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What Matter Who's Speaking: Samuel Beckett and the Author-function

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for Sarah

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Abstract

The post-structuralist incarnation of Beckett Studies has promoted Beckett as a radically "anti-authorial" writer who resists or subverts the traditional prerogatives of authorship. At the same time, however, essays, books and conferences devoted solely to Beckett continue to proliferate. I try to account for this situation, not through a reading of Beckett's texts, but through a reading of "Beckett" as an author-function. I wish to resist the notion of a subversive Beckett appropriated by the cultural mainstream, by tracing the discursive limits of avant-garde writing, and by exploring how Beckett paradoxically reinforced the traditional author-function even as he appeared to challenge it.

There are two main ways of considering the author-function: as a discursive and as an economic category. The two main sections of the thesis reflect this division.

The first is an extended discussion of the work of Michel Foucault. Beckett is prominently quoted in both Foucault's major essays on the author-function, in what has always been seen as a confirmation of Beckett's subversive anti-authorialism. However, I argue that "What Is an Author?" in fact marks Foucault's rejection of avant-garde literature and the notion of writing as transgressive: the quotation of Beckett's "What matter who's speaking" must therefore be taken as profoundly ironic. So too, "The Order of Discourse" prompts a consideration of the distinction between the discursive roles of teacher and author: as a teacher, Foucault must accept the obligation to speak, to explain; as an author, however, Beckett famously remained silent, explained nothing.

The second section explores the relation between aesthetic and economic discourses of value. I discuss how the logic of the collection constructs Beckett's oeuvre as ahistorical, autonomous, and self-contained. In a reading of *Murphy* and the novellas I argue that Beckett's "aesthetics of impoverishment" depends on a cultural politics of the inheritance, whereby labour and the commodity economy is avoided in favour of idleness and an economy of the gift.

I end by suggesting that anti-authorial readings end up "transcendentalising" Beckett, a tendency best countered by focussing, neither on the text nor on the author, but on the space of their conjunction: the writer at work.

Statement

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Russell Smith
16 September 2000

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What Matter Who's Speaking:
Samuel Beckett and the Author-function

Introduction

BORGES AND I

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment, perhaps mechanically now, to look at the arch of an entrance hall and the grillwork on the gate; I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary. I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor. It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me. It is no effort for me to confess that he has achieved some valid pages, but those pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to him, but rather to the language and to tradition. Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. Little by little, I am giving over everything to him, though I am quite aware of his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things. Spinoza knew that all things long to persist in their being; the stone eternally wants to be a stone and the tiger a tiger. I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him.

I do not know which of us has written this page.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*

(Borges 1986, 282-83)

"Someone"

I remember as child climbing with my parents to the top of a famous lookout. I no longer remember the place, or the fabled magnificence of the view, but there must have been a sheer drop below us, for there was a guardrail over which I leaned. What I remember now, however, is not the exhilarating vertigo of great height, but the queer and unpleasant vertigo I experienced when I read the words written in large black letters on the metal rail: I WAS HERE BUT I DIDN'T WRITE THIS. I remember the fearful apprehension these words caused me, as I tried to think what demonic power might be capable of such a mysterious manifestation. Not daring to speak of my perplexity, I silently tucked the words away in my mind, turning them over and over with troubled agitation, trying to resolve the doubt and terror they instilled. No doubt I eventually satisfied myself that the words were not, in fact, some sort of evil spell cast by a malevolent magician, but the clever work of an ordinary mortal with no apparent ulterior motive. But I remember, too, that for a long time I remained impressed by the sheer genius of the anonymous writer who, in the midst of TODD & WAYNE 1971 and STEVE 4 ALISON 4 EVER, had contrived something so extraordinary, so baffling, so bewilderingly complex in the space of so few words. It was, perhaps, one of those rare moments when I experienced, in all its terror and excitement, a genuine leap of the understanding, a moment, like the moment many years later when I first saw a page of *Finnegans Wake*, when I was shaken and transformed by the fabulous and demonic power of language.

Is there any essential difference between that perplexing graffito and Borges's little puzzle? After all, even the most elegant of paradoxes is in principle exceedingly simple, a mere matter of the half-twist that transforms an ordinary loop of paper into a Möbius strip. Both the anonymous slogan and Borges's parable would appear to be different variations on the Cretan paradox, the simple assertion "I lie", which, according to Michel Foucault, was "enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth"

(Foucault 1987b, 9). Surely it is the shape of the thought that matters: it seems ungenerous to suggest that one variation is superior to another simply because it was written by a famous author and was published in a book.

But, of course, there *is* a profound difference between the two statements, and that difference turns on precisely the fact that one of them was anonymous and impermanent, and the other was written by a famous author and was published in a book. It is this difference — textually, an incidental one — that constitutes the realm of literature; it is solely the fact of publication that distinguishes Borges's "I do not know which of us has written this page" from the anonymous scrawl: I WAS HERE BUT I DIDN'T WRITE THIS. The difference between the statements boils down, in the end, to the presence or absence of the author-function: it *does* matter who's speaking, and it is solely that fact, and the weight of that fact, that gives Borges's parable its distinction. After all, with the anonymous graffito it is easy to detect the trick, the false copula that links a necessarily true statement, "I was here", with a necessarily false one, "I didn't write this". Borges's parable is a little more carefully constructed, but, like the Möbius strip, the two sides of which constitute a single, continuous surface, the resolution of Borges's dilemma is by no means impossible.

Borges's piece distinguishes between two persons, named "Borges" and "I". Grammatically, it must be "I" who has written the page, which the deictic "this" serves only to confirm. The "he", on the other hand, "the other one, the one called Borges", is someone else, somewhere else, temporarily absent, pursuing his vanities. The "I" who speaks is speaking behind "his" back.

Moreover, given that, whatever has been written on the page, some real person had to be there writing it, we may as well assume that that person was the historical person named Jorge Luis Borges. The "I" is — *has to be* — Borges, himself, in the flesh. When the "I" speaks of "the other one", he means "the other Borges", the one who is an author, who is famous, who is read, and written about, and read about (in the biographical dictionary, for instance), and who is *not* flesh and blood, and therefore

not destined to "perish definitively". The "other Borges" is the one we, as readers, know, and all we know is the "other Borges" [1].

It seems logical to assume (although it is strictly only speculation) that, at the moment the piece was written, Borges ("I, Borges") was meditating on his own fame and reputation ("the other Borges"). Being a distinguished writer, he was no doubt entitled to do this, and if his meditation smacks of self-satisfaction, he also chides his alter ego a little for his vanity and his perverse distortions of the truth. All this is, of course, merely speculation: it is equally possible that the magisterial Borges ("the other Borges") is cruelly satirising his so-called "real" self, mocking his sense of affronted dignity, the ignominy of his private existence, the triviality of his timid anxieties.

The paradox and the pleasure of "Borges and I" turns precisely on the distinction between the writer of a text and its author. In this little meditation, an unnamed writer, someone who refers to himself only as "I", tries to steal a moment in which to write, before what he writes inevitably becomes part of the oeuvre of the famous author, Jorge Luis Borges. He fails, of course, but in the end that failure is his business. For us, for you and me as readers, there is only the "other Borges". It makes no sense for us to try to distinguish the "other Borges" from the "real Borges", as I have pretended to do in the previous paragraph: the "real Borges" is always only this stranger, this "someone". We might insist that the real Borges was born in Buenos Aires in 1899, and died in 1986, that, among other things, he was Director of the Argentine National Library, and shared the 1961 International Publishers' Prize

[1] We can imagine, of course, that the piece was written by an understudy, who, in a manner traditional in the visual arts, submitted his or her work to the master for the endorsement of his signature. Borges might have smiled for a moment at his student's cleverness, and happily signed the work as his own. In this situation, the "I", which in the last sentence must necessarily refer to the person writing in the very act of writing, would undoubtedly refer to the nameless understudy, forever lost to history. If so, there would have been a bitter and somewhat clumsy irony in the understudy's mendacious lament: "I do not know which of us has written this page". In these circumstances, Borges might well have resented such a graceless swipe at his authority, and refused to sign the piece. In any case, in the absence of any evidence of the existence of such an understudy, it seems judicious to apply Occam's razor and avoid the multiplication of imaginary entities.

with Samuel Beckett. But these details already belong to the other Borges, and since the "I" who wrote the page has perished definitively, he has lost everything to his double, or to oblivion.

As Michel Foucault points out, every text must necessarily have a writer, but only certain texts have authors (Foucault 1977c, 124). Because he or she is not named or identified, the writer of the anonymous message on the lookout guardrail cannot be an author, and the statement therefore merely makes the false claim, *I am not the writer of this text*. Borges's situation is different, and his apparent paradox might be restated as a straightforward truth: *I am the writer of this text, but Borges is its author*.

Even here, however, things are far from simple. The statement "I do not know which of us has written this page" *must* be disingenuous, since the grammatical function of "I" is precisely to identify the person "who has written this page". It is as much a lie to write, "I do not know which of us has written this page" as it is to write, "I didn't write this". Only an author in the course of writing a fiction would write such a lie as this, but in becoming an author, "I" is no longer itself, is spoken by another, despite the armature of its deictic function. Thus it is that the lie becomes, at least within its own terms, true. It becomes, in other words, fiction. At this level, then, the question of "which of us has written this page" is a meaningful and profoundly searching question, since this "someone" who speaks, and who we assume once to have been Jorge Luis Borges, can no longer be sure that his words will not be usurped by the immortal and all-consuming "other Borges".

This doubling, this "non-self-identity" of the "I" with its own statement, is sometimes elevated to the status of a metaphysical principle, part of the structure of subjectivity *per se*, the essential exile of the self in language, in the non-self-identity of the first person pronoun[2]. In fact, the character of this separation represents nothing more or less than the outline of the author-function, and signifies no more or less than the privilege that we accord to the writers of certain texts.

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[2] This is notion is derived, of course, from Derrida's model of subjectivity, based on the signifying structure of writing, where the subject's imagined self-present identity is always already a self-re-presentation, the repetition of a non-originary difference. See Trezise 1990, 35-36.

For the writer of anonymous graffiti, there can be no author-function, so there can be no self-conscious doubling of the subject of the utterance. "I DIDN'T WRITE THIS" scrawled in a public place might conjure up mysteries for a small boy, but it is hardly replete with the metaphysical profundities of great literature, because, without a signatory, there is no "other I", the separation from whom might form the basis of a meditation on identity and alterity, language and subjectivity.

We are accustomed to the idea that all language, all writing, is impersonal, that the sentimental fiction of the "I" — the subject-in-language — is in reality a fleshless phantom at the heart of whose utterance stirs a glacial indifference. It matters little whether it is Heidegger's *das Man*, Lévinas's *il y a*, Blanchot's *ça* or Derrida's *écriture*, we are accustomed to find in literature confirmation of our estrangement in language, the essential separation of our selves from our words. But isn't this separation really only a product of the special privilege we grant to authored texts?

Blanchot sometimes refers to this non-self-coincidence of the literary "I" as "Someone":

> When I am alone, I am not alone, but, in this present, I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. (Blanchot 1982, 31)

We can only read such a splitting of the grammatical subject, between "I" and "Someone", between the "I" destined to "perish definitively" and the "other Borges" living on to usurp everything, if there is already an author-function ready to receive our anxious imaginings. To be sure, this splitting of the speaking subject is not confined to literary texts, but occurs in various forms of public or recorded utterance, from the famous words of historical figures to the speeches of actors and politicians. But for the anonymous writer of the self-cancelling text I WAS HERE BUT I DIDN'T WRITE THIS, there is no such alibi, no such "Someone". This writer was destined to perish "definitively", that is to say, *anonymously*, and in these words we now discover, not "Someone" or "*ça*" or "*écriture*", but always only "someone".

The Other Beckett

It may seem a little perverse to begin a study of Samuel Beckett with a discussion of a story by Borges. That in the course of that discussion Samuel Beckett is casually mentioned in passing for no apparent reason can only make matters worse. But perhaps, like Borges, we might expect to recognize Beckett less in his own books than in many others, or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. Those of us who never met nor spoke with nor worked with nor corresponded with the man have this privilege: Beckett now belongs to us, to language and tradition.

For us, indeed, the situation of Borges is reversed. The only Beckett we have is the one whom Borges would have called the "other Beckett", the one whose name appears in biographical dictionaries, who liked eggs for breakfast, Jameson's whiskey, the prose of Samuel Johnson, and watching rugby on television, but who liked these things in that same vain way that we now find a little contrived, as if it were the work of an actor trying a little too hard to achieve verisimilitude. Everything — *everything* — now belongs to this "other Beckett": all the books and manuscripts, of course, but also all the anecdotes and reminiscences, all the cups of coffee and the cigarettes, all the hats and coats and bags, the cysts and boils and cataracts and emphysema.

Of the unknown person who "perished definitively" on 22 December 1989 we will always know nothing. It is *he* who is the phantom, the bloodless creature of our imaginings: it is he whom we should call the "other Beckett". For us, the only *real* Beckett is this usurper, this clumsy impersonator, this amalgam of attributes: "Beckett". As Roland Barthes writes:

> Le plaisir du Texte comporte aussi un retour amical de l'auteur. L'auteur qui revient n'est certes pas celui qui a été identifié par nos institutions (histoire et enseignement de la littérature, de la philosophie, discours de l'Église) ; ce n'est même pas le héros d'une biographie. L'auteur qui vient de son texte et va dans notre vie n'a pas d'unité ; il est un simple pluriel de « charmes », le lieu de quelques détails ténus, source cependant de vives lueurs romanesques, un chant discontinu d'amabilités, en quoi néanmoins nous lisons la mort plus sûrement que dans l'épopée d'un destin. … Car s'il faut que par une dialectique retorse il y ait dans le Texte, destructeur de tout sujet, un sujet à aimer, ce sujet est dispersé, un peu comme les cendres que l'on jette

> au vent après la mort. … Si j'étais écrivain, et mort, comme j'aimerais que ma vie se réduisît, par les soins d'un biographe amical et désinvolte, à quelques détails, à quelques goûts, à quelques inflexions, disons : des « biographèmes », dont la distinction et la mobilité pourraient voyager hors de tout destin et venir toucher, à la façon des atomes épicuriens, quelque corps futur, promis à la même dispersion. (Barthes 1971, 13, 14)
>
> The pleasure of the text also involves the amicable return of the author. The author who reappears, however, is no way the same as the one identified by our institutions (the history and teaching of literature and philosophy, the discourse of the Church); nor is he even the hero of a biography. The author who emerges from his text and enters into our lives has no unity; he is simply a series of "charms", the site of a few minor details, at the same time brought to life by certain "novelistic" touches, an intermittent refrain of pleasantries in which, nevertheless, we read the mark of death as surely as in the epic tale of a destiny. For if, as the result of a twisted dialectic, the Text, destroyer of all subjects, nevertheless contains a subject to love — *un sujet à aimer* — this subject is dispersed, a little like the ashes one scatters to the wind after death. … If I were a writer, and dead, how I would love my life to be reduced, by a genial biographer, to a handful of details, particular tastes or turns of phrase, let's call them "biographemes", whose distinctiveness and mobility would allow them to escape all destiny and come to touch, in the manner of Epicurean atoms, some future body, itself destined to the same dispersion.

"Beckett" is an entirely "literary" creation. Although we might convince ourselves that we can come to know something of the "other Beckett", it is always only of "Beckett", the alibi of this nothingness, that we speak:

> For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realised that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. (*Watt* 77)[3]

So too, this whole argument, in its splitting of "Beckett" into two halves — the real flesh-and-blood person, and the series of representations which constitute a kind of "author-function" — is predicated on a false dichotomy. For, as Borges knew, everything now belongs to "Beckett", to language and tradition, and any claims made on behalf of the "real" Beckett (such as the decisions of the Beckett Estate, or the

[3] References to Samuel Beckett's works are by title or short title only. Please refer to the note under "Editions of Samuel Beckett's works" below.

protestations of loyal friends) are really only moves in the game of representations that we call the author-function.

Nevertheless, this notion of some "other Beckett", who stands slightly apart from the familiar set of representations of "Beckett", continues to play a decisive function within the field of Beckett studies, for is it not always in the name of some "other Beckett" that writing on Beckett claims to speak? By this I do not mean that every new piece of writing on Beckett claims to set the record straight about the deceased, or that every new reading of his work claims to speak at last the truth of his intentions or his secrets, conscious and unconscious alike. What I mean is that every new piece of writing on Beckett must in some way carve out, from the immense mass of all that has already been said and written about Beckett, a new space, a new Beckett, another Beckett, an "other Beckett".

The opening of P. J. Murphy's *Reconstructing Beckett* — entitled "Foreword/ Manifesto: The Other Beckett" — might be taken as a typical example:

> The dominant rhetoric of Beckett criticism … has, at best, dealt with only fragments of one aspect of Beckett's literary enterprise and has — almost totally — either missed or misread what might be termed "the other Beckett", whose major achievements lie outside of the guiding principles entrenched in the tradition of Beckett scholarship and, more generally, in Anglo-American criticism of the last three decades. (Murphy 1990, xi)

How often do we read this kind of opening? Since the mid sixties it has virtually become a convention of the genre to begin a discussion of Samuel Beckett's work with, on the one hand a weary acknowledgement of the sheer volume of critical exegesis, and on the other a vigorous denunciation of the irrelevance or worthlessness of the bulk of it. No doubt one of the reasons for the prevalence of this rhetoric is the demand for "originality" as one of the fundamental requirements of the PhD thesis, the source from which many new book-length studies of Beckett emerge. But there is, I think, a deeper kind of logic at work here, since new writers on Beckett inevitably discover a discrepancy between their experience of Beckett through a reading of his works, and "Beckett" the author-function as they receive it from their epoch. It is into the space of this breach — between the old "Beckett" and each new

and different "other Beckett" — that critical writing is repeatedly launched. Already in 1965 Martin Esslin had argued:

> The recognition of the fact that the very existence of such a writer's work is made up of the sum total of the reactions it evokes does not, however, imply that each and every reaction, each and every critical response, is of equal value. While the impact of a text, emotional as well as intellectual, must and will be different on different individuals at different times and in different aspects of a richly structured literary creation existing on a multitude of levels, there are nevertheless definite and effective criteria that will, if only in due time, eliminate the irrelevant, insensitive, or factually mistaken critical evaluations from the body of the organic tradition that is continually forming and renewing itself around the work of a major creative writer. (Esslin 1983a, 90-91)

Nowadays, of course, we might question Esslin's core assumption, the notion that "definite and effective criteria" will eventually "eliminate … from the body of the organic tradition"[4] whatever readings are judged to be irrelevant, insensitive or mistaken. "In due time", of course, the criteria themselves change, in part as a result of the activity of those new critics who offer not only new evaluations but new paradigms of evaluation, and in any case, on that fabled judgement day "in due time" — which from the viewpoint of 1965 might well be the present — how is one to judge current and more recent works, which have not had the benefit of "due time"?

Esslin was writing, of course, with the assumptions and beliefs of another era, and the style, if not also the substance, of his argument has become somewhat dated and shop-worn, as no doubt too will my own and everyone else's, in due time. More useful than Esslin's model of an "organic tradition" — for the moment at least — is the model proposed by Anthony Uhlmann in the introduction to his recent study:

> It might be claimed that just as philosophers are linked as friends of wisdom these thinkers [who attempt to understand the works of Beckett] might usefully be grouped together as "friends of Beckett". Indeed, given that Samuel Beckett died only a few years ago the field includes many critics who literally counted themselves as friends of the man, and these critics, in part because of their real friendships with Beckett, might still be said to be the most prominent in the field. I would also claim that, even amongst those who did not know Beckett personally, even those who claim only to be interested in the works, there is a sense of obligation. This might be

[4] Can this really be intentionally scatological?

> considered to involve fidelity: a friend must, or should, be faithful. … The friends of Beckett are not only faithful to Beckett but see it as part of their duty to check that this faithfulness (be it to the work or the man) is maintained by all the other suitors. Following the line of thought developed by Deleuze and Guattari a little further, the friends become rivals, and the struggles of the rivals turn about notions of fidelity [Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 107]. The question becomes: who is the true friend? (Uhlmann 1999, 2-3)

As opposed to Esslin's model of a critical tradition, where heterodox readings of Beckett will in due course be expelled from its organic body, Uhlmann's model of Beckett studies accounts for the fact that rivalry and contestation are the very fuel that makes the machine run. The very principle of its coherence — the body of writing which bears Beckett's signature — is also the cause of its multiplications and divisions. And at the same time, there is a certain fraternity among these rivals, a definite boundary to the field of their division, since all are united by their different claims of fidelity, their different claims to be "true friends of Beckett".

What Deleuze and Guattari write of the friends of philosophy may equally well stand as a description of the amiable rivalry of Beckett scholars:

> For if the philosopher is the friend or lover of wisdom, is it not because he lays claim to wisdom, striving for it potentially rather than actually possessing it? Is the friend also the claimant then, and is that of which he claims to be the friend the Thing to which he lays claim but not the third party who, on the contrary, becomes a rival? Friendship would then involve competitive distrust of the rival as much as amorous striving toward the object of desire. … It is the rivalry of free men, a generalised athleticism: the agon. Friendship must reconcile the integrity of the essence and the rivalry of claimants. Is this not too great a task? (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 4)

This model, where "truth" — or in our case, the "other Beckett" — is cast as the elusive and ultimately unwinnable object of desire claimed by a series of suitors, is borrowed from Nietzsche's highly sarcastic preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> Supposing truth to be a woman — what? is the suspicion not well founded that all philosophers, when they have been dogmatists, have had little understanding of women? that the gruesome earnestness, the clumsy importunity with which they have hitherto been in the habit of approaching truth have been inept and improper means for winning a wench? (Nietzsche 1986, 13)

Nietzsche's subversive tactic was to "psychologise" philosophy, undermining its claims to scientific disinterestedness by revealing the hidden structures of desire and power at work in the production of truth. "Beckett studies" is perhaps a little different. For one thing, very few writers on Beckett pretend to a scientific detachment from their subject: on the contrary, a tone of passionate, sometimes almost worshipful enthusiasm is the norm. At the same time, however, while Beckett (the man or the work or both) stands as the openly contested object of desire — the *sujet à aimer* — there are few who approach or claim to possess their subject with the dogmatic earnestness and the clumsy importunity derided by Nietzsche. On the contrary, in the amorous discourse of Beckett studies, a deferential acknowledgement of the ineffable mystery and inexhaustible multiplicity of the beloved has come to constitute a kind of ritual formula. With reference to the jealous desire for possession, and the multiple and ungraspable elusiveness of the beloved, Uhlmann quotes Beckett quoting Proust (Uhlmann 1999, 2):

> "We imagine that the object of our desire is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! it is the extension of that being to all the points of space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess contact with such a place and with such an hour we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points." (*Proust* 58)

This multiplication and dispersion of the beloved is, of course, a major theme of Proust's *Recherche*, and Beckett duly picks it up in his own study. What is relevant for our purposes is the kind of dialectical movement it establishes between a jealous desire for possession of the object and a magnanimous recognition of its essential plurality. In terms of the discourse on Beckett, Uhlmann points to this centrifugal force, whereby the narrowing intensification of its focus on "Beckett" only serves to multiply and disperse its points of contact with an ever-expanding field of influence:

> In asking "which one?", then, as a friend you are forced to recognise the impossibility of absolute possession. If this is not recognised, the only option is to find sanctuary in an immobilised totalising ideal of the loved one which, in the end, can only do injustice to the real loved one who, sooner or later, will break free of these imposed limits and betray you (behind your back, if you are lucky). It is clear, then, that the field of Beckett studies must divide; it also becomes apparent how the field must also always be constantly expanding as the works continue to touch more points in time and space and that this expansion will inevitably cause it to cross, as it has crossed already, numerous disciplinary boundaries. (Uhlmann 1999, 2-3)

This interdisciplinary expansion of Beckett studies can be best illustrated by a quick glance over the programme of a recent conference devoted to Beckett's work, itself significantly entitled "Another Beckett". In addition to familiar conjunctions such as "Beckett and psychoanalysis" or "Beckett and phenomenology", other topics for debate include the relationships between Beckett studies and television studies, queer studies, popular culture, and theories of space (London Beckett Seminar 2000). At times, this cross-disciplinary expansion magically combines the qualities of the unexpected and the inevitable, for if Beckett is manifestly *not* a queer writer, and possibly not even of much interest to queer studies, there is nevertheless just enough in Beckett's writing — the gender ambiguity of "Enough", perhaps, or the homo-erotic encounters of "The Calmative", or the sado-masochism of *How It Is* — for a case to be made for the "queer Beckett", and thus for Beckett studies to demonstrate its continuing importance by the incorporation of yet another field of contemporary critical activity. The same goes for many of the other connections established in the unfolding and expansion of Beckett studies. A little forced, at times, a little *recherché*, these new and different "other Becketts" are nevertheless quietly absorbed into the growing mass of "discourse on Beckett" without the slightest shadow of a schism in the ranks of the faithful.

The amicable plurality of Beckett studies calls into question the extent to which Beckett studies, in Uhlmann's analysis, "must divide", for it would seem that the "friends of Beckett" is a broad church, and it is doubtful whether any of these "different Becketts" could in any way precipitate a definitive fracturing of the scholarly community devoted to the study of Beckett's works. In fact, "Beckett studies", with its amiable collegiality, closely resembles that learned community so beautifully evoked by Michel Foucault, in a passage on the "febrile indolence" of the scholar. Apologising for the fragmentary and discontinuous character of his own researches, Foucault writes:

> [such inconclusiveness] would accord all too well with the busy inertia of those who profess an idle knowledge, a species of luxuriant sagacity, the rich hoard of the *parvenus* whose only outward signs are displayed in footnotes at the bottom of the page. It would accord with all those who feel themselves to be associates of one of the more ancient or more typical secret societies of the West, those oddly indestructible societies unknown it would seem to Antiquity, which came into being

> with Christianity, most likely at the time of the first monasteries, at the periphery of the invasions, the fires and the forests: I mean to speak of the great warm and tender Freemasonry of useless erudition. (Foucault 1994, 18)

Beckett studies might well be characterised as such a "great warm and tender Freemasonry".

In fact, so warm and tender is the Freemasonry of Beckett scholars that some critics have come to see this fraternal piety as a kind of betrayal of the subversive or iconoclastic spirit of Beckett's work. Indeed, the advertisement for the "Another Beckett" conference draws attention to this very problem within Beckett studies, while at the same time replicating the logic of interdisciplinary expansion that guarantees its continued growth and its pluralistic integrity:

> The London Beckett Seminar is holding a conference that seeks to provide a forum for innovative approaches to the work of Samuel Beckett. Presenting work that interrogates the current direction of Beckett studies or draws attention to approaches that have received little or no critical attention, the conference is not focusing on specific "themes"; rather, the emphasis is upon demonstrating a plurality of approaches and questioning why such consistently disruptive work as Beckett's yields criticism which has had the tendency to settle into orthodoxy. (London Beckett Seminar 2000)

In terms of the discussion I have been developing, one aspect of this problem might be to account for the way in which such a plurality of approaches, such a multitude of seemingly incommensurable "other Becketts", are nevertheless quietly absorbed, sooner rather than later it would seem, into the dispiritingly innocuous mass of that canonical cultural institution: "Beckett".

One can argue till the cows come home about the justice of representations: since "Beckett" belongs to everyone and no one, each of us has his or her own "other Beckett", and even the most recalcitrant of them must in some way resemble the other Becketts in circulation:

> Before him there were others, taking themselves for me, it must be a sinecure handed down from generation to generation, to judge by their family air. (*Unnamable* 37)

This, then, was the problem I began with: the vicious circularity of this opposition between an author's texts and the authorial discourse in which they circulate. The

dilemma on which one is skewered does not lose its ferociousness for being a false dichotomy. For to write on "Beckett", is it not inevitable that you must take arms against the mass of "discourse on Beckett", must enter the fray of representations and carve out a new space in which your own "Beckett" may stand and defend himself? For to turn away — with "fatigue and disgust" (*Watt* 247), perhaps even "with fool's mate in [one's] soul" (*Murphy* 138) — from the discourse on Beckett, to return to the essential, to go "back to Beckett" (to borrow the title of Ruby Cohn's (1973) canonical work of Beckett criticism), do you not risk in the end reproducing out of ignorance or recalcitrance the very discourse you affect to despise? For it seemed to me that there was no way of reading Beckett *against* the "discourse on Beckett", for the simple reason that such readings were already or would readily become *part of* the discourse on Beckett. In short, it seemed that the notion of Beckett's work as "consistently disruptive" was already, in fact, the "orthodoxy" of Beckett criticism.

I can't go on

No doubt the work that follows does not constitute a solution to this problem. It is not intended as the formulation of a new approach to Beckett, but as the description of an impasse.

In helping me to recognise and understand and acknowledge this impasse, and even in a shy way to like it, two short and highly complex pieces of Beckett criticism were instrumental: a review-essay by Darren Tofts on Peter Gidal's book *Understanding Beckett*, and the final chapter of Steven Connor's book *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Not only do both writers investigate the failure of the "discourse on Beckett" adequately to engage with the radical implications of Beckett's writing, but they go on to assess the inherent contradictions of any critique which bases itself on a reading of Beckett's texts. If it is no more than the delineation of an impasse that forms the narrow ground of this thesis, it was the lesson of these exemplars that enabled me to understand why I couldn't go on.

TOFTS

In 1983 Frederik N. Smith began a review of recent critical studies of Beckett with the words "It is theoretically impossible to write sensibly about Samuel Beckett" (Smith 1983, 127). This lucid formulation did not mark an impasse, of course. Theoretically, there were two alternatives: either cease to write sensibly, or cease to write on Beckett altogether. In practice, of course, critics have always found a way of "going a little further along a dreary road" (*Dialogues* 103) continuing to write sensibly on Beckett while blithely conceding the impossibility of doing so.

According to a neat genealogy of Beckett criticism by Darren Tofts, published in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, "the perception of the impossibility of criticism developed out of an ongoing recognition throughout the 1970s of the failure of most of the available critical methodologies" (Tofts 1993, 85). According to Tofts, throughout the 1970s Beckett's work "strained the expository and discursive possibilities of mimetic criticism" (Tofts 1993, 85), while in the early 1980s the "deconstructionist incarnation" of Beckett criticism habitually employed the "impossibility of criticism" as a characteristic opening gambit. As Tofts remarks, "far from being ironical, this apparently contradictory situation, where criticism is relentlessly produced on the assumption of its theoretical impossibility, attests to institutional hegemony" (Tofts 1993, 85).

Furthermore, Tofts characterises the then-emergent 1990s post-structuralist incarnation of Beckett criticism in similar terms. Lance St. John Butler and Robin Davis's *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, which Tofts identifies as "the first major collection of post-structuralist criticism" (Tofts 1993, 86), claims a "new Beckett" as "the poet of the post-structuralist age" (Butler and Davis 1990, x), whose work is "thinkable only in the most recent critical terms" (Butler and Davis 1990, xi). For Tofts, despite the repeated insistence among post-structuralists that the profound difference of Beckett's writing calls into question the very notion of a metalanguage — an interpretive authority outside and above the text — such critics nevertheless continue to present their conclusions in the sensible and impossible form of "the standard academic essay, unselfconscious and apolitical" (Tofts 1993, 86). Tofts' conclusion is that "the implications of Beckett's difference for the mode of

critical discourse have rarely been addressed within Beckett scholarship" (Tofts 1993, 86).

I mention Tofts' deft critique partly in order to indicate how widespread the "rhetoric of the impossible" is in Beckett criticism (no doubt the *Three Dialogues* have much to answer for here), but also because, despite everything, I too wish to start by defining a preliminary "impossibility". However, instead of using "the impossible" as a kind of open sesame by which I might penetrate, like so many others before me, to the wonders of the Beckettian universe, I hope to rely on a more impassable kind of impasse, an unequivocal impossible that stands firm like the door-keeper in Kafka's parable, and if you are "foolish enough not to turn tail" (*Dialogues* 122), waits until you are about to breathe your last before saying: "This door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it" (Kafka 1985, 237).

The exact nature of this impossibility comes into clearer focus from a consideration of the continuation of Tofts' article, which is exemplary of that dissonant or dissenting voice that, as we have seen, is sometimes, perhaps even frequently, raised against the critical orthodoxy of the discourse on Beckett.

After dismissing the "institutional hegemony" of Beckett criticism, Tofts goes on to praise Peter Gidal's *Understanding Beckett*, a text based around an uncompromising use of the avant-garde modernist techniques of fragmentation and collage, as "the only critical text written in English which radically alters critical practice to accommodate the metadiscursive and ideological problems which Beckett's work entails" (Tofts 1993, 87). For Tofts:

> Gidal has appropriated the implications of Beckett's dissolution of the subject in discourse into his own writing style. ... The dismantling of a univocal position in Gidal's theoretical writing reinforces the indifference to the origin of the voice which Foucault perceived in Beckett ("What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking" [Foucault 1977c, 115]). *Understanding Beckett* is a discursive act irreducible to any single author. The entire book ... is a sustained collage of fragmented quotation, comprising Beckett's writing (principally his dramatic works), theoretical and polemical writings, and an array of miscellaneous texts (annotated typescripts, reported conversations, letters, photographs). There is absolutely no sense of a conventional, hierarchical arrangement of material. ...

> Rather than synthesizing the multiplicity of writings of which the book is composed into a coherent, linear argument, Gidal's commentary reinforces the provisionality of the book's "fragmentary composite of subjective voices" [Dusinberre 1977, 81]. (Tofts 1993, 88-89)

For reasons that will become apparent in my chapter on Beckett and Foucault, I don't necessarily share Tofts' perceptions of Beckett's "dissolution of the subject in discourse" and "indifference to the origin of the voice". Nor do I feel that this indifference is necessarily the implication of Foucault's quotation of Beckett in the essay "What Is an Author?" Nor, finally, do I share Tofts' avant-gardist assumption that radical contents require radical forms and vice-versa, an assumption that can often merely perpetuate, in an oppositional register, the form/content dyad that is the cornerstone of traditional aesthetics.

I agree with Tofts, however, that Gidal's tortuously unreadable book "must ... be understood as a radical political moment, rather than the avatar of a new critical stance within Beckett scholarship" (Tofts 1993, 90-91). As suggested by its title's allusion to Walter Benjamin's famous study of Brecht's political theatre, *Understanding Beckett* is a "politically oppositional work within the Beckett critical tradition" (Tofts 1993, 91), and perhaps for this reason is "something of a pariah" (Tofts 1993, 89). As Tofts concludes:

> *Understanding Beckett* represents an anarchic attitude to critical practice, generated by a perception of the rehabilitating mastery of conventional critical discourse, which smooths over and unifies the complex epistemological tensions in Beckett's writing. ... This reliance on the logocentric and institutional practices of traditional academic discourse continues to be the unassailable stumbling block of experimental writing. Writing which seeks to evade interpretation or the mediatory intervention of metalanguage inevitably remains caught within a hierarchy of discursive registers. ... Analytico-referentiality reigns supreme. ... To describe *Understanding Beckett* as a post-critical essay is already on the way to distorting it into intelligibility. (Tofts 1993, 90, 91)

While it would require considerable distortion to render Gidal's book intelligible, what is valuable about it, and about Tofts' eminently intelligible commentary, is not so much its "attempt to define criticism's relation to Beckett's writing" (Tofts 1993, 92), but the way in which the failure of this attempt brings into particularly sharp

focus a particular kind of impossibility: *the impossibility of a radical Beckett criticism*.

The nature of this impossibility is hard to pin down. Part of it no doubt stems from the growing impossibility of a certain kind of radical criticism *per se*. In the case of Gidal, this would relate to the steady decline of the Marxist structuralist/materialist aesthetics that characterised Gidal's work as a filmmaker, and which perhaps had its high point with the films of Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Tofts quotes Gidal from an earlier essay, where in similarly tortuous prose he acknowledges the passing of the moment of avant-garde aesthetics:

> With the (at best) nearly total demise (flourishing) of New American Cinema mainly through its resurgent romanticism, or (at worst) its continued operation as pseudo-narrative investigations, there remain the few English (one Canadian, one Austrian) structural/materialist film-makers, lamentably largely existing without the beginnings even of a theoretical/historical approach. (Gidal 1975, 190)

For Gidal, perhaps, there was a growing sense of the impossibility of radical criticism in general.

What I am more interested in, however, is the sense of the impossibility of a radical *Beckett* criticism in particular. There are three things worth noting about Gidal's book. In its concern to link Beckett's work to larger social and political themes, it makes only the most perfunctory reference to or engagement with "Beckett studies", such that the background material on Beckett is generally restricted to interviews with actors and directors, or occasional *obiter dicta* culled from Deirdre Bair's biography. So too, if Beckett critics are inclined, at best, to temper their theoretical methodologies to the demands of Beckett's texts, or at worst, to borrow from Beckett's texts the very terms of those methodologies, Gidal's approach is characterised, on the one hand, by a refusal of the "rhetoric of the impossible" which tends to dominate Beckett criticism, and on the other, by an unapologetic and sometimes doctrinaire use of a Marxian theoretical metalanguage which is often seemingly at odds with the Beckett text. Thirdly, while the majority of accounts of Beckett's theatre tend to refer back to Beckett as the authority on matters of *mise en scène*, Gidal takes his cues not from Beckett, but from the 1930s German cabaret

performers Karl Valentin and Liesl Karlstadt, to such an extent, in fact, that one begins to wonder whether it is not they who should be the subject of the book.

It is for these reasons, perhaps, that Gidal's book is "something of a pariah" in Beckett studies: it is, finally, not *about* Beckett, certainly not about *Understanding Beckett*, but about a particular kind of radical political theatre, where Beckett's works are taken as the point of departure for a series of experiments that, in the end, have more to do with the possibilities and limitations of the avant-garde than with any notion of "fidelity" to Beckett or to Beckett's work. Because it goes off in other directions, because it does not finally return us safe and sound to "Beckett" as its *raison d'être*, Gidal's book will always remain slightly outside "Beckett studies". In the ruck of amorous suitors that characterises the "friends of Beckett" as described by Uhlmann, Gidal declines to press a claim, declines to enter the fray of representations with his own version of an "other Beckett" which would draw its justification from the fidelity of its purpose. This is not to say, however, that Gidal does not affirm a love of Beckett's writing. There is something very dignified and moving, I think, about this admission on the final page of his book:

> A final footnote. I guess I should say that I have loved Beckett's work since first reading *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1963, have been involved with it mentally consistently since then. So this isn't some academic "choice" for a book; there was no choice for me. (Gidal 1986, 278 n.56)

For Tofts, the challenge of Gidal's book is precisely its attempt to evade an "academic" metalanguage, its attempt to evade the "anteriority" of a critical act that always comes after and presumes an authority over the text, and its attempt to avoid reconstructing a unified subject and a logically coherent argument as an inevitable betrayal of the subversion of these things in Beckett's writing. Perhaps Gidal's book succeeds in these things, but for this reason, I suggest, and to the extent that it does so, it is not specifically an act of Beckett criticism. Tofts, on the other hand, is only too aware of the contradictions inherent in presenting these arguments in the sensible academic form of the critical essay, and in the sensible academic context of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*:

> The problem facing me in this very essay is the perpetuation of the look of anteriority, of the location of myself "beyond the fatuous clamour" of Beckettian critical discourse. However, my attention to the question of where critical practice

> stands in relation to Beckett's fragmentation of the unified subject can only have a relevance from within Beckett scholarship. Anteriority is part of a complex discursive network, accepted by its producers and its participants as a necessary fiction. Beckett's writing will continue to problematise critical practice, and it will continue to be noted that it does so, and that it has been noted that it does so. It is to be hoped, though, that Gidal's work is not the last attempt to redefine criticism's relation to Beckett's writing. Gidal's anarchic attitude to critical practice is a timely reminder that critics of Beckett need to be forever vigilant, reflexive, for when dealing with an art of the inexpressive, they, too, are "skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression." (Tofts 1993, 91-92)

Tofts' conclusion seems to repeat, perhaps despite itself, the call-to-arms for criticism once again to come to grips with Beckett, with a newer, truer "other Beckett", who, like Butler and Davis's Beckett before him, is "thinkable only in the most recent critical terms". For Tofts, it is supposedly through its "fragmentation of the unified subject" that Beckett's work "will continue to problematise critical practice". But, at the same time, is not this "fragmentation of the unified subject" precisely what post-structuralist critics (among others) endlessly discover and rediscover in Beckett's texts? In suggesting that the measure of Beckett's work is still to be fathomed, in reminding us that criticism's relation to Beckett's writing "can only have a relevance from within Beckett scholarship", and in borrowing from Beckett the very words of this formulation, Tofts finally gives everything, once again and like every Beckett critic before him, "back to Beckett". For if Gidal goes elsewhere, using Beckett as the starting point for a non-Beckettian excursion, Tofts brings us back home, returns us safe and sound to the bosom of the author, redefines the problem as Beckett and Beckett as its only solution. Everything returns, to the source of nought:

> *Abandoned my little to find him. My little to learn him forgot. My little rejected to have him. To love him my little reviled. This body homeless. This mind ignoring. These emptied hands. This emptied heart. To him I brought. To the temple. To the teacher. To the source. Of nought.* (*Watt* 164; passaged reconstructed)

CONNOR

A similar problem underlies one of the other major influences on the present work, the last chapter, or more particularly the last section of the last chapter, of Steven Connor's *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, Text*, entitled "Producing Power"

(Connor 1988, 185-201). I remember the moment of revelation, mingled with a pleasurable sense of scandal, when I first read this chapter, for in it Connor dares to do something I had learned never to expect in Beckett criticism: he mounts an attack on the authorial mystique that surrounds Beckett. This attack takes a number of forms: an implicit denunciation of Beckett's desire for absolute control over the reproduction of his dramatic works; a subtle demonstration that Beckett's refusal to comment on meaning is paradoxically complicit with critical discourse; an unsparing critique of the quasi-religious devotion of Beckettian actors, directors and critics, who seem all too willing to subordinate their own professional identities to a kind of "Beckettian necessity" (Connor 1988, 194); a blisteringly sarcastic account of the various kinds of fetishism which attach to the person of Beckett, from the enviable prestige of personal relationships to the magical aura of the precious manuscripts; and a merciless attack on the whole academic industry which has grown up around Beckett, and which has turned the author and his work into a powerful icon of Western tradition and cultural authority.

Connor's discussion of Beckettian discourse touches on many of the themes that I have been elaborating: the discourse on Beckett is "an ensemble of representational practices ... unified around the name Samuel Beckett" (Connor 1988, 190); it is not necessarily absolutely coherent, but is held together by "the intensity of its internal divisions"; these divisions arise, not only from the various competing interpretations of Beckett's work — "the humanist, existential, religious and structural-linguistic" — but also from the struggles between various "definitions of what criticism is, and where it stands in relation to its object" (Connor 1988, 191). Thus, "it is not the actual figure of Beckett himself ... that unifies this discursive field, but rather that 'Beckett' who is its complex projection" (Connor 1988, 191). In these matters, Connor's analysis is exemplary, and will be seen to have exerted a powerful influence over much of the work that follows.

There is, however, a point at which a false note enters into Connor's argument. Perhaps the best illustration of this is in the following passage, where Connor has just subjected to corrosive irony the all-too-common narratives of Beckett actors and directors who describe some mystical Beckettian "presence" which haunts them in their work:

> If the notion of presence demands a certain dream of intimate contact with the author, then, as might be expected, actual personal intimacy between actor, critic and author is an important component in Beckettian mythology. Just as the faithfulness of an actor to Beckett's intentions is rewarded by friendship or association with the author, so critics too can penetrate to this mystical presence and advertise this validating friendship in books and lectures. What is strange is the way in which these stories of close contact go along with the repeated accounts of Beckett's mysterious privacy and aloofness. Actually, if Beckett really counted as close friends all those who hint deliciously at close and continuous intimacy with him, then the most celebrated literary recluse of the twentieth century would have a social diary to rival Nancy Mitford's. But my point is not really to sneer at these friendships (as though critics should never fraternize with the enemy), or indeed, to dispute the accounts of Beckett's personal qualities — Beckett has always responded kindly and helpfully to my own enquiries. But when narratives of personal intimacy come to have such a central place in a public discourse, and to cooperate so strikingly with other ideological purposes, then they have a different status from garden-fence gossip. They become part of a myth, which can be articulated unpleasantly around mysticisms and the power that they can enshrine. (Connor 1988, 195-96)

There is, of course, a profound and troubling irony apparent in the passage from Connor's apologetic qualification of the "sneering" tone that characterises much of this final chapter, to the unexpectedly urbane patness of the confidential aside: "Beckett has always responded kindly and helpfully to my own enquiries". Connor's point is well made, of course, that there is no good (that is, non-ideological) reason why narratives of personal intimacy should enjoy such authoritative status in the discourse on an author's work: surely, one would like to think, quality of scholarship and acuteness of critical perception should be the measure of the Beckett critic. Connor is right, too, that the various religious, mystical or mythical representations of Beckett tend to go hand in hand with a kind bathing in reflected glory, the assumption of the mantle of cultural authority by a number of, on the whole, fairly mediocre intellectuals. But is not Connor's central argument undermined, rhetorically if not logically, by the insertion of his own narrative of personal contact? Why mention this at all, especially here, if not to advertise, despite everything, the critical validation that this association inevitably brings?

Connor's argument, for all the rambunctiousness of its anti-authorial provocations, ends up playing the author card at every critical juncture. The blueprint of this argument is given in the following terms:

> Beckett's work, and the criticism which reconstitutes it, remain deeply implicated in the structures of power which, in certain senses, his work undermines. (Connor 1988, 184-85)

This argument is repeated in various forms throughout the rest of the chapter. To cite another example:

> For all of its alleged challenge to the notion of "the human", and the decisive breaks which Beckett's work makes with history, Beckettian critical discourse has devoted itself energetically to reforging the continuities between his work and the traditions of Western literature and culture. (Connor 1988, 198)

To a greater extent than any other Beckett critic, Connor is aware of the ways in which Beckett's work is complicit with discourses of cultural authority and structures of economic exchange. Indeed, the section on Beckett in Connor's later work *Theory and Cultural Value* is devastating in its juxtaposition of Beckett's aesthetics of loss and negativity with the enormous cultural and economic profit margin that his work delivers (Connor 1992c, 80-89). Here, too, Connor is highly critical of the "economy of assimilation" that governs the reception of Beckett's work, the "table of conversion" whereby "much if not most criticism of Beckett ... has learnt to give every extremity of dilapidation in his work a positive reflex of value" (Connor 1992c, 82). What is problematic about Connor's reading, however, is his continued insistence that, despite everything, there is in Beckett's work some indefatigable spirit of subversion always at work, undermining its recuperation as cultural capital.

This is not necessarily to suggest that Beckett's work is not subversive in the ways that Connor describes. Instead, is it not rather the case that this "subversiveness" is precisely what constitutes its value for critics? And is it not entirely characteristic of the "discourse on Beckett" to trace this subversiveness back to the works and ultimately the author in exactly the way Connor has done? And is it not further characteristic of the "discourse on Beckett" to find, in this discrepancy or "lack of fit" between the bland academicism of the critical discourse and the spirited subversiveness of the work itself, the occasion for advocating a newer and truer "other Beckett" whose true measure no one had hitherto suspected?

There is, therefore, a constant and highly productive tension throughout Connor's critical work on Beckett, between an attempt to determine, with a kind of iconoclastic *sangfroid*, the exact measure of Beckett's complicity with the culture industry, and an enduring attachment to Beckett's work as the reservoir of a kind of permanent insurrection, an unassimilable quiddity irreducible to the estimations of cultural institutions or the calculations of the marketplace. Thus, in another characteristic paragraph, Connor argues:

> What gives Beckett criticism such importance and cultural centrality is the continued reassertion in that critical discourse of the myth of the author as creator, source and absolute origin. Criticism has the curious task of representing for its publics Beckett's disclaimers of the public aura and prestige of the writer, while at the same time ceaselessly reconstituting this willed-away mystique in its own operations; after all, what could be more recognisably "artistic" than Beckett's scrupulous aloofness from the marketplace? All this is made even more complicated by the fact that, despite his withdrawals, Beckett has been forced to collaborate with the criticism that speaks around and within his name; reluctant though he may be to talk about his work, Beckett has seemed increasingly willing to send out cryptic hints about his work and intentions, and he even wrote the blurb for one of his books. (Connor 1988, 191)

Again we find, in the rhetorical sarcasm of "what could be more recognisably 'artistic'?" the "sneering" tone that runs throughout this chapter and which gives Connor's writing its pleasurably acerbic quality. But this tone is qualified, even fatally undermined, by the strange claim that "Beckett has been forced to collaborate with the criticism that speaks around and within his name". In what way *forced*? There would seem to be an element of special pleading on Beckett's behalf here, for in publishing his work and staging his plays Beckett necessarily takes on the role of author, and if Beckett was cagey about giving interviews or offering interpretations of his work, he seems to have participated willingly enough in signing limited editions and posing for publicity photographs. That is, it is impossible, or at least, theoretically untenable, to cleave apart "text" and "book", to separate "writing practice" from "publishing practice", to isolate Beckett's writing from the economic circumstances of its production and circulation, or from the discursive circumstances of its evaluation and preservation.

So too, in suggesting a disjunction between the subversiveness of Beckett's writing and the discourse of cultural authority that surrounds it (in which, as Connor demonstrates, Beckett's own words and actions necessarily play a part), Connor cannot avoid reproducing that discursive logic whereby any challenge to the discourse on Beckett must, nevertheless, justify its arguments through a faithful return to Beckett's works as the ultimate source of authority and value. Thus, in another characteristic passage, Connor returns to the theme of an uncompromisingly radical Beckett who has been appropriated, attenuated and accommodated by mainstream culture:

> The importance of the extraordinary universe of discourse that has formed around Beckett lies precisely in the fact that it allows an affirmation of the values of literature and culture themselves, and, at the same time, an assertion of the power of criticism as the privileged mediator of that culture. The necessity of this affirmation is particularly great at a time when criticism and its institutions in Britain and the USA have been increasingly drawn to the centres of state-based power while being simultaneously stripped of their cultural and ideological effectiveness. Against this, the discourse of Beckett criticism has a special, representative place within discourses of culture as a whole, for it is a site in which cultural values of great importance may be repeated and recirculated with authority. What is extraordinary is that all the breaks which Beckett's writing practice makes, or attempts to make, with these traditions and the power relationships they encode can be so effectively contained and rewritten as repetitions. (Connor 1988, 199)

In his excellent study *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph*, H. Porter Abbott's turns his attention to this passage from Connor's book. His response is, I think, judicious and decisive, and resumes in an extremely compact manner many of themes I have been discussing:

> The argument Connor makes is a powerful one, and touches on many all-too-familiar aspects of Beckett criticism. But to begin with, it is not at all clear that what Connor criticises can, finally, be avoided. He himself does not avoid it. His book is yet one more act of veneration; it is a reading, offered up, of culturally important texts, all of which are attributed to the same man. It presumes to its own superior penetration, presumes to have found a truth about these texts which has been hidden from others. Most insidiously, the book's consistent use of the name Samuel Beckett (along with grammatically appropriate pronouns) as a person and a maker of texts and its blazoning of that name in the title and on the cover only encourages us to persist in our essentialistic habits — which is not so much to criticise Connor as to say that,

> like the rest of us, he inhabits, and is inhabited by, our language and our culture. (Abbott 1996, 39-40).

Abbott's summary of Connor's difficulties neatly describes the impasse with which I was faced at the beginning of this thesis: any critique of the discourse on Beckett which depends on a fidelity to Beckett's work cannot escape the logic of that discourse. It should be clear by now that the only way such a critique of Beckettian discourse might avoid being subsumed by that same discourse is by breaking its pledge of fidelity to Beckett, renouncing its claim to "a superior penetration" of Beckett's texts, and rejecting that "act of veneration" which would encourage us, once again, to go "back to Beckett" to find a new source of contemporary perplexities.

It made you want to lie down in a corner and never get up again

This long and complicated aside is really in order to explain why there is so little about Beckett's texts in the work that follows. The intention of the current study is not to offer a new understanding of Beckett's texts, but simply to try to understand "Beckett", the author-function that always precedes Beckett's texts, in the name of which the amicable rivalry of Beckettian discourse is ceaselessly played out.

I have been describing this situation as an impasse. However, it is important not to imagine "Beckett", the author-function and the discourse that accompanies it, as some kind of impediment standing between us and the true Beckett. It might be tempting to view "Beckett" as something like the door-keeper of Kafka's parable, perpetually denying us access to the true Beckett who remains forever inaccessible, to be known only in fragments by a kind of anxious projection of the imagination. Quite the opposite is the case: the true Beckett is beside us, always ready to hand, and all we need do is open one of his books. In Kafka's parable it is his desire for "admittance to the Law" that condemns the "man from the country" to his life of waiting (Kafka

1985, 235). So too, it is not a desire for Beckett that condemns Beckett critics to the impasse I have been describing, but a desire for a similar kind of "admittance to the Law", for the authority to speak about Beckett, for the right to possess Beckett as a cultural inheritance of incalculable value.

The "impossibility of a radical Beckett criticism" therefore stems from the fact that Beckett critics, because of the cultural importance of Beckett's texts, must always contend with their peers for a share of this authority. To base one's critique of Beckettian discourse on a fidelity to Beckett's texts is simply to remain within the pious circle of this veneration. The sheer magnitude of "Beckett", of the author-function and its cultural corollaries, tends to overwhelm any subversive element in Beckett's writing even as it sets it up as a repository of boundless signifying possibilities. It is not necessary to decide, therefore, whether Beckett's texts *are* or *are not* subversive, since the author-function "Beckett" necessarily predetermines and delimits any particular reading. This involves accepting, then, that however we might feel about the dull conservative orthodoxy of the discourse on Beckett, this discourse, in an important sense, *is* Beckett, and we cannot simply will it away as having no relation to the cherished Beckett of our imaginings.

The fundamental *raison d'être* of the present work is therefore an attempt to understand the workings of the author-function. In particular, of course, it is an attempt to understand "Beckett" as an author-function, *not* in order to clear the way to a better understanding of Beckett's texts, but in order, perhaps, not to have to speak perpetually in the abstract. In this respect, of course, Beckett provides a particularly interesting case study, because, on the one hand, he is one of the most iconic of twentieth century literary geniuses, surrounded by a formidable aura of authorial mystique, and because, on the other hand, the critical discourse on Beckett's work has tended to concern itself, especially in recent times, with the question of the relation between author and text, and more particularly, with the extent to which Beckett's "fragmentation of the unified subject" may constitute in some way a subversion or critique of that author-function.

SYNOPSIS

There are two main ways of thinking about the author-function. The first is as a discursive category: as means of identifying, classifying, interpreting and evaluating texts. The second is as an economic category: as means of securing the concept of intellectual property, of asserting control over the essentially fleeting and intangible nature of words and ideas. The two main sections of this thesis correspond to these two major conceptions of the author-function.

First, however, a brief prologue "Who Speaks?" outlines the nature of debates over the question of authorship in the discourse on Beckett. I argue that these debates tend to be entirely circumscribed by the author-function; ironically enough, recent post-structuralist readings that promote Beckett as an "anti-authorial" writer only end up further reconfirming Beckett's authorial prestige.

The first main section, "Foucault, Beckett and the Author-Function" considers the function of "Beckett" as a discursive category. It takes the form of an extended discussion of the work of Michel Foucault, and in particular, of the two essays in which he quotes from Beckett's work, "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse". Particularly since the post-structuralist incarnation of Beckett studies, Foucault's citation of Beckett has always been received as a positive endorsement, a statement of intellectual affinity, a confirmation of Beckett's uncanny status as an avatar, as a post-structuralist *avant la lettre.*

In this section I argue, however, that Foucault's citation of Beckett is highly ambiguous. Drawing on the work of Simon During, I argue that these two essays, written during the same pivotal period, actually mark a decisive shift in Foucault's thinking, an abandonment of literature and the notion of writing as transgressive. Foucault's critique of the author-function in these essays necessarily sets a limit to the subversive potential of avant-garde writing, and in this context Beckett cannot function as anything other than an exemplary instance of the avant-garde literary author.

Here Beckett's refusal to comment on meaning is both characteristic and decisive. Developing a suggestion by Edward Said, I distinguish between the discursive roles of *teacher* and *author*. The distinction turns on a certain relation to the voice. As a teacher, Foucault must always be ready to explain, to elucidate, to *perform* his thinking. As an author, on the other hand, Beckett explains nothing, refuses to speak: the burden of speech is transferred to the reader. Beckettian discourse is, in many ways, like that "Lover's Discourse" described by Roland Barthes: "the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak" (Barthes 1990, 3). This might almost serve as a definition of what an author is: *the other who does not speak.*

The second part, "Beckett's Aesthetic Economies", turns to what might be thought of as a blind spot in Foucault's analysis: the author-function as an economic category. Here I consider "Beckett" not as an object of knowledge or a discursive grouping of texts, but as a signature, a brand name, a commodity. This section, divided into three chapters, attempts to explore the uncertain ground between the cultural status of the commodity and of the work of art, in terms of the competing axiological discourses of economics and aesthetics.

The first chapter, "Indifference Engines", considers the importance of structures of combination and permutation in Beckett's work, in order to begin to examine the fundamental structure of Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment. Using the famous scene of Murphy contemplating his assortment of biscuits, I argue that this characteristic process of substitution and deferral might be seen as producing a kind of "aestheticisation", whereby the signifiers of bodily need become objects of aesthetic contemplation, purely formal elements in an autonomous aesthetic universe.

The second chapter considers Beckett's oeuvre in strictly materialist terms, as a collection of books. Firstly, through a reading of John Frow's work on the logic of the signature, I examine how authorial "personality" comes to be constructed as an element of the cultural commodity. Then, using Susan Stewart's analysis of the logic of the collection, I examine the ways in which Beckett's oeuvre, as a signed collection, is aestheticised, constructed as ahistorical, autonomous, and formally self-contained.

The third chapter considers another aspect of the uncertain ground between economics and aesthetics: the unstable relation between the commodity and the gift. One of the cornerstones of traditional aesthetics is the distinction between the alienated labour of the marketplace, performed out of economic necessity, and the free and autonomous labour of the artist, whose work presents itself not as a commodity but as a gift. Given the importance of the trope of poverty in Beckett's work, I examine the ways in which the commodity economy is nevertheless always held at bay in favour of the economy of the gift. Here I offer readings of *Murphy* and the four novellas in terms of their privileging of the gift over the commodity. The conclusion here is that Beckett's *nostalgie de la boue* actually masks a kind of patrician cultural allegiance to the privileges of property over labour.

Where in the first half I have been concerned to examine the workings of the author-function independently of Beckett's texts, in the second half I have suggested tentative readings of crucial passages in certain works. There is a necessary and irresolvable tension between these two approaches: between a quasi-sociological approach which would see institutions and their discursive operations as having the final say in determining the cultural status of canonical literary texts (such as Beckett's), and a literary-critical approach which would seek to discover in those canonical texts (such as Beckett's) signs of their implicit ideological involvement in the discourses of cultural authority within which they circulate. That is, throughout the first half I have argued that the author-function, the status of the literary work in commodity culture, and the discourses and institutions of cultural value, all, to a greater or lesser degree, predetermine and circumscribe whatever radical element there might be in Beckett's work. But, just as I believe it is wrong to subscribe automatically to the strangely reassuring myth of a radical Beckett domesticated by critical discourse, so too, for the purposes of the "sociological" argument it is not really necessary to demonstrate any fundamental complicity between Beckett's work and the cultural discourses in which it is enmeshed. Nevertheless, in the course of developing what is an admittedly provisional and incomplete approach to the question of Beckett's "aesthetic economies", I found myself coming to the conclusion that, for all its superficial glamour of indigence and dispossession, Beckett's is a fundamentally patrician aesthetic. It depends, like so many other "high modernist"

visions, on an inheritance — both financial and cultural — that will deliver the "luxuriant sagacity" of the "well-to-do ne'er-do-well" (*Murphy* 14).

I've always been attracted to this culture of idleness: it's what first drew me to Beckett. Like Moran, "I've always loved doing nothing" (*Molloy* 126). For many years, in fact, Beckett's work gave the listless torpor of my existence a vague sense of higher purpose. In terms of all these "other Becketts", *my* Beckett told me to "lie down and stay down" (CSPR 34). Beckett's work was for me like Ruth's (or Edith's) flat for Molloy: "it made you want to lie down in a corner and never get up again" (*Molloy* 77).

There is an incoercible logic as to why such a reading of Beckett cannot result in a PhD thesis. No doubt there's something pathetically naïve about this youthful misprision, how an inclination for the literature of indolence can actually have a bad effect on the course of one's life. "In the innocence of my heart!" exclaims Molloy (*Molloy* 22). For this reason, perhaps, I no longer have quite the same kind of affection for Beckett's texts that I once had. But perhaps affection is another word for misunderstanding.

PART 1:

Who speaks?

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The question of the author

> Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply. (CSPR 114)

The simple answer is, of course, "Samuel Beckett", but it's a simple answer only in the sense that no one but a simpleton would dare say it. After all, haven't the last twenty-five years of literary theory taught us that there is no simple answer to the question of the author, that the very essence of literature springs from this gap, this excess, this *écart* which separates the figure of the author from the subject of the utterance which bears his or her signature?

> Il me semblait que tout langage est un écart de langage. (*Molloy* 193)
>
> It seemed to me that all language was an excess of language. (*Molloy* 159)

Answering the question "who speaks?" with the words "Samuel Beckett" would seem to be the height of critical naivety. Moreover, if the author is always doubled by the subject of his or her utterance, this doubling is doubled again in the case of Beckett by his unique status as the author of a bilingual oeuvre of works in French and English. If the question of the author is ultimately unanswerable, serving only to initiate an endless series of slippages and deferrals, perhaps it is better to rephrase the question. Instead of trying to answer the unanswerable, what if we answered, like the wise guy in the gangster film, with another question: "Who wants to know?"

Who is it, then, who more rigorously and profoundly than anyone ever before, poses the question of the author, the question of "who speaks?" Who makes this demand of us? Who always insists that we return to this problem, to the question of the subject in language, the transparency of the first-person pronoun, the fragility of its utterance, and the haunting of a familiar and yet unidentifiable voice?

Now the answer is simple, and even the most sophisticated reader can reply without hesitation: "Samuel Beckett".

So, let's begin at the beginning, "like an old ballocks" (*Molloy* 8), with an inaugural moment in the reception of Beckett's work. Maurice Blanchot opens his 1953 review of *L'Innommable* with the words: "Who speaks in Samuel Beckett's novels?" (Blanchot 1988, 23). The question recurs like a refrain throughout Blanchot's review: "Who speaks? Who is the 'I' condemned to speak without pause, he who says 'I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never'?" (Blanchot 1988, 25).

Blanchot calmly observes that "a reassuring convention enables us to answer: it is Samuel Beckett" (Blanchot 1988, 25). But such an answer is, after all, only convention — "by so doing we are … trying to reassure ourselves with a name" — whereas:

> *The Unnamable* is precisely experience experienced under the threat of impersonality, undifferentiated speech speaking in a vacuum, passing through he who hears it, unfamiliar, excluding the familiar, and which cannot be silenced because it is what is unceasing and interminable. (Blanchot 1988, 25)

Thus Blanchot returns to his theme:

> Who then is speaking? Is it the "author"? But to whom can such a term refer since anyhow he who writes is no longer Beckett but the urge that sweeps him out of himself, turns him into a nameless being, the Unnamable, a being without being who can neither live nor die, stop nor start, who is in the vacant site where speaks the redundancy of idle words under the ill-fitting cloak of a porous, agonising I? (Blanchot 1988, 25)

Right from the beginning, then, the author question, the question of "who speaks?", becomes inseparable from the discourse on Beckett, and Blanchot's notion of "impersonality" becomes one of the key terms in the endless proliferation of debate around this question[5].

[5] Locating the "beginning" of Beckett's literary reception with Blanchot's review may appear deliberately obtuse. Either one begins at the beginning of Beckett's writing career, with his first published work, or, on the other hand, at the beginning of his international literary fame, with the premiere of *En Attendant Godot* on the 5th of January 1953. However, as Anthony Cronin is careful to point out, it was the enthusiastic critical reception of *Molloy* and *Malone Meurt* in 1951 that

Bruno Clément argues that Blanchot's reading of *L'Innommable* as the utterance of "la voix, incarnée mais impersonnelle, du réel qui n'a pas de forme" [the voice, embodied yet impersonal, of a formless reality] (Clément 1986, 291), initiates, along with Bataille's review of *Molloy*, a dominant tradition of Beckett criticism: "toute la critique beckettienne est partie de là, de ces deux textes écrits immédiatement après la publication des livres dont ils parlent" [the whole of Beckett criticism takes its cue from these two texts written immediately after the publication of the books they discuss] (Clément 1986, 292).

Thus, in a more recent study, Thomas Trezise considers the "question of authorship" to be "central to the trilogy" (Trezise 1990, 106), and finds here "a basic affinity between Beckett and Blanchot" (Trezise 1990, 117). Trezise quotes Blanchot's

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established Beckett's literary reputation in France (Cronin 1997, 412-13). Coming after Georges Bataille's rapturous review of *Molloy* (Bataille 1951), and two highly influential essays by Maurice Nadeau (Nadeau 1951, 1952), Blanchot's review of *L'Innommable*, nine months after the premiere of *Godot*, should be read in the context of Beckett's growing reputation as an avant-garde novelist. Consider, for example, Nadeau's assessment six months *before* the premiere of *Godot*:

> *Molloy* a été salué comme « un livre-événement » et comme l'expression d'un « cas-limite » dans la littérature. Il a suscité des commentaires enthousiastes ou savants, et le voici déjà chargé de significations si diverses que l'obscurité s'épaissit à mesure qu'on parle de lui. (Nadeau 1951, 693)

> *Molloy* has been hailed as a literary "event" and as the expression of a "limit-case" in literature. It has inspired both enthusiastic and learned commentary, and has already given rise to such diverse interpretations that the obscurity only seems to thicken the more one speaks of it.

As Cronin points out: "the reception of the trilogy made Beckett an important figure in the French literary consciousness", and Blanchot's essay "was a milestone in the progress of Beckett's reputation" (Cronin 1997, 436).

Thus the notion of Beckett rocketing to fame as the "célèbre inconnu" who wrote *En Attendant Godot* is a piece of popular Beckett mythology, as is the notion that it was the proceeds of the play, rather than the substantial inheritance he received at his mother's death, which enabled Beckett to purchase the farmhouse in Ussy-sur-Marne. Characteristically, Beckett himself contributed to this legend by referring to Ussy-sur-Marne as "the house that Godot built" (Cronin 1997, 416).

formulation of "a porous, agonising I", and shifting into the language of deconstruction, concludes:

> Blanchot's "answer" might be reformulated as follows: if the voice of the trilogy is to be construed as the allegorical self-representation of its author, the essential non-self-coincidence of the former defines the latter as already an allegory. In still other words, one may say here that the relation between author and narrator is analogous to the relation between narrator and character … in moving from narrator to author, we do not enter an extratextual world in which this non-self-identity would prove to be merely the aesthetic alteration of a self-identical subject but rather find ourselves in an intertextual universe where the non-self-coincidental voice of the trilogy thematises literature itself as the ex-pression of a subjectivity beyond separation. (Trezise 1990, 107)

For Trezise, "the undecidability or, indeed, the unnamability of the authorial or artistic subject" (Trezise 1990, 115) corresponds to a deeper indeterminacy in the constitution of subjectivity itself, but, in a characteristically circular formulation, this "non-self-identity" of the subject is itself modelled on the structure of the signifier, the Derridean notion of "iterability" (see especially Trezise 1990, 71-73). Thus "who speaks?", the question of the author, becomes, or rather remains, an inescapably textual question, a question, once again, of the excess, or *écart*, by which author and utterance fail to coincide:

> Condemned to reopen the ambiguous or imaginary *écart* between the real and the ideal, between the "je suis" and the "il est," the subject of the trilogy does not end in apocalypse but, as an *autrement qu'être*, exceeds the end itself, thereby testifying to the excess of signification in general over the phenomenological dream of totality. If Beckett's work appears therefore to demand a general reconsideration of literature, including most notably its authorship, it is clearly not with a view toward closing the question thus opened. (Trezise 1990, 168-9)

In another recent study, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph*, H. Porter Abbott begins with an epigraph from *The Unnamable*:

> All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. (*Unnamable* 21)

Abbott writes:

> Do we dare say, This is Beckett, and he wants to speak of Beckett? Such a statement fairly bristles with insuperable problems. So well have we been schooled, for so

> long and in so many ways, that hardly can we imagine saying these ten modest words without feeling overwhelmed in advance by semantic misery. Still, though I would not commit to precisely these words, it is nonetheless the case that Beckett always pulls us back to the question of who speaks. (Abbott 1996, ix)

In opposition to the widespread contemporary orthodoxy of Blanchotian or Derridean readings of Beckett, Abbott bravely contends that the figure of the author should not simply be reduced to an inscrutable absence, an empty linguistic cipher, but that the circumstances of the life of the historical person known as Samuel Beckett are crucial in understanding the texts which bear his name.

