 to M.]
M: A little dinghy - [Spot from M to W1.]

(Beckett, 1986, p.316)

[54] Graff's comments refer to the Manichaean framework of Norman Mailer's An American Dream, a work which further exemplifies 'the difficulty a writer encounters when he attempts to make an improvised typology take the place of a plausible system of concepts' (Graff, 1979, p.219). Such arbitrary organization is Krapp's affliction also.

than Krapp can refer to the empirical substantiation of the precepts of a Manichaean faith. In both cases, the chosen conceptual framework imposes itself upon the empirical evidence instead of responding to it. Popper theorizes this error shared by Krapp and Chapter Two:

> Without waiting, passively, for repetitions to impress or impose regularities upon us, we actively try to impose regularities upon the world. We try to discover similarities in it, and to interpret it in terms of laws invented by us.
>
> (Popper, 1972, p.142)

Krapp's ability to state the episode of his 'memorable equinox' vision in Manichaean terms (Beckett, 1986, p.217) and the configuration of a reading of Krapp's Last Tape according to Proustian emphases, proves merely that each can be interpreted in accordance with a conceptual priority selected respectively by Krapp and Chapter Two. That each interpretative system can be so applied provides no evidence as to the value of doing so. If Chapter Two is to affect hilarity at Krapp's persistence in his Manichaean obsessions despite the absence of any empirical evidence as to their pertinence or accuracy, it should explain how the Proustian grid through which it reads the play is any less arbitrary, given an analogous paucity of positive textual evidence by which to justify its own operations. The Manichaean system is Krapp's principle of organization; Proust plays an identical role for Chapter Two. Each, lacking empirical or

textual substantiation, must be considered empty according to the Kantian rules of verification which Chapter Two repeatedly invokes against metaphysical statements. The organization of Krapp's Last Tape via a framework abstracted from Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu is as dependent upon ungrounded conceptual re-ordering as any interpretation intending to read metaphysical profundity into the play. Neither reading, in principle, can marshall sufficient textual evidence to substantiate its own case. As was the case in regard to Catastrophe, by violating the standards of verifiability that it thinks proper to invoke against criticism with metaphysical leanings, Chapter Two manages to delineate a strategy whereby its own claims may be defeated.

xxvi. Theatre II: Kant's universal subject

Chapter One is similarly myopic in promoting the importance of the Kantian critique of metaphysics to an understanding of Beckett's Rough for Theatre II. There is similar potential for self-defeat. The investigators A and B are chided for their propensity to turn each strand of evidence cited concerning C into a confirmation of their initial judgement, 'Let him jump' (Beckett, 1986, p.238):

> 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 [...].

Just as the investigators can see only overwhelming reasons for C's suicide, Chapter One can see nothing in Theatre II that should not be cited in support of a Kantian reading of the play. There is scant acknowledgement on the side of Chapter One that more than one theory can account for, and more than one conclusion follow from, the evidence available in Theatre II.[55]

Moreover, to cite individual pieces of textual evidence in support of a general Kantian hypothesis by which to interpret Theatre II as a whole, is to replicate the inductive procedures which the epistemologies of both Kant and Hume are invoked in Chapter One to critique. Induction is used by the investigators A and B to extrapolate, from the particulars of C's unfortunate past experiences, so ill-favoured a diagnosis of his possible future experience that 'Let him jump' suggests itself as a preemptive measure to escape continued miseries. Induction legislates from past to future and from particular to general; according to Chapter One, such an extrapolation is illegitimate.

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[55] It should thus be unaccountable for Chapter One that Levy, for example, can so easily apply an entirely different interpretative framework to the play:

> In Theatre II, C is no other than a live though silent embodiment of the playwright [...]. A and B are theatre (or literary) critics who are looking for he who is right there, in the same way that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for he who will only come in Theatre II.
>
> (Levy, 1990, pp.121-122)

For Levy, the play 'is wholly dedicated to dramatic criticism' (Levy, 1990, p.116). That the Kantian influence on Theatre II is less than self-evident is suggested by the fact that no commentator has previously felt the need ever to mention it.

But from the basis of the textual particulars of Theatre II, an underdetermined leap is also made toward a generalized and totalizing Kantian allegory, which is then itself cited in opposition to induction itself. Inductive techniques are thus exploited by Chapter One in order to establish a Kantian interpretation of Theatre II which can itself be used to support the claim that the narrative of Theatre II demonstrates the methodological failings of induction. Induction draws Kant into the play to fulfil a role as a crucial opponent of this very procedure.

The Kantian frame through which Theatre II is read can be criticized as a conceptual imposition which is as arbitrary and underdetermined as Krapp's selection of a Manichaean framework through which to organize his experience or Chapter Two's selection of Proustian priorities by which to judge Krapp's Last Tape. Essential to the Kantian frame which Chapter One adopts, however, is the claim that experience is actually organized by the perceiving subject not via an eccentric individual choice between disparate conceptual schema, but according to specific and fixed forms of intuition and categories of the understanding which are themselves universal and a priori. The eccentric idealism inherent in Krapp's Manichaean scheme, or in Chapter Two's Proustian framework, is transformed by Kant into 'transcendental idealism'. According to Chapter One:

> 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. These impositions of the subject comprise a conceptual scheme, but one which is transcendental, universal and necessary.

(Chapter One, pp.41-42)

As admitted in relation to Chapter Two, 'the mind <u>imposes</u> its order on nature', an admission which provides the 'idealist' side of the system; in Kant, however, that order is also 'fixed and immutable in all of us' (Solomon, 1988, p.27). It is this addition which defines Kantian idealism as collective or 'transcendental'. The security of empirical objectivity follows from transcendental idealism, for the perceptual and cognitive apparatus of each subject organizes the materials of its experience in an identical manner.[56] A common version of

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[56] The disparity between individual and 'transcendental' idealism is played out with regard to solipsism in Winston's interrogation by O'Brien in Orwell's <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u>:

> The belief that nothing exists outside your own mind - surely there must be some way of demonstrating that it was false? Had it not been exposed long ago as a fallacy? There was even a name for it, which he had forgotten. A faint smile twitched the corners of O'Brien's mouth as he looked down at him.
>
> 'I told you, Winston,' he said, 'that metaphysics is not your strong point. The word you are trying to think of is solipsism. But you are mistaken. This is not solipsism. Collective solipsism, if you like. But that is a different thing: in fact, the opposite thing.'
>
> (Orwell, 1954, p.229)

As evinced by its ability to guarantee empirical objectivity, Kant's transcendental idealism can also be cited as 'the opposite thing' to idealism or solipsism conceived as conducive to individual perceptual eccentricity.

'external' reality is thus constructed by each normally constituted subject.[57] Metaphysical knowledge, knowledge concerning things as they are in-themselves unconditioned by any organizational impositions of the perceiving subject, is excluded as a possibility under this system. As human sensibility and cognition actively synthesize and order experience according to these fixed schema, metaphysical insight, if required to access the unconditioned, would be obliged to bypass the entire apparatus of human sensibility and cognition itself, the sole means by which anything beyond analytic tautologies can be known. Metaphysics is thus defined by Kant to comprise what is literally unthinkable. The theoretical basis of the entire thesis against metaphysical interpretation of Beckett's texts pursued here, rests upon the validity of this Kantian critique of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, as expounded in Chapter One. Yet there is a case to answer as to whether the basis upon which Kant pushes metaphysics outside the bounds of possible knowledge contains premises which are themselves metaphysical in nature. If so, Kant's critique of metaphysics is self-defeating.

xxvii. Metaphysics against metaphysics

Prime among 'metaphysical questions', as Solomon acknowledges, have always been investigations into 'the nature

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[57] The 'Kantian idea', according to Hoy, is 'that there can be a single world only if there is a single conceptual framework' (Hoy, 1988, p.26). Differences in conceptual framework would entail irreducible empirical relativity rather than objectivity, a threat which Kant wished to remove from Humean empiricism rather than confirm in his own philosophy. This debate returns with the 'linguistic turn' in contemporary philosophy.

of the self' (Solomon, 1988, p.29). In an idealist version of cognition, the nature of the subject is especially significant. As Borges' story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' demonstrates, if 'men [...] conceive the universe as a series of mental processes', it is entirely rational that 'the classic culture of Tlön comprises only one discipline: psychology' (Borges, 1970, p.33). Investigation of the nature of the mind is the prelude to all other knowledge, for the mind is the basis of all other existence. Under Kant's transcendental idealism, it is indeed the self and the mind which become the most important focus of investigation:

> It is with Kant that philosophical claims about the self attain new and remarkable proportions. The self becomes not just the focus of attention but the entire subject-matter of philosophy. The self is not just another entity in the world, but in an important sense it creates the world, and the reflecting self does not just know itself, but in knowing itself knows all selves, and the structure of any and every possible self. [...] The underlying presumption is that in all essential matters everyone, everywhere, is the same.
>
> (Solomon, 1988, p.6)

The dismissal of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge is predicated upon Kant's description of the constitution and operation of the human cognitive faculties. This description is fixed and universally applicable. Thus, 'The pure form of

sensible intuitions [...] must be found in the mind a priori' (Kant, 1933, A20/B34, p.66); this is true according to 'the constitution of our sensibility' (Kant, 1950, §36, p.65). With regard to the synthesis of impressions into discrete objects, the 'subjective grounds of such unity [are] contained a priori in the original cognitive powers of our mind' (Kant, 1933, A125, p.147); this is true according to 'the constitution of our understanding' (Kant, 1950, §36, p.65). Both strands comprise the 'nature of our mind' (Kant, 1933, A125, p.147). 'The pure concepts of reason' are not options for individual selection, but 'grounded in the nature of human reason' (Kant, 1933, A323/B380, p.316). Kant's philosophy is concerned with 'the fundamental faculties of the human soul' (Kant, 1933, A124, p.146). As Strawson remarks, such comments upon the constitution of subject 'embrace Kant and his readers and the rest of humanity' (Strawson, 1966, p.235). 'To Kant', as Adorno's analysis puts it, this shared structure of the mind can be conceived as a 'predesigned unit underlying every identity' (Adorno, 1973, p.154).

Analysis of one human mind thus legislates for all others. According to Kant:

> I have to deal with nothing save reason itself and its pure thinking; and to obtain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self.
>
> (Kant, 1933, Bxiv, p.10)

The unstated premise which permits this generalization from one subject to all others, is the existence of a collective, or transcendental, human condition. It is as if 'we're of one mind, all of one mind, always were, deep down' (Beckett, 1984, Text I, p.73). Kant assumes the existence of a universal subject, of an essential <u>a priori</u> human condition, which constitutes '<u>the</u> self - timeless, universal' and therefore descriptive of 'each one of us around the globe and throughout history' (Solomon, 1988, p.40). The nature of this universal subject excludes it from metaphysical knowledge. But the very delineation of its essential nature as given here is itself metaphysical. For Chapter One:

> The metaphysical potentialities of <u>Theatre II</u> 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.
>
> (Chapter One, p.32)

It is the burden of Chapter One that Kant's assessment of the limitations inherent in the human condition provide a basis for arguing that the human condition cannot itself be known. It is Kant's 'metaphysical assumptions about the nature of man' (Hoy, 1988, p.26) which are employed to exclude the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. It is Kant's delineation of human perception and cognition, incorporating the forms of the intuition and the categories of the understanding, which rules

out metaphysical knowledge of how things are in-themselves. Yet this account depends upon Kant's description of an essential and universal subject, as it is in-itself. This 'knower' should not itself be so 'known' if what Kant says about the limits of its knowledge can be maintained. These limits should apply to Kant's possible knowledge also.

xxviii. The absence of the noumenal self: Beckett vs Kant

There is a 'distinctly Kantian question' which leads towards this universal subject; as Norris phrases it, the query asks:

> what must be the case with our cognitive faculties - our knowledge-constitutive categories - for the world to make sense for us in the way it does?
>
> (Norris, 1990, p.196)

The condition for the possibility of an objective, coherent and shared 'external' world is, for Kant, each individual's possession of identical cognitive apparatus which organizes experience according to identical forms and categories. But the world must be admitted 'to make sense for us' before this supposed 'fact' can be used as a basis to support Kant's version of the universal subject.[58] It is the universal subject,

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[58] In Beckett, by contrast, the experience of characters such as Murphy, Molloy, Moran and Watt is pointedly incoherent, as detailed throughout Chapter Five. In Watt moreover, the conceptual apparatus of 'Mr Thomas Nackybal, native of Burren' and fraudulent calculator of cube-roots, attains a decidedly sub-Kantian level:

however, which Kant cites to argue that the world must indeed 'make sense for us'. To argue for the necessity of the universal subject, appeal must be made to the objectivity of experience; but in the Kantian system, the objectivity of experience can be maintained only if the universal subject is first accepted. Each part of the argument is dependent upon the other; neither can properly serve to establish the other. Neither the universal subject nor the coherence of experience can be assumed as givens so that merely the conditions of each remain to be deduced; both instead are precisely what is in question.[59]

Neither can the features which Kant ascribes to the mind of the subject be empirically verified, as should be the case if they are not to be empty conceptualizations. Kant's judgements

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> Mr. Fitzwein said, Mr. Louit, you would not have us believe that this man's mental existence is exhausted by the bare knowledge, emerging from a complete innocence of the rudiments, of what is necessary for his survival. That, replied Louit, is the bold claim I make for my friend, in whose mind, save for the pale music of innocence you mention, and, in some corner of the cerebellum, where all agricultural ideation has its seat, dumbly flickering, the knowledge of how to extract, from the ancestral half-acre of moraine, the maximum of nourishment, for himself and his pig, with the minimum of labour, all, I am convinced, is an ecstasy of darkness, and of silence.
>
> (Beckett, 1976, p.173)

By his possession of an additional faculty of the mind dedicated to 'agricultural ideation' and lack of all others, Mr Nackybal at least must count as an exception to the universality of the Kantian subject.

[59] The objection is to Kant's use of a 'transcendental argument' which attempts to show 'that something must be so because it constitutes a condition of the possibility of something else' (Hamlyn, 1984, p.46). The universal subject and the coherence of experience are conducive to the existence of each other, but from this coincidence nothing can be concluded as to the actual existence of either.

as to the internal constitution of the cognitive subject pass 'beyond the limits of experience' and attempt to describe 'objects which are not given to us, perhaps cannot in any way be given' (Kant, 1933, A63/B87-88, p.100). Such should be the error of metaphysics, not Kant himself:

> the inculcation of this rule [...] admits of no exception: [...] our pure concepts of the understanding as well as our pure intuitions extend to nothing but objects of possible experience, consequently to mere things of sense; and as soon as we leave this sphere, these concepts retain no meaning whatsoever.
>
> (Kant, 1950, §33, p.62)

Kantian conceptions concerning the forms and categories of the understanding, however, do not refer to 'mere things of sense'. The internal cognitive organization of the mind was not empirically apprehended by Kant in 1781. Strawson's assessment of the statements which comprise the Kantian model of the mind is despairing:

> It is useless to puzzle over the status of these propositions. They belong neither to empirical (including physiological) psychology nor to an analytical philosophy of mind, <u>through some of them may have near or remote analogues in both</u>. They belong to the imaginary subject of transcendental psychology, a part of the Kantian model.
>
> (Strawson, 1966, p.97)

Kant's ability to tabulate 'the fundamental faculties of the human soul' (Kant, 1933, A124, p.146) should be halted by his further statement that 'the nature of the human soul [...] is elevated above all concepts of experience' (Kant, 1950, §59, p.111). Indeed, the Cartesian version of the self, with its 'supposed knowledge of the substance of our thinking being', is condemned as 'specious so far as the knowledge of it falls quite without the complex of experience' (Kant, 1950, §47, p.82). We can have no empirical experience of the knowing or thinking 'I' itself, as distinguished from the changing content of what it knows or thinks at any moment. According to Kant himself, 'No fixed and abiding self can present itself' to consciousness; rather, 'Consciousness of self' is reduced to a 'flux of inner appearances' as the state of consciousness modulates in time (Kant, 1933, A107, p.136). This self which is chased and never caught is admirably described by Beckett as 'the knowing non-exister' (Beckett, 1984, Text XII, p.112). That which is the locus of all knowledge, cannot itself be known. This locus of knowledge has no determinable location:

> I'm not in his head, nowhere in his old body, and yet I'm there, for him I'm there, with him, hence all the confusion. That should have been enough for him, to have found me absent [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text IV, p.82)

An inability to determine location, translates into the removal of the 'I' from space, time, origin and duration; the 'I' is

paradoxically 'found [...] absent':

> [...] Where am I, to mention only space, and in what semblance, and since when, to mention also time, and till when, and who is this clot who doesn't know where to go, who can't stop, who takes himself for me and for whom I take myself, anything at all, the old jangle.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text XI, p.109)

The confusion endemic between 'me' and 'him' in Texts for Nothing, which somehow both constitute aspects of the 'I', is analogous to the difficulties which the Kantian categories of the understanding introduce into the subject's ability to know itself. The subject ('me') must become an object ('him') in order to know itself. The concomitant peculiarity which disturbs the Kantian model is that the categories of the understanding, if they are to exist for investigation, can only be assessed and understood via these categories of the understanding themselves. Yet this organization of the cognitive apparatus must affect how the cognitive apparatus knows itself via itself. The knowing self must impose its own conceptual framework upon itself, as an object, if it seeks to explore that framework which is yet part of itself, as a subject. The forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding cannot then be known as they are in-themselves, for they are the very frameworks which ensure that it is impossible to know anything as it is in-itself. The forms and categories are analogous to spectacles which cannot be removed and which affect how everything is seen. But Kant's

delineation of the qualities of these spectacles requires that they be viewed as if they were no longer filtering our vision. We are required, contradictorily, to see the unremovable spectacles without seeing through them. The 'I' is required to step outside itself in order to know itself. And, ironically, as soon as this supposedly outlawed knowledge of the noumenal human subject is attained, the self-contradictory conclusion is supplied that the subject is so constituted that it can know no noumena.