> Though there is, assuredly, no unimpeachable answer [to the question of who speaks], this book is dedicated to the proposition that the sustained originality of Beckett's work can be best understood as self-writing or, as I much prefer to call it, autographical action. (Abbott 1996, ix)

Arguing that "there has been hardly any work yoking these two subjects" — "Beckett studies" and "the study of that broad terrain of self-writing which goes by the name of autobiography" — Abbott distances himself, nevertheless, from traditional autobiographical approaches, which seek to uncover traces of a point by point correspondence between the life and the fictions, "aligning fictional texts with the personal history that went into them" (Abbott 1996, ix). For Abbott, "the price we pay for this kind of autobiographical approach can be sadness as we see art shrinking into the epiphenomenal residue of a single life's contingencies" (Abbott 1996, x).

Abbott's view that a straightforward autobiographical approach to Beckett's texts diminishes their aesthetic value is an attitude so prevalent in Beckett criticism as to be virtually axiomatic. To take the most prominent example, Deirdre Bair's biography of Beckett, first published in 1978, has met with enduring hostility from Beckett critics, who have objected, not only to the book's many inaccuracies, but to Bair's simplistic and often highly speculative parallels between Beckett's fiction and the details of his life. With the publication of *Company* in 1980, Bair again courted controversy by concluding that Beckett had adopted a "new directness" in telling "the facts of his life one more time" (Bair 1982, 17). John Fletcher had earlier made the "irreverent" suggestion that perhaps the apparently autobiographical nature of *Company* was Beckett's own attempt to set the record straight after the publication of Bair's biography (Fletcher 1981). However, the more orthodox, "pious" opinion was

expressed in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* by Linda Ben-Zvi, who felt that such a suggestion would diminish "the greatness of the work and the greatness of the author" (Ben-Zvi 1984, 83).

Abbott's notion of "autography" seeks to avoid these polarities by regarding Beckett's writing "not as a mode of recovery or reconstruction or even fictionalising of the past but as a mode of action taken in the moment of writing" (Abbott 1996, x). As Abbott further explains:

> The term "autobiography," with its middle syllable "bio," is literally self-life-writing. It carries with it the strong connotation of a life story, written by the one who lived that life. Autobiography in the sense of a memoir or life story is something Beckett had few illusions about, and the inadequacy of life stories is a theme that recurs throughout his oeuvre. So a better term than "autobiography" is "self-writing" and, better still, "autography," which avoids not only the implications of historical narrative in "bio" but also the semantic baggage of "self," a term as problematical for Beckett as the term "story". (Abbott 1996, x)

The subtle caution of Abbott's approach should alert us to the highly charged atmosphere that surrounds the question "who speaks?" in Beckett studies[6].

To take a final example, Simon Critchley argues:

> to ascribe the voice that speaks in the work with the author Samuel Beckett, or to identify the narrative voice with a controlling consciousness that looks down upon the drama of Beckett's work like a transcendent spectator, is to fail to acknowledge the strangeness of the work under consideration and to read the work as an oblique confession or, worse still, a series of case studies in a reductive psycho-biography. (Critchley 1997, 172)

For Critchley too, then, there is a reductiveness in reading Beckett's work in terms of an authorial or autobiographical presence which inevitably compromises its literary status. While Critchley concedes that "there is an irreducible existential residuum of

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[6] For a thoughtful response to Abbott's book, and an excellent short overview of the biographies of Beckett, see Daniel Albright's "Beckett at the Bowling Alley" (Albright 1997). In a sophisticated and wide-ranging reading, James Olney situates Beckett's "life-writing" in the tradition of St Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as interpreted by Foucault (Olney 1997). See also his *Memory and* Narrative (Olney 1998). For a recent example of a more conventional approach to these questions, see Frank Matton's "Beckett's Trilogy and the Limits of Autobiography" (Matton 1996).

authorial experience in the creation of any text that we might call 'literary'" (Critchley 1997, 172), it turns out that what we might call "literary", according to Critchley's Blanchotian definition of the term, is precisely those texts in which the "existential residuum of authorial experience" is entirely dissolved:

> in Beckett's work we approach an experience, a *literary* experience, that speaks to us in a voice that can be described as impersonal, neutral or indifferent: an incessant, interminable and indeterminable voice that reverberates outside of all intimacy, dispossessing the "I" and delivering it over to a nameless outside. Beckett's work draws the reader into a space — the space of literature — where a voice intones obscurely, drawn on by a speaking that does not begin and does not finish, which cannot speak and cannot but speak, that leads language towards what Blanchot calls with reference to *Comment C'est* "an unqualifiable murmur". (Critchley 1997, 173)

The question "who speaks?" therefore opens out onto the question of literature *as such*:

> There is no name for the voice that speaks in *The Unnamable*. Whoever speaks in Beckett's work, it is not "I", it is rather "he" (although this is still a pronoun, and that's the trouble), the third person or the impersonal neutrality of language. … In literature — and this is the defining quality of the literary for Blanchot — I do not speak, it speaks. (Critchley 1997, 174)

In terms of the contemporary discourse on literature, and there can be no doubt that Beckett's writing is more closely bound up with the discourse of "the literary" than any other, the greatness of Beckett's writing is seen to correspond precisely to the extent to which it is authorless, the extent to which the question "who speaks?" returns us to an inscrutable anonymity.

Autobiography and anonymity

Since Blanchot, then, the question of "who speaks?" has remained a central problem in the interpretation of Samuel Beckett's work. And at first sight, it would appear that responses to this question fall somewhere between two poles.

On the one hand, there would be the "autobiographical" approach, which, as we have seen, is associated most controversially with Deirdre Bair's biography (Bair 1990), and which represents the body of Beckett's writing as a kind of cryptic psychobiography. If subsequent biographers Lois Gordon (1996), James Knowlson (1996), and Anthony Cronin (1997) have been more judicious in their extrapolation of parallels between the life and the work, the sheer wealth of factual detail now available concerning Beckett's life means that many of these parallels come to seem unavoidable. Once one has read that lemon verbena grew in profusion around the hall door of Beckett's childhood home, Cooldrinagh (Cronin 1997, 12; Knowlson 1996, 14), it is impossible to read in the same way lines such as the following, from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*:

> Belacqua was heartily glad to get back to his parents' comfortable private residence, ineffably detached and situated and so on, and his first act, once spent the passion of greeting after so long and bitter a separation, was to plunge his prodigal head into the bush of verbena that clustered about the old porch … and longly to swim and swoon on the rich bosom of its fragrance, a fragrance in which the least of his childish joys and sorrows were and would for ever be embalmed. (*Dream* 145)

But *Dream* is a juvenile and evidently semi-autobiographical work, which Beckett only consented to publish posthumously, more than sixty years after it was written. It is one thing, as Knowlson does, to trace this more or less transparent passage back to the details of the author's life, and quite another to argue, as Cronin does, that Cooldrinagh is "the model for Moran's house in *Molloy*" (Cronin 1997, 12). And yet, given this knowledge, one can hardly ignore it when reading Moran's statement:

> … Contentedly I inhaled the scent of my lemon-verbena.
>
> In such surroundings slipped away my last moments of peace and happiness.
>
> (*Molloy* 127)

Does such an evident autobiographical connection inevitably reduce art, as Abbott complains, to "the epiphenomenal residue of a single life's contingencies"? Even the most stubbornly author-centred of Beckett critics would reject the suggestion that the autobiographical connection "explains" this passage, that it exhausts or even reduces its possible significance.

And in fact, although Abbott quite rightly observes that there has been little work yoking "Beckett studies" with the "broad terrain of self-writing", recent

autobiographical approaches have tended to proliferate, rather than reduce, the possible meanings of the work. Rather than the finite details of the life reducing the infinite possibilities of the literary text, recent autobiographical approaches have tended to produce a diverse and often highly contradictory array of interpretations of the *relation* between the life and the work.

Nevertheless, we might characterise as "authorial" any mode of criticism that would seek to locate, in the details of the author's life, clues to the origin or the final significance of the work. At the opposite end of the spectrum, then, would be Blanchot's invocation of impersonality, in which the figure of the author is reduced to a sort of empty cipher, a necessary but invisible medium through whom passes an anonymous flow of language, undifferentiated speech. For Blanchot:

> Art requires that he who practises it should be immolated to art, should become other, not another, not transformed from the human being he was into an artist with artistic duties, satisfactions and interests, but into nobody, the empty, animated space where art's summons is heard. (Blanchot 1988, 28)

According to Blanchot, it is *language itself* that speaks in Beckett's works, or rather, Beckett's works begin at "the point where language ceases to speak but *is*, where nothing begins, nothing is said, but where language is always reborn and always starts afresh" (Blanchot 1988, 28). This mode of criticism, then, would seem to represent the opposite extreme: a rigorously anti-authorial approach, where the figure of the author is reduced to a "nobody", no more than an arbitrary name which happens to attach itself to what is essentially an impersonal linguistic act, without origin or destination, motivation or identity. Of course, Blanchot was writing his review at a time when Beckett was relatively unknown as an author, when there was consequently very little knowledge of or speculation about the autobiographical elements of his work. If subsequent writers like Trezise have had to take into account the crypto-autobiographical nature of some of Beckett's writing, there is nevertheless a strong tradition of reading Beckett as a singularly impersonal or anonymous author, one who relentlessly fragments and disperses the conventional markers of autonomous and coherent authorial identity.

These, then, would be the poles of response to the question of "who speaks?": autobiography or anonymity, Beckett or Nobody. Of course the bulk of writing on

Beckett falls somewhere between the two: on the one hand, it takes a (frequently unexamined) notion of the authorial subject as the eponymous definition of its field ("Beckett studies"), and on the other it consistently urges the essential unanswerability of the author question, defensively invoking the fruitful multiplicity of the text against the impoverishing univocity of autobiographical explanations. But, in any case, are these polarities between authorialism and anonymity really as diametrically opposed as they appear to be?

As I mentioned earlier, the question "who speaks?" is already Beckett's question. And the answer Beckett gives, at least in the text quoted as an example earlier, is "It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer" (CSPR 114). This indeterminacy, this fragmentation and multiplication of the speaking subject, is of course one of the most characteristic features of Beckett's prose writing of the late forties and early fifties, the period of the *Stories*, the *Trilogy*, and the *Texts for Nothing*. If the answer to the question "who speaks?" is indeterminate, or impersonal, or anonymous, then perhaps that very indeterminacy is already Beckett's. It might be argued, then, that Blanchot's notion of "impersonality", far from undermining the ascendancy of the author by returning language to the status of an anonymous utterance, represents an even greater deference to the author, in that it reproduces in the language of criticism the very discourse of the text itself.

Thus, according to Bruno Clément, Blanchot's "reading" of *L'Innommable* is really little more than a repetition, an echo, a re-writing of Beckett's text. Clément quotes the final paragraphs of Blanchot's review, which lead into a long quote from Beckett, where Blanchot invites the reader to: "descendre dans cette région neutre où s'enfonce, désormais livré aux mots, celui qui pour écrire est tombé dans l'absence du temps, là où il lui faut mourir d'une mort sans fin : « les mots sont partout … » " [descend into that neutral region into which sinks, henceforth at the mercy of words, he who in order that he may write dwells in a timelessness where he must die in an endless dying: "the words are everywhere …"] (Blanchot 1988, 23; cited in Clément 1986, 300; translation modified).

Clément observes:

> Celui qui est familier des livres de Samuel Beckett n'est pas dépaysé. Il connaît ces questions. Ces affirmations, il y souscrit. Et il aspire, lui aussi, à descendre dans l'arène, à se « livrer aux mots ». Il n'a pas l'impression que le critique, comme il arrive parfois, superpose au texte qu'il vient de quitter un appareil technique, systématique, qui alourdit l'œuvre, l'éloigne de lui, la défigure. Non. Il reconnaît dans ces paroles l'accent qu'il aime. Mieux : il reconnaît ces paroles. Ce sont celles mêmes de Samuel Beckett. Il a du mal d'ailleurs à distinguer l'un de l'autre le commentaire de Maurice Blanchot et le texte de Samuel Beckett qui y est tellement imbriqué qu'il n'aperçoit pas toujours les coutures. (Clément 1986, 300)

> Anyone familiar with Samuel Beckett's work will not be disoriented. He knows these questions, he endorses these statements. And he, too, hopes to enter the fray, to be "at the mercy of words". He does not get the impression, as is sometimes the case, that the critic is imposing upon the text a pre-existing system or technical apparatus which would burden the work, estrange it from itself, disfigure it. On the contrary: he hears in this passage the tone he admires. Better still: he recognises these words. They are Samuel Beckett's. It then becomes difficult to distinguish Maurice Blanchot's commentary from Samuel Beckett's text: the two are so neatly stitched together that it's sometimes difficult to see where the seams are.

For Clément, Blanchot's reading of *L'Innommable* inaugurates a tradition of Beckett criticism in which the critic "adopte en face de lui non pas l'attitude d'un sujet considérant un objet d'un point de vue quelconque, mais celle d'une conscience aspirant à s'emplir de ces paroles" [relates to the text no longer as a subject considering an object from a certain point of view, but as a consciousness seeking to immerse itself in these words] (Clément 1986, 304).

The critical tradition is little more than a faithful impersonation of the master's voice:

> Ainsi s'est abolie la nécessaire distance entre le critique et l'écrivain, entre la voix qui parle et l'oreille de celui qui la commente. Ce texte ne laisse, en vérité, rien à comprendre, rien à entendre, rien à voir ou à analyser; on dirait qu'il impose au lecteur, pouvoir inouï, le discours même à tenir sur lui, qu'il se dérobe aux regards, à l'analyse, comme texte, et cela en s'exposant, en se commentant. Il assigne au critique le lieu d'où il parlera: il parlera de l'intérieur du texte, le vivra, n'en sortira jamais. Il y a plus: le critique se voit contraint d'utiliser jusqu'aux mots, aux formules du texte qui ne lui laisse même, finalement, rien à dire. ...
>
> Quand Maurice Blanchot parle de Samuel Beckett, il le répète; il n'est plus en mesure de faire autre chose. Il est parlé par lui. (Clément 1986, 304-5)

> Here that crucial distance, between critic and author, between the voice that speaks and the ear of the commentator, is abolished. In truth, Beckett's text leaves us nothing to understand, nothing to hear, nothing to see or interpret. It's almost as if the text imposed upon the reader, with unprecedented authority, the very words of its own critique, as if it withdrew itself from the reach of critical analysis, as textual object, while at the same time providing its own exegesis, conducting its own commentary. It assigns to the critic the place from which he speaks: he speaks from within the text, inhabits it, will never escape it. What is more, the critic is reduced to using the very phrases and expressions of the text; the text leaves him, finally, with nothing else to say. ...
>
> When Maurice Blanchot speaks of Samuel Beckett, he merely repeats him; he is in no position to do otherwise. He is spoken by him.

Clément sees this renunciation of critical distance as an endemic problem in the reception of Beckett's work, and quotes as a final example Brian T. Fitch's *Dimensions, structures et textualité dans la trilogie romanesque de Beckett*:

> nous espérons donc paradoxalement clore cette étude sans avoir rien dit de l'essentiel, sans avoir été amené à formuler l'informe, mais en ayant créé une sorte d'équivalent critique de l'œuvre elle-même ... et seule compte pour nous la fidélité à cette œuvre remarquable. (Fitch 1977, 94)
>
> therefore we hope, paradoxically, to bring this study to a close without ever touching on the essential, without being forced to formulate the formless, but having created a sort of critical equivalent of the work itself ... and the only thing that matters for us is our fidelity to this remarkable work.

As Clément drily comments: "On ne saurait rêver prétention plus humble" [one cannot imagine a more humble ambition] (Clément 1986, 306). The critical act becomes no more than a kind of recitation:

> I shall submit, more corpse-obliging than ever. I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible. This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation, is all I have to worry about. (*Unnamable* 86)

Thus the "anti-authorial" tradition of reading Beckett's work as "impersonal" or "anonymous", inaugurated by Blanchot and reproduced in post-structuralist readings like Trezise's, can be seen as essentially a "critical equivalent of the work itself" — a tradition which has renounced critical distance in the name of "fidelity to this remarkable work". Although an emphasis on the fragmentation of the individual

speaking subject and on the essentially transpersonal or anonymous nature of language might ordinarily deprive the author-function of its legislative powers over the interpretation of the text, the work of Samuel Beckett would seem to represent a special case, in that such a mode of reading is already anticipated, promoted, and regulated by the text itself.

Thus it is possible to open *The Unnamable* virtually at random and find a ready-made stock of quotations for a theoretical study of the literary constitution of the speaking subject: "Into the dossier with it in any case, in support of whatever thesis you fancy" (*Unnamable* 79). *The Unnamable* is, in fact, already such a study.

Beckett and the author-function

If Beckett is, in a significant sense, the author who poses more rigorously than any other the question of "who speaks?", then the various attempts to answer this question, from the naively autobiographical approaches to the sophisticated invocations of literary anonymity, nevertheless remain within the field of concern delineated by Beckett himself and sanctioned by the authorial name. In spite of everything, "impersonality" becomes part of a distinctly *authorial* mystique, and "anonymity" paradoxically becomes Beckett's distinctive signature.

Therefore it is no doubt fitting that in the most important contribution to the author debate, Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?" of 1969, it is precisely Beckett who is cited as defining the problem most succinctly: "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" (CSPR 109).

Both the context and the significance of Foucault's citation of Beckett in this essay are extremely complex, and raise important questions on a number of levels: in relation to the development of Foucault's thought, in relation to the discourse of

Beckett criticism, and in relation to the question of the author in literature and the question of the place of literature in culture more generally.

"What Is an Author?" occupies a pivotal moment in Foucault's thinking, and if, on the one hand, the question of the author remained a crucial and seemingly intractable problem to which he continually returned right up to the end of his life, on the other, this essay marks more or less the final moment in which literature will be of primary concern in his thinking. Nevertheless, Foucault's citation of Beckett, both here and in a second important essay of the same period, "The Discourse on Language", indicates an intense and problematic relation between Beckett's writing and the theoretical issues Foucault was grappling with at this point.

Therefore, in the chapters that follow, I examine these essays in considerable detail, in order to draw out the full implications of Foucault's invocation of Beckett. Inevitably, in "What Is an Author?" the casual mention of Beckett's name produces a peculiar tension in an essay in which the very functioning of the authorial name is called into question. So too, the ambiguous presence of Beckett's words in such a landmark theoretical text inevitably raises a series of questions in relation to the wider discourse on Beckett.

On the one hand, Beckett is seen as a literary author who, more rigorously than any other, poses the question of the author, and on the other, Foucault is seen as the theorist who, more rigorously than any other, analyses the operation of the author-function. The conjuncture of these two writers in this highly over-determined context inevitably sets in train a complex series of questions to which the following chapters might be seen as constituting the preliminaries of a response.

PART 2:

Foucault, Beckett, and the author-function

I believe that — at least since a certain epoch — the individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks — this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn. He may well overturn the traditional image of the author; nevertheless, it is from some new author-position that he will cut out, from everything he could say and from all that he does say every day at any moment, the still trembling outline of his oeuvre.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*

(Foucault 1987d, 59)

Introduction

In any discussion of authorship, Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?" inevitably stands as the *locus classicus*: as an indispensable point of theoretical reference, as a precise summation of the issues at stake, and as a polemical provocation from which other arguments, both *pro* and *contra*, continue to derive their rhetorical energy.

Within the field of Beckett studies, Foucault's essay exerts a redoubled influence, since Beckett's words "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" (CSPR 109, cited in Foucault 1977c, 115) are prominently but enigmatically cited both at the opening and closing of Foucault's argument. In any discussion of Beckett and authorship, therefore, Foucault's essay functions as a touchstone, and the spectrum of responses to Foucault tends to reflect the wider spectrum of opinion regarding the relationship between Beckett and the "author-function".

As the title suggests, this chapter considers a tripartite set of relations, between Foucault, Beckett, and the author-function. Of course, each of these terms is already a complex entity: both Foucault and Beckett are, of course, "doubled" by their own author-functions, quite different in each case, and although it is difficult, although perhaps not entirely meaningless, to distinguish between a real Beckett and an author-function "Beckett", it is nevertheless in the space of this disjunction that the "discourse on Beckett" is played out. The author-function, as Foucault defines it and as others take it up in their turn, is a complex and contradictory ensemble of representations and practices, and part of its power no doubt derives from its anxious reconstruction of a vanished real, as if the author could only ever appear as an absence, as if authenticity could only glimmer fitfully in the dark night of doubt.

The question of the author is often misunderstood as relating to the element of autobiography in an author's writings. In fact, the issue of the autobiographical is something of a red herring, a spectre over which antagonists dispute who in reality have far too much in common. If we consider, for a moment, the author-function as a kind of dyad, as the unstable yet inseparable relation between author and text, then it is easy to see how both "authorial" and "anti-authorial" readings of Beckett ultimately remain within the domain of the author-function as the locus of authority, authenticity and originality. Calling the author as witness against another's version of the text, and calling the text as witness against another's version of the author, are really two sides of the same argument, and do nothing to undermine the authority of the court.

Foucault's "What Is an Author?" is, I think, poised at the cusp of a new way of thinking about literature: in particular, it implicitly suggests that a rigorous questioning of the author-function undermines the resources of literary writing altogether. While Foucault is passionately concerned about literature in this essay, it is at the same time, as Simon During argues, "a resolutely anti-literary paper" (During 1992, 124), and its influence no doubt derives from the intensity of its own inner contradictions. What is ultimately at stake, perhaps, is what was (in 1969 at least) the timely question of the avant-garde, the question of an aesthetic practice that might critically undermine the ideologies and institutions of official culture. "What Is an Author?" represents a first step in what was a decisive shift in Foucault's thought. It is an abandonment of the notion of writing as transgressive, and a devastating critique of *écriture*, of the notion that writing can in itself be revolutionary, that it can do or be anything in particular independently of the structures and occasions of its reception and reproduction.

Foucault's questioning of the author-function is one of the key elements of this shift, and ironically, when he follows up this line of thought in "The Order of Discourse" in 1971, it is once again with a quote from Beckett that Foucault begins. Now, however, the tone is different: "I wish I could have … I should have preferred … I should have liked …" (Foucault 1987d, 51). It is a gesture of resignation, of abandonment, of moving on: Beckett is no longer cited as an exemplar for the future, but as a reminder of the past, the last echo of a vanished discourse that it is no longer possible for Foucault to speak.

In both essays Beckett's words serve as an ambiguous opening gambit, both a way of beginning and a way of avoiding beginning. Similarly, in both essays it is with a return to this opening that Foucault concludes. Critics have always seen Foucault's use of Beckett in these highly significant contexts as an implicit endorsement, a homage paid to a favourite author whose words, for a moment, can be called upon to say what Foucault himself might have wanted to say. This view is held both by those who accuse Foucault of a misuse or misreading of Beckett, and by those who find Foucault's reading appropriate or illuminating.

However, I believe that Foucault's quotation of Beckett is far more complex and ambivalent than has hitherto been acknowledged, because, in the context of Foucault's decisive critique of literature and the author-function, Beckett cannot function as anything other than an exemplary instance of the literary author.

By the same token, however, this is not to say that Foucault's attitude to Beckett or to literature is entirely ironic or critical. On the contrary, in a later interview Foucault acknowledges the seminal importance of Beckett's writing in the early development of his thought:

> I belong to that generation who as students had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism. Interesting and stimulating as these might be, naturally they produced in the students completely immersed in them a feeling of being stifled, and the urge to look elsewhere. I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a breathtaking performance; then reading the works of Blanchot, Bataille, and Robbe-Grillet … Michel Butor, Barthes's *Mythologies*, and Lévi-Strauss. (Foucault 1987c, 174)

Here Beckett is situated alongside the more familiar Foucaultian avatars, as the initiator of a fundamental "break" with an earlier mode of thinking.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is devoted to a detailed reading of "What Is an Author?" Here I wish to set Foucault's essay in its context, as a pivotal moment in his critical reappraisal of the literary avant-garde of the 1960s. With these considerations in mind, Foucault's tactic in using Beckett's words as a

kind of *leitmotiv* can be seen, not as the unqualified endorsement it is usually taken to be, but as a highly ambiguous and even ironic gesture. Therefore I trace the outline of Foucault's argument in some detail, at each step relating Foucault's general analysis of the author-function to the particular ways in which these themes are played out in the case of Beckett. That is, I focus on "Beckett" as an author-function: both in terms of how Beckett himself "played" it, as a role in which he was not entirely uncomfortable, and in terms of the various ways in which "Beckett" is taken up by the discourse which bears his name.

In the second section, I examine in detail two contrasting responses to Foucault's essay from within the discourse of Beckett studies. On the one hand, Iain Wright mounts a vigorous defence of authorial intention, what he calls "Beckett's vision" (Wright 1983, 18), against the hyperbolic excesses of the Anglo-American anti-authorial criticism of the 1980s, arguing that the "death of the author" debate has led to an "over-polarisation of our interpretative options — either the tyranny of the author or the tyranny of the reader" (Wright 1983, 6). On the other hand, Jim Hicks takes issue with Wright's reading, arguing that texts such as *Company* demand to be read in terms of an avant-garde ethic of authorial indifference. He argues that a scrupulous fidelity to the anti-authorial rhetorical strategies of Beckett's texts necessarily undermines any attempt to construct a Beckettian authorial vision (Hicks 1993).

However, Hicks's essay, as much as Wright's, in its attempt to present a faithful rendering of Beckett's text, necessarily remains "within the true" of the eponymous field of "Beckett studies". That field cannot be anything other than authorial, not because some critics are still enchained to the notion of authorial intention, or because others choose to read the texts as coded autobiography, but because it delimits as its field of inquiry a collection of signed and named and authored texts, because it draws both its justification and its purpose from the authority of those texts, and because it thereby restricts itself to the domain of what Foucault was to call "commentary", setting itself the task — whether by interpreting or refusing to interpret, whether by constructing authors or deconstructing them — of repeating and reconfirming the authority of those texts.

The final section turns to "The Order of Discourse", and underscores the ironies implicit in Foucault's citation of *The Unnamable* in the opening of this essay. Edward Said's useful distinction between the roles of "teacher" and "author" provides the starting point for a comparison between Foucault's and Beckett's responses to the author-function, where Beckett's apparent refusal of the role of author can be seen in fact as an embattled defence of authorial privilege. The intention here is not to mount some heavy-handed critique of Beckett, but to trace the limits of the literary avant-garde: it is to suggest that no form of writing, however scrupulous, can in itself be definitively anti-authorial, since, as Foucault argues in "The Order of Discourse", for Beckett, as for any other writer, "this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn" (Foucault 1987d, 59).

Beckett's work is, after all, only literature — not philosophy or theory or criticism — and it is doubtful whether what we call literature can exist without the author-function. After "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse" Foucault's philosophical and political trajectory carries him far beyond the domain of literature and literary criticism, and these essays are the last in which the literary is still of concern. If Beckett's writing stands as an exemplary instance of the literary aesthetics to which Foucault attests a lingering attachment at this time, Beckett as an author also stands as the exemplary object of Foucault's embryonic but decisive critique.

Foucault and Beckett 1: "What Is an Author?"

Introduction

THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHORIAL SUBJECT

"What is an Author?" occupies a pivotal position in the development of Michel Foucault's thought. First delivered as a lecture at the Collège de France in 1969, it is a highly revisionist essay, grappling with some of the theoretical problems raised by *The Order of Things*, as well as looking forward to the themes of the research program to be laid out more explicitly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, published later in the same year. It is a complex piece of theoretical positioning, full of provocations and retractions, contradictions and ironies. It is an exploratory piece, an *essay* in the true sense of the word, and the revisionist, transitional, and even polemical circumstances of its writing are inseparable from the extraordinary richness and complexity of its ideas[7].

[7] There are several versions of Foucault's paper. The essay was originally published as "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 63.3 (1969): 73-104. It was delivered as a lecture before the Société at the Collège de France on February 22, 1969. There are two different English translations which I consult. On the whole, I refer to Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon's translation (Foucault 1977c), which follows the original French faithfully to the point of clumsiness at times. However, Foucault later revised the paper, adding important material to the essay's concluding pages, and it is this revised version which appears in Josué V. Harari's anthology (Foucault 1980a) and which I discuss later in this chapter. Both versions, however, omit the discussion

"What Is an Author?" follows in the wake of the controversy generated by *The Order of Things*. Uncharacteristically, Foucault acknowledged the validity of many of the criticisms of that work, and in the belligerent "Foreword to the English Edition" he identifies three problems for which he has no satisfactory answers: the problems of change, causality, and the authorial subject (Foucault 1973, xii-xiv). On the question of authorship, he writes:

> I tried to explore scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse. (Foucault 1973, xiv)

This is the problem which he addresses in "What Is an Author?": the problem of writing a history of ideas in terms of the conditions of discursive practice rather than by giving priority to the autonomous thinking subject. Although the problem originally arises, particularly in *The Order of Things*, in relation to the production of scientific knowledge, in "What Is an Author?" Foucault is clearly more concerned with the general question of how the notion of the author begins to function as "a privileged moment of individualisation in the history of ideas, knowledge, and literature" (Foucault 1977c, 115). In his preamble to the paper, Foucault is more openly critical of his earlier work:

> In proposing this slightly odd question, I am conscious of the need for an explanation. To this day, the "author" remains an open question both with respect to its general function within discourse and in my own writings; that is, this question permits me to return to certain aspects of my own work which now appear ill-advised and misleading. In this regard, I wish to propose a necessary criticism and reevaluation.
>
> For instance, my objective in *The Order of Things* had been to analyse verbal clusters as discursive layers which fall outside the familiar categories of a book, a work, or an author. But while I considered "natural history," the "analysis of wealth," and "political economy" in general terms, I neglected a similar analysis of the author and his works; it is perhaps due to this omission that I employed the names of authors throughout this book in a naive and often crude fashion. I spoke of

which follows the paper, as well as Foucault's opening remarks, and I quote these from the original French (Foucault 1969).

> Buffon, Cuvier, Ricardo, and others as well, but failed to realise that I had allowed their names to function ambiguously. (Foucault 1977c, 113-14)

Seán Burke has argued that this self-criticism is deceptive, since if any author's name was allowed to function ambiguously in *The Order of Things*, that author, that name, was not Buffon or Cuvier or Ricardo, but Nietzsche (Burke 1992, 81-89). Burke argues that, contrary to Foucault's main thesis that the *episteme* conditions the possibilities and limitations of thought, in *The Order of Things* Nietzsche is allowed to function as a kind of eruptive trans-epistemic Prometheus who exceeds the discursive limitations of his own time. For instance, according to Foucault:

> Nietzsche … took the end of time and transformed it into the death of God and the odyssey of the last man; he took up anthropological finitude once again, but in order to use it as the basis for the prodigious leap of the übermensch; he took up again the great continuous chain of History, but in order to bend it round into the infinity of the eternal return. It is in vain that the death of God, the imminence of the übermensch, and the promise and terror of the great year take up once more, as it were term by term, the elements that are arranged in nineteenth-century thought and form its archaeological framework. The fact remains that they sent all these stable forms up in flames, that they used their charred remains to draw strange and perhaps impossible faces; and by a light that may be either — we do not yet know which — the reviving flame of the last great fire or an indication of the dawn, we see the emergence of what may perhaps be the space of contemporary thought. It was Nietzsche, in any case, who burned for us, even before we were born, the intermingled promises of the dialectic and anthropology. (Foucault 1973, 263)

As Burke drily comments, "this passage — with scarcely perceptible modifications — is to recur four times in Foucault's text, and always at critical junctures" (Burke 1992, 82). If Foucault's ambitious project in *The Order of Things* is to write a history of ideas that "avoids the genealogical table of exceptional individuals" (Foucault 1977c, 114), the one glaring contradiction in this account is the figure of Nietzsche. It is Nietzsche, rather than Ricardo, Cuvier or Bopp, whose name is invoked "in a naive and often crude fashion". Burke argues:

> Foucault's attitude to Nietzsche is completely uncritical. … Essentially, Foucault seems to be saying of Nietzsche what Nietzsche's final megalomania was saying of Nietzsche: to wit, that he is a destiny, will be born posthumously, and so on. Indeed, we might say that Foucault is never so Nietzschean as when he invokes Nietzsche, not on account of the thought thereby represented, but by the manner of his invoking, for Nietzsche throughout celebrated the view of history which sees great men —

> Socrates, Luther, Goethe, Napoleon, and others — succeeding each other across epochs. Every age, he will insist, is meaningful only in terms of its higher types. And it is these higher types who carry with them the promise of the übermensch. First and foremost, the übermensch is the untimely one, he who cannot be contained by his times, still less by an organising centre of prediscursive regularities. Within Foucault's textual history, this privileged, transhistorical status is bestowed upon Nietzsche himself. (Burke 1992, 86-88)[8]

Increasingly, towards the end of *The Order of Things*, Foucault celebrates Nietzsche as nothing less than the avatar and visionary prophet of a yet-to-be-articulated contemporary thought, the untimely herald of the "Death of Man". The Death of Man is one of Foucault's primary themes in *The Order of Things*. It is a polemical demand for a new form of thought which once and for all dispenses with the eighteenth-century invention of "man" as the foundation of all knowledge, which liberates itself from the twin shackles of the historical dialectic and the phenomenological subject, and which discovers in language and the forms of discourse the possibility of erasing the human subject, "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault 1973, 387).

THE AUTHORIAL SUBJECT IN AVANT-GARDE WRITING

Although *The Order of Things* presents itself as a history of discursive structures which "fall outside the familiar categories of a book, a work, or an author" (Foucault 1977c, 113), the contradictory status and disproportionate presence of Nietzsche in that work can be seen as evidence of Foucault's lingering attachment to what might be described, in a familiar oxymoron, as an avant-garde tradition, where the author

[8] Although Burke's point here is no doubt valid in relation to *The Order of Things*, and Nietzsche certainly does occupy a highly ambiguous status in Foucault's work, Burke's argument can perhaps be countered by reference to Foucault's later work, where Nietzsche's paradoxical trans-epistemic status might be explained by the fact that discursive formations (crudely subsumed in *The Order of Things* under the general concept of the *episteme*) determine, not what it is *possible to think*, but what is *recognised, accepted and practiced as thought*. Nietzsche's untimeliness can therefore be explained, not in terms of a Promethean transcendence of history by an exceptional individual, but in terms of the contemporary re-reading and re-appropriation of hitherto neglected possibilities in the work of an earlier thinker.

functions as a principle of eruptive singularity, and where writing is seen to enfold a transgressive or revolutionary potential.

In many ways "What Is an Author?" can be seen as a scrupulous examination and rejection of many of the principles of Foucault's earlier avant-gardist conception of literature. Simon During emphasises this "anti-literary" element of Foucault's paper, arguing that "'What is an Author?' ... along with ... 'The Order of Discourse' ... provides a clear sense of how [Foucault's] shift away from archaeology was enabled by the dismissal of his transgressive or literary heritage" (During 1992, 120).

This avant-garde literary heritage had been most clearly expressed in *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault 1992), in his book on Raymond Roussel (Foucault 1987a), and in his essays on French writers, including Bataille (Foucault 1977b), Klossowski (Foucault 1964), Blanchot (Foucault 1987b), and even Flaubert (1977a). It is important to bear in mind, however, that these writers and their works had already been characterised as "anti-authorial" in many respects. In the conclusion to *Madness and Civilization*, for instance, madness is defined in aesthetic terms as "the absence of the work of art" (Foucault 1992, 287), where the dissolution of the subject in madness is explicitly linked with the dissolution of the author-function as a principle of unity in the oeuvre. There too, Nietzsche figures prominently:

> Nietzsche's last cry, proclaiming himself both Christ and Dionysos ... is the very annihilation of the work of art. ... It is of little importance on exactly which day in the autumn of 1888 Nietzsche went mad for good, and after which his texts no longer afford philosophy but psychiatry: all of them, including the postcard to Strindberg, belong to Nietzsche, and all are related to *The Birth of Tragedy*. But we must not think of this continuity in terms of a system, of a thematics, or even of an existence: Nietzsche's madness — that is, the dissolution of his thought — is that by which his thought opens out onto the modern world. (Foucault 1992, 287-88)

So too, in Foucault's study of Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth*, Roussel's work, through its rigorous submission to puns and *double entendres* — the objective accidents of language — is celebrated as a liberation from the demands of subjectivity and the burden of expression.

However, Foucault's avant-gardism is perhaps most apparent in his essay on Blanchot, "The Thought from Outside", which begins:

> In ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: "I lie." "I speak," on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test. (Foucault 1987b, 9)

This remark could easily belong in an essay on Beckett: "I have to say, when I speak, Who speaks" (*Unnamable* 145). And in fact, as Foucault's argument develops, its affinity with Blanchot's essay on *The Unnamable* "Where Now? Who Now?" becomes clearly apparent.

> In what extreme delicacy, at what slight and singular point, could a language come together in an attempt to recapture itself in the stripped-down form, "I speak"? Unless, of course, the void in which the contentless slimness of "I speak" is manifested were an absolute opening through which language endlessly spreads forth, while the subject — the "I" who speaks — fragments, disperses, scatters, disappearing in that naked space. (Foucault 1987b, 11)

This fragmenting, dispersing, scattering "I" is already the "I" of Beckett's fiction:

> the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me … I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder … I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing … (*Unnamable* 139)

Foucault invokes the transgressive potential of the kind of writing that allows the inherent subversiveness of language itself to unfold:

> If the only site for language is indeed the solitary sovereignty of "I speak" then in principle nothing can limit it — not the one to whom it is addressed, not the truth of what it says, not the values or systems of representation it utilizes. In short, it is no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority. And the subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse … than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues. (Foucault 1987b, 11)

Clearly this kind of passage aligns Foucault very closely with the notion of *écriture*, a theoretical investment in the transgressive potential of written language, as it was then

being theorised and practiced by a group of contemporary writers in France more or less associated with the *Tel Quel* group and the "new new novelists". In its avant-garde aspirations, it is a form of writing which claims to be itself a form of revolutionary political activity, using radical experimentation with language to open up new spaces of freedom outside the ideological constraints of realist or mimetic fiction, and one of its most powerful techniques is its dissolution of the coherence of the speaking subject. As Simon During explains:

> [transgressive writing] breaks with the notion that writing is the product of a single and simple self. The self may be dispersed by transgressive writing because such writing provides its readers with no stable and "realist" linguistic codes by which to position themselves, no author or characters to be identified with. (During 1992, 7-8)

Perhaps the most characteristic example of the formulation of writing as revolutionary activity in this period is Julia Kristeva's *La Révolution de la langue poétique* (Kristeva 1974). For Kristeva, the aesthetic subversions of nineteenth-century avant-garde poets such as Mallarmé and Lautréamont, and modernists such Joyce and Céline, serve to break up the elementary structures of language and subjectivity. However, as Toril Moi argues:

> [Kristeva] seems essentially to argue that the disruption of the subject, the *sujet en procès* displayed in these texts, prefigures or parallels revolutionary disruptions of society. But her only argument in support of this contention is the rather lame one of comparison or homology. Nowhere are we given a specific analysis of the actual social or political structures that would produce such a homologous relationship between the subjective and the social. (Moi 1988, 171)

And in fact, it is this conception of writing as possessing *in itself* a transgressive or political potential which Foucault is somewhat at pains to distance himself from in "What Is an Author?"

In a later interview Foucault is openly, even derisively critical of the *Tel Quel* doctrine that writing in itself possesses a revolutionary character[9]. It is worth quoting

[9] For a detailed discussion of Foucault's relationship with the *Tel Quel* group, see Danielle Marx-Scouras's *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel* (Marx-Scouras 1996), especially Chapter 2, "Excesses of Language" (53-103). In terms of the reassessment of the politics of *Tel Quel*, see Pierre Bourdieu's "Sollers *tel quel*", where he makes a blistering denunciation of group founder Philippe Sollers's trajectory "from the fake avant-garde of literature (and politics) to the authentic political rearguard"

this passage at length, for in it Foucault explains why he attached a certain importance to the notion of intransitivity of literature, and why he was to reject that thesis in his later work:

> In order to break with a number of myths, including that of the expressive character of literature, it has been very important to pose this great principle that literature is concerned only with itself. If it is concerned with its author, it is so rather in terms of the death, silence, disappearance even of the person writing. ...
>
> But it seems to me that this was still only a stage. For, by keeping analysis at this level, one runs the risk of not unravelling the totality of sacralizations of which literature has been the object. On the contrary, one runs the risk of sacralising even more. And this is indeed what happened, right up until 1970. You will have seen how a number of themes originating in Blanchot or Barthes were used in a kind of exaltation, both ultra-lyrical and ultra-rationalising, of literature as a structure capable of being analysed in itself and on its own terms.
>
> Political implications were absent from this exaltation. Some people were even able to say that literature in itself was so emancipated from all determinations that the very fact of writing was in itself subversive, that the writer, in the very gesture of writing, had an inalienable right to subversion! The writer was, therefore, a revolutionary and the more writing was writing, the more it sank into intransitivity, the more it produced, by that very fact, the movement of revolution! As you know, such things were, unfortunately, said ... (Foucault 1988, 309-10)

At the time of "What Is an Author?", however, the problems involved in this "ultra-lyrical and ultra-rationalising" exaltation of literature were only beginning to emerge. Foucault's essay is very much a transitional and exploratory piece — its rejection of avant-gardism is by no means unequivocal or unambiguous — and thus there remain traces of a contradictory series of positions regarding the kind of potential enfolded in the act of writing. As we have seen, the full implications of Foucault's rejection of the notion of writing as transgressive, and the full intensity of that rejection, really only become apparent the late interviews. To give another example, in "Truth and Power" Foucault expands on the relationship between the theorisation of writing and institutional discourses of power, signalling the late sixties as a kind of twilight of authorial prestige, where the writer as universal intellectual still enjoyed a certain cultural authority:

(Bourdieu 1998, 11), as well as dismissing *en bloc* "all the masters of pretence who have clustered at one time or another around *Tel Quel*" (Bourdieu 1998, 11).

> The intellectual *par excellence* used to be a writer: as a universal consciousness, a free subject, he was counterposed to those intellectuals who were merely *competent instances* in the service of the State or Capital — technicians, magistrates, teachers. Since the time when each individual's specific activity began to serve as the basis for politicisation, the threshold of *writing*, as the sacralising mark of the intellectual, has disappeared. The whole relentless theorisation of writing which we saw in the 1960s was doubtless only a swansong. Through it, the writer was fighting for the preservation of his political privilege; but the fact that it was precisely a matter of theory, that he needed scientific credentials, founded in linguistics, semiology, psychoanalysis, that this theory took its references from the direction of Saussure, or Chomsky, etc., and that it gave rise to such mediocre literary products, all this proves that the activity of the writer was no longer at the focus of things. (Foucault 1980a, 127)

This statement marks the end point of the trajectory which had begun with "What is an Author?", where Foucault was beginning to shift the theoretical emphasis away from various radical forms of writing and towards the institutions which govern the circulation, reproduction and transmission of texts. "What Is an Author?" would seem to represent a first tentative rejection of *écriture*, of "textuality", a questioning of the notion that writing can possess, in itself, aesthetic or political effects independent of its institutional or discursive conditions of reception.

Literature, of course, is the pre-eminent discourse of textuality. "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse" might seem to signal an abandonment of the basic premise of literary activity, defined as a sort of principled investment in the potential of the written word. What is remarkable, then, is that on both occasions it is Samuel Beckett's work that Foucault quotes in the course of this "farewell to literature"[10].

[10] In the discussion that follows, I have divided Foucault's essay into six parts. These follow the divisions in the original, except that I have divided Foucault's first and most important section into two parts. The section titles are my own.

Indifference, exteriority, death

Foucault opens and closes "What Is an Author?" with the question of "indifference", and it is from Beckett that he claims to borrow his theme. But there is an enormous shift in the meaning and function of the term between the beginning of the essay and its end, and it is in the gap between these two conceptions of "indifference" that Foucault's emerging critique of avant-garde writing can best be understood. For, at the start of the essay, indifference is invoked in relation to a practice of *writing*, while at the end Foucault imagines a time when indifference governs the act of *reading*. It is in the space between modes of writing and modes of reading, and the unexamined assumption of a necessary or causative relation between them, that the problem of an avant-garde conception of literature comes into focus as the implicit object of Foucault's critique.

But first, it is worthwhile examining Foucault's introduction of his theme in detail. After the opening remarks in which he revisits the problems encountered in *The Order of Things*, Foucault moves on to specify more closely the task at hand:

> For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside a sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual and the numerous questions that deserve attention in this context. ... For the time being, I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside it and precedes it.
>
> Beckett supplies a direction: "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking." In an indifference such as this we must recognise one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing. It is not simply "ethical" because it characterises our way of speaking and writing, but because it stands as an immanent rule, endlessly adopted and yet never fully applied. (Foucault 1977c, 115-16)

Clearly there are a number of problems if this is taken as a straightforward comment on Beckett's work[11].

[11] The quotation comes from the third of Beckett's thirteen *Texts for Nothing*. In their translation of Foucault's essay, Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon interpolate a comma in their transposition of the quotation from Beckett. Beckett's own English translation of his French original reads: "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" (CSPR 109), which gives a far more ambiguous reading to the phrase. Instead of "someone" saying, twice, "what matter who's speaking",

Firstly, the statement "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking" is made, not by Beckett himself in an "authorial" capacity, but by one of those barely defined or identifiable voices which haunt his texts from *The Unnamable* onwards: it would clearly be a mistake to consider this declaration of indifference a statement of principle on Beckett's part. However, Bouchard and Simon's translation "Beckett supplies a direction" tends to suggest this reading. Foucault's original French reads: "La thème dont je voudrais partir, j'en emprunte la formulation à Beckett" (Foucault 1969, 77) — literally: "I borrow from Beckett the formulation of

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Beckett's version characteristically makes the attribution of words to implicit speakers far more difficult to pin down. The reading most in keeping with the rest of the text would have a voice declaring "What matter who's speaking", followed by the same voice attempting to distance itself from that utterance by remarking "someone (not I) said 'what matter who's speaking'". Compare this, for instance, with *The Unnamable*: "I said nothing, someone said nothing" (*Unnamable* 165), or "I speak of evening, someone speaks of evening" (*Unnamable* 167), or the following characteristic passage:

> … someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either, let us leave all that, forget about all that, it's not difficult, our concern is with someone … (*Unnamable* 164)

But this second reading too is ambiguous, since the sentence as a whole might be taken to mean "someone said 'what matter who's speaking', but what matter whether I or any other said it?". The text continues in much the same vein: "There's going to be a departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything" (CSPR 109) and towards the end the voice asserts "it's soon said, soon done, in vain, nothing has stirred, no one has spoken" (CSPR 113).

Bouchard and Simon's lapse is minor compared to Harari's rendition, which fails to make direct use of Beckett's text at all, removing all ambiguity by adding further punctuation: "'What does it matter who is speaking,' someone said, 'what does it matter who is speaking'" (Foucault 1980a, 141). When Foucault repeats the quotation at the end of the essay, Harari amplifies the phrase even further: "What difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault 1980a, 160)

For the record, the original French version of Foucault's paper in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* also interpolates a comma in the same place as Bouchard and Simon: "Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit, qu'importe qui parle" (Foucault 1969, 77). Beckett's original French reads "Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit qu'importe qui parle" (*Nouvelles* 129).

Kevin Brophy (Brophy 1995) offers a witty discussion of the variant versions of Foucault's paper in relation to the question of editorial practice and textual authority, although he does not discuss the variants in the quotation from Beckett.

the theme with which I would like to begin". There is a subtle difference between borrowing a phrase from Beckett, and suggesting that Beckett provides a direction: only the latter implies a reading of Beckett's authorial intent, whereas the former is simply a form of literary garnish. It might be argued that Foucault is borrowing a phrase, taking it as the *thème* for a *composition*, very much in the manner of the writing exercises so beloved of the French educational system.

A second problem appears in the fact that Foucault seems to be taking Beckett's words, in displaying "one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing", as being representative of a wider aesthetic and even political movement. Since Foucault does not elaborate, one might take this "contemporary writing" to refer to any number of vague affiliations: the writers associated with the journal *Tel Quel*, such as Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva or Hélène Cixous, for instance; or the *nouveaux romanciers* such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Nathalie Sarraute, Robert Pinget and Marguerite Duras; or perhaps the broader tradition of French post-war avant-gardism, which might include contemporaries such as Maurice Blanchot and Pierre Klossowski, while looking back to figures such as Georges Bataille, Antonin Artaud, or Raymond Roussel.

Beckett's aesthetic or political affiliations with these writers were on the whole negligible. It was, of course, Bataille's and later Blanchot's reviews which helped establish Beckett on the French intellectual scene, but he had no real contact with either of these writers[12]. He did, of course, share a publisher with many of the *nouveaux romanciers*, admired the work of Duras in particular (Knowlson 1996, 453), and, with some reservations, allowed them to identify him as a fellow and a precursor (see Cronin 1996, 423-24). But really, of all these writers, it was only Pinget to whom Beckett was in any way close: Beckett translated Pinget's play *La Manivelle*, and directed the actor Pierre Chabert in another, *L'Hypothèse*, while Pinget collaborated with Beckett on the French translation of *All That Fall* (Knowlson 1996, 468, 518, 505; Cronin 1996, 495). But it would be wrong to characterise

[12] Ludovic Janvier tells how Beckett thought he could read in the eye of Georges Bataille, who had asked to meet him after the publication of *Molloy*, an embarrassed surprise at not finding a gnarled, stooping, physically repulsive Molloy-like creature (Janvier 1999, 37).

Beckett's writing as belonging to a broader movement of "contemporary writing" through its allegiance to shared "fundamental ethical principles". This is not to suggest that Beckett's work springs, miraculously, from the depths of an individual genius independent of cultural and intellectual context, but merely to note that the implication that Beckett is committed to a principled program of politico-aesthetic radicalism shared with other contemporary avant-garde writers would clearly be misleading.

It might be truer to suggest that, whatever his own opinions on the matter, Beckett's writing was enthusiastically received among avant-garde circles, and that many of the figures named above, from Bataille and Blanchot to Robbe-Grillet and Barthes, professed a sense of affinity with Beckett's work.

But even so, there arises a third problem: in what way should this "fundamental ethical principle" of "indifference" be understood? Clearly this indifference to the question "who speaks?" is not simply a literary-critical stance, a hermeneutic principle of leaving aside the question of authorial identity in order to return to the text and to language the limitlessness that properly belongs to it. Such indifference, Foucault insists, is a feature of contemporary *writing*: it is an attitude of indifference to who speaks in the very act of speaking. It appears to be, in other words, a Blanchotian immolation of the self to art, an ethical imperative to transform oneself into "nobody, the empty, animated space where art's summons is heard" (Blanchot 1988, 28).

This would accord with the general tone and tenor of Beckett's third *Text for Nothing*:

> See what's happening here, where there's no one, where nothing happens, get something to happen here, someone to be here, then put an end to it, have silence, get into silence, or another sound, a sound of other voices than those of life and death, of lives and deaths everyone's but mine, get into my story in order to get out of it, no, that's all meaningless. (CSPR 112)

But in truth this seems to be more a matter of *aesthetics* than *ethics*: why should a writing which dispenses with characters, voices, persons as such necessarily be an ethical rather than an aesthetic practice? For such an indifference to be an ethical principle, it must presumably be borne out as a mode of conduct in the so-called real

world, rather than simply a pronominal subterfuge, a grammatical delicacy restricted to the confines of the text, a purely "literary" conceit.

In fact, a truly *ethical* indifference to the question of who speaks might seem to entail a wholesale abdication of the rights traditionally vested in the institution of authorship. Clearly, such an indifference is neither characteristic of Beckett, nor of Blanchot, nor of any of the other writers Foucault may be thought to be invoking. Indeed with Beckett quite the opposite is the case. Though Beckett's writing may tremble with the fragility of utterance and the uncertainty of identity, few writers in the twentieth century have exercised a more authoritative control over their texts than Samuel Beckett. For the moment, two examples will suffice: Beckett's attitude to translation and to the performance of his theatrical works.

It is well known that Beckett was notoriously difficult regarding the translations of his own texts. Having originally organised for Richard Seaver to translate *L'Expulsé* and *La Fin*, Beckett became infuriated at the results, and ended up taking over the translation himself (see Knowlson 1996, 396-7). Similarly, with Patrick Bowles's translation of *Molloy*, Beckett ended up abandoning even the pretence of a joint effort and revised the translation on his own (see Cronin 1997, 434-5). From that point on, Beckett did all the English translations of his French works himself, and later, when he returned to writing in English, did all the French translations of those works himself as well (with the exception of the collaboration with Pinget on *Tous ceux qui tombent*, the French version of *All That Fall*). Far from an ethical indifference to the prerogatives of authorship, Beckett exercised an extremely vigilant control. In effect, he became an author twice over, insisting on being the solitary creator of a second oeuvre, a double canon of definitive works in both French and English. Moreover, given his considerable skills as a linguist, Beckett was known to keep a watchful and often harshly critical eye on translations of his works into German, Spanish and Italian as well.

Anthony Cronin comments on the oppressive weight that past work was to assume in Beckett's life after *Godot*:

> Beckett felt in the autumn of 1953 that an endless prospect of translation was stretching out before him which would perhaps last into 1955. There was now a question of a German translation of *Godot* in which, with his knowledge of German, he felt compelled to collaborate, and he found this going back over old work "with all the adventure gone" very dispiriting, particularly since it seemed to be driving out new inspiration.
>
> And, given his temperament, into the future also was beginning to stretch an endless process of supervising theatrical productions. (Cronin 1997, 435)

James Knowlson also comments on Beckett's unwillingness to relinquish to others the task of translating his own works, quoting from Beckett's letters to illustrate the fatigue and disgust that this seemingly endless rehashing of old work was liable to provoke:

> Beckett became closely involved from early March 1953 with the German translation of [*Godot*], going over it in great detail with a young German, Elmar Tophoven, a former *Lektor* at the Sorbonne. … At the same time, he was helping Patrick Bowles of the *Merlin* group with his English translation of *Molloy*. Some months later, he found the Spanish translation of *Godot* "bad, full of mistakes and omissions and unjustifiable liberties" [letter to A. J. Leventhal, 21 January 1954] but could not face improving it, commenting that he was "sick of all this old vomit and despair more and more of ever being able to puke again" [letter to Barney Rosset, 22 January 1954]. (Knowlson 1996, 779 *n.* 3)

Beckett's complaint of being "sick of the old vomit" inevitably conjures up Arsene's lament to Watt:

> life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it. (*Watt* 44)

It's hard not to imagine that the endless, perverse and compulsive task of self-translation must have sometimes represented for Beckett a painful and repetitive process of "puking puked puke", with the difference that, in Beckett's case, he never really learned to like it. Nevertheless, he continued to do all the French and English translations of his works himself right up to the end, the only exception being the "untranslatable" *Worstward Ho* (Knowlson 1996, 827 *n.* 4), which he bequeathed to another translator, Edith Fournier, having selected her title, *Cap au pire*, from among several she suggested (Knowlson 1996, 684-5).

But if Beckett was reluctant to relinquish his authorial prerogatives in the matter of translations of his work, he was nothing short of dictatorial in his attitude to his dramatic works (see, for instance, Connor 1988, 185-201, and especially 216 n.15). Beckett was notorious for attempting to exert absolute control over the interpretation and production of his plays, on several occasions attempting to sue a director or company that departed from his own precise stage directions. For instance, Cobi Bordewijk (1992) describes Beckett's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to sue a Dutch theatre company in 1988 over their all-female production of *Waiting for Godot*. The play, it must be remembered, had by this stage been in the public domain for 35 years and had been performed thousands of times all over the world. Similarly, Jonathan Kalb (1989) reports on Beckett's resistance to JoAnne Akalaitis's production of *Endgame* for the American Repertory Theatre in 1984. The dispute was settled out of court, but both sides presented their case in statements to the audience. The theatre company, understandably, insisted on the collective nature of a theatrical production, claiming: "normal rights of interpretation are essential in order to free the full energy and meaning of the play". For his part, Beckett insisted:

> Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theater production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. (Kalb 1989, 79; cited in McMullan 1994, 196)

This incident still has the potential to ignite conflict. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1999, Robert Brustein of the American Repertory Theatre claimed:

> The furor unleashed by this production, and the unsuccessful efforts of Beckett and his agents to close it down, eventually made him put a codicil in his will insisting on control of future productions beyond the grave, on pain of legal action. Recently, a theatre in Washington was threatened with court action by the Beckett estate after reports that its black cast members had introduced some hip-hop interpolations into a production of *Waiting for Godot*. Only through the intercession of Beckett's nephew Edward was the production permitted to proceed. (Brustein 1999a, 14)

Beckett's lawyer, Martin Garbus, fired back a letter arguing that Beckett's demand was not that the play be closed down, but, significantly, that his name be removed from the playbill, and that it was only after the American Repertory Theatre's refusal to comply that a temporary restraining order was sought (Garbus 1999, 36).

In his review of the Beckett-Schneider correspondence, Brustein writes that "few will dispute the fact that early performances of a play deserve the most exacting and faithful attention available" (Brustein 1999a, 14), and acknowledges the importance of Alan Schneider as an, at times, slavishly dutiful director of Beckett premieres. But, given Beckett's status as the most frequently performed playwright after Shakespeare, it is hard not to agree with Brustein's statement in the 1984 *Endgame* program, that "a purist rendering of this or any other play ... not only robs collaborating artists of their interpretive freedom but threatens to turn the theatre into a waxworks" (Brustein 1999b, 36).

Despite these protests, the dead hand of the author continues to exercise an unusual degree of control: the Beckett Estate recently refused permission once again for an all-female production of *Waiting for Godot* (McCallum 1998, 15).

All of this might seem to call into question Foucault's casual invocation of Beckett as an exemplar of the "indifference" which is a "fundamental ethical principle of contemporary writing". In February 1969, when Foucault came to deliver his paper at the Collège de France, Beckett was already hailed as one of the major writers of the twentieth century — indeed, he was to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in October of the same year. So too, Foucault must have been familiar with Beckett's reputation for exerting to the letter his authorial prerogative over translations of his work and productions of his plays. Therefore, Foucault can not have been unaware of the ironies involved, not only in opening his address to the question "What Is an Author?" with a quote from one of the best known and most discussed of contemporary authors, but also in invoking, as characteristically "Beckettian", the indifferent non-answer: "What matter who's speaking".

In fact, it is an example of the rhetorical technique that Foucault uses again in "We Other Victorians", the famous opening to *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1990, 3-13), where Foucault's first move is not to make a clear and unambiguous statement of his own position, as at first it might appear, but instead to present, with an ironic display of innocence, a contemporary theme so familiar that it has become part of received wisdom. Having outlined the apparent direction of his essay, Foucault then

makes an arresting about-face, as if to say, with the appropriate rhetorical flourish: "*That*, at least, is what we are accustomed to thinking". The rest of the essay then proceeds patiently to dismantle piece by piece the position sketched out in the opening paragraphs. In "What Is an Author?" this turn rhetorical turn occurs precisely with the words: "While all of this is familiar in philosophy, as in literary criticism, I am not sure that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author have been fully explored or that the importance of this event has been appreciated" (Foucault 1977c, 117).

There is undoubtedly a note of irony, then, not only in Foucault's adoption of Beckett's words "What matter who's speaking" as his motto, but also in his nomination of Beckett as an exemplar of contemporary authorial indifference. In fact, this opening seems calculated, not so much to illustrate a contemporary theme, as to draw attention to its simplistic pervasiveness. As we have seen, this notion of an authorial "indifference" was a central theme of Foucault's earlier writing on literature, particularly in his essay on Blanchot, and there are recognisable echoes of Blanchotian literary theory in the way Foucault goes on to develop this theme in "What Is an Author?" Specifically, having begun with the notion of indifference, Foucault goes on to illustrate his point by identifying two major themes, the notion of "exteriority", and the notion of a "kinship between writing and death" (Foucault 1977c, 116). It is in relation to these two themes that one can begin to trace the Blanchotian source from which Foucault draws his "reading" of Beckett.

On the notion of "exteriority", Foucault writes:

> the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of "expression"; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognise it in its exterior deployment. ... Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears. (Foucault 1977c, 116)

There are clear echoes here of Foucault's earlier essay on Blanchot, "The Thought from Outside", where he explored the concept of an "unfolding of pure exteriority", of an "outside in which the speaking subject disappears" (Foucault 1987b, 11, 13).

This ethic of "exteriority" is, of course, an implicit critique of the Romantic model of "expression", which supposes a wordless and almost ineffable interiority of experience or emotion that it is the task of the writer to capture with the cumbersome and imprecise equipment of human language. For all Beckett's scorn for this model, such as Arsene's lament in *Watt* that "what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail" (*Watt* 62), Beckett remains committed, throughout his work, to an aesthetic of expression. Albeit that Beckett's is a negative aesthetic (on the model of negative theology) paradoxically grounded in its own futility, the notion of the burden of expressing a reality impossibly beyond expression is central to Beckett's work, from "Assumption", his first published work, to "What is the Word", his "final literary utterance" (Publisher's Preface, *As the Story Was Told* 10). The protagonist of "Assumption" is tormented by the struggle for expression: "the rising tossing soundlessness that seemed now to rend his whole being with the violence of its effort", "in silence listening for the first murmur of the torrent that must destroy him" (CSPR 5). In the end he mysteriously explodes in "a great storm of sound" (CSPR 7), effs himself while trying to eff the ineffable. So too, "What is the Word", written sixty years later, is a stuttering attempt to continue to speak in the face of futility:

> folly for to see what —
> glimpse —
> seem to glimpse —
> need to seem to glimpse —
> afaint afar away over there what —
> folly for to need to seem to glimpse afaint afar away over there what —
> what —
> what is the word —
>
> what is the word
> (*As the Story Was Told* 133-134)

However, the clearest example of Beckett's commitment to an aesthetic of expression is in what is probably the most frequently quoted passage in all Beckett criticism, his famous retort to Georges Duthuit:

> there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (*Dialogues* 103)

Critics endlessly seize upon the repetitions of "no" and "nothing" in this paragraph, in order to demonstrate Beckett's commitment to an aesthetic of negation, or impoverishment, or exhaustion, or impotence, but what is seldom remarked is that the word "express" is repeated no less than six times. For all the negations, "expression" remains for Beckett the bottom line of the artistic ledger. There are plenty of other *raisons d'être* for the creative act, from an anti-subjective aesthetic of "construction", to political commitment, from a need or a desire to make money to Kafka's plan to "attract girls to oneself by writing". That the burden of expression is taken by Beckett, and by extension by Beckett critics, as the sole, self-evident and unavoidable obligation of the creative act puts insuperable obstacles in the way of an "anti-authorial" reading which would find, in this restless grappling with impossible paradoxes of expression, a radically anti-subjective, "exterior deployment" of language.

If Foucault takes the notion of "exteriority" from Blanchot, it is from Blanchot too that he draws the theme of a "kinship between writing and death", although he notes that the theme is an old and familiar one. For instance, Blanchot asks in *The Space of Literature* of 1955, "isn't the writer dead as soon as the work exists?" (Blanchot 1982, 23). So too, Foucault argues:

> Writing … is a voluntary obliteration of the self that does not require representation in books because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer. … We find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer. … If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing. (Foucault 1977c, 117)

Here too there are immediately recognisable echoes of Blanchot's essay on Beckett, of the notion that the writer should be "immolated to art", and should transform himself into "nobody, the empty, animated space where art's summons is heard" (Blanchot 1988, 28).

If these remarks are intended as part of an extended commentary on "contemporary writing", and on Beckett in particular, then Foucault is clearly following Blanchot's lead in his reading of Beckett. As Pascale Casanova argues, Blanchot's championing of Beckett as an exemplar of literary anonymity and indifference was already a well-established critical commonplace:

> Dès les années 50, le discours blanchotien est devenu le seul commentaire autorisé, contribuant ainsi à « fabriquer » un Beckett sur mesure, héros de la critique « pure ». Sans histoire, sans passé, sans héritage et sans projet, Beckett a disparu sous les oripeaux de la canonisation poétique. (Casanova 1997, 8)
>
> Since the 1950s, the Blanchotian reading of Beckett has become the sole authorised commentary, contributing to the fabrication of a made-to-measure Beckett, hero of a "pure" criticism. With no history, no past, no heritage and no project, Beckett has disappeared beneath the glitter of literary canonisation.

However, contrary to what many Beckett critics assume, Foucault does not simply invoke the Blanchotian commentary on Beckett as part of an endorsement of avant-garde writing. In fact, quite the opposite is the case, and Foucault's opening move of citing Beckett and invoking these familiar themes of contemporary writing can actually be read as part of an inchoate critique, an implicit revision and rejection of the earlier "transgressive" conception of literature that had formed the basis of much of Foucault's writing and thinking throughout the sixties.

The privileges of the author: *oeuvre* and *écriture*

As the title "What Is an Author?" provocatively suggests, Foucault's purpose in this essay is not simply to celebrate the "Death of the Author" announced in Barthes's famous essay of the previous year, but to take account of the ways in which the author remains very much alive, the ways in which the author-function and its variations continue to exercise a determining function in the production, circulation and classification of "discourse".

Thus Foucault argues, in a crucial move that is often overlooked in the more "literary" interpretations of the essay, that the characteristic themes of contemporary writing have served merely to preserve the privilege of the author in a different guise:

> While all of this is familiar in philosophy, as in literary criticism, I am not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author have been fully explored or that the importance of this event has been appreciated. To be specific, it seems to me that the themes destined to replace the privileged position accorded to the author have merely served to arrest the possibility of genuine change. (Foucault 1977c, 117-18)

Of these themes, Foucault goes on to discuss two that seem "particularly important": the notion of the work, or *oeuvre*, and the notion of writing, or *écriture*. Foucault's attack on these two familiar themes of literary criticism might be read, I think, as involving implicit critiques of Blanchot, in relation to the *oeuvre*, and Derrida, in relation to *écriture*. Thus, on the notion of the work, Foucault writes:

> What ... is the strange unit designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an "author"? ... If some have found it convenient to bypass the individuality of the writer or his status as an author to concentrate on a work, they have failed to appreciate the equally problematic nature of the word "work" and the unity it designates. (Foucault 1977c, 118-19)

There is a certain ambiguity in this passage that it is important to clarify. The French term which Foucault uses, *oeuvre*, carries two overlapping senses which are not so apparent in English translation: *oeuvre* can mean both a single work of art, as well as a sense similar to that it carries in English, as "l'ensemble [des] differentes oeuvres [d'un écrivain], considéré dans sa suite, son unité et son influence" [the sum total of a writer's works, with regard to its sequence, its unity and its influence] (*Petit Robert* 1987, p.1302). In other words, Foucault's remarks more directly concern the notion of what we call in English the oeuvre, which clearly bears a stronger relationship to the author-function than the notion of the individual work. After all, it is possible for the author of a particular work to be unknown or anonymous, but to collect a number of works together into an oeuvre requires an author-function as a matter of necessity.