If the Kantian thesis is correct in that nothing can be known except through the frameworks imposed by the mind, that must apply to knowledge of the mind itself. In seeking to retain knowledge of the subject in-itself, Rorty chides Kant, and Hegel, for backsliding from the consequences of their own idealism:

> [...] Kant and Hegel went only halfway in their repudiation of the idea that truth is 'out there.' They were willing to view the world of empirical science as a made world - to see matter constructed by mind, or as consisting in mind insufficiently conscious of its own mental character. But they persisted in seeing mind, spirit, the depths of the human self, as having an intrinsic nature - one which could be known by a kind of nonempirical super science called philosophy.
>
> (Rorty, 1989, p.4)

The logic of Kant's system should insist upon 'the unknown

constitution of things as they are in themselves, including ourselves as we are in ourselves'; instead, as Strawson continues, 'the constitution of the latter does not appear to be as unknown as it ought to be' (Strawson, 1966, p.199). The fundamental problem for Kant, a problem which recurs in Beckett's Texts for Nothing, The Unnamable and Murphy, is the self-reflexive difficulty as to 'how I can be an object to myself at all' (Kant, 1933, B155, p.167). Self-knowledge is a clichéd subject for fiction; for Beckett, it is an area fraught with logical and philosophical paradox. In Kant's critical philosophy, the limitations of self-knowledge threaten to undermine his very calculation of all limits of knowledge, and thereby to undo the critique of metaphysics relied upon throughout this thesis.

Eventually Kant determines a 'suitable place' to address this 'paradox' within his own system:

> This is a suitable place for explaining the paradox which must have been obvious to everyone in our exposition of the forms of inner sense [...]: namely, that this sense represents to consciousness even our own selves only as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves.
>
> (Kant, 1933, B152-153, pp.165-166)

The entire elaboration of the forms and categories which organize the Kantian model of the mind, so as to exclude the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, must be subject to the provisionality

of constituting merely 'appearances'. Chapter One here does badly in making so little of this. When the Kantian system has its say upon the Kantian system, it discovers that its own claims to knowledge are premature:

> the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor [are] their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and [...] if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our subjectivity, remains completely unknown to us.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A42/B59, p.82)

Notions of the 'receptivity of our subjectivity' are also filtered through that subjectivity. It must be conceded that the organization of the mind as it is in-itself may be entirely different from the Kantian model of it. The objective knowledge required concerning the constitution of the mind needed to declare metaphysical insight a priori impossible as a consequence of that constitution cannot be got. Hoy assesses the result of 'Kant's enterprise':

> ultimately the mind is not only unthought, but also

> unthinkable. Genuine self-knowledge is in a sense impossible, since the self that we make appear to ourselves as an object of knowledge will never be identical to the self that is constructing that object.
>
> (Hoy, 1988, p.16)

As in each case of self-defeat documented here, it is during a self-reflexive movement, when the consequences which a theory implies are applied to itself, that an impasse is encountered. In matters concerning knowledge of the self, the problem is especially acute, for the moment of self-reflexion is unavoidable: the mind cannot be an object of investigation to anything other than the mind itself. The provisionality which this inescapable condition introduces is clearly recognized by Beckett in Murphy. A scare-quoted '"Murphy's mind"' is described and delimited in a manner more respectful of Kantian restrictions upon self-knowledge than Kant frequently is himself:

> It is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind' has to be attempted. Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was - that would be an extravagance and an impertinence - but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be. Murphy's mind is after all the gravamen of these informations.
>
> (Beckett, 1963, p.63)

As Beckett wrote to Thomas MacGreevy, what might in another

context be thought simply a description of 'Murphy's mind', is defined instead as a 'short statement of his mind's fantasy on itself' (Beckett, 1983a, p.102). To conclude the a priori impossibility of metaphysics by reference to the limitations of the human subject, as required by Chapter One, is just to encounter the 'extravagance' and 'impertinence' of presuming to know the mind's 'apparatus as it really was' (Beckett, 1963, p.63).[60] To explain the impossibility of discovering a universal human condition via Kant's philosophy is simply to assume the Kantian version of the human condition. And this Kantian version can equally be undone via re-application of Kant's critique of metaphysics to itself. We are returned to self-defeating procedures.

xxix. Regulative ideas and self-defeat

According to the first words of Chapter One, 'The contribution of Kant to exercises in metaphysics consists principally in the deletion of their epistemological security' (Chapter One, p.28). When that contribution is applied to itself, its own epistemological status can be challenged. Yet objections to Kant's account, as given above, continue to be dependent upon that account. When it is conceded that 'I have

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[60] Even Watt's investigations are finally restricted to phenomena, or 'appearances', rather than unknowable noumena:

> [...] Watt's concern, deep as it appeared, was not after all with what the figure was, in reality, but with what the figure appeared to be, in reality. For since when were Watt's concerns with what things were, in reality?
> (Beckett, 1976, p.226)

no knowledge of myself as I am but merely as I appear to myself' (Kant, 1933, B158, p.169), it is the content of this 'appearance' which is actually used to determine that 'I have no knowledge of myself'. The self is assumed to be known sufficiently to determine that it cannot genuinely know itself at all. Admissions as to the unknowability of the self can be wrung out of Kant only as necessary consequences of the very model of the mind that these admissions exist to problematize. It is the entire epistemological status of the Kantian model that must be revised away from a position of security. Kant's critique of metaphysics, as employed by Chapter One and throughout this thesis, must go with it. The universal subject, upon which this critique relies, is indemonstrable according to Kant's own epistemological standards. And, ultimately, the universal subject is indeed re-defined by Kant as attaining merely hypothetical status. It is not an object of knowledge but a merely 'regulative idea' of reason.

In Kant's epistemological system, 'understanding' is always liable to be outpaced by 'regulative ideas', hypotheses and 'reason':

> once reason advances beyond pursuit of understanding it becomes transcendent. It displays itself in ideas - that have certainly a foundation as regulative principles - but not in objectively valid conceptions.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part II, §76, p.55)

It is not the 'understanding', which does in fact require that its concepts be empirically substantiated in order to be 'objectively valid', but 'reason' which is responsible for positing the nature of the universal subject. The nature of that subject is posited as a hypothesis or 'regulative idea' rather than being properly known by the understanding. Regulative ideas seek to organize and unify the conceptual field to which they are applied. 'The first object of such an idea', Kant confirms, 'is the "I" itself' (Kant, 1933, A682/B710, p.557). This field of 'pure reason' is almost equivalent to what has been meant throughout this thesis by metaphysics. Both attempt to maintain their postulations in the absence of empirical substantiation. The crucial difference is that where metaphysics seeks to legislate for reality in-itself, reason must retain a consciousness that its descriptions remain merely hypothetical posits.

Such is the technique of the narrator in The Unnamable. The greater part of his narrative comprises 'hypotheses, call them that' (Beckett, 1959, p.293). Just as Kant redefines his model of the universal subject as merely an explanatory postulation, major characters and events in The Unnamable are cast as merely explanatory and expedient suppositions:

> And Basil and his gang? Inexistent, invented to explain I forget what.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.306)

Should an element in the narrative situation change, an explanatory hypothesis to account for the alteration is instantly proffered:

> old slush to be churned everlastingly, now it's slush, a minute ago it was dust, it must have rained.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.407)

We can be assured that the narrator will 'find a rejoinder to everything' (Beckett, 1959, p.359).[61] Should his hypotheses or rejoinders conspire to contradict one another, a peculiar tolerance is required:

> May one speak of a voice, in these conditions? Probably not. And yet I do. The fact is all this business about voices requires to be revised, corrected and then abandoned. Hearing nothing I am none the less a prey to communications. And I speak of voices? After all, why not, so long as one knows it's untrue?
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.338)

Not only does the narrator permit the possibility that his hypotheses are ill-founded, as Kantian reason requires, he is

---

[61] In Waiting for Godot, Vladimir is equally expert in positing innovative explanations for narrative events:

> VLADIMIR: I could have sworn I heard shouts.
> ESTRAGON: And why would he shout?
> VLADIMIR: At his horse.
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.21)

also prepared to point out their falsity.[62] Earlier, Molloy discovered that, despite their apparently paradoxical formulation, 'hypothetical imperatives' were 'Charming things' (Beckett, 1959, p.87);[63] in The Unnamable, hypothetical 'resolutions' are formulated, not as potential untruths this time, but as a series of imperatives:

> More resolutions, while we're at it, that's right, resolutely, more resolutions. [...] Assume notably henceforward that the thing said and the thing heard have

---

[62] In Film, Beckett similarly withdraws 'truth value' from his framing suppositions:

> Esse est percipi.
> All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.
> Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception.
> No truth value attaches to above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience.
> (Beckett, 1986, p.323)

Decades earlier in 'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', Beckett ascribed an identically non-assertive stance to Joyce regarding the abstractions 'Church, Marriage, Burial':

> This social and historical classification is clearly adapted by Mr. Joyce as a structural convenience - or inconvenience. His position is in no way a philosophical one.
> (Beckett, 1961, p.7)

[63] Molloy's 'hypothetical imperative' is undoubtedly Kant's property. In his Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals (1785), 'Hypothetical imperatives declare a possible action to be practically necessary as a means to the attainment of something else that one wills' (Kant, 1948, §39, p.78). The imperative is 'hypothetical' because dependent upon some antecedent aim; if that aim lapses, so does the imperative. The Kantian scholar H.J. Paton translated Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals in 1948; Dr Wilfred Ruprecht Bion, whom Beckett was assigned as a therapist at the Tavistock Clinic in the early 1930s, 'came under the influence of H.J. Paton and studied the philosophy of Kant' while at Queen's College (Knowlson, 1996, p.175).

a common source, resisting for this purpose the temptation to call in question the possibility of assuming anything whatever. Situate this source in me, without specifying where exactly, no finicking [...]. Carry if necessary this process of compression to the point of abandoning all other postulates than that of a deaf half-wit [...]. Evoke at painful junctures [...] the image of a vast cretinous mouth [...]. Set aside once and for all, [...] all idea of beginning and end. Overcome [...] the fatal leaning towards expressiveness. Equate me [...] with him whose story this story had the brief ambition to be. Better, ascribe to me a body. Better still, arrogate to me a mind. Speak of a world of my own, sometimes referred to as the inner, without choking. Doubt no more.

(Beckett, 1959, pp.393-394)

'And finally', the narrator counsels, 'these and other decisions have been taken, carry on cheerfully as before' (Beckett, 1959, p.394). What is important is to postulate, to hypothesize, to make decisions, to 'Doubt no more' and permit 'no finicking' (Beckett, 1959, p.394). Much of the narrative of Watt is indeed fabricated from the consequences of taking its own hypotheses more seriously than The Unnamable could ever manage. One amongst Watt's various kitchen duties is a case in point; it concerns the apparently innocuous mode of disposal of Mr Knott's leftovers:

> Watt's instructions were to give what Mr. Knott left of this dish, on the days that he did not eat it all, to the dog.

(Beckett, 1976, p.87)

Some twenty-five pages of baseless hypothesizing must be completed in Watt prior to a satisfactory mechanism being designed to guarantee that a sufficiently famished dog should be available in perpetuity to devour Mr Knott's scraps. Watt's hypothetical solution to the problem of bringing together the dog and food does not, however, long remain merely 'a tissue now dilating now contracting of thoughts in a skull' (Beckett, 1976, p.97). No sooner has the desirability of a colony of famished dogs bred by generations of the Lynch family been postulated, then 'the twin dwarfs Art and Con', two of that family's least incapacitated members, actually arrive with a suitably famished dog at Watt's door in anticipation of 'Mr. Knott's occasional remains' (Beckett, 1976, p.109). Ungrounded postulation is instantly translated into narrative fact.

Metaphysics, like Watt, similarly mistakes its own postulations for reality and thereby elevates 'thoughts' to 'things':

> all controversy in regard to the nature of the thinking being and its connection with the corporeal world is merely a result of filling the gap where knowledge is wholly lacking to us with paralogisms of reason, treating our thoughts as things and hypostatising them.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A395, p.361)

Reason, by contrast, as perhaps surprisingly exemplified by The Unnamable, acknowledges its use of merely hypothetical organizing principles. With regard again to the self:

> Nothing but advantage can result from the psychological idea thus conceived, if only we take heed that it is not viewed as more than a mere idea, and that it is therefore taken as valid only relatively to the systematic employment of reason in determining the appearances of our soul.
>
> (Kant, 1933, A683/B711, p.558)

A lack of empirical substantiation cannot invalidate a posited regulative idea.

Furthermore, in any case, the necessity of empirical substantiation, cited in Chapter One to invalidate all metaphysical speculation, is not itself provable in empirical terms. As Priest puts it, 'there can be no empirical proof of empiricism' (Priest, 1990, p.64). It may again be posited that all knowledge, except the tautological truths of analysis, requires empirical grounding if its concepts are not to be empty, but this hypothesis, as derived from Kant and incorporated into Logical Positivism, is itself neither an analytic truth nor an empirical observation. Thus the 'Verifiability Principle' can also defeat itself according to its own statement:

> [the Verifiability Principle] does not seem, as it is claimed it should be, applicable to itself; that is, that

> the statement that all factually meaningful sentences should say something verifiable is not itself verifiable, and therefore the sentence used to state the Principle is not factually meaningful.
>
> (White, 1987, p.109)

Empiricism itself cannot be grounded any more firmly than as a provisional regulative principle. According to Ayer, the Vienna Circle could only 'adopt the verification principle as a convention' (Ayer, 1959, p.15). Any more principled adherence to empiricism and rejection of metaphysics paradoxically leads straight back into the metaphysical realm.

xxx. The necessity of self-defeat?

To establish the a priori impossibility of metaphysics via a certain definition of the human condition, as Chapter One seeks, must be self-defeating. The putative exit from metaphysics in this case is itself dependent upon metaphysical presuppositions. Indeed, according to Heidegger, 'a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics' (Heidegger, 1972, p.24). That a stance against metaphysics which wishes to establish itself as more than a posit or hypothesis must lapse back into hidden metaphysical assumptions in order to support itself, evinces a fatalism as to the eradicable nature of metaphysics which is shared, unexpectedly, by Kant himself. That which the Critique of Pure Reason exists to undermine is also acknowledged as necessary and

inevitable:

> That the human mind will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we, to avoid inhaling impure air, should prefer to give up breathing altogether. There will, therefore, always be metaphysics in the world; nay, everyone, especially every reflective man, will have it and, for want of a recognized standard, will shape it for himself after his own pattern. What has hitherto been called metaphysics cannot satisfy any critical mind, but to forego it entirely is impossible [...].
>
> (Kant, 1950, p.116)

Far from believing his own researches succeed in 'discrediting, once and for all, the pretensions of transcendent metaphysics' (Strawson, 1966, p.240), Kant insists that even 'pretended indifferentists', believing their arguments to be absolutely uncontaminated by metaphysical presuppositions, nevertheless 'inevitably fall back, in so far as they think at all, into those very metaphysical assertions which they profess so greatly to despise' (Kant, 1933, Ax, p.8). And, of course, the point is quickly proved, for the persistence of metaphysics is not depreciated here by Kant as a contingent aberration, but instead identified as an unwelcome but necessary accompaniment to all thought. The enemies of metaphysics are implicated in metaphysical thinking 'in so far as they think at all' (Kant,

1933, Ax, p.8).[64] The necessity of a lapse back into professedly despised metaphysical terms is also the charge that this chapter exists to make against four of its predecessors. Yet, following Kant, it makes this charge from a resolutely metaphysical position. Such a contention, invoking the necessity of a self-defeating dependence upon terms declared inadmissible, denotes another essentialist attitude toward the inevitable course of thought itself whenever it ventures into metaphysical controversies. And it is such attempts to state the a priori nature, and concomitant limits, of human thought which has just been condemned here in regard to Kant's definition of the universal subject.

This chapter is left with a choice between two equally displeasing conclusions. The self-defeating structures of Chapters One, Two, Three and Four might be said to constitute merely contingent and culpable errors in argument. Or, these recurrent self-defeating patterns might signal some ineradicable

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[64] Derrida comes closest to Kantian themes in his assertion of the inevitable lapse back into metaphysical terms of every critique of metaphysics. A decisive break from metaphysics, Derrida charges, cannot be made, for such a break translates into the rejection of language, and concomitantly thought, themselves:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon - which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.
>
> (Derrida, 1978, pp.280-281)

According to Derrida also, this lapse and complicity is non-contingent; rather, precisely as Kant argues, it 'has something essential to do with the movement of thought' (Derrida, 1980, p.60).

and essential twist of logic inevitable in any discourse which aims to eliminate those metaphysical terms that it declares obsolete and indefensible. Rather than being a constructive, concluding, and thoroughly Kantian insight, however, this latter option is itself self-defeating as a critique of metaphysics, for it appeals to an essentialist interpretation of thought, to an a priori narrative of what the mind is mysteriously and inadvertently ever fated to do. It thus offers a metaphysical position to be deployed against metaphysical positions. This option is self-contradictory.

The choice must be recast. This thesis comprises four chapters which can be unravelled according to contingent and non-significant errors, accompanied by two further chapters which say so without fear of self-contradiction. The question remains, however, as to why four chapters damaged by admitted errors are submitted extant. The alternative is to conclude that the first four chapters here all commit necessary and exemplary errors, but are ill-served by a final self-defeating and self-contradictory explanation as to why. Considered as a whole, the thesis offered here is finally either predominantly non-significant and error-ridden or finally self-defeating.