It is important, I think, to realise that Foucault's questioning of the problematic nature of the "unity" designated by the work, is not an attack *per se* on the principles of a

formalist criticism, and the possibility of regarding literary works as structural unities. On the contrary, as the following observation by Bernard Couturier illustrates, the formalist school of literary criticism arrived very late in France, and its struggle against *l'homme et l'oeuvre* orthodoxy was one of the key battles in the campaign to dispose of the author. Writing of the anti-authorial hyperbole of Barthes's essay, "The Death of the Author", against which Foucault's essay is so clearly posed as an ironic foil, Couturier comments:

> Il est trop facile aujourd'hui de stigmatiser l'outrance de ces propos. On a oublié que la critique française des années soixante était encore essentiellement lansonienne et allait puiser la plupart du temps ses interprétations du texte littéraire chez l'auteur, comme en témoignent les titres de nombreuses thèses à l'époque : « X, l'homme et l'œuvre ». Ce texte de Barthes était un manifeste, c'est-à-dire un acte militant qui visait à déboulonner le dieu qu'adorait depuis plus d'un siècle la critique française, à savoir l'auteur en tant que garant du sens. La critique anglaise et américaine n'a pas toujours compris la véhémence de ces propos parce qu'elle était bizarrement plus formaliste que la nôtre, depuis notamment T. E. Hulme et I. A. Richards, relayés outre-Atlantique par la Nouvelle Critique de John Crowe Ranson, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Clean Brooks [sic] ou W. K. Wimsatt. Le mouvement structuraliste constituait chez nous une véritable révolution copernicienne à rebours, le lecteur sémioticien occupant dès lors la place centrale dans la galaxie du texte. (Couturier 1995, 12-13)

> It's a little too easy these days to deride the excessiveness of Barthes's claims. We have forgotten that the French criticism of the 1960s was still essentially Lansonian[13] and for the most part grounded its interpretations of literary texts in the figure of the author, as witnessed by numerous titles of the period *X: The Man and the Work*. Barthes's text was a manifesto, that is to say, a militant act that aimed to tear down the altar at which more than a century of French criticism had worshipped,

[13] Gustave Lanson (1857-1934), Professor at the Sorbonne and director of the École Normale Supérieure from 1919-27, was best known for his *Histoire de la littérature française* (1894), and his *Manuel bibliographique de la littérature française moderne* (1913). He was also the author of numerous studies and critical editions of French writers such as Bossuet, Boileau, Corneille, Voltaire and Lamartine (*Who Was Who* 1967, p.780; *Chambers's Biographical Dictionary* 1968, p. 762). The term "lansonien" refers to the critical tradition he established, characterised by a meticulous attention to details, sources, and erudition. According to Stéphanie Ravez, "More often than not, the word has a pejorative connotation, as characteristic of the conservative literary criticism that was prevalent in the French academy at the turn of the century, and that lasted until structuralism stole its supremacy" (private correspondence, 8 March 2000).

> namely, the author as the guarantor of meaning. English and American critics have not always understood the violence of Barthes's proclamations, because their critical tradition was, strangely enough, more formalist than our own, dating from the work of T. E. Hulme and I. A. Richards, and relayed across the Atlantic by the New Criticism of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt. In France, the structuralist movement amounted to nothing less than a Copernican revolution in reverse, with the reader-semiotician coming to occupy the centre of the textual galaxy.

In fact, Foucault's description of the displacement of the author as the centre of critical concern reads like an endorsement of New Criticism:

> It has been understood that the task of criticism is not to re-establish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works and, further, that criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships. (Foucault 1977c, 118)

Here the term "work" clearly designates the singular unity of the individual literary artefact. But the main thrust of Foucault's argument in this section is directed at the oeuvre, and at that empirical activity whereby "the millions of traces left by an individual after his death" (Foucault 1977c, 119) are assembled into an ensemble that is required to demonstrate "sequence, unity and influence". Thus Foucault argues:

> Plainly we lack a theory to encompass the questions generated by a work [la théorie de l'oeuvre n'existe pas (Foucault 1969, 79)] and the empirical activity of those who naively undertake the publication of the complete works of an author often suffers from the absence of this framework. (Foucault 1977c, 119)

A confusion of these two senses of *oeuvre* seems to be behind a parenthetical grumble against Foucault by Thomas Trezise, whose study of Beckett's trilogy is heavily indebted to the Blanchotian reading of Beckett's "impersonality". Trezise complains that Foucault's treatment of Blanchot is marked by contradiction:

> Michel Foucault's lecture entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" contains a number of formulations that suggest an affinity between his thought on the subject and the tendency of this argument. The most striking example is one that also recalls Blanchot: "Il serait tout aussi faux de chercher l'auteur du côté de l'écrivain réel que du côté de ce locuteur fictive; la fonction-auteur s'effectue dans la scission même, — dans ce partage et cette distance" (Foucault 1969, 87). [It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the "author-function" arises out of their scission — in the division and distance of the two

> (Foucault 1977c, 129).] On the other hand, it is strange, to say the very least, that, many years after the publication of both *L'Espace littéraire* and *Le livre à venir*, Foucault should claim that "la théorie de l'oeuvre n'existe pas" (Foucault 1969, 79) [the theory of the work does not exist]. (Trezise 1990, 107 n.39)

However the "*théorie de l'oeuvre*" Foucault demands is a theory of the oeuvre, not the individual work. Blanchot's literary criticism, particularly in *The Space of Literature*, is clearly more concerned with *work*, on the one hand, as the physical and mental activity of the writer, and on the other, *the work* as the product of this activity: its chapter titles include "The Work's Space and Its Demand", "The Work and Death's Space", "Communication and the Work". Blanchot's extensive theorisation of the work in *The Space of Literature* is always in relation to the author, the author at work, and in particular to Blanchot's notion of *désoeuvrement* or "worklessness", of what he considers the writer's essential exclusion or exile from the work that he or she creates (see Ann Smock's "Translator's Introduction": Smock 1982, 13). Understandably enough, this notion of the relationship between writer and work also informs Blanchot's reading of Beckett, even down to reproducing the same phrases and formulations. In *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot writes: "The work — the work of art, the literary work — is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively this: that it is — and nothing more" (Blanchot 1982, 22). In his review of *L'Innommable*, part of Blanchot's response to the problem of "who speaks in Samuel Beckett's works" is to invoke this same inscrutable materiality of language: Beckett's narrator reaches "the point where language ceases to speak but is" (Blanchot 1988, 28). Blanchot's theorisation of the work, for all its paradoxes, is clearly tied to the notion of an individual work: it concerns the relation between author and work in the act of composition. In short, it is a theory of the creative act. It quite clearly is *not* a theory of the oeuvre that would offer guidance to the editor of a deceased writer's literary remains.

The problem that, for Foucault, arrests the possibility of genuine change lies in the unexamined notion of the oeuvre that continues to underpin formalist criticism. A structuralist or formalist criticism that dispenses with the notion of the individual literary work as the expression of an author's thought and experience, only to retain a completely unexamined notion of the oeuvre, merely transposes the author's privileges into an empirical principle. It is the notion of the oeuvre as a natural and

unproblematic grouping of texts that is the object of Foucault's questioning here, *not* the notion of the work of art as a formal unity in itself.

If, in the quasi-empirical disguise of the oeuvre, the contemporary literary criticism of Foucault's day still clung to the notion of the author, so too, the contemporary theorisation of writing, or *écriture*, also failed to take full account of the author's disappearance.

Thus Foucault writes of the concept of *écriture*:

> It avoids confronting the specific event that makes it [writing] possible and, in subtle ways, continues to preserve the existence of the author. ... It stands for a remarkably profound attempt to elaborate the conditions of any text, both the conditions of its spatial dispersion and its temporal deployment. ... It appears, however, that this concept, as currently employed, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity. ... This conception of écriture sustains the privileges of the author through the safeguard of the a priori; the play of representations that formed a particular image of the author is extended within a grey neutrality. (Foucault 1977c, 119-20)

This passage is clearly directed against the work of Jacques Derrida. According to Foucault, Derrida's characterisation of writing as a fundamental categorical given (his reversal, for instance, of the traditional view of writing as an anterior supplement to the presence of speech), merely serves to transpose the hermeneutic techniques of traditional exegesis to a higher plane of philosophical abstraction. The author is preserved, but as an *a priori* transcendental anonymity. The effacement of the visible signs of the author's activity, the celebration of writing as absence, the notion of a primordial textuality, merely transform writing into a sort of ineffable mystery, and deliver criticism over to "the religious principle of hidden meanings (which require interpretation) and the critical assumption of implicit significations, silent purposes, and obscure contents (which give rise to commentary)" (Foucault 1977c, 120). In this profound attempt to account for textuality in its own terms, without reference to its origin in the empirical act of writing, and without reference to the signs of an author's intentions, the author nevertheless continues to haunt the text, but as a shadowy, bloodless creature, an immortal spirit fabulously beyond history or circumstance, unfettered by the day-to-day nuisance of paying the bills or having something to say.

Literary criticism risks becoming a kind of negative theology, in which the author's non-existence is endlessly pursued through the fugitive signs of his or her absence. Indeed, the strong affinity between deconstruction and negative theology has often been noted (for a detailed discussion of these questions, see Hart 1991). In Simon During's summary: "Deconstruction secures literature's immortality by its very erasure of authorial presence, by its undoing of the claim that literature represents the world or expresses subjectivities" (During 1992, 121). In their apotheosis of absence as a sign of the absolute, both deconstruction and negative theology devote themselves to a similar hermeneutic mission: an anxious elaboration upon the fugitive traces left behind by the withdrawal of the author/God from the world. But, as the reception of Derrida's work in the US demonstrates, deconstruction has proved singularly compatible, not only with the quasi-religious tradition of the literary canon, but also with the continued predominance of authorial (and particularly psycho-biographical) models of literary interpretation.

However, During argues that Foucault's attack on Derrida as the sacerdotal metaphysician of *écriture* is flawed:

> Foucault's argument is less than fair to Derrida, who could reply that he does not regard language either as having transcendental conditions peculiar to it *or* regard it as always already given in the form of *énoncés*. ... Language is, as it were, its own ground — a notion that points to a strange fold or doubling which limits any account of a discursive practice's preconditions. And Derrida could also object that, despite our usual sense of death, for him, it does not quite stay on the far side of life ... For Derrida there are many deaths — that of the body, of memory, of fame, indeed, absence as such carries death's traces. If that were not the case there would be no writing, as writing is to be regarded less a grand replacement for what is absent than the attempt to incorporate absence. Writing, for Derrida, is an act which, necessarily, though not necessarily knowingly or welcomingly, shelters a little death. This incorporation of death is the obverse of writing's ability to live on, but it also means that writing is always a little empty, absent — dead. (During 1992, 121-22)

There is a problem here in During's defence of Derrida, in the metaphorical slippage it allows in the meaning of "death". If "death" represents a whole semantic continuum from the miserable reality of physical decease to the purely logical category of absence, then the whole notion of "the death of the author" risks being reduced to the petty paradox of two incompatible kinds of obviousness. Clearly, the

physical beings we sometimes call authors have always and will continue to defunge, and equally clearly, in the ordinary conditions of reading, authors are, if not by definition then usually in practice, mercifully absent. At this metaphorical level, the "death of the author" might amount to no more than the banal statement of a commonsense critical practicality. But, by the same token, the death of an author, his or her physical decease, seems to tug us in the other direction, since it inevitably comes as a reminder, too late perhaps, that, despite everything, the author *was* alive, and had to be present, in order to write the works in which we are accustomed to find no more than the meaningless residues of a non-entity.

So too, if death is a kind of absence, it does not necessarily follow that absence is a kind of death. To go from "Yes, we have no bananas" to "The death of bananas" might seem to be elevating a mundane, if regrettable, state of affairs to a plane of metaphysical tragedy. But this is precisely the kind of argumentation that the metaphorics of absence tends to encourage. Thus, the "death of the author" is claimed to mean a great deal more than the absence that is the matter-of-fact condition of writing.

Foucault's response is to argue that, in the discursive conditions of our society, the author-function always already precedes and intervenes in our approach to texts. In other words, Foucault replaces the transcendental *a priori* of absence, textuality, *écriture*, with the historical and empirical *a priori* of the "author-function". Viewed in this light, Derrida's attempt to give writing ontological priority then appears profoundly ahistorical, transcendental and quasi-religious. For Foucault, on the other hand: "The disappearance of the author — since Mallarmé an event of our time — is held in check by the transcendental" (Foucault 1977c, 120).

The name of the author

It is in the third section of Foucault's essay that its "anti-literary" character becomes apparent.

> It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance. (Foucault 1977c, 121)

No doubt the object of Foucault's scorn here is, at least in part, the contradictions in his own earlier works, such as *The Order of Things*, where, as we have seen, the "Death of Man" thesis, the attempt to write a history of thought in which the role of individual thinkers was subordinated to impersonal, epistemic forces, went hand in hand with a "naive and often crude" (Foucault 1977c, 113) use of authors' names, and in particular, a highly problematic appropriation of Nietzsche.

However, Foucault's polemical scorn for "empty slogans" underlies, I think, a more complex theoretical positioning which involves an implicit, but decisive, rejection of the "transgressive" literary heritage which was so much a part of Foucault's writing and thinking to this point. This provocative statement can be seen as a rejection of "the whole relentless theorisation of writing" (Foucault 1980a, 127) which characterised French philosophy and literature of the sixties, the Blanchotian critical orthodoxy according to which "the subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse … than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues" (Foucault 1987b, 11). In Simon During's analysis, "when [Foucault] abandons the view that avant-garde writing can break down the structures of subjectivity, one of his first gestures is to re-theorise the role of the author" (During 1992, 120).

If "the author has disappeared" is an empty slogan, there are two distinct implications that follow from this statement, and it is important to recognise the different consequences for literary criticism and literature more generally. On the one hand, of course, it is an empty slogan because, as Foucault has been at pains to demonstrate, the author has been replaced in literary criticism by other themes that have served

merely to maintain the author's privileges in the guise of a grey neutrality — the notions of the *oeuvre*, and of *écriture*. In this sense, literary criticism has failed to take its own thesis seriously enough, allowing the author-function, and the habits of thinking associated with it, to live on vicariously through a series of proxies: the familiar avant-garde themes of indifference, impersonality, exteriority, death, absence, writing, and the work. Foucault's scorn is directed at the contemporary literary scene, in which, under the facile guise of theoretical radicalism, the author's traditional privileges are subtly preserved.

But there is a second, far more significant implication that flows from this. If radically anti-subjective literary writing ("since Mallarmé, an event of our time") can be comfortably accommodated by critical discourses which preserve tradition under the guise of radicalism, it follows that literary writing in itself can have no determinate radical function: the whole *raison d'être* of avant-garde aesthetics is called into question. That is, if writing is always already preceded by the author-function, or its sophisticated theoretical analogues, then in itself it can have no determining effect on that function. Within the current conditions for the publication and distribution of texts there can be no anti-authorial writing.

One begins to appreciate the ironies of Foucault's opening gesture: "Beckett supplies a direction: "What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking" (Foucault 1977c, 115). Foucault's *naming* of Beckett clearly undermines the purpose of the question "What matter who's speaking?" Of course it is Beckett speaking, and such indifference to who speaks is characteristic of Beckett as an author. That Beckett can exist simultaneously *both* as an exemplar of a supposedly anti-authorial indifference, *and* as one of the most famous and highly regarded of contemporary authors is surely part of Foucault's point here: all this theoretical talk of indifference and exteriority and the death of the author doesn't actually change a thing in the real world. Foucault goes on to remark that "In an indifference such as this we must recognise [*reconnaître*] one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing". The French verb *reconnaître*, like the English "recognise", carries the twin senses of identifying something already familiar ("that sounds like Beckett's style"), and formally acknowledging the validity of a claim ("credit where credit's due"). The *recognition* of Beckett here is, of course, heavily imbued with the

kind of authorial discourse Foucault is supposedly at pains to distance himself from. It seems that even in this essay he continues to employ the names of authors in a "naïve and often crude fashion".

Therefore, what Foucault subsequently sets out in the remainder of his essay is the preliminary sketch of a research program that would address itself to an analysis of the author-function, and he begins, significantly, with a consideration of the complex functioning of the author's name: "What is the name of an author? How does it function?" (Foucault 1977c, 121).

With regard to Beckett, and Beckett's author-function, the authorial name is obviously of central importance, and it is worth considering Foucault's three conclusions in turn in order to consider the functioning of Beckett's name in the discourse we habitually refer to as "Beckett studies".

1 ... AS A CLASSIFICATORY FUNCTION

Foucault's first point is that the author's name is different to ordinary proper names in that it does more than simply point to a person:

> an author's name is not simply an element of speech.... Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. (Foucault 1977c, 123)

Clearly Beckett's name performs this function within the discourse of Beckett studies, classifying and delimiting the oeuvre that is its field of inquiry. There are no great controversies of attribution in Beckett studies, for not only did Beckett sign his own name to virtually everything he published[14], but he was more than scrupulous in the

[14] The only exception I am aware of is the pseudonym "Andrew Belis", the surname of his maternal grandmother, which Beckett used for his article on "Recent Irish Poetry" in the *Bookman* in August 1934 (see *Disjecta* 70-76). Significantly, as James Knowlson observes (Knowlson 1996, 188), the reason for this use of a pseudonym may have been less a fear of offending those Irish poets whom Beckett (or Belis) memorably referred to as "antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods" (*Disjecta* 70), than a practical consideration, in that Beckett's short story "A Case in a Thousand" appeared in the same issue of the *Bookman* under Beckett's own name.

safe delivery of his private papers into the hands of archivists and librarians. Beckett seems to have taken great pains to ensure that after his death there would be no massive cache of previously undiscovered papers fighting for authentication by the Beckett industry. There is some speculation as to whether Beckett was the author of various anonymous reviews of the 1930s, but on the whole the boundaries of the signed Beckett oeuvre seem to be well established and clearly marked.

2 ... AS A MODE OF READING

Foucault's second point concerns authorship as a mode of reading:

> the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse. Discourse that possesses an author's name is not to be immediately consumed and forgotten; neither is it accorded the momentary attention given to ordinary, fleeting words. Rather, its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates. (Foucault 1977c, 123)

Clearly there is a "manner of reception" of authored texts that sets them apart from the great mass of writing that circulates in our society. Foucault's point suggests more, I think, than the banal observation that authored texts, and particularly "literary" texts, are read and interpreted in a different manner to ordinary discourse. It also implies that there is a particular mode of reading which accompanies the author-function — neither the momentary attention given to fleeting words, nor the casual and forgetful consumption of ordinary printed matter — and that this mode of reading is as much a part of the author-function as the existence of signed, authored texts. The author-function is a kind of dyad: *both* a mode of production or circulation, *and* a manner of consumption or reception. Therefore, texts can *become authored*, if the mode of reading of the author-function is applied to them.

To give the most obvious example, Foucault observes that "a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author" (Foucault 1977c, 124). However, with any writer whose life and work becomes the focus of scholarly attention, this private correspondence sooner or later becomes the object of an earnest interpretive overdetermination — *becomes authored*, in other words. With Beckett, as with any major writer, his "private" papers have gradually become part of the public domain,

have gradually become subjected to the same intense pressure of hermeneutic scrutiny as the published works. Moreover, given the nature of letters as a kind of informal space where aesthetic problems are worked out more explicitly, where authorial intentions and theoretical positions are stated more openly, the letters come to be strangely *more authorial* than the published works, become key texts, privileged moments where the author, instead of remaining inscrutable by virtue of the indeterminacies or suspensions of fiction, speaks for once directly in plain terms. Indeed, Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun, the famous "German Letter of 1937" (*Disjecta* 51-54; 170-73), in which he declares: "To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it — be it something or nothing — begins to seep through, I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today" (*Disjecta* 172), and expresses the desire to create a "literature of the unword" (*Disjecta* 173), has practically taken on the status of an official manifesto within Beckett studies, despite the fact of its being dismissed as "German bilge" by Beckett himself (note by Ruby Cohn, *Disjecta* 170)[15].

Therefore it is important to recognise that a second body of work may be set alongside the oeuvre as the domain of the author-function: the entire mass of an author's writings which does not bear his or her explicit imprimatur to be published as *work*. In the case of Beckett, it is easy to identify a clear series of stages by which his private or semi-private writings have become part of the public or semi-public domain. Deirdre Bair's 1978 biography, with its extensive use of Beckett's letters, in particular those written to Thomas MacGreevy, may be set down as a first stage. James Knowlson's biography considerably expanded upon this material, but was especially valued for its insight into the diaries Beckett kept during his travels in Germany in the 1930s (see Knowlson 1997, especially Chapter 10: "Germany: The Unknown Diaries 1936-7", 230-261). A further step in the "becoming-authored" of Beckett's private papers was the publication in 1998 of Beckett's correspondence with the American director Alan Schneider, significantly entitled *No Author Better Served* (Beckett and Schneider 1998). Undoubtedly, the next instalment will be the

[15] I am not suggesting, of course, that Beckett's latter remarks necessarily invalidate his earlier ones: we should treat the retraction with the same circumspection that we treat the original expression.

eagerly anticipated publication of a general "Correspondence", the *Collected Letters of Samuel Beckett*, edited by Lois More Overbeck and Martha Fehsenfeld.

In a review of Maurice Harmon's efforts in preparing the Beckett-Schneider correspondence for publication, Dan Gunn, a member of Fehsenfeld's editorial team, provides a fascinating insight, not only into the ethical problems which traditionally beset the editor of correspondence, but into Beckett's own attitude towards its publication. Clearly, Beckett took his letter writing very seriously. In Gunn's estimation:

> He was one of the great letter-writers of our era, indeed of any era: not just by the volume of his correspondents and letters — upwards of 15,000 have to date been traced and transcribed — but … by the extraordinary quality of his attentiveness. (Gunn 1999, 3)

As we have seen, Beckett was unusually scrupulous in ensuring that his manuscripts and notebooks ended up in University archives, and the mass of Beckett material housed in the Beckett Collection at Reading University alone will keep scholars occupied for decades to come. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Beckett was highly aware of the level of scholarly interest in his private correspondence, and after some initial misgivings, eventually took steps to oversee the manner in which it would be published.

> Schneider once published a compilation of quotations from the letters he had received. Beckett acquiesced, but in 1958 came back to them, saying, "I prefer those letters not to be republished and quite frankly, dear Alan, I do not want any of my letters to anyone to be published anywhere, either in the *petit pendant* or the long *après*." The *après* lasted (and will go on lasting) much longer than Beckett could have imagined in 1958. It lasted long enough for him to change his mind, and to accept, indeed arrange, that his letters be published, where relevant to his work. Of course, by the time of his death in 1989, the academic industry was in full production, and he had had ample chance to see that his letters would be reproduced willy-nilly, would be quoted liberally (and misquoted, as they often are in Deirdre Bair's biography). Yet just as he eschewed the Sartrean pose of refusing the Nobel, so he came to eschew what seems uncharacteristically adolescent or romantic in Kafka's famous enjoinder to Max Brod, accepting perhaps as in his dealings with the theatre that his words had their own life beyond any "schema" or "intention". (Gunn 1999, 4)

Beckett's stipulation that only those letters, or parts of letters, be published that are "relevant to the work" presents his editors, as Gunn puts it, with a "teaser" (Gunn 1999, 4), for where exactly does one draw the line?

Foucault asks facetiously, apropos of Nietzsche, "what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included in his works? Why not?" (Foucault 1977c, 118-19). This same set of problems inevitably confronts the editors of Beckett's correspondence, who, still working in the absence of a "*théorie de l'oeuvre*", must constantly redefine the boundary between the life and the work, separating what belongs to Beckett the man from what belongs to "Beckett" the author, and therefore "to the language and to tradition".

Gunn distinguishes Harmon's editorial approach with the Schneider letters from a "worthy lineage dating back to the nineteenth century" (Gunn 1999, 4), where any whiff of scandal among an author's literary remains is suppressed. However, the full texts of Beckett's letters to Schneider, in this case, are available, and "all scholars need do is make the pilgrimage to the John J. Burns Library at Boston College"(Gunn 1999, 4). To print only the parts of the letters judged "relevant", while paraphrasing the elisions, "may forestall the pilgrimage, but only at the cost of turning Beckett's original into the holiest of 'holy writs', to be whispered about but not named" (Gunn 1999, 4). Thus it seems inevitable that "Beckett" will consume everything, that everything must in some way or other eventually become "relevant to the work", and that the laundry lists will take their place in the oeuvre, if only in the enigmatic form of an editor's ellipsis.

3 ... AT THE CONTOURS OF TEXTS

Foucault's third point is more or less a summary and elaboration of the previous two:

> unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of texts — separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterising their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture. The author's name is not a

> function of man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence. (Foucault 1977c, 123)

Here it is interesting to observe the ways in which Beckett's name "remains at the contours" of his texts, hovering between its denotative signatory function, and a kind of emblematic significance as an element within the fiction. That is, within Beckett studies, there is a moot question as to the meaning and significance of the various passages where Beckett's name may be discovered hidden within his own texts, much in the same way as mediaeval writers concealed their names, as a kind of open secret, in the coded form of acrostics or anagrams, or much in the same way as the use of the word "will" is always slightly excessive and overdetermined within Shakespeare's sonnets.

Perhaps the best known of these instances is the presence of a character named Sam in the novel *Watt*. Sam is a fellow inmate of the asylum where Watt spends Part 3 of the novel, it is to Sam that Watt tells his story, and it is Sam who presumably reconstructs as normal speech Watt's unusual manner of speaking (*Watt* 164-169). But if Sam might be thought of as a kind of double of Beckett himself, this is complicated by the presence in the strange prologue to the novel of a character named Hackett, who witnesses Watt's disembarkation from a tram. It is tempting therefore to speculate that Sam and Hackett are perhaps one and the same person, since the former's last name and the latter's first name are not given, and that this shadowy composite "Sam Hackett" is in some way intended to be a symbolic representation of the author himself.

Equally well known, at least within Beckett studies, is the putative arcane significance of the fact that so many important Beckett characters bear the initial M or W. A quick, and by no means exhaustive list would include: Murphy, Mercier, Molloy, Moran, Malone, Mahood, Wylie, Watt, Worm, Winnie and Willie. While it is by no means necessary to read anything at all into this fact, it seems to have become widely accepted that the significance of this onomastic preference lies in the fact that M and W can both be seen as a sigma (Σ) — the initial of "Samuel" in Greek — lying on one side or the other. Thus the sequence of M's and W's can be read as a kind of coded series of authorial avatars. This somewhat *recherché* speculation, first

made by Martin Esslin in 1962 (Esslin 1962, 142), seems to have become entrenched in Beckett studies as the kind of evidence that confirms the reading of Beckett's work as a cryptic autobiography.

In a detailed discussion of the presence of Beckett's name in his works, Alan Astro delves into the Biblical and Hebraic significance of the name Samuel, and discovers a meaning that explicitly links "Samuel" with the role of a creator or demiurge[16]:

> L'Hannah biblique vient au temple demander à Dieu un fils, qu'elle promet au service divin, c'est-à-dire aux fonctions sacerdotales. A sa naissance, elle le nomme Samuel, expliquant son choix ainsi : « Car je l'ai demandé au Seigneur » (I Samuel 1:20). Pourtant, les commentateurs ont soutenu que cette glose conviendrait plutôt au nom hébreu de Saül, *Shaul*, alors que Samuel, *Shmuel*, voudrait dire « le nom de Dieu ». ... Pour nous qui venons de goûter la richesse de l'onomastique beckettienne, il est intéressant que le prénom Samuel ait pu donner lieu à des interprétations divergentes, parmi lesquelles se trouve « le nom de Dieu ». Nom difficile à porter, nom de l'Auteur par excellence. (Astro 1990, 742)
>
> The Biblical Hannah comes to the temple to ask God to give her a son, whom she will dedicate to the service of the Lord, in other words, to a priestly role. At his birth, she names him Samuel, explaining her choice thus: "Because I have asked him of the Lord" (I Samuel 1:20). However, commentators have maintained that this gloss is more appropriate to the Hebrew version of Saul, *Shaoul*, while Samuel, *Shmuel*, means "the name of God". ... Having seen the richness of Beckett's onomastics, it is interesting that the name Samuel should lend itself to such divergent interpretations, among which is "the name of God". This is a difficult name to live up to, the name of the Author *par excellence*.

So too, Beckett's surname, or rather, the closest homonym in French — *becquet* — bears a set of meanings of uncanny literary significance. Originally *becquet* meant simply "*petit bec*", where *bec* in French has the two meanings of a bird's beak and the nib of a pen. But there are further specific dimensions to the word *becquet* that lend added onomastic richness to "the name of the author". As Astro explains:

> Une autre définition de becquet est la suivante : « Languette, petit morceau de papier qu'on ajoute à une épreuve » (*Petit Robert* 1987, 176). Il est bien possible que

16 This observation is also made by Leslie Hill (1990, 107), who in turn attributes the original observation of the significance of the Biblical name Samuel to Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, in their *Condemned to Life: The World of Samuel Beckett* (1976), pp. 34 and 216 (Hill 1990, 176 n.2).

> Beckett, qui écrivit une étude sur Proust en 1930 à Paris, ait rencontré ce mot de becquet utilisé pour désigner les innombrables bouts de papier que l'auteur de la *Recherche* attachait à ses manuscrits. (Astro 1990, 748)

> Another definition of *becquet* is the following: "Small strip of paper added to a proof" (*Petit Robert* 1987, 176). It is quite possible that Beckett, who wrote a study of Proust in 1930 in Paris, would have come across the word *becquet* used to describe the innumerable scraps of paper that the author of the *Recherche* attached to his manuscripts.

So too, *becquet* has a further significance uncannily appropriate for Samuel Beckett: "Fragment de scène ajouté par l'auteur au cours des répétitions" [Fragment of dialogue added by the author in the course of rehearsals] (*Petit Robert* 1987, 176). No doubt Beckett was aware of the multiple literary associations of his name sounded in French, but to my knowledge the word *becquet* nowhere appears in his texts. The name "Beckett", on the other hand, is pronounced in French in the long-unpublished *Eleutheria*, where an exasperated Spectator confronts the actors, exclaiming:

> Au fait, qui a fait ce navet? (programme) Beckett (il dit: "Béquet") Samuel, Béquet, Béquet, ça doit être un juif groënlandais mâtiné d'Auvergnat. (*Eleutheria* 136)

> Actually, who wrote this rubbish? [*He consults his programme*] Beckett (*he says "Béké"*), Samuel, Béké, Béké, he must be a cross between a Jew from Greenland and a peasant from the Auvergne. (*Eleutheria* 136)

The explicitness of this authorial self-reference is on a par with the general clumsiness of the play, and it is easy to see why Beckett should have wanted it to remain unpublished. But more typical is the tension it exploits between English and French, the strangeness of an English name sounded in French, and it is this technique that is behind Astro's final example of Beckett's authorial self-reference. Astro discusses the celebrated passage in *Molloy* concerning Lousse's foul-mouthed parrot, where, in both the French and the English versions of the novel, the bird's multi-lingual obscenities testify to a series of owners of different nationalities. Astro concludes:

> Ce croisement linguistique, le chiasme par lequel Beckett traduit ses oeuvres françaises en anglais et vice versa, constitue justement sa croix, la signature de Beckett, sa particularité. Et si, comme Mallarmé l'a suggéré [Mallarmé 1945, 259], « le nom du poète mystérieusement se refait avec le texte entière », celui de notre auteur se cache et se recompose sous les mots de l'Innommable : « Un perroquet, ils

> sont tombés sur un *bec de perroquet* » (*Innommable* 82). Nous decelons ici la signature de Beckett : b,e,c dans *bec* et q, u, e, t dans perro*quet*. (Astro 1990, 754)

> This interweaving of languages, the chiasmus by which he translates his French works into English and vice versa, in fact constitutes Beckett's sign, his signature, his uniqueness. And if, as Mallarmé has suggested, "the name of the poet is mysteriously rewritten in the text as a whole", so too, the name Beckett is concealed and reconstituted in the words of the Unnamable: "a parrot, that's what they're up against, a parrot" [*bec de perroquet*: literally "a parrot's beak"] (*Unnamable* 67). We discover here, between the *b, e, c* of *bec* (beak), and the *q, u, e, t* of *perroquet* (parrot) the signature of Beckett: *Becquet*.

This "textual encrypting" (Connor 1992b, 126) of Beckett's name is the subject of a brilliant discussion by Leslie Hill (1990, 107-120), who also finds another allotrope of "Samuel Beckett" in the figure of Lemuel in *Malone meurt*:

> Interestingly, at the end of *Malone meurt*, one of Lemuel's chief implements of execution is what Beckett calls "sa hache" [*Malone meurt* 189, 190]. In *Malone Dies*, Beckett takes care to translate the word as "hatchet" [*Malone Dies* 117, 118, 119], rather than, say, as "axe" or "chopper". Already in *Molloy*, Moran's son had spent his time reading from the bowdlerised versions of the classics published by "les éditions Hatchet" [*Molloy* 218]. The phrase is evidently a joke at the expense of the over-prudish French publisher Hachette. But, by substituting an English pronunciation for a French word, and thus making a bilingual pun, it also works as a secret clue, a nudging reminder of the eccentric position of Beckett, the native speaker of Anglo-Irish, writing here in French. The effect is cryptic, but considerable. For, as *Malone meurt* reaches its end, in the place of the author (whose job it is, like Lemuel, to be the one to kill off the superfluous characters), in the place of the name of the author, then, in the place of a certain Samuel Beckett, what the text inscribes, or encodes, is a cryptic other name for that author, one which might be read as: Lemuel Hatchet. (Hill 1990, 107-8)[17]

[17] Close attention to Beckett's text reveals that Hill's point is actually more neatly made than he imagines, for Lemuel's hatchet is referred to as "sa hache" [axe] only once in *Malone meurt* (190). The first time it is referred to as "une hachette": "Lemuel sortit une hachette de dessous sa cape et s'en frappa à plusieurs reprises le crane" (*Malone meurt* 186) [Lemuel produced a hatchet from under his cloak and dealt himself a few smart blows on the skull (*Malone Dies* 117)]. The second time, significantly, it is explicitly emended, in the French version only, from "hache" to "hachette": "Lemuel … s'approcha par derrière de Maurice … et le tua à coups de hache, de hachette plutôt" (*Malone meurt* 189) [Lemuel went up behind Maurice … and killed him with the [axe, or rather,] hatchet (*Malone Dies* 118)].

As well as discussing the significance of *becquet*, Hill finds echoes of Beckett's name elsewhere in the trilogy, including the *bec de perroquet* discussed by Astro (Hill 1990, 116). So too, Hill finds, in Molloy's insistence on the word *bicyclette* — "Chère bicyclette, je ne t'appellerai pas vélo" (*Molloy* 22), and the fact that a whole series of Beckett characters, from Molloy and Malone to the narrator of *The Unnamable*, rely on crutches (*béquilles*), "secret allusions to the author's name, as covert repetitions of the consonantal armature of that name (/b/k/t)" (Hill 1990, 116)[18]. Drawing attention to the prosthetic nature of both bicycles and crutches, Hill presents an ingenious and well-nigh convincing thesis that this onomastic encryption is part of a complex theme which plays off "the unceasing movement of a speaking self forced to oscillate back and forth, undecidably and perpetually, between maternal body and paternal name" (Hill 1990, 117).

Such discussions can seem like trivial word games, but the point they reinforce is a profound one. The author's name exists in a complex and reciprocal relation to the text he or she signs: in many ways the name of the author is a product of the text. This is not to say, in some absurd sophistry, that the person who writes does not exist until the text is written. Instead, it is to say that, on a certain level, the author's name is co-extensive with the text, exists in the same world, and is subject to the same indeterminacies as any other linguistic element. In other words, the denotative function that links the name "Samuel Beckett" with an actual person is really only a matter for friends, lawyers, and the telephone company. For the rest of us, "Beckett" is always already the author of Beckett's works, and all we know of him is as a result of his name appearing on the cover of certain books. In this way, the author's name, as Foucault insists, "remains at the contours of texts", having neither a purely civil status nor an entirely fictional one, but "situated in the breach" (Foucault 1977c, 123). In the endless series of embedded fictions and narrators that constitute texts like *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, "Beckett" is the unattainable Ur-narrator, lurking, like Kafka's Law, behind an endless hierarchy of gatekeepers, but no less a textual, and therefore slightly fictional entity for all that. We should be ready to accept that, while on the one hand the author's name ties a fictional text to a real world person and thus embeds it in historical circumstance, by the same token, the name of the

[18] Although, of course, "*bequilles*" lacks the final 't' that would clinch the case.

author also inevitably becomes a part of the fictional world, and "Beckett" becomes another character, albeit considerably more complex, in the fictional series of "all these Murphys, Molloys and Malones" (*Unnamable* 21).

The author-function

Foucault argues that in order to deal with the "author" as a discursive function "we must consider the characteristics of a discourse that support this use and determine its difference from other discourses" (Foucault 1977c, 124). Foucault goes on to identify four distinctive features of authorial discourse, which I will briefly discuss below.

1 ... AS A MODE OF APPROPRIATION

Firstly, the author-function is a form of appropriation. In a passage that is highly elliptical, and for this reason not entirely satisfactory, Foucault asserts of authored texts: "the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago" (Foucault 1977c, 124). Foucault's account of this process is highly questionable, although for the moment I will only isolate two main difficulties. Foucault writes:

> It is important to notice ... that its [authored discourse's] status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation. Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. (Foucault 1977c, 124)

This account clearly fits well with Foucault's vestigial attachment, in this essay, to a transgressive conception of literature, and no doubt it is attractive to imagine the figure of the author as the avatar of a historically emerging discourse of intellectual and political transgression. However, Foucault's casual conflation of "speeches and books" in this passage should alert us to a lack of rigour in his brief account of the emergence of the author-function. I shall examine these issues in a later chapter, but

for the moment I would like to consider briefly two major objections to Foucault's account.

Firstly, in an important contribution to ongoing debates over the history of authorship, David Saunders and Ian Hunter take issue with the notion of the author as a kind of historical model of the transgressive individual. Saunders and Hunter's argument is specifically directed against the transgressive conception of literary discourse, which sees writing —*écriture* — as a kind of lawless resistance to the repressive and totalising powers of the state. In particular, their argument is pitched against post-structuralist works such as Annabel Patterson's *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, and, at the risk of jumping ahead slightly, it is worth quoting a lengthy footnote, in which Saunders and Hunter acknowledge the profound contradictions underlying Foucault's account of the emergence of the author:

> Patterson's argument rests on opposing a transgressive indeterminacy of literary writing to a historically bounded and binding set of institutional controls. For her appeal to this transgressive power of "language", she cites theoretical support from Foucault. This is the ironic and surrealist 1970s Foucault who, having identified the "author-function" as a "certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction", nonetheless envisages that limit as transgressed by the "cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations" [Foucault 1980b, 159]. Yet Foucault's essay ends with this reminder: "It would be pure romanticism … to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure" [Foucault 1980b, 159]. Our argument, which treats the legal personalities of authors as having a historical gravity and practical independence which cannot be melted away into an "indeterminacy inveterate to language", can thus also draw on Foucault's essay; we draw not on his romantic leanings towards the transgressing of constraints, but on his treatment of the author as a historical positivity. Foucault's essay was having things both ways,

> and can be cited in support of quite divergent arguments. (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 486 n.9)[19]

This is a lucid description of the contradictions at the heart of Foucault's essay, and significantly, Saunders and Hunter trace the problem with Foucault's account to a lingering attachment to the post-structuralist thesis of an inherent unruliness in language itself, the very notion of *écriture* which at other points in the essay Foucault takes pains to reject. The substance of Saunders and Hunter's argument is that it is historically false to associate the censorship of texts with the figure of the writer:

> The identification of the person who creates and the person who is prosecuted is central to a cherished assumption of postromantic criticism. Whether speaking for a "complete" personality or spoken through by a transgressive and "de-completing" discursivity, the author has come to embody the impetus of human development against the repressive powers of law and state. So deep is this assumption that literary histories of censorship and obscenity law do not even begin to digest the fact that the bulk of obscenity prosecutions have been launched against printers and publishers, not writers. (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 485)

This casual conflation of author and publisher is behind a second objection to Foucault's thesis. Foucault concedes that authorship is a mode of appropriation, but immediately goes on to link the property right of authorship with the functioning of power. That is, in line with the explicit hostility towards Marxist intellectual history that he voices in *The Order of Things*, Foucault is anxious not to accord any explanatory or determinate role to economic relations. However, as I shall examine at length in a later chapter, a closer consideration of the history of authorship, and particularly of copyright, shows that it was the economic factors of the marketplace, rather than the forces of censorship and discursive control, that were decisive in the formulation of the modern concept of the author. Here, too, what is significant is that it was in order to protect the economic interests of *publishers*, not authors, that the concept of intellectual property was gradually developed. The notion of the expressive, and therefore transgressive author, comes quite late in the piece, and as Saunders and Hunter point out (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 485), should be regarded

[19] It should be noted that both remarks from Foucault quoted here appear in the second, amended version of the essay reprinted in Harari's 1980 translation, and do not appear either in the original French or in Bouchard and Simon's 1977 translation.

as a contingent outcome, rather than as the historical emergence of the modern subject, or a decisive moment in the repression and control of discourse.

2 ... AS HISTORICALLY VARIABLE

Secondly, Foucault argues that the author-function "is not universal or constant in all discourse" (Foucault 1977c, 125). To illustrate, he compares the shift between the pre-scientific era and our own, where the author-function, which was once essential in determining the truth-value of a scientific text, has disappeared as a mode of verification in science. On the other hand, Foucault claims, fictional texts once circulated without need for an author, and it is only in our age that "every text of poetry or fiction was obliged to state its author and the date, place, and circumstance of its writing" (Foucault 1977c, 126).

Foucault's argument here sits neatly with his charge that the contemporary themes of the *oeuvre* and *écriture* have subtly preserved the author-function in a different guise. Moreover, the characteristic operations of the author-function have multiplied and dispersed in our culture, and it is easy to observe variations of the author-function at work in discourses far removed from the literary and intellectual milieu.

3 ... AS A SET OF CRITICAL OPERATIONS

Foucault writes that the author-function

> is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author. (Foucault 1977c, 127)

Foucault speculates that the methods for defining an author in literary criticism derive from the Christian tradition where it was necessary "to prove the value of a text by ascertaining the holiness of its author" (Foucault 1977c, 127). Citing Saint Jerome, Foucault isolates four operations by which, in the establishment of an official canon or oeuvre (the words are synonymous in this context), the author is reconstructed after the fact from textual evidence. First, those works are excluded which are inferior to the others: the author is defined as a *constant level of value*. Second, those works are

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excluded which contradict the doctrine expounded in other works: the author is defined as a field of *conceptual or theoretical coherence*. Third, those works are excluded which do not conform to the author's characteristic style: the author is a principle of *stylistic unity*. And fourth, any passages that refer to events of which the author could not possibly have had any knowledge are excluded as inauthentic interpolations: the author is defined as a *historical figure* bounded by certain temporal and geographical limits (Foucault 1977c, 128).

Although authentication is usually not at issue, these principles are carried over into modern literary criticism in a similar series of techniques. Thus, although the field of Beckett studies is not troubled by questions of authentication, these principles of unity continue to determine many of the characteristic problems of Beckett criticism, particularly as it applies to the fringes of the oeuvre: early works, minor works, abandoned works.

To take Foucault's four critical modalities in turn, "the author is a particular source of expression who, in more or less finished forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in a text, in letters, fragments, drafts, and so forth" (Foucault 1977c, 128-29). I remember the shock experienced in reading a transcript of one of Beckett's early drafts for *Ohio Impromptu* (Beckett 1983): the raw clumsiness of the writing and the unpromising banality of the ideas was totally unexpected. The assumption that the author manifests a constant level of quality is so deeply ingrained, particularly in the case of Beckett, that one simply does not expect to find a clumsy phrase or a banal idea anywhere, whether in a draft or a letter or on the back of the electricity bill. In the case of Beckett studies, the problem is then subsumed into the notion of the author's transformative genius being capable of turning unpromising beginnings into masterpieces. In other words, instead of operating as a discontinuity or a rupture, variations in quality become a reconfirmation of the author's creative power.

Secondly, for Foucault, "the author serves to neutralise the contradictions that are found in a series of texts". It is assumed that there must be a level, whether of conscious thought or unconscious desire, "where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating

contradiction" (Foucault 1977c, 128). That is, the burden of accounting for contradiction or discontinuity is transferred from the text to the author, where the complexities of authorial subjectivity can be relied upon to account for all manner of contradictions. Whereas in the first case the author serves as a principle of rational and conscious control, the expressive force which unifies the salient features of a series of texts in the unity of its vision, here the author functions as the alibi of a deeper chaos, where everything which might disturb or undermine the coherence of the oeuvre can be traced back to the unruliness of the deeper self from which this vision sprang.

Thirdly, the authorial biography becomes a kind of evolutionary time-line, against which textual anomalies can be mapped, "where any unevenness of production is ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence" (Foucault 1977c, 128). Naturally enough, this process is a significant feature of Beckett studies, where, to cite only two examples, the degree and significance of Joyce's influence, and the literary merit of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, are both perennial topics of debate.

Fourthly, as a principle of historical delimitation:

> the author explains the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions, and their various modifications (and this through an author's biography or by reference to his particular point of view, in the analysis of his social preferences and his position within a class or by delineating his fundamental objectives). (Foucault 1977c, 128)

In the case of Beckett, characteristically perhaps, it is the *absence*, rather than the presence of certain events that poses a series of questions for Beckett critics. After early works such as *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, and *Murphy*, Beckett's work becomes so disconnected from geographical and historical points of reference that it has become a central concern of Beckett's studies to tie the texts *back* to their author's biography. This process can take many forms, but among them we might mention the well-known thesis that the "plot" of *Waiting for Godot* was inspired by Beckett's experiences in the Resistance[20], reflecting the fear and

[20] H. Porter Abbott suggests that this surmise was first made by Hugh Kenner (Abbott 1996, ix).

anxiety of making dangerous rendezvous in an atmosphere of deep uncertainty and suspicion. Or to cite an even more eminent example, there is Theodor Adorno's famous thesis that *Endgame* is the cryptic (because impossible) representation of a post-apocalyptic world: "The violence of the unspeakable is mirrored in the fear of mentioning it. ... History is kept outside because it has dried up consciousness' power to conceive it" (Adorno 1991, 245, 247). In fact, there is a persistent concern in Beckett studies to account for the fact that there are so few direct references in his work to the war, or to the rise of fascism, or to Beckett's experiences in the Resistance. Here the author-function operates as a kind of powerful interpretive magnet, where Beckett's biography, and particularly the larger history of his time, is assumed to have a coded presence in his work.

To cite a pre-eminent recent example, Anthony Uhlmann addresses this problem by developing a notion of "counterpoint" borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (see Uhlmann 1999, "Introduction" 1-39, esp. 36-38), a version of non-mimetic aesthetics whereby a writer like Beckett connects with history by working on "a vast plane of composition that is not abstractly preconceived but constructed as the work progresses, opening, mixing, dismantling, and reassembling increasingly unlimited compounds in accordance with the penetration of cosmic forces" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 188). Using this fluid conception of the politico-aesthetic relation, Uhlmann has attempted more rigorously than any critic before him to reread Beckett's trilogy against the historical backdrop of Vichy France and the *guerre franco-française.*

It might be objected that this attempt to tie a literary work to its historical context involves an interpretive paradigm that necessarily sidelines the author as a privileged point of reference, opening up the work to larger historical forces. By the same token, however, the author remains as a kind of privileged intermediary, the indispensable link between the social and political forces of his or her own historical moment, and the social and political forces which are legible in his or her text. Indeed, the theoretical sophistication of Uhlmann's use of the concept of "counterpoint" seems designed to address that very difficulty, a kind of anti-subjective model of the person which attempts to sidestep the phenomenological notion of an experiencing and creating subject. But the fact still remains that the

biography of the author remains definitive in the construction of the field of possible references that may lie beneath the text's imperturbable surface.

4 ... AS A GRAMMATICAL ANOMALY

This fourth feature of the author-function is familiar to readers of Beckett: in fact, it might be argued that it is one of the characteristic features of the Beckett oeuvre as such. Foucault discusses the ways in which a text bears signs that refer to the author, and how these signs, rather than performing the deictic function of specifying a particular speaking individual, tend to multiply and disperse the subject positions offered by a text. It is worth quoting Foucault at length, since this passage defines one of the exemplary cruces of Beckett studies:

> Well known to grammarians, these textual signs are personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and the conjugation of verbs. But it is important to note that these elements have a different bearing on texts with an author and on those without one. In the latter, these "shifters" refer to a real speaker and to an actual deictic situation, with certain exceptions such as the case of indirect speech in the first person. When discourse is linked to an author, however, the role of "shifters" is more complex and variable. It is well known that in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localisation refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather they stand for a "second self" whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the "author-function" arises out of their scission — in the division and distance of the two. (Foucault 1977c, 129)

At first sight, this passage might appear to repeat an exceedingly banal theme: that in literary texts writers adopt a "persona", an "alter-ego", or a "second self" that corresponds neither to the person of the author nor to an entirely fictional character, but which operates in this breach and this suspension that fiction makes possible. This would amount to little more than a reiteration of what has been a familiar theme in literature since, perhaps, Flaubert's cryptic claim: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi", or T. S. Eliot's formulation of poetic "personae", or Yeats' of "masks", or Joyce's famous expression, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, of the author's essential separation from his own statement, remaining "within or behind or beyond

or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Joyce 1986, 194-95).

It is worthwhile, therefore, considering this statement in a different light, since Foucault's emphasis is decidedly not on this "scission" as an element of literary technique, but as the effect of a certain discursive operation on texts. As we have seen, Beckett's fiction lends itself particularly readily to the kind of criticism that aims to trace the exact outline of this separation. In fact, major divisions of the field of Beckett studies tend to define themselves precisely in relation to this author-question: from the naïvely autobiographical approach of Deirdre Bair, to the middle ground of H. Porter Abbott's "autographical" approach or Uhlmann's "counterpoint", to the sophisticated theoretical evaporation of authorial presence in the work of Blanchot, Trezise or Critchley.

On the level of literary technique, as a question of authorial vision, it is no doubt both true and readily demonstrable that throughout his work Beckett has shown a consistent predilection for multiplying these gestures of authorial deferral, exploring this "scission" and the possibilities it opens up for fiction. In his essay on Blanchot, Foucault writes:

> in ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: "I lie." "I speak," on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test. (Foucault 1987b, 9)

If we had to find an equivalent formula for Beckett's particular strategy of deferral it might be a hybrid of "I lie" and "I speak". A crudely formulaic expression of the characteristically Beckettian utterance might be something like: "When I speak, I lie, because 'I' is a lie, and because to speak is to lie". The permutations of this statement are innumerable in Beckett's work, from the fine words of *Molloy*:

> And every time I say, I said this, or, I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far away inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. (*Molloy* 118-19)

to the famous ending of that novel:

> Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. (*Molloy* 241)

One could also cite the convoluted writhings of the voice that speaks in *The Unnamable:*

> Perhaps it's by trying to be Worm that I'll finally succeed in being Mahood, I hadn't thought of that. Then all I'll have to do is be Worm. Which no doubt I shall achieve by trying to be Jones. Then all I'll have to do is be Jones. (*Unnamable* 72)

or the more gnomic peremptoriness of the fourth of the *Texts for Nothing*:

> Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply. It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer. (CSPR 114)

In each case, the logical armature of the statement might be reduced (with considerable losses, of course) to the paradox "It's not I speaking" (*Unnamable* 161), or, in the greater compression of the play's title, *Not I.* It is more or less — and it is in the space of this "more or less" that the space of literature opens up — it is more or less the same grammatico-existential dilemma which Beckett plays with, in a deft manipulation of a limited set of symbols, like an illusionist performing an endless series of tricks with a top hat, a playing card, and a handkerchief.

But these are merely questions of technique, and for this reason, I think, we should heed the words of *The Unnamable*: "But enough of this first person, it is really too red a herring" (*Unnamable* 77). For although it is clear that throughout his work Beckett has enormous fun exploiting the shiftiness of these shifters, to leap from this to the conclusion that this necessarily implies some sort of statement about, or assault on, or subversion of the author-function, is precisely to be taken in by the false clue that Beckett is so careful to warn us about.

The cardinal mistake, I think, is to read Beckett as if he were a post-structuralist theorist rather than a writer of fiction, or worse, as if he were a post-structuralist theorist who finds in fiction a better way to do post-structuralist theory than as a post-structuralist theorist. Acknowledging that "Beckett's work contains innumerable philosophical red herrings" (Critchley 1997, 143), Simon Critchley summarises, as

deftly as anyone, the characteristic anxieties of post-structuralist theory *vis-à-vis* Beckett:

> The writings of Samuel Beckett seem to be particularly, perhaps uniquely, resistant to philosophical interpretation. To speak from the vantage point of a conceptual framework, an interpretative method or any form of metalanguage, is, at the best of times, a hazardous exercise with regard to those texts regarded as "literary" — *traduttore, traditore*. However, the peculiar resistance of Beckett's work to philosophical interpretation lies, I think, in the fact that his texts continually seem to pull the rug from under the feet of the philosopher by showing themselves to be conscious of the possibility of such interpretations; or, better, such interpretations seem to lag behind the text which they are trying to interpret; or, better still, such interpretations seem to lag behind their object by saying too much: something essential to Beckett's language is lost by overshooting the text and ascending into the stratosphere of metalanguage. (Critchley 1997, 141)

Such characteristic caveats notwithstanding, the reading of Beckett as a kind of crypto-post-structuralist has rapidly become the received orthodoxy in Beckett criticism[21]. Having had definitive statements on Beckett from Bataille (1951), Blanchot (1988), Cixous (1976), Kristeva (1987), and a variety of essays and passages from Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze 1986, 66-68; Deleuze 1994b; Deleuze 1995; Deleuze and Guattari 1983; 1986; 1987), all that would be needed to admit Beckett fully into the post-structuralist pantheon would be an extended essay from Jacques Derrida. Instead, Derrida has gone one better by explaining why he has remained silent on Beckett up to this point: because he feels "too close" to Beckett, but also "too distant", because it would be "too easy and too hard" to respond to Beckett's oeuvre, and because Beckett "is nihilist and is not nihilist" (Derrida 1992, 60-61).

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[21] The inaugural text for the post-structuralist re-reading of Beckett was undoubtedly Lance St. John Butler and Robin Davis's collection *Rethinking Beckett*, published in 1980. Since then, the post-structuralist reading of Beckett rapidly established itself as the new orthodoxy in Beckett criticism: a brief survey of book-length studies might include those by Angela Moorjani (1982), Peter Gidal (1986), Steven Connor (1988), Sylvie Debevec Henning (1988), Leslie Hill (1990), Thomas Trezise (1990), Carla Locatelli (1990), Richard Begam (1995) and Anthony Uhlmann (1999). H. Porter Abbott provides a judicious overview of Beckett's ambiguous status in the "modernist/postmodernist turf war" (Abbott 1996, 23-27).

What could be a more fittingly paradoxical confirmation of Beckett's place in the post-structuralist canon than the fact that its most garrulous high priest keeps a special silence on the subject of his work? Critchley cites with approval Derrida's acknowledgement, in response to a suggestion from Derek Attridge in the interview quoted above, that "Beckett's writing is already so 'deconstructive', or 'self-deconstructive,' that there is not much left to do" (Derrida 1992, 61). But Critchley, like Blanchot, and Derrida, and a host of Blanchotians and Derrideans after them, continues to read Beckett in terms of "the challenge that he poses to philosophy" (Critchley 1997, 147). Using Beckett to *do* philosophy need not inevitably impose a philosophical metalanguage on Beckett's text. But for Beckett's work to pose a *challenge* to philosophy, it must in some sense be read *as philosophy*, since philosophy is not disposed to receive or comprehend its challenges from anywhere else. As Jim Hicks puts it at the beginning of a philosophical essay on Beckett's work:

> It may well be the case that any argument against philosophy faces itself as first and most formidable opponent; that in short, by arguing against philosophy, one does philosophy. Unless, that is, one decides to critique philosophy by playing the piano, a decision, it would seem, with obvious limitations. (Hicks 1993, 309)

Therefore, as Derrida's own remarks abundantly confirm, to say: "Beckett is not a philosopher", within the language-game of post-structuralist theory, is to say nothing less than: "Beckett *is* a philosopher". Calling attention to the non-philosophical character of Beckett's writing is the inevitable prelude to a claim for its importance to philosophy.

While it is no doubt perfectly justifiable, immaculately tidy, and sometimes even convincing to read Beckett as this-philosopher-who-is-not-one, since Beckett's paradoxes can be slipped so unobtrusively into the smooth flow of post-structuralist discourse, this kind of reading rests, I think, on a fundamentally untenable assumption: it depends on the innocent faith that because Beckett and the post-structuralists appear to say the same thing, they must *mean* the same thing.

Here I am not appealing, of course, to the chimera of an authorial intention somehow legible in the text. Instead, I think it is important to recognise that the discursive context in which a writer chooses to bring his or her work before the world constitutes

an essential component of writing *as such*. To publish one's work in an exclusive literary milieu while refusing to discuss its meaning, rather than, say, presenting one's work as an adjunct to a teaching program carried out in an institutional setting, must be seen, I think, as an element of "authorial intention". The post-structuralist insistence on the indeterminacy of the text fails to account, I think, for the importance of this authorial decision in determining whatever "meaning" the work might take on for its various readerships.

Founders of discursivity

If there is a tendency in Beckett studies to read Beckett as a crypto-philosopher rather than as a writer of fiction, this blurring of discursive boundaries inevitably carries with it a new series of questions regarding the nature of the Beckettian author-function. We might begin to explain this shift by pointing out that Beckett's work concerns itself with many of the characteristic themes of post-structuralism — in particular a profound set of questions regarding the relationship between the self and language — and we might further add that the quasi-philosophical density of Beckett's texts lends itself, far better than more conventional narratives, to the intense and detailed theoretical elaboration characteristic of post-structuralist criticism. And we might further suggest that, if the transformation of the contemporary humanities has been characterised by both an "anti-literary" turn towards cultural studies (a kind of superstitious dread of the ossified literary canon and all that it might represent), along with a corresponding embrace of the liberating potential of "theory" (to the extent where, as Guillory points out, the literary canon has been replaced by a "canon of theory" [Guillory 1993, 176-181]), one of the main reasons Beckett, as an unquestionably "literary" writer, has remained more or less acceptable has been the reinvention of Beckett as a kind of post-structuralist theorist *manqué*.

But, beyond these speculative explanations, we have to account for the transformations of the author-function that this shift in the treatment of Beckett might

entail. In the fifth section of "What Is an Author?", Foucault begins to explore a series of distinctions between literary authors, and authors whose works initiate new discursive practices. For, as Foucault points out:

> a person can be the author of much more than a book — of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate. For convenience, we could say that such authors occupy a transdiscursive position. (Foucault 1977c, 131)

This type of author is "as old as our civilisation" (Foucault 1977c, 131), but in the nineteenth century, according to Foucault, authors of a new type emerge, neither the authors of canonical literary works, nor the founders of sciences, but what Foucault calls "founders of discursivity" (Foucault 1980b, 154)[22].

> The distinctive contribution of these authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts. … Freud is not simply the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or of *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* and Marx is not simply the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*: they both established the endless possibility of discourse. (Foucault 1977c, 131)

Clearly, there is a sense in which Beckett's work sets the scene for an "endless possibility" of discourse, but there are obvious distinctions to be made between the status and function of literary texts, however "theoretical" their orientation or reception, and the kind of discursive practices that Foucault is elaborating here.

Firstly, Beckett's texts evidently neither present themselves, nor are treated as if they present themselves, in a *didactic* mode. Ironically, although questions of authorial intention are seldom raised in relation to the work of theorists such as Foucault or Derrida (not so much because the authors' intentions are self-evident, but because the application of a theorist's ideas is not seen to depend inherently upon an appeal to authorial intention), in the field of Beckett studies a reading of Beckett in terms of a specified programme is fraught with difficulties. To be sure, there are frequently quoted Beckettian mission statements, such as the desire "to bore one hole after another in language" expressed in the letter to Axel Kaun (*Disjecta* 172), the "nothing

[22] Here I use Harari's translation, as both more literal and more elegant than Bouchard and Simon's rendering: "initiators of discursive practices" (Foucault 1977c, 131). The French original is "fondateurs de discursivité" (Foucault 1969, 89).

to express" of the *Three Dialogues* with Georges Duthuit (*Dialogues* 103), or the various *obiter dicta* culled from Beckett's rare interviews, such as the equally often-quoted comment: "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (Driver 1979, 219). But these are statements of aesthetic goals, and it is not at all clear whether they can or should be translated into nebulous post-structuralist appeals for social transformation such as "undermining the structures of subjectivity", or "liberating the unconscious from the prisonhouse of language". Within these conditions there can be no didactic spirit of Beckettian orthodoxy, a *Beckettism* on the model of Freudianism or Marxism. Inevitably, post-structuralist readings try to have it both ways, on the one hand stressing that it is both fallacious and unnecessary to attribute such a didactic "intention" to Beckett's writing, while on the other hand employing Beckett's writing to advance readings that are often implicitly didactic in themselves.

Secondly, Beckett's texts are not read as if they might yield a more or less coherent set of abstract propositions that could constitute a Beckettian philosophical system, on the model of the Cartesian or Kantian systems: "The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system" (*Unnamable* 4). On the contrary, the quality of Beckett's work is in its concreteness, the extent to which it resists reduction to a set of propositions that can be tested independently of the language in which they are expressed.

And thirdly, Beckett's work clearly does not initiate a characteristic ensemble of practices, of methodologies, applications or techniques, which would constitute a discursive operation. Although critics might like to claim that it is equally possible to do a Beckettian reading of Derrida as it is to do a Derridean reading of Beckett, the fact remains that Beckett's texts do not and are not assumed to provide a set of techniques that can be adapted to a new series of applications. On the contrary, the Beckett text is always the *raison d'être*, both the beginning and the end of any act of Beckett criticism, and any "Beckettian reading" only has a value and a meaning in so far as it enables us better to understand Beckett. The object of Beckett studies always remains Beckett's texts, and one does not put Beckett to "use" in a way that does not ultimately return to the question of the nature and the value of the Beckettian oeuvre.

To adopt a distinction from the scientific disciplines, there is only a "pure", and not an "applied" Beckettology[23].

Thus, we can set out a systematic series of oppositions which might distinguish the discursive field of Beckett studies from the discursive field established by a "founder of discursivity": an opposition between a didactic social or political programme and a set of aesthetic goals; an opposition between concrete expression and the formulation of a propositional system; and an opposition between the hermeneutics of commentary on the "master text", and a set of technical or methodological applications.

This seems straightforward enough, but I think it is important to emphasise the fact and the extent to which Beckett is *not* a thinker, no matter how attractive it is to explore and develop the philosophical dimensions of his work. Although it should be taken as no more decisive than any other expression in Beckett's oeuvre, his comment in an interview with Tom Driver touches upon this distinction:

> When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. (Driver 1979, 219)

So too, in an interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède:

> "Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?"
>
> "I never read philosophers."
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "I never understand anything they write."
>
> "All the same, people have wondered if the existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works."
>
> "There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophical terms."
>
> "What was your reason then?"

[23] This may seem to contradict my first point, that many post-structuralist readings of Beckett appear to pursue other, quasi-didactic aims, rather than an understanding of Beckett's texts for their own sake. But precisely the fact that Beckett's authorial "intention" is carefully bracketed off in such readings tends to confirm the separation between "interpretive" and "productive" responses.

> "I haven't the slightest idea. I'm no intellectual. All I am is feeling. 'Molloy' and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel." (D'Aubarède 1979, 217)

We should not be deceived by Beckett's false ingenuousness here: this whole passage is redolent of the air of inscrutable mystery that Beckett liked to maintain around his works and in particular around his own creative intentions. Entirely characteristic is his insistence that there's "no key or problem", or the quintessential Romanticism of the formulation: "I'm no intellectual. All I am is feeling". But Beckett's hostility to the suggestion that his work might be expressible in philosophical terms is decisive here, not because it is necessarily true, but because one simply cannot imagine Marx or Freud, Derrida or Foucault claiming: "All I am is feeling".

By this formulation Beckett attempts to invalidate, at a stroke, any reading of his work that is not in itself a mode of "feeling", that is not, in other words, an aesthetic response, and it suggests that whatever scraps of philosophy are present in his work are there primarily for aesthetic effect.

Conclusion

The conclusion of Foucault's essay poses two interesting problems. The first concerns the question of how we should read the line from Beckett at the end of the essay in relation to the beginning, for clearly the words take on an entirely different character in the course of repetition, and the shift has a clear relation to the workings of the author-function of "Beckett" in the essay. Most obviously, as mentioned earlier, the "indifference" expressed in "What matter who's speaking" is initially taken to characterise a particular mode of *writing*, whereas at the end of the essay it is indifference as a mode of *reading* that appears to be Foucault's main concern. The second problem concerns the variant versions of the paper, since, as I mentioned earlier, Foucault later substantially revised the conclusion of the paper. The

interpolations are, I shall argue, not necessarily an improvement, and in fact have greatly contributed to the characteristic misreading of Foucault's essay.

The main part of Foucault's conclusion attempts to remedy what he concedes as "a decided absence of positive propositions in this essay" (Foucault 1977c, 136), and so he goes on to sketch out a number of possible directions for future research opened up by the space of the author's disappearance: the development of a "typology of discourse", the development of a "historical analysis of discourse", and a re-examination of the "privileges of the subject … a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse" (Foucault 1980b, 157-158).

However, what is of greater interest here is the passage with which Foucault concludes. He invites his audience to imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without a need for an author function, where language would unfold in a pervasive anonymity:

> No longer the tiresome repetitions:
>
> "Who is the real author?"
> "Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?"
> "What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?"
>
> New questions will be heard:
>
> "What are the modes of existence of this discourse?"
> "Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?"
> "What placements are determined for possible subjects?"
> "Who can fulfil these diverse functions of the subject?"
>
> Behind all these questions we would hear little more than the murmur of indifference:
>
> "What matter who's speaking?"
>
> (Foucault 1977c, 138)

Foucault returns in his closing words to the line from Beckett with which he began. Here, however, the quotation is taken to signify, not the "indifference" characteristic

of the "fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing" (Foucault 1977c, 116), but the "pervasive anonymity" of an imagined future in which "discourse would circulate without any need for an author" (Foucault 1977c, 138). The shift here is clear and decisive: from a mode of writing, to a mode of reading; from the linguistic experiments of sixties avant-garde aesthetics, to an imagined social order in which language is not tied to the subject who speaks; from the studied indifference of *écriture* to the easy anonymity of a discursive utopia.

The implications of this shift clearly alter the significance of the line from Beckett at the beginning and at the end of the essay. At the beginning, we are told: "Beckett supplies a direction". It is as if Foucault is saying: "Listen to this great writer's voice, listen to his formulation of the subject's indifference to its own discourse. *That* is how we should be thinking and writing." Perhaps Foucault uses the line from Beckett in the same way he uses the passage from Borges about the Chinese encyclopaedia at the beginning of *The Order of Things*: "Imagine thinking *that*". At the end of the essay, however, we are supposed not to care: "Beckett, Schmeckett, what matter who's speaking?" If these words resonate with a heavy irony at the beginning — Beckett named as the exemplar of indifference and anonymity — they expire soundlessly in a vacuum at the end: the words are no longer anyone's, but part of the ceaseless murmuring of discourse, a page torn at random from the Library of Babel. It is, in the end, a pointless and self-cancelling question, since, in such an imagined world, even the word *who* will no longer mean what it does today, and the phrase "What matter who's speaking" would sound as enigmatic and unthinkable as the taxonomy of the animals from Borges's encyclopaedia.