Conclusion: Changing Territory

i. The paradigm of self-defeat: the liar paradox

An admission of non-significance and error does not strike a happy concluding note. A declaration of self-defeat and self-contradiction, however, based upon the construction of a metaphysical position versus all metaphysical positions, might offer access to a significant strand of thought in both Enlightenment and twentieth-century philosophy. Irreducible contradiction is central to the Kantian antinomies and the progress of Hegel's dialectic, to Bohr's theory of complementarity in quantum physics and Priest's elaboration of transconsistent logics. By weight of numbers, ideas of the contradictory form a significant sub-section in the philosophical tradition. Religious thought, in concert, considers itself equally cognisant of 'the essentially paradoxical nature of the truth' (Smith, 1987, p.75). Meister Eckhart, indeed, professes to teach 'the Way of Paradox' (Smith, 1987, p.27). At the opposite extreme to Eckhart's religious mysticism, irresolvable contradictions also occur within the discipline of formal logic. The liar paradox is perhaps the most infamous and most concise of logically self-defeating procedures. Its statement is deceptively simple:

(λ) This proposition is not true

(Barwise and Etchemendy, 1987, p.20)

The proposition self-reflexively negates its own truth-value.

As Barwise and Etchemendy explain, 'λ can be used to express a proposition, call it f, about itself, namely, the proposition that f is not true' (Barwise and Etchemendy, 1987, p.20). The following consequences can be inferred:

> If f were true, then what it claims would have to be the case, and so f would not be true. So f cannot be true. [...] But if f is not true, then what f claims to be the case is in fact the case, so f must be true, which is a contradiction.
>
> (Barwise and Etchemendy, 1987, p.20)

The assertion 'I am lying' is false if what it states is true (if I am indeed lying, then my claim that 'I am lying' must itself be a lie), and true if what it states is false (if I am not lying then I lie in asserting that I do). The contradiction supplied is not the result of an error; the true and false verdicts can both quite properly be logically derived from the stated proposition.

This contradiction arises whenever a discourse self-reflexively throws its own truth into doubt. Beckett's texts are thus thoroughly infected with it. The ultimate renunciation of all the narrative facts of How It Is, for example, is rendered contradictory because that renunciation is, and must be, contained within How It Is itself:

> all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story

from beginning to end yes completely false yes

that wasn't how it was no not at all no how then no answer how was it then no answer HOW WAS IT screams good

there was something yes but nothing of all that no all balls from start to finish yes this voice quaqua yes all balls yes

(Beckett, 1964, p.158)

If 'the whole story from beginning to end' is 'completely false', then this assertion, being part of the 'whole story' itself, falls within the range of what it dismisses as 'completely false'. Therefore, if we believe this statement to be true, then we must admit that it is, as truthfully stated, also 'completely false'. Alternatively, if we believe the statement to be false, then by admitting that the 'whole story', including itself, is indeed 'completely false', the assertion must be conceded true after all. If true, the statement is false; if false, it is also true. When Beckett's narratives attempts to cancel themselves from within, the result is just this paradox. According to <u>The Calmative</u>:

All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing.

(Beckett, 1984, p.36)

If 'All' is to be cancelled, this instruction to cancel must be struck out too. A self-reflexive 'stet' (Beckett, 1959, p.373) spirals into paradox. A phrase in <u>Texts for Nothing</u> triples the

liar paradox within its own statement:

> here there is no frankness, all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me [...].
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text VIII, p.97)

The impasse is soon conceded:

> ah if no were content to cut yes's throat and never cut its own.
>
> (Beckett, 1984, Text VIII, p.98)

We encounter, and must try to follow, 'so many times the same lie lyingly denied' (Beckett, 1984, Text XIII, pp.114-115).

In Ill Seen Ill Said, the assertion 'Scrapped all the ill seen ill said' (Beckett, 1982, p.51) scraps itself. In Watt, Arsene's tale of a Mr. Ash's protracted unbuttoning of garments to reach a 'gunmetal half-hunter' in order to inform Arsene of the time (an inquiry Arsene never made) unfolds into a lesson concerning the unreliability of 'all information':

> he [...] sprang open its case, held it to his eyes (night was falling), [...] said, Seventeen minutes past five exactly, as God is my witness, remember me to your wife (I never had one), let go my arm, raised his hat and hastened away. A moment later Big Ben (is that the name?) struck six. This in my opinion is the type of all information

whatsoever, be it voluntary or solicited.

(Beckett, 1976, p.44)

But if 'all information whatsoever' is unreliable, this piece of information concerning information must also condemn itself to unreliability. As Worstward Ho recognizes, if 'all' is cancelled or undermined, the cancellation or undermining must also apply to itself:

Say all gone. So on. In the skull all gone. All? No. All cannot go.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.25)

All? If of all of it too.

(Beckett, 1983b, p.18)

Narrative statements must impact upon themselves when they attempt to cancel the narrative in its entirety. They replicate precisely the self-reflexive movement which sets up the liar paradox.

A version of the liar paradox might in fact be extracted from the unsound structure of this thesis. Given the confessed unreliability of Chapters One to Four, it might be inquired why Chapters Five and Six, which detail that unreliability, should themselves be exempt from the very proclivity to unreliability they uncover. Accordingly, when the final chapter here actually finds itself back within a self-defeating loop, it might

conceivably be rescued by a re-description as 'Beckettian' rather than incompetent. As threatened in the Introduction, the criticism of Martin Esslin, with all its knots and paradoxes, could also be rehabilitated if it were thought to demonstrate an exemplary performative sympathy with the contradictory modes of the Beckettian text. A paradoxical critical response to Beckett's 'paradoxical world view' (Breuer, 1993, p.560) is not inappropriate. Contradictory deadlock in criticism could be judged a satisfactory conclusion to an account of a writer for whom 'The characteristic position of consciousness is [...] an impasse' (Wheatley, 1994, p.137). All might yet be well, if contradiction and paradox could be awarded paradigmatic status in Beckett's work. And, according to Breuer, it is indeed 'paradoxicality' which informs 'the deep structure of Beckett's works' (Breuer, 1993, pp.561-562). Regarding How It Is, Levy too identifies paradox as an essential principle in Beckettian analysis:

> Demanding resolution, the paradoxes work as an alembic, distilling the fundamental elements out of what seems to be a shapeless sprawl. They reveal some way of comprehending that apparent formlessness, some principle of structure and coherence.
>
> (Levy, 1975, p.27)

The implications of adopting paradox as the essential organizing principle or deep structure of Beckett's work need, however, to be pursued just a little further to clarify exactly why, as an

interpretative option, adoption of such a principle is finally unavailable to this thesis, whatever aid it might offer Esslin.

Levy provides the fatal blow:

> The search for such a principle is the charge of metaphysics and Beckett pursues it unremittingly.
>
> (Levy, 1975, p.27)

Far from acting as disruptive elements, paradox and contradiction can once more operate as metaphysical principles, bringing order where once was merely 'formlessness' and 'shapeless sprawl' (Levy, 1975, p.27). For example, Baudrillard's description of 'the world' as torn between the 'radical antagonism' of irreducible contradictory opposites translates into a blatantly metaphysical diagnosis:

> The world is not dialectical - it is sworn to extremes, not to equilibrium, sworn to radical antagonism, not to reconciliation or synthesis.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1990, p.7)

This degree of abstract transcendence qualifies as metaphysical speculation. If paradox, impasse, contradiction and aporia are not to be counted as insignificant and contingent errors in argument here, they must indeed be considered essential, inevitable and irreducible, as Baudrillard and Levy advocate. But if so considered, such terms are elevated to a status

functionally indistinguishable from metaphysical principles. For a thesis which seeks to critique metaphysical readings of Beckett, the appeal to such metaphysical terms to sustain its own reading of Beckett is, maddeningly, contradictory, aporetic and self-defeating.

Nevertheless, this outcome should not be used to confirm the inevitability of self-defeat. If contradiction is made essential to discourse, rather than signalling the existence of contingent argumentative flaws, then all rational checks against unadulterated nonsense have lapsed. Such manifest illogicality has consequences:

> To be illogical [...] is to be stupid, or to be incoherent, or to be insufficiently concerned about truth, or all three together.
>
> (Flew, 1975, p.21)

Theses should undoubtedly attempt to refrain from such behaviour. Contradiction should confirm the presence of error rather than the inevitable workings of a venerable philosophical tradition. The other option considered as a concluding insight will have to be tried. Non-significance must make its case.

ii. The point of non-significance

To treat the errors of Chapters One to Four as contingent and accidental will at least thwart any attempt to recuperate

them as examples of a species of self-defeat around which metaphysical credentials might, with ingenuity, be made to accrue. These errors must be condemned as unforced, rather than justified as inevitable contradictions. They should not permit of systematic explanation, but be irreducibly particular in the varieties of misapprehension they promote. Systematic self-defeat hears 'the call of that ignorance which might be noble'; random error, by contrast, can resist significance by falling into 'mere poltroonery' (Beckett, 1959, p.189). The wish of W1 in Play must be fulfilled:

> If only I could think, There is no sense in this [...], none whatsoever.
>
> (Beckett, 1986, p.314)

The bewildering arbitrariness of Mr Knott might be a model:

> Knott [...] says 'tweet' and 'plopf.' He says 'Exelmans!' and 'Cavendish!' He has a gardener named Graves. He has a bad piano. He watches a worm and bird. He climbs a tree.
>
> Watt cannot say just what this means.
>
> (Abbott, 1973, p.70)

Only this degree of senselessness can secure Watt a respite from his relentless efforts at systematic explication. The second option pursued here swaps irreducible, and potentially meaningful, contradiction for irreducible, and arbitrary, particularity. It courts not philosophical profundity but its

opposite, unsystematized non-significance.