So too, although Foucault is clearly indulging here in a speculative moment, we should ask, What is the implicit relation between the indifference of avant-garde writing, and the "pervasive anonymity" in which the author-function has ceased to exist? We have already seen that Foucault is openly critical of the manner by which, under the twin alibis of the *oeuvre* and *écriture*, the privileges of the author continued to function in the literary theory of the late 1960s. If this is the case, if avant-garde deconstructions of the author have failed to unsettle the cultural dominance of the author-function, in what way is this imagined "authorless" discursive order to come

about? Foucault is evasive on this point, gesturing vaguely towards the unforeseeable discontinuities of the episteme characteristic of *The Order of Things*:

> The author — or what I have called the "author-function" — is undoubtedly only one of the possible specifications of the subject and, considering its past historical transformations, it appears that the form, the complexity, and even the existence of this function are far from immutable. We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity. (Foucault 1977c, 138)

There is something falsely ingenuous about this "we can easily imagine", this casual transition from an analysis of the contemporary author-function to a confident prediction of its imminent historical demise. No doubt it is this moment of speculative fancy that has led critics to assume that in this essay Foucault is once again, with perhaps a different set of reservations, pronouncing the "death of the author" thesis. In fact, this appears to have been the reaction of his first audience, at the Collège de France in 1969. The first two respondents to the paper, Jean d'Ormesson and Lucien Goldmann, offer extremely sarcastic comments in which they locate Foucault firmly in the mainstream of structuralist thought, aligning him with Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Barthes and Derrida. Goldmann goes so far as to suggest:

> Michel Foucault n'est pas l'auteur, et certainement pas l'instaurateur de ce qu'il vient de nous dire. Car la négation du sujet est aujourd'hui l'idée centrale de tout un groupe de penseurs, ou plus exactement de tout un courant philosophique. (Foucault 1969, 96-97)

> Michel Foucault is not the author, and certainly not the originator, of what he has just told us, for the negation of the subject is today the central proposition of a whole group of thinkers, or rather, of an entire philosophical movement.

Foucault, in his response to his critics, is therefore at some pains to reiterate that he is not a structuralist, and that he is not merely whistling along with the old "death of the author" tune. I quote this passage at some length, because, like the belligerent "Foreword to the English edition" of *The Order of Things* which I quoted earlier, it brings into particularly clear focus both the contradictions at the core of Foucault's argument, and the characteristic misreading which is the inevitable accompaniment of this significant shift in Foucault's thinking.

> La première chose que je dirai, c'est que je n'ai jamais, pour ma part, employé le mot de structure. Cherchez-le dans *Les Mots et les choses*, vous ne le trouverez pas. … De plus : je n'ai pas dit que l'auteur n'existait pas ; je ne l'ai pas dit et je suis étonné que mon discours ait pu prêter à un pareil contre-sens. Reprenons un peu tout cela.
>
> J'ai parlé d'une certaine thématique que l'on peut repérer dans les oeuvres comme dans la critique, qui est, si vous voulez : l'auteur doit s'effacer ou être effacé au profit des formes propres aux discours. Ceci étant entendu, la question que je me suis posée était celle-ci : qu'est-ce que cette règle de la disparition de l'écrivain ou de l'auteur, permet de découvrir ? Elle permet de découvrir le jeu de la fonction-auteur.
>
> …
>
> Même chose pour cette négation de l'homme dont M. Goldmann a parlé : la mort de l'homme, c'est un thème qui permet de mettre à jour la manière dont le concept d'homme a fonctionné dans le savoir. … Il ne s'agit pas d'affirmer que l'homme est mort, il s'agit, à partir du thème … que l'homme est mort … de voir de quelle manière, selon quelles règles s'est formé et a fonctionné le concept d'homme. J'ai fait la même chose pour la notion d'auteur. Retenons donc nos larmes. (Foucault 1969, 100-101)

> First, let me begin by saying that, for my part, I have never used the word "structure". Look for it in *The Order of Things*, you won't find it. … Moreover, I did not say that the author does not exist. I did not say it and I am staggered that my paper could give rise to such a misunderstanding. Let's go back over it again.
>
> I spoke of a certain theme one can discern in both literary and critical writing, which is, if you like, "the author must efface himself or be effaced in order to reveal the characteristic forms of discourse". This being understood, the question I asked myself was this: "What does this rule of the author's or writer's effacement allow us to discover?" It allows us to discover the workings of the author-function. …
>
> So too for the negation of man of which M. Goldmann spoke: the "death of man" is a theme which allows us to bring to light the way in which the concept of man has functioned in the creation of knowledge. … It's not a question of affirming that man is dead, it's a question of taking this theme … that man is dead … as a point of departure, in order to see in what manner and according to what rules the concept of "man" came into being and exercised a certain function. I have done the same thing for the notion of the author. Let us therefore hold back our tears.

It's a subtle distinction, between saying the author is dead, and using the theme of the death of the author as a point of departure, but Foucault's argument here is, I think, clear enough. The theme of the death of the author, by clearing the author's space of of its "humanist" platitudes — its biographical colour, its psychological depths, its intentions and its genius — allows us to perceive the ways in which the author-

function organises and pre-determines the ways in which we read certain texts. But, by the same token, in arguing that the themes of *oeuvre* and *écriture* have merely preserved the privileges of the author under a grey neutrality, and thus "arrest the possibility of genuine change" (Foucault 1977c, 118), Foucault seems to be calling, once again and with renewed insistence, for the advent of a society in which discourse might circulate without the supervision of the authorial chaperone. It can almost be taken as a rallying cry for a new, more ruthless and decisive attempt on the life of the author, as if the old "death of the author" was a botched job by a bunch of amateurish and reluctant assassins.

This is where the variant conclusions of Foucault's essay become important. The versions I have been using, for the most part, are the original version as it appeared in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, and Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon's translation of that paper. Later, however, Foucault substantially revised the paper, and it is this revised version that appears in Josué Harari's anthology (Foucault 1980b). The major revisions occur in the final section of the paper: approximately a page and a half is added just before the series of questions with which Foucault concludes the paper.

Following Simon During's lead, I have argued that the shift in Foucault's thinking at this time was characterised by his abandonment of the avant-garde theme of writing as transgression. As we have seen, Foucault's invocation of Beckett's words "What matter who's speaking" can therefore be read as profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, this indifference, representative of the "fundamental ethical principle of contemporary writing", is nevertheless, in its pursuit of a purely textual dissolution of the speaking subject, inevitably caught up in, and dependent on, a discourse in which the privilege of the author is subtly preserved. This, then, might be Foucault's point, that it is possible, within the bounds of a discourse of avant-garde transgressive writing, to hail Beckett as an ethical exemplar of anonymity and indifference, while simultaneously aware of the purely theoretical nature of this version of "Beckett", its fundamental inappropriateness to the real Beckett's practices and attitudes as an author. Moreover, the notion of anonymity and indifference becomes part of an official discourse on Beckett and on contemporary writing, a discourse which proclaims the death of the author and the liberation of the reader, while at the same

time theoretically incapable of examining its own role in the reproduction of relations of power and authority.

Most significantly, perhaps, what Foucault is signalling in this passage is more or less an abandonment, in his own work, of the theorisation of literature. If the function of literary texts is crucially delimited by the institutions that govern the discourse on literature, then the notion of "transgressive writing" becomes deeply problematic, since the final effect of any piece of writing will be determined, in the last instance, not by the skill or violence or rigour with which a writer presents "language in its raw state" or creates a "space where the writing subject endlessly disappears", but by the discursive relations of power and constraint which govern the reception, interpretation and evaluation of texts. Foucault's theorisation of the author-function is, therefore, a rejection of writing *as textuality*. Given the extent to which literary culture privileges textuality over orality, absence over presence, it must stand as a rejection of literary writing *per se*.

The focus of Foucault's attention in subsequent works will be the operations of a certain set of discursive regimes: his exploration of the relationship between power and knowledge in the governance of human populations will eventually lead to his rejection of the "repressive hypothesis" and his celebrated model of power as productive. It is strange, therefore, that the interpolations that Foucault later added to the paper seem to belong to the earlier Foucault, to the theme of power as repressive and of discourse (or madness or *écriture*) as unruly, dangerous, transgressive[24]. Less

[24] Josué Harari sees it differently, associating the themes of repression and transgression with Foucault's more overtly political work of the mid seventies:

> It is worth focusing on the difference between the two versions, which appears in the essays' concluding pages. Whereas the *Bulletin* version concludes with some general considerations on the necessity for future discursive typologies, the version herein ends on a political note. This divergence is crucial to an understanding of Foucault's work in that it reveals the shift from his former fascination with phenomena of language to his more recent politico-historical work. (I refer here to *Discipline and Punish* and *La Volonté de savoir*.) There is indeed a shift, and yet, in many ways, the same problematic — that of discourse — remains at the heart of Foucault's questioning. (Harari 1980, 43)

strange, perhaps, is the fact that within the field of literary criticism, it is almost always from this interpolated conclusion that the quotable quotes are culled.

The notion of the author as a repressive figure is a familiar notion from Barthes's famous hyperbolic polemic:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. ... Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. (Barthes 1977a, 146-47)

It is surprising, therefore, especially after the difficulties Foucault faced with the initial reception of his paper, to find him inserting exactly this sort of rhetoric into the revised version of the paper. Nevertheless, in the revised version we see Foucault once again presenting the "repressive hypothesis", in a passage that might as well have come from "The Death of the Author". I quote this passage at length because it is highly problematic, standing in manifest contradiction to the implications of the rest of the essay. Foucault discusses the author as an "ideological" figure:

> The question then becomes: How can one reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world? The answer is: One can reduce it with the author. The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. As a result, we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author. We are accustomed ... to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. ...
>
> The truth is quite the contrary: the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain

---

The notion of "discourse" is the problem at the heart of this shift. If Foucault's earlier work is premised on a quasi-linguistic model of the functioning of power, as obeying certain "discursive" regularities, the later "genealogical" work is premised on the model of the *dispositif*, the notion that apparatuses such as the panopticon function on an entirely non-discursive, non-linguistic level, as architectures or technologies of power rather than as signifying regimes. For a detailed analysis of the importance of this distinction, see Ian Hunter, "From Discourse to Dispositif: Foucault and the Study of Literature" (Hunter 1991).

> functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function. ... The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning. (Foucault 1980b, 158-59)

Clearly it is impossible to imagine Samuel Beckett consenting to the dismemberment of his works implied in the notion of "free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction". Whatever his own aesthetics of disintegration, Beckett always insisted, with the incoercible refusal to compromise that he no doubt learned from Joyce, on the absolute integrity of his written works. In fact, this was the source of his famous falling-out with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, after Beauvoir refused to publish the second half of his short story "Suite" (later called "La Fin"; translated as "The End"), having published the first half in the July 1946 issue of *Les Temps modernes*. Beckett's wounded indignation is palpable in the letter he sent to Beauvoir:

> I have sufficient confidence in you to explain exactly what I feel. It is this. You allow me to speak only to cut me off before my voice has time to mean something. You halt an existence before it can have the least achievement. This is the stuff of nightmares. I find it difficult to believe that concerns of presentation could justify in your eyes such a mutilation. (Letter from Samuel Beckett to Simone de Beavoir, reproduced in Lake 1984, 82; cited and translated in Knowlson 1996, 359-60)

But in a sense, of course, it is not really important what Beckett's own attitude to the author-function is, despite Foucault's implied recruitment of Beckett to the "ethical principles of contemporary writing", since Foucault's primary concern is with the way authorial discourse governs the reading, rather than the writing, of texts.

Nevertheless, in the polemic insistence on "the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" in this interpolated paragraph, Foucault seems to be retrospectively underlining his adherence to the more familiar Barthesian notion of the author as a "principle of thrift" governing the limitless semiosis of the linguistic act. If it is not quite an embrace of *écriture*, since that notion has been so strongly

rejected elsewhere in the essay, it nevertheless states, with a kind of polemical insistence, the familiar thesis of an infinite and unruly proliferation of language constrained by the repressive machinery of discourse. It shares, in other words, the avant-gardist theorisation of writing as an enfolded political potential. How else is one to read the rhetorical hyperbole of "the great danger with which fiction threatens our world"?

It is a deeply problematic conclusion to what is otherwise a definitive critique of the radical limitations of avant-garde literature. As Simon During comments:

> there remains a certain equivocation. In these essays, it is still as if language, as formed by the rules of discourse, commits a violence against, or even represses, writing as the domain of materiality, chance and reversibility. It reduces "the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world," as Foucault puts it in "What is an Author?" (During 1992, 122)

This "great danger" is clearly a fantasy of avant-garde writing, an invocation of the power of the literary text to resist the constructions and restraints imposed upon it by discourse. Foucault's adherence to this notion is a clear point of tension underlying both "What is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse". Simon During reads the attack on *écriture* earlier in the essay as a veiled attack on Derrida, although Foucault's comments in a later interview indicate that he was referring more generally to the "exaltation" of writing characteristic of the late sixties which had its origins in a misappropriation of certain themes originating in Blanchot and Barthes (Foucault 1988, 309-10). Nevertheless, During argues:

> Foucault's attack on Derrida seems to involve a hidden agenda and some embarrassment *because* he is rejecting that "theorisation of writing" which is still — just — necessary to his thought at this point of his career. Necessary because, as we have seen, this theory kills the author as the founding subject of "works" which express his or her meaning. Only once the author is dead in this sense can writing be reduced to discourse, so as to become available to an analytics of institutionality and power. (During 1992, 122)

Of course, once writing is reduced to discourse in this sense, literary writing ceases to be interesting in itself. Its value inheres no longer in the ways it exceeds or subverts or transgresses, but in the ways it can reveal to us the operations of the institutions that govern the production, evaluation, circulation and preservation of texts. This

would include, of course, the way notions of excess or subversion or transgression function positively within literary institutions, as a crucial part of their interpellation of the subject, their construction of literary subjectivity as the domain of a certain kind of freedom. As Simon During points out, it is often explicitly anti-institutional works, such as Wordsworth's *Prelude*, that turn out to be official English Literature's most effective texts (During 1997, 2; see also Smith 1998).

In "What Is an Author?" Foucault still retains, it seems, a vestigial attachment to the avant-garde, to the notion of writing as transgressive, to some notion of "the great danger with which fiction threatens our world". But if this theme is retained, even amplified, in the revised version of Foucault's essay, he also adds a note of caution. If in the original version of the paper, Foucault could permit himself a prophetic moment, claiming: "We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author" (Foucault 1977c, 138), in the revised version Foucault's prognostications are far more circumspect:

> In saying this, I seem to call for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author. It would be pure romanticism, however, to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure. ... I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author-function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still within a system of constraint — one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced. (Foucault 1980b, 159-60)

The muted tone of this qualification exemplifies the highly equivocal nature of Foucault's conclusion. If, on the one hand, Foucault appears to deride as "pure romanticism" the notion of a discursive utopia where texts would circulate in the anonymity of a murmur, he nevertheless asserts with some confidence that the author-function will disappear. The essay is poised between two incompatible versions of literary history, between Foucault's "romantic leanings towards the transgressing of constraints" on the one hand, and his "treatment of the author as a historical positivity" on the other (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 486 n.9). As Saunders and Hunter conclude: "Foucault's essay was having things both ways, and can be cited in support of quite divergent arguments" (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 486 n.9).

It is no surprise, really, that in literary criticism it is the former, "romantic" reading of the essay that has tended to prevail. Foucault's subsequent work began to focus, not on "discourse" as a kind of universal linguistic category capable of subsuming various modes of the construction of knowledge, but on the "dispositif" as a contingent, practical, material apparatus of power that is not governed or limited by the privileged category of language or meaning. The abandonment of language as the fundamental determinant in the operation of knowledge goes hand in hand with the abandonment of literature as a privileged site of subversion or transgression. But if the subsequent direction of Foucault's work took him beyond the horizons of the literary avant-garde, and its assumption of "the great danger with which fiction threatens our world", any reading of "What Is an Author?" that holds to this earlier "Romantic" version of Foucault must be seen as wilfully ignoring the complexity and the ambiguity of the essay.

Within the field of Beckett studies it is the "Romantic" reading of Foucault's essay that tends to prevail. According to this reading, Beckett can be held up as an exemplar of the avant-garde subversion of traditional models of subjectivity as embodied in the author-function. As the following chapter demonstrates, the reception of Foucault's essay within the discourse of Beckett criticism remains confined by the horizon of discourse, by the form-content equation of avant-garde aesthetics, and by a notion of the author as an ideological figure serving to constrain the transgressive power of writing. Otherwise, if the essay is taken as a preliminary sketch for a rejection of literature and a study of the author as a historical positivity, Beckett must be seen as nothing less than the exemplary object of Foucault's emergent critique.

The discourse on Beckett

Responses to Foucault

For the most part, critics have responded with approval to Foucault's invocation of Beckett, since it tends to confirm the affinity they are eager to demonstrate between Beckett's work and contemporary theoretical concerns. However, Iain Wright, in one of the few dissenting opinions, draws attention to the disparity between Foucault's apparent endorsement of Beckett's "indifference" to the question of "who speaks?", and the manifest importance, indeed centrality, of this question in Beckett's work, particularly in the trilogy, and more importantly, the *Texts for Nothing* (Wright 1983). Jim Hicks, in a thoughtful response to Wright's essay, finds to the contrary that Foucault "may well have been the best reader of Beckett to ever not write on the subject" (Hicks 1993, 312), and argues, through an analysis of *Company*, that Beckett is involved in much the same kind of dismantling of the author function as Foucault attempts in "What Is an Author?". However, both Wright's and Hicks's arguments rest, I think, on a misreading of the fundamental implications of Foucault's essay, implications borne out in "The Order of Discourse" and in Foucault's later interviews. Firstly, however, I want to make a brief survey of other responses to Foucault before moving on to consider first Wright's, and then Hicks's essays in detail, since they provide a comprehensive analysis of the question of authorial "indifference" invoked in Foucault's essay, and more generally, of the problematic status of Beckett's work in debates over the "Death of the Author".

Sheri Hoem observes, in connection with Foucault's quotation of Beckett's "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking":

> although the quotation may be apt or appropriate for Foucault's discussion, the text in question does not pass simply and clearly into the comprehension he wishes it to convey. How does one account for the parenthetical expression inserted into this structurally repetitive question: "someone said"? The example may not be as "indifferent" to the writing subject as Foucault would have it. (Hoem 1997, 124-25)

Unfortunately, Hoem does not develop this point, and in an essay devoted to tracing the superficial affinities between Beckett's work and the work of theorists such as Foucault, Blanchot, Derrida and Deleuze, concludes that Foucault's work displays "a method of analysis and discourse that fits well the obsessions in Beckett's work" (Hoem 1997, 125).

Similar claims are made by Michael Guest, who traces affinities between Foucault and Beckett, arguing, with exemplary opacity:

> The post-structuralist context of the point of contact between the writer and the philosopher implies an affinity, in respect of the primacy of text and discourse. … A broad thematic affinity pertains to the systematic construction of the self-subject by discourse. Beckett enacts the process textually; Foucault historicizes it. (Guest 1996)

However, it is the very limitations of "enacting the process textually" that Foucault's interrogation of the author-function is intended to demonstrate. In the end, Guest's "affinities" amount to little more than a catalogue of superficial similarities, with Beckett's work shown to explore the Foucaultian themes of surveillance, discipline, power, and the constitution of the subject in language. Guest plays down the enormous differences between Beckett's and Foucault's responses to these problems. Nevertheless, his useful distinction between Beckett's "textuality" and Foucault's "historicism" goes some way towards explaining the crucial disparity that "What Is an Author?" is a first attempt to articulate.

So too, Anthony Uhlmann has written on the affinities between Beckett and Foucault, tracing a series of analogies between *Discipline and Punish* and Beckett's *Molloy* (Uhlmann 1996; Uhlmann 1997). However Uhlmann's observations, as he hints in the synopsis of one essay, tend to be based on "isomorphism" (Uhlmann 1996, 146) rather than a thoroughly worked-out conceptual parallelism. So too, his reading of

Foucault seems to be distorted by an eagerness to bend it to the purposes of his reading of Beckett. To take only the most glaring example, Uhlmann describes the constant suspicion and fear of denunciation under the Vichy régime during the Nazi occupation of France as an example of "discipline", seeing the constant surveillance of a fearful populace as analogous to the workings of a Benthamite Panopticon (Uhlmann 1997, 29-30). It takes considerable ingenuity to read *Molloy* as a coded denunciation of Vichy. But what is worse is that it becomes clear, from Uhlmann's own very useful evocation of this shameful period in France's history, that the so-called "*guerre franco-française*" was not so much an example of disciplinary "bio-power" (which in Foucault's analysis is inseparable from architectural forms and spatial arrangements), as a particularly unsavoury instance of the sort of proto-fascist "*justice populaire*" with which Foucault experimented with such equivocal results in the 1970s (see Macey 1994, 297-318, especially 301-05; Eribon 1991, 248-50).

WRIGHT

The most detailed and sophisticated critique of Foucault's use of Beckett is Iain Wright's combative essay "'What matter who's speaking?': Beckett, the Authorial Subject and Contemporary Critical Theory" (Wright 1983).

The explicit antagonists against whom Wright's essay is pitched are not Foucault or Barthes or Derrida, but British and American critics of the era such as Colin MacCabe and Catherine Belsey, Paul de Man and Stanley Fish, whom Wright accuses of turning the "death of the author" into a simple-minded slogan, such that "its characteristic over-polarisation of our interpretative options — either the tyranny of the author or the tyranny of the reader — insinuates itself into the language of critics who ought to know better" (Wright 1983, 6). Much of the energy of the first half of Wright's essay is expended in a muscular attempt at mediation in the midst of the shrill and often irrational "author debate" of the mid-1980s, and this part of the essay is perhaps a little dated as a result of its being, as Wright admits, "written from within the muddle" (Wright 1983, 5). Nevertheless, it is hard not to agree with Wright's main contention that the "over-polarisation of interpretative options" he complains of may be explained in part as "a simple misappropriation — sometimes an over-

simplification or vulgarisation — of French ideas by Anglo-Saxon critics," while bearing in mind, of course, that "the original texts, by their use of hyperbolic antinomies, lend themselves to such misuse" (Wright 1983, 9).

For instance, Barthes claims in "The Death of the Author" that "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 1977, 147). In a parodic over-simplification of "authorial" criticism, Barthes claims:

> we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. (Barthes 1977, 146)

This sort of claim, which can only be described as polemical hyperbole, is taken up with studious earnestness by Anglo-Saxon critics, who, Wright argues, make the "fundamental mistake … of assuming or pretending that to talk of a text's origin is always to talk of something single, simple, and unambivalent" (Wright 1983, 18). Like Barthes, with his parodic over-simplifications, critics like MacCabe, Belsey, de Man or Fish construct a ghostly adversary, a dogmatic and simple-minded "authorial" criticism against which they can score easy points. "Mere Aunt Sallying," Wright complains, "really … a very widespread rhetorical trick" (Wright 1983, 19). To illustrate, Wright quotes a characteristic passage from Belsey:

> The Death of the Author, the Absolute Subject of literature, means the liberation of the text from the authority of a presence behind it which gives it meaning. Released from the constraints of a single and univocal reading, the text becomes available for production, plural, contradictory. (Belsey 1980, 134; cited in Wright 1983, 18)

"Why," Wright asks with a mixture of exasperation and false innocence, "why should not an author's meanings — Beckett's for instance — be plural and contradictory?" (Wright 1983, 18-19).

This simple question underscores beautifully the unacknowledged continuity between the "anti-authorial" criticism of the 1980s — of MacCabe, Belsey, Fish and de Man — and the New Criticism against which it expended itself in such Oedipal antagonisms. Both are concerned to discover through a practice of close reading the complexity, ambiguity, contradiction and plurality of texts, but whereas the New Critics might ascribe this either to an authorial mastery of language or to the

unconscious complexities of the text, the "anti-authorial" critics might ascribe this to any number of other things — language, history, ideology — extra-subjective forces which divide and undermine the traditional subject of consciousness. In their concern to uncover the "unconscious" polysemy of texts, the anti-authorial critics feel the need to dispense once and for all with the notion of "intention" as a hermeneutic shibboleth. However, given that "The Intentional Fallacy" had already been laid to rest back in 1946, in the canonical New Critical essay of that title by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1964), the entire protracted "author debate" of the 1980s seems to rest, to a large extent, on a foolish mis-identification of the problem. To be sure, there are serious faults with the New Critical paradigm, but a slavish devotion to the author as guarantor of a univocal meaning is clearly not one of them.

As Maurice Couturier indicates (Couturier 1995, 12-13), the hyperbole of Barthes's "Death of the Author" essay was part of a militant campaign against the stultifying force of the Lansonian *l'homme et l'oeuvre* orthodoxy which had dominated French literary criticism for most of the century. When Anglo-American critics adopted Barthes's ideas, they also tended to adopt his sabre-rattling rhetoric, despite the fact that the Anglo-American critical tradition was considerably more sophisticated in its approach to the author and authorial intention than its French counterpart.

Thus, while Wright is sensitive to the French context behind the *outrance* of Barthes's claims, what is problematic in his otherwise exemplary analysis is his identification of Foucault as a straightforward signatory to Barthes's "Death of the Author" thesis. Wright seizes upon Foucault's apparent invocation of Beckett as an exemplar of authorial indifference:

> Beckett's texts seem to provide the ideal site for post-structuralist critical revelry, particularly in its extreme anti-authorial manifestations. Indeed, Beckett's name is continually invoked, talismanically, in such criticism. Foucault, for example, in a key-text for the development of the anti-authorial polemic, "What Is an Author?," cites the opening of the third section of *Textes pour rien* — *"Qu'importe qui parle, quelqu'un a dit qu'importe qui parle"* / "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" — as the very embodiment of "one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing" and begins *L'Ordre du discours* with a quotation from *L'Innommable* to the same effect: Beckett's narrator is seen as

> *"doublant à l'avance tout ce que je vais dire"* / "repeating in advance everything I want to say." (Wright 1983, 13)

Wright goes on to warn:

> It is almost too easy (and that I suggest is precisely what should put us on our guard) to apply [the] vocabulary of decentring and displacement to the trilogy, for its narrators — its Molloys, Morans, Malones and Unnamables — have already done all the work for us. In fact, they all look eerily like deconstructionist critics *manqués*. (Wright 1983, 13)

Wright's central argument contends that, although Beckett's narrators may seem to enact many of the once-fashionable rhetorical moves of deconstructionist criticism — "foregrounding their own textuality, decentring the texts they inhabit, subverting subject-positions, denaturalising language" (Wright 1983, 17) — this does not mean that Beckett himself, as author, is indifferent to the notion of authorial discourse. The fact that the outcome of the linguistic "free-play" of Beckett's narrators is not liberation and *jouissance*, but misery and meaninglessness, should alert us to the fact that Beckett by no means endorses a wholesale abandonment of the task of making meaning.

Thus, Wright acknowledges:

> [Beckett's trilogy] really is organised around those issues which have so preoccupied Saussure and Barthes and Althusser and Derrida and Lacan: the problematic of language, the problematic of the subject, and above all, the problematic of the subject in language … and therefore the language of the new criticism can be very illuminating in helping us read him. (Wright 1983, 18)

But, Wright insists, behind the multitude of voices in Beckett's texts, ceaselessly undermining and contradicting each other, there is another discourse, "one that nowhere speaks in the text but which it would be perverse to call anything but an *authorial* discourse", which Wright then goes on to give "a thoroughly old-fashioned name — Beckett's vision" (Wright 1983, 18).

> Beckett's texts … deconstruct all their authorial subjects, and the very possibility of being an author. And yet there is no modern writing in which the author, Sam Beckett, is so persistently present, directing us, always, relentlessly, back to the same problematic, badgering us, not to listen to "language itself" — or not only to that — but to the problem of knowledge. (Wright 1983, 27)

This is the basis of Wright's critique of Foucault:

> Foucault is in danger of making this error: he quotes the words, "What matter who's speaking?" as if this is Beckett's own slogan. Not at all. This is said by that extension of the Unnamable, the voice that narrates *Textes pour rien*. But Beckett, as putative authorial presence, cares very much who's speaking; and the whole strategy of these later fictions is to get us to address ourselves to that question: the problematic of the subject. (Wright 1983, 18)

This remark returns us to the common-sense ground of H. Porter Abbott's contention that "Beckett always pulls us back to the question of who speaks" (Abbott 1996, ix). Now, the view that Beckett is an author who, more rigorously than any other, poses the question of the authorial subject is, as we have seen, an established truth in Beckett criticism. It should also be clear that Beckett's questioning of authorial discourse in no way amounts to an "indifference", but in fact constitutes a significant part of Beckett's authorial "project" — to move into a less Romantic authorial vocabulary. Thus, although it is hard to fault Wright's lucid analysis of Beckett's trilogy, there are a number of questions raised by his handling of Foucault.

Firstly, it is not altogether certain that Foucault quotes the line from *Texts for Nothing* as if it were Beckett's own slogan. As I have argued, Foucault may be employing this line on the rhetorical model of a *thème*, in which case it really *doesn't* matter who is speaking. The fact that Foucault goes on to characterise this indifference as "one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing" would seem to enlist Beckett as an ally in this project, but even here Beckett's words may be taken as representative of a general theme rather than expressing a personal attitude.

So too, it should be remembered that, whereas Barthes and Belsey advocate an indifference to the author as a critical practice of *reading*, Foucault is, at least at the beginning of the essay, speaking of authorial indifference as a "fundamental ethical principle of contemporary *writing*". There is a vast difference between advocating an anti-authorial reading practice, and arguing that anti-authorialism characterises a certain author's writing practice. The latter argument is, ironically, very much an "authorial" argument.

Therefore, Wright should detect an enormous irony in the fact that Beckett is "invoked talismanically" in anti-authorial criticism. After all, the exemplary passage with which Barthes opens "The Death of the Author" is not from Beckett, nor from any of his avant-garde contemporaries, but from *Balzac*. One cannot imagine a writer in whose works authorial discourse is more apparent: Balzac must be taken to stand as a pre-eminent incarnation of the Author-God, with his sacred gospel of realist mimesis, against which so much iconoclastic energy has been expended. And yet surely this is Barthes's point, that even with so "authorial" a writer as Balzac, a rigorously anti-authorial reading practice will discover, beneath the imperturbable authority of the discourse of the Author-God, all the iconoclastic ambiguities of textuality — the subversion of subject positions, the denaturalising of language, the refusal of univocal meaning, the free play of contradictions and pluralities. Therefore it makes no sense to find any one author, such as Beckett, more "anti-authorial" than any other, since, according to this theory, it is precisely *texts* that are anti-authorial, not those who write them. That is, for Barthes it is *textuality*, and the reading practice that is sensitive to its complex determinations, that always undermines the sovereignty of the Author-God, and not any particular anti-authorial ingenuity on the part of the writer. To champion a writer as anti-authorial is precisely to return us safe and sound to the bosom of authorialism and intentionality.

This is where the complex inner contradictions of Foucault's essay are glossed over somewhat by Wright's reading. Although Wright does situate Foucault's work within the context of a general questioning of the problematic of the subject, rather than limited specifically to the "death to the author" thesis, his summary of Foucault's "discourse-theory, with its message that 'the author' is an invention (which has now outlived its usefulness) of those who wish illegitimately to stabilise textual meaning" (Wright 1983, 8) indicates a somewhat one-dimensional reading of Foucault in terms of 1960s literary avant-gardism. It is true that at the end of "What Is an Author?" Foucault does appear to invoke the Barthesian thesis of the author-function as repressing the fundamental unruliness of textuality. But the main implications of Foucault's essay lead in precisely the opposite direction, seeing the "repressive hypothesis" of the "Death of the Author" as a kind of swansong of avant-gardism. I will return to these questions in the following section, but for the moment, it is enough to observe that it is not necessarily true that Foucault quotes "What matter

who's speaking" as if it were Beckett's slogan, nor is it necessary for an "anti-authorial" critical practice to demonstrate that Beckett is indifferent in his attitude to his work. Wright's argument, while elegant and decisive in its dismantling of the "death to the author" camp, lacks critical purchase in its treatment of Foucault. But perhaps we should bear in mind that, as Tony Bennett warns, "there are many Foucaults and, as he would be the first to argue, we should not seek to meld these into one in subjecting the name 'Foucault' to the unifying impulse of 'the author effect'" (Bennett 1998, 61).

My purpose is not so much to counter Wright with my version of the "true" Foucault, but to suggest that Wright's reading of Foucault is not the most useful way of approaching the essay "What Is an Author?". In short, Wright tends to construct, as a foil to his own argument, that version of Foucault, as Bennett scoffs, "much loved by libertarian thinkers" (Bennett 1998, 61). While this element of Foucault's early thought is present in "What Is an Author?", and even more so in the reception of Foucault in Anglo-American criticism, I think the usefulness of the essay lies elsewhere, and Wright's tendency to align Foucault with the "death to the author" cohort fails to grapple with the more serious implications of the essay.

HICKS

Jim Hicks, in an article on "Beckett, Foucault, et al. and the Author Question", takes issue with Wright's criticism of Foucault, arguing that Foucault "may well have been the best reader of Beckett to ever not write on the subject" (Hicks 1993, 312).

The core of Hicks's argument is pitched against Wayne Booth, whose reading of *Company* Hicks is primarily concerned to refute. However, Hicks associates Wright with Booth's position, arguing that they both are "occupied with finding a speaker for Beckett's texts" (Hicks 1993, 311). But, as Hicks points out, "Who is speaking?" is one of the "tiresome repetitions" derided by Foucault at the end of the "Author" essay:

> "Who is the real author?"
> "Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?"

> "What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?"
> (Foucault 1977c, 138)

In a detailed reading of *Company*, pitched directly against Booth's reading of that text in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Booth 1983), Hicks distinguishes, as do most critics, between "three primary subjective positions in the text" (Hicks 1993, 313): that of "one on his back in the dark" to whom "a voice comes" (*Company* 7), that of the voice that addresses him in the second person, and that of a third person, "in another dark or in the same … devising it all for company" (*Company* 8). Thus:

> Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not. (*Company* 9)

The essence of Hicks's argument is that critical responses to *Company* tend to privilege the first two positions, that of hearer and voice, to the near exclusion of the third. The reason for this undoubtedly lies in the fact that it is the second-person voice that narrates the fifteen passages of evocative reverie that constitute perhaps the main appeal of the text. But, as Hicks points out, of the 37 paragraphs of which *Company* is composed, "the third person discourse (not "voice") in fact dominates the text (in number of paragraphs, by more than two to one; in pages, by roughly that)" (Hicks 1993, 313). Thus Hicks concludes:

> It is difficult to understand how the very critics who centre their effort on postulating an author manage to be so easily seduced into turning away from the "authorial" third position, that of "another devising it all for company" [*Company* 8]. Here again Booth is exemplary; he notes, "If we rule out the pages about the problems of telling, of imagining, of remembering the story, we have a lifetime in about twenty short pages" [Booth 1983, 450]. Whether or not *Company* belongs in the fictional tradition that Booth characterises as "almost frantic imitation of Tristram Shandyism" [Booth 1983, 451], it should be clear that, if one is attempting to comment on the "author-function" of this text, a tendency to rule out the pages of a text that themselves address that function is not a tendency to be encouraged. (Hicks 1993, 313)

In the second-last paragraph of the text, the third subject position, the "deviser", shifts from the position of sitting huddled, arms around the legs, to lying supine, adopting the position of the first subject, the "hearer". Whereas this act might be seen as a reconciliation of the three divided subject positions in the unifying vision of an "authorial" discourse, Hicks sees this as a radically disruptive gesture, since the act of

shifting position arrests the narrative: "Supine now you resume your fable where the act of lying cut it short" (*Company* 87). As the "deviser" adopts first intermittently and then permanently the supine position, the "fable" at which he labours "in vain" (*Company* 88) mimics this collapse, sacrificing both fable and fabler in order "at any price to make an end" (*Company* 84):

> … Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. … And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.
>
> Alone.
>
> (*Company* 88-89)

For Hicks, this dismantling of authorial presence, this refusal of a unifying or reconciliatory subject position that would subsume the other voices as the work of a supreme fabler, amounts to a radical attack on the "author-function". For Hicks, as opposed to Wright, it is not so much that it is Beckett's "project" to get us to address ourselves to "the problematic of the subject", but that it is Beckett's project to do this in such a radical way as to render it impossible for us to define or identify a "Beckettian" project.

> It seems safe to suggest that, for a text that fails to construct a protagonist, and which sacrifices its "fabler" in order "to make an end at any price" [*Company* 84], the interpretive construction of an "author-figure" seems ill-advised. However, an enterprising literary critic, in an attempt to capitalise on this failure (this is the position of Iain Wright), might yet claim that the text's author is in fact that very figure responsible for advancing failure as the only true result of fabling. Although I have no real defence against such claims, defending against them is perhaps unnecessary, given the fact that they appear to defeat themselves. Literary interpretations, as readings, are also arguments for reading, and I cannot conceive of an instance in which criticism might produce such a "failed" author, except (as in the case of Booth or Wright) in order to dispose of him. And if Foucault is right — as I think he is — about the contemporary ethic of authorial indifference, getting rid of "Beckett" is not going to rid us of Beckettian discourse. Rather, it is Beckettian discourse that will rid us of "Beckett". (Hicks 1993, 320)

This is a complex and highly compressed passage, and raises a number of questions that are worth considering in more detail. The first concerns the limitations of Hicks's counter-argument to Wright and Booth, which appears to rest on the

assumption that an "author-figure" or an "authorial discourse" is more or less analogous to that of a narrator, or narratorial discourse. As we have seen, Foucault's analysis of "the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it" (Foucault 1977c, 115) has absolutely nothing to do with the inner workings of the rhetoric of a text, and everything to do with how a text comes to bear a person's name, be collected in a named oeuvre, and interpreted in terms of the textual and psycho-biographical unity that this process both assumes as an *a priori*, and endlessly seeks to reconstitute.

Firstly, it is perhaps necessary to make a distinction, where Hicks does not, between Wright's and Booth's positions on the construction of an "author-figure". Booth's reading is specifically directed towards the construction from textual evidence of a determinable "implied author", whereas, as we have seen, Wright posits a Beckettian authorial vision that "nowhere speaks in the text".

The distinction here is crucial, and may be elucidated by reference to the traditional narratological distinction, which I adapt here from M. H. Abrams (Abrams 1981, 21), between "showing" and "telling", between a "dramatic" method which stages the interaction between a number of different characters or "voices", and a "novelistic" method which offers either omniscient "authorial" or limited "narratorial" reflections and judgements on the material presented.

Texts like *Company* seem to offer critics a rich vein of ambiguity in relation to these questions. Booth, with his traditionalist leaning towards the "novelistic" as part of his analysis of the peculiar "rhetoric of fiction", is thus inclined to read Beckett's self-reflexive concerns with the process of "fabling" as a kind of narratorial intervention in the "telling" in the canonical tradition of *Tristram Shandy*, *Tom Jones* or *Vanity Fair*. For this kind of reading to work, there must be a puppet-master lurking in the text somewhere, no matter how implied or inferred.

But it is equally possible to view Beckett's technique in *Company* as analogous to that of a dramatist, presenting a number of different "voices" or "discourses" (since not all statements in the work are connected to a person as such), without any of them assuming the role of a narratorial master-discourse. This, I assume, would be more or

less the position of Iain Wright in relation to the trilogy, although the argument would apply equally well for *Company*. Just as there is no inherent difficulty in inferring an "authorial" discourse from a dramatic work (whatever the debate about the nature of that discourse), so too, with fiction such as Beckett's, one can speak of a Beckettian "vision" without having to discover an "implied author", an implicit "authorial voice" among the many voices that haunt or inhabit Beckett's texts.

The situation in Beckett's texts is made more complex by three characteristic techniques that tend to undermine the stability of conventional narratological distinctions. Firstly, whereas a conventional dramatic text might present discrete *dramatis personae* who engage in inter-subjective communication, in Beckett's fictions (and even in much of the later drama) many of these voices appear to be "inner" or "infra-subjective" voices, especially in texts like *The Unnamable*, the *Texts for Nothing* and *Company*, and thus the relationships between the different discourses which constitute the text are often indeterminate or contradictory. Secondly, there is Beckett's technique of doubling pairs of characters through a series of similarities and differences, such that the reader cannot determine with any certainty whether they are different manifestations of the same personality, or whether they are in fact discrete entities. Beckett's pseudo-couples, such as Mercier and Camier, or Vladimir and Estragon, display this property of separation and doubling, difference and identity, as do, most notably, Molloy and Moran, in the complex series of parallels which make it equally plausible to read them both as separate characters and as different aspects of the same (a fabler "devising it all for company" such as Malone). And the third technique, which this last example foreshadows, is Beckett's device of deliberately disrupting the conventional separations between narrative levels, with characters usurping a narrative or authorial role, or narrators fearing that they may be the figment of another, so that the hierarchical distinction between teller and tale, author, narrator and character, is continually stood on its head, leading to the dizzying regressive series which characterises the unfolding of the trilogy, and which is worked through in increasingly compressed form in the *Texts for Nothing* and *Company*.

Hicks contends that "the interpretive construction of an 'author-figure' seems ill-advised" (Hicks 1993, 320), but it should be clear that one can speak of an "authorial

discourse" without necessarily positing an authorial proxy among the voices of the text. So too, it should be clear that simply demonstrating the absence of a coherent authorial discourse within the text itself does not in itself dispose of the author as a figure of global unity of intention or purpose. The problem with Hicks's anti-authorial argument is that he expects the working of the author-function to be visible *within* the text. As Foucault argues: "It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the 'author-function' arises out of their scission — in the division and distance of the two" (Foucault 1977c, 129). More significant, perhaps, the author-function arises out of those discursive practices that precede and frame the text: the attribution of works, the assembling of an oeuvre, the tracing of intertextual parallels, and the construction of a teleological narrative of artistic development. All this is the critics' rather than the writer's business. Rather than exclusively denoting a mode of writing practiced by traditional "authorial" writers, the author-function is a *reading* practice, a discursive mode of identifying, circulating valuing and preserving texts. The demonstration of authorial absence at the heart of a text ignores the fact that the author haunts the *contours* of the text, neither inside nor outside it but a kind of topological anomaly that both inhabits and exceeds it:

> ... perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel.... (*Unnamable* 134)

For Wright, the dismantling of a single, coherent and unified subject-position within Beckett's trilogy cannot be read as anything other than a coherent and meaningful project which "nowhere speaks in the text but which it would be perverse to call anything but an authorial discourse" (Wright 1983, 18). Wright reads the Beckettian text against the Beckettian oeuvre as part of his exploration of the "problematic of the subject" (Wright 1983, 18).

For Hicks, on the other hand, it is important to read the abandonment of a coherent narrating voice as an "ethic of authorial indifference". This is a curious position, in that it appears to naively identify the characteristics of the narrating discourse with

the intentions of the author, thereby replicating, in a negative mode, the sort of simplistic author-narrator equation that Hicks is at such pains to counter.

A second problem with Hicks's argument, then, is that, despite everything, it requires Beckett's indifference to be the outcome of a deliberate authorial intention. There is a vast difference between artificial constructions of authorial indifference, in processes such as automatic writing or chance operations, and the "contemporary ethic of authorial indifference ... as an immanent rule, endlessly adopted and yet never fully applied" (Foucault 1977c, 115-16). Moreover, an artist such as John Cage, who seems to push authorial indifference to its limits by submitting his compositions to random processes, can also, and without contradiction, be fiercely defensive of the integrity of these works. In any case, given that Beckett's writing is clearly not the outcome of random processes, nor of automatic writing, the question of authorial indifference returns us, however circuitously, to the notion of an authorial practice.

However, the major problem with Hicks's argument lies, I think, in his use of the term "Beckettian discourse" in his final comments. By "Beckettian discourse" I presume he means something akin to what Wright means, with a different emphasis to be sure, as Beckett's "vision": that is, the ensemble of Beckett's writings, his oeuvre, as an exemplary instance of authorial indifference. Beckett's oeuvre, then, would work against its own author-function: "Beckettian discourse ... will rid us of 'Beckett'" (Hicks 1993, 320). In other words, a scrupulous devotion to anti-authorial avant-garde writing such as Beckett's will eventually cure us of the disease of reading and interpreting texts in terms of authors and their intentions, and will allow us to listen, once more or perhaps for the first time, to what Hicks calls, quoting Deleuze, the "*il y a du langage*" (Hicks 1993, 322).

As we have seen, in "What Is an Author?" Foucault characterises both oeuvre and *écriture* (another name for Deleuze's "*il y a*") as mere alibis of the author-function, part of the grey neutrality under the cover of which the author's privileges have been subtly preserved. In restricting himself to a reading of Beckett's text, what he calls "Beckettian discourse", Hicks is forced to leave aside the functioning of that other "Beckettian discourse", the ensemble of discursive practices into which both Wright's authorial and Hicks's anti-authorial readings are inevitably absorbed, becoming part

of the endlessly proliferating complexity of "Beckett" as an author-function. Reading the text against the author, as Hicks does, does nothing to disturb the imperturbable authority of the author-text dyad, which continues to retain its centrality as the problematic object of literary criticism. To follow through Foucault's argument to its natural conclusion, perhaps it is Hicks's attention to the text itself that serves "to arrest the possibility of genuine change" (Foucault 1977c, 118). In other words, any reading of Beckett's texts, no matter how scrupulously and ingeniously anti-authorial, will only give us more "Beckett": the only way to get rid of "Beckett" would be to stop reading Beckett's texts.

"Beckett" and Beckettian discourse

Hicks's contention that "Beckettian discourse will rid us of 'Beckett'" can be seen as a more or less exemplary statement of the post-structuralist reading of Beckett's work as radically anti-authorial, a reading, as we have seen, that traces its roots to Maurice Blanchot, that is (seemingly) reinforced by Foucault's lapidary quotation of Beckett in "What Is an Author?", and that finds its contemporary expression in the work of critics such as Thomas Trezise and Simon Critchley. However, a crucial problem with this reading might be identified in the wording of Hicks's formulation, in an ambiguity in the understanding of the term "discourse", or in French, *discours*. The term has a complex resonance, especially in relation to the work of Foucault, and it is worthwhile considering the various senses in which the term can be understood. Moreover, in terms of the shift of Foucault's thinking encompassed by the two essays "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse", the use and understanding of the term *discours* is fundamental to the character of this transition.

The term *discours* is fundamentally a linguistic term. What is significant about the later development of Foucault's thought is his rejection of language as playing an all-encompassing role in the operation of power. Instead, from *Discipline and Punish* onwards, Foucault becomes interested in how the power of institutions is embodied in

material practices: in architecture, spatial organisation, and forms of surveillance, punishment and reward. The concept of the *dispositif* will replace *discours* as the key term in Foucault's analysis of power. Therefore, I will first outline three different but overlapping senses in which the term *discours* might be understood, both in general, and in relation to Foucault's work in particular, before briefly considering how the "discourse on Beckett" might fit in to the *dispositif* of literary education.

To begin with, it is worth examining the dictionary definition of the term *discours*, in order to appreciate the complex and even contradictory resonances of the term in French:

> **DISCOURS** [...] **1°**. *Vieilli.* Propos que l'on tient. V. **Conversation, dialogue, entretien.** [...] **2°**. *Cour.* Développement oratoire fait devant une réunion de personnes. [...] **3°**. (1637) Écrit littéraire didactique qui traite d'un sujet en le développant méthodiquement. [...] *Le Discours de la méthode*, de Descartes. **4°**. (v. 1613) Expression verbale de la pensée. V. **Parole; langage.** *Les parties du discours:* les catégories grammaticales traditionelles (nom, article, adjectif, pronom, verbe, adverbe; préposition, conjonction, interjection). [...] ◊ (déb. XX^e^). *Ling.* Exercice de la faculté du langage. V. **Parole.** — Tout énoncé linguistique observable (phrase et suite de phrases prononcées; texte écrit), par opposition au système abstrait que constitue la langue. [...] **5°** *Philo., Log.* Pensée discursive, raisonnement (*opposé à* intuition). [...]
>
> (*Petit Robert* 1987, 549-50)

> **DISCOURS** **1**. *Arch.* Remark, statement, proposition. *See* **conversation, dialogue, interview**. **2**. *In common usage.* Prepared speech delivered to an assembly of people. **3**. (1637) Didactic literary text that expounds a subject in a methodical manner. Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. **4**. (c. 1613) Verbal expression of thought. *See* **utterance, speech**. *Parts of speech* [literally "parts of discourse"]: the traditional grammatical categories (noun, article, adjective, pronoun, verb, adverb; preposition, conjunction, interjection). ◊ E20. *Linguistics*. Act of speaking, use of the faculty of speech. *See* **parole**. — Any observable linguistic utterance (spoken phrase or sequence of phrases, written text), as opposed to the abstract system that constitutes a language. **5**. *Philosophy, Logic*. Discursive thought, reasoning (as opposed to intuition).

The sense that most concerns us here is the fourth definition, which seems to straddle uncomfortably the structuralist opposition between *langue* and *parole*, between *language* as a system, a set of rules for producing grammatical statements, and *speech*

as the specific act of utterance. If the meaning of *discours* leans towards the singular act of utterance, the locution *parties du discours* (parts of speech) certainly points in the opposite direction, towards the generative rules of grammar. So too, while the more specialised linguistic sense of *discours* appears to make it more or less a synonym for *parole* (the unruly ensemble of all the informal acts of speaking a language rather than its frozen systematic structure), the second, third and fifth senses tend to gesture towards more formal and rule-bound acts of utterance. In fact, the word seems to embody a tension between a systematic or theoretical generality, and an empirical and informal specificity. The ambiguity of the term reproduces, in other words, the central tensions in the structuralist debate in which Foucault was, somewhat unwillingly, involved at this juncture in his intellectual career. As the remarks made by Lucien Goldmann in the discussion following Foucault's presentation indicate, the polemical opposition from which Foucault was trying to escape at this point was characterised, on the one hand by a "non genetic" structuralism which denied the autonomy of the subject in favour of an ultimately all-determining structure in which the subject does no more than play a pre-determined role, and a "genetic" structuralism which posits a "transindividual" subject which, while significantly limited in its options by linguistic, psychic and other structures, nevertheless retains the potential to modify and transform those structures (Foucault 1969, 97-98). Foucault's tetchy response is to insist: "je n'ai jamais, pour ma part, employé le mot de structure. Cherchez-le dans *Les Mots et les choses*, vous ne le trouverez pas" [for my part I have never used the word "structure". Look for it in *The Order of Things*: you won't find it] (Foucault 1969, 100). The inner tension of *discours* is significant here: it can mean both the general structures by which thought, speech, action are delimited in advance, and it can mean the specific acts that have the potential to unsettle, modify or transform those structures. It is worth noting, however, that in both "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse" Foucault generally uses *discours* in the empirical sense, as the vast unknowable totality of speech acts that make up human languages. It carries, therefore, a whiff of that radical energy associated with *parole*, with *écriture*, with the notion that the liberation of language from its constraints — whether the rules of grammar or the reductive principle of authorial intention — must bring a transformation in subjectivity and social relations.

There is, of course, a third sense of the English word "discourse" which is more familiar to English readers of Foucault: the notion of "discourse" as the ensemble of structures (especially including non-linguistic structures) by which knowledge is defined and produced, and by which the unruly limitlessness of language is ordered and controlled. This is the sense in which Anglophone academics speak of "the discourse of medicine", "the discourse of psychiatry", or more loosely, "the discourse of colonialism", "the discourse of race" and so forth. For instance, in relation to the field of postcolonial criticism, Ania Loomba sketches out the semantic complexity of the term "discourse" before defining the restricted sense in which it is used in postcolonial studies:

> Discourse in this sense is a whole field or domain within which language is used in particular ways. This domain is rooted … in human practices, institutions and actions. Thus, the discourse on madness in modern society is anchored in institutions such as madhouses, and in practices such as psychiatry. Discursive practices make it difficult for people to think outside them — hence they are also exercises in power and control. (Loomba 1998, 38-39)

This widely accepted sense of "discourse", as a kind of shorthand for "discursive formation", sometimes leads to confusion, since it would seem that the procedures of "discourse" in this sense are designed precisely to control the proliferation of "discourse" in the empirical sense in which Foucault often uses it. For instance, a characteristic passage from "The Order of Discourse" can come to read very strangely:

> In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (Foucault 1987d, 52)

According to the Anglophone understanding of the term, "discourse" would refer not to the "powers and dangers", but to the procedures whose role it is to ward them off. This second understanding of "discourse", as the means by which certain processes of knowledge-production delimit and control the proliferation of speech, has to be added to the complex resonance of the term in an English context.

At this point, then, we are in a better position to unravel the ambiguities and ironies of the claim that "Beckettian discourse … will rid us of 'Beckett'" (Hicks 1993, 320).

Hicks's use of the term *discourse* appears to be in the empirical sense, as the act of speaking or writing, the "ponderous, formidable materiality" of words and texts. Throughout his essay Hicks insists on referring to the different voices that haunt *Company* as second- and third-person "discourses" (Hicks 1993, 313), where discourse clearly refers to the act of utterance. On the other hand, when Hicks puts "Beckett" in quotation marks, he presumably means the author-figure as constructed by readers such as Wayne Booth and Iain Wright, and more broadly by the tradition and institution of literary hermeneutics. "Beckett", in Hicks's argument, would refer more or less to what Anglophone Foucaultians would call the "discourse on Beckett".

Thus, when Hicks argues that "getting rid of 'Beckett' is not going to rid us of Beckettian discourse", he is presumably making the reassuring observation that an anti-authorial approach to Beckett's texts (getting rid of 'Beckett'), an approach which takes account of the ethic of authorial indifference supposedly advocated by Foucault, does not mean that people should stop reading or valuing Beckett's texts (Beckettian discourse). Instead, "Beckettian discourse … will rid us of 'Beckett'" — that is, the scrupulous authorial indifference that characterises Beckett's texts will undermine and disable reading practices such as Booth's that depend on the construction of an author-figure, "Beckett". Hicks's claim, in other words, is that proper attention to the radical authorial indifference of Beckett's texts will lead to a transformation of literary interpretation, ushering in a mode of reading in which the question of the author — the tireless repetition of "Who speaks?" — is no longer of interest or relevance.

But Hicks's argument is inevitably caught in coils of contradiction. *Discourse*, in the radical sense of a dangerous and unruly empirical reality, is by definition authorless, since to attribute authorship to a discourse is precisely to bring it under the control of "discourse" in the institutional sense. "Beckettian discourse" is thus a contradiction in terms, since the moment Beckett's texts are attached to a name, the radical authorlessness of their discourse comes into conflict with the institution of the author-function, which inevitably precedes and constructs the way in which they are read. Strictly speaking, no text is in itself more authorial (or anti-authorial) than any other, as Barthes shows by his use of a passage from Balzac to illustrate the "death of the author". Instead, it is the operation of the signature, and the particular conventions of

reading and interpretation that accompany it, that make utterances authored. The act of signing a text and publishing it with a real or invented name on the cover is inevitably an authorial act, whatever the anti-authorialism of the text itself. To follow up one of Foucault's examples, if Beckett's words had been posted anonymously on a wall, would they still be part of "Beckettian discourse"?

If this version of the anti-authorial argument falters on the contradiction of attributing a name to the supposedly authorless unruliness of discourse, there is another sense in which Hicks's formulation may be more profitably interpreted. This is to take Hicks's use of the term "Beckettian discourse" as referring to "discourse" in the logical and rationalist sense, as referring to a form of thought embodied in a series of didactic texts, taking Beckett, for a moment, as a thinker, even a "founder of discursivity" as that term is defined in the latter stages of Foucault's essay. Foucault speaks of Marx and Freud in such terms, as establishing new discursive fields which are characterised both by subsequent divergences from the original texts (Foucault 1980b, 155) as well as a recurrent "return to the origin" (Foucault 1980b, 156) which in itself prompts a modification of the discursive field. Foucault writes of such "founders of discursivity":

> They are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts … they both have established an endless possibility of discourse. (Foucault 1980b, 154)

In these terms, Hicks's argument might be taken to conclude that the new ways of thinking about the act of utterance and the discursive situation of the literary text that are embodied in Beckett's texts would necessarily undermine the notion of "Beckett" as an author, as a stable and authoritative guarantor of intention and meaning. Beckett's author-function, through the scrupulous and ingenious machinery of his subjectless literary utterances, would paradoxically function precisely to undermine his own and all other writers' author-functions. As the anti-author *par excellence*, "Beckett" would dissolve into the anonymity demanded by Beckettian discourse.

There are a number of problems that can be identified here, not least, as I have argued above, that it is difficult to attribute to Beckett the role of a founder of discursive practices, no matter how much Beckett's texts might encourage us to question the

coherence of the speaking subject or the meaningfulness of language. Beckett's texts are not prescriptive or methodological, they do not lay the groundwork for a ensemble of practices or techniques, they do not stake out or point the way toward new fields of exploration or enquiry. So too, the dominant mode of writing *on* Beckett, what one would call "Beckettian discourse" in the sense of a "discursive formation", is largely restricted to forms of elucidation, elaboration and exegesis, what Foucault calls, in "The Order of Discourse", *commentary*.

At this point it is worth jumping forward, so to speak, to examine Foucault's definition of "commentary", which he associates with "procedures for controlling and delimiting discourse" (Foucault 1987d, 56) (where *discourse* is used here in the empirical sense, as the infinite proliferation of speech acts, the ponderous materiality of language).

> In what is broadly called commentary, the hierarchy between primary and secondary text plays two roles which are in solidarity with each other. On the one hand it allows the (endless) construction of new discourses: the dominance of the primary text, its permanence, its status as a discourse which can always be re-actualised, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the essential reticence or richness which is attributed to it, all this is the basis for an open possibility of speaking. But on the other hand the commentary's only role, whatever the techniques used, is to say at last what was silently articulated "beyond", in the text. By a paradox which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said. The infinite rippling of commentaries is worked from the inside by the dream of a repetition in disguise: at its horizon there is perhaps nothing but what was at its point of departure — mere recitation. (Foucault 1987d, 57-8)

This "mere recitation", of course, characterises much of "Beckettian discourse" in this wider sense. Here "Beckettian discourse" would refer not simply to the typical character or even the totality of Beckett's texts, but would include the totality of commentary on Beckett, from the painstaking recovery of buried allusions to the audacious demonstration of hitherto unexplored affinities between Beckett's writing and, say, Zen Buddhism (Kundert-Gibbs 1999), quantum physics (Montgomery 1991), or chaos theory (Meriwether 1994). "Beckettian discourse" in this sense would refer more generally to the field of "Beckett studies", the small but perfectly-

formed universe of commentary which would include journals such as *Samuel Beckett Today/Samuel Beckett aujourd'hui*, *The Beckett Circle*, and the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, but also the biographies of Beckett by Deirdre Bair (1990), Lois Gordon (1996), James Knowlson (1996) and Anthony Cronin (1997), the innumerable books and articles on Beckett, reminiscences such as those of Charles Juliet (1986), André Bernold (1992) or Enoch Brater (1989), all the photographs of Beckett, of Beckett's friends and family and of the places he frequented (see, for instance, Minihan 1995; O'Brien 1986), all the websites devoted to Beckett, all the ways in which Beckett and Beckett's works are remembered, repeated, represented, and reinterpreted. So too, since theatrical productions are, in a special sense, "mere recitation", and therefore forms of commentary, this "Beckettian discourse" would also necessarily include the sum of all productions of Beckett's theatrical works. In short, it contains all the acts of speaking and writing which are "in the true" of Beckett studies. "In the true" does not simply encompass all representations that are judged to be true within the discourse of Beckett studies, but all representations that can be submitted to the test of truth and falsehood as demanded by the discourse, including "heretical" acts such as all-women productions of *Waiting for Godot*, or contentious theoretical interpretations of Beckett's work. Seen in these terms, then, "Beckettian discourse" would be an "authorial discourse" *par excellence*.

Steven Connor is particularly lucid on this question:

> Beckettian discourse has now reached such a pitch of productivity and influence that it can almost be thought of as a "discursive formation" in its own terms, an ensemble of representational practices, unified around the name Samuel Beckett, but engaged in continual redefinition of what that founding name means, and how far its authority extends. It would be wrong to conceive of the formation itself as necessarily possessing absolute coherence. What holds it together, indeed, is the intensity of its internal divisions, the struggle not only of competing interpretations of Beckett's work, the humanist, existential, religious and structural-linguistic, but of definitions of what criticism is, and where it stands in relation to its object. (Connor 1988, 191)

Thus critics such as Jim Hicks, Thomas Trezise or Simon Critchley claim that a rigorous attention to the radically anti-authorial questions raised by Beckett's texts will undermine and break apart the ossified procedures of repetition and commentary which have formed around the name "Beckett". But at the same time, of course, this

demand for a more scrupulous attention to the radical potential of Beckett's texts is entirely characteristic of "Beckettian discourse", which is constituted by endless repetitions of the Beckettian text as authority for, in Foucault's terms, an "open possibility of speaking". Thus, even if one accepts the terms of the anti-authorial reading, that the rhetorical strategies of Beckett's texts necessarily work to undermine the coherence of "Beckett" as an authorial discourse, at the same time, that very process of critical undermining and disintegration, exemplified in Hicks's and Trezise's and Critchley's and many others' books and essays on the subject of Beckett, only serves to expand and intensify "Beckettian discourse".

Within the "discursive formation" which has Beckett's texts as its centre, its field of inquiry, and its *raison d'être*, any particular reading of Beckett therefore only swells the critical mass of "Beckett", and all these "anti-authorial" readings, no matter how rigorous and uncompromising, eventually become absorbed into the continuing debate over the power and significance of the authorial name. This, then, is the problem the anti-authorial reader of Beckett is up against, and there appears to be nothing that anyone can do to stop it. Nor, for that matter, is there anything that Beckett could have done to stop it, supposing him, for a moment, to have been a rigorously anti-authorial writer of "Beckettian discourse". On the contrary, the fact that Beckett's work seems to accommodate with equal facility the most insistently author-centred, and the most theoretically rigorous anti-authorial readings, would tend to indicate that the playing out of an author-debate over the legacy of the dead Beckett is, in part at least, what "Beckettian discourse" is all about.

This leads, then, to a third level at which the term "Beckettian discourse" can be understood. In this sense "Beckettian discourse" would not simply refer to a textual entity, not simply to the sum of Beckett's works or the sum of works about Beckett, but would also include a set of material practices embedded in institutions and directed towards the production of knowledge and the accreditation of persons according to defined protocols. This wider sense of "Beckettian discourse" would therefore include the ensemble of institutions that have grown up around Beckett's writing, such as the Beckett Archive at Reading University, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Texas, the Samuel Beckett Society and of course the Beckett Estate. It would also include all those scholars who have established

professional careers and international reputations as Beckett specialists, as well as the innumerable students from undergraduate to doctoral level who are seeking accreditation of their knowledge and professional skills. In short, and without wanting to put too fine a point on it, there is of course a level at which the "discourse on Beckett" ceases to be centrally concerned with Beckett and Beckett's texts *per se*, and becomes enmeshed in wider questions of institutional training, accreditation, and professional advancement. At this level, importantly, questions of truth and falsehood, representation and interpretation are secondary to the demonstration of appropriate capacities, the performance of specified activities, the ability to conform to certain standards and protocols.

In other words, there is another level of "discursive formation" which neither Hicks's essay, nor Foucault's formulations in "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse" are yet quite able to encompass, but which can be developed from a consideration of Foucault's subsequent work after the transitional period marked by these two essays. In those two essays, "discourse" is a concept fundamentally restricted by the horizon of language, characterised by questions of representation and its limits, the language games of truth and falsehood, and the discursive rules for the production of knowledge. However, the legacy of the later Foucault is precisely to develop an analysis of historical relations of knowledge and subject formation that is not fundamentally dependent on a theory of language and representation. For example, Foucault's famous model of the panopticon is so clearly *not* a question of discourse, so clearly has nothing whatever to do with representation, the construction or limitation of meaning, that it represents a decisive challenge to the institutional orthodoxy of linguistic or language-based models of social and political domination and control. In a later interview, "Truth and Power", Foucault is quite explicit about this distinction:

> Here I believe one's point of reference should be not to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. (Foucault 1980a, 114)

Thus Beckett's work, and indeed "Beckettian discourse" as a whole, necessarily exists within pre-existing structures of power, institutional apparatuses primarily located in the university (and to a lesser extent the secondary school system), wherein

specific questions of truth and falsehood, representation and meaning, are fundamentally secondary to the primary task of these institutions, which is the production, assessment and accreditation of individuals who are able to display a body of knowledge, a repertoire of intellectual skills, and an implicit liberal ethical orientation which we recognise, more or less, as the task of "the humanities".

Now this level of analysis takes us some distance from Beckett's texts, but it helps, I think, to place in context the contention that "Beckettian discourse will rid us of 'Beckett'". It is useful, I think, to consider the degree to which the potential impact of any text is always delimited by the practices which frame and shape "textuality". In this sense, it matters little whether "Beckettian discourse" is or is not informed by an ethic of authorial indifference, since any reading of Beckett's texts that advocates this authorlessness is inevitably pronounced within the "discourse on Beckett". The demand that this "Beckettian discourse" be capable of changing the "discourse on Beckett" fails to appreciate, I think, the extent to which any argument against the "discourse on Beckett" which constructs its arguments from the evidence of Beckett's texts remains, inevitably, part of that discourse, and can be easily accommodated as yet another example, however tendentious, of "commentary".

Foucault and Beckett 2: "The Order of Discourse"

The wish to remain anonymous

If, in "What is an Author?", Foucault uses Beckett's line "What matter who's speaking" to illustrate a certain *indifference* to the question of the author, in "The Order of Discourse", Foucault's next important essay, he begins again with a quote from Beckett, but this time to evoke a theme of *anonymity*. Before I go on to examine this passage in detail, to draw out the ironies of Foucault's theme of anonymity and of the ambiguous role of Beckett in its elaboration, I want to examine the question of anonymity from the perspective of Foucault's subsequent work. After "The Order of Discourse" Foucault rarely concerned himself in his writings with the question of the author, or with the questions of literature more generally. However, in a number of later interviews Foucault returned to discussions concerning the function of literature, and the various roles that authors and their writings are called upon to play in our culture.

Of particular interest is the interview "The Masked Philosopher". In this interview, published in *Le Monde* in 1980, Foucault declines to reveal his name, opting for a mask of anonymity, in order, supposedly, to demystify the aura that attaches to the name of the intellectual. Asked at the start of the interview why he has chosen to remain anonymous, he confesses to a "nostalgia for a time when, being quite unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard" (Foucault 1988, 323).

Arguing that "a name makes reading too easy" (Foucault 1988, 324), the Masked Philosopher playfully proposes a game, that of the "year without a name":

> For a year books would be published without their authors' names. The critics would have to cope with a mass of entirely anonymous books. But, now I come to think of it, it's possible they would have nothing to do: all the authors would wait until the following year before publishing their books. (Foucault 1988, 324)

The tone of ironic irritation that characterises this interview arises, no doubt, from Foucault's own frustration with the prescriptive power of the author-function, whereby any comment he makes is already heavily predetermined in its reception and interpretation by the fact that it comes from "Foucault". We can see, in this interview, the same private drama that characterises Borges's little fable, whereby "someone", an anonymous "I", becomes painfully aware of how his double, this "other Foucault", magnifies and distorts everything. Thus the Masked Philosopher makes his appeal:

> If I have chosen anonymity ... it's a way of addressing the potential reader, the only individual here who is of interest to me, more directly: "Since you don't know who I am, you will be more inclined to find out why I say what you read; just allow yourself to say, quite simply, it's true, it's false. I like it or I don't like it. Period." (Foucault 1988, 325)

But inevitably, of course, the "other Foucault" usurps everything: the Masked Philosopher's interview becomes unproblematically gathered into the oeuvre of Michel Foucault. So much so, in fact, that a quotation from the interview — "Curiosity ... suggests something quite different to me. It evokes 'care'" (Foucault 1988, 328) — eventually takes on the significance of something like an authorial slogan, by being emblematically quoted on the back cover of the first volume of *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. So too, the "Masked Philosopher" interview stands as the crucial concluding piece in that volume (see Foucault 1997, 321-28).

If Foucault's stratagem of anonymity in the "Masked Philosopher" interview appears somewhat contrived, the serious problem it was designed to address continued to trouble him right up to his last interviews. In an interview shortly before his death, Foucault complains that, because his name is so well known, his books are no longer read for themselves any more, but only in relation to a grotesquely distorted "Foucault" who has come entirely to pre-empt the reception of each new work. He

acknowledges, however, the kind of impossible dilemma that he faces, between a prescriptive authorialism that would seek to censor divergent readings, and a laissez-faire authorial indifference that would allow distortions to proliferate at the expense of the work itself:

> It doesn't bother me particularly if a book, given that it is read, is read in different ways. What is serious is that, as one goes on writing books, one is no longer read at all, and from distortion to distortion, reading out of others' readings, one ends up with an absolutely grotesque image of the book.
>
> This does indeed pose a problem: is one to involve oneself in polemics and reply to each of these distortions and, consequently, lay down the law to readers, which I find repugnant, or leave the book to be distorted to the point at which it becomes a caricature of itself, which I find equally repugnant? (Foucault 1988, 52)

There is, of course, a fundamental circularity legible in Foucault's argument here: on the one hand, he feels that his books have become distorted, due to their being read not for themselves but in relation to a controversial and highly contested author-function bearing the name "Foucault", but on the other hand, he cannot intervene in this process except by asserting his prerogative as an author, as "Foucault". Once again, as in "The Masked Philosopher", he nostalgically invokes a kind of utopia of discursive anonymity:

> There is a solution, however: the only law on the press, the only law on books, that I would like to see brought in, would be a prohibition to use an author's name twice, together with a right to anonymity and to pseudonyms so that each book might be read for itself. There are books for which a knowledge of the author is a key to its intelligibility. But apart from a few great authors, this knowledge, in the case of most of the others, serves absolutely no purpose. It acts only as a barrier. For someone like me — I am not a great author, but only someone who writes books — it would be better if my books were read for themselves, with whatever faults and qualities they might have. (Foucault 1988, 52-3)

At first sight this passage, in its call for discursive anonymity, might seem to repeat that call for a more decisive "death to the author" which characterised Foucault's thinking in the late 1960s. However, the recognition that such a decisive mutation of the author-function could only come about through a kind of authoritarian annulment of the traditional legal and economic arrangements that govern the publication and circulation of books marks a decisive shift. It signals Foucault's wholesale rejection of the notion that such a change might come from within the institution of literature

itself. It acknowledges that no mode of writing in itself, however scrupulously "indifferent" in its "unfolding of pure exteriority", could ever achieve the death of the author, that the author-function is less a question of literature and the regularities of literary discourse, than a mode of practice embedded in a vast and interlocking set of legal, economic, pedagogical and cultural institutions.

What else is intriguing here is the sibylline remark that, for a few great authors, a knowledge of the author is a key to the intelligibility of their works. It is fruitless to speculate which "great authors" Foucault may have had in mind; what is significant is that Foucault decisively excludes himself from such a category. Of course, Foucault has since become, and probably was already, such a "great author". Not only have the years since his death have seen a proliferation in intellectual biographies of Foucault, but there have been various attempts to read his life itself as exemplary (see Halperin 1995; Miller 1993). The irony of this incipient hagiography was obviously already keenly felt at the time of this interview. The person speaking had already lost a great deal to his double, the great author "Foucault", and no doubt his troubled anxiety about this process of distortion, his sense of self-estrangement, was already becoming yet another aspect of his author-effect, his "sainthood". Beckett too became the victim of the hagiographers towards the end of his life, and this religious canonisation may be added to his literary canonisation as yet another layer serving to swell the mass of the Beckettian author-function.

I would have liked ...

If Foucault expresses the desire for anonymity somewhat flippantly in these interviews, the same desire is expressed with a much heavier irony in the second essay in which Foucault has recourse to Beckett's writings, his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, *L'Ordre du Discours*[25].

[25] As with "What Is an Author?", there are several versions of this essay. The original lecture was published as *L'Ordre du Discours* by Gallimard in 1971. The most readily available English

Like "What Is an Author?", *L'Ordre du Discours* is a pivotal essay, both in the progress of Foucault's career and in the development of his thought. In 1974 Edward Said already considered it to be his most important work (Said 1994, 85). In it, Foucault lays the groundwork for many years of work to come, and the essay is usually seen as marking the turning point from the "archaeology" of *Madness and Civilization* and *The Order of Things*, towards the "genealogy" of *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality*.

Leaving aside for the moment the theoretical and methodological concerns of the essay, I wish to look here at Foucault's opening remarks. It is an opening about openings, a beginning that attempts to displace or evade the obligation to begin. But it also appears to be an invocation of a familiar "Blanchotian" (or indeed "Beckettian") anonymity, an attempt once more to create a space in which the speaking subject — in this case, Michel Foucault — endlessly disappears. Thus Foucault begins:

> I wish I could have slipped surreptitiously into this discourse which I must present today, and into the ones I shall have to give here, perhaps for many years to come. I should have preferred to be enveloped by speech, rather than have to begin it myself. I should have preferred to become aware that a nameless voice was already speaking long before me, so that I should only have needed to join in, to continue the sentence it had started and lodge myself, without really being noticed, in its interstices, as if it had signalled to me by pausing, for an instant, in suspense. Thus there would be no beginning, and instead of being the one from whom discourse proceeded, I should be at the mercy of its chance unfolding, a slender gap, the point of its possible disappearance.
>
> I should have liked there to be a voice behind me which had begun to speak a very long time before, doubling in advance everything I am going to say, a voice that would say: "You must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens" [*Unnamable* 179] (Foucault 1987d, 51)

translation, by Rupert Swyer (Foucault 1972), is widely regarded as unreliable (During 1992, 240 n., Said 1994, 87 n.). I have referred throughout to the translation by Ian McLeod (Foucault 1987d).

Foucault's wish to be anonymous, to be unnamable, to be *The Unnamable*[26], is obviously, given the circumstances of its utterance, a highly contrived rhetorical gesture. As Simon During writes:

> This is subtly, if deeply, ironic: the controversial Michel Foucault, in his inaugural address on taking up the chair at perhaps the most prestigious institution of the French academic system, wanting to "slip surreptitiously" into the lecture theatre. It is impossible. Which is the point. This impossible desire works to the same end as the implied attack on Derrida in "What is an Author?": both lead towards accepting the irretrievably social and institutional nature of language. (During 1992, 122)

Already, in 1971, Foucault seems to suffer from that "nostalgia for a time when, being quite unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard" (Foucault 1988, 323). However, while the irony of this opening is clear enough, the rhetorical purpose of this subterfuge, its precise relation to the concerns of the rest of the essay, is a little more complex. So too, the significance of the passage from Beckett, quoted here without attribution, is highly ambiguous and has a profound bearing in understanding Foucault's theorisation of the author-function in this period.

During acknowledges that, despite Foucault's heavy irony, "there remains a certain equivocation" (During 1992, 122). I think it is possible to read, behind the casual words "I wish I could have … I should have preferred … I should have liked …", a profound and somewhat mournful renunciation taking place. In accepting this obligation to speak, Foucault's opening is a kind of performative renunciation of *writing*, of the privileges of the writer who can allow himself to be "enveloped by speech", "at the mercy of its chance unfolding, a slender gap, the point of its possible disappearance". The speaker, on the other hand, and particularly the Chair of the Collège de France, has no such anonymity available to him, except perhaps through the rhetorical displacement briefly made possible by the quotation of another's words.

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[26] In his translation Rupert Swyer unaccountably attributes this voice to Molloy (Foucault 1972, 215). The original French version of Foucault's address contains no reference to Molloy (Foucault 1971, 7-8). Swyer also rather clumsily translates the quotation from *L'Innommable* himself, rather than referring to Beckett's own English translation. For the record, the original French version of Foucault's paper is not entirely accurate in its quotation of *L'Innommable* either.

Foucault goes on to stage an imaginary dialogue between "desire" and "the institution". Desire wants to be freed from the obligation to begin, to be already on the other side of discourse, carried along in the infinite openness of an anonymous murmur in which truths would emerge one by one. The institution, on the other hand, insists that every speech act emerges in a space already governed by laws, a space which both honours and disarms it, so that "if discourse may sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it" (Foucault 1987d, 52).

Foucault seems to quote the narrator of *The Unnamable* as an exemplar of this impossible desire, this desire for anonymity, this desire for a discourse which would circulate in the anonymity of a murmur: "What matter who's speaking". Clearly, at the Collège de France on December 2 1970, it *did* matter very much who was speaking.

This was not simply a matter of authorial discourse, since the author strictly only comes into being in relation to written texts. Instead, in expressing, however paradoxically, his desire for anonymity, Foucault is formally acknowledging his acceptance of a certain role conferred by the institution. Many people have commented on Foucault's lifelong concern to reconcile his ethical commitment to the cause of those marginalised by or excluded from the circuits of power, with his own pragmatic and extremely successful career within the French governmental and educational bureaucracy. In accepting the Chair at the Collège de France there is, therefore, a real anonymity which Foucault is forced to accept along with it: he must renounce the possibility of a "transgressive" freedom which, whatever its limitations, remains the prerogative of the *writer*, and he must accept the role of a *speaker*, for whom the position from which he speaks, the audience he addresses, the purpose and perhaps even the subject of his speech, and the manner in which his words will be taken up and repeated, are always already prepared in advance, delimited by the institution which confers upon him the authority to speak.

This equivocal relationship, between Foucault's role as a speaker and the author-function which he goes on to analyse in the course of the lecture, is brilliantly analysed by Edward Said in a detailed review of Swyer's English translation of

L'Ordre du discours. Said observes that since *Les Mots et les choses*, Foucault's work has been strongly revisionist in character:

> part of this revisionist phase has been Foucault's disenchantment with the idea of an author, a concept he has found grossly incapable of dealing with the trans-personal authority of texts and documents. ... To revise for him has meant primarily to understand more closely the process of knowledge, its formation, dispersion, transmission and permanence, in terms of "anonymous rules" that are extremely precise and specialised. (Said 1994, 69)

But Said offers an important critique of Foucault's self-revision, for while it has been theoretically consistent with his project of tracing "the disappearance in contemporary knowledge of man's role as central subject, author and creator", it is not, however, "practically consistent" (Said 1994, 70):

> Foucault is ... far too clearly the unusually impressive author of *his* work. This is an unhesitating compliment to him as a stylist of thought, yet I intend it also as a way of making very doubtful his theoretical ambition to find himself, as he would like, "on the other side of discourse". An anonymous writer he clearly is not. (Said 1994, 69-70)

This is not merely the sort of quibbling *ad hominem* objection that, as Seán Burke observes, is often the knee-jerk response to any proclamation of the death of the author (Burke 1992, 22)[27]. Said notes that Foucault's ambition to write as if from the standpoint of anonymous rules, his rigorous attempt to dispense as far as possible with the baggage of the autonomous humanist subject which lingers in the notions of the author and the work, does finally enable him to sketch out a new theoretical project in relation to the analysis of discourse. Said formulates Foucault's questioning of the author-function as follows:

> What gives written language a recognisable imprint over and above the signature of its author? What in short is the regularity of language in use in relation to which the author is a kind of eruptive irregularity? (Said 1994, 70)

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[27] Thus Paul Taylor, in a review of Malcolm Bradbury's *Mensonge*, writes:

> But though the Deconstructionists may confidently proclaim the Death of the Author, they have never evinced much difficulty in reconciling this view with the scooping up of advances and royalty cheques made out to them personally, not (as you might logically suppose) to the English or French language. (Taylor 1987, 59; cited in Burke 1992, 22)

This, I think, is a particularly useful synopsis of Foucault's critique of the author-function: on the one hand, the notion of the individual author, and in particular the notion of genius, blinds us to the trans-personal discursive regularities which govern intellectual and cultural production; on the other, the notion of the author becomes the focal point of anxieties surrounding the eruptive irregularities which threaten and transform discourses. In these terms, then, "literature" would be that discourse which constructs *the subject of written language as the space of its problematic.* The author becomes the site of irregularity that it will be the task of literary discourse ceaselessly to question, whether that space is characterised as anonymity, indifference, madness, death, language, writing, or transgression. Each of these terms, and the different modalities of the author-function to which they give rise, would be a hypostatisation of a transcendental *a priori* of textuality.

But if discourse is the rule of regularity constraining the use of language, and the author its most visible principle of limitation, in the position in which Foucault finds himself at the beginning of his lecture those discursive conventions governing speech are more than usually apparent. If, as an unknown writer, he might have desired simply to insert himself into the flow of discourse, to let himself be carried along by its chance unfolding, here, at the Collège de France, the institution has imposed upon him the obligation to begin:

> To this very common wish [to be on the other side of discourse], the institution's reply is ironic, since it solemnises beginnings, surrounds them with a circle of attention and silence, and imposes ritualised forms on them, as if to make them more easily recognisable from a distance. (Foucault 1987d, 51)

Where desire, represented perhaps by the narrator of *The Unnamable*, experiences the freedom of indifference at the price of the infinite fragility of its utterance, the institution offers the reassurance of authority, formality, tradition, at the same time imposing this obligation to speak, to begin. Said observes:

> As with most contemporary writers Foucault is saturated with and emboldened by [the examples of Vico, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud]. Yet still more explicitly than they, he acknowledges that their work places drastic limitations upon the idea of man as author of his work. So much so that discourse — the monumentality of man's organised utterance — is an order of, indeed *is*, repetition. To begin therefore is to repeat. (Said 1994, 86)

Foucault's beginning, therefore, is appropriate enough. It is literally a repetition, a quotation of a nameless voice which itself ceaselessly laments its obligation to speak.

Teacher and author

In his analysis of Foucault's equivocation — between the limited powers granted the writer as against the limited freedoms granted by institutions — Said formulates an important distinction which goes to the heart of Foucault's rejection of literature, and which raises serious questions regarding the limitations of writing.

> In raising these questions [about the author-function] Foucault, I suspect, would prefer to be called a teacher rather than an author, because a teacher exposes knowledge directly before his students, he frees "a coherent domain of description" for and with his students. ... Nowhere does Foucault himself make the explicit distinction between author and teacher, but it is a very useful one nonetheless. Primarily a teacher makes explicit what an author hides inside the flowing lines of his language: namely that knowledge is dispersion, strategy, formation, discontinuity. Moreover the teacher's place of business is the class, a site of exteriority, whereas the author's locale, a page, is far less visible as activity (which it is), and much more his private property. All this is a political motif running through Foucault's *Archaeology* as he turns the teacher's openness upon the author's accumulated reserves of power. (Said 1994, 70)

This is a brilliant formulation, from which I wish to develop a series of four important distinctions, in order to contrast the role of a "teacher", which Foucault invokes upon himself at the beginning of the lecture, with the role of an "author", like Beckett, which Foucault implicitly rejects in his mournful acknowledgement that he "would have liked" to be carried along by the murmur of *The Unnamable*, "doubling in advance everything I am going to say" (Foucault 1987d, 51).

Firstly, as Said notes, the teacher works in a site of exteriority, the class. Teachers adopt a role of openness, and are duty-bound to make themselves available in this respect. On the other hand, for all Blanchot's invocation of writing as a site of exteriority, the writer's place is the intensely guarded, personal, private space of the

page. It is the writer's mark, the written word, the text, and finally the finished work, which seeks out its world, which risks exteriority. The writer, and more particularly the author, remains scrupulously aloof from the public gaze, having already disappeared in the solitary moment when the words were put on the page.

It is useful, therefore, to compare Beckett's legendary reclusiveness with Foucault's scrupulous dedication to openness. Although Beckett occasionally weakened in his refusal to give interviews (D'Aubarède 1979; Driver 1979; Shenker 1956; Sigal 1964), he was unwavering in his refusal to offer the slightest commentary on or explanation of his works. Perhaps the most fulsome expression of this attitude is in the fine words of a famous letter to Alan Schneider, where Beckett gives his advice on dealing with the press:

> When it comes to these bastards of journalists I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind. That's for those bastards of critics. And to insist on the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue. If that's not enough for them, and it obviously isn't, or they don't see it, it's plenty for us, and we have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, *nec tecum nec sine te*, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could. (Letter to Alan Schneider, 29 December 1957; reprinted in Beckett and Schneider 1998, 24)

"I only know what's on the page" was Beckett's standard reply to actors' and critics' questions (Cronin 1997, 526). There is the famous story of Jack MacGowran asking Beckett how he should deliver Clov's line: "If I knew the combination of the refrigerator I'd kill you". Beckett is said to have told MacGowran simply to imagine: "if you knew the combination of the refrigerator you'd kill him". (Schneider 1975, 32) As Steven Connor remarks: "the refusal to comment on meaning becomes part of a directorial style or signature" (Connor 1988, 189).

This refusal to offer commentary should be seen as entirely consistent, rather than ironically at odds, with Beckett's attempts to sue directors and theatre companies who departed from his written instructions. Beckett insists on literality, a strict adherence to the letter of the text, for its own sake and as its own end: literary language as the

indivisible unity of form and content. For all the subversiveness of his writing, Beckett remained committed in practice to the pious aesthetics of totality — "I always had a mania for symmetry" confesses Molloy (*Molloy* 114). In this sense, Beckett resembles that other great modernist often mistaken for a postmodernist, John Cage. For all that he submitted his authorial prerogative to chance operations based on the *I Ching*, or left the "composition" of his music in the hands of the performers, or enjoined his listeners to heed silence as a kind of music, Cage could be venomously critical of performances that departed from the letter or the spirit of his conception. It would be the greatest heresy, therefore, to treat Beckett's writing as the indifferent vessel from which might be decanted an independent propositional content — "the scant cream of sense" (*Disjecta* 26) — that can be freely interpreted, explicated, developed and reworked in different words and in different contexts. In interviews, letters, and conversations, Beckett never let slip an opportunity to warn critics against reading their own meanings into his work. Indeed there are plenty of instances of such "authorial" warnings in his works too, from *Watt*'s "no symbols where none intended" (*Watt* 254), to *What Where*'s "make sense who may" (CSPL 316), to Hamm and Clov's exchange:

> HAMM: We're not beginning to … to … mean something?
>
> CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (*Brief laugh.*) Ah that's a good one!
>
> (*Endgame* 27)

If Beckett's authorial style is characterised by a refusal to speak, a refusal to offer elucidation or commentary in favour of a repeated gesture of mute deference to the authority of the page, Foucault, on the other hand, took his role as a "speaker" at the Collège de France very seriously indeed. As he expressed in an interview given in 1983:

> When newsmen ask me for information about my work I consider that I have to accept. You see, we are paid by society, by the taxpayers [*Laughter*] to work. … I think it is quite normal that this work, as far as it is possible, is presented and made accessible to everybody. Naturally, part of our work cannot be made accessible to anybody because it is too difficult. The institution which I belong to in France (I don't belong to the University but to the Collège de France) obliges its members to make public lectures, open to anyone who wants to attend, in which we have to explain our work. We are both researchers and people who have to explain publicly our research. (Foucault 1988, 16)

This commitment to a public exteriority is one of the demands of the institution, and, in a very important sense this demand for explication and clarification, elucidation and paraphrase, works *against writing*, since it is not possible in these circumstances for Foucault simply to gesture mutely towards the definitive authority of his written works. His work is a process rather than a product, a process of questioning, research, experiment, risk and failure. It is *thinking* rather than *writing*, a verb rather than a noun, and therefore his work must be ceaselessly re-enacted in an ongoing performance of the role of the intellectual.

This brings me to a second distinction, then, between the teacher and the author. Because the teacher works in this site of exteriority, his work manifests itself as activity, as *labour*. The author's labour, on the other hand, is hidden, unfolds in the private space of the page. It is invisible, and for that reason mysterious, something like Beckett's famous "siege in the room". The author's work, therefore, presents itself to the outside world, not as labour, but as *property*. This, I think, is an important distinction, and goes to the heart of the mysticism that attaches to the author-function. The literary work mysteriously comes into being as the author's private property, and presents itself to the world, not as the labour of one earning a living, but as a gift. The author-function depends, to a certain extent, on these two economic principles: of a privileging of property over labour, and of the gift over the commodity. This is particularly true in the case of Beckett, and in a later chapter I explore the operation of these principles in the implicit aesthetic economy that underpins Beckett's work.

A third distinction arises out of Beckett's peremptory statement: "I accept responsibility for nothing else". If the author's domain of activity extends no further than the private space of the page, so too, it seems, does his responsibility. That is, to adopt Edward Said's term (Said 1991), the author is, in a sense, not "in the world" in the same way that the text is. It is important to remember, as we have seen, that in the history of publishing it has more often been printers and publishers, rather than authors, against whom prosecutions have been launched (Saunders and Hunter 1991, 485). And although, as Said argues, "the effects of writing can be grave indeed" (Said 1991, 43), the example which Said discusses, the prosecution of Oscar Wilde, significantly turns on a private letter rather than a published work.

What is it exactly that the author takes responsibility for? It would seem to be no more or less than the finished form in which the work presents itself. Beckett seems to have understood this principle profoundly. On the one hand, the author enjoys the privilege of a kind of divine irresponsibility, since it is the text that enters the world and creates the mischief for which the publisher must take the legal and financial responsibility. On the other hand, because he has delivered himself over to the text, the author can no longer intervene in the process of distortion and misunderstanding that is the seemingly inevitable fate of the text when it encounters the world. This is why Beckett's interventions are both so fierce and so particular. In principle, Beckett can only object to a clear-cut departure from his written instructions; he cannot object to an interpretation that contravenes the "spirit" or the "intention" of the work. To do so, he would be obliged to offer a commentary on the text, to supplement it, and therefore to violate its integrity by suggesting its radical incompleteness. This is why, I think, Beckett will "accept responsibility for nothing else" than the letter of the text, because to begin to explain would destroy the work as a total and self-sufficient statement. Where texts become subject to prosecution, as in the famous trial of *Ulysses*, it is the publisher who must explain the merit of the work and the seriousness of its intention. The author stays out of it, "indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Joyce 1986, 194-95).

This brings me to a fourth point that is extremely important both for understanding Foucault's analysis of the author-function, and for understanding how the author-function is played out in the case of Beckett: the question of the voice.

If the crucial question of authorial discourse is "who speaks?", this is because, as we have seen, the author is by definition absent, unavailable for comment. The author is he who remains silent, "hides inside the flowing lines of his language" (Said 1994, 70), while the text speaks, with a voice whose origins, ends, and intentions the discourse of literary hermeneutics endlessly seeks to uncover. The question "who speaks?" is always a textual question, and is addressed, not, of course, to the author himself, nor even to the text, but from one reader to another, as both a provocation and a reassuring means of having something concrete to talk about.

If the author has the right to remain silent (and perhaps even owes his work the honour of this silence), the teacher has an obligation to speak. In this sense, and for a certain time ultimately limited by his death, a writer like Foucault, in accepting the obligation to speak in the name of the institution he works for and the research projects he undertakes by its means, ceaselessly undermines his own author-function. On the other hand, of course, Foucault's spoken words were frequently recorded and later published as lectures and interviews, thus serving ultimately to swell the mass of the Foucaultian oeuvre and the Foucaultian author-function. Perhaps, however, it was Foucault's fate to become not a "great author" but a "founder of discursivity", as he explains that term in "What Is an Author?"(1980a, 154). On the one hand, his work always obliged him to be "discursive" — to insert himself into discourse by accepting the responsibility of thought to speak itself, to reformulate itself, to explain, correct, adapt, transform itself in the modulations of a voice which was always, in the end, linked to the physical presence of the speaker, and through him to his visible and public emplacement in a discursive institution with its distributions of power, of knowledge, of "the authority to speak". On the other, as a body of work that ceaselessly offers itself as a series of discrete propositional formulations, what Deleuze refers to as a kind of conceptual "*boîte à outils*" or "tool-box" (Deleuze and Foucault 1972, 5), the posthumous legacy of Foucault's oeuvre invites a process, not of exegetical commentary, or not only of this, but of application and experiment, adaptation and further development.

Thus the work of the teacher is clearly a kind of performance, a role, and is carried out in a kind of intimate relation with his voice. The relation between the author-function and the author's voice is quite different, far more obscure and ambiguous, and the example of Beckett is an instructive, perhaps even exemplary case in point. It is often said that the question of voices is one of the central preoccupations of Beckett's oeuvre: "it's entirely a matter of voices, no other metaphor is appropriate" says one of the voices of the trilogy (*Unnamable* 52). Beckett's concern with the relation between speaker and voice obviously manifests itself with particular clarity in dramatic works such as *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*. The relation between the speakers in Beckett's texts and Beckett's own voice is rarely discussed, but gives I think, a crucial insight into the characteristic mystifications which surround the author-function "Beckett".

The obligation to speak and the right to remain silent

Steven Connor provides a useful discussion of the significance of authorial and authorised voices in relation to Beckett's author-function:

> Billie Whitelaw is not alone in saying that she needs to hear Beckett's voice speaking the lines of his plays before she can understand them. The closeness of Beckett to his actors and actresses seems sometimes to imply that his plays cannot be satisfactorily performed except by someone who, literally as well as figuratively, knows his voice. This famous voice is everywhere, but also nowhere to be heard, for Beckett refuses to allow his voice to be recorded; this refusal exists in strange, erotic complicity with the dependence on the voice of those with whom he works. This metaphor of voice may account partly for the extraordinary power which is invested by Beckett and Beckettian discourse in a small number of authorised actors and actresses, who have dominated all the "important" performances of Beckett's plays. … Authority is added to this by the often repeated claim that Beckett hears in these performers the voice that speaks to him when he is writing. The metaphor of voice here sinks to a deeper, and more mystical level; the actor's voices are no longer repetitions of Beckett's own voice, but rather of that deeper more authentic voice that speaks through him and his writing. (Connor 1988, 192)

Connor writes at some length on the mystical implications of this metaphor of the voice as it operates in Beckettian discourse. But the crux of the matter lies, I think, in the enormous importance Beckett attaches to the elision of his own speaking voice. Through his refusal to have his voice recorded, through his refusal to give interviews, through his refusal to explain his works, Beckett seems not only to prefer silence, but to go out of his way not to speak. In an interview with Bruno Clément, Beckett's friend Ludovic Janvier gives an interesting insight into Beckett's attitude to his own voice[28]:

> Il n'y a pas d'enregistrement de la voix de Beckett. S'il supportait ou se prêtait sans trop de répugnance à la mise en éternité de son image, il n'était pas question d'une éternisation de sa voix. Il ne s'en est jamais expliqué. Moi qui l'ai entendu réciter des poèmes de Dante, Hölderlin ou Apollinaire, mais aussi les premières pages de *From an Abandoned Work*, avec son bel accent d'Irlandais, je crois qu'il ressentait sa propre voix comme insupportable. Corollairement, la voix du texte était sa véritable voix. Je me demande si la confiance qu'il a accordé à la « voix-texte », en fondant tout son travail sur le vocal, n'a pas eu comme envers — ou comme endroit — la

[28] See also Janvier's interview with the French monthly *Magazine Littéraire* (Janvier 1999).

> méfiance qu'il entretenait à l'égard de sa voix. Tout son désir de présence vocale est passé dans le texte même. (Janvier and Clément 1993, 67-68)
>
> No recording of Beckett's voice exists. If he participated in, or at least submitted to, the immortalisation of his own image, there was no question of an immortalisation of his voice. He never explained this. Personally, having heard him recite Dante, Hölderlin or Apollinaire in his lovely Irish accent, having heard him read the first few pages of *From An Abandoned Work*, I think he found the sound of his own voice intolerable. By the same token, the voice of his texts was for him his true voice. I am led to wonder if the trust he felt in his "text-voice", the way he based all his work around speakers and voices, was not in opposition to — or even an aspect of — the distrust he felt in relation to his own voice. All of his desire for vocal presence is transferred to the text itself.

The juxtaposition of Janvier's appreciation of the *bel accent d'Irlandais*, and the fact that Beckett "distrusted" his own voice, even found the sound of it unbearable, is of great significance here.

In contrast to Beckett, another Irishman who wrote in French, Oscar Wilde, laboured self-consciously to rid himself of his Irish intonation, adopting a "stately and distinct English which astonished its hearers" (Ellmann 1988, 37). Later Wilde would quip: "My Irish accent was one of the many things I forgot at Oxford" (Ellmann 1988, 37). There is strong evidence that Beckett, a Trinity man with a fierce sense of *amour-propre*, at times experienced profound humiliation at being patronised as a "Paddy" because of his own strong Irish accent (Kiberd 1995, 532). In 1964 he admitted to an interviewer: "I hated London … everyone knew you were Irish — the taxi drivers called you 'Pat' or 'Mick'" (Sigal 1964, cited in Bair 1990, 224). The motivations behind Beckett's disgusted turn away from writing in English after the war no doubt arose out of the complex linguistic circumstances of such experiences. In this, as in so many things, Joyce was undoubtedly a precursor:

> [Stephen] felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson. He thought:
>
> — The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (Joyce 1986, 172)

Things are more complex, however, in the case of Beckett. His decision to write in French seems, at one level, to be a straightforward and definitive rejection of English and Englishness, a rejection most famously embodied in an interview with a French journalist, who, on asking whether Monsieur Beckett was an English writer, was told: *Au contraire.*

But, in addition to its rejection of English, Beckett's turn to French necessarily involves kind of rejection of his Irish voice too, so that his famous remark that in French it was easier to write *sans style*, may also mean that in French it was easier to write *sans accent*, to avoid the Irishisms that, in translating the French works, he dropped selectively but ostentatiously back into his English prose, such as "Was I hungry itself?" in *The Calmative* (CSPR 62). Certainly, Beckett's antipathy to Ireland and Irish cultural nationalism is well known:

> What constitutes the charm of our country, apart of course from its scant population, and this without help of the meanest contraceptive, is that all is derelict, with the sole exception of history's ancient faeces. These are ardently sought after, stuffed and carried in procession. Wherever nauseated time has dropped a nice fat turd you will find our patriots, sniffing it up on all fours, their faces on fire. (CSPR 34)

The decision to write in French thus involves a kind of double negative, a two-fold elision of the speaking voice, since it involves a deliberate rejection of both the English language and his Irish accent[29].

Beckett's refusal to speak went further than merely refusing to grant interviews to journalists. Towards the end of his life, Beckett seems to have made an unpleasant habit of occasionally consenting when aspiring young writers expressed the desire to meet him, only to meet them for a coffee and confront them with such glacial detachment and stony silence that it seems to have inspired the requisite mixture of terror and admiration. Charles Juliet thus describes his first meeting with Beckett:

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[29] This situation is made even more complex by the fact that *Watt*, the last work Beckett wrote in English before turning to French, at times reads as if it were clumsily translated from French, containing deliberate Gallicisms such as "I do not rise, not having the force" (*Watt* 10), and "a merely facultative stop" (*Watt* 19). These and other complexities are discussed in Ann Beer's excellent article "'Watt', Knott and Beckett's bilingualism" (Beer 1985).

> Le silence est tel qu'il pourrait quasiment se solidifier. Je me rappelle soudain, non sans appréhension, que Beckett peut rencontrer quelqu'un — c'est Maurice Nadeau qui me l'a confié — et le quitter une à deux heures plus tard sans avoir émis un seul mot. (Juliet 1986, 12)
>
> The silence is such that it seems as if set in stone. I suddenly recall, not without apprehension, that Beckett is quite capable of meeting someone — it was Maurice Nadeau who told me this — and leaving him again an hour or two later without having spoken a single word.

Another hapless would-be interlocutor, André Bernold, tells a similar story of his first encounter with Beckett:

> Une carte par retour de courrier indiquait jour, heure et lieu d'un rendez-vous. C'est donc la première entrevue, elle dure une heure précise, dans un silence presque total. Je ne me souviens d'aucune parole. Nous étions assis l'un en face de l'autre, royalement muets. Je crois me rappeler que nous étions un peu penchés, pour ausculter l'ample respiration de ce silence. (Bernold 1992, 21)
>
> A card by return post indicated the day, hour and place of our rendezvous. This, then, was the first interview, it lasted exactly an hour, passed in almost total silence. I don't remember a single word. We sat facing each other, royally mute. I believe we leaned slightly forward, the better to auscultate the ample breathing of this silence.

Here, one must conclude, Beckett used his authorial silence to particularly devastating effect, creating a forbidding aura of glacial boredom and magisterial aloofness — the otherworldly intensity of artistic genius — that I for one can't help seeing as something of a con.

Beckett was extremely familiar with and highly conscious of the cultural and institutional discourses in which his work was to be circulated, evaluated and discussed. After all, he originally started out his adult life intending to be an academic, working first as a *lecteur* at the École Normale Supérieure, and then returning to Ireland to take up a post as Lecturer in French at Trinity College. In fact, by all accounts one of the most traumatic and decisive turning points in his life was his resignation of the Trinity lectureship, prompted largely by the fact, according to James Knowlson, that "standing up to speak in public was sheer torture" (Knowlson 1996, 126).

We might therefore place Beckett's decisive refusal of the obligation to speak in public in ironic counterpoint to Foucault's rhetorical gesture "I would have liked ..." at the beginning of "The Order of Discourse". Beckett self-consciously renounced a career of speaking as the bearer of an institutional knowledge, in order to adopt the "silence, exile, and cunning" proper to the writer and his authorial self-effacement. Therefore, in saying ironically: "I should have liked there to be a voice behind me which had begun to speak a very long time before, doubling in advance everything I am going to say" (Foucault 1987d, 51), Foucault borrows Beckett's words, or perhaps the words of the nameless being who speaks in Beckett's texts, in order to dramatise what is, in effect, Foucault's renunciation of the privileges of writing and authorship and his acceptance of the responsibilities of his role as a speaker and a teacher at the Collège de France.

It is important, I think, to regard Beckett's calculated and cultivated silence as, in an important sense, part of Beckett's oeuvre, to read it in terms of what Phil Baker calls "the larger aesthetic of lacunae in Beckett's work, where absence is frequently an emphasis or aesthetic effect" (Baker 1996, 143). Beckett's silence is all the more striking when contrasted with his great assiduousness in depositing his manuscripts with university libraries. As Steven Connor observes, Beckett's thorough familiarity with the institutions of the discourse on literature enabled him to become an extremely canny participant in the creation of his own author-function:

> There can be little doubt that Beckett's own cultivation of silence, and his strategic (and inconsistent) refusals to co-operate with the culture and criticism industry, are themselves caught up with this structure of exchange: the less Beckett gave to criticism the greater the potential yield of value from his work. (Connor 1992c, 98)

Thus there is a powerful reinforcement of authorial privilege and prestige at work in the disjunction between, on the one hand, the fascination with the question of voices that runs through the entirety of Beckett's oeuvre, and on the other, Beckett's own refusal to speak — his total refusal to allow his voice to be recorded, his total refusal to speak about his work, and his almost total refusal to be interviewed.

Indeed, Beckett's refusal to speak, his rejection of presence and the voice, in favour of absence and the text, must be seen as much as a conscious "authorial" strategy as

anything that appears in his writings. Nothing could be more "authorial" than this silence. While there is a great tendency in Beckettian discourse to see Beckett as a quasi-saintly figure, whose seeming indifference to acclaim and publicity bespoke a genuine humbleness and integrity, I think it can also be maintained, without contradiction, that much of the mystique that attaches to Beckett and Beckett's work arises from the skill with which he played the role of the "Great Author". It is a role that requires, paradoxically, the Great Author to be seen to refuse to play a role, to insist on his privacy and his right to remain silent just as he insists on the private space of the page as the true and only site of his work. In "The Order of Discourse" Foucault argues that it is impossible to think of any writer in the modern age being "innocent" in this respect, being unaware of the author-function that haunts and intensifies every moment of his life as a writer:

> I believe that — at least since a certain epoch — the individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is prowling, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks — this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn. He may well overturn the traditional image of the author; nevertheless, it is from some new author-position that he will cut out, from everything he could say and from all that he does say every day at any moment, the still trembling outline of his oeuvre. (Foucault 1987d, 59)

Thus for Beckett, as for Borges, there was always also this "other Beckett", this unquiet presence which, like his texts, was out "in the world" and thus slightly beyond his control, which already belonged "to the language and to tradition", but which it was his part at every moment to create.

PART 3:

Beckett's Aesthetic Economies

Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et L'Économie politique.

Everything can be summed up in aesthetics and political economy.

Stéphane Mallarmé, "La Musique et les lettres"

(Mallarmé 1945, 656)

Introduction

A major weakness of Michel Foucault's account of authorship — fragmentary and provisional as it is — is his refusal to acknowledge its *economic* character. As we have seen, in "What Is an Author?" Foucault is anxious to associate the emergence of the modern author with the development of modern institutions of discursive control. For Foucault, the modern concept of authorship comes into being as a function of power, against the background of an increasingly vigilant surveillance of the dangerous proliferation of discourse:

> its status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation. Speeches and books were assigned real authors … only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. (Foucault 1977c, 124)

To be sure, this bias is entirely typical of the rejection of Marxism and Marxist models of culture and ideology that characterised not only Foucault's work but that of many of the post-1968 generation of French thinkers.

While I don't wish directly to take issue with Foucault's account of the author-function, I think it is important to recognise that, to a certain extent, the modern concept of authorship *did* come into being as a response to an economic imperative: the increasing commodification of culture towards the end of the eighteenth century. The figure of the modern author marks the emergence of the notion of intellectual property, a concept crucial to the development of post-industrial capitalism, governing the production of everything from crops and livestock to pharmaceuticals and computer software.

In the chapters that follow I explore the notion of the author-function as a form of property relation, and more broadly, I examine the complex and contradictory relations between the two major competing discourses of value in contemporary

culture: aesthetics and economics. While these discourses of value present themselves as independent, incommensurate, even mutually exclusive, they are, at the same time, deeply implicated in each other. I explore this mutual implication in greater detail in the chapters that follow, but for the moment it is worth remarking that this mutual implication is brought to a pitch of unusual intensity in the case of Beckett. Indeed, the reception of his work would seem to be governed by a kind of exponential inverse ratio: each progressive reduction in Beckett's writing — with the works becoming successively shorter, bleaker, and more unsparing in their vision of an essential failure, destitution, suffering and hopelessness — was returned many times over in aesthetic acclaim and economic success.

This conversion of Beckett's negativity into a positive cultural value is nowhere more apparent than in the citation of the Swedish Academy, which, in awarding Beckett the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969, commended "a body of work that, in new forms of fiction and the theatre, has transmuted the destitution of modern man into his exaltation" (Wasson 1987, 68). In his presentation speech Karl Ragnar Gierow of the Academy noted that Beckett's fundamental pessimism nevertheless "houses a love of mankind that grows in understanding as it plumbs further into the depths of abhorrence, a despair that has to reach the utmost bounds of suffering to discover that compassion has no bounds" (Wasson 1987, 68).

So too, the transmutation of Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment into a positive economic value is nowhere better illustrated than in the publication of Beckett's last work, *Stirrings Still*, which appeared in 1989 in a limited edition of 200 copies at £1000 each, while the full text was simultaneously available for 25p in *The Guardian* newspaper. As Frank Kermode commented with heavy irony in his review in the same paper:

> The purchasers can henceforth meditate the destitution of their existence and simultaneously take pleasure in their privilege. … They can take further comfort from the thought that the worldly value of their purchase will steadily increase while its contents insist on a terminal comfortlessness. (Kermode 1989, 29)

Beckett's work, therefore, represents a particularly acute instance of the complex interdependence between aesthetics and economics. As Steven Connor remarks:

> There is a huge distance between the specificity of Beckett's writing practice and the economic function served by his work (either as cultural or directly as economic commodity), but this distance is precisely what energizes the process of positivization. (Connor 1992c, 98)

The three chapters that follow explore various aspects of the relation between economics and aesthetics as it is played out both in Beckett's work and in the discourse on Beckett's work.

The first, "Indifference Engines", considers the importance of structures of combination and permutation in Beckett's work. Using the famous scene of Murphy contemplating his assortment of biscuits, I argue that this process of substitution and deferral, which runs through the entirety of Beckett's oeuvre, might be seen as producing a kind of Kantian "disinterestedness", whereby the signifiers of bodily need become objects of aesthetic contemplation, purely formal elements in an autonomous aesthetic universe.

The second chapter, "The Collection and the Oeuvre", carries this logic a step further. Here I consider Beckett's oeuvre in purely materialist terms: as a collection of books. The same aestheticisation that characterises the combinatorial characterises the consumption of authored texts: the oeuvre, unified by the figure of the author, presents itself to the reader as ahistorical, autonomous, and formally self-contained.

The third chapter, "Property and the Economy of the Gift", considers a third aspect of the relation between aesthetics and economics in Beckett's work. Traditionally, the author's work, if it is to have any aesthetic value, must not present itself as work carried out through economic necessity, as a commodity produced for sale, but must appear to be freely created, unbidden and unmotivated, must present itself, in other words, as a gift. Through a reading of *Murphy* and the four novellas, I show that, while Beckett's characters appear to survive amidst a superficial décor of indigence, they nevertheless always manage to escape the drudgery of wage labour, subsisting almost entirely in an economy of the gift, often in the form of an inheritance. This denial of the world of labour and the commodity economy is, I think, a crucial element of Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment: his *nostalgie de la boue* conceals, in the end, an impeccably genteel poverty, and, as in the romances it is the destitute

beggar's inner nobility which identifies him as the dispossessed claimant to the throne, so too it is the impeccable credentials of a patrician cultural inheritance which enable Beckett's work to deliver such a massive profit margin of cultural and economic value.

This is not to suggest, however, that Beckett's work is politically irredeemable; rather, it is an attempt to clear the way towards a realistic assessment of Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment, one which can begin to account for its cultural value and canonical status without giving in to the helpless shrug of baffled or embittered irony.

The Indifference Engines

The Combinatorial

Beckett's work is full of combinatorial structures. One of the earliest examples is Murphy's packet of assorted biscuits.

> He took the biscuits carefully out of the packet and laid them face upward on the grass, in order as he felt of edibility. They were the same as always, a Ginger, an Osborne, a Digestive, a Petit Beurre and one anonymous. He always ate the first-named last, because he liked it the best, and the anonymous first, because he thought it very likely the least palatable. The order in which he ate the remaining three was indifferent to him and varied irregularly from day to day. On his knees now before the five it struck him for the first time that these prepossessions reduced to a paltry six the number of ways in which he could make his meal. But this was to violate the very essence of assortment. … Even if he conquered his prejudice against the anonymous, still there would be only twenty-four ways in which the biscuits could be eaten. But were he to take the final step and overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways!
>
> Overcome by these perspectives, Murphy fell forward on his face in the grass, beside those biscuits of which it could be said as truly as of the stars, that one differed from another, but of which he could not partake in their fullness until he had learnt not to prefer any one to any other. (*Murphy* 57)

Murphy's struggle with the "demon of gingerbread" (*Murphy* 57) parallels one of the major themes of the novel, the dialectic of freedom and necessity announced in the opening lines: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton" (*Murphy* 5). For

Murphy, the physical world is the domain of necessity, subject to determination by both the external forces of a clockwork universe, and the internal forces of the body's unruly desires. For Murphy, it is only in his mind that he can experience freedom. According to his own peculiar brand of Occasionalism, Murphy feels his mind to be "bodytight", "a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body" (*Murphy* 64). Unfortunately for Murphy, however, and in direct contradiction to this theory, "it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind" (*Murphy* 6), "motion in this world depended on rest in the world outside" (*Murphy* 64). The novel therefore concerns Murphy's attempts to still the body's unrest, to reach that famous third zone of his mind, where, in a Schopenhauerian transcendence of the despised flesh, he attains a state of selfless, will-less indifference: "not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (*Murphy* 66).

Murphy's perplexity is a variation on a familiar philosophical theme, the dialectic of freedom and necessity transposed to the dichotomy of mind and body: while the mind takes wing in the freedom of Assortment, the body is tethered to the necessity of Biscuit.

Murphy's combinatorial can be seen as a kind of Indifference-Engine. It produces in-difference by suspending and dispersing desire, forcing the ginger from its privileged position at the end of the series into a shuttling movement across all five positions. It also produces in-difference by suspending distinctions, for the qualitative differences that ordinarily make the ginger and the anonymous opposed contraries are no longer recognised in the rigorous substitutions of the combinatorial. If desire plays favourites, the combinatorial enforces a rigorous equality. If desire belongs to the domain of difference, the *vive la différence* of the pleasures of the flesh, the combinatorial produces a coldly formal in-difference, the disciplined detachment of "it's all the same to me".

The combinatorial therefore operates on a tension between two kinds of indifference — a taxonomic indifference, a lack of distinction, or what I shall call "indifferentiation", and a volitional, or, to use a favourite word of Beckett's,

"conative" indifference, a lack of desire, or what I shall call "disinterestedness" (cf. Hill 1990, 15).

"Indifferentiation" names the process of cancelling qualitative differences by repeated substitutions. In Murphy's case, the ginger and the other biscuits become equivalent and interchangeable, place markers in an abstract formal system. "Disinterestedness" names the result of this process, a transcendence of the grubby instinctual proddings of the flesh, towards higher, purer, freer pleasures: the formal, abstract, disinterested pleasures of the mind. Murphy's struggle to experience the "essence of assortment" is not so much an ascetic denial of pleasure, but the disciplined pursuit of a higher pleasure, because for Murphy "life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (*Murphy* 6).

Thus Murphy's rocking chair is another Indifference-Engine, not simply because it appeases his body and sets him free in his mind, but because the motion of the rocking produces an indifferentiation, an erasure of the distinction between opposed extremes:

> Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free. (*Murphy* 9)

As the rocking-chair's motion approaches this "identification of contraries" where "maximal speed is a state of rest" (*Disjecta* 21), Murphy too approaches disinterestedness, the blissful will-lessness which he ardently desires, but which he cannot claim until he relinquishes even that desire. In a deterministic universe, Murphy's only hope for escape paradoxically lies in resigned submission to fate, which he expresses in what Leslie Hill (Hill 1990, 15) terms a "neatly calculated chiasmus": "the freedom of indifference, the indifference of freedom" (*Murphy* 61).

Here I wish to consider this dialectic of freedom and necessity, not in terms of mind versus body or free will versus determinism, but in terms of the competing discourses of value, the aesthetic and the economic, and their characteristic objects, the work of art and the commodity. I argue not only that the combinatorial can be seen as a crucial element of Beckett's aesthetics, but that it plays out in a particularly lucid way

the broader tension in modernist aesthetics between the necessity of economic exchange and the freedom of aesthetic autonomy.

Exhaustion

The combinatorial is an art of exhaustion. Art is an exhaustion of the combinatorial. Exhaustion is the combinatorial of art. Exhaustion is an art of the combinatorial. Art is the combinatorial of exhaustion. The combinatorial is the exhaustion of art.

Arranged in permutative sequences like this, words start to lose their senses, become mute shapes or hollow packets of sound which do no more than punctuate the silence like the distant clinking of stone-masons' hammers, or the croaking of frogs in the summer night: *Krak! Krek! Krik!* (*Watt* 136-138). Steven Connor observes:

> One of the most obvious features of repetitive lists and sequences is the way that they insist on their linguistic materiality. I mean this in the most literal way. The effort of getting through many of Beckett's repetitions, either reading silently, or, more especially, reading aloud, imparts an agonizing strain on the eye, cramps the tongue and paralyses the lips. In the end, such extreme consciousness of the shape and sound of language leads to the well-known phenomenon of the draining of meaning from the words, so that they do indeed become simply inert noises or shapes. (Connor 1988, 32)

In an essay devoted to the combinatorial in Beckett's work, Gilles Deleuze names this process "exhaustion". For Deleuze, "Beckett's great contribution to logic is to display that exhaustiveness does not occur without a certain physiological exhaustion" (Deleuze 1995, 5).

> The combinatorial is the art or science of exhausting the possible, through inclusive disjunctions. But only the exhausted can exhaust the possible, because he has renounced all need, preference, goal or signification. Only the exhausted is sufficiently disinterested, sufficiently scrupulous. (Deleuze 1995, 5)

Exhaustion therefore consists of two elements: *logical* exhaustion — the construction of an exhaustive series, and *physiological* exhaustion — the renunciation of goals or

desires. Deleuze sees this use of the combinatorial as a governing structural principle in Beckett: "All of Beckett's work is pervaded by exhaustive, that is to say exhausting, series" (Deleuze 1995, 4).

Much has been written on the importance of the combinatorial in Beckett's work. In addition to Deleuze's essay, Steven Connor has dedicated a full-length study to the significance of repetition in Beckett's writing (Connor 1988), while exhaustive analyses of the combinatorial structures in *Watt* have been made by John J. Mood (1971) and François Martel (1972). In various ways these studies all return to the question of signification, showing how the mechanical repetitions of the combinatorial tend to destabilise or undermine meaning, even while repetition itself is a crucial element of the structure of the sign. But if the insistent repetitions of the combinatorial lead to an emptying of meaning, an exhaustion of signification, it is nevertheless also true that nothing could be more transparently comprehensible, on a literal level, than, for instance, Watt's observations concerning the disposition of Mr Knott's furniture:

> Thus it was not rare to find, on the Sunday, the tallboy on its feet by the fire, and the dressing-table on its head by the bed, and the nightstool on its face by the door, and the washhand-stand on its back by the window; and, on the Monday, the tallboy on its back by the bed, and the dressing-table on its face by the door, and the nightstool on its back by the window … (*Watt* 204-05)

And so on for another two pages, and twenty of the fifteen thousand possible permutations. It is unlikely that many readers would bother to follow through patiently word-by-word every step of this mind-boggling and gratuitously tedious enumeration. It is enough to register the existence and nature of the list: its real significance, one feels, lies elsewhere.

The combinatorial exhausts signification because to say everything, systematically to cover in sequence all permutations of a given set of variables, amounts to saying nothing. And yet, such passages are perfectly comprehensible on a denotative level: if you wanted to, you could easily reproduce Mr Knott's method of furnishing his room. It constitutes a kind of *program*, like a computer program, and this "atomic language" (Deleuze 1995, 7) constitutes a kind of code in which, as Deleuze says, "the relations of objects are identical to the relations of words" (Deleuze 1995, 6).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, "The elementary unit of language — the statement — is the order-word" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 76). The program is a series of order-words, exhaustive and repetitive because "ordering is redundancy" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 75).

In "literary" terms, of course, such passages are defiantly opaque: tedious, repetitive, and gratuitously redundant. The combinatorials in *Watt* are usually read in terms of Watt's laborious attempts to discover the true nature of his mysterious employer, and this failed quest is variously interpreted as an allegory of the soul's attempts to know God (Breuer 1992; Hayman 1997; Hesla 1963); as an "exposure of the bankruptcy of rationality" (Mood 1971, 258; Smith 1976); as a parodic illustration of Wittgenstein's logical positivism (Coe 1968; Hoefer 1965); or as an ironic commentary on Fritz Mauthner's critique of language (Skerl 1974; Solomon 1971). Watt's combinatorials seem to bear out the gloomy prediction made by his predecessor Arsene, that "what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail" (*Watt* 62). The combinatorials offer little to the interpreter, and most writers have preferred to speak of them in general terms, rather than in any detail.

For this reason, one of the most enjoyable articles on *Watt* is the study by John J. Mood. In what is itself an exhaustive and exhausting analysis, he finds that the 37 combinatorials contain a total of 22 unacknowledged omissions or mistakes, while there are several more errors to which Beckett draws attention in the text. He reads these errors in terms of Beckett's own unequivocally expressed aesthetic of impotence and incompetence, and concludes:

> The mistakes were certainly planned. … If Beckett is truly working with the incompetence he said he was … then it follows that a portrayal of a personal system, of a closed logical set or a series of such sets, must, if the form is to be one with the content, be faulty. And that faultiness must have attention called to it and be noticed by the reader. And, to be even more incompetently incompetent, there must be unnoticed faultiness. … And one can suspect, or imagine, that [Beckett] in some way composed in such a manner so that some mistakes would escape his own notice as well. … What we have then is a perfect illustration of Beckett's own express artistic convictions. (Mood 1971, 263)

This is a beautifully ingenious argument, further enhanced by the fact that Mood's own analysis itself contains a number of errors. It is a fine example of how, with a little ingenuity, profound literary significance can be extracted out of what is seemingly intractably "unliterary" material. Moreover, it is a stunning demonstration of how the construction of authorial failure can paradoxically end up further confirming the author's sovereignty.

Use-value, exchange-value, aesthetic-value

If Beckett criticism has traditionally focussed on the linguistic qualities of the combinatorial, here I want to shift the emphasis away from questions of signification and concentrate on the combinatorial as an Indifference-Engine, as a rigorous program of substitutions that produces both indifferentiation and disinterestedness. In particular, I wish to consider the combinatorial in the light of the discourses of aesthetics and economics, as an element of what we might call Beckett's "aesthetic economy".

Clearly, in Murphy's case, the combinatorial's austere process of substitution and exchange enacts a drama of values, cancelling the qualitative distinctions between the ginger and the anonymous by a commutative in-difference. The combinatorial is an exercise in commensuration, since, as Jean-Joseph Goux observes, "it is always by replacement that values are created" (Goux 1990, 9). But if it is clear that, in some ways, the combinatorial enacts in miniature a paradigm of economic exchange, what is less clear is the fact that the combinatorial also enacts a process of *aestheticisation*. What I hope to demonstrate, in fact, is that the combinatorial performs a kind of "aestheticisation of need", for Murphy's Biscuit Assortment is a kind of parody of nutrition. By considering further examples of Beckett's alimentary Indifference-Engines, I want to show how the combinatorial is a crucial element in Beckett's aestheticisation of impoverishment, creating a distance both from the necessity of economic exchange, and the necessity of corporeal nourishment. In short, Beckett's

combinatorials serve to bring into particularly clear focus a complex set of relations between the discourses of the aesthetic and the economic, use-value and exchange value, freedom and necessity.

One of Beckett's favourite comic devices is to draw attention to the inhuman aspect of the combinatorial, which seems to crush qualitative distinctions in its inexorable machinery. For instance, Watt scrupulously lists all twelve possibilities regarding Mr Knott's role in the design of his eating arrangements, even though at least half the list is logically absurd (*Watt* 89-90; Martel 1972, 167-70). So too, he patiently enumerates all 78 of Mr Knott's combinations of socks, stockings, boots, shoes, slippers and bare feet, even though at most only 10 of these combinations could be regarded as in common usage (*Watt* 200-1). Similarly, in *Watt* again, the maidservant Mary eats an endless succession of peppermints and onions, in a violently indigestible series that, not surprisingly perhaps, leads to a detached indifference to her surroundings:

> ... in the morning when Mary had finished doing this, if Mary may be said to have ever finished doing anything, then she began to do this, that is to say she settled herself firmly in a comfortable semi-upright posture before the task to be performed and remained there quietly eating onions and peppermints turn and turn about, I mean first an onion, then a peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, and so on, while little by little the reason for her presence in that place faded from her mind ... (*Watt* 51)

But perhaps the most extreme example of this process, and the second example I wish to focus on in detail, is the preparation of Mr Knott's meals:

> This dish contained foods of various kinds, such as soup of various kinds, fish, eggs, game, poultry, meat, cheese, fruit, all of various kinds, and of course bread and butter, and it contained also the more usual beverages, such as absinthe, mineral water, tea, coffee, milk, stout, beer, whiskey, brandy, wine and water, and it contained also many things to take for the good of the health, such as insulin, digitalin, calomel, iodine, laudanum, mercury, coal, iron, camomile and worm-powder, and of course salt and mustard, pepper and sugar, and of course a little salicylic acid, to delay fermentation.

> 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. 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. (*Watt* 87)

For all its nutritional excellence, Mr Knott's poss risks being indigestible. Seeking to represent all foods, it ceases to be one. Despite its comprehensive incorporation of all the good things of life, it attains a medicinal austerity. In its indifference to the qualities of its elements, it takes on the character of a privation, a renunciation of pleasure in the interests of pure nutrition.

Clearly Mr Knott's poss involves a different kind of indifferentiation to that produced by Murphy's Biscuit Assortment. Murphy's combinatorial produces an "articulated" indifferentiation, since the separate elements continue to maintain their separate identities, while the qualitative distinctions between them are subordinated to the formal equations of substitution. Mr Knott's poss, on the other hand, involves a "smooth" indifferentiation, in that the separate elements are dissolved in a single universal equivalent, by being boiled together in the famous pot that gives Watt so much trouble[30].

This distinction between "articulated" and "smooth" is crucial to the operation of Beckett's aesthetic economy: the *articulated* indifferentiation of the combinatorial allows Murphy to participate in the fullness of the Biscuit Assortment, while the *smooth* indifferentiation of Mr Knott's poss represents a kind of nihilistic form of nutrition. Articulated indifferentiation belongs to the domain of the aesthetic, and names the detached contemplation of an abstract, formal law or truth. Smooth indifferentiation, on the other hand, belongs to the domain of commodities. In its pure indifferentiation, its smooth, featureless plasticity, Mr Knott's poss is analogous

[30] This distinction between "smooth" and "articulated" indifferentiation owes a great deal to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between "smooth" and "striated" space in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 474-500).

to the money form. By representing the infinite diversity of commodities in terms of a single, universal equivalent, the money form dissolves qualitative differences into an abstract, generalised law of exchange.

At first sight, then, Murphy's Biscuit Assortment seems to belong to the formal domain of the aesthetic. Murphy's bracketing of his own desires, in his wrestle with the demon of gingerbread, can be seen as a parody of the scrupulous disinterestedness of the Kantian aesthetic, in which individuals supposedly put aside their personal prepossessions in order to participate in the universal formal beauty of the aesthetic. The hundred and twenty permutations of biscuits represent a kind of abstract law to which Murphy must freely submit, in order to partake of the assortment in all its plenitude.

On the other hand, however, a biscuit is simply something to eat. Unlike the aesthetic object, it has a use-value related to a fundamental human need for nutrition. But if, instead of eating your biscuit, you exchange it for something else, even another biscuit, it becomes a commodity. That is, in addition to being a material thing, it becomes simultaneously an abstraction, a signifier of the value of other commodities for which it can be exchanged. The commodity "looks on every other commodity as but the form of appearance of its own value" (Marx 1976, 165). The commodity is therefore a curious hybrid, combining a use-value and an exchange value, a concrete specific quality and an abstract generalised equality. It is both itself, and a sign of its own buying power. It is "present and absent simultaneously, a tangible entity whose meaning is wholly immaterial and always elsewhere, in its formal relations of exchange with other objects" (Eagleton 1995, 208).

In the combinatorial Murphy's biscuits come to take on the characteristics of the commodity, in a kind of miniature parody of an exchange economy, which requires an evaporation of the material qualities of the biscuits in the abstract equality of their exchange-value: money is indifferent to the taste of ginger. Indeed, in the act of purchasing his meal, Murphy wittily draws attention to the arbitrariness of the relation between exchange value and use value, between money and nutrition: "Twopence the tea, twopence the biscuits, a perfectly balanced meal" (*Murphy* 49).

This not all, however, for when the biscuits are laid out in series, they cease to be mere commodities, and become place markers in a game of substitutions: they start to take on the logic of a collection. In Susan Stewart's exemplary analysis, the process of constructing a collection involves the withdrawal of objects from their worldly contexts into a private space of contemplation, wherein their intrinsic qualities are subordinated to their formal interrelations as the components of an autonomous system. In Stewart's succinct phrasing: "the collection represents the total aestheticisation of use value" (Stewart 1993, 151). I shall discuss Stewart's analysis of the logic of the collection in detail in the following chapter. For the moment, it is important to note how the compulsive activity of the collector performs a strange alchemy: it turns the humble commodity into an aesthetic object, a work of art. If you can't have your cake and eat it too, the activity of the collector turns "having" into an aesthetic experience far more satisfying than the simple pleasure of "eating". The collection represents a "Paradise of Consumption" (Stewart 1993, 151), but one in which, like all paradises, perhaps, consumption is endlessly deferred.

The movement of the combinatorial serves to evaporate use value, into both the disinterestedness of an aesthetic formalism, and the indifferentiation of an exchange economy. It is entirely appropriate, then, that Murphy never actually gets to eat any of the biscuits, which are all, with the partial exception of the ginger, consumed by Rosie Dew's dachshund. Having had the cake, it would have been superfluous to eat it too, since the higher pleasure lies in the assortment itself, rather than the incidental biscuits through which it expresses its formal truth. And in fact, Murphy has already advertised his disdain for the mere use-value of the biscuits in question: "Murphy's fourpenny lunch was a ritual vitiated by no base thoughts of nutrition" (*Murphy* 49).

The representation of need

Murphy is quite explicit about the perceived incompatibility between the "freedom of indifference" its protagonist desires, and the economic necessity that continually

threatens to disturb his equanimity. The novel opens with Murphy attempting to blot out of his mind the *Quid pro quo* of a street cry by which the "big world" (*Murphy* 8) threatens to intrude on Murphy's attempt to gain the "little world" of his mind. So too, the plot of the novel revolves around Murphy's vigorous determination to remain unemployed, expressed in his dire prediction to Celia that "work would be the end of them both" (*Murphy* 16). Finally, while his "deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on" (*Murphy* 102) is presented as an impediment to Murphy's transcendence of worldly desires, it should also be remembered that both Celia and ginger belong to the circuits of commodity exchange, and it is this world, as much as anything, against which Murphy desires to remain a "closed system", "self-sufficient", "subject to no principle of change but [his] own" (*Murphy* 64).

After *Murphy*, the awkward question of money becomes progressively less visible in the Beckettian economy, while at the same time representing the motive force behind many of his characteristic situations. The typical Beckettian character has no money, and professes himself indifferent to it: "I don't work for money," says Molloy (*Molloy* 7). Instead, as I argue at greater length in a later chapter, Beckett's characters subsist, or attempt to subsist, entirely within an economy of the gift: as with Murphy and Celia, the narrator of *First Love* is supported by Lulu's earnings as a prostitute; Molloy lives off his mother, although he denies it: "I took her money, but I didn't come for that" (*Molloy* 23); Malone seems to be sustained by the proceeds of an inheritance; the narrator of *The Expelled* receives an inheritance from a mysterious benefactor and later accepts the services of a generous cabman; and the narrator of *The End* is at the mercy of a charitable institution. At the same time, for all this indifference, it is economic necessity which forces Beckett's protagonists to "go on": the plot of *Murphy* entirely revolves around his ultimately fatal attempts to earn an independent living; Molloy's narrative concerns his attempts to reach his mother; while Malone dies presumably as a result of the death or departure of the woman who, either from charity or economic necessity, caters to his minimal needs of "dish and pot, dish and pot" (*Malone Dies* 7) — itself an miniature combinatorial.

In the Beckettian economy, money operates in a curious way: it rarely functions as a medium of exchange, but more often figures as a capital resource; it is frequently associated with an economy of the gift, the object of a personal and often familial

relation between giver and receiver; and Beckett's narrators often boast of their indifference to it while perpetually unable to throw off the yoke of its necessity.

This attempt to gain distance from physical necessity is nowhere more succinctly encapsulated than in the strange figure of Mr Knott, whose only needs are "one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing" (*Watt* 202). Perversely enough, Mr Knott on the whole tends to polish off his poss (*Watt* 92), perhaps precisely because he doesn't need it, perhaps in order to advertise the excellence of its flavour rather than its carefully calculated nutritional qualities. So too, the combinatorials governing the arrangement of Mr Knott's furnishings (*Watt* 204-07), or the combination of his footwear (*Watt* 200-01), seem specifically calculated to ridicule the humble use-value of such ordinary objects, subjecting them to a gratuitous series of displacements through which Mr Knott once again asserts his utter freedom from the everyday human domain of use, function, and necessity.

Nevertheless, as a witness to his not needing, Mr Knott stipulates that the remains of his poss, when there are any, be given to the famished dog which it is the task of generations of the unhappy Lynch clan to keep alive for that purpose (*Watt* 91-117). The twenty-seven pages of Watt's earnest lucubrations regarding the means by which this "kennel or colony of famished dogs" (*Watt* 100) are kept in a state of readiness for Mr Knott's occasional leavings represent one of the *tours de force* of the novel. The tribulations of the disease-ridden Lynches, and the death by starvation of one of their famished dogs during the period of Watt's service, very prettily underscore the serenity of Mr Knott's not needing with a vivid counterpoint of suffering. But *Watt*, in its adumbration of class divisions in these master-servant relations — at times it almost resembles the "big house" novel of the Irish tradition — is relatively atypical in Beckett's fiction, resembling more closely the pairings of the plays, such as Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*. So too, the fact that its protagonist is more or less contentedly involved in the workaday economy of ordinary mortals is almost unique in Beckett's fiction, where, particularly after the period of the novellas and the trilogy, his characters tend to remain at the fringes, if not completely outside the exchange economy, in a kind of twilight zone of hunger, cold, pain, disorientation, idleness, erudition and grandiloquence. It is a world without a *quid pro quo*, where humanity is represented, no longer as a social animal

whose impoverishment might be a product of economic relations, but as a kind of metropolitan Robinson Crusoe, as a bundle of fundamental human needs confronting a State of Nature that just happens to resemble the town-and-country landscape of Western Europe.

Thus, for all that Beckett's writing is often claimed to challenge the fundamental assumptions of humanism — such as the notion of a unified *cogito*, the notion of the speaking subject as a coherent expression of grammatical relations, or the notion of the subject as the author and originator of its own actions — Beckett's characters often seem to be tethered to a sort of anthropology of minima, which makes of necessity a virtue, which makes of destitution a signifier of essential truth, which makes of hunger, thirst, coldness and isolation a sort of austere aesthetics of impoverishment, what Georges Bataille referred to as "the inevitable beauty of rags" (Bataille 1988, 13).

At first sight, Beckett's characters seem to live among pure use-values, to be excluded from the exchange economy. For one thing, they do no work: their labour is never commodified, so they resist alienation in the marketplace. So too, they never consume beyond minimal levels of subsistence, surviving within an economy of the gift, a series of relations without a *quid pro quo*. Their miserliness is only equalled by their lack of desire; the two fit exactly, in fact, in a scrupulous balancing of the books in which minimal needs receive minimal satisfactions. Thus the narrator of *The End* muses:

> As for my needs, they had dwindled as it were to my dimensions and become, if I may say so, of so exquisite a quality as to exclude all thought of succour. (CSPR 97)

As far as possible, Beckett's location of his characters outside ordinary circuits of human commerce requires their marginalisation from an exchange economy, and thus they seem to exist in a sort of anthropological display case of pure use values, pure need.

For Jean Baudrillard, however, the concept of use-value is inescapably a product of political economy:

> contrary to the anthropological illusion that claims to exhaust the idea of utility in the simple relation of a human need to a useful property of the object, use value is very much a social relation … the functionality of objects, their moral code of utility, is as entirely governed by the logic of equivalence as is their exchange value status. (Baudrillard 1981, 132, 134)

That is, use-value, as a "value", is necessarily an economic term, a product of political economy, since, as we have seen, "it is always by replacement that values are created" (Goux 1990, 9). This notion of an "anthropological illusion" does not mean, of course, that there is no fundamental biological need for food, drink, sleep, and so on. Rather, it should remind us that "need" is always singular, experiential, absolute: only my hunger is a need, whereas your hunger will always be a representation. In other words, while needs exist, they can only be represented in economic terms, as values:

> needs, far from being articulated around the desire or the demand of the subject, find their coherence elsewhere: in a generalised system that is to desire what the system of exchange value is to concrete labour, the source of value. (Baudrillard 1981, 135)

Thus the notion of a "use value" inherent in an object — such as the nutritional value of a piece of food — is the effect of our immersion in political economy. Need is absolute, incalculable, and therefore unrepresentable in political economy. Or rather, need is representable only as a value, by which it loses its sovereign status, to become no more than an occasional irruption of moral urgency into the bland politics of the market economy. Since for us the experience of "going without" a Porsche or a Louis Vuitton handbag does not allow us, by any stretch of the imagination, to intuitively experience "going without" clean drinking water, the notion of "fundamental human needs", while it theoretically must have its grounding in the biology of the individual subject, in practice has to be recognised as an invention of political economy, a product of the social distribution of inequality.

For Deleuze and Guattari, too, need is very much a social relation:

> Lack is created, planned, and organised in and through social production. … The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organising wants and needs amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 28)

Therefore, to seek the essence of the human in terms of fundamental biological needs is wilfully to turn one's back on the struggles of civil society; to commune privately with the pain of one's needs is precisely to aestheticise need by transforming it into a mystical experience; to attempt to escape the nightmare of economic relations by insisting on the fundamental human experience of need represents a refusal to acknowledge the social and political nature of hunger.

This all happens to some extent in Beckett's work. Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment manipulates the signifiers of need, while depriving its representation of the socio-economic context that would make it intelligible as something other than a resolutely mystical *lacrimae rerum*. Beckett's middle-class *nostalgie de la boue* represents a kind of "need for need" — impoverishment as the precondition of an aesthetic or spiritual vision — which parodies the actual historical conditions that tether whole populations to the exchange economy, the alienation of labour, and the goegraphical distribution of poverty. It is Beckett's first hero, Murphy, who most explicitly tries to escape the exchange economy, and whose ignominious compromise with the circuits of commodification and exchange finally leads to his demise. Subsequent Beckettian heroes subsist entirely outside it, in a pure economy of the gift. Within this schema, the combinatorial serves as a means to submit use-values to a sort of aesthetic evaporation, subjecting the domain of necessity to a kind of abstract sublimation, a *fort/da* game with the stuff of life.