It is the paltry narrative offcuts which Abbott recounts, those not worth fitting into any explicative critical hypothesis, which, by default, escape the burden of being significant. The Unnamable calls such details 'superfluous particulars' (Beckett, 1959, p.364). It is such 'superfluous particulars' which mar that narrator's explanatory hypotheses concerning the dire fate of Mahood's extended family. The technical cause for their mass demise can be, if the narrator so chooses, 'sausage-poisoning' (Beckett, 1959, p.320). That we should also be referred to 'the fatal corned-beef' (Beckett, 1959, p.326), however, is a troublesome detail. The method of dispatch could scarcely matter less; these base and arbitrary particulars are undoubtedly superfluous. They are also undoubtedly anomalous and disruptive to the general narrative line the narrator wishes to communicate. Similarly, all manner of 'significance' may be attached to the abstractions which go into the making of 'Worm' in The Unnamable, but the unmotivated particularity of his stated destination is more conducive to nonplussed bafflement:

> But the eye, let's leave him his eye too, it's to see with, this great wild black and white eye, moist, it's to weep with, it's to practise with, before he goes to Killarney.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.362)

It seems neither essential to his concept, nor in any other way significant, that Worm, once completed, should be despatched to

Killarney. Equally, it is not certain that Pozzo's inexplicable suspicion that Vladimir and Estragon might be 'Highwaymen!' (Beckett, 1986, p.79) can be further systematized. The interpretation of Endgame that can smoothly account for Hamm's singular inquiry, 'No phone calls?' (Beckett, 1986, p.97), has probably not yet been formulated. It is these 'dismal details which scorn conceptualization' (Adorno, 1969, p.92) that cause perturbation to systematic textual explication. As Molloy confesses, 'observations', or particularity, can leave one 'doubting the possibility of systematic decorum, even within a limited area' (Beckett, 1959, p.25). Let us, for once, not be content with paradigms.

It is not essential that this thesis should commit the errors that it does in fact perpetrate. It might be refreshing to discover, as the narrator of Dream of Fair to Middling Women does, that all one's travails 'epitomised nothing' (Beckett, 1993, p.126). Upon this account, Knowlson's version of the actual circumstances surrounding Beckett's work on The Lost Ones might relieve Chapters Four, Five and Six of many worries concerning the significance of that text's inconsistent narrative specifications. While on holiday, Beckett worked on one section of Le Dépeupleur without access to earlier manuscript versions:

In the first week, he managed to write only ten lines. It was hard to concentrate on this text, Le Dépeupleur, which had become complex and intractable. One of the problems was that, on holiday, it was impossible to hold in his mind all

the details of what he had written earlier in his notebooks.

(Knowlson, 1996, p.542)

The presence of inconsistencies in the text of The Lost Ones may have just this simple and empirical explanation, an explanation to which no broader theoretical significance whatsoever can be attached.[1] The respite offered by contentment with the non-significant should not be underrated.

To continue these simple pleasures, we require 'the sort of unreclaimable details which ridicule [...] conceptual "recoup"' (Wheatley, 1994, p.144), that is, examples of the random, arbitrary and singular. All Strange Away offers a sample enumeration:

> imagine as needed, unsupported interjections, ancient Greek philosophers ejaculated with place of origin when possible [...], completed propositions such as, She is not here, the exception, imagine others, This is not possible, there is one, in here another of exceptional length, In a hammock in the sun and here the name of some bewitching site she lies

---

[1] Empirical analysis of Beckett's manuscripts for Le Dépeupleur might settle this question. Despite advocating the merits of empirical investigation at every turn, and concomitantly depreciating the reliability of unanchored theoretical speculation, this thesis engages in the latter throughout and makes no attempt to undertake the former. Equally, however, empirical analysis might settle nothing. Any given state of the empirical evidence, as argued in Chapter One, can support a multiplicity of conflicting theoretical determinations; that the occurrence of inconsistencies in the text of The Lost Ones was accidental remains, in Knowlson's account too, a theoretical judgement which is underdetermined by the available material evidence.

sleeping.

(Beckett, 1984, p.122)

Regarding Jack B. Yeats, Beckett wrote of a 'Strangeness so entire as even to withstand the stock assimilations' (Beckett, 1983a, p.149); the interpretation which could assimilate the fragments offered by All Strange Away above is not obviously apparent. Thus, in so far as it attempts to render 'senselessness more comprehensible' (Weiner, 1990, p.274), critical explication itself should be rejected so that the integrity of such strangeness may be respected. Esslin's criticism, for example, is not so respectful. Instead, it assimilates the random and non-significant under the general conceptual category of the Absurd; as such, the random and non-significant are set to interpretative work and, concomitantly, negated. Lukács' choice of citation from Nadeau, however, explicitly employed to condemn Beckett's work, can be re-deployed to celebrate its peculiar resistance to 'the lenitive of comment' (Beckett, 1983a, p.149):

> '[...] the author has not only made plain his intention not to say anything; he has succeeded in not saying anything. [...]'
>
> (Nadeau cited in Lukács, 1962, p.66)

Confirming failure and non-significance, Lukács and Nadeau at least allow accusations of Beckett's metaphysical profundity to lapse. Nor is failure invoked as 'spice to the "exploit" it

jeopardised' (Beckett, 1965, p.111), so that actual success might appear more triumphant. Lukács, if not Nadeau, means to convict Beckett of genuine failure. Beckett's Malone Dies encourages the accusation:

> I began again. But little by little with a different aim, no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail. Nuance.
>
> (Beckett, 1959, p.195)

Under these terms, failure is the criterion of success. But, disastrously, when to fail means to succeed, the guarantee of non-significance, via the random acts of incompetence which ensure failure, is lost. When failure and non-significance are converted into desiderata, they effect their own negation. As soon as non-significance is sought and valued, perhaps as the conclusion for a thesis, non-significance is of the highest importance. The second option for a conclusion, the cultivation of non-significance, reduces into merely an example of the first, irreducible self-defeat. Beckett's transformative 'Nuance' above shows the logical route straight back into this familiar impasse of self-defeat, and, surprisingly, Kantian philosophy.

iii. That again: self-defeat and Kant

Worstward Ho lays out the scheme by which self-defeating procedures yet again emerge:

> All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
>
> (Beckett, 1983b, p.7)

The compound instruction 'Fail better' contains a conceptual impasse within itself. Simultaneously, it advocates an attempt to fail less and, oppositely, an attempt to fail more completely. Moreover, if the latter option is chosen, and one also retains the deliberate 'aim [...] to fail' (Beckett, 1959, p.195), then a more complete failure translates back into its opposite, a more complete success. The liar paradox is recast: to fail is also to succeed; to succeed is simultaneously to fail. In Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, Beckett uses this very 'fidelity to failure' to define the success of the artist:

> van Velde is [...] the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.
>
> (Beckett, 1965, p.125)

The paradoxes attendant upon such a re-definition of failure as the highest achievement of art lead variously to B.'s speechless stupefaction (Beckett, 1965, p.103), his ignominious 'Exit weeping' (Beckett, 1965, p.113) and entanglement in 'an unenviable situation, familiar to psychiatrists' (Beckett, 1965, p.126). These same paradoxes, however, also lead back to Kant's aesthetic philosophy.

The Kantian sublime, that most exalted aesthetic state, should be the speciality of the Beckettian artist devoted to failure. The sublime, Kant argues, is 'connected [...] with a representation in which we would least of all look for it - a representation, namely, that lets us see its own inadequacy' (Kant, 1952, Part I, §26, p.100). Throughout Three Dialogues, Beckett is concerned with the inexpressible; in parallel, throughout the aesthetic theories elaborated in the Critique of Judgement, the sublime is defined by Kant as unpresentable. The sublime permits only of negative invocation:

> the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation.
>
> (Kant, 1952, Part I, §23, p.92)

The only art which may succeed in invoking intimations of the sublime is precisely that which advertises its own inadequacy. For Kant as well as Beckett, if art is to succeed in its highest end, it must simultaneously fail. Failure is the precondition of its success.

While explicitly referring to the Kantian sublime, Lyotard below also accurately describes 'that impoverished painting, "authentically fruitless, incapable of any image whatsoever"'

(Beckett, 1965, p.113) to which B. aspires in Three Dialogues:

> As painting, it will of course 'present' something though negatively; it will therefore avoid figuration or representation. It will be 'white' like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see only by making it impossible to see; it will please only by causing pain. One recognizes in those instructions the axioms of avant-gardes in painting, inasmuch as they devote themselves to making an allusion to the unpresentable by means of visible presentations.
>
> (Lyotard, 1984a, p.78)

Beckett's account of the 'avant-gardes in painting' in Three Dialogues, anticipates the paradoxical formulations of Lyotard and arguably owes them to the same source in Kantian aesthetics. For both Kant and Lyotard, 'allusion to the unpresentable' can only be made negatively, for the attempted positive expression in art of the unpresentable, of the ineffable, of what we have been calling here the metaphysical, precipitates the breakdown of the representative faculty itself. That breakdown may signal actual meaninglessness or the presence of unfulfilled metaphysical ambition. Any ambition positively to represent the unpresentable, the ineffable or the metaphysical must fail. This is what Kant confirms via epistemological analysis in the Critique of Pure Reason. The application of the Kantian arguments found there to Beckett's works ended in Chapter Six, amid accusations of Kant's self-defeating complicity with the

very metaphysical assumptions which he critiques. But the Kantian critique of metaphysics is re-confirmed in the aesthetic theories elaborated in his Critique of Judgement. The relationship of the Critique of Judgement, not to Beckett's literary works, but instead to his aesthetic criticism, principally Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, 'Les Deux Besoins', 'Les Peinture des van Velde' and 'Peintres de l'Empêchement', must be of central importance to any final conclusion as to the conceptual territory shared by Kant and Beckett. The nature and extent of this relationship is another field worthy of critical investigation. This thesis will not attempt to chart this new territory further.

Appendix

Allegorical readings of The Lost Ones

Allegorical reading of The Lost Ones was depreciated in Chapter Four for its transcendence of the terms of the text. In its essential impulse to introduce coherence to such a text, to make sense of disparate textual items under the guidance of a unifying interpretation, allegorical reading may be deemed especially unsuitable for a text fractured by contradictions and inconsistencies. As a concession to the wrongs of allegorical readings in relation to The Lost Ones, this Appendix juxtaposes, without any attempt at integration, a series of fragments from The Lost Ones and some possible allegorical identifications which may be attached to them. Transcendence remains a features of these readings; coherence does not.

Resonances may be suggested firstly between elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy and The Lost Ones. Recognition of the narrator and Schopenhauer's shared liking for the term 'aperçu' aids an appreciation of the irony involved with the former's use of the term. For Schopenhauer, 'all [...] great discoveries' are 'the work of an insight, an aperçu, a sudden idea' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §6, p.21). The qualities of clarity and immediacy of understanding which Schopenhauer associates with the aperçu are pointedly absent from the 'insights' the narrator chooses to classify under this term. Ladders and their stolen rungs, objects of fraught consequence in the cylinder, also interest Schopenhauer under the heading of 'insight':

for the man who studies to gain <u>insight</u>, books and studies are merely rungs of the ladder on which he climbs to the summit of knowledge. As soon as the rung has raised him one step, he leaves it behind. On the other hand, the many who study in order to fill their memory do not use the rungs of the ladder for climbing, but take them off and load themselves with them to take away, rejoicing at the increasing weight of the burden. They remain below for ever, because they bear what should have borne them.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.80)

The ladders themselves and the purloined rungs thereof are respectively arranged and missing 'without regard to harmony' (Beckett, 1972, p.9; p.10); elsewhere, however, the narrator's concern that the specifications of his cylinder be adjusted 'for the sake of harmony' (Beckett, 1972, p.7), finds a parodic echo in Schopenhauer's tribute to the 'unity' and 'harmony' to be observed organizing 'the endless diversity and multiplicity of [...] phenomena' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §28, p.154). As an example of 'this <u>consensus naturae</u> we see everywhere', Schopenhauer directs attention to the fact that 'The eye is well adapted to light and its refrangibility' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.1, §28, p.159). The narrator of <u>The Lost Ones</u> prefers to dwell on 'the slow deterioration of vision' attendant upon the inability of his creatures' eyes to adapt to the cylinder's 'fiery flickering murk' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). The narrator's contention that 'all is for the best' within the world of the cylinder (Beckett, 1972, p.42), calls up Schopenhauer's

determination to establish logically that the actual world 'is as bad as it can possibly be, if it is to exist at all':

> against the palpably sophistical proofs of Leibniz that this is the best of all possible worlds,[1] we may even oppose seriously and honestly the proof that it is the worst of all possible worlds. For possible means not what we may picture in our imagination, but what can actually exist and last. Now this world is arranged as it had to be if it were to be capable of continuing to exist. Consequently, since a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible; and so this world itself is the worst of all

---

[1] One part of Leibniz's proof that the existing world is the best of all possible options, runs as follows:

> 53. Now as there is an infinite number of possible universes in the ideas of God, and as only one can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, determining him to one rather than to another.
>
> 54. And this reason can only be found in the fitness, or in the degrees of perfection, which these worlds contain, each possible world having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection which it involves.
>
> 55. And it is this which causes the existence of the best, which God knows through his wisdom, chooses through his goodness, and produces through his power.
>
> (Leibniz, 1973, §53-55, p.187)

The creator of The Lost Ones operates according to opposing principles; as Rosen argues, the typically Beckettian gesture is to inaugurate 'a world system in which all works out perfectly for the worst' (Rosen, 1976, p.108). The 'seriousness of Beckett's philosophical preoccupations', as Rosen further remarks, 'manifests itself in his need to disparage other philosophers, like Leibniz, whose views most contemporary artists simply ignore' (Rosen, 1976, p.153). Leibniz's central principle of pre-established harmony, which organizes such matters in Watt as the interchange of servants in Mr Knott's establishment and the chorus of croaking frogs, is there re-described as 'a pre-established arbitrary' (Beckett, 1976, p.132). Arrangements for 'the sake of harmony' (Beckett, 1972, p.7) amid the inconsistent and contradictory terms of The Lost Ones ensures that Leibniz's principle emerges as an entirely ironic cipher.

possible worlds.

(Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.583)

If the narrator does indeed think the 'unthinkable end' of the cylinder (Beckett, 1972, p.60), his previous notes upon the abode must be counted among 'the records of worlds whose continuance was no longer possible' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.584). If destined to end, the abode becomes under Schopenhauer's terms 'somewhat worse than the worst of possible worlds' (Schopenhauer, 1966, vol.2, p.584).

Ironic sparks can also be struck between The Lost Ones and the delineation of statecraft in Rousseau's Social Contract (1762). Under the political system recommended by Rousseau, an 'act of association' undertaken by 'each contracting party [...] creates a corporate and collective body' which receives 'from this act its unity, its common identity, its life, and its will' (Rousseau, 1973, p.175). The 'key to the working of the political machine' in Rousseau's account is to be found in the rule that following this act of association 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body' (Rousseau, 1973, p.177). The queue in the cylinder violated by the attentions of a searcher disrespectful of the general declaration of their lawful 'immunity' (Beckett, 1972, p.59) may employ such a collective sanction: 'Like a single body the whole queue falls on the offender' (Beckett, 1972, p.60). The right accorded by Rousseau to the 'the whole body' to enforce order, which in individual hands 'would be absurd, tyrannical and

liable to the most frightful abuses' (Rousseau, 1973, p.177), translates in the cylinder into one of its most spectacular 'scenes of violence' (Beckett, 1972, p.60). Ill-advised 'infractions' against the ladder laws too, 'unleash against the culprit a collective fury' (Beckett, 1972, p.21), a fury, that is, specially modified to appeal to the prerogative granted by Rousseau to the 'collective'. The narrator judges the 'presence of properties serving no purpose' as 'intolerable' (Beckett, 1972, p.23); Rousseau recommends that 'the right of property' should incorporate reference to the 'labour and cultivation' of that claimed for individual possession (Rousseau, 1973, p.179). In matters of religion or cult, Rousseau deems that 'a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles' is appropriate (Rousseau, 1973, p.276); the narrator obligingly offers a choice of 'credence', trap-door exit or tunnel, and is moved to comment upon the 'fatuous little light' (Beckett, 1972, pp.19-20) that these twin inventions accord the faithful. The narrator also conforms to the role of Rousseau's legislator, that 'superior function, which has nothing in common with the human empire' (Rousseau, 1973, p.195). The quality of transcendent observation required of the legislator describes the narrator's preferred version of his own position in relation to his creatures:

> In order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence beholding all the passions of men without experiencing any of them would be needed. This intelligence would have to be wholly unrelated to our

> nature, while knowing it through and through [...] It would take gods to give men laws.
>
> (Rousseau, 1973, p.194)

Accordingly, to facilitate the practical possibility of inaugurating statutes, Rousseau's legislators, taking a note from Machiavelli, are free to claim 'recourse to divine intervention and credit the gods with their own wisdom', if such a shift might persuade 'the common herd' to 'bear with docility the yoke of public happiness' (Rousseau, 1973, p.196). In order to perceive certain facts readily perceived by the narrator of The Lost Ones, 'one must be in the secret of the gods' (Beckett, 1972, p.19). If the objective is to cultivate authority, however, one may indeed agree with the narrator's next line, that 'This shift has logic on its side' (Beckett, 1972, p.19). Where information is 'had [...] from God', after all, we should be able to 'rely on its being accurate in every particular' (Beckett, 1970b, p.9); access to a plurality of gods in consort should only increase accuracy. For Rousseau, population, territory and the viability of a state are interrelated calculations:

> A body politic may be measured in two ways - either by the extent of its territory, or by the numbers of its people; and there is, between these two measurements, a right relation which makes the State really great. The men make the State, and the territory sustains the men; the right relation therefore is that the land should suffice for the maintenance of the inhabitants, and that there should be as

many inhabitants as the land can maintain.