The freedom of indifference

I want to conclude, then, with perhaps the most famous of Beckett's Indifference-Engines. The two examples I have discussed already, of Murphy's biscuits and Mr Knott's poss, involve a parody of the act of nutrition, since characters in Beckett never seem to be actually hungry, but only interested in playing with their food. For Molloy, the use-value of nutrition has been entirely transcended: he seems to exist in a realm of complete bodily autonomy. Need is experienced as an entirely aesthetic

prompting of the higher faculties, a desire to perfect his system of circulating his sixteen sucking stones through the four pockets of his greatcoat in such a way that he can be sure of sucking each stone in turn and no stone more often than any other:

> So it was something more than a principle I abandoned, when I abandoned the equal distribution, it was a bodily need. But to suck the stones in the way I have described, not haphazard, but with method, was also I think a bodily need. Here then were two incompatible bodily needs, at loggerheads. Such things happen. (*Molloy* 99-100)

Molloy's combinatorial is a spatial grid translated into a complex linear sequence of sucks and transfers. It is a kind of collection, but an exceedingly "pure" collection. For one thing, the objects have no commodity status, no use or exchange value from which they are deflected. For another, they are all virtually identical, so that their differences are reduced to their most minimal ontological form, the fact of simply being different existents (Deleuze 1994a, 28-42). Molloy's combinatorial is the purest of Indifference-Engines. It articulates a combinatorial of objects that, although derived from nature, are pressed into the service of a self-referential aesthetic operation. It creates an entirely arbitrary system of differences between a set of identical objects. And in its defiant parody of nutrition, it states its autonomy from the realm of necessity, both from the necessity of biological nature and the necessity of economic exchange. It is a miniature paradigm of modernist aesthetics, and what Rosalind Krauss says of the importance of the grid in modernist visual arts holds as eminently true for the operation of Beckett's combinatorial:

> In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organization, it is the result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree. Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves; the relationships in the aesthetic field are shown by the grid to be in a world apart and, with respect to natural objects, to be both prior and final. The grid declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic. (Krauss 1993, 9-10)

Significantly, then, the product of Molloy's scrupulous construction of his combinatorial is neither satisfaction, nor pleasure, nor relief from a need, but a kind of

wandering and forgetful lack of interest: "the indifference of freedom and the freedom of indifference":

> 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. And if I had collected sixteen, it was not in order … to suck them turn about, but simply to have a little store, so as never to be without. But deep down I didn't give a fiddler's curse about being without, I wouldn't be any the worse off, or hardly any. And 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. (*Molloy* 100)

The Collection and the Oeuvre

Two modes of collecting

In his nostalgic meditation on the pleasures of book collecting, "Unpacking My Library", Walter Benjamin remarks that many of his most memorable purchases have been made while travelling, since "property and possession belong to the tactical sphere. Collectors are people with a tactical instinct" (Benjamin 1992b, 64). At the same time, however, his books, his collections, constitute a dwelling in which he feels at home, because "for a collector ... ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects" (Benjamin 1992b, 69).

There is something very familiar about this dialectic of travelling and domesticity, perhaps because it makes us think of the nesting behaviour of birds. For Gaston Bachelard, the nest is the most intimate of physical structures, because it takes its form from the process of inhabitation, it conforms itself uniquely to its inhabitant like a hat to a head, or a pair of boots to a pair of feet (Bachelard 1992, 90-104). Bachelard quotes Jules Michelet, whose pages on "bird architecture" might equally well refer to the activities of Benjamin's collector:

> On the inside, the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side, that it succeeds in forming this circle. ... The house is a bird's very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say, its suffering. (Michelet 1893-99, 208; cited in Bachelard 1992, 101)

Collecting is a domestication of the big world, the drawing of a magic circle around the subject to ward off the forces of chaos, so that, as Benjamin remarks, "there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of order and disorder" (Benjamin 1992b, 62).

Benjamin's collector is very much a bourgeois bibliophile, a "disreputable" (Benjamin 1992b, 69) man of leisure, who seeks, in the recovery of fragments of the past, to "renew the old world" (Benjamin 1992b, 63). Benjamin's collector finds his pleasure in a kind of historical rescue mission, in a relationship to objects which "does not emphasise their functional, utilitarian value — that is, their usefulness — but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate" (Benjamin 1992b, 62). Benjamin sharply distinguishes his collector from the purchaser of deluxe editions — "a collector of older books is closer to the wellsprings of collecting than the acquirer of luxury editions" (Benjamin 1992b, 63) — and Arendt in her introduction further distinguishes him from the avaricious collector who collects with an eye to market value, or the snobbish collector who collects with an eye to social status (Arendt 1992, 48). Benjamin's collector anxiously bids in the auction room, pores lovingly through booksellers' catalogues, patiently combs through the shelves of second-hand bookshops. In these locations the book has, of course, transcended its commodity status, which for Benjamin is already too ostentatiously apparent in the deluxe edition, and has become instead a kind of heirloom, an object of *virtù*. For Benjamin, the collector's attitude "is, in the highest sense, the attitude of an heir" (Benjamin 1992b, 68). The collection is an emblem of privilege, the withdrawal of treasures from the public domain into the private space of the collector's dwelling.

In contrast to this passionate seeker of rare or unique fragments of the historical past, we might oppose a very different, more familiar kind of collector: the collector of serial commodities. Serial commodities are manufactured solely for the purpose of inspiring collectors to collect them: such structures of consumption are often associated with "low" culture and the consumers portrayed as the gullible dupes of clever marketing strategies. Characteristic examples of such serial commodities might include the Pokémon cards sold with snack foods, or the basketball cards sold with chewing-gum, or, to borrow John Frow's example, the plastic toys sold with Kinder Surprise eggs (Frow 1996, 151-55). Such serial commodities often come in

this bipartite form: a cheap, disposable item which constitutes a fixed element (the chips, the gum, the chocolate egg) and a variable element (the "collector's card", the toy) which, in its sequence of variations, gives rise to systematic collection. In this way, the supposed "base" commodity — the "use value" of the chips or the gum or the chocolate — becomes subordinate to the supplementary "collectible" commodity, itself eerily empty of use-value or function, which thereafter takes on a demonic life of its own, regulated by the infinitely expandable logic of the collection. In the case of the Kinder Surprise, the plastic toys are widely collected, swapped, bought and sold, while "value is created within an internationally organised system structured around relative rarity" (Frow 1996, 155). Particularly prized figures attract high prices at auctions, while, as the ultimate confirmation of value, forgeries appear on the market.

Frow provocatively suggests, however, that "these figures are thus in their demonic lack of function and their singularity analogous to aesthetic objects, and are collected in a similar but not identical way" (Frow 1996, 155). That is, these mass-produced serial commodities can come to take on the characteristics of Benjamin's objects of *virtù*, blurring the opposition between the ordinary serial commodity and its supposed antithesis in the heirloom, the relic, the work of art.

In this chapter I wish to consider Beckett's oeuvre in terms of these two modes of collecting. On the one hand, collecting the works of a favourite author is one of the most characteristic practices of what Simon During calls "literary subjectivity" (During 1996), and such a collection becomes a kind of "technology of the self" analogous to the "bird architecture" described by Michelet. On the other hand, book collecting, and collecting more generally, is also a mode of commodity consumption. The collection becomes a means of personalising or singularising the impersonal mass-produced commodity. It performs a kind of aestheticisation, withdrawing the commodity from the world of economic exchange into the autonomous, ahistorical, purely formal world of the collection.

The role of the author is crucial. Authorship continues to be the dominant factor in the marketing of books, and in determining readers' choices (see Bennett et al. 1999, 145-69; 212-15). The oeuvre therefore constitutes the link between the collection as a

practice of literary subjectivity and the collection as an aestheticisation of commodities. It is important to grasp the ways in which the author-function operates entirely outside the realm of the text, both as a brand-identification crucial to the marketing of books, and as the organising principle of a reader's collection.

For many years I was an assiduous collector of Beckett's works, and in this chapter I want to write about these books not as a reader, but as a collector[31]. Where readers give free rein to their imagination, desiring some form of intimate relation with an author and an author's thoughts, collectors indulge their "tactical instinct", seeing ownership as "the most intimate relation that one can have to objects". Here, then, I wish to consider Beckett's oeuvre, not in terms of its textuality — its themes or its continuities or its silences or its ruptures — but in terms of its materiality — its brute physical existence as a collection of books.

The aesthetic object and the commodity form

In his essay on "The Signature", John Frow presents a set of three interlocking arguments concerning the relation between the aesthetic object and the commodity form, arguing that the terms which structure this opposition are unstable, and that all kinds of objects can pass, in the manner of Kinder Surprise toys, backwards and forwards between the humble status of the mass-produced commodity and the elevated status of the singular aesthetic object. Frow's three arguments turn on three familiar antinomies of traditional aesthetics: works of art are singular, unique and unrepeatable, while commodities are multiple, identical, and mass-produced; works of art belong to an "authentic" economy of the gift, while commodities belong to the

[31] There is, as I discuss later in this chapter, a complex interplay between the status of *work*, *text* and *book*, where the work is considered as the ideational entity conceived by its creator, where the book is considered as the purely physical object of commodity culture, while the text operates somewhere in between, on the one hand, as the often corrupted linguistic embodiment of the work, and on the other, as the putative final object of readerly desire.

"alienated" economy of calculation and exchange; commodities are impersonal and anonymous, while works of art are *signed*, an operation by which the signature, as the trace of the author's presence, unifies the two former virtues of singularity and authenticity in a graphic metonym of the author as a singular and authentic person.

Here I will consider Frow's three arguments in turn, before moving on to consider the problematic status of literary authorship within the cultural antinomies of aesthetic value and economic exchange.

SERIALITY AND SINGULARITY

Frow's first argument is that "seriality and singularity are not opposed terms: the industrial production of commodities precludes neither their conversion into scarcity value nor their conversion into pure use values" (Frow 1996, 162). Significantly, Frow cites as illustration (Frow 1996, 162) an anecdote of book collecting told by Susan Stewart: a wealthy English collector discovers that there exists in Paris a second copy of a prized book in his collection which he had long believed was unique. He travels across the channel and at length succeeds in purchasing the book from its owner, who is not inclined to sell it, for the princely sum of twenty-five thousand francs, only to cast it immediately into the fire. He explains to the stunned Frenchman: "I, too, possess a copy of that book. I deemed it a unique" (Walsh 1892, 95-6; cited in Stewart 1993, 160).

Frow takes this as a metaphor for the way objects are transformed from their serial commodity state by "acts of singularisation" (a phrase he takes from Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff), as part of the "perennial and universal tug-of-war between the tendency of all economies to expand the jurisdiction of commoditisation and of all cultures to restrict it" (Appadurai 1986, 17).

Thus Kopytoff writes:

> There is clearly a yearning for singularisation in complex societies. Much of it is satisfied individually, by private singularisation, often on principles as mundane as the one that governs the fate of heirlooms and old slippers alike — the longevity of

> the relation assimilates them in some sense to the person and makes parting from them unthinkable. (Kopytoff 1986, 80)

The activity of the book collector, and particularly the collector of an oeuvre, reproduces these two means of singularisation, longevity and scarcity: on the one hand, the collection gains significance over time in much the same way as do old slippers or Michelet's nests, by a process of inhabiting; and on the other hand, as the collection grows, the remaining items it requires become increasingly harder to find, and thus the tactical forays that are the true activity of the collector increase in scope and intensity.

GIFT AND COMMODITY

Next, Frow turns to the familiar post-Romantic opposition between the organic, free, disinterested, and self-fulfilling work of art, and the mechanical, alienated, interested and utilitarian mass-produced commodity of industrial culture. This opposition is often recast as "an opposition of an aesthetic of the gift to an aesthetic of the commodity — where the concept of 'gift' is equated with the authenticity and generosity that are thought to constitute the central core of the person" (Frow 1996, 167; see also "Gift and Commodity" in Frow 1997, 102-217). But, as Frow goes on to argue, "this opposition quickly breaks down as its two poles come to implicate each other" (Frow 1996, 167). Frow's argument is a complex one, and here I can only present in schematic form a series of reflections on the relation between the gift and the commodity, and the conception of the person that underpins them both.

Frow begins with Lewis Hyde, who attempts to construct a categorical opposition between the work of art and the commodity, arguing:

> … a work of art is a gift, not a commodity. Or, to state the modern case with more precision, … works of art exist simultaneously in two "economies", a market economy and a gift economy. Only one of these is essential, however: a work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift there is no art. (Hyde 1983, 168; cited in Frow 1996, 167-8)

For Hyde, the work of art as an act of gift giving transcends the commodity economy.

However, the problems of conceptualising the gift as an act of exchange "with no assurance of anything in return" (Hyde 1983, 9) are compellingly illustrated in Georges Bataille's attempt to theorise "non-productive expenditure" — *dépense* — as a figure of anti-economic and anti-utilitarian excess (Bataille 1985, 117). In "The Notion of Expenditure", Bataille characterises *dépense* as "luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (ie., deflected from genital finality)" (Bataille 1985, 118). Taking his cue from Marcel Mauss's study of the *potlatch*, Bataille attempts to construct a theory of loss and expenditure that would resist the principle of a restricted economy of reciprocal exchange as the privileged model for social interactions. Bataille wants to call upon a force of absolute negativity that would not automatically be recuperable as a positivity within the terms of a Hegelian dialectic. However, as a number of critics have pointed out (see, for example, Smith 1988, 134-44; Connor 1992c, 71-80), the conspicuous destruction and loss of *potlatch* is offset by a corresponding gain in social status, and indeed in all of Bataille's other examples the "losses" which he advocates are offset by various kinds of "non-productive" gain, whether as glory, honour, social prestige or bodily pleasure. Indeed, Bataille's entire project is undermined by one intractable contradiction, that the very effort to *advocate* radical negativity inevitably reconstructs negativity itself as a form of positive value.

For Frow, the significant point is that it is impossible theoretically to separate the gift from the economy of reciprocity and exchange. And if this is the case, the gift is fundamentally no more "authentic" than the commodity. Thus Frow observes:

> in anthropological theory, to which both Hyde and Bataille are indebted, the economy of the gift is directly linked to the maintenance of social ties of obligation; gifts function as extensions of persons and carry with them something of the *virtù* of the person. But the commodity form too is linked with the category of the person. (Frow 1996, 171)

Frow's argument is that, under the conditions of what Marilyn Strathern calls "Western proprietism" (Strathern 1988, 159; cited in Frow 1996, 177), the category of the person grounds both gift economies and exchange economies, since liberal economics is founded on the primordial property right of self-possession of one's own body. That is, individuals are supposedly free as independent economic agents to sell both their possessions and the labour of their bodies in the marketplace, and it

is from this form of "ownership of the self" that all other property rights are seen to derive. The only limit to this freedom, the only inalienable property right, is the ownership of one's body, since to sell oneself outright is to sell oneself into slavery, thereby infringing the social contract of liberal economics. The notion of "the person" comes into being as part of the conceptual machinery of commodity exchange. As Frow concludes, "'the person' is at once the opposite of the commodity form and its condition of existence" (Frow 1996, 177). In the essay "Gift and Commodity" (Frow 1997, 102-217), Frow demonstrates at length that it is impossible to distinguish conclusively between the so-called gift economy and commodity exchange, nor is it possible completely to isolate the "person" as an inalienable possession. The gift is no more authentic than the product, the "person" no more primeval or fundamental than the "economic agent".

The discourse on Beckett's work is unusually dependent on notions of the gift, most notably in the universal critical insistence on Beckett's personal "generosity", a generosity manifested by frequent gifts of money and other forms of support to friends in need and to young or impoverished artists and writers. Beckett's generosity with money stands out vividly against his frugality with words: the increasingly begrudging minimalism of his texts, his persistent refusal to discuss his works, and his disconcerting habit of remaining silent for hours at a time when he finally gave in to requests to meet him. That Beckett's negativity is so frequently recuperated as a kind of positivity is not so much a function of the "generalised positivity" which characterises social and cultural exchange (see Smith 1988, 146), but rather it is evidence of the instability of the opposition between aesthetic and economic values, between gift and market economies.

To summarise, the gift economy is traditionally thought to depend on an intrinsic, personal and singular relation between the object and its possessor, in the nature of an heirloom or an inheritance, a prize or an award, whereas, in the commodity economy, both persons and things are thought of as essentially empty, mere structural place-holders (much like Saussure's signifiers), among which values (and meanings) circulate without there ever being a singular and necessary relation between them. However, as Frow's analysis of arguments against commodification demonstrates, the opposition between the exchangeable and alienable nature of the commodity and the

unique and inalienable nature of the person soon breaks down, since the concept of the person is already so deeply implicated in structures of possession and exchange that "it becomes problematic to argue against the commodity form by appeal to an apparently given and universal category of the person" (Frow 1996, 172).

The discourse of the aesthetic is thus predicated on an attempt to characterise itself in terms of a gift, rather than a market economy. As we shall see in the next chapter, Beckett's work is frequently structured around various strategies whereby the market economy and the force of commoditisation is held at bay, while the economy of the gift is repeatedly presented as a guarantee of the authenticity of personal relations.

THE SIGNATURE, THE AUTHOR, THE CATEGORY OF THE PERSON

Frow's third argument is "that the form of the person is the juridical basis of all property rights in information, including aesthetic information" (Frow 1996, 177). While this may seem to be self evident, the consequences of this fact are far ranging and not immediately apparent.

Frow first discusses the problematic of the signature, tracing a sequence of failed attempts in twentieth-century art, from Marcel Duchamp to Sherry Levine, to challenge the centrality of the signature as the guarantee of singularity, authenticity, and aesthetic value. As the failure of these challenges indicates, "the signature has become intrinsic both to aesthetic and to market value" (Frow 1996, 181).

In the visual arts the signature is, of course, an indexical sign, a guarantee of the artist's physical presence, and thus confirms in a literal sense the twin aesthetic virtues of singularity and personal relation. In literary terms, the strict equivalent of the signature would be the manuscript, the unique and authentic object that bears the direct imprint of the author's hand. However, the distinctive thing about literary production is precisely that texts do not circulate in manuscript, that the book is a machine-made, mass-produced commodity — arguably the archetype of all mass-produced commodities — and therefore its typical mode of production and circulation

is precisely the opposite of that which typically governs the work of art. In aesthetic terms, a book is no more singular, personal and authentic than a can of soup.

Of course, there is an aspect of the book market where the logic of the signature comes into effect, and as Frow points out, "the workings of the signature can be seen in a particularly clear form in the case of limited-edition prints, which fuse a signature-effect with a restricted serial production to produce a work that is neither quite authentic nor quite inauthentic" (Frow 1996, 188). It is well known that Beckett participated readily in the production of such limited and deluxe signed editions of his work, as well as being exceedingly generous in his donations of manuscripts to private collectors and university libraries. Thus the discourse on Beckett, like any authorial discourse, is dominated by this "logic of the signature", which confers a kind of fetishistic value on any object which bears the trace of the author's hand. If Beckettian discourse is dominated by this desire for evidence of the author's presence as a guarantee of the object's authenticity, the very scope and intensity of this discourse has inevitably led to the reproduction and publication of Beckett's manuscripts, letters, and theatrical notebooks, in a reverse process which paradoxically confirms the logic of the signature, and the desire for singularisation at the heart of commodity consumption. Steven Connor neatly draws out the ironies of this process:

> The enormous amount of manuscript material relating to Beckett which has been deposited in libraries all over the world makes available to anyone able to scrape together a research grant that sense of physical closeness to the author that turning over the pages of a manuscript can give. It might also have been anticipated that this private manuscript material would begin to enter the public domain, as it has with the publication of facsimiles of the production notebooks, and the frequent reproduction of manuscript facsimiles in works on Beckett. This is evidence of the recurrent contradiction between identity and repetition which is to be found in Beckettian discourse; the discourse is magnetized around the image of the writer, and seeks to approach ever more closely to this authorial "presence" at its core, but the very intensity of this demand calls into being many different kinds of substitution for authorial presence, all of which tend to draw the discourse away from its hidden centre. If manuscripts take us into the presence of the artist, allowing us to perceive the creative mind at the very moment of its creation, then the multiplication of knowledge about manuscripts seems to work against this, for by making them

> publicly manifest and available, it desecrates the auratic privacy of the process of creation. (Connor 1988, 196)

Within the terms of book collecting as a form of consumption of serial commodities, the auratic quality of the signed authorial manuscript is of as little relevance as the deluxe edition is of interest to Benjamin's disreputable bourgeois antiquarian. The collector of serial commodities is interested in books, not authors, commodities rather than historical treasures. This is not to suggest that the logic of the signature does not have its part to play in even the most "low-brow" forms of book consumption. If it is hard to imagine Samuel Beckett sitting at a card-table in the shopping centre signing copies of *Worstward Ho*, it should be remembered that this a distinction of degree, not of kind.

In literary production, then, the operation of the signature clearly governs both the auratic form of the manuscript, and the hybrid form of the limited edition. But what is of interest here is how the logic of the signature governs "ordinary" literary publication — the book as a serial machine-produced commodity. For if, as I mentioned earlier, the book is no more singular, personal and authentic than a can of soup, there is nevertheless an "author-function" at work which at some point turns an ordinary market commodity into an aesthetic object, a work of art.

What we are dealing with, then, is a different logic of the signature, the signature not as an index of presence or guarantee of authenticity as in the manuscript, nor as an object of rarity or limitation, as in the signed edition, but the signature as an *authorisation*. That is, how does the signature, which is, like the author's own voice, "nowhere present in the text" (see Wright 1983, 18), come to govern the reproduction of a theoretically infinite number of copies of a text?

An investigation into the history of copyright quickly reveals that literary production is governed by quite a different logic to the logic of the signature. It seems self-evident to us now that, as Frow suggests, "as a metonym for the self-possessed, self-possessing person, [the signature] is the foundation for all intellectual property rights" (Frow 1996, 181). But, as his brief overview of copyright history emphasises, since its origins in the early eighteenth century, copyright law has tended to vest the right of reproduction in the copyright *holder* (the investor of capital) rather than directly in the

author (the investor of labour) (Frow 1996, 184). So too, Frow emphasises the increasing complexity and instability in contemporary intellectual property law of supposedly commonsense notions such as "author", "work", "original", "copy", and so forth (Frow 1996, 183-6). As Frow's account suggests, the rights of the author expressed in the authentication process of the signature are actually only a minor aspect of copyright law[32].

However, while commonsense "signatory" authorship is relatively marginal in copyright law, the category of the person is fundamental to the notion of property rights in "aesthetic information":

> Peter Jaszi speaks of two overlapping modes of legally controlling the proliferation of meaning. One of them, copyright, is commercial, giving the author the right to control copying of the work for a limited period of time. The other, that of moral rights, is noncommercial, protecting the author's control of the circumstances of release of her work to the public, the right to withdraw the work from circulation, the right to claim attribution ("paternity right"), and the right to object to distortion or mutilation of the work ("integrity right"). The doctrine of moral rights is based in "the idea that the work of art is an extension of the artist's personality, an expression of his innermost being. To mistreat the work of art is to mistreat the artist, to invade his area of privacy, to impair his personality" [Merryman and Elsen 1987, 145, cited in Jaszi 1991, 497]. Both copyright and moral rights, however, protect the source of market value: the artist's unique personality, which establishes the singularity of the work of art vis-à-vis any series it might generate. (Frow 1996, 181)

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[32] An important distinction needs to be made here between the formulation of English *copyright* law, and the French *droit d'auteur*. Where English law is based on a *right to copy*, which may be alienated outright by the sale of a manuscript to a publisher, French law is based on a *droit moral*, a *moral right*, which views the text as intrinsically linked to the personality of the author, and which extends to issues such as bowdlerisation. The difference between the fundamental concepts which found copyright in English and French law, and the consequent disparity in the importance of the author as a basis for those rights, is no doubt another element which adds to the confusions and misinterpretations which have characterised the Anglo-American reception of Barthes's and Foucault's critiques of the author-function. For a discussion of this issue from a French perspective, see Gilbert Larochelle (1998): "De Kant à Foucault: que reste-t-il du droit de l'auteur?" Thus it is important to remember that in French law the concept of a commercial right is itself based on a moral right, the idea that "to mistreat the work of art is to mistreat the artist", and thus these two aspects of authorial personality overlap far more closely in the French context.

The important point to draw from this is that the notion of the work of art as an "extension of the artist's personality" is not simply a residue of literary criticism's problematic origins in Romantic aesthetic theory, but is actually a deeply embedded principle in the moral, legal, and economic discourses governing the circulation of culture in contemporary society. Thus it is worth considering at greater length the construction of the work of art as "extension of the artist's personality" in the emergence of copyright law and the modern author-function.

Authorship and commodity culture

In its origins the very notion of intellectual property required for its formulation a specific conception of the person as a unique individual endowed with a unique personal and intellectual character and capacities. In her essay on "Genius and the Copyright" (Woodmansee 1994, 35-55) Martha Woodmansee provides a useful history of the relation between copyright and authorship. Throughout the eighteenth century, authors generally did not receive money for their work: writing was regarded as the nobly unremunerated pursuit of the cultivated man of leisure. So too, printers did not retain copyright over the works they published. With popular new works, the marketplace would quickly be flooded with pirated editions. As Woodmansee points out, "the weight of opinion was for a long time with the book pirates" (Woodmansee 1994, 49), because "writing was considered a mere vehicle of received ideas that were already in the public domain, and as such a vehicle, it too, by extension or analogy, was considered part of the public domain" (Woodmansee 1994, 42).

In fact, it was only in the course of publishers' attempts to combat the unauthorised reprinting of popular works that the notion of intellectual property was first defined. The problem was to determine how writing, once it had entered the public domain, could still be protected as private property, given that no one could assert private ownership over language as such. One of the most influential solutions, which

became the basis of the modern notion of intellectual property, was provided by Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Woodmansee explains:

> Fichte [distinguishes] three distinct shares of property in the book. When the book is sold, ownership of the *physical* object passes to the buyer to do with as he pleases. The *material* aspect, the content of the book, the thoughts it presents also pass to the buyer. To the extent that he is able, through intellectual effort, to appropriate them, these ideas cease to be the exclusive property of the author, becoming instead the common property of both author and reader. The *form* in which these ideas are presented, however, remains the property of the author eternally. (Woodmansee 1994, 51)

Woodmansee goes on to quote Fichte, in a passage crucial for the development of the concept of intellectual property:

> each individual has his own thought processes, his own way of forming concepts and connecting them. … All that we think we must think according to the analogy of our habits of thought; and solely through reworking new thoughts after the analogy of our habitual thought processes do we make them our own. Without this they remain something foreign in our minds which connects with nothing and affects nothing. … Now, since pure ideas without sensible images cannot be thought, even less are they capable of presentation to others. Hence, each writer must give his thoughts a certain form, and he can give them no other form than his own because he has no other. But neither can he be willing to hand over this *form* in making his thoughts public, for no one can *appropriate* his thoughts without thereby *altering their form*. This latter thus remains forever his exclusive property. (Fichte 1962, 227-28; cited and translated by Woodmansee 1994, 51-2)

I quote this passage in detail because it is important to recognise that the Romantic conception of writing as the unique expression of an individual sensibility dates from this period, and is a product, not so much of what Foucault imagined as a "privileged moment of individualisation in the history of ideas" (Foucault 1977c, 115), but of a corporate economic imperative, on the part of the publishing industry, of establishing a property right over something formerly regarded as part of the public domain (much like the conceptual shift which accompanied the annexation of common lands in earlier centuries). The notion of the author's personality being inexorably imprinted in his or her writings was therefore not developed, after the fact, as a hermeneutic principle serving to restrict the dangerous proliferations of textuality, but was presented *de jure* as a philosophical and legal argument for the purpose of asserting a property right over language.

In this historical shift, Fichte's formulation was crucial in establishing the philosophical grounds for a concept of authorship. Moreover, as Woodmansee shows, the Romantic conception of "genius" follows from and is entirely dependent upon this concept, rejecting both the paradigm of craftsmanship (genius as the unoriginal accomplishment of an exceptional level of skill or workmanship) and the paradigm of external inspiration (genius as the visitation of an outside force such as a Muse or God). Thus the Romantic location of creative genius in the unique and particular personality of the artist can be traced back to an economic necessity: the publishing trade's need for a juridico-legal formulation of the notion of intellectual property in the wake of the massive expansion in the book trade in the late eighteenth century (Woodmansee 1994, 36-7).

Another consequence of the commercialization and professionalisation of writing in the Romantic era was also the rise of a doctrine of aesthetic value that made a sharp distinction between the "disinterested" work of art and writing produced for commercial gain. As John Guillory's investigation of its origins shows, the notion of aesthetic value only comes into being in direct opposition to the commodification of culture, and may be seen as an ideological defence of aristocratic privilege, represented by the leisured man of letters, against the rise of the professional cultural producer (Guillory 1993, 303-17). Nigel Cross provides a grim account of the economic realities facing the professional writer in England in the nineteenth century: up to the end of the century copyrights were usually sold outright to publishers, with authors receiving no benefit for reprints, and most "common writers" made pitifully small incomes (Cross 1985, 233). In a direct inversion of the Romantic cliché, the vast majority of writers starving in garrets were not sacrificing themselves to the pure and lofty principles of their art, but were trying to scrape together a living writing potboilers. By the same token, as Cross concludes, "the vast bulk of what we call English Literature was written by people whose circumstances were both comfortable and conducive" (Cross 1985, 240).

Thus there is a complex group of axiological discourses governing the rise of literature as a cultural form, a set of conflicting discourses of value which continues, of course, to structure the realm of cultural production and consumption, and which is

reproduced in many of its main features in contemporary debates over culture and cultural value. Literature is a singularly important case in point for a number of reasons.

Firstly, as John Frow remarks, "the book is perhaps the earliest and in many ways still the paramount example of seriality" (Frow 1996, 163). As the first mass-produced commodities, books and the changing conditions of their production and distribution have been an important index of developments in the commodification of culture.

Secondly, and equally importantly, the concept of copyright developed in relation to literary production forms the basis of all other forms of intellectual property. Thus, the theoretical structure of literary authorship conditions many of the assumptions that govern the production and consumption of other cultural forms.

Thirdly, Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) argue that contemporary cultural experience is structured by an ongoing tension between commoditisation and singularisation, between the exchange-values of the marketplace, and the various use-values of cultural ownership and belonging. Literature, through its traditional placement as an official form of "common culture" in governmental educational institutions, remains a highly charged cultural form, at the intersection of at least three major socio-political forces: free-market capitalism and the publishing industry; the state and its cultural hegemony, incorporating especially notions of national cultural identity; and a traditionally left-leaning "knowledge class" equally suspicious of the free market on the one hand and of government institutions on the other. Literature, and the arts and humanities more widely, have traditionally presented themselves as countering the forces of commoditisation with their own alternative sets of values. The debates in humanities disciplines surrounding literature and literary value over the last decade can be seen as embodying in a particularly symptomatic form the structural tensions and changes in the broader notion of "culture" and "cultural value".

The relations between commodity culture and the institution of authorship are therefore extremely complex and exist on a number of levels. For the purposes of the

present discussion, the nature of this relationship is summarised in the four main principles that follow.

1. Modern authorship is first and foremost a form of property right

The modern concept of the author is a product of a legal struggle between *publishers*, not authors, over the concept of intellectual property rights. As Mark Rose summarises: "putting it baldly and exaggerating for the sake of clarity, it might be said that the London booksellers invented the modern proprietary author, constructing him as a weapon in their struggle with the booksellers of the provinces" (Rose 1988, 56). As Nigel Cross shows, as late as 1892 publishers such as William Heinemann could still regard it as an outrage that authors should attempt to claim royalties on their works (Cross 1985, 212). Thus, the notion of the modern author coming into being as a kind of bourgeois hero, striking a blow for the rights of the producer in a corrupt and unregulated marketplace, is as mythical as the notion of the author as the lawless and transgressive quarry of a vigilant and punitive regime of ideological repression.

2. The institution of authorship is fundamentally tied to the notion of personality

While the author is a juridico-legal concept originally defined in the interests of publishers, the notion of intellectual property that it underpins depends on a Lockean discourse of possessive individualism, and the notion that writing is the expression of a unique human personality. Foucault remarks:

> it would be worth examining how the author became individualised in a culture like ours, what status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began, in what kind of system of valorisation the author was involved, at what point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes, and how this fundamental category of "the-man-and-his-work criticism" began. (Foucault 1980b, 141)

The history of copyright and the concept of intellectual property provides a tentative answer to these searching questions. Once the literary work is defined, not as a physical book, but as an immaterial "text" over which a property right can be established, then the modern concept of the author becomes an equally immaterial entity, a kind of hermeneutic fiction serving to tie that property right to individual economic agents. Although Foucault would no doubt reject such a reductively

economic model of authorship, Mark Rose's study provides a suggestive series of conclusions regarding the rise of the author as a critical entity:

> No longer simply a mirror held up to nature, a work was also the objectification of a writer's self, and the commodity that changed hands when a bookseller purchased a manuscript or when a reader purchased a book was as much personality as ink and paper. The emergence of this new commodity can be connected with the increasing tendency to read authors' works in the context of their biographies — Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* is the most prominent example — and with the rise of the novel, the literary form explicitly devoted to the display of character. *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy* — the very titles of the eighteenth-century novels suggested that what was changing hands in the purchase of reading matter was the record of a personality. (Rose 1993, 121)

The commodification of personality inherent in the construction of the modern author thus finds its full expression in recent attempts by celebrities to claim "personality" itself as a form of intellectual property (Frow 1997, 179-87).

3. The concept of intrinsic aesthetic value comes into being at the same time as the notion of exchange value, and is in fact a product of the commodification of culture

The concept of aesthetic value is not merely incidentally opposed to the concept of exchange value, "artistic integrity" does not just happen to be incompatible with commercial success, but the dialectical tension between culture and commodification arises from a deep structural reciprocity. The very concept of "value" has its origins in the eighteenth-century discourse of political economy, and the notion of intrinsic value is itself a product of the increasingly problematic theoretical struggle to distinguish the work of art from the commodity. As John Guillory argues, it is significant that in the discourse of political economy, in the work of Adam Smith, for example, there is no distinction made between the work of art and the commodity: the phrase "work of art" referred to "any made thing" (Guillory 1993, 307), while the ordinary commodity was acknowledged to possess aesthetic qualities. It is only later, in the wake of a growing commodification of culture, that this discourse splits into the competing discourses of aesthetics and political economy (Guillory 1993, 315-16). Both discourses, however, are founded in contradistinction to the concept of "use value": the aesthetic object, as in the collection, is not consumed, but in its display as part of a formal system is preserved as an aesthetic value, while the commodity

similarly is not consumed, but is sold for money, converted into exchange value. As Guillory summarises:

> a closer examination of the historical record will reveal that ... *both* aesthetics and economics were founded in contradistinction to the concept of "use value." ... If these two discourses diverge on the question of the relation between their two exemplary objects — the work of art and the commodity, or between "aesthetic value" and a supposedly antithetical "exchange value" — that divergence ... postdates a suspiciously convergent origin. (Guillory 1993, 302)

Aesthetic value is thus not the opposite of exchange value, but to extend Guillory's metaphor, is its long-lost mutant twin (Guillory 1993, 303).

4. The notion of authorial personality is a product of the commodification of culture, and may be seen as an aspect of the commodity form

The modern author-function, in the sense in which Foucault examines it, thus has its origins as a kind of juridico-legal construction invented for the purpose of tying an immaterial property right to an economic agent, the copyright holder. The notion of authorial personality and originality is developed in order to establish and protect the notion of intellectual property, and thus can be seen as an intrinsic component of the commodity form. If modern literary discourse is obsessed with the question of the author, it is because notions of personality and originality are inseparable from the conditions of publication of written works. This is more than a humanistic prejudice governing the hermeneutics of reading: in fact the concept of the author which governs literary interpretation is itself an immaterial, largely "textual" phenomenon, a combined product of legal discourse, marketing strategy, intellectual biography and literary criticism. The author, and the author's "authenticity", is simply a supplementary set of signs, produced and consumed alongside the cultural commodity itself. Thus Claude Gandelman argues:

> the "Name", when one abstracts it from the signature which indicates it and "contains" it, loses its "index" character and becomes a "trade mark". Indeed, like the trade mark, the name is of a symbolic order. Thus the name "Degas" abstracted from its index the signature is something like "Ford" or "Cadillac". It does not mean that the artist, Mr Degas, was there any more than the name Ford means that Mr Ford has taken part in the fabricating of the car which bears his name. What the signature-freed name Degas means is that what we have here is a Degas in a symbolic system opposing Degas to Monet or Bouguereau (just as a Ford is meaningful within a

> context or system which opposes Ford to Dodge or Cadillac). (Gandelman 1985, 76; cited in Frow 1996, 188-89)

Thus the "author-function" can best be understood as a classificatory sign, both circulating within and giving structure to the symbolic system that constitutes contemporary culture. As John Frow observes:

> the massive work of classification and certification effected by the institution of authorship … remains the single most important channel for the creation of textual desire and the minimisation of market uncertainty. (Frow 1997, 190)

The "author-function" serves as a limit case: it is the pre-eminent intermediary between serial production and singularity, and the name on the cover performs a magical transmutation whereby the machine-produced commodity becomes human again. Of course, as Frow's essay demonstrates, the author-function is merely the prototype of the functioning of the Name in commodity culture: analogous functions are performed by the painter's signature, by the face or voice of a television or movie star, by the style of a particular film director or music producer, by the branding of goods through their association with sporting champions, and so on. In its liminal status between singularity and repetition, between an indexical function and a symbolic one, the authorial Name is a special kind of signifier. In the slippery symbolic economy of culture, the Name prematurely forecloses the endless deferral that is the condition of signification, and brings us back to its grounding metaphysical absolute, the human.

Thus Mark Rose, following Foucault's account in *The Order of Things*, argues that the author comes into being at precisely the moment when the basic structure of representation undergoes an epistemic shift:

> Still somewhat controversial, the idea of copyright as an immaterial property paralleled another eighteenth-century innovation, paper money. … Thus money also became fantasmatic, a matter of the circulation of signs abstracted from their material basis. … In the advanced marketplace of the eighteenth century, the solidity of apparently concrete referents was dissolving, replaced in many different but interconnected spheres by the circulation of signs. (Rose 1993, 129)

In this world of empty and exchangeable signs, where commodification is undermining all traditional relationships, where, in the famous phrase from the *Communist Manifesto*, "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx 1977, 224), the author

comes into being as a grounding and stabilising category in a culture in which all structures of meaning threaten to dissolve in the infinite exchangeability of the commodity market. Thus it is no accident that the rise of the book market in the eighteenth century coincides with the period in which "Shakespeare" is invented:

> The attempt to anchor the notion of literary property in personality suggests the need to find a transcendent signifier, a category beyond the economic to warrant and ground the circulation of literary commodities. Thus the mystification of original genius, pressed to its logical extreme in the limiting case of Shakespeare, became bardolatry. Here was a transcendental signifier indeed. (Rose 1993, 128)

Although, as Rose notes, Shakespeare "participated in a mode of cultural production that was essentially collaborative" (Rose 1993, 122), he is "reinvented" in the eighteenth century as a singular literary genius, becoming, through the construction of monuments such as Stratford-on-Avon, the star attraction of the prototypical "theme park" of cultural tourism. The "personality" of Shakespeare is emptied out: he becomes universal precisely because he is strangely absent from his work, having voided or transcended the limitations of personality in the creation of his characters. This transformation of Shakespeare from a human being (about whom, significantly, little was known) into a universal signifier of the human encapsulates the curious logic of authorship: instead of Shakespeare being the empirical grounding figure in the world of signs which he created, "Shakespeare" himself becomes a sign, while the works themselves become the concrete cultural and economic reality. In a literary culture where the supposedly intrinsic quality of "personality" has started to detach itself from the "person", circulating freely as an object of economic exchange, the notion of some essential and inalienable "humanity" is guaranteed as a transcendent and unquestionable value by the figure of Shakespeare, the universal author, the universal oeuvre, the quintessence of the "human".

Thus, to summarise:

> 1. Authorship is primarily a form of property relation governing the circulation of cultural commodities.
>
> 2. Authorship is grounded in the notion of the individual personality.
>
> 3. The concept of an intrinsic aesthetic value, while it appears to stand in opposition to commodification, is an essential part of the structure of the cultural commodity.

> 4. So too, "authorial personality" functions both as an absolute value, a transcendental signifier of the human, and as a sign like any other, a relative value essential to the circulation and exchange of cultural commodities.

It is this bifurcated conception of the author, and by extension of the literary work — as both serialised commodity and transcendent singularity — which I wish to emphasise in my description of the cultural practice of "collecting Beckett".

Collecting Beckett

John Calder's British editions of Samuel Beckett's books are a beautiful example of the aesthetics of the serial commodity.

I have nine of these books spread out before me as I write.

The books have a rigorous uniformity of design that gives me pleasure.

The upper third, approximately, of the space of the cover is a white rectangle, containing, without exception, the words "SAMUEL | BECKETT", all caps in a large, perhaps 72 pt. Roman face. The words are printed black against the white ground, and are enclosed within a rectangular border, a single black line that runs a few millimetres inside the edges of the white space.

The lower two thirds of the book, roughly a square defined by the bottom edge of the cover, repeats the austere formality of this design, except that the ground is a solid block of colour, a different colour for each book. The block of colour forms a border with the upper white rectangle, and extends to the edges of the book. Within this coloured field the words of the titles appear in the same manner as the name of the author in the white space above, that is, all caps in a large Roman face, centred aligned, such as "MERCIER | AND | CAMIER" or "ILL SEEN | ILL SAID". With the exception of "HOW | IT | IS", the titles of the books are printed in a slightly

smaller face than the name of the author. As with the author's name, the title too is enclosed within a squarish border that extends to within a few millimetres of the edge of the coloured space.

Within the austerity of this design, then, the real point of interest lies in the colours that distinguish each of these of objects that are otherwise differentiated only by their titles. The colours are not the bland pastels or austere and neutral tones which one might expect. They are luscious, fruity, edible colours that give a palpable visual pleasure. Spreading the books out before me, I experience the same pleasure as in laying out a series of coloured pencils, and face the same divertingly pointless problem of how to arrange them in the most harmoniously graduated order. Here then, is what I have[33]:

Mercier and Camier: light yellowy lime green, the colour of green bananas
Worstward Ho: vivid lime green
Proust & Three Dialogues: light yellowish mandarin orange
Ill Seen Ill Said: vivid burnt orange
Disjecta: cherry red
How It Is: warm peanut-buttery brown
All Strange Away: lavender grey
As The Story Was Told: bright grapey purple
Company: black (the title and enclosing border appear in white)

There is something a little reminiscent of Rothko in these covers, in the luminosity of their colours and the austere minimalism of their design, and this effect is even heightened somewhat by the fact that in at least two cases the colours "bleed" a little. The title on the spine of *All Strange Away* is printed in an arctic minty blue, and this colour bleeds across onto the left edge of the cover, forming a mysterious glowing margin to the lavender grey of the main colour field. So too, with *As The Story Was Told*, the upper edge of the block of purple is tinged with a halo of bright geranium-

[33] To this list can be added the following examples, which I have noted in passing without succumbing to the desire to purchase, since I already owned the works in other editions, and the Calder editions are comparatively quite expensive:

More Pricks than Kicks: bright grassy green
Murphy: lavender/mauve
Watt: custard yellow, the colour of cornflour or polenta
Collected Poems in English and French: coppery brown

pink, an effect which is repeated more strikingly in the repetition of the title on the back cover, where the purple letters seem to emerge from a fuzzy pink nimbus. Finally, the mandarin orange of the cover of *Proust* fades along the left edge towards the corn yellow of the lettering on the spine, although this effect may be the result of sun damage.

In the design of these books, then, one can read the seductive logic of the serial commodity. The books pursue a finely balanced mediation between repetition and variation, identity and difference. Far more compelling than the monkish austerity of Minuit's French editions of Beckett's works, which, like most French "literary" books, are published in plain covers differentiated only by the author's name and the title, the Calder English editions offer the promise of a sort of chromatic plenitude, a rich palette of works by a writer too often thought of as monochromatically bleak and gloomy[34]. In their interplay between seriality and variation, the Calder editions of Beckett's works reproduce with a fair degree of accuracy the structure of the Kinder Surprise[35].

It might be objected, of course, that the different works in Beckett's oeuvre retain a value independent of their place in the colour scheme: *Company*, for instance, obviously has a value beyond merely that of being "the black one", the last term in the coloured-pencil arrangement of the series. But this objection really only carries weight in relation to each individual book taken in isolation: as soon as the books are considered from the perspective of the *collection*, the separate identity and intrinsic value of any particular item in that collection is "contaminated" by its place in the series. As soon as one can glimpse the horizon of seriality opened up by comparing any two volumes in the series, one has the beginnings of a collection. The point here is that, like the Kinder Surprise, the marketing of books through the promotion of a uniform "look" for the works of particular authors, depending on the play of a

[34] A recent essay by Jennifer M. Jeffers compares Beckett's "achromatic" use of black, white and grey with the work of the American painter Georgia O'Keeffe (Jeffers 1996).

[35] Another divertingly pointless problem would be to try to dispel the seeming arbitrariness of these colours by linking each work thematically with its distinctive hue. Thus *Company* might conceivably be black: "A voice comes to one in the dark" (*Company* 7), the mud of *How It Is* may well be a rich orangey brown, but *Worstward Ho* a vibrant lime green?

variable element across a basic serial repetition, courts the anxious desire of the collector as much as it depends on the "use value" of the works themselves. In this scheme of things, a single book remains a single book, but any two books together are always an incomplete set.

At this point it might be argued that the Kinder Surprise operates on a infinitely expandable potential for collectibility, since there are new series of toys, with pre-planned hierarchies of "rarity", being manufactured all the time, whereas the collectibility of books is definitively limited by the productivity of the author, the final dimensions of the oeuvre. But this objection in fact runs counter to the spirit of the collector, who is inspired, not by the horizons of the infinite, but by the promise of closure, the domestication of the big world in the small world of the mantelpiece, the bookshelf, the display cabinet. As Susan Stewart puts it, "to play with series is to play with the fire of infinity. In the collection the threat of infinity is always met with the articulation of boundary" (Stewart 1993, 159). Just as Kinder Surprise toys are released in smaller sub-series, so too, in publishing, the oeuvre can be seen as a principle of limitation which creates, within the infinity of seriality, structures of containment wherein the desire of the collector can find its true measure. The Calder editions of Beckett's works make up a set, and function like any other serial commodity: *Collect the whole set!* The back covers of the Calder editions invariably advertise the complete set of the works they publish by and about Beckett, which according the most recent publication I have in front of me, *As The Story Was Told* (1990), now numbers at least 28 volumes. So too, it is easy enough to imagine a Beckett series of Kinder Surprise toys, in which one could collect tiny figurines representing Murphy, Watt, Molloy and Malone, including difficult-to-obtain rarities such as Quin or Yerk.

Thus, wilfully to distort the epistemic focus of Foucault's argument, one might say that the author functions as a principle of thrift in the proliferation of commodities (Foucault 1980b, 159), serving to organize and channel consumer desires amidst the bewildering overproduction of textuality in modern economies.

Reader and collector

The relationship between the reader and the collector is not easy to specify. For Benjamin, the two activities are almost by definition mutually exclusive:

> The book borrower of real stature whom we envisage here proves himself to be an inveterate collector of books, not so much by the fervour with which he guards his borrowed treasures and by the deaf ear which he turns to all reminders from the everyday world of legality, *as by his failure to read these books*. (Benjamin 1992b, 63; my emphasis)

The true figure of Benjamin's collector is, as we have seen, the heir, and the true meaning of the collection is to signify the privileges of possession rather than the accomplishments of learning:

> Suffice it to quote the answer which Anatole France gave to a philistine who admired his library and then finished with the standard question, "And you have read all these books Monsieur France?" "Not a tenth of them. I don't suppose you use your Sèvres china every day?" (Benjamin 1992b, 64)

But what of that other collector, the collector of serial commodities, a collector more or less like myself who has accumulated, over the years and by various means, a modest but much-loved collection of Samuel Beckett's works?

If there is a practical distinction between collecting Samuel Beckett's works and, say, Stephen King's, that difference might concern the difficulty of purchase. While the *Collected Shorter Plays*, *Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days* are all relatively easy to come by, there is clearly not a substantial market for Beckett's prose works, in Australia at least. The Penguin edition of *The Expelled and other Stories* turns up from time to time, as do Picador editions of the trilogy, and less frequently, *Murphy* and *Watt*. But the other works, either in the Grove or the Calder editions, are virtually impossible to find, and so it is that Benjamin's image of the collector as a traveller with a tactical instinct rings true. After a decade of checking under "B" every time I entered a bookshop, many of the other volumes in my collection have come to be indelibly associated with the place where I obtained them. Thus, a battered Grove edition of *Stories and Texts for Nothing* came from a dusty, hopelessly cluttered shop in Smith St, Melbourne; a Faber edition of *Our Exagmination...* turned up, appropriately enough, in the short-lived Unnamable Bookshop in Brisbane, while I

stumbled across a copy of *Disjecta* in a bookshop in Berlin where I was looking to buy a map.

If the true collector has an eye for the neatness of seriality, my collection is quite haphazard, made up of a combination of Calder, Grove, Picador and Faber editions of the works in English. So too, if the true collector attempts to preserve the collection in as near as possible to its original condition, my collection has been thoroughly desecrated. Many of the books were bought cheaply second-hand and were already in poor condition: whole bundles of pages fall out of *Murphy* at a time; *Texts for Nothing* has been defaced by someone's illegible marginalia scrawled with a wide-nib fountain pen; *More Pricks than Kicks* is threatening to become unreadable, as the pages turn brown and the ink fades to grey. Worse, I have desecrated the other volumes myself: in an assertion of the property right of the collector as opposed to the author I have written my name on the fly-leaf of virtually all of them, usually with the month and year and sometimes the place of purchase; some I have attempted to preserve by covering them in clear plastic adhesive; and many of them, *Molloy* in particular, contain pencilled marginalia of varying vintages and degrees of inanity, all of which considerably diminishes the pleasure of reading the works.

If I were inclined and could afford it, I might attempt to collect the entire set of the Calder editions which I like so much, but on the whole I'm satisfied with my collection, since I have a copy of more or less everything Beckett published. After all, I tell myself, the texts are the important thing, and the logic of the collection, the "aesthetic value" of the books themselves, should be secondary to the "use-value" of reading them.

But is this "subordination to use-value" really the case? If so, why, for example, did I lash out a considerable sum of money on the hardback edition of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* as soon as it appeared in the bookshops? I had only a lukewarm interest in reading the book, because Beckett's early works generally leave me cold, and indeed I put the book down without regret after only a few pages, and didn't manage to finish reading it until many years later, out of a vague sense of duty connected with the research for this thesis. So couldn't I have borrowed a copy from a library? For that matter, couldn't I have borrowed and read most of Beckett's

works if reading them was what was most important to me, and only purchased and kept copies of the works that most interested me and that I would be most likely to come back to?

Clearly there is involved here a pleasure in possession as much as there is a pleasure in reading. In fact, one could say that my collection of Beckett's books really begins when I start buying books without reading them, without necessarily having an interest in the book beyond the necessity of its place in the collection. There is nothing unusual in this, of course. Many people accumulate, over the years, collections of books by their favourite writers, or collections of recordings by their favourite bands or singers, and at a certain point the pleasure of collecting comes to vie with the pleasure of reading or listening, so that every collection has its favourites and its duds, its well-thumbed copies and its unopened volumes gathering dust. So too, collections preoccupy their owners with amiably diverting questions of arrangement. Alphabetical order? Chronological order? Classification by genre? By size? By colour? Clearly the collection is ruled by a necessity other than its pure "use-value" for the collector.

This kind of collecting, this kind of collector, is very different from Benjamin's bourgeois collector, who is always interested in *singularity*, in the uniqueness or rarity of an item. The collector of serial commodities — Works of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction — is governed by *seriality*, and the collection gains its meaning and its value not only from its singularisation of serial production, but also from its very celebration of seriality itself, gaining status as it approaches comprehensiveness, the unquestionable authority of the complete set. Of course an element of rarity enters into the equation if certain items in the set are relatively difficult to acquire, but in principle each object in such a collection is one of a multitude, a mass-produced commodity which is purchased new or second-hand on the open market. This mode of collecting serial commodities is thus quite distinct from the logic of the Kinder Surprise as Frow describes it, since, firstly, it has its roots in a kind of use-value, the pleasures of reading, even if this value becomes mixed with the logic of the collection, and secondly because its characteristic elements are not the rare or unique items of the auction room or the sale catalogue, but simply the mass-produced commodities which ordinarily occupy the shelves of

bookshops, or lurk at the back of second-hand stores, and which are the rewards of the casual fossicker rather than the ardent collector.

Clearly the author-function operates both as the object of readerly desire, and as a principle of limitation serving to mark the boundaries of a collection of serial commodities. What, then, is the fundamental difference between the reader and the collector? Can a meaningful distinction be made between the collection and the oeuvre?

A Paradise of Consumption

Susan Stewart describes the collection as a "Paradise of Consumption" (Stewart 1993, 151), and offers an analysis which has strong resonances with the notion of the oeuvre, with the notion of the literary canon, and with the notion of literature *per se*.

Stewart examines various modes of collecting, from the great public collections of the museum and the library, to the private obsessions of the man who was searching for three antique Tiffany postal scales, having collected six of the nine known to exist (Stewart 1993, 159-60). In each case, however, the basic structure of the collection remains the same in its principal features. The collection is constituted by the removal of objects from their contexts, according to principles of selection and limitation that give the collection both its coherence and its boundaries, and which create within it an interplay between singularity and uniformity, between difference and repetition.

Stewart isolates three aspects of the collection that are important to consider in connection with the notion of the literary oeuvre.

Firstly, the collection is *ahistorical*. Even when it is apparently at its most historical, in the case of the museum, the collection subordinates temporality to a spatial

arrangement in which the past can exist "all at once" (Stewart 1993, 162). Thus, Stewart argues:

> The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism. The collection replaces history with *classification*, with order beyond the realm of temporality. In the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world. (Stewart 1993, 151)

The author-function, in delimiting the oeuvre as a particular kind of collection, produces two kinds of ahistoricism. Firstly, the context of the oeuvre is held to be more decisive than the general historical context of any particular work. Thus Beckett's early works are almost always read in terms of what they can tell us about his later works — hindsight allowing the past to exist "all at once" — rather than being considered in the context of their own time. Secondly, and as a corollary, the oeuvre is considered as embodying an implicit narrative of personal and artistic development: the wider sweep of history is subordinated to the writer's individual biography as a key to understanding the oeuvre.

In this way it is not so much that the oeuvre as collection denies temporality, since temporality underpins the teleological argument of the oeuvre, and organises its relative values. Rather, it is through the concept of the oeuvre that temporality is powerfully circumscribed, removed from history and reinscribed within a narrative of personal and literary development. The ahistoricism of the oeuvre is a denial, not of temporality, but of history.

Stewart's second point is that "the collection is not representational" (Stewart 1993, 152). The collection does not refer to the world outside itself as a map might refer to a terrain, but instead it provides its own world seemingly autonomously.

> The collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world — a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority. (Stewart 1993, 152)

The consideration of a writer's oeuvre as a microcosm is familiar enough in relation to Dickens or Balzac, Zola or Proust, Faulkner or Joyce. That writers on Beckett sometimes speak of "Beckett's world" or the "Beckettian universe" is perhaps a little

surprising, given the increasing abstraction of Beckett's fictional environments, and more significantly, given his narrators' frequent and intrusive insistence on the purely verbal and even arbitrary character of the "worlds" they simultaneously create, inhabit and describe, a practice which culminates in the purely hypothetical "worlds" of *Worstward Ho*: "Say a body. Where none" (*Worstward Ho* 7). Then again, it would seem in certain cases Beckett very deliberately sets about creating a "Beckettian universe", establishing the oeuvre itself as a hermetic textual world, traversed by a haphazard network of cross-references and echoes between earlier and later works. Thus, for instance, Mercier remembers "a poor man named Murphy" who died ten years earlier in "rather mysterious circumstances" (*M & C* 111), while Mercier and Camier have a strange encounter with Watt (*M & C* 111-18), who exclaims "Fuck life!" (*M & C* 118) like the woman thirty-five years later in *Rockaby* (CSPR 282), while Mercier is frequently mentioned in the trilogy (*Molloy* 188; *Malone Dies* 63; *The Unnamable* 11, 53, 163-64), even though *Mercier et Camier* was not published until seventeen years after *L'Innommable*. Of course, any fiction, no matter how abstract, always enters into intensive relations with our world: this is the very nature of language. But if the world of any particular fiction "always connects", the world of the oeuvre is a world apart: as a collection the oeuvre is a closed and autonomous universe.

Finally, Stewart argues that the collection depends on a kind of *formalism*: "its existence is dependent upon principles of organisation and categorisation" (Stewart 1993, 153). Stewart's analysis of this formalism is complex, and raises a number of questions about the relations between singularity and series, between the work of art and the commodity form, and between the differing regimes of value which structure contemporary culture.

Stewart quotes a passage from Douglas Rigby, which bears a striking affinity with the seriality of the Calder editions I described earlier:

> Samuel Pepys, who arranged and rearranged his library, finally classified his books according to size. In double rows on the shelves the larger volumes were placed behind the smaller so that the lettering on all could be seen; and in order that the tops might be even with each other, this neat collector built wooden stilts where necessary and, placing those under the shorter books, gilded them to match the bindings!

> Subject and reference-convenience were secondary in this arrangement, except insofar as the sacrosanct diary was concerned, and this, which had been written in notebooks of varying size, Mr. Pepys, reverting to reason, had bound uniformly so that its parts might be kept together without disturbing the library's general arrangement-scheme. (Rigby 1944, 79; cited in Stewart 1993, 155)

With the Calder editions of Beckett's works, variation is expressed across the disciplined uniformity of cover design as a fulsome chromatic plenitude. By contrast, Pepys is more austere. And yet, the same principles apply, which demand that the collection express both uniformity and variation, identity and difference. "Pepys's collection must be displayed as an identical series (the stilt arrangement) and as a set of individual volumes ('so that the lettering on all could be seen')" (Stewart 1993, 155).

Of course this drive to uniformity not only governs the collecting and arranging of books, but is also a fundamental element of the author-function. Just as, in the Calder editions, the author's name is a principle of identity repeated across the differences of the individual works, so too, the author-function operates in a textual sense as a gage of consistency in the evaluation and interpretation of different works. As we have seen, Foucault observes that the author begins to play a classificatory function according to four criteria: as a consistent level of *value*, as a field of *conceptual coherence*, as a *stylistic unity*, and as an *empirical historical figure* (Foucault 1980b, 151). In the discourse on Beckett, as in the discourse on Shakespeare, the tendency to establish Beckett's authorship, rather than any specific pieces of writing, as the source of literary value, sometimes leads to a Pepys-like concern to elevate the neglected elements of an oeuvre, justifying them (in both the moral and the typographical senses) as equally worth consideration as anything else in the oeuvre. Thus, to single out by no means the worst example, H. Porter Abbott, in a discussion of *More Pricks Than Kicks*, argues:

> I have been primarily concerned to show that much of the bad writing is bad for a purpose: that the well-read incompetent was indeed a calculated guise. This is, quite simply, the best way to explain the sheer variety of failure which we have observed in *More Pricks*. (Abbott 1973, 35)

Although his argument is far more subtle and persuasive than this excerpt might indicate, Abbott's intention here is, I think, characteristic of Beckett criticism, which

is unusually susceptible to the redemptive powers of the author-function and the oeuvre. If such operations can be seen as analogous to Pepys's construction of gilded wooden stilts, the distinction between the collection and the oeuvre, between the collector and the critic, becomes difficult to specify.

The formalism of the collection

What is most significant in Pepys's exemplary book collection is the sheer difficulty of finding any particular volume in it, the fact that "subject and reference-convenience were secondary in this arrangement" (Stewart 1993, 151). The neatness of the collection comes to prevail over the ease with which one can find and read the books, and the books thus cease to be texts, in order to become simply aesthetic objects.

This is the most important feature of collecting as a mode of cultural consumption. In Susan Stewart's succinct phrasing: "the collection represents the total aestheticisation of use value" (Stewart 1993, 151).

This definition of the collection's transformative alchemy, the conversion of "use value" into "aesthetic value", is important in considering the role of the collection as a cultural practice. The logic of the collection may be seen as crucial to the workings of the author-function, the oeuvre, and the literary canon, all three of which can be viewed as fundamentally classificatory schemata. The important movement is the "aestheticisation of use value" which characterises the collection. To recapitulate Stewart's arguments, the objects in the collection become *ahistorical*, *autonomous*, and *formal*: precisely the criteria that characterise the work of art according to traditional aesthetics. Thus Stewart, following Baudrillard's argument in *Le Système des objets* (Baudrillard 1968, 147-48), concludes:

> because of the collection's seriality, a "formal" interest always replaces a "real" interest in collected objects. This replacement holds to the extent that aesthetic value

> replaces use value. But such an aesthetic value is so clearly tied to the cultural (i.e., deferment, redemption, exchange) that its value system is the value system of the cultural; the formalism of the collection is never an "empty" formalism. (Stewart 1993, 154)

It is important to understand the exact nature of this formalism. While the value system of the collection is the value system of the cultural, the relation between the collection and the cultural is *not in any way representational*. That is, the collection is not linked to the cultural by mimesis, or allegory, or analogy or isomorphism. The collection's link to the cultural is through the *axiom* which defines and delimits it, an unquestionable value which nowhere enters into or disturbs the serene logic of the collection, but which provides its foundation and its truth. Beyond this axiomatic value, the collection's value system is entirely its own. Thus it is important to grasp the relation between the collection's axiom, which ties it to the cultural, and its autonomy, by which its relation to the cultural is endlessly deferred.

AXIOM

Every collection is based on an axiomatic premise, a fundamental principle which ties it to a set of cultural values, so that, even as the collection's "aestheticisation of use value" produces a kind of evaporation of the "real", subordinating values, meanings, and histories to the abstract formalism of the collection's internal logic, at the same time the very existence of the collection is founded upon a silent but unequivocal statement of value.

In the case of Pepys's library, the axiom, the one unquestioned truth which authorises and justifies the collection, is the social, cultural and moral value of books in themselves, the indispensability of a library to the cultivated man.

So too, although it seems self-evident to spell it out, the axiom which defines Beckett criticism is the proposition that there is an inherent and unquestionable value in reading and studying and attempting to understand Beckett's work. The exact nature and extent of that value may frequently be the subject of debate, but to begin without the assumption that Beckett is *important* in some way is simply not to be "in the true" of Beckett studies. The value of the oeuvre is axiomatic, and to attempt to question

its value (as opposed to the relative value of any particular work) would be like attempting to file a banana in Samuel Pepys's library. There simply is no place for it.

But if the collection cannot contain a questioning of its own value-system, so too it cannot provide its own defence. Holding a truth to be self-evident is not an argument, and so the collection is not rhetorical. Even though it is shot through with cultural values, it *says nothing* about culture beyond the fundamental premise that constructs it.

AUTONOMY

Similarly, within the self-contained logic of the collection, the use-value of any item is entirely subordinated to its aesthetic value, and this aesthetic value is not intrinsic, but relational, a product of its place in the system.

For Pepys, "textuality" is effectively erased in favour of the aesthetic status of the book as a piece of intellectual furniture. If the banana mentioned above were enclosed in gilt bindings, it could take its place alongside the Bible.

So too, within the context of the oeuvre, which stands as both the beginning and the end of the discourse on Beckett, the value of any one work is calculable only in terms that refer back to the context of the collection. The authorial name demarcates the limits of an enclosed world, entirely autonomous and self-referential. In the discourse on Beckett, everything must be read *as* Beckett, in relation *to* Beckett, for what it can tell us *about* Beckett. The value of any particular critical intervention is measured by the contribution it makes to our understanding *of* Beckett, where Beckett functions, like Shakespeare, as a transcendental signifier, an ineffable mystery, and a cultural token of self-evident and unquestionable worth.

Within the logic of the collection, the self-referential system of the oeuvre, "use value" becomes entirely aestheticised. Within Beckett studies, no one asks: "What's the *use* of reading Beckett?" Of course, it would perfectly acceptable, and even a little banal, to propose: "Beckett prompts us to ask, 'What's the use of reading

Beckett?'" But to propose a use of Beckett that does not either deliver us to a more intimate understanding of his work, or return us once more to the silent confirmation of his ineffable mystery, is to queer the pitch slightly, breaking the magic circle that encloses "Beckettian discourse".

It is, in fact, comparatively rare to read criticism that actually puts Beckett's work to *use*, in the sense that one might *use* the work of a theorist or philosopher. In fact, *use* in this sense destroys the notion of the oeuvre at a single stroke, since it removes a phrase or a passage or a concept from its original context, its place in the oeuvre, and puts it to work it in a new context, that is to say *out of context*, thereby distorting its *meaning* (where meaning can be defined more or less as its structural place within the enclosed formal system of the oeuvre). In the same way, it would be difficult to take down and read one of Pepys's volumes without spoiling its austere perfection, creating an unsightly gap-toothed effect on the shelves.

This, in effect, is the basis of Iain Wright's objection to Foucault's "use" of Beckett in "What Is an Author?" (Wright 1983, 18), and I think Wright is correct to argue that Foucault has distorted Beckett's meaning. But, as Wright is perfectly happy to admit, it is precisely only in reference to an oeuvre, to an author-function, that texts are able to *mean* in Wright's sense of the word.

Even within the terms of the post-structuralist orthodoxy which now dominates Beckett criticism, where terms such as "meaning" and "author" are treated with such suspicion, propositions such as the notion that Beckett's texts provoke us to discover the meaningless of meaning, or that Beckett as a writer shows us the authorlessness of language, still remain "within the true" of Beckett studies, because this meaninglessness and authorlessness are always returned to Beckett, it is always he who teaches us what we know.

To give another example, Gilles Deleuze's essay on Beckett, *The Exhausted* (Deleuze 1995), is exemplary when it develops a concept of "exhaustion" which is arguably implicit in various places in Beckett's work, but which is primarily of interest for Deleuze as an *operation*, a practical concept which can be used in different contexts, rather than as a "meaning" or a "theme" of the oeuvre as a whole. This might be seen

as an example of Deleuze (like Foucault) *using* Beckett to *do* philosophy, which Deleuze defines elsewhere as "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 2). But by the same token, Deleuze's essay is remarkable for the breadth of its reference to the oeuvre, as if the *fabrication* of the concept of exhaustion were simultaneously an *interpretation* of Beckett that had to be justified by reference to the oeuvre as the ultimate context. So too, it is entirely characteristic that in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Brian Evenson, in an excellent review of Deleuze's writings on Beckett, nevertheless brings us back to the oeuvre and the author as the source of significance and value: "Deleuze has prepared the way not only to understand exhaustion as a structural principle in Beckett, but to see Beckett's television plays as playing a unique and important role in the progression of his project" (Evenson 1994, 174).

Thus the collection might be seen as the logic whereby a certain *productive* operation of reading, a practice turned towards the outside world and the demands of use, is aestheticised, turned into a "paradise of consumption", an enclosed and self-referential concern with the mysteries of "meaning" as the reconfiguration of certain formal relations between the elements of a system. Moreover, this functioning of the collection, as an aestheticisation of use-values, is by no means restricted to fictional texts, but operates in the same way in relation to philosophical and theoretical texts: once the oeuvre takes methodological priority, once an author's texts are read in terms of each other, in terms of comparison or development, the work ceases to be of productive use and returns instead to a circumscribed and entirely formal domain of intrinsic value.

Collecting culture

As Stewart reminds us, "the formalism of the collection is never an 'empty' formalism", but is directly tied to the cultural: "its value system is the value system of the cultural" (Stewart 1993, 154). Even as it seeks to withdraw itself from the world,

to establish its own world as whole and autonomous, the collection is shot through with social, cultural and historical forces. The collection, therefore, is intensely ideological, and its value system always bears the traces of history. If the collection does not *represent* the cultural, in either a mimetic or allegorical, analogical or isomorphic sense, there are ways in which collection nevertheless connects with the cultural, pointing outside its own enclosed space.

In particular, I wish to consider three ideological relationships that define the collection as a cultural practice: its relation to the *self*, to *labour*, and to *money*. Firstly, the collection is a kind of metonym of the self, and its desire for autonomy clearly parallels the characteristically petit-bourgeois desire for independence from the vicissitudes of social and economic reality. So too, the objects in the collection are not made, but *found*: the collection performs a kind of magical erasure of labour, presenting its objects not as products, but as discoveries. Thirdly, the collection might appear to prize objects for their intrinsic value, as opposed to their exchange value in the marketplace, but in its subordination of objects to an abstract principle of self-referential "collectibility", the collection does not, in fact, challenge the logic of the monetary economy, but mirrors it in miniature.

SELF

The enclosed space of the collection is a familiar metaphor for the boundaries of the self. As Stewart remarks, "each sign is placed in relation to a chain of signifiers whose ultimate referent is not the interior of the room — in itself an empty space — but the interior of the self" (Stewart 1993, 158). Like the cupboards and shelves that constitute its characteristic architecture, the collection is a form of enclosure, a fragile shelter, a nest. Bachelard writes:

> And if we were to work at our dwelling-places the way Michelet dreams of his nest, we should not be wearing the ready-made clothes, so often viewed with disfavour by Bergson. On the contrary, each of us would have a personal house of his own, a nest for his body, padded to his measure. (Bachelard 1992, 101)

The intimacy, the delicacy of the collection cannot be overestimated: it is the armature that protects the quick of the collector's being. If collecting in general is a

kind of defence against the vulnerability of the body, the more extreme forms of collecting, the activities of the miser and the hoarder, are equated with a dysfunctional relation to the body and its boundaries. As Stewart remarks in relation to hoarding: "this form of insanity is, like anal retentiveness, an urge toward incorporation for its own sake, an attempt to erase the limits of the body that is at the same time an attempt, marked by desperation, to 'keep body and soul together'" (Stewart 1993, 154).

If the collection is metonymic of the self of the collector, so too, the activity of the collector becomes a form of self-fashioning, a work on the self. And if the collection is an intensely personal affair, and its proper setting is the domestic interior, at the same time the activity of collecting involves a direct confrontation with the infinitude of the world, a ceaseless rhythm of journeying and return. So too, while the collection depends on enclosure, "relies upon the box, the cabinet, the cupboard, the seriality of shelves" (Stewart 1993, 157), such structures are also forms of framing and display, so that the collection is "a complex interplay of exposure and hiding" (Stewart 1993, 157).

The association between collecting and a kind of thwarted self-expression is a strong one. Among the many pathetic figures of sexual and spiritual repression in Joyce's *Dubliners*, Mr James Duffy of "A Painful Case" is a parody of anal-retentive orderliness:

> The books on the white wooden shelves were arranged from below upwards according to bulk. A complete Wordsworth stood at one end of the lowest shelf and a copy of the *Maynooth Catechism*, sewn into the cloth cover of a notebook, stood at one end of the top shelf. (Joyce 1987, 119)

Like Samuel Pepys's irrational rage for order, the finical neatness of Mr Duffy's arrangement is a perfect illustration of the collection's total aestheticisation of use value. So too, Mr Duffy's niggardly and costive jottings in the notebook ironically entitled *Bile Beans* (Joyce 1987, 119-20) indicate the extent to which the collector's finical neatness is a form of repression rather than expression: "collection is the antithesis of creation" (Stewart 1993, 160).

In *Molloy*, too, the collection figures as a model for the fragile boundaries of the self, in the disturbing confrontation between the two Jacques Morans, father and son. Moran senior tells his son to pack his things for a journey, and in response to the boy's request that he be allowed to bring his stamps, authorises him to bring the small album of duplicates. Moran reflects to himself, with grim self-satisfaction: "When I can give pleasure, without doing violence to my principles, I do so gladly" (*Molloy* 142). But a little later, when Moran goes to check on his son in his room, the sadistic side of his nature becomes more apparent:

> Sitting at his little desk he was admiring his stamps, the two albums, large and small, open before him. On my approach he shut them hastily. I saw at once what he was up to. … What are you doing? I said. Looking at my stamps, he said. You call that looking at your stamps? I said. Yes papa, he said, with unimaginable effrontery. Silence, you little liar! I cried. Do you know what he was doing? Transferring to the album of duplicates, from his good collection properly speaking, certain rare and valuable stamps which he was in the habit of gloating over daily and could not bring himself to leave, even for a few days. Show me your new Timor, the five reis orange, I said. He hesitated. Show it to me! I cried. I had given it to him myself, it had cost me a florin. A bargain, at the time. I've put it in here, he said piteously, picking up the album of duplicates. That was all I wanted to know, to hear him say rather, for I knew it already. Very good, I said. I went to the door. You leave both your albums at home, I said, the small one as well as the large one. (*Molloy* 148-49)

A little later in the evening, Moran checks his son's stamp albums once again, to make sure that he has not surreptitiously removed some of his favourites to take with him on the journey:

> I put down the tray and looked for a few stamps at random, the Togo one mark carmine with the pretty boat, the Nyassa 1901 ten reis, and several others. I was very fond of the Nyassa. It was green and showed a giraffe grazing off the top of a palm tree. They were all there. That proved nothing. It only proved that those particular stamps were there. (*Molloy* 165-66)

Phil Baker, in an excellent article on the significance of these scenes, "The Stamp of the Father in *Molloy*", finds that all three stamps are real stamps, and that the visual details given for the Nyassa and Togo are accurate. The illustration on the third stamp is not described. As Baker comments, "Its primary significance lies in the word 'Timor', Latin for 'Fear', which is appropriate to the way that Moran the tyrant father terrorises his son" (Baker 1996, 143). Baker also discovers that the

undescribed illustration is also significant, "concordant with the larger aesthetic of lacunae in Beckett's work, where absence is frequently an emphasis or aesthetic effect" (Baker 1996, 143). In fact, the 1895 Portuguese Timor stamp bears "the image of a thoroughly upright-looking man with a moustache" (Baker 1996, 144), a *doppelgänger* of Moran himself, "the incarnation of upright pomposity" (Baker 1996, 144), whose own moustache is an integral part of his identity: "without a moustache I was inconceivable" (*Molloy* 162).

Although Baker traces a series of parallels between the moustached man of the Timor stamp and Moran as a sadistic and tyrannical father, seeing the Timor stamp as "a kind of underlying totem within the patriarchal theme of Molloy's second half" (Baker 1996, 144), there is a highly significant scene which he does not comment on. Baker summarises well Beckett's delineation of Moran as a repulsively anal-retentive character:

> Moran is a tremendous comic creation and to associate him with the definitively petit bourgeois and anal-retentive pursuit of stamp collecting is just as much a part of his characterisation as his stress on punctuality [*Molloy* 133], his interest in double-entry bookkeeping [*Molloy* 220], and his walking "with delicate steps, almost mincing, congratulating myself as usual on the resilience of my Wilton" [*Molloy* 149]. (Baker 1996, 153)

Moran senior's anal obsession is borne out many times throughout the novel, most impressively, perhaps, as when he lists among the "questions of a theological nature" which preoccupied him strangely: "Does it really matter which hand is employed to absterge the podex [i.e., *wipe the arse*]" (*Molloy* 228-29; see also Connor 1999). But if anal-retentiveness is the physical corollary of the definitively petit-bourgeois pursuit of stamp-collecting, this fact is borne out not so much by Moran senior, as by his son, who complains that he is feeling ill.

> Have you shat, my child, I said gently. I've tried, he said. Do you want to, I said. Yes, he said. But nothing comes, I said. No, he said. A little wind, I said. Yes, he said. Suddenly I remembered Father Ambrose's cigar. I lit it. We'll see what we can do, I said, getting up. We went upstairs. I gave him an enema, with salt water. He struggled, but not for long. I withdrew the nozzle. Try and hold it, I said, don't stay sitting on the pot, lie flat on your stomach. We were in the bathroom. He lay

> down on the tiles, his big fat bottom sticking up. Let it soak well in, I said. What a day. I looked at the ash on my cigar. It was firm and blue. (*Molloy* 162)[36]

If stamp collecting is "like anal retentiveness … an attempt, marked by desperation, to 'keep body and soul together'" (Stewart 1993, 154), Moran's peremptory violation of the bodily integrity of his son comes as something like a Dantean punishment for the son's desperate attachment to his stamps. A great deal of sadistic violence lurks beneath the matter-of-factness of Moran's narration. Baker points out that Moran senior "addresses Junior in the literally 'patronising' mode appropriate to a Catholic priest like Father Ambrose (who also stands *in loco patris* to Moran Senior): 'Have you shat my child …'" (Baker 1996, 146). But Father Ambrose makes another metonymic appearance in the scene, in the shape of his cigar, the quintessential symbol of the patriarchal phallus, and Moran's preoccupation with this cigar only serves to heighten the suggestion of patriarchal sodomy throughout this episode[37].

Moran's anal obsession and his stamp-collecting are of a piece, and the connection pointed out by Baker between the bristling moustachioed *senhor* of the Timor stamp and Moran's own "little abortive moustache" (*Molloy* 206) is played out in the dénouement of the scene above. In a contrapuntal irony reminiscent of the famous love scene between Emma and Rodolphe during the agricultural show in *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert 1983, 182-83), Moran critically examines himself in the bathroom mirror while his son is letting the enema "soak well in":

> What do I look like? I said. The sight of my moustache, as always, annoyed me. It wasn't quite right. It suited me, without a moustache I was inconceivable. But it

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[36] Moran's exclamation "What a day" here has a complex resonance, within the context of the entire patriarchal theme as it is played out in the second half of *Molloy*, being a variation on Beckett's own father's dying words (as described in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy dated 2 July 1933). "Sam was never to forget his father's final words to him: 'Fight fight fight' and (with massive understatement) 'What a morning'" (Knowlson 1996, 170).

[37] A gratuitous footnote. The addenda to *Watt* mentions "Watt's Davus complex (morbid dread of sphinxes)" (Watt 251). The Picador edition of the same novel (London: Picador, 1988) contains a typo: "Watt's Davus complex (morbid dread of sphinges)" (p. 252). The word "sphinge", although not mentioned in any dictionary, cannot fail to conjure up, in the mind of the assiduous reader, both "sphincter" and "syringe", that is, an enema. That is the way I always understood the passage, until I read a discussion of the significance of sphinxes in *Watt* in an excellent essay by Michael Beausang (1996). Frankly, "morbid dread of sphinxes" seems, in comparison, a little disappointing.

> ought to have suited me better. A slight change in the cut would have sufficed. But what change? Was there too much of it, not enough? Now, I said, without ceasing to inspect myself, get back on the pot and strain. Was it not rather the colour? A noise as of a waste recalled me to less elevated preoccupations. He stood up trembling all over. We bent together over the pot which at length I took by the handle and tilted from side to side. A few fibrous shreds floated in the yellow liquid. (*Molloy* 162-63)

Moran's aggressive monitoring of his son's body and its functions is clearly of a piece with his surveillance and control over the stamp collection, part of the quintessentially anal and sadistic nature of his petit bourgeois temperament. This comes out too in his pathetic comment on the patriarchal Timor stamp: "it had cost me a florin. A bargain, at the time" (*Molloy* 149). No doubt these obsessions fit into the general movement of dispossession that characterises the second half of *Molloy*, for not only does Moran lose his son, he also loses his hens and his bees and all the creatures over which he once liked to assert his dominion.

But although Moran, at the beginning of the novel, asserts a kind of proprietory relationship over his possessions and indeed his whole personal world — his insistence, in the opening pages of his report, on "my bees", "my son", "my neighbours' chimneys", "my beloved church", "my lemon verbena", "my Beauty of Bath", and tellingly, "my last moments of peace and happiness" (*Molloy* 126-27) — his attitude is quite different from the attitude of the collector, who is really embodied in the dismal figure of his son. For collecting, in the end, has little to do with wealth or power or prosperity, and more to do with the fashioning of a private aesthetic universe, and the transforming of commodity culture into a blighted form of self-expression.

LABOUR

This self-fashioning, this *work on the self* bears a special relation to the commodity, and the socially alienated labour which commodities enfold. In Marx's famous formulation of commodity fetishism, "it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes ... the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx 1977, 436). For Marx, the alienation of workers from the products of their labour is doubled at the

ideological level by the way in which commodities take on a "life of their own". In this model, however, the notion of the labouring individual is primary: commodity fetishism is a means by which the category of the human returns in the cycle of consumption even as it is alienated in the cycle of production. But for Stewart, the labouring individual has no primacy: "we must extend this description a degree further in order to see the final stage of this alienation, a stage in which the self is constituted by its consumption of goods" (Stewart 1993, 164).

Thus, prior even to its existence as a labouring being, as a producer of commodities, the self comes into existence as a consuming being, a product of commodities. The self-fashioning that we may take to be characteristic of cultural experience in general is, paradoxically, a "labour of consumption". And the collection, as a characteristic form of cultural consumption, can be seen as the production of a self, an identity, a personality, just as the commodification of the work of art depends, as we have seen, on the notion of personality as an inherent aspect of the cultural commodity.

But the "labour of consumption" which characterises the collection is, as Stewart is at pains to show, an intensely ideological process. Essentially it refigures the act of consumption, rather than the act of production, as the source of value. The items in the collection are displayed as "found", as if magically produced by the restless fossicking of the collector, and in the process the labour of the producer is erased. As Stewart writes:

> What is the proper labour of the consumer? It is a labour of total magic, a fantastic labour which operates through the manipulation of abstraction rather than through concrete or material means. Thus, in contrast to the souvenir, the collection presents a metaphor of "production" not as "the earned" but as "the captured." ... The collection says that the world is given; we are inheritors, not producers, of value here. We "luck into" the collection; it might attach itself to particular scenes of acquisition, but the integrity of those scenes is subsumed to the transcendent and ahistorical context of the collection itself. This context destroys the context of origin. In the souvenir, the object is made magical; in the collection, the mode of production is made magical. In this belief in fortune we see a further erasure of labour. (Stewart 1993, 164-5)

In fact, Stewart conflates here two modes of acquisition which characterise the collection, and which should, I think, be considered separately as well as in terms of

what they have in common. She remarks at one point that we are "inheritors" of value, while in the next line replaces the narrative of inheritance with the narrative of "luck". This is a significant distinction, I think, and deserves closer attention.

The notion of inheritance is crucial to the notion of culture, and its narratives of heritage and tradition. Collecting, of whatever kind, usually requires two things: time and money. Classically, it is the leisure pursuit of the independently wealthy, and, as Stewart remarks in a throwaway line: "one might say … that the liberal arts education characteristic of the leisure classes is in itself a mode of collection" (Stewart 1993, 161). In the mode of collecting which is a liberal arts education, what is essentially a form of consumption is recast as a form of labour: rather than the "captured", this is the collection as the "earned".

On the other hand, in its more modest and everyday forms, as Stewart points out, "the collector constructs a narrative of luck which replaces the narrative of production" (Stewart 1993, 165). Indeed, collecting is entirely subordinated to luck, delivering desire into the hands of fate, a denial of fulfilment in favour of the agony of patient hopelessness. In my experience of collecting Beckett's works, for instance, it was always an unspoken and self-evident rule that simply to order a book from a bookseller was to violate the spirit of my search. The book must be *found*, no matter how long it took, as if ordering a book directly were an admission of failure: a failure of will, of patience, of desire. Therefore, part of the bitter pleasure of collecting, which I know other collectors share, is the frustrating, time-consuming, purely autonomous and therefore ultimately pointless nature of the search itself.

> It is not acceptable simply to purchase a collection *in toto*; the collection must be acquired in a serial manner. This seriality provides a means for defining or classifying the collection and the collector's life history, and it also permits a systematic substitution of purchase for labour. "Earning" the collection simply involves *waiting*, creating the pauses that articulate the biography of the collector. (Stewart 1993, 166)

The drama of waiting is familiar enough to readers of Beckett, and the economics of waiting is an important element of the Beckettian economy. *Waiting* is what unites these two modes of acquisition — inheritance and luck — that Stewart conflates in the passage above.

On the one hand, if waiting is the time of the *heir*, a waiting for death and the succession of generations, it is also the time of the *investor*, from whom the magical power of capital demands no more than a little idle patience before returning its rewards to the undeserving. At the same time, of course, waiting is also the business of the idle and the unemployed, the *flâneur* and the gambler, and "luck", the gambler's jackpot, like the collector's *trouvaille*, can be seen as no more than a disenfranchised version, at inexorably losing odds, of the magical waiting of the investor. Viewed from another angle the gambler's waiting is, of course, quite the opposite of the anticipatory idleness which characterises the collector, for, as Benjamin remarks, "games of chance have the great attraction of making people free from waiting" (Benjamin 1982, 178; cited in Buck-Morss 1993, 104). The collector is anything but bored, for the activity of collecting transforms waiting into a productive activity.

MONEY

If the act of collecting performs magical transformations of value, if the collection itself represents, as Stewart claims, an "aestheticisation of use-value", it might be thought that the collection — the library, the oeuvre, the canon — represents a sort of sanctuary of qualitative, intrinsic, purely aesthetic values, against the empty commensurability of exchange values, the philistine calculus of the marketplace. It might be thought that the collected object, in its "uniqueness", could not be further removed from the seriality, indifference and exchangeability of the money form. But in fact, in its removal from its context into the framed space of the collection, in its abstraction from "use-value" into an etherealised "aesthetic value", the collected object enters a magical world of signification: it becomes a sign, a sign of itself, of "objecthood," of "collectibility", and even of "uniqueness".

At this point it important to recall John Guillory's point:

> both aesthetics and economics were founded in contradistinction to the concept of "use value." ... If these two discourses diverge on the question of the relation between their two exemplary objects — the work of art and the commodity, or

> between "aesthetic value" and a supposedly antithetical "exchange value" — that divergence … postdates a suspiciously convergent origin. (Guillory 1993, 302)

The aesthetic abstraction of use-value, performed by the magical activity of collecting, repeats the abstraction of use-value that is the condition of economic exchange: in fact, as Guillory argues, "a concept of specifically aesthetic value can be formulated only in the wake of political economy's discourse of exchange value" (Guillory 1993, 316). That is, the recasting of use-value as aesthetic value, expressed in the abstraction of "collectibility", might be seen as the exchange-form governing the collection, just as the recasting of use-value as exchange-value, expressed in the money-form, can be seen as the exchange form driving commodity production.

> Thus the collection is not only far removed from contexts of material production; it is also the most abstract of all forms of consumption. And in its translation back into the particular cycle of exchange which characterises the universe of the "collectible", the collected object represents quite simply the ultimate self-referentiality and seriality of money at the same time that it declares its independence from "mere" money. We might remember that of all invisible workers, those who actually make money are the least visible. All collected objects are thereby *objets de luxe*, objects abstracted from use-value and materiality within a magic cycle of self-referential exchange. (Stewart 1993, 165)

Thus, while the collection might present itself as a monument of incommensurability, a defence of singularity in the face of universal commodification, it is at the same time an apotheosis of the money-form, and it is perhaps no coincidence that some of the most characteristic "collectibles" — coins and stamps — are simultaneously those objects whose use-value is entirely as a medium of exchange.

The characteristic feature of the collection as a model of the cultural is its strategy of *withdrawal*, for the collected object might appear to differ from the money-form in that its value derives from its *removal* from exchange. At the same time, however, this removal is simply a deferral, according to the rhythm of "deferment, redemption, exchange" which Stewart characterises as the value system of the cultural (Stewart 1993, 154). The collectible always returns to the marketplace in the intensified and atypical scene of the auction.

> Herein lies the ironic nostalgia of the collection's economic system: although dependent upon, and a mirroring of, the larger economy of surplus value, this smaller economy is self-sufficient and self-generating with regard to its own meanings and

> principles of exchange. Whereas the larger economy has replaced use value through the translation of labour into exchange value, the economy of the collection translates the monetary system into the system of objects. Indeed, that system of objects is often designed to serve as a stay against the frailties of the very monetary system from which it has sprung. (Stewart 1993, 159)

Thus there is a definite set of relations between the activity of collecting and the experience of the cultural in a commodified society.

Firstly, collecting is a kind of "self-fashioning" in which the self is produced as a product of the commodities it consumes. In contradistinction to Marx's theory of alienation, in contemporary culture there is no essential "humanity" prior to its abstraction in the commodity. Rather, the commodity pre-exists and produces the human. Consumption is thus refigured as a kind of production: in the act of reading Beckett, one produces oneself as a Beckett reader.

Secondly, this notion of the commodity as pre-existing and producing the human masks an erasure of labour that is characteristic of the notion of the cultural. In the collection, cultural commodities are reconceived as pre-given, "naturalised", while natural objects become acculturated. In both cases it is the magical labour of the collector that produces value in the collection, just as it is the labour of consumption that produces meaning and value in culture. Thus collecting is recast as a productive activity when in fact, as Stewart argues, "collection is the antithesis of creation" (Stewart 1993, 160). The collector's real labour is simply the labour of waiting, and the "drama of waiting" is an essential part of the contemporary experience of culture.

Finally, the aestheticisation of use-value characteristic of the collection requires a withdrawal of the object from use, and a deferment of exchange. In its subordination of the object to an abstract and quasi-universal notion of "collectibility", as in its insistence on the entirely formal character of an object's value, the collection is not so much a challenge to the money-form, as its apotheosis.

In a commodified culture, collections — and their analogues in the oeuvre and the literary canon — are an important structure governing various regimes of cultural value. So too, the various modes of author-function — as genius, champion, star,

celebrity, personality — all serve to organise consumer demand according to the logic of the collection in practically every sphere of cultural production. The marketing of "authored" cultural products is often tied to the aesthetics of seriality, stimulating the logic of the collection and the activities of personal expression to which the magical labour of the collector gives rise.

So too, as Stewart suggests, the classic bourgeois liberal education can be seen as a mode of collection. The literary canon — like those other great public collections, the museum, the art gallery, and the library — embodies cultural authority on the basis of a representative comprehensiveness that Stewart likens to Noah's Ark (Stewart 1993, 152). Like the objects in a museum, books subsumed into the canon start to become pure signifiers, place-markers in an increasingly abstract aesthetic system that presents itself, as we have seen, as ahistorical, autonomous, and purely formal.

The activity of collecting Beckett's oeuvre demarcates a miniature universe that, like the chromatic plenitude of the books themselves, is formally complete, aesthetically autonomous, and totally without use-value. But at the same time, through its relation to the self, to labour, and to money, the collection is always immersed in the cultural, exposed to the social and political forces against which its boxes, cabinets, cupboards and shelves, like Michelet's nests, or the gilt bindings of texts, offer a magic but fragile shelter.

Property and the economy of the gift

Possession and value

Possession is not a positive relationship between a person and an object, a bond between an owner and a thing owned. Instead, possession is a social relation, a relation between persons. Essentially, possession is a negative relation, a form of exclusion: it is the conventional means by which one prevents others using or possessing what one reserves for oneself. The system of private property operates through the twin structures of the *boundary* (fence, wall, cupboard, drawer) and the *name* (signature, tag, label, brand). Although both structures operate as metonyms for the self — the boundary signifying as a last resort the sacrosanct integrity of the body; the name signifying a claim to identity and the rights of citizenship — in both cases, the self is defined negatively, and the fundamental message is one of exclusion: *Keep Off, Don't Touch.*

So too, value is a social relation. In crude terms, one might oppose value directly to possession, and say that whereas possession is a form of exclusion, value is the product of exchange, and is thus an affirmative movement, a form of connection, or relation. According to Jean-Joseph Goux:

> Metaphors, symptoms, signs, representations: it is always through replacement that values are created. … Whether this exchange involves comparison, substitution, supplementation — or translation and representation — value enters into it. Value is presupposed by formal identity and by indemnity, even if no real permutation, no

> give-and-take trade actually makes the substitution of equivalents visible; even if no barter, no circulation, no apparent bargaining dramatises the counterbalancing and commutation. (Goux 1990, 9)

The tension between possession and value, between reserve and exchange, is reflected in the ambiguity of Goux's term "formal identity", in its balance between an abstract "formal" quality of sameness and a concrete quality of "identity" as uniqueness or difference. Indeed, this tension is internal to the word "identity" itself:

> **identity** *n.* **1** The quality or condition of being identical in every detail; absolute sameness; an instance or example of this. Also, the fact of being identified *with*. L16. **2** The condition or fact of a person or thing being that specified unique person or thing, esp. as a continuous unchanging property throughout existence; the characteristics determining this; individuality, personality. M17. (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1993, 1:1304)

Much has been written about the theme of identity in Beckett's work. However, this theme is often cast in terms of its relation to the individual subject, whether as a question of psychology (O'Hara 1997) or of psychoanalysis (Watson 1991) or of metaphysics (Butler 1984) or of linguistics (Katz 1999). The tradition of critical interpretations of *Molloy*, as summed up by Thomas Cousineau, might stand as an illustrative example:

> Critics of *Molloy* have always recognised that the two parts of the novel resemble the two halves of a divided self. Further, they have generally agreed that the novel ends with some form of reconciliation between the opposing regions of self represented by Molloy and Moran. According to this interpretation, the movement of the novel reflects the acceptance, on the part of the higher, rational self, of those inadmissible, irrational aspects of its personality that it had formerly disavowed. (Cousineau 1983, 81)

If the theme of identity in Beckett has traditionally been figured in personal or subjective terms (Cousineau's essay, for instance, is based on a Lacanian model of paternal language), here I want to turn it inside out, so to speak, and examine identity in economic terms, as the unstable centre of a network of relations. The distinct meanings of the word cited above reflect a dualism familiar in economic theory, between the abstract commensurability of the marketplace, and the concrete uniqueness of things-in-themselves. The question of identity, refigured in this way, turns on a tension between possession and value, between identity as uniqueness or individuality, and identity as sameness or commensurability.

With regard to the trilogy, there is a well-established critical tradition concerning the relation between possession and identity, and, more importantly, between dispossession and the dissolution of identity. According to the general thrust of such readings, Moran, through a harrowing process of dispossession, is seen as approaching the state of Molloy, who may already have existed as an inner avatar, who may in fact, be the same person at a different time[38]. What is important is the comparison between Moran the bourgeois surrounded by his possessions, and the impoverishment of Molloy. Along with the theme of possession goes the theme of self-possession, for if Moran is secure in his identity: "His name is Jacques, like mine. This cannot lead to confusion" (*Molloy* 125), Molloy forgets his name, and forgets the boundaries between self and the world: "Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved, but a wall gave way and I filled with roots and tame stems" (*Molloy* 65). It is tempting to read into statements such as this a straightforward and familiar quasi-religious or mystical theme: the things of this world are vanity, and the true knowledge lies in a disowning or disavowal, as the narrator of *First Love* puts it, "of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world" (CSPR 31).

In this chapter I want to examine more closely the nature of this dispossession. Moran's affluence and Molloy's impoverishment are not entirely what they seem, of course, for Molloy's is a far more privileged and proprietorial state of affairs than Moran's. While Molloy leads the life of a cultivated gentleman of leisure — "So many pages, so much money. … Yet I don't work for money" (*Molloy* 7) — Moran is

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[38] Trezise 1990 (*passim*), who in many ways takes issue with such existentialist or phenomenological readings of *Molloy*, nevertheless comes perilously close to affirming the familiar theme of the reconciliation of the whole self and the vanity of the things of the world:

> As both the "already" and the "not yet" of the first person, Molloy does not represent another person so much as the fundamental impersonality of the first person itself. Whence the necessity of *two* proper names — Molloy and Moran — which anticipate the Unnamable inasmuch as their confusion describes the dispossession that invests all "propriété". (Trezise 1990, 52)

far less his own man, forced to run errands at the behest of distant superiors. Through the course of the trilogy there is a steady dismantling of the social and economic reality in which a novel's characters are traditionally immersed. The wealth of worldly detail which upholsters the characterisation of Moran, to the extent of naming the brand of his favourite beer, "Wallenstein" (*Molloy* 133), is generally out of keeping with the austere quasi-metaphysical setting of the work as a whole, which becomes progressively more abstract as it centres in on its essential themes. This process becomes further intensified, of course, in Beckett's later works from *How It Is* to *Worstward Ho*, where the social world is figured only in the most symbolic or allegorical way.

Here I want to examine the nature of Beckettian dispossession, but instead of focussing on the trilogy, I want to concentrate on the works that preceded it, *Murphy* and the four novellas, where the structures of possession and exchange which underpin the Beckettian economy are played out in a more visible way, with a lot more filthy circumstance.

The progressive evaporation of social context is an important element in Beckett's aesthetics. At first sight, the trope of impoverishment might appear to go hand in hand with a minimalist reduction of social detail, but, as the following examination of the *Stories* reveals, for Beckett's characters to exist in such splendid and defiant isolation, beyond the reach of the commodity economy and the everyday necessity of working for a living, they must either be totally dependent on third parties, or have some form of independent financial reserve. Thus what appears to be a minimalist reduction to essentials actually disguises a kind of privileged insulation against the vicissitudes of the world of work and exchange. Beckett's characters, instead of being exposed to the political realities of the commodity economy, tend to survive within an economy of the gift, a domain of privilege where, contrary to the terms of the conventional reading of Beckett, the gift relation affirms the primacy of property over labour, of being over doing, of identity over anonymity.

In this chapter, therefore, I examine Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment through the lens of political economy. There is more than just a paradoxical irony in the transmutations of value that characterise the reception of Beckett. Through a

consideration of the political status of Beckett's impoverished ne'er-do-wells, I try to account more precisely for the unexpected cultural wealth that is ceaselessly discovered at the heart of Beckett's impoverishment.

Possession and self-possession

The classic liberal definition of property belongs to John Locke:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. (Locke 1963, II §27; 328-29)

While a number of the characteristic aporias of liberal theory are lurking in this passage, such as the presupposition of a free and limitless State of Nature from which raw materials can be gathered, the most important point to note here is Locke's grounding of his theory of property in the notion of "self-possession". The free ownership of oneself that Locke posits here is intended to distinguish liberal subjects from slaves (and, in Locke's era, from women), who are not able to act as autonomous economic agents in the marketplace. Locke's extension of the subject's self-possession to "The *Labour* of his Body and the *Work* of his Hands" then leads to that familiar myth of liberal economics: the free exchange of labour in the marketplace.

The notion of self-possession, however, introduces an awkward reflexivity into the definition of the liberal subject, which is henceforward conceived simultaneously as *that which owns* and *that which is owned*. This splitting of the subject, the unstable relation it establishes between self and property, is crucial in approaching the crisis of possession and value in Beckett's work.

Firstly, if the model for property ownership is grounded in the self-possession of the individual, this has the effect of *naturalising* the property relation. That is, if the self-evident relation between "a Man" and "his Person" is one of property, then the institution of property ownership tends to present itself as self-evident. This has the effect of naturalising all other property relations, such that private property is seen as indissolubly linked with the "Person" of its owner, rather than being seen as an object of contestation or exchange temporarily protected by the social convention of ownership.

A correlative of this, then, is that property becomes an extension of personhood, and in this Molloy and Malone, with their inventories of goods and possessions, are no different from the protagonists of conventional realism, in which a character's individuality is delineated through a catalogue of possessions, the familiar literary convention whereby one's personal effects create "personal effects". The link between ownership and identity, and the notion of commodity consumption as signifying practice, is a well-established field of cultural theory. In Beckett the relationship between the self and its possessions is invested with a peculiar intensity, an urgency that serves to bring into focus the crisis of possession and value.

Most important, however, is the aporia created by the category of the "Person". In Locke's model of self-possession, the Person, as owner, is the foundation of all other forms of ownership, the archetype of the free economic agent. But at the same time, as a kind of possession, a thing owned, the Person is the prototype of those things that *cannot* be alienated in the marketplace, for to sell one's Person is to violate the fundamental right that distinguishes the liberal subject from the slave. Self-possession is thus an aporetic form of property right: while it serves as the foundation and the model for all other forms of property rights, it is at the same time an exception to the rule. Self-possession is different from all other property rights, in that the owners are *not* free to dispose of their property on the market, since the property itself marks the limit condition of the so-called free-market economy.

Paradoxically, the self-possessing subject is both the model for all property rights, and the model for all that is inalienable in the market system. As John Frow explains:

> the system of property rights in the liberal state is paradoxically founded on the withdrawal of its founding moment from that system; but this withdrawal is always problematic. Hence one of the central cruces of liberalism has been the question of whether individuals have the freedom to sell themselves into slavery. In Mill's *On Liberty*, for example, this question — the apparent contradiction of a freedom that destroys freedom — is bound up with the question of the limits of the market, and in particular the question of whether and why the human person should be considered non-commodifiable. To the extent that they take "the person" as a point of departure rather than as the historical outcome of categories of ownership, these are questions that cannot be answered. (Frow 1997, 161)

The figure of the author is a crucial example of this limit-case in liberal economics, for the aporia at the heart of the concept of authorship precisely replicates this tension. As we have seen, the concept of intellectual property is predicated on the notion of a unique and individual selfhood that is strictly inalienable:

> each writer must give his thoughts a certain form, and he can give them no other form than his own because he has no other. But neither can he be willing to hand over this *form* in making his thoughts public, for no one can *appropriate* his thoughts without thereby *altering their form*. This latter thus remains forever his exclusive property. (Fichte 1962, 227-28; cited and translated by Woodmansee 1994, 51-2)

But at the same time, this formulation of an inalienable aspect of personhood is developed precisely for the purposes of regulating the *commodification* of a writer's thoughts in the cultural marketplace. On the one hand, the notion of the author is predicated on inalienable self-possession, the uniqueness of individual identity, but on the other, the figure of such an author comes into being only as a means of assisting the commodification of those supposedly inalienable qualities in the impersonal relations of the marketplace. Thus the figure of the author, while a crucial element of the commodification of culture, is always preserved aloof from the market as belonging strictly to the sphere of the private and the personal, of "the human" as a domain to which it would be improper to apply the calculations of the marketplace.

This withdrawal, this sheltering of "the human" from the forces of exchange, is thus the fundamental crux of liberal economics. This abstraction of the self-possessing individual as both the representative agent of market economics, and as its primary unrepresentable category, serves to elevate the individual, generalised as the "human", to a sort of metaphysical plane, autonomous, inviolate, beyond the claims

of the market, the economy, the social. It reinforces, as Frow concludes, "the notion of a transcendental and autonomous sphere of personhood which is prior to and essentially untouched by property relations and which exists in a 'private' rather than a 'public' space" (Frow 1997, 214).

The drive to stasis

Beckett's characters are often described as tramps, or bums, or hoboes, but it would be more accurate to call them dandies, dilettantes, or *flâneurs*. They all have their modest inheritances and their scraps of learning, and they all seem to share a common destiny: the slow and miserly expenditure of cultural and financial capital in a languorous extinction of activity, relation, self, world, sense, meaning and time.

The inscrutable imperatives that prod Molloy to set off in search of his mother, or which compel the narrators of *From An Abandoned Work*, or *Stirrings Still* into their aimless and headstrong excursions, are actually the exception rather than the rule in Beckett: the default setting of the Beckettian character is stasis. Even Moran, who comes closer than any other Beckett character to embodying the Protestant work ethic, confesses: "I've always loved doing nothing" (*Molloy* 126). It would be a mistake, therefore, to lean too heavily on the "quest" motif in Beckett, to find in it the essential element of the Beckettian vision (see, for instance, Amiran 1993; Barge 1988; O'Hara 1997). Like their author — the famous exile who left Ireland to roam the continent, who lived 23 years in the same small Paris flat, and who could leave it again after all that time "without a pang" (Knowlson 1997, 476) — Beckett's characters are governed by a force which is neither the restlessness of nomadism, nor the settledness which puts down roots, but a kind of ectopic indifference, a rootless fixity which in physics goes by the name of inertia:

> For in me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better that to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on. (*Molloy* 64-5)

To be sure, much of Beckett's work seems to explore this kind of agonised dialectic of movement and repose: even for Molloy, so devoted to reaching his mother, "my progress reduced me to stopping more and more often, it was the only way to progress, to stop" (*Molloy* 105). In Beckett's early essay "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce", movement and rest collapse into each other, becoming indistinguishable at their extremes, according to the Brunonian principle of "identified contraries" (*Disjecta* 20):

> There is no difference, says Bruno, between the smallest possible chord and the smallest possible arc, no difference between the infinite circle and the straight line. The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent. Minimal heat equals minimal cold. ... Maximal speed is a state of rest. (*Disjecta* 21)

This principle is illustrated later by the paradoxical movement of Murphy's rocking chair: "most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped" (*Murphy* 9).

The static motion of the rocking-chair, movement without displacement, might be seen as a characteristic expression in Beckett's oeuvre, governing a series of theatrical works, from the rocking-chair of *Rockaby*, most obviously, to the shuttling movements of *Footfalls*, to the choreographed cycles of permutations in *Come and Go*, *What Where*, and *Quad* (as well, of course, as in prose works such as *How It Is* and *The Lost Ones*).

In fact, Beckett's works for the theatre show most clearly the drive towards stasis in his work. To a certain extent this can be seen as the result of Beckett's unique awareness of the inherent limitations of the medium. In all of Beckett's theatre, only in the long-unpublished *Eleutheria* is there so much as a scene change, and even there the divided stage is merely the same space rotated so as to be seen from different angles, with the Kraps' salon falling into the orchestra pit for the third act (*Eleutheria* [E] 6). More characteristically, the only scene changes tend to be indicative of a change of time rather than place, such as the addition of "four or five leaves" to the tree in the second act of *Waiting for Godot* (*Godot* 57), or the progressive engulfment of Winnie in the mound of earth in *Happy Days*. If Vladimir and Estragon are really only immobilised by their concern to keep their appointment — for Vladimir insists that they are not "tied" to Godot (*Godot* 21) — their successors are immobilised in

increasingly literal, physical terms, from Hamm's wheelchair in *Endgame* (another figure of immobility mingled with mobility), to the completely paralysed figures of Nagg and Nell in their dustbins, Winnie in the mound of earth of *Happy Days*, and the tormented figures in the urns of *Play*.

So too, in the prose works, stasis becomes the dominant principle. Molloy's and Moran's tortuous progress in the trilogy gives way to the bedridden Malone, who gives way in *The Unnamable* to Mahood, a legless, armless torso embedded in a jar whose head is fastened in place by a cement collar (*Unnamable* 62). If the choreographed shuttling movements of *How It Is* and *The Lost Ones* can be seen as yet further examples of the same kind of circular displacement which governs *Footfalls* or *Quad* — a motion as quest-like as a bee buzzing in a jar — the later, more clinical and refined prose works such as "All Strange Away", "Imagination Dead Imagine", and "Ping" cancel movement altogether, evoking a sort of hellish tableau in which breath is the only thing that stirs.

However, given the increasing abstraction of Beckett's work through the latter part of his oeuvre, it is in the works of the early and middle period, where the so-called "real" world, or, better perhaps, the world of "realism", although distant, is still visible on the horizon, that the social, political, and aesthetic connotations of Beckett's drive towards stasis can be assessed. As early as his book on Proust, Beckett had denounced the inadequacies of realist representation as "the grotesque fallacy of a realistic art — 'the miserable statement of line and surface', and the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations" (*Proust* 76), as well as rejecting conventional linear narrative as "the vulgarity of a plausible concatenation" (*Proust* 81-82). The connotations of the term "vulgarity" are highly significant here, of course. At one level, the patrician disdain for the common herd is paralleled by the high modernist disdain for the "common writer", who suffers the aesthetic indignity of having to work for a living. But on another level, not only does the workaday world form the scene of the common writer's efforts, but the signs of that world tend to "contaminate" the writing itself: the writer's enslavement to the world of economic necessity demands that that world be reflected, in all its "vulgarity", within the pages of the work itself. Therefore, it is surely significant that, in the course of those works in which Beckett struggles to free himself of the last entanglements of realism, it is

precisely the problem of how to locate his characters and their stories *outside* the "vulgar" socio-economic realm that is the driving force behind what minimal narrative remains. So too, it is through the serio-comic difficulties experienced by his characters in their pursuit of immobility that the crisis of possession and value is played out.

Murphy

A large proportion of the plot of *Murphy*, certainly the most plausible concatenation among Beckett's novels, revolves around Murphy's desperate and ultimately failed attempts to maintain a life of lassitude in the face of increasingly unfavourable economic circumstances. All of Beckett's indolents are inheritors in some degree, and Murphy's benefactor is an uncle, Mr Quigley, himself a "well-to-do ne'er-do-well" (*Murphy* 14). Murphy's "honourable independence" derives from a deal with his landlady, who sends "exquisitely cooked" accounts to Murphy's uncle, and hands over the difference, less a reasonable commission, to Murphy (*Murphy* 15).

Murphy in his rocking-chair is a dedicated seeker of oblivion in a world of penny-a-line notations, so the socio-economic impediments to Murphy's brand of transcendence are not only legible in this novel, but constitute the argument of the novel *per se*. One of the principal themes of *Murphy* is the dialectic of freedom and necessity that is stated in the opening sentences:

> The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton. (*Murphy* 5)

The determinism of the sun's clockwork universe is parodied later in the novel in Pandit Suk's ludicrous horoscope, while Murphy's "freedom", for what it is worth, is dependent on being "out of it", the state of blissful withdrawal attained when the rocking-chair reaches its maximal speed. The question of freedom in a deterministic universe is crucial to the philosophical underpinning of *Murphy*.

David Hesla (Hesla 1971), among others, has noted that Murphy exemplifies the Occasionalist doctrine of Descartes's follower Geulincx:

> Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. ... Murphy was content to accept this partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body as due to some such process of supernatural determination. The problem was of little interest. ... Of infinitely more interest than how this came to be so was the manner in which it might be exploited. (*Murphy* 64)

For Murphy, freedom is an entirely mental phenomenon. Murphy's universe, like that of the Enlightenment rationalists, is a radically dualist affair, divided between a world of brute matter inexorably unfolding according to deterministic laws, and a world of pure intellection, where the mind takes its liberties while the physical world trudges along its inevitable way. Geulincx's famous image for this freedom, which Beckett returns to in *Molloy*, is of a slave imprisoned aboard a ship who is free to move about anywhere on deck but powerless to change the ship's course:

> I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the sad and futile wake. (*Molloy* 68)[39]

Unfortunately for Murphy, however, and in contradiction to his feeling that "his mind was a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own", the mind is not entirely "bodytight": in order for Murphy to enjoy the freedom of the mind, "motion in this world depended on rest in the world outside" (*Murphy* 64). And significantly, among the sight and sounds that, in the opening of the novel, detain Murphy "in the world to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped" (*Murphy* 6) is the street cry of "*Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo!*" (*Murphy* 5).

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[39] Judith Dearlove (1982, 72) points out a series of punning references to Joyce in this passage: the black boat of *Ulysses*, a sadly *rejoicing* slave, the proud and futile *wake*. This subtle punning is doubly reinforced by the context, which seems to pay an ambivalent homage to Joyce as a pioneer, while at the same time mapping out Beckett's own art of reduction, negation, and stasis.

Thus what is for Murphy a philosophical conundrum — how to attain the famous "third zone" of his mind, the renunciation of all will and desire, becoming "a missile without provenance or target", "not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (*Murphy* 66) — becomes, in the interests of the narrative, a socio-economic perplexity: how to pursue a life of idleness in the absence of independent means.

For Murphy this perplexity is expressed in the following syllogism: "Celia said that if he did not find work at once she would have to go back to hers. Murphy knew what that meant. No more music" (*Murphy* 47). The fact that Celia earns her income through prostitution is not only the earliest example of a frequent congruence in Beckett's work between sex and money — where both are figured as undesirable yet unavoidable moments of exchange in a personal economy which strives for an inviolate autonomy and transcendence — but the nature of Celia's work corresponds entirely with the series of oppositions which structure *Murphy*.

In Beckett, economic existence frequently takes the form of the expenditure of capital rather than the alienation of the self through the sale of labour. Mr Quigley, as "well-to-do ne'er-do-well", exemplifies this economy. Murphy, less well-to-do, is nevertheless a stubbornly committed ne'er-do-well:

> He begged her to believe him when he said he could not earn. Had he not already sunk a small fortune in attempts to do so? He begged her to believe that he was a chronic emeritus. But it was not altogether a question of economy. There were metaphysical considerations, in whose gloom it appeared that the night had come in which no Murphy could work. (*Murphy* 16)

Murphy goes on to make two predictions, first that "Providence will provide", and then that "work would be the end of them both" (*Murphy* 16). If the first turns out to be false, the second is at least half true, in that it is at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, on the point of chucking the job and returning to Celia, that Murphy's body is finally quieted for good by the exploding gas, at the precise moment that he attains freedom in the oblivion of his rocking-chair.

Work is anathema to the Beckettian hero because it precludes the bodily quietude that is crucial to the mental experience of freedom. Some form of capital backing, some form of financial reserve, whether already possessed or gained by inheritance, fraud,

charity or good fortune, is essential to the ambitious program of indolence sketched out by someone like Murphy. In the drama between possession and value, between the two senses of identity — as uniqueness and individuality, and as similarity and commensurability — it is the former term that always receives priority in the Beckettian scheme of things. Thus, in one of the bitterest exchanges between Celia and Murphy over the question of work, Murphy characteristically appeals to a notion of existence as the expenditure of capital rather than the creation of labour. Murphy is attempting to argue that Celia's demand that he find work constitutes an attempt to change him into something he is not:

> "Have I wanted to change you? Have I pestered you to begin things that don't belong to you and stop things that do? How can I care what you DO?"
>
> "I am what I do," said Celia.
>
> "No," said Murphy. "You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing." (*Murphy* 25)

This priority of "being" over "doing" becomes a central feature of Beckett's work as a whole. The indolence or inactivity of Beckett's characters works in the service of a kind of heightened Heideggerian apperception, the ontological lucidity of the insomniac, who is able to measure the exact weight of being, stripped for a moment of its dross of circumstance. It is only through such a program of disciplined immersion in idleness that Beckett's vice-existers touch the bottom of being, since work, activity, the world, is what allows us to forget ourselves, to forget the greater pain of existence in our attendance to the minor pains of living.

> The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering — that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom — with its host of top-hatted and hygienic ministers, Boredom that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils. (*Proust* 28)

Beckett's long exposition of his reading of the Proustian aesthetic draws an explicit equation between the world of work as exemplifying the dull inviolability of Habit, and the apperceptive readiness of the aesthetic sensibility, wherein, through the workings of involuntary memory or the experience of the work of art, "the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (*Proust* 19). For Beckett:

> Habit is like Françoise, the immortal cook of the Proust household, who knows what has to be done, and will slave all day and all night rather than tolerate any redundant activity in the kitchen. But our current habit of living is as incapable of dealing with

> the mystery of a strange sky or a strange room, with any circumstance unforeseen in her curriculum, as Françoise of conceiving or realizing the full horror of a Duval omelette. (*Proust* 20-21)

For Murphy, Celia's insistence on "doing" over "being" is equivalent to Françoise's unimaginative practicality. Later in the novel, of course, Celia herself discovers the "paradisial innocence" of Murphy's chair (*Murphy* 86), the way of stasis as the most direct route to the truth of being, but in the bitter exchange quoted above, Murphy's insistence on "being" over "doing" is an explicit rejection of the economic necessity to which, at this point in the novel, Celia must bend in order to provide for them both.

In terms of Lockean liberalism, Celia's work as a prostitute might be seen as embodying, in the most literal way, the principle that even the least well-to-do of ne'er-do-wells has a "*Property* in his own *Person*". For Celia, in the absence of other assets and in the face of economic necessity, the sale of her body allows her to keep it and soul together. However, it is significant that she characterises this transaction as a sale of *labour* rather than a sale of *property*: "I am what I do". For Murphy, on the other hand, work is anathema: you live off your capital, you sell what you have.

Murphy's bitter retort can be adapted as a general formula to characterise the typical Beckettian hero over the course of the *Stories* and on to the trilogy: "you are what you have, you suffer a dreary ooze of your having into being".

First Love

If Murphy's situation can be characterised as an attempt at "being" without "doing", delivering him over to the languorous waiting that characterises the time of the gambler, the collector, the inheritor, this same quest for a kind of hyperaesthetic inertia also lies behind the four *Stories*. These are among the last of Beckett's works, with the exception of *Molloy*, which might be said to have anything resembling a plot,

and in each of them the fundamental intrigue is the same, namely, the effort expended by an unnamed narrator or narrators in an attempt to live a life of complete inactivity.

The structure of the inheritance serves to reinforce a kind of essentialism of identity — identity as possession rather than as commensuration, identity as "who you are" rather than "what you do". After all, the inheritance is tied to a name and a unique individual, and the passing of property through generations of hands preserves it aloof from the marketplace and the calculation of rivals. In this sense, the transaction of an inheritance excludes the notion of value, since it belongs exclusively to the domain of the gift, where the identity and relation between giver and receiver is more important, at least in principle, than the nature and value of the goods exchanged. To borrow Chris Gregory's functional definition of this distinction:

> Commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal independence that establishes a quantitative relationship between the objects transacted, whereas gift exchange is an exchange of inalienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal dependence that establishes a qualitative relationship between the subjects transacting. (Gregory 1983, 109; cited in Frow 1997, 121)

To introduce questions of value into the gift economy of the inheritance is to commit one of the grossest offences against bourgeois etiquette: the discussion of money in the private sphere, a sphere where the only values should be "family values". No doubt this explains, too, why in the nineteenth-century novel the obsequious and venal heir is such a familiar butt for bourgeois comedy, a perennial signifier of vulgarity and moral turpitude.

Such bourgeois family dramas lie in the background of Beckett's four novellas, where the "Murphy scenario" once again becomes the animating problematic of the narratives, for each of Beckett's ne'er-do-well aesthetes (assuming for a moment that they are not the same person) attempts to pursue idleness as a sort of defiant act of freedom, in the face of insuperable physical and socio-economic necessity.

First Love begins with the bourgeois drama of a disputed inheritance. Although the nominal subject of the story will be his first experience of love, the narrator begins with the death of his father, commenting:

> I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father, in time. That other links exist, on other levels, between these two affairs, is not impossible. I have enough trouble as it is in trying to say what I think I know. (CSPR 25)

This confession of ignorance will, of course, become a familiar trademark of Beckett's later writing, especially in the trilogy and the *Texts for Nothing*. Characteristic, too, is the hint as to a hidden connection between the two incidents, the admission of confusion containing an implicit invitation to discover a buried significance. I will return to the implied connection between these incidents later. For the moment, it is important to underline the theme of inheritance, for after his father's death the narrator is expelled from the house:

> They would never let me see his will, they simply said he had left me such a sum. I believed then and still believe he had stipulated in his will that I be left the room I had occupied in his lifetime and for food to be brought to me there, as hitherto. (CSPR 27)

The novelistic scenario is complete with hard-hearted and venal relatives, who reject the narrator's offers to make himself useful about the place, and who lock him out of his room while he is "at stool", leaving his possessions in a heap before the door. The narrator drily comments that the success of this subterfuge "will give you some idea how constipated I was, at this juncture" (CSPR 28).

Constipation occurs with flawless regularity among Beckett's characters, as one might expect perhaps, given the well-known Freudian equation of shit with money, and the Beckettian insistence on the measured expenditure of capital as the most desirable of socio-economic circumstances. For instance, even though he describes his mother as "quite incontinent", Molloy muses that "it can't have amounted to much, a few niggardly wetted goat droppings every two or three days" (*Molloy* 22). Shitting, no doubt, is one of the ways in which, in Murphy's terms, "you do what you are … you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing" (*Murphy* 25). However, for the narrator of *First Love*, his magnificent disquisition on constipation ends in the same confusion that attended the relation between his father's death and his marriage:

> What can that have been but constipation? Or am I confusing it with diarrhoea? It's all a muddle in my head, graves and nuptials and the different varieties of motion. (CSPR 28)

To distort slightly Julia Kristeva's reading of *First Love* (Kristeva 1987, 150), what might be taken as the common factor between graves, nuptials and the different varieties of motion is the theme of expulsion. The father's death results in the expulsion of the narrator from the house, an expulsion not only facilitated by the narrator's constipation, but described, in a passage directly following the discourse on constipation, with suggestively scatological overtones: "I'd have barricaded myself in the room, nothing less than gas would have dislodged me" (CSPR 29), while the other residents of the house experience "the blessed relief … all clear and joy in every heart, come let's eat, the fumigation can wait" (CSPR 29).

The narrator describes his predicament in terms strikingly reminiscent of Murphy's:

> What mattered to me in my dispeopled kingdom, that in regard to which the disposition of my carcass was the merest and most futile of accidents, was supineness in the mind, the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short. (CSPR 31)

The narrator here suffers the same fatal contradiction of the mind/body dichotomy, for while he would happily describe his body as a "carcass", and a "corpse" (CSPR 29), while he extols the "smell of corpses" as "infinitely preferable to what the living emit" (CSPR 26), the sad truth is that "man is still today, at the age of twenty-five, at the mercy of an erection, physically too" (CSPR 31). Like Murphy, the narrator of *First Love* experiences sexual desire as an insurrection of the flesh against the mind's bodytight autonomy, the ball and chain of the physical universe preventing his solipsistic flight into a purely intellectual freedom. In relation to his mind, the disposition of his body is not "the merest and most futile of accidents", but, as for Murphy, "motion in this world [of the mind] depended on rest in the world outside" (*Murphy* 64). In contradistinction to the joyous or anguished or terrified desire for communion that characterises the sexual act in Joyce or Proust or Kafka, Kristeva compares the detached and reluctant copulations of Beckett's narrators with the icy autoeroticism of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*:

> In the manner of Duchamp, Beckett says, after and against the militant bachelors of the early twentieth century, that rather than avoid the sexual act, they should assume it but only as an impossible relationship, whose participants are condemned to a perpetual banishment that confines them within autoeroticism. (Kristeva 1987, 151)

Thus Beckett's narrator mournfully muses: "What goes by the name of love is banishment, with now and then a postcard from the homeland, such is my considered opinion, this evening" (CSPR 31).

As with unbidden tumefaction, the need to shit, whether complicated by constipation or diarrhoea, comes to be regarded as yet another of the impediments the unruly body places in the way of the mind's striving to escape the world of necessity: everything that recalls the body to its corporeality falls under the sign of banishment, banishment from the true self which transcends itself in a bodiless lassitude. Thus the constipated narrator of *First Love* describes how he "parted the cheeks with both hands and strained, heave! ho! heave! ho!, with the motions of one tugging at the oar, and only one thought in my mind, to be back in my room and flat on my back again" (CSPR 28). The reasons he gives for his period of cohabitation with Lulu/Anna are that it enables him to regain some measure of his former indifference:

> I did not feel easy when I was with her, but at least free to think of something else than her, of the old trusty things, and so little by little, as down steps towards a deep, of nothing. And I knew that away from her I would forfeit this freedom. (CSPR 39)

So too, once installed in her room, with the sofa and the stewpan, he experiences a return to the kind of self-possession which, it is hinted, he enjoyed before his expulsion from his father's house and his entanglement in the snares of love:

> Already my love was waning, that was all that mattered. Yes, already I felt better, soon I'd be up to the slow submersions, so long denied me through her fault. And I had only just moved in! Try and put me out now, I said. (CSPR 41)

It is clear enough that Lulu/Anna comes to take the place of his father, just as in *Molloy* Lousse will take the place of Molloy's mother, in the sense that she enables him to subsist in a state of more or less complete dependence, providing a roof over his head and the basic necessities, characterised by Malone as "dish and pot" (*Malone Dies* 7). So too, it is with the birth of her child that the narrator feels himself compelled to leave — "it went to my heart to leave a house without being put out" (CSPR 45) — since his place has been usurped, as it were, by his child — "there was no competing with those cries" (CSPR 45) — cries which nevertheless pursue him down the street and, indeed, continue to pursue him for the rest of his existence.

The flight of the narrator of *First Love* from the responsibilities of fatherhood is, of course, immediately and ironically undercut by a reminiscence of his own father:

> I looked among the stars and constellations for the Wains, but could not find them. And yet they must have been there. My father was the first to show them to me. He had shown me others, but alone, without him beside me, I could never find any but the Wains. (CSPR 45)

First Love thus reproduces, without the "penny-a-line vulgarity" of street names and minor characters, the same socio-economic perplexities that structured *Murphy*, for if the narrator's goal is a state of transcendent indolence — becoming "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" — the narrative once again traces the extremity of his exertions to achieve that lassitude. Thus while Beckett's gradual stripping away of the markers of conventional realism moves towards an aestheticisation of reality, a gradual abstraction of his characters from social context, in stories such as *First Love* the economy of the social still surrounds and enmeshes the protagonist in a series of relations upon which he is dependent but which he simultaneously seeks to disavow.

Although the narrator of *First Love* supposedly subsists in a state of noble and spiritualised indifference, the narrative is motivated by the classic bourgeois plot-device of the disputed inheritance, a fact underscored by the narrator's haughty outburst:

> Were you to inquire, as undoubtedly you itch, what I had done with the money my father had left me, the answer would be I had done nothing with it but leave it lie in my pocket. For I knew I would not be always young, and that summer does not last forever, nor even autumn, my mean soul told me so. (CSPR 32)

This insistence on the "poor form" of questions of economic circumstances underscores the characteristic value system that underlies much of Beckett's work. It's not a question of miserliness, for it is clear that this money is hoarded as a resource, not through a fetishistic aestheticisation of money itself. The miser collects money as others collect stamps — it functions as an aesthetic absolute — whereas the narrator's inheritance serves a utilitarian purpose. If the narrator repudiates any discussion of this money as a lapse of good taste, it is because money is a sign of the social, whereas the narrator's quest is for an economic insulation against the outside world as a necessary prelude to the oblivion of the inner. If his "marriage" to Lulu/Anna allows him to live the life to which he is accustomed without drawing

upon his capital, she herself has no such prerogative but, like Celia in *Murphy*, is forced to sell her assets: "So you live by prostitution, I said. We live by prostitution, she said" (CSPR 43).

This exchange underlines the narrator's continual reluctance to acknowledge an emplacement within circuits of exchange and relations of dependence. In fact, the statement can be taken in two ways. Most obviously it can be taken to mean that because Lulu/Anna lives by prostitution, and because she supports both of them, they both live by prostitution. But in another sense, because the narrator himself is supported by Lulu/Anna in exchange for his sexual favours (for what they are worth), the relationship itself can be seen an ironic inversion of the institution of patriarchal marriage as a form of legalised prostitution. (In other ways, of course, the relationship reproduces the traditional patriarchal economy, in that the narrator contributes no labour of either the domestic or child-rearing kind, and leaves, in fact, at the very moment the child is born.) The narrator's refuge at Lulu/Anna's from the world of economic exchange is bought at the cost of his involvement in the transactions of the sexual economy, and Lulu/Anna's reminder that he lives by prostitution serves to unite the two economies in a single figure of physical and economic enslavement.

The Expelled

The same dramas of inheritance and dependency, the same concern to preserve an illusion of autonomy and independence in the face of economic necessity, come to structure the other stories too. Like *First Love*, *The Expelled* begins with the narrator being turfed out of his place of residence, and although he starts off with a "small sum my father had left me as a gift, with no restrictions, at his death" (CSPR 54) this is apparently stolen and he is left destitute. Thus he complains:

> The great disadvantage of this condition, which might be defined as the absolute impossibility of all purchase, is that it compels you to bestir yourself. It is rare, for

> example, when you are completely penniless, that you can have food brought to you from time to time in your retreat. (CSPR 54)

The economy of the gift continues to structure the Beckettian plot, however, for the narrator eventually learns that he has been left another inheritance by a woman whom he barely remembers: "perhaps she had dandled me on her knees while I was still in swaddling clothes and there had been some lovey-dovey" (CSPR 55). The important thing to note is the insistence on "lovey-dovey": the relation here is once again personal and quasi-maternal, belonging to the economy of the gift. As distinct from the anonymous economic relations of the market, to which the cab driver in this story or Lulu/Anna in *First Love* are condemned, an inheritance depends on "who you are" rather than "what you do". Once again, the relation between identity and possession — "who you are" being definable in terms of "what you have" — becomes crucial in this story, for in order to claim his inheritance the narrator, who has been wandering the streets with no fixed address, must verify his identity, an issue which comes to turn on the possession of a hat.

At the beginning of the story, at the moment of expulsion itself, the narrator's ironic Proustian daydream of "hawthorn and wild roses" (CSPR 47) while lying in the gutter is broken by a second slam of the front door from which he has just been ejected:

> it was merely my hat sailing towards me through the air, rotating as it came. I caught it and put it on. They were most correct, according to their god. They could have kept this hat, but it was not theirs, it was mine, so they gave it back to me. (CSPR 47)

He goes on to devote an entire paragraph to a discussion of this hat, which comes to bear an uncannily metonymic relation to his own identity:

> When my head had attained I shall not say its definitive but its maximum dimensions, my father said to me, Come, son, we are going to buy your hat, as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place. He went straight to the hat. I personally had no say in the matter, nor had the hatter. (CSPR 48)

The hat is no ordinary manufactured commodity, entering into a casual alliance with any given purchaser, but bears a unique relation to the narrator, having seemingly been made only for him and fitting, as if by preordained design, the maximum dimensions of his skull. Indeed, it comes to function as a kind of talisman, fitting the narrator like the glass slipper fits Cinderella, or Excalibur fits the young Arthur, and

like these fairytale objects it ushers in a magical transformation of economic and social status. In other ways, the hat functions like another talisman of social distinction, the family name: it pre-exists from time immemorial, and is given to him by his father without anyone having any say in the matter.

With the difficulties it causes him, the hat comes to take on the dimensions of a genuine patriarchal burden, a burden that the narrator must learn to accept as an inescapable part of his identity:

> I have often wondered if my father's purpose was not to humiliate me, if he was not jealous of me who was young and handsome, fresh at least, while he was already old and all bloated and purple. It was forbidden me, from that day forth, to go out bareheaded, my pretty brown hair blowing in the wind. Sometimes, in a secluded street, I took it off and held it my hand, but trembling. I was required to brush it morning and evening. Boys my age with whom, in spite of everything, I was obliged to mix occasionally, mocked me. But I said to myself, It is not really the hat, they simply make merry at the hat because it is a little more glaring than the rest, for they have no finesse. … When my father died I could have got rid of this hat, there was nothing to prevent me, but not I. (CSPR 48)

The painful, and yet seemingly necessary and inevitable relation between this hat and the narrator's identity becomes crucial in his dealings with Mr Nidder, the lawyer employed to handle the estate of the narrator's mysterious benefactor. Indeed, the hat becomes a powerful signifier of the family name, allowing the narrator to claim his rightful inheritance:

> He verified my identity. That took some time. I showed him the metal initials in the lining of my hat, they proved nothing but they increased the probabilities. Sign, he said. (CSPR 54)

As mentioned earlier, the Lockean liberal model of property, grounded in the self-possession of the individual, gives rise to a conception of ownership as an intimate and natural relation between oneself, one's identity, and one's possessions. Property comes to appear, not as a social convention, but as a personal attribute. It is conceived of as inalienable, aloof from the circuits of calculation and exchange that regulate the everyday economy. This model of property is strongly borne out in *The Expelled*, since relations of ownership are everywhere confirmed as *essential* rather than accidental: the hat exists in a unique relation to the narrator, doubly personalised in its familial relation to the patriarchal inheritance and in its physical relation to the

dimensions of his skull. So too, the two inheritances he receives are inalienable gifts that correspond to personal relations of "lovey-dovey".

Here the two primary meanings of "property", as both a "mode of having" and as a "mode of being" are borne out:

> **property** *n.* **1** That which one owns; a thing or things belonging to a person or persons; possessions collectively. **2** An attribute, quality, or characteristic, *esp.* an essential one; an inherent power or capacity, a virtue. (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1993, 2:2379)

Thus, as Thomas Trezise points out, for Moran at least, "to have and to be are no less than synonymous" (Trezise 1990, 43). Moreover, as Trezise goes on to note:

> the French word "propriété" ... encompasses a larger number of meanings derived from the Latin *proprius* and pertinent to Beckett than does any one English term. Its principal meanings in current French usage are (1) property as a right; (2) property as that which is possessed; (3) property as distinctive quality or attribute; (4) appropriateness, suitability, correctness. (Trezise 1990, 43 n.15)

This last sense adds an extra dimension of necessity to the set of relations which link the narrator and his hat: what is *propre* is what is "fitting", and thus the hat functions on the one hand as a possession, as an attribute, as a distinctive quality which is uniquely formed by its "fitting" his skull, and on the other as a kind of decorous formality, as the token that serves to establish as "fitting" or appropriate his claim to the deceased woman's estate.

This form of property belongs exclusively to the economy of the gift: property in this highly personalised sense cannot be bought or sold, but only passed on through forms of exchange which are grounded in varying forms of social and familial obligation or inter-relation. This pattern of exchange is of course the reverse of the commodity form, which facilitates anonymous transactions of labour and its products through the mediation of a universal equivalent, money. The Beckettian economy, then, works through a stubborn insistence on the primacy of the gift, and through a corresponding refusal of commodification and the money form. The concomitant of this essentialism of property relations, which sees property as *propriété* governed by structures of personalised gift giving, is a refusal to recognise the labour of others as constitutive of value.

If Murphy cannot care what Celia does, if the narrator of *First Love* cannot recognise that he too lives by prostitution, so too in *The Expelled* the narrator insists on accepting the cabman's labour as a gift rather than as work for hire. The class differences which separate the narrator from the cabman are borne out as much by the fact that the cabman marks the likely addresses of suitable lodgings "with a cross, as common people do" (CSPR 56), and refers to the horse as his "beast" ("And they talk to us of the specificity of primitive peoples' speech" [CSPR 55]), as by the fact that the narrator refuses the invitation to sit beside him on the seat, preferring the snugness of the inside of the cab (CSPR 56).

By a strange inversion, however, the narrator accepts the cabman's offer of lodgings for the night, but insists, in a kind of perverted *Imitatio Christi*, on sleeping in the stable rather than in the house. Having overcome the urge to set fire to the stable with the matches the cabman gives him to light his way, the narrator eventually leaves in the middle of the night:

> No sooner had I left the yard than I thought of something. Weakness. I slipped a banknote in the matchbox, went back to the yard and placed the box on the sill of the window through which I had just come. The horse was at the window. But after I had taken a few steps in the street I returned to the yard and took back my banknote. I left the matches, they were not mine. (CSPR 60)

The last phrase, in its finical insistence on "correctness" echoes, of course, the beginning of the story when the narrator's hat is thrown after him into the street. But the narrator's eventual decision to reclaim the banknote is ambiguous: it seems to represent, not so much a reluctance to repay the cabman for his generosity, but a reluctance for the form of repayment to take the form of money, which would remove it from the domain of the gift and characterise it as a commodity transaction.

The Calmative

So too, the central transaction of the next story, the exchange of the phial of calmative, even though it is, like the relation with the cabman, an exchange between strangers, takes more the form of a gift than that of a commodity transaction. The narrator, older and more decrepit, more disoriented and desperate than the narrators of the first two stories, has explained to the mysterious stranger that he has no money. For the stranger, this seems to place the narrator in a state of conveniently pliable vulnerability: "No money! he cried. All of a sudden his hand came down on the back of my neck, his sinewy fingers closed and with a jerk and a twist he had me up against him" (CSPR 73). The man shows him the phial, exclaiming "There you have it all" (CSPR 74).

> Want it? he said. No, but I said yes, so as not to vex him. He proposed an exchange. Give me your hat, he said. I refused. What vehemence! he said. I haven't a thing, I said. Try in your pockets, he said. I haven't a thing, I said, I came out without a thing. Give me a lace, he said. I refused. Long silence. And if you gave me a kiss, he said finally. I knew there were kisses in the air. (CSPR 74)

This is a strange and disturbingly surreal transaction, and for a number of reasons. The phial of calmative is clearly not worth nothing, since the man has just named its price as "One and six" (CSPR 73). And yet its buyer does not want it, or only agrees to want it in order to avoid the violence of the man's fingers "rowelling" his neck (CSPR 73), and indeed when the transaction is over he almost leaves it behind (CSPR 74). The narrator makes it quite clear that he has nothing with any exchange-value — no money, no other valuables. In the absence of exchange-values, then, the bargaining must move into other domains of value, and thus the man makes a series of offers.

The first object proposed for exchange, the hat, as we have seen from *The Expelled*, is most likely an heirloom, and thus the narrator vehemently rejects the idea of parting with it: it might be thought of as a symbolic value, a marker of personal identity.