(Rousseau, 1973, p.201)

The reliance of Rousseau's reckonings upon ratios provide an additional factor which can fluctuate in harmony with the instability of population in the cylinder. That Rousseau's performance in political theory in the Social Contract can be described as 'confused and unclear' (Thompson, 1969, p.99), incorporating the provision of assertions which 'simply [do] not fit with other things he has to say' (Thompson, 1969, p.99) but rather demonstrate 'great internal psychological tensions and intellectual conflicts' (Thompson, 1969, p.103), does not mar a case for an allegorical relation between Rousseau and The Lost Ones.

Similarly, the translators and editors of Schiller's treatise On the Aesthetic Education of Man (1795) recommend a strategy of establishing links between assertions peculiarly consonant with that demanded by The Lost Ones:

> Whether the appropriate analogy is with any kind of mathematical structure may for the time being remain an open question. But some highly organized system of relations, with its own built-in controls, is certainly there. [...] [T]he translator rapidly acquires the habit of looking backwards and forwards, and backwards again, in search of illumination. [...] And he cannot for long pursue this comparative activity without becoming aware that Schiller's

> treatise abounds in contradictions far more flagrant than any hitherto observed.
>
> (Wilkinson and Willoughby, 1967, pp.xlviii-xlix)

The illumination offered by a methodology of comparison between assertions, and the inferences which may be drawn from them, in The Lost Ones similarly leads to the acknowledgement of a highly developed faculty of contradiction. Where isolated statements do not collapse themselves, a further aperçu on the subject from the narrator can often be trusted to rectify this momentary coherence. In Schiller too, while following the path of a particular assertion through the text, one risks encountering its 'exact opposite':

> Can Schiller really have forgotten from one Letter to the next? Or from the first paragraph to the last? It seems unlikely. Such contraries are so frequent, so flagrant, and often so symmetrically placed, that it would seem far more more plausible to assume that they are of the order of deliberate paradox rather than of inadvertent self-contradiction.
>
> (Wilkinson and Willoughby, 1967, p.xlix)

In such treatises, it is indeed plausible to be assured that flagrant self-contradiction can be rescued by redefinition as mere paradoxes which may be transcended to yield a sensible and internally consistent meaning. The availability of such a built-in exit-clause in relation to The Lost Ones cannot be guaranteed.

In Schiller, 'A labyrinth has been devised for leading [the reader] to the centre and out again' (Wilkinson and Willoughby, 1967, p.lvii); in both its narrative content and narrative strategies, The Lost Ones is instead concerned to problematize the availability of a way out.

The achievement of a final harmony regulates both the form and content of Schiller's treatise: formally, elements are ultimately to work in concord to assert a thesis stating the advantages of a harmonious integration of intellectual and sensory faculties in the individual and a parallel external integration between individuals thus harmonized. Harmony, organicism and wholeness organize Schiller's utopia; an artificially regulated mechanism is its negation:

> That polypoid character of the Greek States, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the whole organism, now made way for an ingenious clock-work, in which, out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical kind of collective life ensued.
>
> (Schiller, 1967, p.35)

As the clock-work of The Lost Ones achieves an ingenious disorder, the cylinder may under Schiller's terms, as under those of Schopenhauer, exhibit properties of a world rather worse than the worst possible. Like the narrator, Schiller installs a hierarchy of categories through which 'the individual and the

species as a whole must pass [...] if they are to complete the full cycle of their destiny' (Schiller, 1967, p.171). The progression through graduations envisaged by Schiller, however, occurs 'inevitably and in a definite order':

> these several periods may indeed be either lengthened or shortened, but no one of them can be left out altogether; nor can the order in which they follow upon each other be reversed, neither by the power of nature nor by that of the will.
>
> (Schiller, 1967, p.171)

Such regularity and irreversibility is what the narrator concedes 'An intelligence would be tempted to see' (Beckett, 1972, p.33) informing the progress of a lost one from lowest searcher to vanquished. However, 'experience' teaches him greater flexibility, for the 'ill-vanquished' may relapse to the 'sedentary' wherein may also be counted 'a few chronic waverers' (Beckett, 1972, p.34); moreover, as has been seen in the lower echelons:

> 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 to four skipping three.
>
> (Beckett, 1972, p.34)

The highest state envisaged by Schiller is that which achieves within one of its sub-stages a 'complete absence of

determination' (Schiller, 1967, p.129); accordingly:

> the Greeks [...] banished from the brow of the blessed gods all the earnestness and effort which furrow the cheeks of mortals [... and] freed those ever-contented beings from the bonds inseparable from every purpose, every duty, every care, and made idleness and indifferency the enviable portion of divinity - merely a more human name for the freest, most sublime state of being.
>
> (Schiller, 1967, p.109)

The sublime freedom achieved by the vanquished of the cylinder, via a parallel transcendence of 'inclination' and 'violation' (Schiller, 1967, p.109), is such that 'They may be walked on without their reacting' (Beckett, 1972, p.29). This feature of achieved wisdom is notable for its absence from both Schiller and Schopenhauer's catalogue of the advantages accrued by the cultivation of ascetic indifference.

Remarks of Augustine point to yet another allegorical route. A faculty to apply distinctions beyond the power of 'the eye of flesh' (Beckett, 1972, p.31) is claimed by both narrator and Augustine:

> [...] I saw Your unchangeable Light shining over that [...] eye of my soul, over my mind. It was not the light of every day that the eye of flesh can see, nor some greater light of the same order, such as might be if the brightness of our

> daily light should be seen shining with a more intense brightness and filling all things with its greatness. Your Light was not that, but other, altogether other, than all such lights.
>
> (Augustine, 1944, p.113)

The narrator might be permitted to enter Augustine's discourse upon light armed with the apposite and concise conclusion that 'light is not the word' (Beckett, 1972, p.40).

Alternatively, Augustine's light of the understanding might be co-opted towards the 'light of the imagination' credited to the narrator by Levy:

> The light in the cylinder corresponds perfectly to the narrator's omniscience. It illumines every surface, including the interior of the tunnels. [...] It is uniform because nothing imagined is hidden to the imagination.
>
> (Levy, 1980, pp.98-99)

A perfect correspondence between omniscience and the light of the cylinder might be spoiled by the narrator's further statement that this light 'not only dims but blurs into the bargain' and results in both a 'the slow deterioration of vision' and an 'incessant straining for ever vain with concomitant moral distress' (Beckett, 1972, p.38). The cylinder as an allegory of the interior of the mind, however, is a popular one: Brienza considers its 'physical niches and mazes' suggestive of 'mental

convolutions' (Brienza, 1987a, p.31). Amiran documents 'rudimentary parallels with Murphy', and particularly its sixth chapter's rudimentary zoning of Murphy's mind, which 'suggest that the world of the cylinder is - not surprisingly - a microcosmic mind' (Amiran, 1993, p.166). Despite finding, in the style of the narrator, that 'Other details support this notion' (Amiran, 1993, p.166), Amiran is also able to reveal, somewhat inconsistently and thus also in the style of the narrator, that 'The organization of life in the cylinder works out a model of the Neoplatonic cycle' (Amiran, 1993, p.167). There are indeed many pigeon-holes into which The Lost Ones may be stuffed by the 'analogymongers' (Beckett, 1961, p.4).

The main discussion in Chapter Four attempts to give reasons why such potentially allegorical fragments should be confined to an Appendix. It may be admitted here that the fact that details culled from The Lost Ones for the purpose of these suggestions are subject to revision, are ambiguous or clash with other details, does not aid the allegorist's cause. To use Beckett's formulation of allegorical relations, when the 'fabulous form' which should house the 'message of general significance' cannot itself be securely determined, the 'technical difficulty in uniting the two' is considerably heightened (Beckett, 1961, p.12). In the attempt to attach an allegory to the unstable terms of The Lost Ones there is little danger of making 'a really tidy job of it' (Beckett, 1961, p.3).

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