The man then proposes a lace, an object which is of little exchange-value, but which it would greatly inconvenience the narrator to be without: its value is entirely a use value, and in fact it is perhaps for this reason, remembering Adam Smith's

characterisation of the use-value of water (see Guillory 1993, 300-301), that it is ordinarily useless as a medium of exchange.

The third item proposed for exchange, then, a kiss, moves into that domain of last resort, the body and its favours as the one remaining asset of the self-possessing subject. In the sexually-charged atmosphere of the narrative this proposal comes as a sort of inevitable surprise: the opening paragraph of the story hints darkly at "the assaults on unshakable pillars, the fornications with corpses" (CSPR 61), the inexplicable comedian in the brown suit alludes to "the reigning penis" (CSPR 63), the encounter with the boy holding the goat is charged with a sort of unspeakable eroticism — "Can this base thought be mine?" (CSPR 66) — while the man with the phials immediately asks the narrator: "Are thighs much in your thoughts … arses, cunts and environs?" (CSPR 73).

In the end, the kiss itself turns out to be a relatively chaste affair, a kiss with lips pursed "as mother had taught me" (CSPR 74) planted in the middle of the man's forehead. The strangeness of this transaction, however, is complicated by the fact that the narrator clearly desires the kiss more than the man with the phials. In fact, the "calmative" of the title may well apply as much to the kiss itself as to the phial for which it is exchanged, since the narrator states at the beginning of the story that "it would be a sad state of affairs if in that unscandalizable throng I couldn't achieve a little encounter that would calm me a little" (CSPR 65).

In fact, this transaction may be seen as an ironic reversal of the narrator's earlier encounter with the young boy, who had offered him a sweet:

> I hadn't been offered a sweet for eighty years at least, but I took it eagerly and put it in my mouth, the old gesture came back to me, more and more moved since that is what I wanted. The sweets were stuck together and I had my work cut out to separate the top one, a green one, from the others, but he helped me and his hand brushed mine. (CSPR 66-7)

However, the repressed eroticism of this gift giving, which is in itself an ironic inversion of the stereotypical paedophile encounter, is suddenly exposed as the boy is turning to leave:

> with a great gesticulation of my whole body I motioned him to stay and I said, in an impetuous murmur, Where are you off to, my little man, with your nanny? The words were hardly out of my mouth when for shame I covered my face. (CSPR 67)

It is here, with this humiliatingly failed attempt at seduction, that the narrator experiences a moment of awkwardness as a result of not having any money on him:

> If I had had a penny in my pocket I would have given it to him, for him to forgive me, but I did not have a penny in my pocket, nor anything resembling it. Nothing that could give pleasure to a little unfortunate at the mouth of life. … Of his little person I was fated to see no more than the black curly hair and the pretty curve of the long bare legs all muscle and dirt. And the hand, so fresh and keen, I would not forget in a hurry either. I looked for better words to say to him, I found them too late, he was gone, oh not far, but far. (CSPR 67)

If the narrator here lacks the money that would buy forgiveness for his improper advance, in the transaction with the man with the phials it is the sexual advance that itself figures as a medium of exchange. In both cases, the absence of money provokes an intensification of the relation: the transactions are not merely casual and impersonal relations between anonymous economic agents, but are charged by a kind of pseudo-erotic yearning. Remembering that "perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)" is among the activities which Bataille characterises as "pure expenditure" (*dépense*) (Bataille 1985, 118), the atmosphere of homoerotic sexual tension, the narrator's desire to "achieve a little encounter that would calm me a little", and the fact that he "came out without a thing" (CSPR 74), illustrates to what extent *The Calmative* represents a further step in Beckett's shift from the "penny-a-line vulgarity" of a realist "literature of notations" (*Proust* 76), towards an exclusive economy of the gift.

The End

The End resumes many of the themes I have been outlining in this chapter: the drive towards stasis; the insistence on the primacy of the economy of the gift over that of

the commodity; the insistence on "being" over "doing" as the fundamental attribute of identity.

Like the other three stories, *The End* begins with the narrator being turned out of his place of lodging and left to his own devices. As in *First Love*, he receives a sum of money — "The sum was not large, compared to other sums, but to me it seemed large" (CSPR 80) — except that on this occasion it is a gift not in the form of the inheritance, but of the charitable donation: "This is a charitable institution, he said, and the money is a gift you receive when you leave" (CSPR 81).

In fact, this story explores the paltry economy of charity in a number of guises, from the narrator's eviction from a charitable institution, to his unhappy sojourn in the cave of a man evidently poorer than himself, to his subsistence by begging on a street corner. The theme of charity as a civic virtue is somewhat sarcastically signalled early in the story when the narrator comes to describe his bench by the river:

> It stood beside a watering trough, gift of a Mrs. Maxwell to the city horses, according to the inscription. During the short time I rested there several horses took advantage of this monument. … Mrs. Maxwell would have been pleased if she could have seen her trough rendering such services to the city horses. (CSPR 82)

But there is an important distinction to be made here between charity and the gift. The economy of the gift, as we have seen, is characterised by the unique and personal nature of its transactions: in the circulation of objects in the gift economy, qualitative relations between persons take precedence over quantitative relations between things. The gift depends on the specific identities of giver and receiver: it is a bond between specific persons in which the character of the object is secondary to the gift-giving relation it establishes. This is not to say, as Bataille attempts to argue in "The Notion of Expenditure", that the gift is pure loss, uni-directional and unmotivated, or that the gift does not carry with it obligations of reciprocality or indebtedness. On the contrary, it should be recognised that *indebtedness*, as opposed to *debt*, is a kind of converse form of the gift: one is indebted only to specific persons in specific ways which are not strictly calculable or quantifiable, whereas debt is quantified, impersonal, and, with the imposition of interest, constantly re-calculable.

If the gift determines concrete relations between specific persons, charity, on the other hand, is impersonal, abstract, quantifiable. In fact, *The End* explores in a number of ways a series of distinctions between the nature of the "true" gift, and the "false" gift of charity, while, in line with the overall movement of Beckett's fiction in this period, the exchange economy of the commodity is increasingly marginalised and suppressed.

Mrs. Maxwell's gift to the city horses may be seen as an intermediate example. The watering trough, as a specific object, a use-value, is closer to the economy of the gift than of charity, which on the whole deals with exchange values. On the other hand, of course, Mrs. Maxwell's gift does not really create a relation of reciprocality or indebtedness. On the contrary, the very inability of the horses to comprehend or express their gratitude, their indebtedness, their relation to Mrs. Maxwell, underscores the typical sentimentality of the charitable gift, which depends precisely on this *suppression of relationship*, a uni-directional giving which consoles itself with the construction of an imagined gratitude rather than risking the reciprocity of genuine relationship. Thus charity is a highly ambiguous form of gift: while it seeks to render service, at the same time it wishes to deny kinship. It is neither completely impersonal, like commodity exchange, nor entirely personal, like the exchange of gifts: it belongs to a kind of abstract, universal, commensurate form of the person and the gift, in which we may recognise precisely the appearance of the "human"[40].

If Mrs. Maxwell's sentimental act of charity may be seen as an ambiguous instance, the rest of the story *The End* contains a remarkable series of examples illustrating the complex relations between charity and the gift.

"They clothed me and gave me money" (CSPR 78). The proverbial coldness of charity is signalled right at the beginning of the story, when the narrator is forced to leave the charitable institution in which he has been staying for an indefinite period.

[40] The fact that this quality is transposed by Mrs. Maxwell to "the city horses" by no means invalidates the notion of charity as an expression of the human. On the contrary, it merely illustrates the extent to which the human — particularly in the form of "humanity" or the "humane" — is precisely an abstract universal independent of actual persons or even human beings as such.

We have seen that the gift of money is more characteristic of charity than of the gift because it is an exchange rather than a use value, because it is quantifiable, and because it is abstract and universal rather than concrete and particular. But the clothes the narrator is given also resemble money, in that they too are a kind of concrete universal: "shoes, socks, trousers, shirt, coat, hat" (CSPR 78). They are a universal equivalent of clothing, and if the true gift is always *propre*, both "fitting" and belonging to the realm of personal property, the clothing of charity is always ill-fitting, inappropriate, impersonal: any size, any style, fits all, suits all. The narrator spends some time describing these ill-fitting clothes that smell of sulphur, and the pretty blue tie with little stars that he doesn't like. Significantly, he insists on having his own property returned to him:

> I said, Keep your hat and give me back mine. I added, Give me back my greatcoat. They replied that they had burnt them, together with my other clothes. I understood then that the end was near, at least fairly near. (CSPR 78)

The destruction of the narrator's personal belongings by the charitable institution might be read as a destruction of personal identity, especially given the importance of the patriarchal hat. The narrator comes to be categorised as merely a particular instance of generic humanity. But even the diligent machinery of charity does not completely erase the narrator's identity, for, as Mr. Weir explains, he has been identified: "Never come back here whatever you do, you would not be let in. Don't go to any of our branches either, they would turn you away" (CSPR 80).

If the narrator of *The End* is suspicious of, and even hostile towards the ministrations of charity, this attitude will be taken up again by Molloy, who displays similar recalcitrance when he is given a cup of tea and a slab of bread at the police station:

> Let me tell you this, when social workers offer you, free, gratis and for nothing, something to hinder you from swooning, which with them is an obsession, it is useless to recoil, they will pursue you to the ends of the earth, the vomitory in their hands. The Salvation Army is no better. Against the charitable gesture there is no defence, that I know of. You sink your head, you put out your hands all trembling and twined together and you say, Thank you, thank you lady, thank you kind lady. To him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth. (*Molloy* 30)

This attitude is, of course, highly ambiguous. On the one hand, it can be read as an angry refusal of an economic system that requires the dispossessed to relish filth for

the edification and moral satisfaction of their betters. But on the other hand, it can be read as a proud and defiant rejection of welfare, in the name of an embattled individualist autonomy, a kind of Thatcherism of the roofless.

But if the narrator regards charity with suspicion, his dealings in the economy of commodity exchange turn out to be even more disastrous. After encountering a series of rejections in his search for lodgings, he finally takes up residence in a basement where he is left pretty much in peace to pursue his life of isolation, withdrawal and idleness. Significantly, even in this most ideal of retreats, as it was for Murphy, the sounds of the *quid pro quo* of the world of commerce come to disturb his tranquillity:

> What lacerated me most was the din of the newspaper boys. They went pounding by every day at the same hours, their heels thudding on the sidewalk, crying the names of their papers and even the headlines. (CSPR 85)

This idyll comes to an end, however, with the narrator being defrauded of the better part of his financial reserves, having paid the landlady six months' rent in advance only to be thrown out by the building's new owner a few days later. The scene of expulsion contains verbal echoes of the corresponding scene in *The Expelled*, where the narrator muses after the all-important hat is thrown after him: "They were most correct, according to their god. They could have kept this hat, but it was not theirs, it was mine, so they gave it back to me" (CSPR 47). In *The End*, too, a link is made between "correctness" and "property": "He was most correct, I must say. His surprise, he said, was no less than mine. It was his house. His property" (CSPR 86). So too, the scene prefigures the opening of *Molloy*: the new owner's offer to "send for a taxi, even an ambulance if I preferred" (CSPR 86), anticipates Molloy's "I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind" (*Molloy* 7). The narrator's expulsion from his retreat here is as brutal and peremptory as his eviction from the charitable institution, while the economic imperative invoked here — "He said he needed the room immediately for his pig which even as he spoke was catching cold in a cart by the door" (CSPR 86) — recalls the grim impoverishment of the Irish so cruelly satirised by Flann O'Brien in *The Poor Mouth* (O'Brien 1993).

But *The End* also contains a series of examples of the gift. The nature of the gift as an exchange of personal property between specific persons is underlined in the narrator's description of his glasses:

> For it seemed to me my eyes were not completely spent, thanks perhaps to the dark glasses my tutor had given me. He had given me the *Ethics* of Geulincx. … The *Ethics* had his name (Ward) on the fly-leaf, the glasses had belonged to him. (CSPR 91)

The link between the property and the person of the tutor is reinforced by the name on the flyleaf, while the tutor's name even suggests a relationship of protective guardianship. So too, the gift is often an object of concrete use-value, and here the dark-glasses have the benefit of preserving the narrator's eyesight.

In *The End* the State of Nature itself is also figured as a sort of divine gift. When the narrator meets a former acquaintance, the man who lives in a cave by the sea, he accepts his offer of lodgings, and despite his predilection for solitude, ends up staying in the cave for some time. The Lockean notion of property as the admixture of Labour with the State of Nature is embodied by the economic activity of the man:

> With the help of [his] ass he could deliver sand, sea-wrack, and shells to the townsfolk, for their gardens. He couldn't carry much at a time, for the ass was old and small and the town was far. But in this way he earned a little money, enough to keep him in tobacco and matches and to buy a piece of bread from time to time. (CSPR 87-88)

So too, the State of Nature provides the narrator with medicines with which to treat the ailments that Nature inflicts upon him:

> I treated my crablice with salt water and seaweed, but a lot of nits must have survived. I put compresses of seaweed on my skull, which gave me great relief, but not for long. (CSPR 88)

What the narrator desires, however, is complete stasis, a kind of glacial tableau where all forms of circulation and exchange are stilled: he decides to leave the cave because he can't bear the sea any longer "its splashing and heaving, its tides and general convulsiveness" (CSPR 89). Before the narrator leaves the man gives him his knife, once more an object of supreme use value but little exchange value. No doubt this knife plays its part in the "little odd jobs" the narrator is fond of doing, such as constructing the coffin-like box from the upturned boat.

In the man's "cabin in the mountains" we see the same Lockean interaction with Nature: "I rested on a bed of ferns, gathered at great labour with my own hands" (CSPR 90). So too, Nature sends the narrator a providential cow:

> One day I couldn't get up. The cow saved me. … I took off my hat and, summoning all my energy, began to milk her into it. The milk fell to the ground and was lost, but I said to myself, No matter, it's free. (CSPR 90)

But this idyll in a veritable Land of Cockaigne — "I might have learnt to make butter, even cheese" (CSPR 90) — quickly comes to an end and the narrator finds himself back in the city, at the mercy of his fellow citizens. Significantly, however, his physiognomy has changed so much for the worse that he is no longer able to evoke a sense of common humanity from the charitably inclined:

> The humble, ingenuous smile would no longer come, nor the expression of candid misery, showing the stars and the distaff. I summoned them, but they would not come. A mask of dirty old hairy leather, with two holes and a slit, it was too far gone for the old trick of please your honour and God reward you and pity upon me. It was disastrous. (CSPR 91)

This "absence of humanity" is, of course, the quintessential distinction of Beckett's characters, the paradoxical means by which they enlist sympathy, and a constant source of vaudevillian comedy: "'E don't look rightly human to me" says one of Murphy's prospective employers (*Murphy* 47). Indeed, in one of the first reviews of *Molloy*, Georges Bataille repeatedly invokes the phrase "absence of humanity" to describe Molloy, "this *absence* of humanity heralded by the derelict dragging himself through the streets" (Bataille 1988, 14; italics in original).

The narrator, in his career as a street beggar, therefore makes the best of a bad lot, keeping his face covered with a black rag and his skull covered with his hat, and constructing a board that he strews with flowers and petals. Begging belongs to the domain of charity rather than the gift. As we have seen, the true gift takes the form of concrete objects, use-values such as the tutor's glasses or the man's knife, and constitutes the affirmation of a relationship, such as Ward's protective mentorship, or the desperate longing for company of the man in the cave. By contrast, the coldly sentimental act of charity tends to take the form of exchange-value, usually money, and is delivered in such a way as to avoid contact or reciprocity while at the same

time extracting the expression of gratitude. The narrator is a very canny participant in the sentimental charade of the charitable transaction, constructing his board in such a way that "it jutted out just at the right height, pocket height, and its edge was far enough from my person for the coin to be bestowed without danger" (CSPR 92). His system is perfectly calibrated to receive alms with just the right balance of distance and reciprocity:

> But people who give alms don't much care to toss them, there's something contemptuous about this gesture which is repugnant to sensitive natures. To say nothing of their having to aim. … What they like above all is to sight the wretch from afar, get ready their penny, drop it in their stride and hear the God bless you dying away in the distance. Personally I never said that, nor anything like it, I wasn't much of a believer, but I did make a noise with my mouth. (CSPR 92)

This form of charitable transaction, it might be argued, belongs far less to the economy of the gift than to the ordinary commodity economy, being, in Chris Gregory's definition, "an exchange of alienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal independence that establishes a quantitative relationship between the objects transacted" (Gregory 1983, 109). In this case, a penny buys a blessing, or at least the narrator's mumbled substitute for one. Given the reciprocal nature of this transaction, the great enterprise with which the narrator perfects his board, and the sheer physical demands of standing at his post until nightfall, it is entirely appropriate that the narrator repeatedly refers to the money he receives as "earned" (CSPR 93, 95), and to his occupation as "work" (CSPR 94, 95).

This section of *The End*, therefore, is one of the few occasions where one of Beckett's characters is compelled to bestir himself in order to survive, and thus participates, however marginally, in the commodity economy of everyday life. Where, throughout the novellas, all of Beckett's other characters have been able to fall back on various forms of the gift — on an inheritance, or the generosity of conjugally-inclined prostitutes, or the miraculous providence of Nature — here at last is a Beckettian character cast into the street, thrust into the midst of the marketplace and the hurly-burly of economic life. It is ironic, as well as highly appropriate, that this rare moment of contact with socio-economic reality marks the only extended passage of explicitly political discourse in all of Beckett's writing, as the narrator becomes the object of a violent harangue by a vituperative Marxist orator. This episode brings into

particularly clear focus, I think, the relations between Beckett's aesthetics of impoverishment and the discourse of the political.

The politics of impoverishment

The narrator's encounter with the Marxist orator in *The End* is one of the few overt references to political discourse in Beckett. In fact, in all of Beckett's writing, there are only two other examples that I am aware of. There is Malone's claim:

> Yes, that's what I like about me, at least one of the things, that I can say, Up the Republic!, for example, or, Sweetheart!, for example, without having to wonder whether I should not rather have cut my tongue out, or said something else. (*Malone Dies* 62-63);

and there is the following passage from the third of the *Texts for Nothing*:

> The sport of kings is our passion, the dogs too, we have no political opinions, simply limply republican. But we also have a soft spot for the Windsors, the Hanoverians, I forget, the Hohenzollerns is it. Nothing human is foreign to us, once we have digested the racing news. (CSPR 112)

The bob-each-way politics of these men of the track is entirely of a piece with the ambiguity of Malone's cry "Up the Republic!", which hovers indeterminately between a cheer of support for the republic and a scatological expression of contempt[41].

Leslie Hill, in an elegant essay entitled "'*Up the Republic!*': Beckett, Writing, Politics", acknowledges that "Beckett's writing maintains, with respect to received political discourse, an irreducible distance or reserve" (Hill 1997, 911). Hill sums up with exemplary clarity and concision the dichotomy that has characterised approaches to the question of the political in Beckett:

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[41] As Leslie Hill points out (Hill 1997, 911), the original French also reads: *Up the Republic!* (*Malone Meurt* 102).

> The question of politics, or the political, has rarely loomed large as a topic for debate in the world of Beckett studies[42]. ... It would indeed not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that, with one or two notable exceptions, the approach to the political in Beckett today still remains positioned, much as it was in the early 1960s, between Lukács and Adorno: between, that is, on the one hand, the moralistic, teleological claim that a novel such as *Molloy* — this depiction of "the utmost pathological human degradation" as Lukács calls it [Lukács 1958, 31] — falls damagingly short of any proper concern with the political, and, on the other, the almost exactly inverse contention that, like some obstinate apocalyptic remainder, Beckett's writing bears critical witness to what has been thematised, notably apropos of *Endgame*, as the deficient and tawdry emptiness of a post-historical, post-political, even post-modern capitalist Europe. (Hill 1997, 909)

This dichotomy turns, therefore, on two different approaches to the *absence* of the political in Beckett: for Lukács, the absence of political analysis condemns Beckett's depiction of human misery as politically reactionary, while for Adorno, the absence of political analysis marks a kind of "post-political" recognition of the historical disintegration of politics. It should be possible, however, to read Beckett's politics without resorting, on the one hand, to Lukács's peremptory condemnation (a version of the "faut-il brûler Beckett?" line of argument sometimes compared, in the rogues' gallery of Communist attacks on modernism, to Karl Radek's infamous denunciation of Joyce), or, on the other, to Adorno's cryptic post-political pessimism. For his part, Hill attempts to escape this dichotomy by reading Beckett's politics through the lens of deconstruction, discovering (a little like Adorno, but without the plangent world-weariness) that the almost total absence of political discourse in Beckett is itself a political demand for what Hill calls "a politics beyond representation" (Hill 1997, 925). I quote from the final paragraph of Hill's subtle and complex argument:

> Writing as contestation, writing as challenge, writing as a response to the infinity of the other beyond all representation: formulas such as these do not found a politics, if politics is to be understood as the art of the possible, the feasible, or the practical. But they are nevertheless indispensable for any attempt to think in its radicality the relation of non-relation between Same and Other that is fundamental to politics as such. So to the extent that Beckett's writing refuses political discourse and does so

[42] Hill cites as recent noteworthy exceptions the studies by Connor (1988) and Trezise (1990). To this list might be added David Lloyd's excellent essay "Writing in the Shit: Beckett, Nationalism, and the Colonial Subject" (Lloyd 1989) and Stephen Watt's Baudrillardean reading of Beckett's drama (Watt 1987).

> in the name of what resists naming but thereby infinitely requires a name, it may yet be said to effect an oblique but nonetheless decisive intervention into that fundamental logic of relation we call the political. (Hill 1997, 924)

Hill's argument turns, as one might expect, on the radical singularity of writing and the undecidable nature of Beckett's self-translations from French to English. Although Hill may be right that Beckett's politics is undecidable, I think it is nevertheless possible to analyse this undecidability in relation to the discourse of political economy. This undecidability is inherent, in fact, in the figure of the beggar in *The End*, who exists simultaneously both within and outside the commodity economy, whose livelihood through charity is neither entirely gift nor entirely commodity, whose life is measured both by the exquisite labour of suffering and by the idleness of pure being.

The encounter with the Marxist orator is entirely symptomatic of the liminal status of the beggar in the discourse of revolutionary politics. As the most explicit appearance of political discourse in all of Beckett's writing, it is therefore worth examining this passage from *The End* in detail:

> One day I witnessed a strange scene. … It was a man perched on the roof of a car and haranguing the passers-by. That at least was my interpretation. He was bellowing so loud that snatches of his discourse reached my ears. Union … brothers … Marx … capital … bread and butter … love. It was all Greek to me. The car was drawn up against the kerb, just in front of me, I saw the orator from behind. All of a sudden he turned and pointed at me, as at an exhibit. Look at this down and out, he vociferated, this leftover. If he doesn't go down on all fours, it's for fear of being impounded. Old, lousy, rotten, ripe for the muckheap. … It never enters your head, resumed the orator, that your charity is a crime, an incentive to slavery, stultification and organized murder. Take a good look at this living corpse. … Then he bent forward and took me to task. … I took off the rag, pocketed the few coins I had earned, untied the board, folded it and put it under my arm. Do you hear me, you crucified bastard! cried the orator. Then I went away, although it was still light. … He must have been a religious fanatic, I could find no other explanation. Perhaps he was an escaped lunatic. He had a nice face, a little on the red side. (CSPR 94-95)

The rhetorical violence of this harangue belongs, of course, to a long tradition of leftist antipathy to the "absence of humanity" embodied by the amorphous class of vagabonds and beggars to which so many of Beckett's characters seem to belong. For if the revolutionary proletariat can be counted on to drive the engine of history, the

lumpenproletariat, the lowest of the low, with the apolitical opportunism born of the total destruction of community traditions, can only be regarded as an impediment to social progress. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the opportunistic alliance of Louis Bonaparte with the *lumpenproletariat* calls forth one of Marx's most sublime moments of grandiloquence:

> Alongside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and dubious origin, alongside ruined and reckless cast-offs of the *bourgeoisie*, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley-slaves, swindlers, impostors, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, bamboozlers, gamblers, *maquereaux*, brothel keepers, porters, literary hacks, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars — in short the whole amorphous disintegrated mass of flotsam and jetsam the French call *la bohème*. (Marx 1960, 161; translated and cited in Mehlman 1977, 13)

Jeffrey Mehlman rightly notes "the exhilaration, the almost Rabelaisian verve" of this passage (Mehlman 1977, 13). To be sure, "nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (*Endgame* 20), and the robust invective that Marx directs at the *lumpenproletariat* is almost Beckettian in its comic excess. In *Watt*, for instance, Arsene expounds a theory that might account for the laughter elicited by the lowest of the low:

> Of all the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs, but modes of ululation, only three I think need detain us, I mean the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. ... The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout — Haw! — so. It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs — silence please — at that which is unhappy. (*Watt* 48)

But there is a serious, even a political edge to this laughter. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* begins, of course, with the famous words:

> Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. (Marx 1977, 300)

If the massacre of June 1848 represented the tragic defeat of revolution, the Bonapartist *coup d'état* of June 1849 was a farcical repetition, "a simulacrum of revolution, grotesque in its pretension to pass itself off as the real thing" (Mehlman 1977, 10). The role of the *lumpenproletariat* in this farce is critical, for they are the

third term that chokes the wheels of the Marxian dialectic. Mehlman lucidly delineates what he calls the "unassimilable heterogeneity" of this third element:

> Whereas the *higher* was inevitably to be overthrown by the *lower* — the *bourgeoisie* by the proletariat — those two poles remain constant and are mutually impoverished by a strange irruption of something lower than the low … at the top. For Bonaparte seems to short-circuit both dialectic and class struggle in gathering in his service the "scum, offal, refuse of all classes," the *lumpenproletariat* [Marx 1960, 161]. … A certain proliferating energy is thus released within Marx's writing upon contact with the Bonapartist instance. It generates the motley cast of the Marxian *farce*, a genre which excites a different kind of laughter than (*petit bourgeois*) comedy, and which, in its absurdity, elicits tears unknown to (proletarian) tragedy, free of every promise of redemption. (Mehlman 1977, 13-14)

For Marx, the tragic defeat of 1848, in its confirmation, indeed exacerbation of the class struggle, harboured within its ruins the promise of the ultimate victory of the revolution: "The revolution is dead! Long live the revolution!" (Marx 1960, 24; translated and cited in Mehlman 1977, 10). But the ludicrous events of 1849 were no more than a grotesque and sterile repetition of the signifiers of revolution without the underpinning of historical necessity. As Mehlman explains:

> It inaugurates a local collapse of history, a repetitive span which opens a veritable caesura in time. … Emptied of its dialectical content, history seems "without events," that is, barely history, "wearying with constant repetition of the same tensions, the same relaxations" [Marx 1960, 136]. For it is as though the movement of the dialectic had been frozen. (Mehlman 1977, 12-13)

Here Marx sounds for a moment almost like Adorno, and this hiatus, in its arrest of historical time and its grotesque repetition of absurdly inconsequential events, almost resembles the entropic disintegration of *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*. For Marx, however, the farce of 1849 was no more than an interlude, a necessary preparatory stage in the inevitable unfolding of the historical dialectic: "The revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically" (Marx 1977, 316).

What is significant here, however, is this notion of the *lumpenproletariat* — the comically grotesque scum of society — as a kind of amorphous and contemptible mass that arrests the expression of the dialectical forces of history: "a *third* element which in its heterogeneity, asymmetry, and unexpectedness, breaks the unity of two

specular terms and rots away their *closure*" (Mehlman 1977, 19). The lowest of the low therefore have the paradoxical capacity to blur and besmirch the high/low distinction that is the theoretical foundation of revolutionary politics.

Mehlman goes on to discuss this in terms of Georges Bataille's attempts to formulate a notion of radical *expenditure* — associated here with waste, residue, rot and decay — as a counter to Hegelian dialectics, and as a challenge to the scrupulous balancing of the books characteristic of the "restricted economy". No doubt there would be something to be gained by reading the dereliction of Beckett's characters against Bataille's concept of the *informe*, especially since Bataille himself, in his review of *Molloy*, was evidently excited by what he saw as "l'*absence* d'humanité et [le] caractère *informe* de Molloy" [the *absence* of humanity and the *formless* nature of Molloy] (Bataille 1951, 389).

But here I don't wish to enter a discussion of Bataille. It is enough to remark that, already in Marx, the *lumpenproletariat* figures as a concrete, material, even political instance of something like that mysterious third term in Leslie Hill's deconstructive analysis, "indispensable for any attempt to think in its radicality the relation of non-relation between Same and Other that is fundamental to politics as such" (Hill 1997, 924). Are not Beckett's tramps — the unassimilable other of the class struggle — a concrete expression of "what resists naming but thereby infinitely requires a name"? As Bataille remarks: "we cannot imagine anything more anonymous" (Bataille 1988, 13). Yet this "unnamable" scum of society is, at the same time, endlessly subjected to *name-calling*, the Rabelaisian comedy of verbal abuse that lights up Marx's texts as surely as it lights up Beckett's: *old, lousy, rotten, ripe for the muckheap*.

There is something entirely fitting, therefore, about this volley of Marxian invective inserted within Beckett's text. Beckett's characters all seem to belong among the obscure and amorphous detritus of humanity who remain unassimilable to the categories of revolutionary dialectics. But if Beckett's work is, in this sense, apolitical, it might argued that Beckett acknowledges this through his staging of the encounter between the aesthetics of impoverishment and the demands of progressive politics. The scene between the beggar and the political orator marks out quite clearly a kind of mutual incomprehension, or, to be thoroughly Beckettian, an "incoercible

absence of relation" (*Dialogues* 125). For although the orator is "bellowing so loud" that the narrator is able to catch "snatches of his discourse", he remains uncomprehending: "It was all Greek to me" (CSPR 94). So too, the orator is completely impervious to the narrator's mute demand for the sentimental pittance of charity, arguing, with pitiless Marxian clarity, that "charity is a crime, an incentive to slavery, stultification and organized murder" (CSPR 94).

Beckett presents, in a self-conscious manner, I think, the incommensurability between the received discourse of political economy and his own aesthetic vision of suffering humanity. The silent withdrawal of the narrator from this confrontation resembles, in some ways, Beckett's own authorial withdrawal into silence in the face of the political demand for speech. By the same token, political discourse is reduced to the incoherent ravings of a "religious fanatic" or an "escaped lunatic", while the subject is closed once and for all with one of the most appalling puns in all of Beckett's work: "He had a nice face, a little on the red side" (CSPR 95).

Thus I think it is a mistake to try to extract anything resembling a political statement from Beckett's work, to attempt to redeem his "aesthetics of impoverishment" for the benefit of a progressive politics. At first sight, Beckett's depiction of human misery might appear to tackle in some way an urgent political question, but this misery is always merely the simulacrum of impoverishment, absurdly empty of social or historical meaning, just as the revolt of the *lumpenproletariat* in 1849 was a simulacrum of revolution. This staging, in *The End*, of a confrontation with political discourse may be seen as evidence that Beckett didn't care too much for the notion of a political art. In the rather flip words of his third dialogue with Georges Duthuit — in what constitutes, I belatedly realise, a fourth instance of overt political discourse in Beckett's work — he fastidiously washes his hands of politics in an embrace of the aesthetic: "The realisation that art has always been bourgeois, though it may dull our pain before the achievements of the socially progressive, is finally of scant interest" (*Dialogues* 123-124).

The best, and the worst, that can be said of Beckett's politics is that it belongs to what Jeffrey Mehlman terms this "unassimilable heterogeneity". This, I presume, is Leslie Hill's conclusion, although he arrives at it from a different starting point, discovering

it in the literary-philosophical aporia of the "irreducible alterity of the unnamable and untranslatable" (Hill 1997, 924). As we have seen, the political orientation of this "third term" — like the slogan "Up the Republic!" — is always highly ambiguous, since it deliberately confounds the dichotomies upon which a politics is based.

In the brilliant discussion of *la bohème* that opens his book on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin discusses the peculiar fascination of impoverishment, the degree to which everyone on the margins of the economy might make a sentimental identification with the lowest of the low:

> The ragpicker fascinated his epoch. The eyes of the first investigators of pauperism were fixed on him with the mute question as to where the limit of human misery lay. ... But from the littérateur to the professional conspirator, everyone who belonged to the *bohème* could recognise a bit of himself in the ragpicker. Each person was in a more or less obscure state of revolt against society and faced a more or less precarious future. (Benjamin 1992a, 19, 20)

To the extent that they refuse to participate in the commodity economy, Beckett's impoverished aesthetes no doubt remain in an "obscure state of revolt against society" and face a "more or less precarious future". In refusing to sell their labour in the marketplace like other mortals, these bohemian littérateurs remain outside the logic of a historical and political dialectic that would pit labour against capital, proletariat against bourgeoisie. But, as we have seen, with the exception of the narrator of *The End*, who is forced into a confrontation with socio-economic reality, all of Beckett's characters manage to survive almost exclusively in an economy of the gift, where the personal relations of filial inheritance or conjugal dependence insulate them from the anonymous transactions of the marketplace. Thus, in the absence of economic or political necessity, the "obscure state of revolt" of the littérateur quietly relapses into the scrupulous artistic aloofness of a patrician cultural inheritance, an "unassimilable heterogeneity" at the opposite social extreme from the *lumpenproletariat*, with which, nevertheless, it has much in common.

Conclusion

Reading and idleness

I like reading because reading is very close to doing nothing. I read very slowly. I like to read every word. I can't understand people who glide over texts with an aerial swiftness. It might be that I don't like reading to be subordinated to some other demand, or directed towards some other goal, that in my Kantian preciousness I despise the detached reading that reconnoitres for information, or skims the "scant cream of sense" (*Disjecta* 26). But I don't think so. If I like to read slowly, it is not the result of a hyperaesthesia, not an alert attentiveness to every nuance of the text in a "hard, gem-like" Paterian combustion (Pater 1990, 46), but because reading slowly is a kind of anaesthesia, a lassitude, a torpor, a smouldering extinction of consciousness.

I like to read because I'm lazy. And if reading is often a postponement of something else you should be doing, then reading slowly is a compound evasion, an attempt to defer deferral itself, a temporising to infinity. So too, if I like to read every word, it's not because of thoroughness or deliberation, not an unwillingness to let a single word be lost, nor a patient desire to let meaning unfold in all its complexity. Reading slowly means tempering the speed of the eye to the lugubrious rhythm of the ear; it means allowing the mind to hear, without interest, each word resonate fully in the emptiness of its interiority; it means allowing the thoughts to wander, while language drones on with a rocking-chair monotony that often induces a mild state of narcosis.

Such at least is my experience.

I like to read in bed, and not sitting up straight-backed in a parody of relaxation, but *in the bed*, lying on my side propped on one elbow, or better still, lying flat, with my head on the pillow and only one eye open, so that often I will fall asleep without noticing it, will fall asleep, in fact, *without interrupting my reading*. There is

something essential about this fluid continuity between reading, sleeping, dreaming: it seems important to emphasise that reading is, above all, a *bodily* pleasure, and that if, in reality, reading takes place in a variety of physical locations — in waiting rooms and on buses and trains, in chairs and at desks and at café tables — the *ideal* reading situation, which all actual reading situations contain as the fundamental truth of which they are an approximation, is that of the sleeper about to dream with one hand still holding the book open in front of closed eyes.

> For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say to myself: "I'm falling asleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I awoke; it did not offend my reason, but lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a former existence must be to a reincarnate spirit; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to apply myself to it or not; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for my eyes, but even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, something dark indeed. (Proust 1984, 3)

If reading is in its ideal state a fundamentally physical pleasure, a mild narcosis lighter than sleep and less vertiginous than dreaming, it makes little sense to speak of "meaning" in this context. For Proust's narrator, indeed, the distinction between subject and object, between perceiver and perceived is erased in a "peculiar turn" which does not offend the reason, but lies like scales upon the eyes: language here has ceased to marshal its divisions and its hierarchies, its distinctions and exclusions, and the light of grammatical reason has given way to a "pleasant and restful" darkness in which the mind finds its true solace.

> For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. (*Molloy* 86)

Many of the pleasures of reading are therefore more or less independent of the text itself, and instead relate to the practice of reading as a *physical culture*, a sort of gymnastics of idleness. The pleasure of reading involves a familiar inventory of physical objects — beds, sofas, armchairs, cushions, pillows, blankets, bookmarks, pencils, notebooks, food, coffee, cigarettes — among which the book itself plays a central but not sovereign role. So too, the book itself has its own physical culture — the smell of a new book, the creaminess of the paper, the design of the typography, the cover, the jacket blurb, the author biography, the lists of other titles — epiphenomena of the text by which the true reader postpones as long as possible the moment of beginning to read.

Proust's *Recherche* is the great novel of procrastination. Perhaps for this reason, it is also the great novel of reading, a veritable *Portrait of the Reader as a Young Man*. As Gilles Deleuze argues in *Proust and Signs* (Deleuze 1972), the *Recherche* is an apprenticeship in reading, and all of Proust's jealous lovers, zealous snobs, and furtively homosexual young men are in various ways impassioned and meticulous Readers.

In other ways, of course, the Recherche is a *Portrait of the Artist* too: the story of a Reader who transforms himself into a Writer. In the closing pages of the novel, when the narrator finally announces his determination, under the shadow of approaching death, to begin writing at last, it is clear that the work that he now conceives must be executed at the expense of everything he has loved as a reader: "you can make a new version of what you love only by first renouncing it" (Proust 1989, 1102). Thus, where Barthes announces that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1977, 148), we might add that the message of the *Recherche* is that the birth of the Writer must be at the cost of the death of the Reader. The real Reader writes nothing.

But in an important sense the Author, too, writes nothing. The Author is not one who writes, but one who *has written*. The author's work is always invisible, not only because it is always in the past, not only because it occurs in the private space of the page, but also because the pleasure of the text comes from the erasure of the signs of the author's labour, the sense of spontaneous ease by which the Reader is carried

forward into the space of the work. For the Reader, the Author is not a toiling artisan who exists anterior and exterior to the work, but inhabits the work as a kind of amiable bystander with time on his hands, accompanying the reader through the unhurried course of the work's unfolding.

The Reader and the Author are therefore united in this figure of a shared idleness.

"Il n'y a pas d'oeuvre chez Beckett"

For a long time I imagined writing a study of this idleness, of the Reader as the definitive procrastinator, of the Author as the definitive bad influence, perpetually leading the Reader astray. It is, perhaps, a kind of friendship, the aimless companionability of ne'er-do-wells. But inevitably, of course, the true work of idleness never gets written[43].

For me Samuel Beckett was, above all other authors, the incarnation of this idleness, a kind of superhero of inaction. If, as Barthes writes, the Author who emerges from the text — the *sujet à aimer* — is no more than a series of "biographemes", a few minor details brought to life by "novelistic" touches (Barthes 1971, 13-14), the Beckett who emerged from my reading was characterised by a strangely reassuring catalogue of sufferings and failures: the ignominious resignation of his Trinity lectureship; the insomnia, the panic attacks, the psychosomatic torments; the aimless and solitary wandering across Europe; the miserable record of early publications; the bitterly dependent relationship with his mother; the total failure well into his forties to earn an independent living.

For a long time this miserable under-achiever was for me the real Beckett: idleness was his world and the shrink from it "desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping,

[43] In theory, at least, if not in practice. Alberto Manguel's *A History of Reading* (Manguel 1996) might be such a work, among others.

living" (*Dialogues* 125). For me, the quintessential Beckettian motto "I'll go on" always meant: "I'll go on doing nothing".

Attractive as it is, this vision of a tormented Beckett wracked with doubt, guilt and despair is largely mythical, prompted to some extent by the "novelistic touches" of Deirdre Bair's biography. As Daniel Albright comments: "After Bair's book, the task of biography was clear: to humanize Beckett, to show him as one of us" (Albright 1997, 352; see also Abbott 1997, 541). Recent biographies by James Knowlson, Anthony Cronin and Lois Gordon have sought to do this, showing Beckett as a highly disciplined craftsman, a loyal friend, an unfailing correspondent, a companionable drinking partner and a generous supporter of younger artists and writers. As the narrator of *The Unnamable* comments: "The rascal, he's getting humanized" (*Unnamable* 101).

This process of transforming Beckett from a profound and inscrutable enigma into someone more mundane and recognisable is extremely important, I think. What we lack above all is an understanding of Beckett *at work*. To be sure, the manuscripts that Beckett deposited with university libraries give scholars the opportunity to reconstruct Beckett's working methods and follow through the successive stages of a work's development. For instance, *The Ideal Core of the Onion* (Pilling and Bryden 1992) — a collection of studies of various manuscripts held at the Beckett Archive at Reading, many of which are drafts of unfinished or unpublished pieces — casts valuable light on Beckett at work, on his compositional techniques and processes of revision, on the painstaking labour with which he sought to give his writing its final form (see especially Connor 1992a; Kelly 1992; Murphy 1992). This kind of work constitutes an important step in the demystification and demythologisation of Beckett.

In our culture, however, there is still a profound sense in which, as I mentioned above, *the Author does not work*. According to the post-Romantic conception of artistic "expression", of "originality", of "genius", the literary work is regarded, not as the contrived and therefore contingent result of creative labour on the part of a skilled craftsman, but as the spontaneous and therefore somehow necessary emanation of a particular person's essential being.

What this essentialism rests on, above all, is an erasure of the signs of the author's labour: the work presents itself as an emanation of the author's "being" rather than the product of the author's "doing". Writing is one of the ways in which, in Murphy's terms, "You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing" (*Murphy* 25).

I think it is important to recognise the various ways in which Beckett, both in his work and in his attitude to his work, tended to play down the element of authorial labour, promoting the notion of an inscrutable authorial personality. Despite the apparent anti-authorial subversiveness of his work, Beckett was unusually adept at "playing" the traditional post-Romantic author for all it was worth.

First, and most importantly, Beckett's resolute insistence on adherence to the letter of the text in the performance of his dramatic works clearly implies an erasure of the normal interpretive labour of the performers, a denial of the essentially collaborative nature of the drama.

Secondly, Beckett's refusal to comment on meaning, his insistence that "I only know what's on the page" (Cronin 1997, 526), tends to reinforce a kind of essentialism of the text, presenting the work as an eternal given, necessary and unalterable. In a curious way this might appear to represent a kind of abnegation of Beckett's own authorial status, since it presumably cancels even his own authority to change or reinterpret the work. But this abnegation is illusory: as Foucault is at pains to point out, the author-function is a product of the way we read texts, and Beckett's deference to the authority of his own text can be seen as a powerful endorsement of the author-function.

Thirdly, this tendency to present his work as a given, somehow independent of his own power to understand it or alter it, is reflected in Beckett's texts by the recurrent trope of an external voice whose words a character repeats verbatim. Most notably, in *How It Is* the narrator repeatedly insists: "I say it as I hear it" (*How It Is* 7). So too, in *The Unnamable*: "I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible" (*Unnamable* 86). Or, to give a final example, in the *Texts for Nothing*: "I'm

the clerk and scribe, not understanding what I hear, not knowing what I write" (CSPR 120).

In his lucid overview of changing conceptions of authorship, Seán Burke distinguishes between two major discourses of authorship: the imitative and the inspirational. The imitative model includes Classical conceptions of mimesis, such as the Platonic and Aristotelian models, as well as modern models such as Lukács's model of historical realism. It also includes a craft conception of authorship, as belonging to a tradition of established rules and conventions, a conception which runs from Mediaeval views of the artist as copyist, to Russian Formalist notions of literary technique, to Structuralist notions of the artist as a skilled manipulator of literary codes (Burke 1995, 5-6).

The inspirational model, on the other hand, includes traditions such as South American shamanism and the Hellenic concept of the Muse. As Burke summarises:

> Such a view of discourse at once elevates the poet or author as an elect figure — set apart from the rest of humanity via the gift of a divine afflatus — but deprives the author of the role of originating force. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this notion of alterity or "otherness" has persisted but in a manner often transplanted from its sacred or idealist sources. While aspects of romantic and symbolist thought have attempted to preserve this hieratic view of poetic origins, twentieth-century theory has relocated the source of otherness in the unconscious or language itself. (Burke 1995, 5)

The frequency of the trope of an inner or external voice in Beckett's work would tend to align him squarely with the inspiration model. As Burke points out, in the post-Romantic paradigm the source of this commanding voice is no longer an external entity such as God or a Muse, but somewhere within the artist's own personality. Whether this is conceived as a quintessentially personal force, such as the unconscious or the deepest recesses of memory, or as an indifferent impersonal "exteriority" as in Blanchot's influential reading of Beckett, the important thing to note is the way in which the author's *work* is erased: the author does not struggle to invent, revise, correct and continue, but must simply catch and set down the words as they pass in a sort of effortless stream.

A fourth way in which Beckett erases the signs of labour follows from this. One of the most distinctive features of Beckett's writing, in the trilogy especially, is its sense of spontaneity. The seemingly haphazard manner in which the texts unfold — through questions and hypotheses, statements and retractions, hesitations, qualifications and corrections — tends to give the works the appearance of a lack of premeditation, a lack of direction, at times a lack of control.

> Yes, I work now, a little like I used to, except that I don't know how to work any more. That doesn't matter apparently. (*Molloy* 7)

However, much as the off-the-cuff garrulity of *Tristram Shandy* was the result of Sterne's countless redraftings — a painstaking recreation of effortlessness — so too the apparent spontaneity of Beckett's work must be read in terms of a deliberate rhetorical technique rather than as some kind of principled rejection of artifice. Nevertheless, far too many critics take this appearance of disorder or confusion at face value, not only assuming some sort of primeval chaos to be the essential theme of the work, but extrapolating from this that Beckett's working method is less a matter of skill or technique than simply a kind of alert attentiveness to the voice of that primeval chaos.

This is another result of Blanchot's highly influential reading of Beckett. Beckett's writing is seen not as a highly wrought surface created by a painstaking labour, but as "undifferentiated speech speaking in a vacuum, passing through he who hears it" (Blanchot 1988, 25). For Blanchot, a writer like Beckett does not *make* the work, but simply delivers himself over to its necessity, passively allowing it to come into existence: "he who writes is no longer Beckett but the urge that sweeps him out of himself" (Blanchot 1988, 25). In the tribute written shortly after Beckett's death, Blanchot affirms what he considers the essentially spontaneous and unpremeditated nature of Beckett's writing by claiming: "Il n'y a pas d'œuvre chez Beckett" (Blanchot 1990, 636). What this is intended to mean, I presume, is that in Beckett's writing there is no sense of an artistic totality, only this "undifferentiated speech".

Bruno Clément's *L'Œuvre sans qualités: Rhétorique de Samuel Beckett* offers an important counter to the Blanchotian tradition. Clément is concerned to combat the

notion that Beckett's work is the result of some sort of inspired abandonment to chaos:

> Contre toutes les apparences, contre beaucoup des idées reçues, contre une grande partie du discours critique, contre les insinuations sans nombre des théoriciens-narrateurs de l'œuvre, et donc contre toutes les tentations, j'ai voulu considérer l'ensemble des textes conçus et écrits par Samuel Beckett comme le résultat d'un *travail*, et par conséquent comme une œuvre à part entière. (Clément 1994, 23)
>
> Despite appearances, despite received wisdom, despite a large proportion of critical discourse, and despite the innumerable insinuations of Beckett's own narrators-cum-theoreticians — despite every temptation to the contrary, therefore — I have wished to consider the ensemble of texts conceived and written by Samuel Beckett as the result of *work*, and therefore as a distinct oeuvre in its own right.

Clément therefore analyses the apparent disorder of Beckett's texts in terms of consciously employed rhetorical techniques, whereby Beckett conceals the traces of his own labour by throwing in carefully calculated signs of hesitation, confusion and error that give the writing its characteristic feel of spontaneous improvisation.

> Tous les passages de l'œuvre où sans chapitres, sans alinéas, souvent sans points, le texte se dévide comme de lui-même, matière apparement brute et inorganisée (dernières pages de *L'Innommable*, *Pas moi*), relèvent effectivement de cet idéal, délibérément poursuivi. Samuel Beckett … travaille à donner l'impression de l'absence d'ordre, de l'absence de marques d'organisation. (Clément 1994, 100)
>
> All these passages where, in the absence of chapters, of paragraphs, even of full stops, the text seems to unravel of its own accord, all this apparently raw and unorganised material (the closing pages of *The Unnamable, Not I*), effectively arises from a deliberately pursued intention. Samuel Beckett … labours at giving the impression of an absence of order, an absence of signs of organization.

Beckett's erasure of the signs of his own labour, his technique of a carefully crafted appearance of effortlessness serves to confirm, I think, the notion of the work of art as the spontaneous embodiment of a personality, rather than the conscious product of an effort, and thus further contributes to the notion of authorial essentialism.

Finally, the fifth way in which Beckett's work confirms this model of authorship is, of course, through his characters' relentless pursuit of a life of idleness. As we have seen, Beckett's characters will spare no effort in order avoid the commodification of their own labour. Murphy even attempts to attribute his idleness to cosmic forces:

"There were metaphysical considerations, in whose gloom it appeared that the night had come in which no Murphy could work" (*Murphy* 16).

In these ways, I think, we can see why the author-function of "Beckett" has come to be so powerfully centred on the person of Samuel Beckett. For all the dismantling of coherent authorial identity in his work, Beckett's attitude to authorship, in his erasure of the marks of his own labour and his insistence on an essentially spontaneous relationship between himself and his work, serves only to intensify further the relation between the work and the person of the author. "All I am is feeling," he once told an interviewer (D'Aubarède 1979, 217). As the origin of a work of art, what could be more inscrutably private, personal, and singular?

Thus the image of Beckett as a kind of tormented ne'er-do-well paradoxically reconfirms the authority of the author far more powerfully than the image of the writer at work. For all that the vocabulary of impotence, failure, disintegration and formlessness is seemingly inevitable in Beckett criticism — indeed, as Bruno Clément points out, Beckett criticism's use of this Beckettian vocabulary can be seen as an ironic repetition of the ventriloquism trope so prevalent in the work itself (Clément 1994, 28) — it is important to remember that Beckett was anything but a layabout, anything but a failure.

As a corrective, then, it should be remembered that, despite his claim that "to be an artist is to fail" (*Dialogues* 125) there was a genuine culture of failure that, at a certain point in his development, Beckett was extremely anxious to escape: the companionably dissolute world of literary Dublin. One of the great charms of Anthony Cronin's biography is his judicious measurement of the exact degree of Beckett's attachment to Ireland, for if Beckett's decision to write in French is often portrayed as a turn towards the impotence and impoverishment of a second language, it must also be remembered that it represents at the same time a disciplined dedication to artistic ambition and a definitive rejection of the spendthrift atmosphere of Irish literary life.

> Some writers and artists also felt that the paralysis which Joyce had identified as having Dublin in its grip militated against the production of the great works of which they felt themselves capable. There was a standing cliché that in Dublin people went

> to the pubs rather than to their table or desk or easel; and the writer who talked his books away was a recurrent figure in Dublin's own mythology. There was indeed a considerable element of truth in this. In Dublin people did tend to live out their promise until eventually they had great futures behind them. This was partly an effect of the size of the place, partly its sociability. Word-of-mouth reputations were gained easily and often rested on. More businesslike places had a publishing or exhibiting apparatus which separated the sheep from the goats, the workers from those who merely talked about great works; and they had furthermore journals and critics who were seemingly eager to discuss such work when it was written. But even at this point some of Beckett's Dublin friends, among them Arland Ussher, Sean O'Sullivan and Cecil Salkeld, were beginning to be perceived as figures of unfulfilled promise. Acquaintances such as Mervyn Wall and, more notably Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien) would shortly, rightly or wrongly, suffer from the same perception. It was the feeling that this might easily have happened to him which Beckett was much later to express in conversation with Martin Esslin, who asked him point-blank why he lived in Paris and if he had anything against Ireland. "Oh no. I'm a fervent patriot and republican," Beckett replied with, admittedly, a possible degree of over-statement. "Well," Esslin queried, "why do you live in Paris then?" To which Beckett answered: "Well, you know, if I were in Dublin I would just be sitting around in a pub." (Cronin 1997, 265)

As opposed to the glamour of indolence which surrounds the Author, the Writer works hard, very hard, and the 900 pages of the manuscript of *Watt* represent a watershed in this respect, both in terms of Beckett's strengthening commitment to his work and his strengthening commitment to France. If the self-conscious literary pyrotechnics of *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Dream of Fair-to-Middling Women* are evidence of a teeming but undisciplined mind, there is nothing spontaneous, haphazard or cocksure about Beckett's writing after *Watt*. So too, if the image of the Author — the *sujet à aimer* — that emerges from Beckett's works and even from his biographies has the appearance of an indolent and moody character occasionally galvanised by fits of inspiration, it should be remembered that this has nothing whatever to do with Beckett as a writer and everything to do with the author-function as a kind of apotheosis of personality.

Beckett and Shakespeare

The case of Beckett brings into particularly sharp relief the enormous ideological investment in the author-function in contemporary culture. For all the ironic displacements of the authorial voice in Beckett's fiction, for all the sophisticated theoretical demonstrations of his essential exteriority or impersonality, Beckett remains one of the twentieth century's most "authorial" of authors, a paradigm of the author-function in its modern incarnation. Among other epiphenomena of authorship we might mention the following: Beckett's exemplary appearance of aloofness from the marketplace; his principled refusal to discuss his work; the devotion of many fans to a quasi-religious notion of Beckett as "saintly" and therefore beyond criticism or reproach (a tendency sometimes referred to as "Samolatry"); the phenomenal outpouring of scholarship on Beckett's work, rivalled only by that on Joyce among twentieth century authors; the increasing publication of secondary material such as correspondence and production notebooks; the proliferation of websites and discussion groups devoted to Beckett and Beckett's work; the growing number of international conferences dedicated solely to Beckett (in York, Stirling, and Rennes in 1999; in London, Berlin and Glasgow in 2000); and, most tellingly, perhaps, the instant recognisability of Beckett's furrowed brow and intense stare as an iconic representation of "genius" (controversially employed in an advertisement for Apple computers: see Wagner 1999).

Curious then, in the light of Beckett's cultural centrality, his pan-European pseudo-universality, is the repeated and insistent critical demand since the late 1980s for a "subversive" Beckett. No doubt this shift in Beckett criticism reflects a broader shift in the mission of the humanities. Once upon a time, so it seems, the unquestioned cultural status of certain literary texts — and indeed of literature in general — gave reading and its pleasures a kind of unruffled cultural authority, while the question of the political remained strictly the preserve of radical feminist and Marxist challenges to patriarchal bourgeois hegemony. Now, in the wake of the canon debate and the rise of cultural studies, the question of the political has moved to the centre of cultural debate, while at the same time losing much of its oppositional energy and its doctrinaire character. In these circumstances, literary criticism must constantly justify itself in terms of the vaguely political notion of "subversion": subversion of

gender, of race, of subjectivity, of literary genre, of philosophical truth, and, most tellingly, of politics.

In this Beckett criticism is no different. As we have seen, in Beckett studies of the last two decades the notion of a "subversive" Beckett has become something of a truism. What is remarkable, however, is that Steven Connor's work is the only recent Beckett criticism I know which dares to assess the degree of Beckett's complicity with the broader European cultural establishment, and which dares to point out the ways in which Beckett's work at times clearly reflects quite conservative values, particularly in relation to gender. Thus, instead of a radically oppositional discourse on Beckett that attempts to take the true measure of Beckett's sexual and cultural politics, we have the curious situation of a cultural hegemony predicated on subversion, a canonical cultural discourse that endlessly seeks to demonstrate the innate marginality or subversiveness of its central figure. The discourse on Beckett therefore rests on a perpetual displacement of itself, a denunciation of its own cultural authority in the name of a subversive "other Beckett" whom it nevertheless repeatedly elevates to cultural authority.

Scott Wilson, in a thoughtful examination of the problems of a political literary criticism, points to the prevalence in contemporary cultural discourse of this "subversion/containment" paradigm:

> It has been suggested that the insistence of this model in contemporary work in both its optimistic and pessimistic forms, the belief that the resistance of the "other" is genuinely disruptive, coupled with the anxiety that oppositional voices are both produced by and contained within a dominant culture ultimately to strengthen it, is itself an allegory of the perpetual anxiety of political criticism about its own political efficacy in a postmodern world. (Wilson 1995, 12)

Of course, not all Beckett criticism is predicated on the notion of "Beckett" as a subversive writer. Indeed, perhaps the greater part of it is devoted to reconfirming Beckett's place in the literary pantheon, discovering and establishing continuities between Beckett's writing and the literary, philosophical and religious traditions of Europe and beyond, further contributing to the discursive construction of Beckett as a "universal" author. As Steven Connor summarises:

> The story of Beckett's acceptance within literary culture is more than just a repetition of the familiar classicisation of the avant-garde, for Beckett's work comes to stand for the power of tradition itself. One striking way in which this representative status is confirmed is by the increasing tendency to compare Beckett with Shakespeare. Beckett is, like Shakespeare, the representative writer of his age, and yet also the spokesman for the eternal human spirit. Like Shakespeare, Beckett is an artist who finds and confirms his solitary selfhood finally in the public art of the drama, and in the dialectical mingling of self and other which this requires. And like Shakespeare, Beckett is the representative of a whole cultural patrimony, an inherited tradition that, despite Beckett's disgusted turn away from his "mother" tongue, is identified with the power and prestige of "English" as a language. (Connor 1988, 198-99)

The elevation of Beckett to a cultural status rivalled only by Shakespeare is significant here. Beckett's writing and indeed Beckett as an Author are taken to be, on the one hand supremely exemplary, and on the other universally representative, of what "Literature" and the "Author" might mean in the twentieth century. Beckett, like Shakespeare, becomes the Author of Authors, and his work comes to represent an absolute value, becomes the gold standard against which the base-alloys of other literary works are measured. Furthermore, the comparison with Shakespeare is significant, because we have become accustomed, despite his supreme cultural authority, to discovering in Shakespeare too a kind of endless unruliness, a perpetual subversion that apparently belies his conservative ideological function.

Scott Wilson provides a brilliant discussion of the functioning of Shakespeare as an embodiment of literary value. Asking: "What is the most valuable, most irreplaceable thing in the world?" (Wilson 1995 88), Wilson responds that the sun, as the origin of everything, the cause and sustenance of all life, is obviously of unique and absolute value to human existence. At the same time, unlike other objects of value, it cannot be looked at directly, reached or possessed. Wilson goes on to argue:

> Shakespeare is also a sun. He and his work constitute the most luminous star in the Anglo-American literary firmament. Shakespeare's genius and the magnitude of his work, it is conventionally claimed, enlightens the whole of the English language and illuminates every aspect of the human condition. … Yet … if Shakespeare is a glorious sun illuminating the horizon of knowledge, his solar quality is also blinding: he demarcates a limit "beyond which at present we do not see". … Shakespeare is both impossible to look at directly, and impossible to read out of the long shadows of commentary cast by the succeeding centuries. … Shakespeare provides the standard

> against which Anglo-American culture measures its cultural discourses, in which Shakespeare is always already inscribed, empowering and negating the speaker. (Wilson 1995, 88-89)

While Beckett's reputation, in terms of its magnitude, its authority, and its cultural centrality, is clearly not on the same scale as that of Shakespeare, and while there are clearly differences between the author-functions of each writer, there are nevertheless a number of significant parallels. While Shakespeare is ultimately unknowable because of the paucity of biographical information and the gulf of centuries that separates us from him, Beckett too, despite being "damned to fame" in an era of publicity, is also constructed as "unknowable", remaining "impossible to look at directly" because of his legendary reclusiveness, his extreme sense of privacy, his near-total silence on the subject of his life and work. So too, as critics have been noting since the mid 1960s, the mountains of critical exegesis have made Beckett "impossible to read out of the long shadows of commentary". Finally, as has also been noted, there is a very real sense in which Beckett's work, in its uncanny anticipation and incorporation of critical discourse, is always both empowering and negating the speaker. Wilson's analogy serves to illustrate the extent to which the massive proliferation of discourse on Beckett, like the discourse on Shakespeare, has served to transform Beckett from the flesh and blood historical person that he was into a complex cultural metaphor, "Beckett", a signifier of genius, or suffering, or integrity, or vision, or saintliness.

What is ironic, however, is that this ideological construction of a transcendent Author is fed, not by a naïve biographical attention to the minutiae of Beckett's life, but by a sophisticated theoretical insistence on the primacy of the text, on the essential authorlessness of Beckett's writing. The more Beckett is "deconstructed" as an author, the more sovereignly transcendent his author-function becomes. The more the work becomes distanced from the historical person who wrote it, the more it becomes a sort of discursive no-man's land, an empty site upon which competing versions of "Beckett" come to stake their claim over the disputed territory. The more critics uncritically reproduce in their own work the Beckettian language of authorial displacement, the more Beckett indeed becomes this fleshless and ahistorical "grey neutrality" derided by Foucault (Foucault 1977c, 119-20). "Beckett" becomes,

ironically enough, that empty, animated space where the writing subject endlessly disappears.

This is the curious situation of Beckett studies, in which, as H. Porter Abbott rightly complains, there has been so little work bringing Beckett studies together with "the study of that broad terrain of self-writing which goes by the name of autobiography" (Abbott 1996, ix). Abbott judiciously steers clear of a naively autobiographical technique of tracing point-by-point correspondences between life and work, but his study is relatively unusual in daring to formulate an approach to Beckett that takes into account the significance of biographical factors. Far too often in Beckett studies the particularities of Beckett's life are treated with a kind of superstitious dread, as in Linda Ben-Zvi's complaint that suggestions of an autobiographical intention diminish "the greatness of the work and the greatness of the author" (Ben-Zvi 1984, 83), or in Simon Critchley's insistence that despite the "irreducible existential residuum of authorial experience in the creation of any text that we might call 'literary'", Beckett's work nevertheless "speaks to us in a voice that can be described as impersonal, neutral or indifferent: an incessant, interminable and indeterminable voice that reverberates outside of all intimacy, dispossessing the 'I' and delivering it over to a nameless outside" (Critchley 1997, 172, 173).

Thus the post-structuralist incarnation of Beckett studies, with its "anti-authorial" suspicion of the empirical signs of authorial presence, far from disposing of the author-function, has served to transcendentalise it: the empirical, mortal, historical Beckett has receded in favour of a mysterious, transcendent, quasi-mythical "Beckett". Once again, comparison with the discourse on Shakespeare is significant. As we have seen, the discursive construction of "Shakespeare" depends, to a certain extent, on Shakespeare's authorial invisibility: Shakespeare is universal because he is both everyone and no-one, having a genius for anonymity, a "negative capability" whereby he is able to bring his characters to life without the interference of subjective personality. If the mystery of Shakespeare depends, to a certain extent, on the relative obscurity of the historical person, it is sustained, nevertheless, by the extreme magnification brought to bear on the texts. As Scott Wilson argues:

> Shakespeare's accumulation of literary surplus value is guaranteed by that which is perceived to have been lost: direct access to the living Shakespeare. ... Paradoxically, value or profit is based on irretrievable loss, or, and it amounts to much the same thing, a certain inaccessibility, a "mystery" that cannot be grasped. Typically, it is precisely in the most tangible, intrinsic, "formal" qualities of texts that their mystery is located even as, mysteriously, it cannot be grasped. (Wilson 1995, 87-88)

This brings us then, to the question of how a political critique of the author-function "Beckett" might proceed. As we have seen, any critique of "Beckett" which justifies itself on the evidence of Beckett's texts inevitably remains circumscribed by the discursive logic of Beckett studies, and, what is worse, serves further to intensify the power and scope of the cultural authority vested in that author-function. The author-function "Beckett" has clearly reached a kind of critical mass whereby it has become completely impervious to this sort of challenge. To return for a moment to the discourse on Shakespeare, Gary Taylor effects a witty inversion of the metaphor of Shakespeare as a literary sun, arguing that, under the sheer gravity of its enormous mass, the star that was Shakespeare has collapsed on itself, becoming a discursive black hole, no longer emitting light, but voraciously consuming everything that comes within its gravitational field:

> If Shakespeare has a singularity, it is because he has become a black hole. Light, insight, intelligence, matter — all pour ceaselessly into him, as critics are drawn into the densening vortex of his reputation; they add their own weight to his increasing mass ... Shakespeare himself no longer transmits visible light; his stellar energies have been trapped within the gravity well of his own reputation. We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind; he gives us back our own values. And it is no use pretending that some uniquely clever, honest and disciplined critic can find a technique, an angle, that will enable us to lead a mass escape from this trap. If Shakespeare is a literary black hole, then nothing I, or anyone else, can say will make any difference. His accreting disk will go on spinning, sucking, growing. (Taylor 1990, 410-11, quoted in Wilson 1995, 90)

Perhaps this is not quite yet the case with Beckett. What is clear, however, is that an attention to the subversiveness inherent in Beckett's texts is not going to prevent the discursive construction of Beckett as a signifier of authority and tradition; if anything, it will only accelerate the process. Perhaps, instead, it is only by concentrating on the author in all his empirical positivity that we can arrest the transcendentalisation of "Beckett". For if Shakespeare's sacredness rests upon his unknowability, it is clear

that only knowledge about Beckett, and in particular about Beckett *at work*, can begin to dispel the religious aura that increasingly surrounds the man and his work.

No doubt Linda Ben-Zvi is right to fear the damage that may be done to Beckett's reputation by reducing his texts to the dimensions of ordinary human concerns. The cult of Beckett depends on the preservation of Beckett as an inscrutable and awe-inspiring mystery; what Lois Gordon's, James Knowlson's and Anthony Cronin's biographies have begun to reveal is Beckett's ordinariness. However, as we have seen, the Beckettian author-function also depends to some extent on the notion that the writing is a spontaneous emanation of the author's personality, and to this extent, a focus on Beckett's personal life clearly can not, in itself, undo the massive ideological overdetermination of the author-function.

What is most important to grasp, I think, is neither the life, nor the work, but the point at which the life and the work coincide: in the labour of writing. Attention to the empirical signs of authorial activity, to a reconstruction of the writer at work, and to the progress of a work's development tends to undercut the mystifications of the author-function. It reveals, on the one hand, the accidental rather than the necessary nature of Beckett's texts, showing them to be the contingent outcome of a series of intelligible acts rather than as immutable and inscrutable mysteries. On the other hand, by this means we can see Beckett's labour not as the spontaneous outpouring of an isolated and unique sensibility, but as the disciplined execution of a skilled craftsman whose tools are, like those of any writer, language and its conventions, both in the literary tradition that precedes him, and the literary and cultural milieu in which he finds himself.

Thus it is, paradoxically, by attention to the author at work that we can begin to dispel the mysticism of the author-function. It is in the apparently most "authorial" of studies I have mentioned here, such as H. Porter Abbott's *The Author in the Autograph*, or John Pilling's *Beckett before Godot*, or the texts gathered in *The Ideal Core of the Onion*, that we can begin to grasp Beckett's writing in its "ordinariness", as an entirely familiar human activity. We should have nothing to fear in approaching Beckett's writing: it is by an insistence on its ordinariness that we undo the author-function.

The vision of the author at work thus reunites the two halves of the author-function at the moment of their separation: the author as a living presence, and the author as a textual phenomenon. As the parable of "Borges and I" reminds us, the problem of the separation between writer and author is really only important to the writer in the act of writing: the rest is ideology. Therefore we shouldn't invest the separation between writer and author with too much metaphysical weight: we *know* that Borges wrote "Borges and I", and no pronominal subterfuge can dispel the empirical reality of the author's labour. So too, we shouldn't take too seriously Beckett's multiplication of the signs of authorial deferral. His writing should frighten and perplex us no more than "I WAS HERE BUT I DIDN"T WRITE THIS". As Beckett writes — wrongly — in the fourth of the *Fizzles*:

> … if he rattles it's he who will rattle, I won't rattle, he who will die, I won't die, perhaps they will bury him, if they find him … there will be no more talk of me, only of him, of the end of his life and his death, of his burial if they find him, that will be the end … (CSPR 234)

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Where I refer to certain works frequently in the text I have tended to use short titles rather than abbreviations. The short titles or abbreviations are listed below next to the corresponding full titles and details of editions used. Where the titles of the English and French versions of a book are the same, the distinction is marked with [E] or [F] if not clear from the context.

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